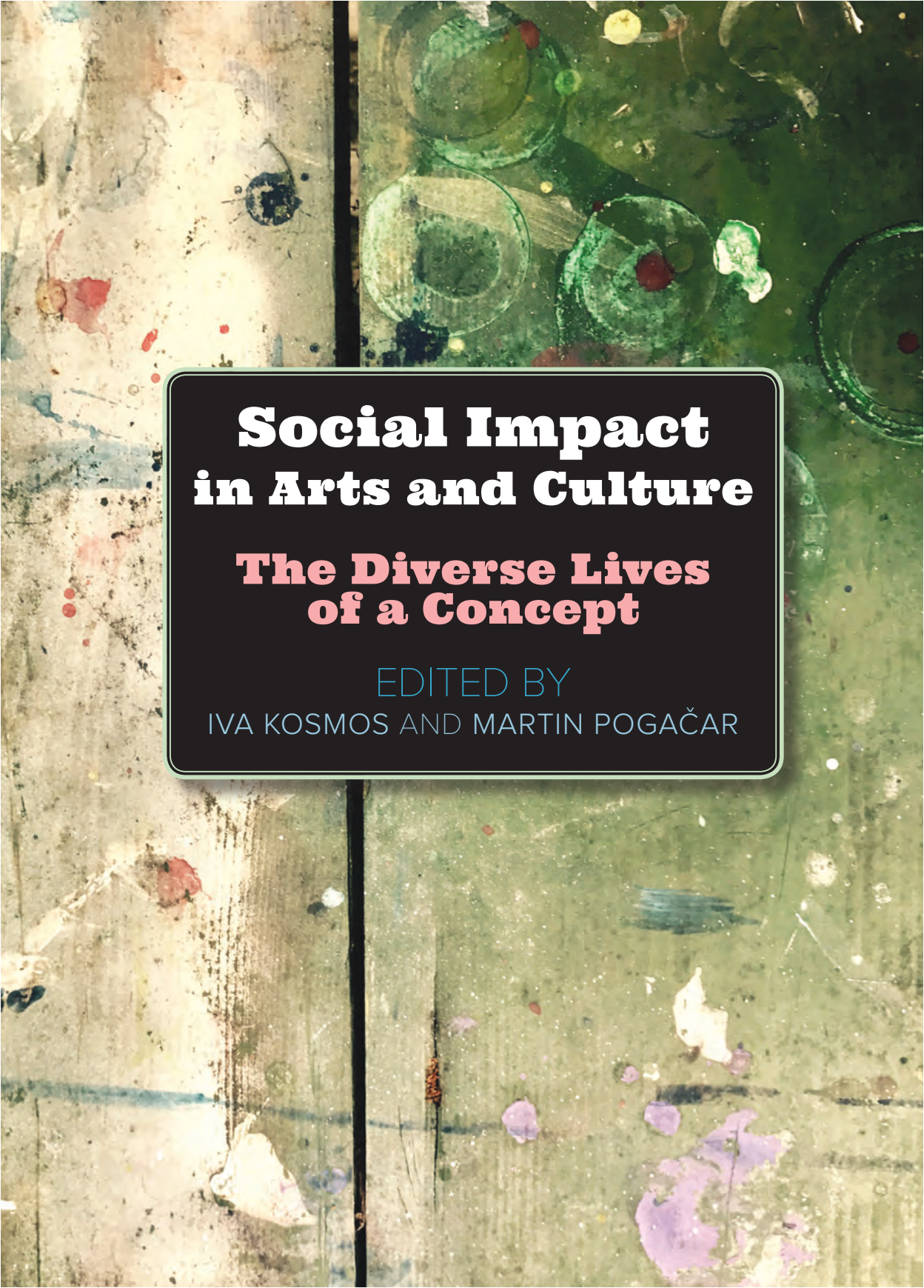
Social Impact
in Arts and Culture
The Diverse Lives
of a Concept
EDITED BY
IVA KOSMOS AND MARTIN POGAČAR

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Založba ZRC

Ljubljana, 2022

Contents

Acknowledgments

Social Impact in Arts and Culture: The Diverse Lives of a Concept results from the project Create to Connect -> Create to Impact / CtC -> CtI (2018–2022), co-funded by the Creative Europe program of the European Union. The book was also supported by the research programs "Historical Interpretations of the 20th Century" (P6-0347) and "Ethnological, Anthropological and Folklore Studies Research on Everyday Life" (P6-0088) of the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS).

CtC -> CtI gathered 14 cultural organizations from across Europe and a research organization, the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU), from Slovenia. The project aimed to shift the focus of artists and cultural operators from audience building to delving into the notion and implications of impact—by trying to use research to inform curatorial and program choices.

Accordingly, the CtC -> CtI core activities focused on artistic creation; how to change the use of space—within and outside of theaters—with artistic tools; how to apply new models of collectivity to production processes; how to conceptualize and adapt shared work to the local contexts; and, not the least, to create space and opportunity to bring together artists, cultural workers, researchers, and students to exchange knowledge and ideas. In this network, ZRC SAZU conducted qualitative research to assess the impact of partner organizations' activities in the society. The results are partly also presented in several chapters in this volume (by **Iva Kosmos, Saša Babič, Martin Pogačar,** and **Dan Podjed**).

In the process, the book has overgrown the initial plans. Thinking about the origins of the concept of social impact, its implications for artistic practices, and its very diverse uses, we realized it is crucial to take a wider thematic, practical, and theoretical approach. So, we invited a diverse group of theorists, critics, and curators to contribute their views, ideas, and experience on the uses and understanding of social impact.

Therefore, we would like to thank **Josipa Lulić, Lana Zdravković, Ana Adamović, Hanna Huber, Tery Žeželj, Aldo Milohnić, Tomaž Toporišič, Maša Radi Buh, Suzana Marjanić, Jasmina Jerant,** and **Katja Kobolt.** We are also grateful to **Jaka Železnikar** for his COVID poem and **Siniša Labrović**, who wrote an intimate literary piece on the very effect of the quest for impact in real life.

For translations, we thank **Juraj Šutej** and **Matt Robinson.** For reviews, many thanks to **Jelena Petrović** and **Blaž Lukan.** For comments on earlier drafts of the manuscript, we thank **Tanja Petrović.** For support and encouragement, we thank **Alma R. Selimović** and the **Bunker team.** For exquisite design, as usual, **Tanja Radež.** And for the thorough, kind, and speedy proofreading and copyediting that made this book much more readable, we thank **Jana Renée Wilcoxen.**

IVA KOSMOS

INTRODUCTION

What Are We Talking About When We Talk About Social Impact in the Arts?

Funding acknowledgment: The research for this chapter was funded through the Creative Europe project CtC -> CtI and by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS) research program "Historical Interpretations of the 20th Century" (P6-0347).

Social art, engaged art, political art, art and social change … social impact. There are different concepts to approaching and thinking the relation(s) between society and art. Every concept comes from and refers to different historical and geographical context(s) and form(s), opening different perspectives on the interaction between the social and the artistic. "Social impact" seems to be the buzzword of the past decade, a term dominant in science and art (of) project writing, but also in thinking and talking about—and practicing—art. If we look at it in practice, the concept of social impact assumes that art or science affects society in a particular manner, with measurable indicators of success, concrete social outcomes, and the possibility of clear planning and predicting the envisioned social results. However, apart from the mentioned principles of measurability and predictability—key elements when talking about the social impact of the arts—there is a lack of sources to clearly explain what the idea is all about. What kind of art, society, and the relationship between them does it envision? Considering the prominence of the term, it is interesting that there is a scarce scholarly and theoretical reflection on the question: What are we talking about when we talk about "social impact" *in* the field of the arts?

This is the question the editors and the contributors to this volume faced when we started reflecting on this omnipresent term. As usual, we wanted to inform our reasoning with some intellectual history. For example, if we wanted to discuss political art in the Marxist tradition, we might reach for Benjamin (2005), or turn to our own cultural past, perhaps to examples of Yugoslav Partisan art (Komelj 2009; Milohnić 2021) or Yugoslav amateurism (Milohnić 2013; Doplgenger 2017). If discussing the embeddedness of art in the social structure, particularly class, we might go to Bourdieu (1993; 1984). If we want to depart in the opposite way, to address the potential of art as an autonomous system, having its independent logic and modus operandi, we might consult Rancière (2006). But, who do you go to when you are after "social impact"?

As we were informed early on by a veteran cultural manager and grant application writer from our project's team, the idea of social impact is most prominent in the British cultural politics; and while it is becoming more relevant in the European arts funding, the latter was previously motivated also by other concepts, such as "audience building". In line with that, a bigger part of the literature on social impact is rooted in the British tradition and is not a scholarly reflection but mostly reports aimed at policy creation.[1] Thus, insight into the British context and its take on the social impact *of* the arts was one source for thinking about social impact *in* the arts. Although there is no methodologically consistent comparison of the usage of this term in the European Union (EU) and the UK, it will become obvious in the following pages that there are parallels between the two contexts and much we can learn from a critical reflection on this concept in the British context.

Another unavoidable source of understanding social impact was our own experience as academic researchers without a stable source of financing. As such, we are invited to meet the requirements for the social impact of science in every project application we hand in, which is more than a couple on a yearly basis. It was our impression that both academic funding and artistic funding depend on the very similar overarching idea of their social impact. The third source for thinking about social impact was to consult the practice: we talked to artists, curators, critics, producers, and academic researchers to reflect on what this idea means to them and how they use and understand this term in their practice. To make the story short, this is how this monograph was born.

But before we proceed, let us stop for a moment and look back: when did we start to use this term, and what are we talking about when we talk about social impact in the field of the arts?

1 Some reports have been published by independent research agencies, and some by researchers employed at universities.

The Genealogy of the Term in the British Context

The genealogy of "social impact" in the British context is meticulously presented by Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett in their study *The Social Impact of the Arts: An Intellectual History* (2008). The authors underline that for understanding the use of this term, we need to consider that it was shaped in a particular context and for a particular use; it became dominant in the UK in the New Labour Period (1997–2010) and in the context of debates about public funding. The New Labour government was run by the principle of "evidence-based policy making", which was pursued as a part of the implementation of the Third Way Politics. This approach envisioned policies that would arguably not be run by ideologies or political preferences but solely with tested and measured evidence showing which practices bring the best results. In this context, the government "required all parts of the public sector to make demonstrable contributions to government objectives and to meet specified targets" (Belfiore and Bennett 2008, 7). Arts were included in this vision and expected to contribute to a range of priorities. As a result, different agencies advocating for the funding of the arts set out to bring evidence on a range of different impacts of arts, from social stability and renewal of civil society (Keaney 2006) to helping the integration of refugees (Edmonds and Roberts 2020), improving health education, and reducing the prison population (Matarasso 1997; Peaker and Vincent 1990; Belfiore and Bennett 2008, 6). A range of defined impacts was, as dryly commented by Belfiore and Bennett, "often coinciding with the priorities of whichever governments are in power at the time" (Belfiore and Bennett 2008, 6).

The first and the most influential report on the social impact of participation in the arts, presenting fifty possible impacts and a new measuring methodology, was written by François Matarasso (1997). As such, it set the basis for the understanding of social impact in the arts, (in)formed British policies and is still a referential point in debates on the funding of art worldwide (cf. Wearring et al. 2021). Reading this report twenty-five years after it was published is thus an interesting experience, as it sounds unexpectedly contemporaneous, its terminology

and the attitude familiar to anyone who ever tried to apply for academic or arts funding. Matarasso writes from the position of the mediator, on the one side courting the funders, that is, the government, and on the other side, lightly scolding the artistic community for refusing to "develop a healthy dialogue with the wider society on whose money it so often depends" (Matarasso 1997, V). In a nutshell: if the arts want some money from the government, they should also do something for the government without (overtly) insisting on their own interests or needs. In Matarasso's words: it is "about what the arts can do for society, rather than what society can do for the arts" (Matarasso 1997, V).

While this sounds quite restraining for the proverbial "artistic freedom", it is also worth considering that the idea of social impact was brought about as a better alternative to the economic impact of arts. Matarasso refers to the 1988 report *The Economic Importance of Arts in Britain* (Myerscough 1988), which made the argument that art makes money and creates jobs and reduced the discussion on arts funding to investment, tourism, cultural industries, and job creation (Belfiore 2002, 95–96). In this context, the social impact of the arts sounded like a much better idea.

Matarasso based his report on the investigation of sixty projects in different locations, concentrating solely on participatory arts as the preferred genre and method for reaching social impact. His methodology included different tools, but the report relied mostly on responses of participants acquired by questionnaires.[2] In this way, he categorized fifty social impacts under six themes (personal development, social cohesion, community empowerment and self-determination, local image and identity, imagination and vision, health and well-being) and, most importantly, envisioned them as measurable and controllable. Matarasso insisted on two things: first, on the evaluation and evidence (of social impact) and second, on control and planning, aimed at minimizing the risk and maximizing the possibility of expected results. He recognized that you could not control "creativity, openness and elasticity of the arts" (Matarasso 1997, X), so he focused on the environment, framework, and conditions for success. He proposed a list of principles to follow, which is also a list of indicators for success, again sounding very familiar to a contemporary project-versed ear: realistic and precise measurable goals and benchmarks for success (instead of vague contributions unmeasurable in some concrete development or shift in the physical world); involvement of participants in setting objectives and gaining clear evidence of commitment from everyone involved, including sponsors, artists, public and independent social organizations (currently known in the project-lingo as "stakeholders"); integration with other social programs, including local authorities and public agencies in the planning process (to enhance their commitment and "owning" of the project); informing participants about the agenda and gaining their consent; being able to acknowledge risks and failures (currently known as "risk mitigation strategies"); excellence in applying the highest standards of (artistic) practice in the processes and outputs; and finally, a joint evaluation including the funders and communities that were beneficiaries of the project (cf. Matarasso 1997, 81–84).

It is not unreasonable to say that Matarasso's idea resonates today in the European context and wider. If you attend project-writing workshops for EU cultural institutions you will regularly find the following motto: "Europe does not fund projects, but finances its policies through projects". This citation, promoted by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency, which manages funding programs in culture, neatly employs Matarasso's idea on art as a tool for controlled policy-making. The same line of thinking was also just proposed in an article by the Australian University of Technology Sydney, stating that it "is critical for arts and cultural organisations to adopt a new strategy in order to revive and thrive within a post-pandemic context" (Wearring et al. 2021, 55). Their proposal is directly built on Matarasso's idea of social impact as the main argument for arts funding and on his methodology of measuring the impact. However, the idea of the social impact of the art has also come under critical scrutiny, which is mostly, but not exclusively, connected to the British context, where the idea was most deeply implemented.

2 Matarasso claims that he uses also interviews, formal and informal discussion groups, participant observation, agreed indicators, observer groups and other survey techniques. However, he was criticized that these tools were used only in some projects and that results are not mentioned in the research report (Merli 2002, 117). For more criticism of Matarasso's methodology see my chapter in this volume..

Critique of the Idea of Social Impact as Reproducing the Social Order

The research on the social impact of the arts was firstly criticized for having "blurred the boundaries between advocacy and research". Considering that the debate on social impact is always also a debate on funding, the reports were often methodologically flawed, as they were motivated by looking for proof of impact while disregarding anything that might testify against their case (Belfiore and Bennett 2008, 6–7).[3] Another objection by Belfiore and Bennett is that the debate on social impact ignores the long intellectual history of art's role in society and the social arena. However, the starkest critique came from a different place, stating that art shaped by the idea of social impact has no effect at all: it does not support the actual change of the social system but an individual adaptation to the *status quo*, namely the neoliberal economic and social system (Bishop 2012; Merli 2002; Gielen 2019).

3 For a critique of social impact studies and their methodology see my chapter in this volume.

In her study of participatory art, which is probably the most common art form associated with social impact,[4] Claire Bishop reminds us that the idea of social impact was created at the same time as the dismantling of the welfare state. In this context, art has become, says Bishop, "a form of soft social engineering" (Bishop 2012, 5). It is expected to shape well-adjusted subjects who will learn how to adapt to the new system and become independent and functional in terms of not relying on state support in the context of the neoliberal market and diminishing social services. Bishop, as well as Belfiore and Bennett, point to "social inclusion" as one of the main concepts in the rhetoric on the social impact of the arts. The idea of social inclusion suggests that people become socially excluded from schooling, education, and, finally, the labor market—and, as such, a burden for the state—because of their personal and individual circumstances, such as crime, drugs, family breakdown, teenage pregnancy, etc. (Bishop 2012, 13). In such an understanding, there are no structural reasons for social maladies. The reasons for one's "exclusion" are presented as individual, while the solution—arts included—are offered on the level of personal biographies. The concept of social inclusion presents the primary division in the society between the included majority and excluded minority, hiding structural inequalities previously visible through the class perspective. Or, as Bishop says, what is now called minority, was "formerly known as the working class" (Bishop 2012, 13). As such, the art of social inclusion does not have a transformative potential: it cannot bring any social change or enable people to see their problems as structural; it can only help them accept their condition and become "individually responsible for what, in the past, was the collective concern of the state" (Bishop 2012, 14).

4 The idea that social impact has demonstrable outcomes and indicators of success resulted in the situation when certain forms of arts are presented as "guarantees" for success. For example: collaborative authorship, participative projects, and active forms of spectatorship or audience engagement are increasingly included in project proposals as guarantees for the envisioned social impact. Bishop contradicts this by insisting that there is no intrinsic value in any form of art, which she shows by different uses and effects of participatory art in Europe in 1917, 1968, and after 1989 (Bishop 2012). Vujanović and Piazza add that there is a line of theoretical texts exploring the proximity between performance and democracy, which is why there is a long tradition of performers counting on "the political power of performance in the direct interaction and live copresence of people in public" (Vujanović and Piazza 2019, 11). Interaction and participation are thus understood as a "guarantee" for performance's political potential. Vujanović and Piazza point that the source of this idea is in a false equation between the role of theater in the Athenian model of direct democracy, and the role of theater in a representative democracy.

This same logic seems to be reflected in the wider process of recruiting different activities to compensate for the vanishing welfare state in the neoliberal era. For example, Andrea Muehlebach (2011) writes about the volunteer charity services in the Italian context, which are directly stepping in to provide for assistance that was once, as Bishop says, "the collective concern of the state". On top of it, volunteer work is presented and practiced as "affective labor"—a work that is done with compassion and out of a moral obligation to others, as well as for individual (moral) satisfaction, which means that it is also unwaged labor (Muehlebach 2011). While the concept of unwaged labor raises a whole set of problems connected with inequality,[5] at this point we can observe that the underlying logic connecting volunteerism and art is quite similar—what was once an obligation of the state is now delegated to other areas of human activity. While art is helping people become socially "included", charity and volunteerism, as well as most of the NGO sector, have directly stepped in to provide for vanished social services.

Pascal Gielen, a professor at the University of Antwerp, writes that the countries establishing neoliberal regimes have simultaneously seen a rise in humanitarian organizations, NGOs, and—community art (Gielen 2019, 76). The Dutch government "stimulates community art in precisely those areas from which it withdrew crucial social services ten years ago" (Gielen 2019, 77). Gielen calls this type of commissioned art "digestive art":

> In much the same way as a digestive remedy helps to enhance one's metabolism, this form of art helps to integrate social groups into society. This is done without questioning the dominant values, norms or habits. Digestive community art is, if you wish, a form of "naturalising art". It conforms to rules that are already in place within society (Gielen 2019, 71).

5 Muehlebach insightfully writes on how the unwaged affective work and the regime of "moral neoliberal" deepen the social inequalities and establish the social hierarchy between the givers and receivers of "help", considering that the services now conceived as "help" were once perceived as social obligation and as a part of social contract.

As an opposite to digestive, Gielen talks about subversive art but is careful enough to note that the practice rarely belongs to one or the other binary pole; it exists somewhere in-between the ideal oppositions. However, he says, there is a clear tendency toward the digestive mode, in which community art becomes "a cheaper form of social work", however unable to resolve serious issues, not only because of its conforming character but also because of its temporal nature, as it belongs to "temporary projects and similarly temporary responsibilities" (Gielen 2019, 78). To explain the frame in which community art nowadays operates, he uses the concept of "pastoral power" developed by Foucault. This is a soft extension of police power, which constantly shows, controls, and prescribes the desirable paths that individuals and collectives should take. This is performed by specific social actors: pastors, social workers, psychologists, and, now, also artists, many of them unaware of this "correctional logic" (Gielen 2019, 78–79).

In spite of this criticism, Gielen does not want to reduce the complexity of artistic practice to the binary between digestive and subversive art. First, he insists that "digestive art" is not "bad art" and that it could (unintentionally) lead to emancipation: empowering people with skills and knowledge could also make them question their position and perhaps bring about subversive strategies (Gielen 2019, 71). On top of it, the "digestive, integrating power" of certain projects can also be useful when faced with global homeless people and diaspora (Gielen 2019, 79). Finally, Gielen points out that both the idea and practice of "community" carries potential that could be an "unexpected ideological counterforce to neoliberal hyper-individualism". However, in order to realize this potential, Gielen insists that artistic practice should move beyond the community art as it is currently defined and refuse to be used for "patch[ing] up the holes" of the same system that produces it (Gielen 2019, 80).

While there are differences between various practices and fields, as well as between the British, EU and individual European state contexts, we could say that we are observing the same underlying principle at hand. The responsibility for social problems is reduced to projects and actions dealing with inequalities on the individual, institutional, communal, or local level—which indeed have their own value and can ease the consequences of social inequalities— however, not engaging with the structural reasons and solutions for social inequalities.

Going back to the role of art in society, we could look at the idea of social impact from the perspective of Rancière's distinction between politics and policy (Rancière 2006). In his understanding, policy is an activity in the field of already designated roles, recognized subjects, and established (power) relations. Policy is everyday politics. However, politics—in Rancière's sense—designates the deeper re-structuring of the social field where policy is played out. It means the re-structuring of what is possible to perceive and understand, hear and see, establishing connections that were previously unperceived, asking questions that were previously un-questionable. In this context, it is worth asking, is the current conception of the social impact of the arts referring to policy or politics? The whole idea of demonstrable social outcomes, measurability, and hence, controllability of artistic projects defines art as an activity that is not supposed to question but to deliver. In Rancière's view, the political potential lies in the art that is understood as both an autonomous field and a practice connected to society. Considering its autonomy, in Rancière's sense, art does not need to deliver but can totally suspend the social and, as such, offer an alternative view. This is why also Bishop, referring among other sources to Rancière (Bishop 2012, 27–30), comes to the paradoxical conclusion that if art wants to be in any way socially relevant, it need not be evaluated solely for its social dimension, but treated and evaluated as art, which means as an autonomous field of practice. This means also considering the inherent characteristics of arts as an aesthetical experience, continues Bishop, such as experiment, antagonism, tension, questioning, perversity, paradox, or pure negations of social expectations. The idea of the social impact of the arts that envisions the arts as delivering on clear objectives—but not questioning those objectives and the whole pretext behind them—will not be impactful at all.

The main idea proposed from this perspective is that if art wants to be socially relevant, it need not be perceived (only) as a social tool but (also) as a(n) (semi-)autonomous social system or field—an idea that has been established by various scholars from different perspectives (Bourdieu 1993; Rancière 2006; Luhmann 2000) and rooted in the historical evolution of modern society. The same could be said for other fields and social systems, such as academia. If they want to create anything relevant, they need to be at least partly autonomous, including the financial autonomy of their practice.

Between Autonomy and Adaptation

The struggle that both artists and academics go through when trying to adapt their practice to policies and goals set outside of their field of practice is evident in an anecdotal encounter between academic researchers and cultural institutions gathered as partners in the international project Create to Connect -> Create to Impact (CtC -> CtI), which was one of the triggers and motivations to write this book. In one of our first consortium meetings, the representatives of cultural institutions wanted to hear what kind of work we, researchers, could concretely do and, most importantly—how they could *use it for their needs.* I tried to answer by stating how we could deepen insight into aspects of social phenomena connected with their work—we could look into their communication patterns, reflect on the idea of social impact, rethink the media they use, etc. However, this was not a satisfactory answer. Partners asked about something "usable": Will there be an evaluation of an artistic work (and its impact) that they can present to potential financiers? Will there be something that they can put on their website in terms of promotion? While I was struggling to answer their demands, the late Nevenka Koprivšek, iconic cultural manager and a former director of the Slovenian production company Bunker, raised her voice in astonishment and said something in line with: *"I have seen this situation so many times but from a different perspective. Usually, it is we, cultural organizations, who are trying to prove to someone how they can use our work for their needs, and the answers are never satisfactory".* In that quick moment, I became aware of the limits of academic inquiry when—similar to the artistic one—it is pushed to answer questions that are defined outside of its field. It is withdrawing from its logic and reasoning, which is not only in implementing policies and answering questions, but in questioning these same policies and questions. Both artistic and academic inquiry must have the space to examine the reasons, ideologies, and discourses that make particular questions questionable and others unthinkable and unquestionable.

On the other side, I do not think it is unacceptable that a government or any kind of public and private institution financing and supporting arts and science

wants to announce and promote the values it finds important. However, one thing is a general articulation of values while allowing for artistic (or scientific) freedom to interpret and re-evaluate them, and another is insistent control over the process and its outcomes trying to assure that the artistic (or scientific) project(s) does not stray from the attached social goals.

If we use an example from the cultural history of Yugoslavia to balance and contextualize (also historically) the British emphases above: the country was clearly promoting particular values and types of citizenships with its cultural politics. One of its main concepts was amateurism, a politics envisioning non-professional artists and everyday people massively engaging in artistic activities. Yugoslavia built an infrastructure of cultural centers (*kulturni domovi*) while the diverse range of cultural activities was organized by local communities, factories, and other business enterprises (Hofman 2011; Doplgenger 2017; Vaseva 2018; Koroman 2016). At the same time, amateurism was deeply ingrained in the Yugoslav socialist concept of self-management and theoretical debates which envisioned active citizens as self-organizers who shape the economy, municipal government, and cultural organizations.[6] In other words, amateurism was supposed to shape people that would practice self-management, educate them, and increase their abilities to practice self-organization, cooperation, solidarity, and comradeship (Supek 1974; Majstorović 1967; 1972; Hofman 2011). However, the history of amateurism also includes practices that transcended what was envisioned by the "policymakers" and often challenged Yugoslav official culture and social *status quo*. The best-known examples are Yugoslav alternative cinema and the "Black Wave", which started in amateur kino clubs (Milohnić 2013; Doplgenger 2017; Sekulić 2017), and alternative conceptual and performative art in 1970 and 1980, which originated in student cultural centers (Jakovljević 2016). Some of these practices provoked controversies and push-backs from the state. However, they were also crucially connected to the amateur infrastructure and its self-organization practice, which was built by that same state and allowed them to act (semi-)autonomously.

6 It is important not to confuse the Yugoslav idea of self-management with socialist planned economy, which was practiced in the Soviet Union and elsewhere in the Eastern bloc. Yugoslavia took its own path after the split with Cominform in 1948 and has since then aimed at creating its own version of socialism, self-management policies included. For more on self-management, see Kirn 2019; Suvin 2016; Unkovski-Korica 2016; Musić 2011.

It would be misleading here to compare cultural policies from two deeply different social systems; however, I want to direct attention to the principle of allowing artistic and academic practice to transcend the frame of social and policy expectations, as opening the path to rich practices that provoke and perhaps make the most "impact".

Everyday Use and Social Impact as a Floating Term— Artists, Curators, Cultural Managers

After reviewing the genealogy of the term social impact in the context of arts funding and its criticism, it would be naive to suppose that the artistic community is unaware of its pitfalls. This also became increasingly clear over the course of the already mentioned international project CtC -> CtI, which brought together fourteen European cultural institutions and one research organization (the Resaerch Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, ZRC SAZU). To include different versions and understandings of social impact in artistic practice, the project environment and interpersonal dynamics proved a great opportunity to observe impact as a term in the making, as well as in pandemic circumstances, which enabled a somewhat different perspective on the matter. Therefore, we talked to several practitioners and art producers, members of the CtC -> CtI project, about how they understood impact and what it meant to them. Their views, unsurprisingly, expressed many of the above-presented criticisms.

Davor Mišković, the director of the cultural institution Drugo more in Rijeka, stated that social impact is *"theoretically problematic"* and thus impossible to measure: *"Impact never comes from one source, even if it is a powerful one. It is always about a field of impact, which is created by multiple actors, and we are only one of them"*. He added that the European funders also silently recognize the vagueness of the term and its un-measurability: *"Even the reviewers do not expect actual social impact*

[in the sense of measurable evidence]". Some correspondents recognized that their national governments are trying to defend arts funding by referring to the arts' social impact. However, they reproached the logic that social impact is the primary argument for funding arts. Mark Deputter, the director of Culturgest, a cultural organization in Lisbon, noted: *"As long as the social impact is second meriting, I am OK with that"*. However, he quickly added that the problem arises when artistic value and programming become of secondary importance. *"You can say that we had 10,000 audience members in our festival—but that is only a small part of the value of the arts. This is the most obvious outcome, but there are so many other outputs that are long-term and very difficult to measure"*.

However, it is not all about criticism; what has happened in the artistic practice is that the social impact, as a term and a signifier, has become much more than just a requirement posed by funding bodies. The term has slowly seeped into the public and artistic sphere; artists, curators, producers, and cultural managers use it in myriad ways. Social impact, as it is used in the field of arts, has become something like a floating signifier—changing its meaning according to the situation. It is not uncommon to hear project partners making light fun of the EU funding bureaucratic lingo and the insistent control over different parts of the process: objectives and goals, outputs and deliverables, milestones and work packages … But most often, "social impact" is used when addressing the issues of their serious and authentic engagement with society. The term was thus invoked when artists and curators faced the most fundamental questions about their practice: Why do we do what we do? How does that affect others? What effect does it have on society? And what do we actually want to do, and whom do we want to reach with our practice?

While artists, curators, managers, and producers might have previously used different terms or concepts to address these questions, now it is increasingly common to hear them talk about their social impact, which on the one hand, demonstrates the adaptability of the arts in changing socio-economic and political system, while also reveals the power of top-down bureaucratic language to shape the practice and theory of social activity.

The Practitioners' Take on Impact

While above, we have noted some critical thoughts shared by the project partners on the question of impact, we also want to show how this term can be used in artistic practice to designate different approaches and engagements with society. In order to grasp some of the meanings of this floating concept, we conducted several informal interviews with cultural producers and curators, asking about the mission(s) and vision(s) of their cultural institutions. While everyone had their own take on social impact, the vision and understanding of what the impact should be about was very diverse and not in line with the policy requirements presented (and criticized) in the previous pages. Below, we present three examples of different definitions and understandings of impact to draw attention to the diverse usage and creative re-formation of this concept in the artistic community.

Alma R. Selimović, Bunker

Thinking about social impact while writing a project is connected with setting the frame in which you will do what you think is right. I believe it is right that we serve the artists and provide them with optimal working conditions. We encourage them and ourselves to do things that have an affect on society and are responsible for the problems in our surroundings. Now, there are different visions of what that exactly is. For some, this is building parks for the children in the neighborhood; for some, it is about improving the lives of retired people. Others talk about refugees, so we never forget how important that is, and then some put a wire fence on the stage [note: In 2015, the Slovenian government erected a barbed wire fence along its southern border to protect from refugees]. And for some, to impact means to nurture fair relations in the community in which we work.

In pursuing social impact, the Bunker office team has its own priorities but at the same time we try to support the artists interested in and motivated for social impact. If Bunker pursues something, it is fairness in the team and for the people with whom we work, locally and internationally. We fight for fair payment, good working conditions, and humanity, which can start by trying to understand that someone cannot meet your deadline because of the pandemic and everything brought with it. If you can move that deadline and make life easier for someone, do it. This is where it all starts. The wire fence on your stage does not mean anything if you are mistreating people and not paying them for being two days late with whatever they need to deliver. We are strong at that. However, we are less successful at preventing self-exploitation because it is hard to get out of the system. We are trying to set policies that will enable us to avoid this. The pandemic definitely ruined a lot of this, but our old principles were: we leave work at 16.00, Fridays are easy and we try to avoid acting like our work is emergency-style and live a normal life. Of course, this is not possible during the festival and when preparing project applications, but there are long periods when it is. This is part of our social impact: that everyone we work with has fair working conditions, does something good, and has a good time.

Bunker, a Slovenian production company, understands its mission exactly opposite from the neoliberal version of social impact, which avoids discussion on structural conditions of work and life. In contrast, their mission is to create different conditions for work in the artistic community and for everyone included in the process. Thus, they envision and practice something like an alternative micro-universe of specific relations and working conditions. For example, they insist on a clearer demarcation between working and non-working time (in stark contrast to the neoliberal blurring between both). Additionally, they insist that every work in the process should be recognized as "work" and compensated with a wage, thus rejecting the neoliberal idea of the "affective labor" (Muehlebach 2012), meaning different types of unwaged work, which are done for some moral reason, such as solidarity, or for "a good cause", which could in our case be translated as "for the sake of the art". For Bunker, the structural conditions of arts are very important: an artwork's "progressive" content is not nearly enough to claim social impact if it is ingrained in an exploitative process.

Mark Deputter, Culturgest

(Answering why he wants to reach more audience): The very simple answer is that art can make you think about the world from another angle. We are always focused on the practical objectives, on making things happen in our personal and professional lives. We are in the mode of producing and organizing, while the arts show us how to think about the world in a completely impractical way. Art does not have any practical purpose for me. It only wants to impact but not as the practical notion of social or educational impact. It has an impact on your soul. On the way you see the world. That is how it works for me. You go to a concert, and it touches something. Or to an exhibition, and you say, "Ah!" But this is very difficult to measure or even put into words. It takes a couple of days to understand what happened in some exhibition or performance. That is the main value of what we do. It is so important in our life to be touched emotionally or intellectually. And I see that a lot of people give importance to that. Many do not, and that is fine. If you prefer to see a football game and be touched by it, that is fine. Or if you are religious, or you like science. But I am sure that many people still do not know the force and the strength of a good theater performance or a concert. So, our mission of having more audience is to show more people that this exists. And this is why we need to get them to our house. We cannot sell this as a soup—they need to have first-hand experience, and then they need to decide on their own if they find it worthwhile. Our job is to make the access as easy and cheap and agreeable as possible so that people come.

On the other side, we can find cultural institutions, such as Lisbon's **Culturgest**, approaching the understanding of social impact from an unexpectedly individual and intimate perspective. Culturgest's director, Mark Deputter, sets his understanding of the impact in the vision of arts as a profoundly intimate experience, which affects people in an intensely impractical way, enabling them to feel and think outside of their everyday routine. He explained that the social impact of his institution is thus exactly in reaching as many people as possible to enable their encounter with that unique aesthetic experience.

István Szakáts, Alt Art

Alt Art has existed for twenty-two years. We started with high-flying art, conceptualized, and high technology art for narrow audiences. Now we are doing not art, but culture, not high-tech, but very low-tech, and not for a very reserved community, but for the ghetto, which means for everybody that lives there. This is a very relevant shift for the trajectory of our foundation. The reason we slipped on this slope is the social impact of the things that we do. We can call it art or culture or just playing football. The core motif of our work was always social impact: does it change anything, does it matter? I do not like the masturbatory process of setting up an exhibition, sipping up the red wine, and then going home while the exhibition space is dead until they set up the next show. I want to build toys that people really use, and that really change something—and this is how we got to culture.

We set up a community radio in the Roma ghetto Pata Rât, but that is only one-third of the project. Radio is a medium for community organizing. If anyone has an idea to clean up the area, they can call over the radio and find co-participants. We also partnered with a city department that announces their services to the community through radio, so the people can learn how to send their kids to school and what services they can get for free. […] We are working with people on the social bottom that have basic needs, like a bus station … So, why radio? Other organizations are providing for such needs. However, the work that could nurture community self-empowerment and connections to the city is missing. On top of it, all these benevolent organizations helping the Pata community are keeping the paradigm of "the hand that gives and the hand that receives". And this is forever an unequal position. I want to step down from the pedestal: "You do this for yourself". As I said at the opening: "I am the background guy and want to remain in the background. You are the forerun people, it's your show, it's your tools. I only repair the tools if you break them".

Finally, there are also cultural institutions that, at the first glance (!), come closer to the definition of impact, as posed by funding bodies, in terms of using art for social work and social inclusion. István Szakáts, a producer and an activist running the small institution Alt Art in Cluj, orients his work directly toward social activism. He uses art and culture, as he says, as a tool to "trick" people into emancipation. His work in the marginal communities, such as the Roma ghetto Pata Rât in Cluj, aims at enabling people with skills and knowledge to practice self-government. However, his work is not at all blind to the structural inequalities or aimed at creating self-sufficient individuals able to cope with the privatized world, as would be the version of social impact promoted by neoliberal governments. Szakáts and Alt Art's other activists are clear about understanding the problems of the Roma as being ingrained in the long-term structure of social inequality. This is why they also work on connecting the Roma to the public system and services, which are supposed to serve all citizens. We could say that their work attempts to establish a micro-cosmos of alternative social relations, which enable emancipatory practice in a marginal community while not disregarding its dependence on and interrelations with the society as a whole.

These three different attitudes demonstrate the diverse takes on what the social impact of the arts means today, whether it creates fair work conditions for the artistic community, enables people to have an individual aesthetic experience, or empowers marginal communities with knowledge and building social capital. The wish to have an effect on society is deeply ingrained in artistic practice, although it might not be easily framed as a measurable and predictable "impact". The source of motivation for this book was precisely this dynamic between social impact as defined by funders—especially its neoliberal version (of art being used as a quick solution for social problems while disregarding their structural sources)—and social impact as understood and practiced in the actual field of practice (by actual artists, producers, curators, and cultural managers). We thus hope to bring the diverse lives and ambiguities of the concept to the public eye and to explore its effects in the actual artistic and cultural practices.

How We Go About It ...

We first gained the initial insight into the multiple nature of social impact in the arts through our work in the project CtC -> CtI, the project which was open enough to grant participating researchers the autonomy and freedom to start questioning the concept that we were supposed to measure and reflect upon. The views of artists and curators that we gathered during the project, which are partly presented above, are relevant and thoughtful. However, to gain a broader perspective, we started to look further. We invited people of different generations involved in various artistic practices to reflect upon what social impact means for them. This book thus presents the joint effort of curators, critics, essayists, artists, producers, and researchers—many occupying several positions, some established writers, and some starting their professional careers—reflecting on the many versions of the same term: social impact. Some reflected on the concept, some wrote about their own practice, and others gave practical examples of what they found to be the social impact of the arts and how to achieve it.

This approach facilitates an intersection and complementing of exploring and creativity that constitutes one of the crucial overlaps between art and science, as much as it already constitutes each. Both need time and space to play, to try and to fail, to put away, move away, to let ferment and sediment, to rethink, to then return, to retry, to re-fail. The quantified impact that supposedly serves society and, in fact, is subservient to politics demands closure; it discourages and dislikes opening up to the unexpected, to the unknown, to the uncertain and unanticipated, to the very possibility of the future. Qualitative impact, on the other hand, seeks openings and avoids closure. In this way, both art and science are (ideally) rhizomatic instead of tree-like (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1987), which alludes to a radical aspect of art and science that aims to reveal and discover, to always rethink the order of things ... where, not least, the "rhizome, without beginning or end, without the privileging of top over bottom or one 'branch' over another, is a moral about subverting hierarchies" (Roy 2017, 61).

The branching out, the crafting of relationships that extend beyond "participation" (an inherently power-laden, imbalanced concept) to foreground collaboration (that at least nominally assumes power-balance) is also a uniting mission of the edited volume as a whole as it is of the contributing authors and their chapters that in many cases thematize and reflect their professional art or research engagement and ambition. It is a joint quest to explore relationships between art and society, performance and its public, the economic conditions and hopes, and the boundaries of place and time. However, it is neither a comparative nor an extensively coherent collection. Instead, the different chapters, their unique topics, and approaches are organized to shed light on the central problem in a way that positions the reader on different branches of a tree, each opening a different perspective, a different approach, a different take. Overall, the chapters, individually and as a whole, are an invitation to approach the social and the art, the practice and the theory through perspective and an encouragement to rethink, to form a community, to politicize, and to build.

The **Rethink** Impact in Different Contexts section comprises three chapters that thematize the issue of impact in very different contexts using distinctive approaches. **Josipa Lulić** combines social impact theory with the theory of distributed cognition to map out the mechanisms of social change. She approaches the idea of expected social impact as presuming not only that we are certain what the right way for society is but also that there is a clear idea of how to achieve it: "we only need to organize that knowledge into predetermined Excel-sheet boxes of goals, results, and budgets, and deliver it to our target groups". However, she argues that such understanding is at odds with the definition of social impact as understood in the fields of cognitive theory and social psychology. Instead, from the point of view of the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO)—which is offers a dramaturgy where the focus is on the collective and the wider social context creating the oppressive system shown on stage—true change in society can only happen in a multidirectional process of experimentation and charting new territories. In her chapter, Josipa follows the impact she has observed on the level of different elements of a social cognitive system over her two-decade praxis of facilitating TO workshops.

Lana Zdravković, in her chapter, discusses impact through the question of the new identities raised within the LGBTIQ movement that shaped themselves in the broader context of the postcolonial agenda, presupposing that desire is not constructed by males (patriarchal) but is colonized by the dominant norm, therefore is heteronormative. She looks at art practices that developed under this paradigm and strove for a performative embodiment of "deviation" from the dominant body, sex, or gender norm, modifying the classical feminist motto into "the private is political". Lana discusses some of the most interesting examples of the appropriation of porn by performance art and questions the proclaimed subversiveness of the nominally transgressive performative strategies that employ self-objectification and over-sexualization to total pornographization.

In yet another vein, **Ana Adamović** engages with history and legacy and the question of the present and future potential of a 1951 Yugoslav opera. She touches upon the inaccessibility of the historical understanding of a poorly documented performance and its social effect. She considers aspects of the historical context of post-war Yugoslavia, the fate of a bourgeois artistic genre, and its potential role in the present. The speculative historical account thus discusses the potential of opera's failure as what makes this bit of forgotten history interesting today: It provokes the questions of inclusion, spectatorship, and potentialities that art may hold if aiming at a wider social impact and calls for a rethinking of the ways of participation and collaboration in art today when the very idea of collectivity is increasingly deteriorating.

The chapters in the next section, **Community** Networks in Extraordinary Situations, engage with the functioning and (re)formation of collectivities in different contexts facing various challenges. **Hanna Huber** thus discusses the French Festival OFF d'Avignon and the performance venue Théâtre Transversal, acting under specific economic and environmental conditions. From this vantage, she analyzes how these festivals reacted to the times of crisis. First, in the light of progressing climate change and, second, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hanna uses a mixed-methods approach and draws on the results of semi-structured interviews conducted with artists and theater directors, quantitative data analysis of the festival programs in 2019 and 2021, performance analyses, and participant observation during both festival editions. Times of crisis—due to the COVID pandemic and global climate change—have the potential to uncover long-standing dysfunctions and to incite fruitful debates on ameliorative measures. The chapter examines how institutional structures impact work practices and artistic content.

Saša Babič and **Martin Pogačar** engage with two internet community radios, the Georgian Community Radio Tbilisi and Radio Pata in Cluj, Romania, to trace how the medium of the radio, repositioned as digital media, impacts two different localities and communities also in the time of crisis. The analysis is based on interviews conducted with radio crews in Tbilisi and Pata Rât and an analysis of available online sources (YouTube, Facebook). However, this is not a comparative study of the two radios but rather an attempt to discuss how two barely comparable initiatives, agendas, and aspirations provide insight into, on the one hand, the technical aspect of forming commonality and, on the other, into how radio with its content and sound shapes reception and weaves and structures communities. They aim to show that the different technological applications demonstrate that different socio-political conditions and contexts, as well as people's social positions and ambitions, may be driven toward transcending the limits of the present condition by acting on the medium.

Dan Podjed focuses on the specific community environment that emerged during the CtC -> CtI project and how the COVID-19 pandemic affected and changed it. Dan discusses how a project network faced and negotiated the crisis and dealt with the changes that occurred in the network, both in the running and managing of the project and in the context of lockdowns and social distancing measures. The chapter illustrates how different means of communication affect interactions between individuals and their institutions and presents innovative approaches for keeping in touch within a network that appeared during the COVID-19 crisis. Dan argues that crises can significantly affect and transform relationships in networks; the crisis that separated people and institutions had a profound impact on strategies of coping with the situation while maintaining links with other project partners.

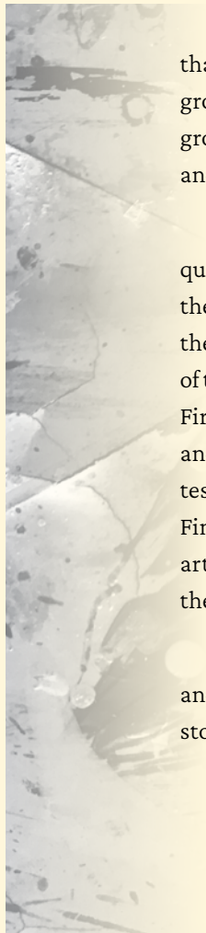
The **Politicize**, Take Nothing for Granted section brings three chapters that, in their unique way, address the role of taken-for-granted-ness, boundaries, and resistance in theater and life, questioning the power of artistic and individual engagement in terms of the political, the environment, and the more-than-human. **Aldo Milohnić** and **Tomaž Toporišič** focus on the political tactics

of two European and post-Yugoslav theater directors: Oliver Frljić and Janez Janša. They argue that unveiling the social pathology conveyed by these authors is the first step toward any kind of resistance, including the aesthetic one. By decentering the spectator's vision of world political events, touching society's tissue, and using theater to create a public forum for open debate, the authors analyze the directors' intention to shape theater as a specific producer of truth, arguing that "the thought of art is not extrinsic but rather is art itself". Tomaž investigates Oliver Frljić's transformation of theater into a weapon of political action using the reactions of the public and non-spectators (politicians, members of religious communities …), while Aldo engages with theater projects by Janez Janša, who thematizes the nationalist ideology of Slovenian political elites, the representatives of the state, and its repressive and ideological apparatuses.

Quite differently, **Tery Žeželj** approaches the question of impact by discussing holes and cuts, the changes in the terrain, in the landscape. She is fascinated by how a scar gets formed, about the new territory that holds the memory of the cut, but also by what gets changed, and with the process of changing. Tery approaches the use of the term impact in the field of arts: How is it measured? Are there good and bad impacts? For it is not only the question of what impacts but also on what the impact impacts. This narratively experimental chapter encourages the reader to question the self in relation to the non-human life of micro-organisms as a tool to disjoint one from the common field of experience. As Tery writes, it is crucial to try out the potential of an experience created in the field of arts to *impact* "environmental imageries" to thus approach the issue of how we live *with* the world.

Suzana Marjanić reviews and analyzes a selection of actions and performances from the Almissa Open Art Festival—a festival of contemporary art held in Omiš, Croatia, with an emphasis on its 12th edition, held in 2021 under the curation of multimedia artist Gildo Bavčević. The chapter also presents the festival and eponymous association AAA (Adria Art Annale), which participated at Almissa as one of the leading representatives of artivist practices on the Croatian scene. Marjanić observes and tests the contemporary artistic practice according to the evocation of the Situationist principles the artists themselves employ as they try to breach the division between art and life.

In her chapter, **Maša Radi Buh** explores how the act of walking can be utilized to reveal invisible economic principles at work in the public space and their ever-changing economic and social value. She inquires how multiple frameworks of performance, spatiality, and the social co-influence and co-create each other in telling a story of the specific path taken in a selected performance. Maša discusses how a walk can be used to expose or bring to light, or indeed construct or build, the stories and histories of marginalized spaces, beings, and communities as phenomena happening in time and space. She argues that the analyzed performances use traveling through the urban space by employing moving to portray and offer a new perspective of a place by addressing its economic dimension. As the COVID-19 regulations prevented travel and attending the performances, Maša decided to reconstruct them based on a combination of promotional materials and the detailed descriptions submitted as funding applications, giving an additional layer of meaning to the performances and their contextualization.



The final section, **Build** Audiences, Consider Reception, brings chapters that discuss how art can build, construct, target, and affect the specific social groups that it perceives as its audience. Three chapters thus discuss diverse social groups targeted by different artworks: a high school audience in Lisbon, tourists and citizens of Ljubljana, and young readers in Yugoslavia.

Iva Kosmos presents her attempt at measuring the social impact by qualitative methods and unstructured interviews with the high-school audience of the performance *The Children of Colonialism*. The first part of her chapter consists of the slightly edited version of her report on social impact, produced for the purposes of the CtC -> CtI project. In the second part, she self-critically examines her research. First, she presents a short overview of the use of the term in social impact studies and a critique of their methodology. Next, she sets her own research in that context, testing how the criticism of established measuring practice reflects in her case. Finally, she questions the possibility of measuring the impact of an individual artwork without considering the vast network of contextual elements and proposes the idea of impact as a network of sources.

Jasmina Jerant, on the other hand, is a co-author and guide of urban and feminist walking tours and explores in her chapter the connection between storytelling and feminist and herstory tours in achieving particular social impact.

Jasmina draws from her experience and practice to study the effects of the tours in Slovenia and assess their social impact in various areas. She also compares her experience with similar tours around the world. The chapter presents the observations stemming from personal and professional involvement in the context of audience responses, media coverage, and various institutions, data which she gathered using an open-ended questionnaire sent to the creators of three other existing Slovenian tours (in the cities of Ljubljana, Celje, and Novo mesto) and the Global Network of Feminist Tours, getting feedback from Buenos Aires, Paris, Rome, Reykjavik, Vienna, and Washington, DC.

Katja Kobolt's chapter concludes the section with a historical discussion about the debates on literature for children and its social role in the first decade of the post-war socialist Yugoslavia (1945–1955), which was (re)establishing publishing for minors. She traces the envisioned role of literature in the socialist society and particularly in children's lives, which is closely connected to the complex understanding of literature in the revolutionary historical period. By establishing difference between the "top-down" approach of the Soviet literary model, and Yugoslav intellectuals who advocated the artistic and intellectual freedom, Kobolt also discusses different models of literature, its social role, and—if we employ the current terminology—its impact.

The penultimate chapter brings a different narrative encounter with the topic of social impact, which differs from the previous chapters, but is a critical part of the volume. **Siniša Labrović,** having promised a literary piece to be included in the volume, shares his intimate account and experience with the imperative to produce and deliver, tied to the question of deadlines, quantity and measure, and social impact. His account is framed in the context of failure and defeat but, in fact, achieves quite the opposite.

Finally, the unique but complementary threads of thinking about and experiencing and practicing art, discussed and analyzed in this volume, aim to grasp and problematize the concept of social impact in its diverse lives. Brought to a close, or rather an opening, the concluding chapter by **Martin Pogačar** thus aims to post-frame the discussions in terms of the relationship of impact and control, and their effect on art, culture, and, not least, life.

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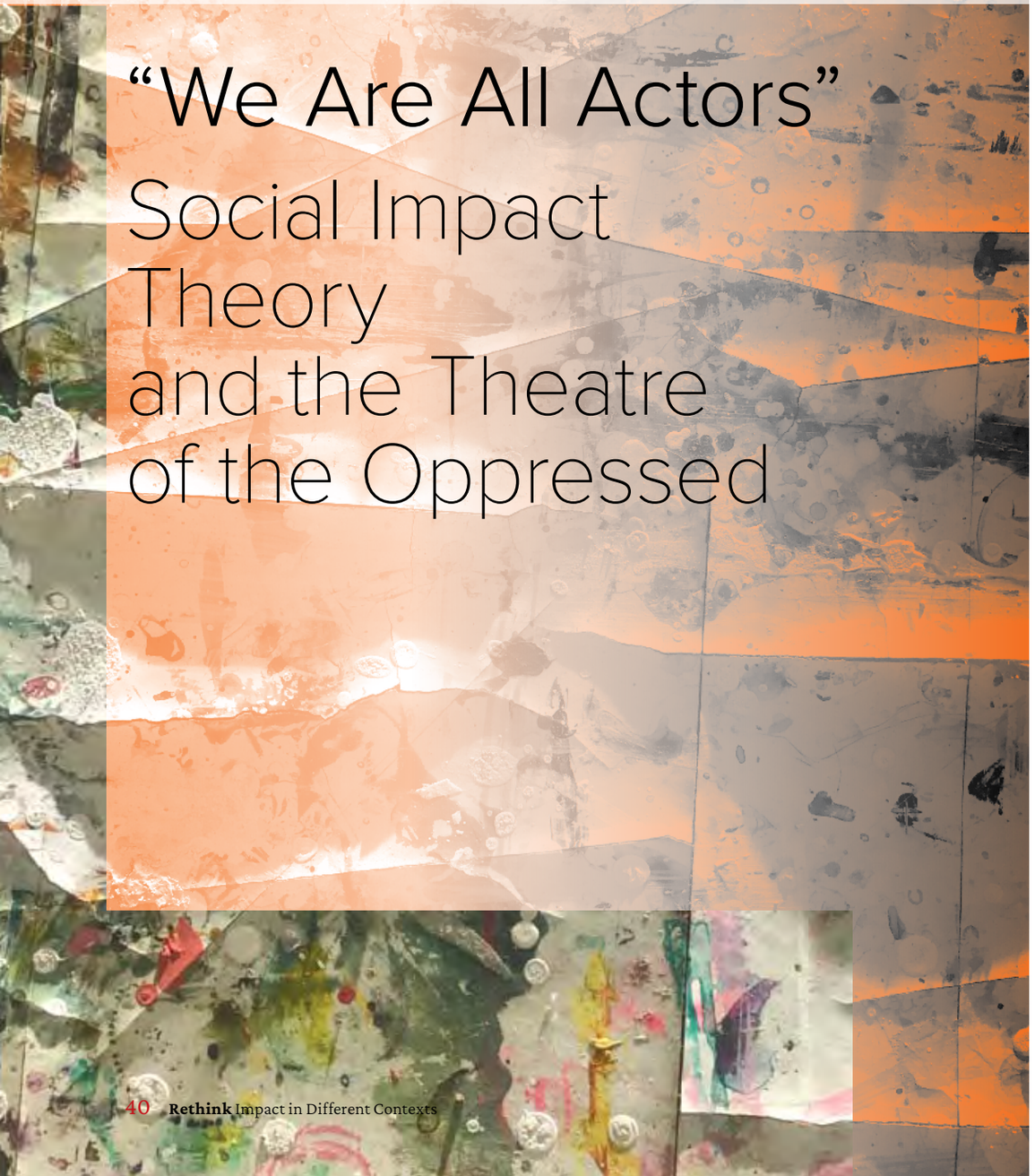
Impact in Different Contexts

JOSIPA LULIĆ

"We Are All Actors"

Social Impact Theory and the Theatre of the Oppressed



"Social impact" is a phrase I started to hear a lot once I realized I would need to apply regularly for funding to carry out my work with the Theatre of the Oppressed[1] (TO) full time. It often came with the added attribute of "expected". The underlying idea was that the donor would fund a number of activities that would bring about measurable change at the level of society. Coming from an academic background—especially since my PhD research revolved around the cognitive theory of culture—this notion struck me as peculiar. The idea of "expected social impact" presumes not only that we are sure what the right "direction" for society is but also that we already have a clear idea of how we can achieve it; we only need to organize that knowledge into predetermined Excel-sheet boxes of goals, results, and budgets, and deliver it to our target groups.

Such understanding of social change not only contradicts the theoretical underpinnings of the Theatre of the Oppressed but is also at odds with the definition of social impact as understood in the fields of cognitive theory and social psychology—formulated by Bibb Latané as "any of the great variety of changes in physiological states and subjective feelings, motives and emotions, cognitions and beliefs, values and behavior, that occur in an individual, human or animal, as a result of the real, implied, or imagined presence or actions of other individuals" (Latané 1981, 343). From the point of view of TO, true change in society happens through a multidirectional process that necessarily stems from experimentation and proceeds into uncharted territory (Boal 2022; 2014). From the point of view of social impact theory, it is not only impossible to unambiguously predict the impact

1 The Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is the name for a range of techniques of interactive political theater developed by Augusto Boal and his collaborators. All of the techniques are linked by the values of democratic dialogue and (self) empowerment of oppressed groups. The plays in TO are rooted in the actors' daily experience of violence and oppression, and the dialogical form of the performances (where the audience plays an active part) encourages both actors and audience to use theater as a space for the rehearsal of social change. The techniques of the Theatre of the Oppressed are forum theater (the play presents a social problem, and the audience steps on stage in order to act out possible strategies), invisible theater (played in public spaces, as a way to open debate between the passers-by who unknowingly become audience members), image theater (still images created by actors' bodies that show social relations), legislative theater (where the audience offers ideas for legislative change), newspaper theater (that deconstructs ideological messages in media), and introspective techniques (that asks from the actors to face internalized oppression).

of a particular action on society, but its focus is also instead at the opposite end of the spectrum: it is interested in the impact that other (real or imagined) agents—including people, works of art (or indexes; Gell 1998), or media—have on the individual. In this paper, I combine social impact theory with the theory of distributed cognition to try to map out the mechanisms of social change. I will follow the impact I have observed on the level of different elements of a social cognitive system over my two-decade praxis of facilitating TO workshops. This is a theoretical discussion from the viewpoint of practice. Each section could be expanded into a research proposal in social sciences, and I would be more than interested in collaborating in that hypothetical research.

The Theatre of the Oppressed (TO)

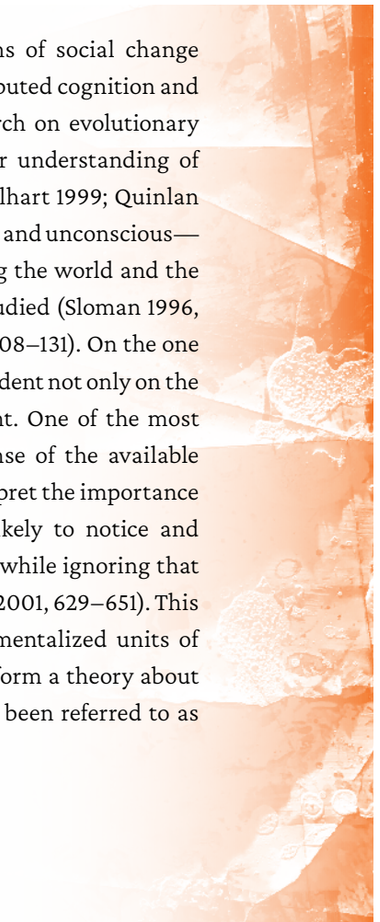
TO draws upon the ideas propagated by Paulo Freire (2018), a famous Brazilian pedagogue, as its main theoretical and political framework. The first basic tenet of Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed is that we are too often put into binary oppositions based on the real or perceived power structure underlying our actions and activities. Teachers see themselves as fundamentally different from their students, progressive party leaders from the masses devoid of class consciousness, actors from the audience, and vice versa. This dualist view also creates the idea that teachers, party leaders, and actors have the knowledge, the mandate, and the power to act and to lead; while students, masses, and audiences are passive, their only job being to follow the instructions in order to be liberated/taught/entertained by their counterparts. Freire strongly criticized this kind of dualism. For him, the main task for creating any meaningful change in society is to understand that there are no passive participants: everybody has the knowledge and the mandate to interpret and change their lived realities. The goal of educators is to create the opportunity for the marginalized groups to gain access to the tools that make change possible, at the same time learning from their students: Any kind of social impact for Freire had to be a two-way street (Freire 2018).

This understanding is directly incorporated into Boal's ideas on the relationship between the actors and the audience. In TO, there is no passive audience: regardless of the technique used, what makes TO distinct is the active role played by the spect-actors, as Boal named them (Boal 2014). In forum theater—the basic and best known of TO techniques—the play itself follows a relatively strict dramaturgical form, consisting of different attempts and strategies by the protagonist to fulfill their desire, constantly thwarted by the antagonist who has the position of power in the context presented in the play. The conflict shown onstage reaches its climax at the moment known as the "Chinese crisis", a term superficially derived from the (misinformed) idea that the Chinese word for crisis is written with the characters for "risk" and "opportunity". However, the crisis in forum theater dramaturgy represents just that: a situation in which the protagonist risks the most, but the opportunity is missed—they are defeated. The possibility for exploring the opportunity comes not within the play itself but in the rich combination of discussions and improvisations known as the forum. Namely, instead of remaining still in their seats, the audience is invited to enter the stage and attempt to change the way the protagonist, or some of the other characters (with the exception of the antagonist), behave. If the real-world context of the play allows for it, they can bring in another character as well as a way of investigating potential strategies that they can put to use in the world outside the stage. This allows the actors themselves, who are always the ones whose lived experiences were used to create the play, to benefit from this multiway learning process described by Freire. In my own experience, I would walk out after every forum theater session with at least one new way to understand the world, if not with a complete strategy to try out on the streets.

The closest notion to social impact as defined by grant donors is what Boal calls "rehearsal for revolution" (Boal 2014, 98)—a way to test and explore possible strategies of social change that can be later used in reality. The impact happens once audience members decide to put those new ideas about strategies into practice, directly organizing, petitioning, lobbying, striking, staging protests, or any other large-scale or small-scale political action that they came up with during the performance.

Here I am nevertheless proposing to explore something less evident: the notion that the act of playing and preparing forum theater itself creates a social impact on the level of social cognition. The hypothesis is that the understanding of the world and social relations transforms drastically due to the practice of TO and that different understanding prompts a different action as a direct consequence of the community's changed cognitive system. The evidence for this is mostly anecdotal—it comes from my lived experience and that of the people I have worked with, from the discussions with other TO practitioners across the world, from comments in the evaluations made by workshop participants, and specifically from the body of work of Sanjoy Ganguly and the Bengali company Jana Sanskriti that he has been running for over thirty years (Ganguly 2010; Ganguly and Yarrow 2016). He claims that Boal's definition of the forum as a rehearsal for revolution is extremely important but incomplete: however necessary organizing and continuous action in the real world may be, the revolution was indeed happening in the theater as well (in Jackson 2020).

To provide a theoretical framework for the mechanisms of social change through TO, it is necessary first to define the concepts of distributed cognition and cognitive theory of culture. Cognitive psychology and research on evolutionary adaptive changes in the nervous system have enhanced our understanding of cognitive processes (Neisser 2014; Murray 1995; Bly and Rumelhart 1999; Quinlan and Dyson 2008). The discovery that the cognitive—automatic and unconscious—processes play an essential role in understanding and creating the world and the self transformed how most psychological phenomena were studied (Sloman 1996, 3; Bargh and Ferguson 2000, 925; Smith and DeCoster 2000, 108–131). On the one side, we have the discovery that much of our cognition is dependent not only on the available stimuli but also on pre-existing patterns of thought. One of the most important functions of our cognitive system is to make sense of the available stimuli and organize them in a way we can use them. We interpret the importance of information on a subconscious level; we are far more likely to notice and remember information similar to that which we already have while ignoring that which is unfamiliar (Conway et al. 2001, 331–335; Pashler et al. 2001, 629–651). This is due to cognitive schemata—a network of small compartmentalized units of knowledge that we acquire in different ways, from which we form a theory about the world outside (Sommerhoff 2000). The same concept has been referred to as



scripts, concepts, states, or internal goal states (Chartrand and Bargh 1996, 464; Barrett et al. 2004, 553). Perception and interpretation of the same event can be completely different (from person to person, but also for the same individual—for example, before and after a traumatic event) depending on the cognitive schemata we use to experience the world around us.

On the flip side, cognitive theory also defines culture and society in terms of cognition (Atran 1998, 547–569; Boyer 1990; Barkow et al. 1992; Sperber 1996; Sperber and Hirschfeld 1999, 111–132). The basic premise is the following: our minds are filled with ideas, concepts, and representations. Only a small part of those myriad thoughts or images that cross our minds every minute will be communicated. Out of this small number, others will understand and find it interesting and significant enough to retain but a handful. However, some of them will be so captivating that they will communicate them further, thus creating a new process of cognition and communication. The ideas that spread through a large part of the population in that manner and remain recognizable enough to become widely understood as a single and identical concept will become cultural ideas. Therefore, any idea being communicated could be considered cultural to a greater or lesser degree, instead of being understood traditionally, through a binary opposition that regards some ideas as cultural and others as individual (Malley and Knight 2008; Tooby and Cosmides 1992). This is the basics of Sperber's so-called epidemiological theory of culture, which is beautifully defined as "the precipitate of cognition and culture in a human population" (Sperber 1996, 90).

Lastly, we do not think only with our brains: distributed cognition theory postulates that cognition also involves external artifacts (such as texts and images), work teams made up of several individuals, and cultural systems for interpreting reality (Hutchins 1991). Cognition becomes a system whose structures and processes are distributed between internal and external representations, across a group of individuals, and across space and time. The extended mind theory, derived from the wider theory of distributed cognition, was first developed in 1998 in an article by Clark and Chalmers (Clark and Chalmers 1998; Clark 2008). There the authors present for the first time the now-iconic example of how the objects from the environment play a role in an individual's cognitive system. In a nutshell, Clark and Chalmers compare Otto, a patient with Alzheimer's disease, who uses a notebook containing information about the world around him, and Inga, who carries that

same information in her head. Otto and Inga both want to visit the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum, but while Inga remembers the museum's address, Otto has to look it up in the notebook. After the analysis, the authors conclude that the processes of recollection and checking the notebook are functionally similar enough that Otto's notebook may be considered part of his cognitive system. The environment is not just a surplus or a medium by which an external message is conveyed; instead, objects themselves become part of thought. This kind of theoretical reflection quickly sparked interest in the humanities as a way to understand the impact that inanimate objects can have, almost as fully-fledged agents, as Alfred Gell theorizes in his book *Art and Agency* (Gell 1998).

Therefore, the limits of the framework through which I want to investigate the idea of social impact in the context of TO are, on the one hand, marked by the fact that the human mind functions as a categorizer—interpreting received information based on pre-existing experiences that shape the individual understanding of the world—and, on the other hand, by the fact that we share our cognition between the internal representations in our brains, and also our bodies as well as the objects, images, and people around us.

Segments of Distributed Cognition: Embodiment

Augusto Boal emphasizes games and exercises as crucial tools for building performance. One of the most famous and influential books he wrote is his "arsenal" entitled *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (2005), where he describes dozens of games and their variations that he adapted and developed himself during his work with different groups. Boal's main focus was using the exercises to de-mechanize the body. He claimed that our bodies are stuck in rigid positions—standing, sitting, or lying down—and that we are trained throughout socialization to move and behave mechanically. In order to break down the mechanization of the mind and provide the opportunity for people to think outside of the box, Boal took to breaking down the mechanization of the body. One of the games he would play at the start of a workshop, but also with the audience at the start of a performance, was *the cross and the circle*—a deceivingly simple task of tracing a cross in the air with one hand while simultaneously tracing a circle with the other. From there, he developed games for building trust and cooperation by exploring senses and imagination. There is even a game using the body to convey the message of how the actor who plays the oppressor should carry out the improvisation. In this exercise, two people of approximately the same size hold each other's shoulders and push as hard as possible without overpowering the other person. The idea is for the character of the oppressor to provide resistance to the improvisation of the spect-actor, who is trying out their strategy, pushing them to try their best, but not completely overwhelming and discouraging them. From the viewpoint of distributed cognition, Boal was working on the level of embodied cognition.

In my praxis, the impact that the inputs from the exercises had on participants' bodies deeply transformed individual and collective cognitive systems. There are numerous examples, but I will focus on a few that were most interesting.

One of the most challenging parts of a workshop is asking a group of individuals, often strangers, to do something that is, in most cases, opposite to what they have been told their entire lives: to collaborate, work as a group, trust one another, to open up about the oppression they face in their everyday life, trusting that the group will support them in elaborating it into a forum play and not exploit it as a weakness. There are numerous exercises developed precisely for this purpose. A basic one is *leading a blind person*. I repeat this exercise at every workshop because it is different every time I do it. It is fairly simple: done in pairs, one person is a leader, and the other has their eyes closed. The seeing person leads the blind one through space using the touch of the hand, without words. It can be developed further by relying on voice or even smell or body warmth rather than touch. This is an exercise in focusing on senses other than sight, but at the same time, it allows our bodies to come into a situation where they need to rely on another person for their safety. For me personally, this sort of trust is not easy to achieve. For a very long time, I would do this exercise with one hand covering my eyes—otherwise, I would instinctively open them. After several years my body gradually started reacting differently: I was able to run with my eyes closed or repeat the exercise in busy streets. At the

same time, I found out that my worldview changed. I started to feel not only much safer—not a small achievement for a survivor of childhood trauma—but also more engaged and willing to act. The exercise's effect on my body transferred to the emotional level and formed the basis of how I acted in the world.

The flip side of not trusting someone to catch us when we fall is expecting others to carry us. For me, the embodied insight into this distinction happened during another game. This time a person would stand in the middle of a small circle of people. She would deliberately lose balance in any direction, and the people in the circle would catch her and return her to a stable position. The trick in this game was to find a balance (pun not intended) between supporting a person who decides to lose balance in a particular direction and taking away their agency by pushing them across the balance point in the opposite direction. There is also, for the person in the middle, a subtle difference between asking for support while working with the group and throwing oneself, expecting to be carried by the group. This insight came within and from my body and still informs how I understand the questions of responsibility, mentoring, and support more than lengthy theoretical books do.

Another example is the game of *shark*. In this game, I did not participate; I was facilitating the workshop and giving the instructions, but during and after the game, the participants shared that they were mindblown by their assumptions. It was a mixed group of feminist activists and union leaders whom I gave increasingly difficult tasks. They would start by walking around the space ("swimming in the ocean") filled with many empty chairs ("islands"). The sound of the whistle would signal that "the shark is attacking": the participants had only a few seconds to find the nearest chair to be safe. In the first round, it was easy—everyone was standing on their island. However, when they were back in the ocean, I removed a couple of chairs, leaving fewer chairs than there were people. "It is like the game of musical chairs!" they exclaimed. "Someone will be out of the game". At the whistle, most of the participants managed to scramble onto the chairs, with two people left in the ocean. They frantically searched for the space on the islands until someone offered to share their chair. This gesture encountered shouts from the others about how it was not allowed, while those who shared chairs (correctly) noted that the rules never mentioned anything about sharing not being allowed. Hence, people started cooperating when there were even fewer chairs in the next round. A few rounds later, up to six people shared the safety of one chair while coming up with incredibly creative ways of staying above ground. The participants came out of the game extremely excited, sharing how, in the second round, they felt bad for the people left in the ocean and angry at me for proposing such a cut-throat competitive game—only to realize it was their pre-existing image of the world as competitive rather than collaborative that prevented them from the possibility of saving everyone from the shark.

The last embodied insight I want to discuss came from the exercises in the forum theater workshop about conflict. The game we played is called *drawing battle*. It is played in pairs. Each person in the pair receives a different secret instruction: one must draw a city at night time, the other a day at the beach. Then they are instructed not to talk, only to follow their given instructions. They receive one piece of paper and one pencil that they have to hold together, and they are given two minutes to carry out the instructions. It has always been fascinating for me to observe the different creative strategies participants use to resolve this conflict—ranging from fighting for domination so hard that they destroy the paper and the pencil to teaming up to create images of a person sitting in a night taxi dreaming of a day at the beach. However, the most illuminating part happened when I would ask what they thought were the secret instructions the other person received. Those who presumed their partner also got a drawing task, only a different one, find compromise quite naturally. Those who thought the other person's task was to obstruct their work ended up with squabbles and no intelligible images. One girl even stood up from her chair with eyes wide open, holding the torn paper, and exclaimed: *"This is what happens between my parents and me"*. The games served as a shortcut to some insights that would be otherwise difficult to achieve: by demechanizing the body, participants also demechanized their minds.

Segments of Distributed Cognition: Aesthetics

In *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed*—Boal's final book (2006), which marks the last methodological experiment he undertook before his death—he explicitly tackles the problem of cognition. Boal is concerned with what he sees as two modalities of thought: while one is verbal and theoretical, the other is connected to the senses and represents aesthetic cognition. In his view, there is only so much we can say in words; a thorough understanding of the world must also encompass movement, images, sounds, rhythms. This view is pretty much in accordance with cognitive theory: cognition is distributed to the body, as well as to the objects that surround us. This notion is thoroughly explored in the work of the feminist TO network Ma(g)dalenas.

Red Ma(g)dalenas International is a network of feminist, women-only TO groups working in several regions of the world—currently, Central America, South America (Brazil), and Europe.[2] The main focus of Magdalenas groups is the question of gender and gender-based violence; they have also done an incredible amount of work exploring and transforming the methodology of TO. The name of the new methodology is Teatro das oprimidas, which changes the original Portuguese name of TO in two aspects: in the original, *Teatro do oprimido*, the oppressed is singular and male, while in this subtle linguistic change, untranslatable into English, the oppressed become plural and female, thus providing us with the main points of the network's new theoretical underpinnings. Bárbara Santos, the most prominent of the network's core team of experienced *kuringas* (facilitators), articulated the main ideas of this new TO in her book, *Teatro das oprimidas* (2019). The main differences between traditional TO, especially forum theater and its new feminist variant, can be seen in several areas, notably dramaturgy, the *kuringa*'s way of facilitating the forum part of the performance, and the aesthetics.

2 Red Ma(g)dalena internacional, https://teatrodelasoprimidas.org/red-magdalena/; Theatro do oprimidio, https://teatrodelasoprimidas.org/teatro-de-las-oprimidas/.

From the forum play *Noises of Silence,* by the international network of feminist TO Red Ma(g)dalenas. Photo: Alberto Martin and Andrea Ximenis

The most noticeable change is in the process of facilitation itself. The traditional setup for the forum part of the play is that the *kuringa* asks the audience to define the roles of protagonist, antagonist, and tritagonist, and then asks: "What would you do?" Spect-actors are invited to step in, replace the protagonist, and show how they would react in the given situation. Within the feminist TO methodology, there is always an invitation to the audience to first discuss the problem shown on stage in small groups so that more people have an opportunity to say something and actively participate. Simultaneously, the *kuringa* incentivizes group interventions into the play rather than individual ones. The main reasoning is the following: an individual's heroic act cannot resolve critical social issues.

Moreover—this notion of a "superman" is strongly gendered. It is the epitome of the savior complex that society teaches its—especially white—boys. Social change can only come from sustained and collective effort, the most important part of which is organizing. Boal's "rehearsal for reality" thus takes a new form as

the audience becomes an image of society insofar as small communities come together to think of possible strategies of resistance. A similar idea manifests in the form of discouraging interventions when a spect-actor who does not share the protagonist's social position, especially when crucial to the conflict on stage, wishes to replace them. Concretely, the idea of a male audience member replacing a woman in a play about gender-based violence or a white woman stepping into the role of a black woman in a play about racial discrimination is not welcome. The reasoning behind this is not that, for instance, men have nothing to do with the "women issue", but precisely the opposite. The main presumption is that sexism or racism is a problem of the whole society and that it should be resolved at the level of the entire society. For this to be possible, a person should try to find a way to act from their social position. If the spect-actor steps into the role they can never fulfill in reality, instead of thinking and planning for collective change, one gets stuck in the position of playing an advisor to the other. This gets us back to the primary tenets of TO: it is a theater not for the oppressed but of the oppressed.

From the formal point of view, the most important feminist objection to the typical dramaturgical scheme of a forum theater play concerns the role of the protagonist. Santos and other *kuringas* in the network claim that by putting the burden of the protagonist on a single individual, especially in the context of gender-based violence, we are sending a message already at the very level of form. That message is that the responsibility for change is mainly on the individual. We get to question the way the woman protagonist behaved, offering solutions that would protect her if only she changed her behavior a little, effectively blaming the victim. Instead, feminist TO offers a dramaturgy where the focus is on the collective and the wider social context creating the oppressive system shown on stage. This change requires the creative use of aesthetic means.

Aesthetics has not always been the main focus of the TO groups, especially when the goal was to create simple and clear performances that could be produced on a zero budget or without a decent space for rehearsals. This made it possible to transform classrooms and dining halls into performing spaces. However, as the focus shifted to more complex depictions of the "context" part of a typical forum play, the dramaturgy, objects, and costumes used in the performances became increasingly important. This is not only the case for Magdalenas' plays but also for the plays by the Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed from Rio de Janeiro, where Santos served as artistic director and Boal's close collaborator for years (she later moved to Berlin). In the forum play *Pink Machine* that premièred during the international online festival Ma(g)dalenas in movement,[3] organized at the 10th anniversary of the network, the group Magdalenas Berlin, under Santos's artistic direction, presented the forum play entirely without words, based exclusively on movement and the symbolic weight of objects. This kind of procedure is not new for the theater in general. However, when presented in the context of a forum play, where there is an expectation for the audience to understand the events on stage as depicting real-life oppression that requires shared understanding and definition from the audience to be addressed, it puts the distributed cognition theory to the test. The reaction from the audience was amazing.

With the added challenge of combining live audiences in Berlin and groups in different parts of the world via Zoom, the play was discussed on stage without using language, only by manipulating objects and bodies in space. I repeated the experiment with the group organized around the Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed POKAZ, where I work. We discussed the play but also tried to offer aesthetic depictions of possible strategies by using objects—in this case, pieces of clothing. A group member commented that they vaguely had in mind what they wanted to do but only completely understood it when they were confronted with the actual clothing item. The action was simple, even banal: the question proposed on stage was about how society coerces women into abiding by the gender roles; this particular moment of oppression was symbolized by a too-tight (pink) sweater put on one of the protagonists. My colleague, in the protagonist role, felt overwhelmed when other spect-actors tried to take it off her as an act of liberation but managed to do it herself after seeing other people taking off the sweater themselves. Through a simple play with an object, taking up a lot less time than it took for me to write this down, the theoretical discussions of liberation and the trap of trying to liberate someone as opposed to supporting their liberation were condensed into an insight otherwise difficult to achieve. The image of the sweater now informs our collective praxis.

3 Listen to the recording of the performance and forum: "The pink machine/ La maquina rosa. Forum theatre online/Teatro foro online, Red Ma-g-dalena Internacional", https://youtu.be/2-6meAACEFI.

Segments of Distributed Cognition: Culture

The idea of cultural/social cognition—which presupposes that our cognition is distributed not only to objects and our bodies but also to other people, creating a model that shapes how we perceive and interpret reality—is not new. It is a key topic in anthropology, as well as in sociology and political theory, and it is most closely connected to the idea of social impact as defined by the EU funding agencies. In the context of distributed cognition, this does not mean that we merely conform our opinion to the opinion of the people around us; instead, our opinion is literally delegated to others—we economize by accepting other people's opinions (if they share our values) above analyzing information to form our conclusion (Kahan 2008). This is one of the most visible patterns that forum theater aims to disrupt. Under the motto of "humanising humanity", Augusto Boal was using TO to disrupt those models and allow the individuals to achieve their full potential not as passive and unconscious parts of the group but as active participants (McLaverty-Robnison 2016). "We are all actors: being a citizen is not living in society, it is changing it" (Boal 2009).

This kind of critical consciousness, or *conscientização*, to use the Freiran term that is usually left in its Portuguese original in translations to different languages, should not be confused with the Marxist-Leninist idea of raising the consciousness of the masses, as it does not start from the idea of the knowing avant-garde. It comes from the notion of creating a space for playing out different antagonisms and different roles. This aspect often already comes to light during the play's preparation stage. One of the exercises used for shaping a character is *hot seating*: in this famous exercise, the actor is asked different questions that she has to answer as the character. This allows for a deep understanding of the role, both in terms of Stanislavskian psychological realism and Brechtian structural determinism, functioning not only as a tool to study the role but also as a way to build up the forum part of the performance. The actor needs to be able to improvise convincingly to test the strategies developed by the audience. There are always safety checks—a good *kuringa* will notice if the actor did not manage to follow through with the improvisation and will bring the question back to the audience—but this can hopefully be avoided. The space of the forum play thus becomes an arena where actors must actively include others in their cognitive process: they need to improvise based on ideas often at odds with how people around them usually react. This creates (quite productive) internal conflict and antagonism even for the actors who are playing a character close to their own mindset, let alone for ones who are truly put in another person's shoes. Moreover, it does the same for the audience.

Examples for this kind of internal conflict are easy to come by; every forum play that I have participated in, whether as a *kuringa*, actor, or audience member, put me in a similar position, where I felt at least a little bit out of joint, surprised by the others' reactions and by my own. One of the more obvious examples is the work done by the Roma Youth Organisation in Croatia on the topic of the double oppression of Roma women. Several women from the group chose the topic and invited other (male) members to participate. They all agreed in principle, but the character work and especially forum performances showed how a large part of the patriarchal matrix had remained unchallenged until then.

Not that this is in any way unique to the Roma community: domestic violence is rooted in patriarchal society as such. In one of the first forum plays I was facilitating, the actors also created a play about family violence; they played it in front of an audience of university-educated middle-class people in a Croatian provincial town. The audience members objected when one of the interventions in the play proposed that the neighbor who witnessed violence call the police. Although the audience did not approve of the violence and spent hours passionately trying to find a way to prevent it and act against it, the very idea of the neighbor—an outsider—reacting to the violence created a strong push-back.

From the forum play *Do we have a choice?*, by the Roma Youth Organisation of Croatia.
Photo: Leo Vidmar

However, it also created a productive antagonism: the unchallenged idea in the community that family violence is a family matter suddenly came into focus, where the same community could challenge it. This kind of clash on the level of unchallenged cultural ideas about the role of men and women in society took place at almost every performance of the play by the Roma Youth Organisation. It was especially poignant in exposing the beliefs that family violence was a problem of women and that women need to be the ones to resolve it by stepping up and not allowing the violence. At the same time, the same actors who expressed such beliefs responded in character with even greater violence once the interventions tried to openly oppose the patriarchy in the family. They played out the exact reason why this intervention cannot work, which thus allowed the community to more deeply investigate the possible strategies.

Putting It Together: Dynamic Social Impact Theory

Dynamic social impact theory recognizes three vectors of change in the belief system of a social group (Latané 1996): consolidation—with time, the beliefs within the group become more and more uniform; clustering—the opposite tendency, wherein a small group within the larger one, holding oppositional beliefs, clusters together and isolates against the influence of the larger part; and correlation. Correlation is an especially interesting phenomenon in the light of social change because this vector predicts that with time the group will show more considerable uniformity even in beliefs that are not openly discussed.

This idea of transferring social cognition from one area to another was the foundation of the pilot project conducted in a primary school in the center of Zagreb in 2019. I carried out this project in collaboration with Ana Širanović, a professor teaching critical theories of education at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Zagreb University. The primary school invited us to use the forum theater method to help resolve the bullying and peer violence problem in a third-grade classroom. From what the teachers described and what we observed, there was a group of extremely disruptive children, with a lack of attention, who took over the entire classroom in a way that the other children became uninterested, silent, and afraid to talk up. Our premise was that one of the reasons this was happening was clustering—this group created their own set of rules that governed their social cognition. Hence, during the school semester in which we worked with the children once a week, we set out to utilize forum theater as a method to redistribute cognitive clusters and to test whether correlation would work: whether the newly acquired beliefs from TO work would transfer to other areas of their school lives.

We started by creating new groups: instead of working in the same class setting, we created two groups and combined them with students from a different class. In collaboration with their teachers, we targeted the "disruptive" children and separated them into groups to shake up the clustering. During the workshops, we drew upon all of the levels described earlier—embodiment, aesthetics, and cultural cognition. For the first five or six sessions, we only explored games, trying to use bodies as vehicles of the ideas of trust and collaboration as opposed to competition and individualism. One particularly interesting session happened when we proposed a game of group navigation. The game is played with the following rules: one person has their eyes closed and needs to cross a room filled with obstacles, navigated by verbal instructions from the rest of the group. The group must self-organize to lead the person safely to a specific goal. The two groups had very different organizing strategies. One decided to put one person on a chair: this person was the only one to give direct instructions to the closed-eyed person, to avoid the cacophony and confusion of different voices, while the rest of the group provided suggestions to the person on the chair. Interestingly enough, the girl on the chair was not part of the "disruptive", dominating group. She fulfilled her role amazingly—she gave clear instructions, asked the group for suggestions, and waited to be clear on the best way to proceed. The other group took a different approach: they decided that the most important thing for them was that everyone had an equal opportunity to participate, so they sat in a circle around the room and gave instructions one by one. The trouble with this approach was that not everyone was in the best position to provide instructions—some could not even see all the obstacles from their seats, and the strategy resulted in a few bumps against the obstacles.

TO games: Columbian hypnosis. Photo: Bojan Mrđenović

We discussed this experience with both groups. The first one was proud of their achievement. In contrast, the second one was somewhat frustrated but continued to claim how the fairness element—for each person to have the same time in the speaking role—was more important than the safety of the closed-eyed person. This game was played at the midpoint of the process, and it quite accurately

shows the shift in the understanding of how the community was functioning. Similar games at the beginning would have everyone opting for the second strategy—putting individual profit as the main focus, even to the detriment of the common goal. In contrast, we saw many more instances similar to the first strategy toward the end.

This shift became quite visible when it came to preparing the plays. The participants created four forum plays, each from their own experiences; they wrote them, cast the roles, and directed them together as a group. The plays were presented at the end of the school year, during the morning, in front of their peers, and in the evening in front of the parents and teachers. The feedback we got from teachers was that they had noticed a significant decrease in violent and disruptive behaviors. However, without the control group, it was difficult to know if this was a result of the workshops or just growing up. In any case, when we observed the children interact, it was obvious that although we never directly discussed the teasing and bullying but focused on building community, the shift happened—exactly as the social impact theory predicted.

Conclusion

Understanding social change and tracing the social impact of a single activity has always seemed like an extremely daunting process. I continue to write down the required buzzwords—empowerment, self-advocacy, community building, inclusion—in the appropriate boxes of project funding bids, and I do see some of these effects in the groups with which I work. However, I need much more than data correlation to understand the mechanism of how and why these changes happen. I am convinced that society is an incredibly complex system and that attributing any kind of change to a single source is overly simplistic, even a sort of magical thinking. On the other hand, if we are working in a field dedicated to bringing social change, as is the Theatre of the Oppressed, the focus needs to be on understanding the mechanisms of transformation. The best framework I have managed to find for this endeavor is the idea of distributed cognition as a part of the cultural cognitive system. This framework allows me to understand that, for a lasting change in society to be possible, interventions must be made on different levels of our shared cognitive system: in the logical, theoretical understanding of the world and the levels of the body, aesthetics, and cultural matrix. This is how the Theatre of the Oppressed proceeds from being mere rehearsal to becoming one of the possible vehicles for revolution. The revolutionary potential of TO is not in big gestures and mass movements: rather, it is to be found in more subtle transformations of individuals and communities. It is evident in the ability of TO to transform our cognition, the way we understand the world and social structures; communication, the way we interact with each other; and in the concrete and continuous actions that follow from it.

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LANA ZDRAVKOVIĆ

Nothing Subversive in Porn Within Performance Art: In Search of a New Performative Condition

Pornography and performance art have been strongly intertwined since the 1960s and 1970s when the sexual revolution, influenced by breakthroughs of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Marxism, and counterculture, opened up the space for sexual liberation, freedom of the body, and resistance to cultural norms. "Performing the subject" (Jones 1998) became one of the most common strategies of postmodern art and has been understood as constitutive for postmodernism "because of their fundamental subversion of the modernism's assumption that fixed meanings are determinable through the formal structure of the work alone" (Jones 1998, 21). Transgressive strategies of blurring the boundaries between artist and artwork and involving the audience within sexual imagery are crucial to many postmodern artworks where sex serves as an artistic metaphor, a critique, and a subversive element.[1]

This process was constitutive of women's performance art that emerged within the second-wave feminism as a specific "deconstructive strategy" (Forte 1988, 218) that allied postmodernism and feminism. Derived from the dominant system of representation, which established women as "the objectified other" (Forte 1988, 218), it added the critique of gender inequality under the dominant patriarchal matrix to the already established critique of modernism. It built a position of woman's identity within the postmodern theory of the subject as constructed by cultural practices. Manifesting the slogan that "the personal is political", a woman's body, burdened with all the ideological connotations, became a battlefield for opposing, mocking, and challenging the male gaze to confront the complex processes of objectification. So it is not a surprise that mostly women

1 This text has emerged through endless debates with Zoran Kurelić about porn and performance art and is also an attempt to rethink my own (over)sexualized performance art practice, as well as to reflect some of the dilemmas of the self-objectification strategies that frames my own performative work. I am extremely grateful to Zoran for endless inspiration, help, and support. I also thank Mišo Mičić for his review of the English text.

artists used the strategy of "explicit body" (Schneider 1997) in order to confront their "inherently oxymoronic" status: "unrepresentable except as representation" (Schneider 1997, 23).[2]

> Making any body explicit *as socially marked*, and foregrounding the historical, political, cultural, and economic issues involved in its marking, is a strategy at the base of many contemporary feminist explicit body works. Manipulating the body itself as *mise en scène*, such artists make *their own bodies* explicit as the stage, canvas, or screen across which social agendas of privilege and disprivilege have been manipulated (Schneider 1997, 20).

"Performing gender" (Butler 1990) became the most important strategy of third and fourth-wave feminism, which became established through a vast critique of the historical failure of feminism from the suffragettes to the modern white middle-class movement to include women who experienced oppression on multiple levels (such as race, class, sexual orientation, or gender expression). New identities raised within the LGBTIQ movement shaped themselves in the broader context of the postcolonial agenda, presupposing that desire is not constructed by males (patriarchal), but is colonized by the dominant norm, therefore is heteronormative. Art practices developed under this paradigm strove for a performative embodiment of "deviation" from the dominant body, sex, or gender norm, modifying the classical feminist motto into "the private is political".

The complex relationship between art and pornography has been shaped through moral/ethical dispute that oscillates between conservative understandings of pornography as obscenity that has to be censured and liberal ones who see it as freedom of speech that has to be legally regulated according to the harm principle (cf. Adler 1990; Dworkin, R. 1981; Manchester 1999). The feminist debate goes between against-porn feminists, who understand pornography as oppression of women (and in some cases pledges for censorship that, in consequence, are in line with conservative and religious arguments) (cf. Dworkin, A. 1979; Mackinnon 1983; 1987; 1993a; 1993b) and pro-porn feminists who proclaim that censoring pornography would undermine, rather than further, women's rights (cf. Strossen 1993; Williams 1989). Different attitudes toward the issue have deeply polarized the feminist movement. Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, they have resulted in "feminist sex wars", initiating a vast debate on matters of sexuality, including pornography, erotica, prostitution/sex work, lesbian sexual practices, the role of transgender women, sadomasochism, and other sexual issues, which lasts until today.

Any attempt to distinguish art from pornography (cf. Maes and Levinson 2012) has become ultimately obsolete within the aesthetic argument of postmodernism, which established itself by attacking the modernist "formal" distinctions between good and bad art, high art and popular mass culture, and the sanctity of the art context and real life. Postmodernism not only rejected the modernist standards of "serious artistic value", but it also rejected the idea that art must have any traditional "value" at all. Based on Derrida's deconstruction of the Kantian notions of aesthetics postmodernism undermined the modern assumption that there can be universal judgments of taste, dismantling the disinterested Kantian model of aesthetics. Blurring the binarity art/porn, postmodern performance art threatens the myth of disinterestedness, flooding the field with a ribald literality marked by porn's immediate and "interested" aim toward sexual or visceral effect. With the sign and signified united in the artist's body, the "binary terror" (Schneider 1997, 13) is provoked "when the word 'art' is flashed over the image 'porn'" (Schneider 1997, 14).

This article presents some of the most interesting examples of the appropriation of porn by performance art to discuss why the transgressive strategies that go from self-objectification and over-sexualization to total pornographization are considered subversive. While pornography has been condemned as obscene, morally problematic, and dirty criminal business, pornographed performance art is considered critical, progressive, and political. However, as postmodernism dismantled all standards of defining what art is, neither are there standards to claim that postmodern art is art. Moreover, we can claim that pornographed performance art reduced the artist into an exhibitionist (radical narcissist, egoist,

2 There are several male performance artists—such as Vito Acconci, with his "masturbatory performance" *Seedbed* (1972); Frank James Moore, with his ritualistic performances with audience participation, which he developed for years under the name "eroart" which he coined to describe art that embraces nudity, eroticism, sexuality, physical play, love, the body, passion for life, pleasure, and is distinguished from pornography; or Jeff Koons, with his kitsch-pop-porn *Made in Heaven* photo series (1990) showing him in extreme sex activity with porn star and his then-wife Cicciolina—which, for the sake of the focus of the article will not be discussed.

individualist) and the audience into a voyeur, i.e., a consumer of artistically framed pornography and all that without the guilt usually induced by the production and consumption of "regular" pornography. Although important within the art world, it is unclear how those practices fight patriarchy, heteronormativity, or capitalism. As we can see, none of them has been threatened by these art practices; this article claims that they merely produce a new imaginary for instant gratification within the consumer capitalistic society that they supposedly criticize. In fact, they exist exactly because of the permissive society and its logic of the full commodification of sexuality. In a situation where transgression has become the norm, this article claims that no emancipation can follow.

Goddesses, Witches, and Muses Who Gaze Back: Radical Nakedness and the Liberation of the Body as the Striving for Agency

Historically, the female body has generally been presented in art as the object of male desire. As shown by the feminist "gang" artist group Guerrilla Girls, less than 5% of the artists in museums are women, but 85% of the nudes are female. Adored as muses, awed as goddesses, condemned as witches, women have been constantly kept in a mystical, passive, and subverted position by the "male genius", thus revealing a combination of hate, envy, and fear. While their beauty was praised, their agency was miscarried. The answer to the question of why there have been no great women artists is thus apparent: "The fault [...] lies not in our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles or our empty internal spaces, but in our institutions and our education—education understood to include everything that happens to us from the moment we enter this world of meaningful symbols, signs and signals" (Nochlin 1971, 26). Therefore, it is no wonder female artists strove to deconstruct the tradition of the passive female nude by taking control over their own sexuality, transforming their bodies from an object of the male gaze to a weapon against socially constructed ideologies of gender. It is less clear why they presumed that using female sexual power would automatically confront male social power. Making themselves not only desired but also desiring—by self-reference strategies of becoming their own work to overtake agency—does not necessarily destroy the patriarchal matrix, as we will see in the following examples.

Carolee Schneemann's performative action *Eye Body* (1963) is one of the best examples. In the kinetic environment of her studio apartment, using the form of a shamanic ritual, she covered herself in various materials, including paint, grease, chalk, and plastic, and, in that way, as she claimed, she "established her body as a visual territory" (Jones 1998, 2). She intended to be the artist and the object, the image and the image-maker, the eye and the body simultaneously, using sexually explicit expressiveness as a strategy to confront the misogynist art system—including her troubled relationship with the male-dominated Fluxus movement.[3] Furthermore, in her 18-minute film *Fuses* (1967), motivated by the desire to shape a woman's depiction of her own sexual acts by her own standards as a feminist reclamation of women's sexuality and not those of mainstream pornography or classical art, she presented herself in sexually explicit activities with her then-boyfriend.

Faced with the (feminist) critique for her "self-indulgent narcissist exhibitionism" (Rosen 2017), Schneemann performed her most notorious piece *Interior Scroll* (1975). Reading her "manifesto" from a narrow, rope-like roll of paper extracting it from her vagina, she strove to establish herself as a "speaking subject" in the phallogocentric art, a world simultaneously foregrounding and subverting her own position. She was praised by some feminists for using "personal clutter", "highlighting the feminist perspective on the personal as the political, but also

3 Fluxus was an international, interdisciplinary community of artists, composers, designers, and poets during the 1960s and 1970s who engaged in experimental art performances, which emphasized the artistic process over the finished product. Fluxus is known for experimental contributions to different artistic media and disciplines and for generating new art forms, including intermedia, conceptual art, and video art. Many Fluxus artists share anti-commercial and anti-art sensibilities, broadening what is considered to be art. George Maciunas, largely considered to be the founder of the movement and the author of *Fluxus Manifesto* (1963), rejected Carolee Schneeman as a member of Fluxus because of, as he claimed, her overt sexuality in her works.

contrasting 'masculine' and 'feminine' modes of addressing the world" (Forte 1988, 222) and by some art critics as a paradigmatic example of an embodiment of the new postmodern feminist paradigm where a woman "performing herself in an erotically charged narrative of pleasure challenges the fetishistic and scopophilic 'male gaze'" (Jones 1998, 2). But for some others (cf. Dolan 1987), she was, by using her gorgeous beauty, just reproducing the patriarchal matrix without any emancipatory potential.

A similar strategy of intersubjective self-depiction was introduced by Hannah Wilke, who developed a specific "rhetoric of the pose" (Jones 1998, 157, 164), establishing herself in relation to the audience through a constant "subversive dynamic of posing" (Jones 1998, 159). The photograph *What Does This Represent / What Do You Represent (Reinhart)*, part of the *So Help Me Hannah* series (1978–1984), presents the artist in the corner of a room, naked and with legs widely opened to the gaze; in the video performance *Gestures* (1974), she presents herself as raw flesh with a hole (which can be interpreted both as mouth or vagina); in a series of "performalist self-portraits" (Jones 1998, 154, 184), *S.O.S. – Starification Object Series* (1974), she poses topless with various pieces of chewed gum in the shape of vulvas arranged throughout her body, metaphorically demonstrating how women in society are chewed up and then spat out. She was praised for her attempt to subvert the postulates of classical aesthetics about the non-interested recipient and open them for closeness and subjective reaction (cf. Jones 1998). She was also criticized for exploiting her beauty.

An examination of how the power relations inherent in media representations inscribe women's bodies and consciousness was central for Valie Export's work. In her early guerrilla performance—which has attained an iconic status in feminist art history—*Action Pants: Genital Panic* (1968), she entered an art cinema in Munich, wearing crotchless pants, and walked among the audience with her exposed genitalia at face level. In another performance piece, *Tap and Touch Cinema*, performed in the public space in ten European cities (1968–1971), Export wandered the streets with a "small mock-up of a [movie] theatre", a case strapped to her bare chest. Peter Weibel, her collaborator, invited passers-by to "'visit the cinema' for five minutes" by reaching into the "theater" and feeling her bare breasts. The action, described by the artist as "the first genuine women's film", was designed to challenge the voyeurism of cinema. She claimed that she was trying to develop a completely new, non-voyeuristic approach to the female body as something other than a visual object and wanted to find out what happens when you leave behind this voyeuristic mode and confront people with reality. Instead of presenting a sexualized female body to be observed, Export solicited physical contact (cf. Fore 2012).

All three artists have clear intentions to challenge, distort, and control the "scopophilic male gaze", which has been central to feminist film theorists rooted in a combination of semiotics, Marxism, and psychoanalysis. Laura Mulvey was one of the first who used psychoanalytic theory as a political weapon to deconstruct how the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured the film form. By analyzing film's fascination with sexual difference, she showed how pre-existing patterns of fascination with socially established interpretations of sexual difference, which control images, erotic ways of looking, and spectacle (cf. Mulvey 1988), reinforce film language. As the "castrated other", Mulvey explains, the woman is sexual difference, operating both as an icon (the object for the pleasurable experience of desire) and as a source of anxiety over that difference (the fear of castration). The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this anxiety. The first is a preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma, which entails investigating the "mystery" that is a woman; or substituting the anxiety with a fetish object; or "turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous" (Mulvey 1988, 64). The second avenue, "fetishistic scopophilia", best developed in the safe darkness of the cinema, builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself. Unlike voyeurism, which needs a narrative, fetishism can exist outside linear time as the erotic instinct is focused on the look alone.[4]

4 Within feminist film theory that criticizes the concept of male gaze as an issue of white feminism, bell hooks (cf. hooks 1992) developed the concept of the "oppositional gaze", as a tool that black people use to disrupt the power dynamic that white cinema uses to perpetuate the Othering of blackness in media.

However, as exposed by Mulvey, scopophilia develops one more aspect: the need to be looked at:

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong and visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness (Mulvey 1988, 62).

Consequently, this "scopophilic eroticism", develops women's masochistic narcissism as a need to be at the center of the male gaze as the only way to be noticed.

Jones praises exactly this "radical narcissism" (1998, 17) as a "fixation to performing the self" (1998, 185), seeing it as a revolutionary strategy of postmodern feminist performance art that collapses the distance between subject and object, artist and artwork, artist and recipient, deconstructing the dominant ideology of disinterested critique, provoked recipient desires and enjoyment. As the public embodiment of the female subject, radical narcissism was, for Jones, a politicization of personal experience and, therefore, a subversive act *par excellence*. However, it is not clear why revealing the fact that man is not a disinterested being and that uninterested judgment does not exist makes these works political, as claimed by Jones and other poststructural essentialist theoreticians.[5] And especially why feminist artists thought that they could control the internal logic of pleasure they provoke. Why do women performers presuppose that if men sexualize them, it is a problem, but if they sexualize themselves, then it is a subversive act?

For Marxian, Brechtian, materialist, anti-essentialist feminist critics, subjection through sexualization does not in any way lead to politicization. Jill Dolan ultimately condemns nudity in performance: "From a materialist feminist perspective, the female body is not reducible to a sign free of connotation. Women always bear the mark and meaning of their sex, that inscribes them within a cultural hierarchy" (1987, 160). Furthermore, they see these praxes to be inevitably linked to the corrupting influence of commodity culture, asserting that they merely reinscribe the body as an object and a source of voyeuristic (male) pleasure, which is significant especially bearing in mind Schneeman's statement: "But you had to be attractive, or they would laugh you off your page. I talked with Hannah Wilke and some other artists about this: being attractive gave us the possibility of subverting the meanings of our bodies as they were predetermined by male culture" (Rosen 2017).

Mary Kelly (cf. 1981) sharply criticized the strategy of "metaphysics of the presence" in the performance art from the 70s, suggesting that any artwork containing an artist's body is necessarily reactionary and metaphysical, reinforcing rather than challenging the exclusive aspects of modernism. Griselda Pollock also developed the distinction of art forms that provoke pleasure instead of discomfort, seduce instead of repulse, and place the audience as passive consumers rather than active critics (cf. 1987). She claims that for feminist artists, the "strategy of distancing" is crucial because it undermines the ruling structures of cultural consumption that are classically fetishistic.

5 Debates over "essentialism" raised by feminist moral and political philosophy, questioning whether there are any shared characteristics common to all women, which unify them as a group, reached its peak in the 1980s and early 1990s. Many leading feminist thinkers of the 1970s and 1980s rejected essentialism, particularly because universal claims about women are invariably false and effectively normalize and privilege specific forms of femininity. On the other hand, by the 1990s, it had become apparent that the rejection of essentialism problematically undercut feminist politics, by denying that women have any shared characteristics, which could motivate them to ask together as a collectivity. An "anti-anti-essentialist" current therefore crystallized, which sought to resuscitate some form of essentialism as a political necessity for feminism.

Whores, Prostitutes, Pornstars Becoming Artists: From Modern Spleen to Postmodern "Frenzy"

Not only the female body but also female sexuality has been socially, culturally, politically, and economically debased in the patriarchal society—even when seemingly worshiped aesthetically. While "modern masters" (Baudelaire, Manet, Picasso …) were fascinated by the low, dirty, marginalized life and especially by prostitutes who became an allegory of modernity itself, women's sexuality was conceived as inherently animalistic, primitive, and perverse. Postmodern feminist performance art cut the division between prostitute and artist, porn and art, in a manner of the ready-made. Works do not attempt to represent the low within the frame of high art but to wrestle with the frame itself, crossing the border between high and low at the level of the frame. Such a work "does not symbolically depict a subject of social degradation, but actually *is* that degradation, terrorizing the sacrosanct divide between the symbolic and the literal" (Schneider 1997, 28). Prostitutes' bodies became a stage, emblematic for border crossing between high and low. As perfect representatives of a "dialectical image", a concept of Walter Benjamin that he defined through the parable of "the whore, who is seller and commodity in one" (1973, 171), they emancipate through commodification. That is why prostitutes are generally perceived as an "abject phenomenon" (Kristeva 1982), i.e., an embodiment of a paradox, which causes ambivalence, attraction and disgust, excitement and repulsion.

It is no coincidence that the avant-garde collective COUM Transmissions promoted their multimedia performance event *Prostitution* (1976) with Cosey Fanni Tutti posing as Manet's *Olympia* (1863)—"one of the most important prostitutes of modernism", as stated on the promotional poster—but dressed in the manner of an SM porn model. The transformative event was a highlight of the collective's transgressive performative work full of explicit sexuality, including SM sexual practices, live sexual intercourses of Genesis P-Orridge and Tutti, and using elements like blood, sperm, and feces. The main content of *Prostitution* was the exhibition of pages from pornographic magazines featuring Tutti. She used her sex work documentation as a work of art, precisely in the form of a readymade, transforming it "through a gesture of contractual reattribution" (Wilson 2015, 111). Namely, Tutti signed each page of a pornographic magazine as both artist and model. According to Wilson, in that way, Tutti transformed her sex work into artwork and herself from a pornographic model to an artist. Exhibited in an elite cultural institution (ICA London), each page was reframed from a porn magazine page to an artifact. In that way, "low pornography" became "high art". It is not quite clear whether Tutti became a part of the porn industry to use the experiences and artifacts from that field in her artistic work or if she just decided to include sex work in her work experience, as she once stated: "We were all into sex magic and stuff like that—sex was always on the agenda" (LaCava 2019). But the fact is that with this project, she mainstreamed the idea that sex is art (cf. Fanni Tutti 2017) and entered the comprehensive history of feminist art, becoming an important part of the feminist canon, especially and in the first place in the United States. A conservative MP proclaimed P-Orridge and Tutti as "wreckers of civilisation"; the show caused sharp debate in UK Parliament about public funding of art and the need to reframe the obscenity laws.[6]

A similar "frenzy" has been going on around the works of Karen Finley, who became known for her striking performances in nightclubs where she initially combined exposed nakedness, demonstrating bodily functions like menstrual blood, urinating, or defecating while expressively narrating the sexual violence, abuse, and degradation of women. In *The Constant State of Desire* (1986), she offers a series of monologues with ribald contents and in-your-face testimonial style, expressing great passion, pain, rage, and anger, speaking from the standpoint of victims of rape, child abuse, AIDS, domestic violence, and racism, but also from the

6 Already in 1970, the British Home Office established the Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship (the Williams Committee), with the task of reviewing the laws concerning obscenity, indecency, and violence in publications, displays, and entertainment in England and Wales, except in the field of broadcasting. The committee reported in 1979 that pornography could not be shown to be harmful and that "the role of pornography in influencing society is not very important […] to think anything else is to get the problem of pornography out of proportion with the many other problems that face our society today". The committee reported that, so long as children were protected from seeing it, adults should be free to read and watch pornography as they saw fit.

position of a perpetrator (position of the male desire), shifting positions of power all the time, all of that set to a disco beat. In the performance *We Keep Our Victims Ready* (1990), she famously smeared chocolate on her nude body to raise attention about the discovery of the body of a young girl, raped and covered in feces. Because of that performance, she was branded "the chocolate-smeared woman", lost her National Endowment of the Arts grant with the charge of "indecency" and "obscenity", and never received public funding again. This opens the debate about public funding of art and obscenity laws in the United States as well.

Feminist art critics have widely praised Finley's attempt to strongly refuse to participate in the dominant representational spectacle of pornified objectification imaginary of the women's body by locating the body not as material for pleasure but as the source of excrement and detritus as wasted, victimized, abused, "as already consumed" (Dolan 1987, 161). By intelligently developing the embodiment strategy of grotesque perversion, she constituted her performative body as a "body of evidence" and as "a site of oppression" (Dolan 1987, 161), which demonstrates how women are debased in society. "What remains of the body and sexuality has already been digested, processed, and regurgitated as splintered, violent images and incoherent words, to be meaningfully reassembled only by spectators with stomachs strong enough for such consumption" (Dolan 1987, 161). By systemically degrading her body as dirty, disgusting, and repulsive, she transgresses the accepted representations of the feminine form and mocks male sexuality, establishing them as a sexual subject in a "reverse gaze" (Dolan 1987, 162). "Because she is mired in the corporeality of her own flesh as it has been abused in the system of representation, she never takes flight into sexual and gender fantasies of liberation" (Dolan 1987, 163).

Certainly, Finley does everything she can to avoid her body being presented as a consumable object. However, the question is whether she can disassociate herself from the cultural definitions that always obscure the female body: "It seems that Finley attempts to appropriate pornography, but is Finley too close to that which she subverts? It seems excessively optimistic to believe that performance art could change the meaning of the female body. The female performance artist does not have the power to completely determine the way the audience perceives women" (Striff 1997, 12). Some critics', such as Erin Striff's, *reliance* on Roland Barthes's theorizations of "the death of the author" (cf. Barthes 1983) simply suggests that it is not the artist who decides the nature of the performance, but the spectators themselves.

The best example of the embodiment of whore and artist in the same body is certainly Annie Sprinkle, the icon of porn, the pioneer of the post-porn movement, and the most notorious prostitute in the art world. "If Duchamp presented the toilet seat as 'art', Sprinkle presents the prostitute as artist" (Schneider 1997, 58). Sprinkle became famous in the world of performance art with her *Post Porn Modernist* (1989–1996), a collection of twelve short performance pieces that were frequently rearranged, easily taken apart, and presented as a whole or only partly, which she performed around New York for several years. In one of the most significant numbers, *Public Cervix Announcement* (1989), spectators have the opportunity to see the artist's cervix, inserting a speculum in her vagina with the aid of a flashlight. Sprinkle further blurs the line between the performer and spectators by maintaining a dialogue with the observer, intermittently discussing the beauty of the cervix and asking the viewer what they see. As does Valie Export, she also faces the spectator gaze and offers the audience the ultimate experience of a porn film by taking voyeurism to an absurd extreme.

Based on her later interest in tantric sex, feminism, lesbian culture, and goddess mythologies, Sprinkle shifts from deconstructing the pornographic body to presenting the female body as a sacred temple. In the number *Sex Magic Masturbation Ritual or New Ancient Sex* (1990–1993), she recreates the famous twenty-minute "masturbation ritual" involving audience participation because the audience receives rattles to shake in synchronization with her sexual sounds, which eventually brings her to orgasm on stage. As she explained in a text on her website:

> Contrary to what most people think, my motivation for masturbating onstage was not to turn people on, to get attention, or to get off on being an exhibitionist. I wish it were that simple. When so many people are witnessing you, it makes every little thing big and clear. I was taking something that's usually done alone in the dark, putting it under a micro-scope, and shining beautiful theatrical light on it so we could all look at it together. The theater setting became a laboratory in which to experiment; sex became a microcosm for all of life (Sprinkle, Masturbating).

Sprinkle's work exposes the ultimate paradox of pornified performance art as she performed this same performance both in a porn nightclub and later in an art context. While in the first case, it was perceived as porn, in the second case, it was proclaimed as art. In another text on her website, she described her shift from porn to art as liberation:

> There was no specific "commercial style", or "formula" one had to adhere to, like in the sex biz. There was total creative freedom and far less censorship. For example in a burlesque show you pretty much had to dress and act a certain way. Performances were always 20 minutes, and there were strict laws about sex and nudity. In art you could dress how you wanted, act how you wanted and perform for as long or short as you wanted, and there didn't seem to be any very specific laws about the sex and nudity (Sprinkle, My Performances).

Praised by pro-porn feminist Linda Williams as a "postmodern", "postfeminist", "postporn" artist (Williams 1993, 60) and defined by Rebecca Schneider as a "postmodern parody of a modernist aesthetic—a doubling back over modernist canonical obsession with the explicit female body, and explicitly the prostitute's body, as a primary foundation for the erection of high modern identity" (Schneider 1997, 60) her work has been understood as ultimately political. Nevertheless, although there is constant ambiguity in her performing, her sexual persona is still strong, and she still treats her sexuality as a commodity. Even though she presents her body as grotesquely over-sexualized, her attempts to "demystify the female body" are not always successful, as the sexual nature of her performance also means that the audience may view her as an object of desire, as a sexual object (Striff 1997, 11–12). Because she is performing for more personally fulfilling reasons and within the trajectory of art, Sprinkle assumes that she pirates scopophilia on her own terms. Yet, as some critics expose, she can never really control the audience's reaction and impulses.

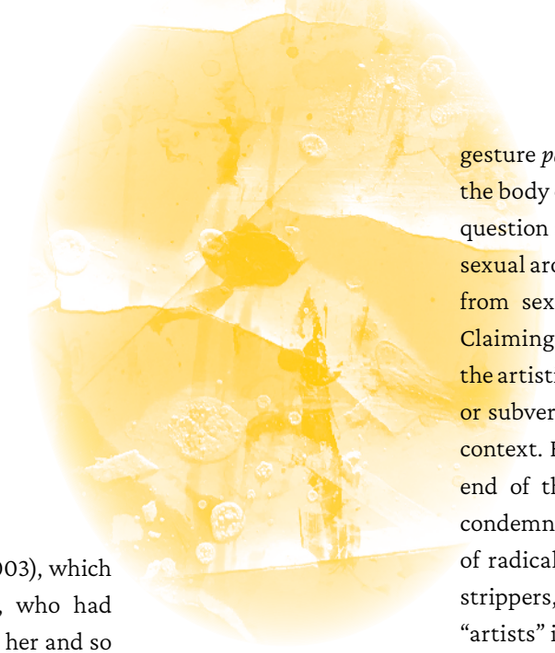
That self-objectification is just another side of the pornified society was the main argument of Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, the most prominent antipornographic feminists, defining pornography as a symptom of the sexualized social hierarchy of men over women, where acts of dominance are experienced as sexually arousing, as sex itself. Pornography parasites on the fact that sexuality is socially constructed as gender inequality, as heterosexual inequality of the sexes of (male) dominance and (female) submission, as sexual difference itself, and represents a function of sexual dominance and power. It seems that these practices just confirm that women have been free only as objects, or, rather, "the object is allowed to desire, if she desires to be an object".

Or, as MacKinnon perfectly defines:

> Women cope with objectification through trying to meet the male standard, and measure their self-worth sexually by the degree to which they succeed. Women seem to cope with sexual abuse principally through denial or fear. On the denial side, immense energy goes into defending sexuality as just fine and getting better all the time, and into trying to make sexuality feel all right, like it is supposed to feel. Women who are compromised, cajoled, pressured, tricked, blackmailed, or outright forced into sex (or pornography) often respond to the unspeakable humiliation, coupled with the sense of having lost some irreplaceable integrity, by claiming that sexuality as their own. Faced with no alternatives, the strategy to acquire self-respect and pride is: I chose it (1989, 340).[7]

7 The concept of objectification is furtherly developed by Martha Nussbaum (cf. Nussbaum 1995) who in contrast with MacKinnon and A. Dworkin argues in support of the legalization of prostitution.

"My Sexuality is an Art Creation"[8]: Postporn and the Disappearance of the Boundaries Between Porn and Art



When Andrea Fraser presented her videotape performance *Untitled* (2003), which showed her hotel-room sexual encounter with a private collector, who had supposedly paid close to 20,000 USD to participate in having sex with her and so co-create the artwork, reactions were very much polarized. Although the video was shot from a single camera mounted near the ceiling of a hotel room, without close-ups, and the piece was framed as an assertion against the commodification of art (i.e., it problematizes whether selling artworks to collectors in itself is a form of prostitution), it seems that critics and the general audience perceived it mostly as pure pornography. Taking as an inspiration Charles Baudelaire's metaphor of art as prostitution, Fraser claimed: "The question I'm interested in posing is whether art is prostitution—in a metaphorical sense, of course. Is it any more prostitution because I happen to be having sex with a man than it would be if I were just selling him a piece?" (Bajo and Carey 2004).

The artist's academic background—Fraser deals professionally with the critique of institutions involved in the sale, display, and economy of art—suggests that, with her act, Fraser wanted to embody the state of commodity fetishism, where the relations among people acquire the characteristics of the relations among commodities, and to show how the reification processes in late capitalism affect the very body itself. However, this work perfectly reveals the pretentious ambition of contemporary performance art to proclaim sexual encounter as a political gesture *par excellence* just because it is framed within the art context while selling the body outside this sacred space is perceived as a "dirty" business. Therefore, the question arises of why sex, if it is framed as art, is not sex? And how exactly is the sexual arousal produced by the pornographic context within pornography different from sexual arousal produced by pornographic content within an art piece? Claiming that sex is art just because the artist said so and because it is done within the artistic context is as problematic as expecting that the work is feminist, political, or subversive just because the artist said so and because it is done within the art context. Having in mind that after the anti-porn debates which took place at the end of the 20th century, porn contents were widely prohibited and morally condemned—while within the art context, they continue to exist with superiority of radical political, feminist, or institutional critique—one might think all that strippers, prostitutes, and sex workers have to do is just name themselves as "artists" in order to decriminalize their work.

And this is exactly what happened. Not only do artists work as sex workers to financially support themselves, but sex work itself has become part of the art context. In at least the past twenty years, there has been an explosion of art events, such as festivals, performances, and presentations, which have become platforms for the promotion and implementation of sex work. Being sugar babies, dominatrices, webcam models, strippers, and fetish specialists (for example, cake sitters) has become a part of performance art genres. Framing their work as art gives them the freedom of expression while performing it within the art context gives them value. Performing all possible porn fetishes as a work of art enabled the audience to consume it without guilt, moral obstacles, or feeling dirty. On the other hand, many recorded performance art shows or their parts are taken and presented on free porn sites as a separate and specific art-porn fetish (usually without the artist's consent). Art and porn have been ultimately and definitely intertwined.

Conceptual artist Milo Moiré, who always performs nude in a public space, perfectly embodies this phenomenon. Whether she creates abstract paintings by pushing balloons filled with paint out of her vagina (*PlopEgg No. 1*, 2014), performs a pornified re-enactment of Valie Export's *Tap and Touch Cinema*, with the difference that her box is made of mirrors and that a hole is besides in front of her breasts, usually also in front of her vagina, so that audience can literally penetrate her (she has presented it in public spaces in Düsseldorf, Amsterdam, and London, where she

8 The documentary *My Sexuality is an Art Creation* (Spain, 2011) presents persons and collectives who create practices they define as postporn and explain why they think it is art.

was arrested) (*Mirror Box*, 2015), or drives through the busy promenades of Düsseldorf naked on the bicycle which she converted into "a dildo vehicle" by replacing the seat with a dildo (*Dildomobile*, 2020), it is not possible to experience her artwork without pornographic imagination. That pornography is crucial for the artist herself is clear as she performs online live pornography on her website *Unlimited Muse*, accessible by subscription. In her *Manifesto of a Free Woman* on her website, she states:

> As someone who is very open sexually, I have created this site so that in addition to my artistic work, I can share my most intimate sides and preferences with you. I quite simply love being naked and having sex. My physical desire is an important driving force in my life (Moiré).

Current theorizations under the influence of Michelle Foucault (cf. 1984)—who made evident how power and knowledge are inherently discursive formations and how discursive formations are events that impact bodies in time and space—are bringing back the ideas of the body itself as potentially transgressive. "Pleasure oriented sex activism" (Schneider 1997, 104), which is generously represented in contemporary performance art, promotes both sex itself and pleasure itself, mediated through an art form as revolutionary, and doubles with the radical gender activism propounded by queer theory feminists such as Judith Butler. Butler, who penned a harsh critique of MacKinnon's work and the terms "gender" and "sex" as most feminists have used them, argues that feminism made a mistake in trying to make "women" a discrete, ahistorical group with common characteristics, which reinforces the binary view of gender relations. Instead, Butler aims to break the supposed links between sex and gender so that gender and desire can be flexible, free-floating and not caused by other stable factors. Butler says: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (1990, 25). Critical toward gender essentialization as binarity, she claims that gender is a social construct and, therefore, can only exist as performative. The idea of identity as free and flexible and gender as a performance, not an essence, has also reshaped the understanding of performativity.

From there, a belief occurs that the social "others"—queers—can destabilize the hegemonic discourse and make room for alternative political identities by the very performing of their own (whatever) gender. A belief that the body itself and sexuality itself is the main site of resistance. The emergence of Porn Studies reveals the belief that performing a specific kind of sexuality or practicing a specific kind of sexual praxis will directly change social relations and that porn itself is a subversive and political act. Influenced by the *Post Porn Modernist Manifesto* (1989) by Annie Sprinkle, Veronica Vera, Frank Moore, Candida Royale, and Leigh Gates, who basically equated art and porn, emerged postcolonial, postfeminist, and postgender ideology. It proclaims that postporn—understood as porn beyond the binary structure within the visual semiotic of pornography—is the production of subjectivity itself. Critical of Mulvey, MacKinnon, and A. Dworkin, Paul B. Preciado claims: "Postpornography will be no more than a name used to describe different strategies of critique and intervention in representation arising out of the reaction of feminist, homosexual and queer revolutions" (Preciado 2008).

The most recent example of postporn performance is *Pornoterrorista* (2011–2013) by the queer performer Diana J. Torres. The performance includes BDSM porn, aggressive masturbation, dildoing, and fisting while reading poetry, making noises by slapping the body while the microphone is in her vagina, cutting or harming herself or animals, or otherwise using blood. These strategies are presented as pornoterrorism, a form of direct action to confront mainstream pornography as an oppressive regime of heteronormativity, whiteness, and capitalist exploitation and fight systemic violence against queer and transgender people. Claiming that her activity is art because she decided so and that her art is political because it is transgressive, the artist basically mainstreams some extreme sexual praxes and fetishes that have usually been reserved for the private space; if they had not been framed as art, they would have been immediately prohibited.

When Transgression Becomes the Norm, No Emancipation is Possible

This article has presented selected examples of performative practices that use strategies of pornographization to take control over the construction of sexuality, hierarchy, and domination together with the theoretical background to show that they do not necessarily threaten the patriarchy, heteronormativity, or capitalism. While feminist artists fight patriarchy through the self-objectification of the beautiful female body, which reproduces male fantasies (and makes new ones) and persistently seduces the male gaze despite the intention of attacking it, queer artists normalize constructions of non-normative sexuality of non-beauty, non-gendered, non-binary bodies, which produces new phantasies, fetishes, and needs. Sexual liberation did not bring an end to oppression based on sexual difference. The diminishing sexual difference did not bring about equality. The sexual revolution did not bring the collapse of capitalism. On the contrary, the liberation of sexual drives within all the sexual practices merely fortified the imperative of enjoyment and opened the space for endless production of new fantasies and mutated consumerism of desire within fetishist digital capitalism. The endless transgressiveness of sexuality in cyber democracy reveals the dark side of sexual liberation: the full commodification of sexuality without any subversive potential (cf. Žižek 1989).

With postulates of desublimated meaning and a destructured form, postmodernism makes place for declaring everything art and everyone an artist, retracting all criteria, and equating aesthetic judgment with the expression of subjective experiences (cf. Habermas 1981). The feminist motto "the personal is political", transformed into "the private is political", ended up as "the pornographic is political". Sex work/prostitution, porn, and art became one and the same thing, while performing (whatever) sexuality became a strategy of performance art, claiming it is political. While porn itself is condemned as something dirty and for the ordinary, uneducated people of the lower class, the appropriation of porn by performance art proclaims itself as political. Yet, it is merely light entertainment for the middle and high classes, which hedonistically enjoy porn without any guilt.

The difference between porn and art is, in most cases, just a question of privilege and class difference or the disproportion of symbolic power: between those who have the power to claim that their pornographed action is art and those who do not have that power.

Pretentious pornified performance art practices with strategies of overidentification with oneself, such as extreme exhibitionism—radical narcissism, egoism, and individualism—in fact, produce a fear of the other, which produces apathy and is anti-social, anti-collective, and so anti-political (Žižek 2008). The post-political paradigm of the permissive society, where everything is allowed, proclaims the vanishing of all boundaries as politics itself, transgression itself has become the norm. With the logic of endless consumerism, fetishist digital capitalism transforms every transgression into a new product we can buy on the market. In that situation, there is no more place for imagination, creativity, and passion that could construct political impact. Instant gratification does not lead to political emancipation. The pornification of political struggle through performance art can no doubt be sometimes attractive, but it would be pretentious to claim that it is subversive. The thing is that we need boundaries in order to establish ourselves. If aiming at truly subversive consequences, performance art will have to rethink its basic postulates starting with the endless transgressive pornographization.

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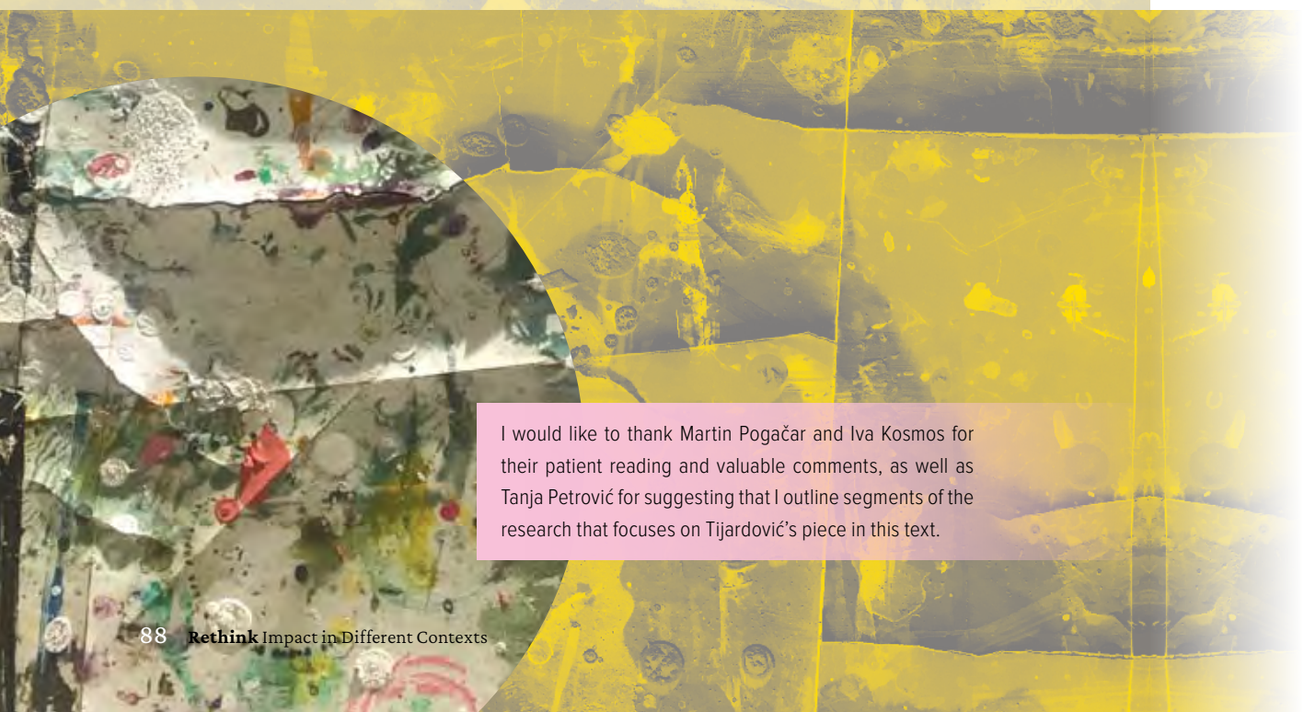
ANA ADAMOVIĆ

Rewrite, Reenact, Reimagine or Searching for a Socialist Opera



I would like to thank Martin Pogačar and Iva Kosmos for their patient reading and valuable comments, as well as Tanja Petrović for suggesting that I outline segments of the research that focuses on Tijardović's piece in this text.

Introduction

The evening of 20 January 1951 was the night of a première in the Hrvatsko narodno kazalište in Zagreb (HNK; Croatian National Theater). *Dimnjaci uz Jadran* (*The Chimneys on the Adriatic*), a new opera by the prominent Croatian composer Ivo Tijardović, had its first public performance.[1] At that time, the première of an opera written by the contemporary Yugoslav composer was a rare event. One can imagine neatly dressed Zagreb opera-goers entering the theater, eager to hear and see maestro Tijardović's new piece. It was the first Yugoslav opera to thematize the events from the National Liberation Struggle (1941–1945) while depicting the victorious struggle of the working class. Hence, one can also imagine the less likely opera public, members of the proletariat, dressed in their newly purchased simple suits and slightly nervous while entering the opera house, a place they might have never had a chance to visit before.[2]

Were those who entered the theater for the first time delighted and relieved when, in the opening scenes, they recognized the Dalmatian love songs that many might have known by heart? Were they subtly jigging while watching the *kolo*[3] circling the stage? Moreover, how did the traditional opera-goers react if they heard them murmuring verses of the popular combat songs, which could be easily recognized in the final scenes?

According to the libretto printed for the opening night, the opera lasted over two hours. One also must imagine some falling asleep after a long workday, especially during the lengthy love arias. Did the workers in the audience wake up

1 Ivo Tijardović authored both the music and libretto. The opera was directed by Margarita Froman and conducted by Berislav Klobučar. I would like to express special thanks to Mrs. Nada Bezić, head of the Library and the Archive of the Croatian Music Institute in Zagreb, for providing me with a copy of *The Chimneys on the Adriatic*.

2 Making culture available to the workers was one of the prime priorities of the post-war cultural policy in socialist Yugoslavia. Union branches were thus involved in organizing collective visits to museums, theaters or cinemas for the workers and their families, while the most prominent ones often got free tickets for various cultural events (Dimić 1988, 85).

3 A traditional folk dance performed in a circle.

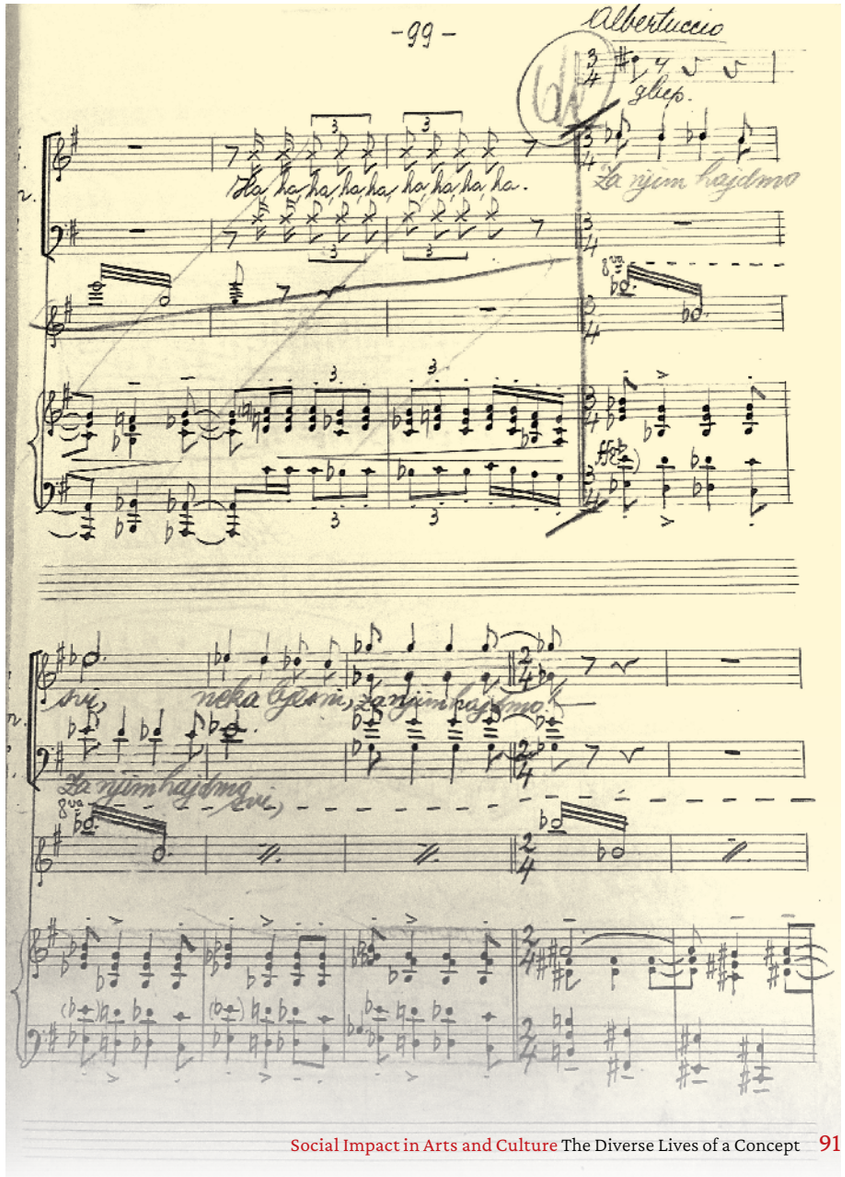
when they heard the loud laughter on the stage from the characters playing their fellow workers and peasants as they ridiculed the ruling class members? Furthermore, what did the more traditional opera public, of course, if we presume that many of the première audience still belonged to the music professionals or those with higher education who were the members of the pre-war bourgeoisie, think of that ridicule that was potentially also directed at them? Finally, while the curtain was "abruptly" falling over the stage accompanied by the sounds of "thunders, automatic weapons, and bursts of the bombs", did they think that the many critics opposing the staging of the piece were correct and that *The Chimneys on the Adriatic* was indeed unsuitable for a major national theater?

Of course, today, it seems almost impossible to know if these encounters ever happened or who actually might have been sitting in the audience that night. Looking at the ticket information printed on the libretto's front page, with the prices ranging from 20 to 130 dinars, the production most likely targeted rather large and diverse social strata.[4] Except for the libretto and some archival documents about the opera's controversy, *The Chimneys* did not leave many material traces. One feels free to imagine when looking into its story. Namely, although the opera seemed to be in absolute consonance with the official political and cultural climate of the time, its staging resulted from lengthy negotiations between Tijardović and his colleagues—musicians and high-ranking Party officials alike. Once premièred, it had only eight public performances before falling into complete historical oblivion.

Were it a success, had the official press and Party organs praised it, had it stayed on the repertoire at least a bit longer, this piece would have come to represent just another episode in the history of the early Yugoslav socialist state. Nevertheless, *The Chimneys on the Adriatic* failed, confining this rare example of Yugoslav socialist opera to obscurity. Paradoxically, this very failure makes it interesting today, as it again provokes the questions of inclusion, spectatorship, and potentialities that art may hold if aiming at broader social impact. In other words, the destiny of this forgotten piece coming from the socialist past calls for a rethinking of participation and collaboration in art today when the very idea of collectivity is increasingly deteriorating.

4 Despite the proclaimed intention to create a new and numerous audience, it seems that this goal has never been fully achieved. Writing in 1946 about the problems musical life in Zagreb was facing, composer Ivo Kirigin complained in an article published in the daily *Vjesnik* that the audience frequenting concert halls or opera performances was not only rather small but, even more important, that it stayed almost the same as it was before the war (in Fabrio 2002).

The Chimneys on the Adriatic, libretto, 1951.



The Chimneys on the Adriatic takes place on an unnamed Dalmatian island, spanning the years 1938 to 1943. The first act occurs in front of the local church. The second takes place four years later at the entrance hall of a cement factory. The third, which closely follows the second act, is set in front of the family villa of the wealthy Italian factory owners, Griseldi Bertrand. Initially titled *Gritty* after one of the leading female characters, the opera's plot centers on the unhappy love affair between Branko, a worker and peasant, and Gritty, the "spoiled"[5] daughter of the Griseldi Bertrand family. However, the love affair is merely a background for a larger historical drama dealing with the anti-fascist struggle and proletarian revolution.

Commenting on the opera he had just finished, Tijardović explained in an interview given to Radio Belgrade in October 1948 that it depicted two opposite worlds: "That of fascism and our democracy, that of capitalist and bourgeois customs and those of our working people who entered the struggle with the enemies both much stronger and more numerous" (in Fabrio 2002). Thus, the unfortunate love affair emphasizes the irreconcilability of these worlds, underlying the morality and righteousness of the one and the immorality and corruption of the other.

Tijardović wrote *The Chimneys* when socialist realism still dominated the Yugoslav culture. Hence, the libretto follows its canon. There, according to Katherina Clark, the "plot takes priority over character;" at the same time, "It is no less crucial that the protagonists assume their correct functions within the plot than that they appear to be emblematic of particular virtues" (Clark 1997, 47). In such a constellation, every character is precisely positioned and belongs to one of the confronted worlds. On the one side are locals, workers, and peasants, who have been exploited for generations by wealthy foreigners. On the other side are the wealthy Italian minority and the few locals siding with them. The only character standing between these two opposed worlds is Branko, who betrayed his own class when he fell in love with Gritty. However, after experiencing the hypocrisy and meanness of the other side, he gravely pays for his mistakes, dying in a fatal factory accident caused by an equipment malfunction. Hence, there are no ambiguities, and the spectator needs not doubt who is right and who is wrong. Equally, there is no doubt about the final victory of the working people and the fall of the fascist rule. No doubt that the future will finally be bright.

Continuing the description of his new opera, Tijardović said that the music equally mirrors the depicted struggle: "The decadent and frivolous tones are in contrast with our healthy national melody" (qtd. in Fabrio, 2002). There too, *The Chimneys* was confined to the important demands of socialist realism and those put in front of the Yugoslav artists. It reflected the working people in their efforts to build a new and just socialist society, employed simple and melodious musical means which originated from the traditional folk music (Hofman 2005: 48), and celebrated the Yugoslav autonomous National Liberation Struggle.

However, in February 1949, when Tijardović presented his piece to the board consisting of his colleagues, members of the HNK staff, and Party officials, they almost in unison suggested that it should not be staged. Although some pointed at the inconsistencies from a rather strict ideological position—such as Zvonimir Agbaba,[6] who claimed that *The Chimneys* did not truly depict the strength of the National Liberation Movement or the leading role of the Communist Party while focusing on the events and characters "atypical" for the former Yugoslav society[7]—most of the critiques concentrated on the artistic, musical quality of the piece. Tijardović's colleagues were rather resolute in the opinion that *The Chimneys on the Adriatic* lacked quality, that the piece was closer to an operetta than a serious opera, that it sounded like a work of an amateur "with no self-control and no artistic self-criticism" and, all in all, that it was written in the manner of, as the composer Jakov Gotovac put it, "speculative kitsch".[8]

5 As described by Ivo Tijardović in the list of characters.

6 Zvonimir Agbaba, was a set designer and at the time a member of the HNK staff.

7 All information on the controversy around *The Chimneys on the Adriatic* from Fabrio 2002.

8 The composer Jakov Gotovac authored the second and even more unsuccessful "socialist-realist" opera *The Quarry* (*Kamenik*) in 1946 (see Fabrio 2002).

Faced with such harsh criticism and disappointed with the course of the discussion, Tijardović said that he did not make the piece "for himself, but for the Party", wishing to honor its Fifth Congress. In addition, he recognized his situation as "absurd" since his own colleagues found him incompetent to write an opera while remarking that "expert opinion may not always be sincere". However, he did not withdraw. After making some adjustments and providing additional support,[9] Ivo Tijardović managed to stage his piece in January 1951. However, already in May of the same year, the opera was removed from the repertoire of the Croatian National Theater, after which it fell into complete historical oblivion. In the following decades, it would only rarely be remembered and even then almost exclusively in the context of surpassed socialist realism, perceived solely as an easily discredited, short-lasting dogmatic style imported to Yugoslavia from the Soviet Union, burdened by banality, clichés, and, ultimately, kitsch, while closely related to the notions of the instrumentalization of art and political indoctrination of the masses.[10]

II

At first glance, the opera's failure seems to concern solely the question of aesthetics. Nevertheless, the controversy about its public staging equally involved issues related to ethics and the larger political field. Finally, although the cultural climate in Yugoslavia was slowly starting to change after the dramatic break-up with the Soviet Union,[11] the controversy *The Chimneys* provoked was framed by the still prevailing postulates of socialist realism. In other words, it was framed by an aesthetic doctrine closely related to the socialist revolutionary project, education, and emancipation of the masses, a doctrine which, according to Katerina Clark, was not even "to any marked degree performing an aesthetic function" (Clark 1997, 27). Yugoslavia was stepping away from the Soviet dogmatism and looking for its own ways into socialism. Still, the perception of art and culture as active agents of the revolutionary project of overall social transformation remained. Art belonged to the working people, the masses, its subject, its projected audience and final arbiter, and ideally its (co-)creator (Dimić 1988; Hofman 2005). However, it seems that the discussion about *The Chimneys* involved solely those highly educated or those coming from the higher echelons of the Party, while "the masses" did not have a say in it.[12]

9 Among those supporting Tijardović in his efforts to stage *The Chimneys on the Adriatic* was the composer Oskar Danon, one of the main proponents of socialist realism in music, who, at the time, was acting as the director of the Belgrade Opera (see Fabrio 2002).

10 This is the angle from which Nedeljko Fabrio, author of the only article I was able to find discussing this piece, approaches *The Chimneys* in his 2002 text titled "Gotovac and Tijardović, or Two Scandals of the Musical Theater in the Croatian Soc-realism" ("Gotovac i Tijardović, ili dva skandala glazbenog kazališta u hrvatskom socrealizmu"). However, this approach does seem rather limiting. A much broader perspective on the phenomenon of socialist realism is offered by authors such as Evgeny Dobrenko or Boris Groys, among others. Discussing the Stalinist art, Dobrenko analyzes it "not so much as a style, but as a grandiose political-aesthetic project which completes the revolutionary project" (Dobrenko 2008, 1). At the same time, Groys (1992) famously (as well as controversially) positioned it as a continuation and, even more, a fulfillment of the aspirations of the (Russian) avant-garde.

11 On 28 June 1948, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform (Communist International Bureau) because of the Tito-Stalin split. Tito and Yugoslavia were accused of nationalism because, when planning the unification with Bulgaria and Albania which was to result in a Balkan Federation, they avoided consultations with Moscow. Another important point of dispute was the civil war in Greece and Tito's and Stalin's opposing views: Tito supported the communist side of the war, whereas Joseph Stalin did not want to intervene following the "Percentage Agreement" he had made with Winston Churchill in 1944. Starting from this, the dispute between the two countries deepened. Hence, only three years after the end of WWII, when Yugoslavia was modeled after the "first country of socialism", the Yugoslav Communists were accused of being "fascist" by the rest of the Communist camp, while the Yugoslav Communists proclaimed that the USSR was no longer a socialist country. The gradual normalization in the relations between the two countries started only after Stalin's death in 1953.

12 Invited to give their opinion about the staging of *The Chimneys on the Adriatic* were actor, director, and writer Tito Strozzi, actor Hinko Nučić, conductor, composer, and, at the time, the director of the Croatian National Theatre Opera, Milan Sachs, composers Boris Papandopulo and Jakov Gotovac, pianist and conductor Mladen Bašić, set designers Vladimir Žedrinski and Zvonimir Agbaba, and the chief secretary of the Croatian National Theatre Ivo Valdec. When the discussion was transferred to the Bureau of the HNK's Party organization, it involved composer Ivo Vuljević, actor Emil Kutijaro, Zvonimir Agbaba, as well as Party officials August Gilić, Maslov Toni, Ceraj, Kavur, and Dado Perera (Fabrio 2002).

This dichotomy between projected cultural politics and their actual implementation becomes especially evident when we read the statement of maestro Milan Sachs, the then director of the Croatian National Theater Opera. Explaining his rather negative opinion, Sachs stated that "the ethical moment of the piece—the victory of a national music along with the grandeur of the victors—was not sufficiently expressed" (qtd. in Fabrio 2002). Nevertheless, Sachs recognized that "as a spectacle, the piece may successfully affect the 'masses' who do not seek ethics from an artwork" (qtd. in Fabrio 2002); following that criterion, some would undoubtedly recommend its staging. Although written about the popular uprising and national anti-fascist liberation struggle and—we must presume—foremost targeting those who were the primary bearers of the revolution, we can only imagine the "masses" as sitting in the audience. However, there is no evidence of how many people ever saw the piece or their reactions. Hence, the question if the spectacular side of the piece might have affected them in any way stays unanswered.

Equally unanswered remains the question if perhaps this opera—aiming to contribute to the process of transformation of social relations by introducing art as an active agent of change—was not in itself, maybe more than anything, a radical artistic gesture, the radical break with the past that the new art emerging in the socialist society was both projecting and demanding: an opera about and for the workers, staged in the very temple of bourgeois art from where it openly critiques and even ridicules the public traditionally frequenting it. Should not its failure in the art world be perceived more as a failure of those critiquing it to go beyond their learned and conventional thinking about art and even more as a failure of the very system to create conditions where the new public in the making could judge for itself? Namely, the question of for whom the opera was a "failure" stays open, together with what the "success" of *The Chimneys* might actually mean. Would it be a "success" if the traditional opera-going public embraced it and the opera stayed on the theater's repertoire in years to come, staged night after night and appreciated for its beauty, musical excellence, and elaborate performance? Would it be a "success" if the Party hailed it as the "correct" representation of the people's struggle and ongoing social revolution? Or, would its success imply rather different and new criteria if art were perceived as an active agent in society's revolutionary transformation and overall emancipation?

Still, we should not romanticize the opera itself. It is not a masterpiece unrightfully forgotten by the workings of cruel and unpredictable history. Neither should we idealize the time and the country from which it is coming. The controversy around the staging of *The Chimneys* has already revealed many inner conflicts and contradictions that seem to accompany the history of socialist Yugoslavia. Hence, the reason to look back at the forgotten Yugoslav socialist opera is not its artistic significance, which is not even a subject of my interest. Instead, it lies in the very failure of this piece of victorious optimism that is coming from the time when it seemed that "revolutionary futures were not merely possible but imminent; not only imminent, but possible", to use David Scott's words describing another revolutionary moment that failed (Scott 2014, 4), and more precisely in the questions that its failure left unanswered.

III

I have been working around *The Chimneys on the Adriatic*, the forgotten Yugoslav socialist opera, at least since mid-2019. Almost no one I asked had heard about it, and those who had had but a vague knowledge of its existence. While searching for the original libretto and score, I imagined, as an artist, *The Chimneys* as an interlocutor in a dialogue through which a new art piece inspired by it might emerge. I imagined the piece I had never heard while envisioning a new work in collaboration with similar groups of people whom the original opera once addressed, a new work that would focus on our current moment and its urgent concerns. At the same time, I wondered what relevance the forgotten piece from the socialist past, deemed a failure in its own time, might hold in the present.

Then in March 2020, a nearly global lockdown began. The new reality shaped by a fast-spreading and unpredictable virus started to determine our daily practices and habits, to occupy the imagination fully. Along with the virus, the ever-present social divides became now bluntly manifested in the gap between those privileged enough to isolate, work from home, and stay in some safety and those with no such privileges. Only occasionally during these seemingly never-ending months of the

quarantine, I would go back to the copy of *The Chimneys* that was finally lying on my desk, as well as to my notes concerning the idea of creating a new video-based installation piece with the original opera as its point of departure and in collaboration with the very people who were now providing us all with basic services and whom we now learned to call the "essential workers".

While the gap between different segments of societies was becoming ever more physical, the contemporary relevance of the struggles *The Chimneys* described became rather obvious. In the events leading to the opera's grand finale, the peasants are deprived of their land by the factory owners while forced to work in their factory for minimal wages. They say "Yes" to work but ask, "What kind of work is this?" When forced out from the public square or the factory yard, they shout, "This is ours, our ancestors built this for us!" and "This is ours, we built it by our own hands!"

In one of its last scenes and the final act of this confrontation, the Griseldi Bertrand family is celebrating Gritty's wedding with other members of the Italian bourgeois class in front of a luxurious villa fully protected by the armed forces, while the Partisans are building fires on the surrounding mountains. The local priest is discussing the beauties of Rome and the correct pronunciation of Latin words with his Italian colleague while the workers arrested after the act of sabotage in the factory are being taken to execution. A lavishly dressed female singer is entertaining the guests to the sound of gunshots approaching the villa. Furthermore, Osvaldo, Gritty's father, urges his guests not to be disturbed, proposing to look at the fires and gunshots as "a little supplement" to their festivity; his future son-in-law jocularly compares the situation to "a dance on the volcano". Hence, reading Tijardović's 1948 libretto today and during the crisis that seems to be the biggest challenge of our generation, one must be surprised by how much the atmosphere the opera depicts resembles that of the present. Against the background of conflicts, social divides, economic inequalities, a rise of right-wing populism, precarization of labor and deprivation of rights, ecological threat, and health crisis, we seem to be "dancing on the volcano" one more time while, at the moment, the "final act" does not look as optimistic as the one *The Chimneys* depicted.

However, I had to ask myself why and in which capacity my future intended collaborators would participate now in creating a complex installation piece that would demand meticulous filming and eventually be exhibited in an art institution. Why would they want to enter the field of contemporary art that so many perceive as removed from their own needs, interests, and experiences and dedicate their already scarce time and energy to such an endeavor? Moreover, if they finally did agree to participate in such an endeavor, how should this collaboration be designed, and what would it convey?

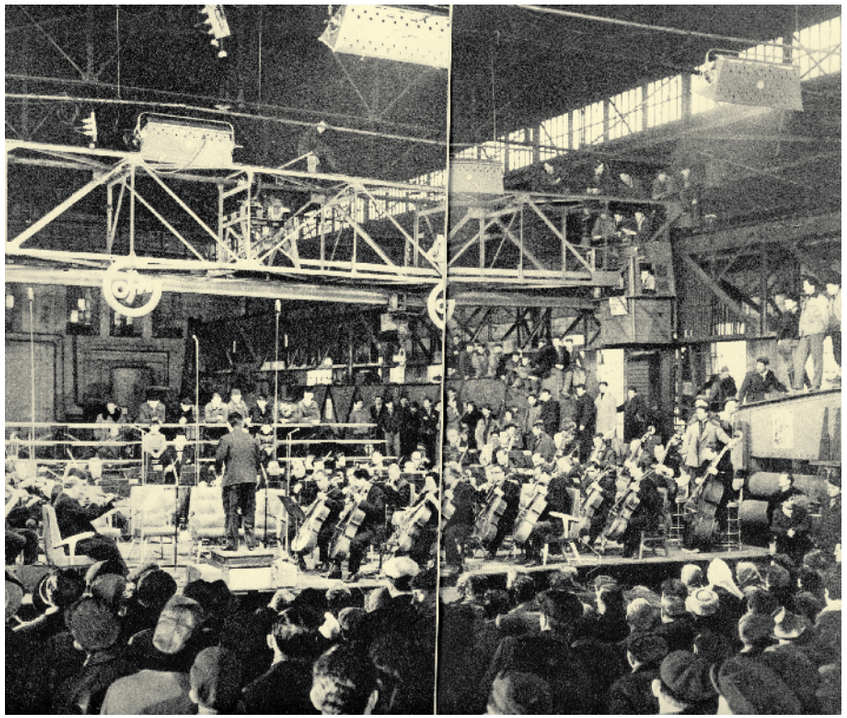
IV

One is tempted to imagine *The Chimneys on the Adriatic* taking place in a real factory rather than on a theater stage, to imagine the mass presence of the performers surrounded by machinery and smoke. In a word, to imagine a situation similar to that depicted in a photograph documenting a concert the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra conducted in 1963 at the "Goša" factory of rail vehicles in Smederevska Palanka in Serbia with workers sitting around the stage, standing on the factory galleries, machines, equipment, or occupying the tops of the vehicles the factory was producing.[13] To imagine a situation where the workers about whom the opera talks finally were there to see it, and even more, to imagine the workers themselves standing around the orchestra as actual members of the choir or even the lead actors. Since its actors might have really been workers and not professional performers, the opera's right place really might have been a factory and not an elitist institution such as a national theater. Maybe Tijardović could have opted for an already existing tradition and removed his piece away from both the institution and professional actors.[14] Or, maybe, such a production would be more expected

13 On 3 March 1963, the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra, together with the choirs of the Yugoslav National Army and Radio Belgrade, performed Beethoven's *9th Symphony i*n the "Goša" factory. This was not a unique event or unusual practice in Yugoslavia, as the same orchestra had held a concert in the same factory ten years earlier.

14 Examples of plays written, performed, and staged by the workers could be found around the socialist countries of the time, following those introduced by the Proletkult in the Soviet Union. See also Dobrenko 1997.

today when art that aims at social impact is primarily perceived as a process of facilitation of a critical dialogue with "real" people taking place away from traditional art institutions.[15] Hence, it is tempting to imagine the work where the workers, now acting both as creators and participants of the piece, would repeat *The Chimneys* and thus translate the opera into the present moment and current struggles.



Belgrade Philharmonia, Concert at "Goša" factory, Smederevska Palanka, 1963.

15 Art historian and critic Grant Kester uses the term "dialogical" to describe socially engaged and potentially emancipatory practices emerging since the 1990s and works where artists act as a "context" rather than "content providers" (2005). He argues: "While it is common for a work of art to provoke dialogue among viewers this typically occurs in response to a finished object. In these projects conversation becomes an integral part of the work itself. It is re-framed as an active, generative process that can help us speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities and official discourse".

Nevertheless, even though it seems tempting to imagine such a production of *The Chimneys* today, again, the question, which the ongoing crisis is making more acute, is why would the invited collaborators agree to such a work and dedicate their already limited time to such an endeavor, and, finally, to what end. Why would they agree to join someone else's scenario, conceived and offered by an artist, a bit more than a well-meaning tourist coming from a (seemingly) very different position than theirs, to trust her with their time, knowledge, experience, and energy? If conceived as a collective endeavor that will facilitate a space for dialogue, negotiations, and even disagreements, why wouldn't they be the ones to initiate it and not an artist? If conceived as a politicized artistic action, as a way of confrontation and radical dissent from the current neoliberal consensus, to whom such an action would be addressed and why would such a protest conceived as an artwork be more effective than the ones in which so many of the still remaining working class are already involved? Finally, if presented as an artistic action addressing a specific community of already like-minded, how would their effort break through the echo chamber that participatory practices unfortunately sometimes reinforce?

Hence, no matter how tempting it is to imagine such a production, and no matter how emancipatory, democratic, seemingly non-hierarchical, and potentially socially transformative or politically loaded an art practice aiming at broader collaboration may be, it is not unambiguous. Besides a well-founded criticism directed at the unintentional perpetuation of a false consensus and ultimate depoliticization both of the art field and that larger one of the society (Bishop 2006; Bolt Rasmussen 2017), its most pressing ambiguity seems to lay in its very nature—namely in the fact that socially engaged art is still art. In other words, many of those whom these practices are primarily aiming to include as collaborators in the art-making process—perceived as a potentially transformative space of collective dialogue—too often see these very practices as *"elitist endeavors with little if any relation to the real life"*, as one of the potential participants in the project I recently was involved in explained while rejecting our invitation for collaboration. This view seems to equally involve the perceived incapacity of art practice to act in a larger social or political field—the "real life",[16] as well as the somewhat exploitative

16 Or, as Boris Groys (2014) notes while writing about art activism: "In our society, art is traditionally seen as useless".

role of the artists who are initiating such projects and who are often recognized as those not interested in "real life" but rather in its representation that consequently takes place in a field from which the participants are, to a large extent, removed.

However, it seems that only as art, only as a form of a specific practice of imagining and proposing different realities, scenarios, and relations that hold an important affective quality, can artworks aiming at broader collaborations have any wider social, political, or emancipatory and transformative potential. If realized collaboratively, aiming at participation and the larger inclusion of the actors who are not coming from the art world, if, as art historian Claire Bishop puts it, they have "people as its medium", they can hold the capacity to communicate both to the participants and the spectators "the paradoxes that are repressed in everyday discourse", and expand "our capacity to imagine the world and our relations anew" (Bishop 2012, 284). But, as Bishop convincingly argues, in order to reach the spectator and thus have a wider impact transcending the group involved in the process, this practice still needs "a mediating third term—an object, image, story, film, even a spectacle—that permits this experience to have a purchase on the public imaginary" (Bishop 2012, 284).[17] In other words, as Chantal Mouffe precisely observes, if art practice can hold any decisive role in constituting new modes of subjectivities and social relations, it is precisely in employing the means that lead to an emotional response and thus reach people on an affective level (Muf 2019, 87).

V

The Chimneys on the Adriatic celebrated people's struggle and its ultimate victory over fascism and the oppression by the capitalist modes of production. It was written for the people, for the masses whose future was now to become bright and full of promises. Enacting the revolutionary momentum of the new Yugoslav society in the making, and maybe against all odds, it was conceived as an opera—presumably the most elitist of all art forms, while staged in a bourgeois temple of high art to bridge the gap between segments of the society that should no longer be divided. Nevertheless, both the choice of the medium and the very place of its production, the opera house itself, became the artwork's stumbling points. Hence, conceiving and staging the piece written about and for the working class that was not only depicting its victory over the bourgeoisie but in moments even openly ridiculing that class, whose members might have still been its primary audience, may be perceived as a radical artistic gesture for laying open the ever-present social conflicts rather than reinforcing the consensus.

Its staging, as indicated above, was the outcome of a long and seemingly fierce process of negotiations involving some of the most prominent music professionals of the time as well as high-ranking Party officials. These negotiations were led behind closed doors and, even more, marked in the archives as classified.[18] They excluded those to whom the opera was dedicated—the masses, workers, and members of the newly emerging class that was perceived as the very avant-garde of the new society in the making.

Maybe its destiny would have been different if at least some of those with whom *The Chimneys on the Adriatic* was primarily concerned were consulted? If asked what they would like to see or hear, what they would find important, and what their experiences were? If they were asked to join the imagining of the piece depicting their lives in the institution of high art that they themselves never dared to enter? If it were created not only following but also to broaden the understanding of the very operatic medium as a complex collective endeavor depending profoundly on the collaboration and joint effort of all included in the process of its making? To stay true to the word's original meaning in Italian, describing an action, work, or a deed? If it were created and staged collaboratively and in dialogue, including both professional performers and those it was addressing, thus following one more possibility that the photograph from the "Goša" factory opens up for the imagination? If all their voices, experiences, and desires were equally included in depicting the immediate past and, even more importantly, the projected future? Because *The Chimneys on the Adriatic*, although portraying the struggle already won, was really all about the future.

17 Bishop points to "the significance of dematerializing a project into social process", but nevertheless emphasizes the importance of approaching socially engaged artistic practices as art (2006).

18 According to Nedeljko Fabrio (2002), most of the Party documents he was using when writing his text about *The Chimneys on the Adriatic* were marked as "classified".

Namely, in the second act, which in the overall narrative of the piece makes its crucial segment, popular protest is brought to the stage almost as a historical reenactment of the event(s) that at the time of the original performance were still a part of the living memory of many—those on stage and those in both the real and intended publics. At the same time, the victorious Partisan overturn of the fascist rule, as well as the ultimate success of the communist revolution in Yugoslavia, which the final, third act depicts, determined both the very present and the projected future of the political and social relations at the time of the performance. As in the case of numerous reenactments of the historical revolutionary events, segments of *The Chimneys,* too, might be perceived as operational in the "continuation of the revolution, activating the masses and giving history a forward impulse" (Lutticken 2005, 55).

However, besides being operational in motivating the masses and directing them toward an already projected future, the reenactment as a specific method in activating the wider participation and involvement has one more important feature—namely, by employing as a background the past struggles along with the questions they left open, it bears the potential of generating fractures or making them more visible, laying open inner contradictions and conflicts both in the collective understanding of that past, as well as those in the present conditions and imaginings of the future.[19] Hence, if employed as a method of critical art, reenactment bears the potential to create dissensus that "makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate" while "giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony" (Mouffe 2007). In other words, it opens a space for productive negotiations and rethinking of the possible different relations. It seems that this kind of repetition may hold a significant potential if the past serving as the background of a reenactment, even though radically different from the present conditions, is still a living memory for a considerable number of people who have the experience that both the present and future may be framed differently.

It appears that this significant potential that *The Chimneys on the Adriatic* may hold when brought to the present and employed as a proposition for an artistic reenactment can be fully recognized only if the art-making process now equally includes collaborators occupying different positions, coming from different segments of the society, and belonging to different generations. In other words, if it includes both the professional artists, musicians, performers, and the "real" people, those the original opera once primarily addressed but whose voices were not involved either in its making or in the controversy that its staging stemmed. And importantly, it equally includes the participants who still remember the relations the original opera enacted, along with those who can now hardly even imagine them. In other words, only if they are all offered the same scenario to rethink, rewrite, reimagine, and inscribe with their own desires and concerns, memories and experiences while being fully aware that they are all equally involved in a collaborative process of art-making.[20]

Employing *The Chimneys on the Adriatic* as its starting point, that scenario would now include the segments of the original opera that strongly resonate in the present while being informed by the conflict that its public performance provoked, as well as by the questions its failure left unanswered: how can art communicate with those who are not regularly exposed to its practices? How can it communicate their concerns, recognize their desires, and transform spectators into active interlocutors in the process of imagining different relations and realities? In other

19 Jeremy Deller's 2001 *The Battle of Ogreave* remains one of the key works when thinking about the potential the method of the reenactment might have, along with the ambiguities it reveals. There, Deller recreated events from the 1984 nationwide miners' strike, more precisely, the most violent confrontation between protesters and police that happened in the Ogreave coking plant. Some 800 participants joined the 2001 action, among them members of the historical societies involved in the re-enactments of the famous war battles and some of the actual miners and members of the police involved in the events taking place 17 years earlier.

20 Bringing back the operatic work from the socialist past to be employed as a point of departure for a new piece that is collectively created in the present points to an important feature that Boris Groys, among others, recognizes in the art practice of the post-socialist countries—namely, "its collective or group-based character". "In Eastern Europe", Groys writes, "artistic projects are thus still viewed as potentially collective operations that other artists are also welcome to join—as means of distinguishing themselves from those who withhold their support. This marks a clear distinction vis-à-vis Western notions of an individual artistic project that, in spite of being communicated in a public forum, nonetheless lacks any desire to recruit further members or to establish a collective" (Groys 2003, 330). Although discussing this collectivity only in terms of artists groups, Groys's insights may be freely applied to the practices aiming at larger collaborations.

words, how can art—so often concerned with those marginalized and the precarious working conditions they are involved in—speak not only about them but with them? How do they account for the effects of structural violence enforced by neoliberal capitalism and make them feel involved and invited into the art field from which they frequently feel detached? How would performers or musicians trained to follow pre-given structures work with those insights and concerns generated throughout the dialogue with the collaborators not coming from the art field? Finally, how would all involved in the process listen to each other, and what would they do with what they have heard or learned?

This is where the very concept of the opera, both in the sense of a specific art form and the very meaning of a word, can become operational and vital. Namely, while using the art form—that is profoundly dependent on a joint effort and work—as a blueprint for collaboration and engaging the affective capacity of music and collective performing to embody possible new and different relations, the reenactment of the past events may become a reenactment of the past imaginings and ideas that are collectively translated into the present and employed as assets in rethinking the potentials of its transformation.

At the same time, to grasp the potential the story of *The Chimneys* may hold for the present, it seems necessary to recognize the significance of the fact that everyone involved in the process should be fully aware that their collaborative effort, incorporating a multitude of diverse and potentially conflictual voices and desires, would finally be realized in the form of an artwork, presented and directed to various and unpredictable audiences, and open for different readings, different imaginations, and different reactions. Nevertheless, this time, and as opposed to the original opera, this artwork should not have any predetermined conclusions, while exposed even to revealing a "failure"—a failure to communicate, to come to the mutual understanding and recognition of the common goals or modes of overcoming the current conditions.

In other words, to grasp the full potential of this specific case coming from the past, it seems important to repeat the artistic gesture and present the work not as removed from the art field but instead use that field along with its institutions as a space of potential commonality as well as of ruptures revealing social conflicts, of dissensus which may foster rethinking of different relations. Hence, while fostering dialogue and multivocality, it seems important to avoid "downscaling" the critical art practice, to employ the terminology the art historian Mikkel Bolt Rasmusen (2017) used to describe the tendency "in which art has become a kind of socially reparatory activity that addresses very specific problems and tries to highlight or solve them".[21] In other words, if aiming at potential transformation or impact in the larger social field, it might be important to use the very field of art to exhibit the gaps in the ever more divided societies, thus emphasizing the urgency to reconsider the ways of overcoming them, rather than reinforcing the idea of the art field as non-hierarchical, although temporary environment, designed as a provisional remedy for structural violence and numerous injustices.

Obviously, this is just one of the many potential scenarios of collaborations through which the art field may be activated as a transformative and politicized space for a much-needed social dialogue. Just as *The Chimneys on the Adriatic* failed once, it may fail yet again. But even if it does, it will still bear the potential to become a starting point for a new consideration, for a new rewriting, new reenactment, and new reimagination.

21 "From a broader perspective", argues Bolt Rasmussen, "this amounts to a reformist acceptance of the violent reproduction of capitalist modernity: In a post-revolutionary world in which it is impossible to make fundamental changes, we have to settle for small-scale adjustments (read: to adjust and continue the slow structural violence that is an essential part of the capitalist mode of production)" (2017).

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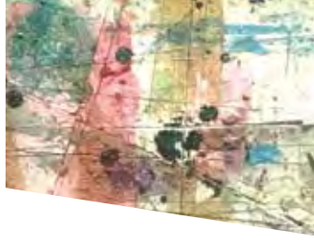
Community

Networks in Extraordinary Situations

HANNA HUBER

Toward a Sustainable Theater Festival: The Théâtre Transversal at the Festival OFF d'Avignon



Introduction

Like non-curated fringe festivals worldwide, the OFF d'Avignon experienced a transformation from a counter-culture event to a neoliberal performing arts market with problematic social and artistic consequences: precarious work practices, unhealthy competition, structural inequalities, and standardization of aesthetic forms. Artist-run festival venues like the Théâtre Transversal actively steer in the opposite direction by creating a place for mutual exchange, artistic experimentation, and sustainable work practices. This chapter focuses on how the Festival OFF and the Théâtre Transversal react to times of crisis, first, in the light of progressing climate change and, second, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conceptualized as mixed-method research, the chapter draws on semi-structured interviews conducted with artists and theater directors, quantitative data analysis of the festival programs in 2019 and 2021, performance analyses, and participant observation during both festival editions. It thereby focuses on the questions: How can artist-run projects at fringe festivals counteract the increasing commercialization and neoliberal logic? To what extent do economic, social, environmental, and health crises give participants the impetus to rethink and rework organizational structures and work practices?

Performing on the Fringe

The organizational structure and historical development of the Festival OFF d'Avignon resemble those of non-curated fringe festivals worldwide: Originally founded with counter-culture narratives, such open-access festivals soon adopt the logic of a free-market economy, which impacts working conditions and artistic content. Comparable developments have been observed and examined at fringe festivals in Edinburgh (Frew and Ali-Knight 2010; Friedman 2014; Harvie 2020; Middlemiss 2020; Zaiontz 2018) and Adelaide (Caust and Glow 2011; Nancarrow 2020; Thomasson 2019).

The term "fringe festival" was initially derived from Edinburgh when, back in 1947, eight acting companies performed uninvited on the "fringe" of the Edinburgh International Festival. This alternative event positioned itself as "oppositional and intentionally anti-elitist, dedicated to operating as an inclusive rather than an exclusive festival, and presenting a broader range of work, by a greater range of companies, for a more diverse audience" (Harvie 2003, 21). Thus, fringe festivals are said to offer alternatives to "high-art" cultural institutions, contribute to a democratization of cultural production and consumption, and open a space for innovative productions even on sensitive issues. The Fringe of the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, for instance, experiments with "new form and content", tackles "contemporary conflicts", and addresses the anti-apartheid struggle (Kruger 2020, 183).

Today, non-curated, bottom-up festivals mirror the functioning, mechanisms, and impacts characteristic of the free-market economy and neoliberal mindset that has spread in Western-world countries since the economic policies under Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s (cf. Harvie 2020, 103). Fringe artists self-organize and self-finance their festival participation by autonomously renting a venue and staging their play(s) in the hope of being discovered by talent scouts, curators, journalists, and the audience. Rental fees are negotiated independently between theater owners and acting companies. The rapid influx of artists, the rising demand for an accessible stage, and the missing transparency of the countless individual rental contracts have led to an exorbitant price increase. Garages, living rooms, courtyards, classrooms, and bars have been converted into provisional theaters, as renting a stage was discovered to be a lucrative business at fringe festivals in Edinburgh, Avignon, and elsewhere. In particular, one can pinpoint three worrying developments.

First, the success of festivals is evaluated using economic measurements and numeric data, as these allow comparison and ranking with other events. In contrast, intangible benefits like contributing to cultural and social life are not prioritized. Quantitative measures are "easier to assemble and promote", whereas "valuing the intangible aspects of arts practice and festivals […] presents difficulties" (Caust 2019, 292). As a result, organizations of fringe festivals publish annual reports promoting visitor numbers, ticket sales, and the profitability of the regional economy instead of focusing on intangible factors like the well-being of artists.

Second, the dominance of market trends outweighs aesthetic considerations, which represses the counter-culture heritage of fringe festivals and encourages the standardization of theater productions. Artists are increasingly reluctant to take creative risks, as financial losses might accompany them. Consequently, the "performance innovation gap" between the traditional festival and its fringe is closing in Edinburgh and Adelaide (Frew and Ali-Knight 2010, 239f). While the curated festivals have begun to experiment with more innovative performances and, thus, attract a more diverse audience, their fringes are increasingly dominated by mainstream shows and stand-up comedies due to reduced economic risks, a broad audience reach, and their compliance with the festive atmosphere.

Third, artists are caught between the idealism of creating art and the necessity of running a business. A non-curated fringe festival "provides professional development, production, and on-selling opportunities", and allows artists to build "their profile and reputation" (Caust and Glow 2011, 10). Thus, "artists are not only expected to produce a saleable artistic product but to also cannily market and promote their event" (Thomasson 2019, 39). They adopt a new role as "artrepreneurs", prioritizing self-interest over sociality, productivity over cultural values, and economic growth over livelihoods and people (Harvie 2013, 77f). Under the pretext of artistic freedom unaffected by any intervention of a festival director or jury, a survival-of-the-fittest mentality among the participating acting companies is normalized and legitimated. While non-curated festivals are generally perceived as the self-empowerment of artists, economic insecurities often lead to their self-exploitation.

Today, the festivals' core values of artistic freedom, accessibility, and inclusion are frequently mentioned in opposition to the commercial and competitive performing arts markets into which they have evolved. In fact, the open-access policy of fringe festivals can be considered their greatest weakness, as the lack of regulation causes unanswerable exploitation, unhealthy competition, and deep structural inequalities (Harvie 2020, 106). In a neoliberal market economy, the focus on financial success entails serious collateral damages; economically weaker participants are driven out of the market; and commercial aims outweigh social, cultural, or environmental considerations. Recently, artist-led initiatives have been designed to consciously oppose the

neoliberal logic. To name one example, Deborah Pearson, founding co-director of the UK artist collective Forest Fringe, started a solidary micro-festival within the highly competitive and commercial environment in Edinburgh (Zaiontz 2018, 73f).

The OFF d'Avignon:
A Festival of Festivals

In July 1966, on the fringe of the renowned Festival d'Avignon, founded and directed by Jean Vilar in 1947, the actor and playwright André Benedetto staged his play *Statues* at the Théâtre des Carmes without having been officially included in the festival program. This rebellious act marked the initial impulse for the foundation of the non-curated performing arts festival. In 1971, the alternative event was named OFF d'Avignon in allusion to "off-Broadway" theater. In opposition to the institutionalized Festival d'Avignon—then referred to as Festival IN—the OFF was perceived as an inclusive, accessible, affordable, and participatory event, which soon attracted actors, playwrights, and theater directors from all over France. Responding to the growing influx of acting companies, the fringe association APO (Avignon Public OFF) was founded in 1982 and succeeded by AF&C (Avignon Festival & Compagnies) in 2006. The aim was to act as a neutral custodian by compiling a festival program and organizing membership cards without intervening in artistic decisions.

In particular, artistic freedom is still defended as the core value of the fringe festival. Every theater owner in Avignon[1] is entirely free and independent with regard to the management of their venue(s), the contracts signed with acting companies, and the selection of theater productions according to their artistic orientation. While some place great importance on the conceptualization of their festival program, others view their performance venue in Avignon as a mere investment by hosting acting companies on a first-come-first-served basis and seeking profit from the high rental fees. In this regard, the OFF is not one single festival curated by a festival director or jury but a collectivity of approximately 140 independent festivals taking place simultaneously. The OFF is, in fact, a festival of festivals.

Avignon and the Palais des Papes. Photo: Benjamin Wendl

The OFF theaters in Avignon can be categorized regarding their artistic orientations, business models, and mission statements. First and foremost, the five historical, permanent, and subsidized theaters forming "Les Cinq Scènes d'Avignon" date back to the festival's origins and have built up a reputation over the past five decades. These include the Théâtre des Carmes founded and directed by André Benedetto and his Nouvelle Compagnie d'Avignon from 1963 to 2009, when his son Sébastien took over the responsibility; and the Théâtre du Chêne Noir that was opened in the former Chapelle Sainte Catherine by Gérard Gelas in 1971, until he handed over the artistic direction to his son Julien in 2020. Benedetto, as well as Gelas, are considered the founding fathers of the Festival OFF d'Avignon. The remaining three theaters completing the Cinq Scènes d'Avignon originate from the

1 In 2019, altogether 139 performance venues participated at the OFF d'Avignon; most of them are located in the city center (*intramuros*).

changes in cultural politics under François Mitterrand in 1982. Gérard et Danièle Vantaggioli opened the Théâtre Le Chien qui fume and a second theater nearby called Le Petit Chien. One year later, in 1983, Alain Timár founded the Théâtre des Halles in the former Cloître Sainte-Claire and Serge Barbuscia opened the Théâtre du Balcon. Their good reputation enables acting companies to attain greater visibility and increases the likelihood of a fruitful encounter with theater curators, so-called *programmateurs*. These five historical theaters all profit from public subsidies by the municipality, regional department, and/or cultural ministry. These subsidies allow them to host acting companies based on *co-réalisation* [box-office split], i.e., costs and profits are shared among the contractual partners according to a percentage negotiated in advance. This agreement significantly lowers the financial risk for the artists.

The often-cited fact that 25% of all theater productions in France are purchased at the constantly growing Festival OFF has led to the emergence of large private associations constructing well-equipped performance venues, ensuring an excellent selection of contemporary creations, thereby attracting *programmateurs* from all over France, which in return allows them to rent their stages at high charges. Venues like the Manufacture, the Train Bleu, and 11 Avignon (formerly 11 Gilgamesh) claim to be the "IN du OFF", as they have built up a good reputation and promise acting companies public visibility and media attention for their new creations. Of course, excellent infrastructure and a professional network come at a price, which excludes acting companies with limited financial resources. The standard contractual model of these venues [Fr.: *location*] determines a rental fee for the entire duration of the festival and leaves the revenue from ticket sales to the acting companies. The price is calculated according to the size of the stage and auditorium, technical equipment, ticket sales, reservation services, lighting and sound engineers, and the support staff to welcome the audience. Acting companies criticize that they have to carry the entire financial risk themselves and economically depend on a successful festival performance. While the Cinq Scènes d'Avignon also program performances throughout the year and organize alternative festivals like Fest'Hiver in winter, the abovementioned private venues are open only during the three weeks in July.

By contrast, small private theaters struggle for recognition in the overcrowded festival city. Some of them have accompanied the OFF already for multiple decades.

The high influx of acting companies in the 1980s let the city council of Avignon search for alternative venues and directly address locals. Thus, Nancy and Patrick Maréchal converted the clothing store on the ground floor of their house into a small theater for 48 spectators and called it Au Magasin. With two further venues, L'Alibi and L'Albatros, opened in 1985 and 2003, respectively, Nancy and her daughters still host acting companies at every festival edition. Another small theater with a different artistic program is the Théâtre Au Chapeau Rouge, directed by Helen Landau. The performance venue for 38 spectators offers a year-round program with open stages, theater workshops, concerts, and *seul-en-scène* [solo performance]. Likewise, Fabienne Govaerts from Belgium opened a venue called Théâtre du Verbe Fou with 49 seats in 2007 simply because *"Avignon is the Mecca of theater"*, she explains.

Poorly-equipped "*garages à spectacle*" [garage theaters] are a segment that has caused the negative reputation of the Festival OFF. Their proprietors profit from high rental charges by distributing time slots on a first-come, first-served basis. These venues are considered a mere investment without further artistic goals. In response to supply and demand conditions, the rental fees for performance venues have steadily increased over the past decades. Especially, young and inexperienced acting companies gamble for success by renting any possible venue, face insufficient technical equipment, and must take care of the ticket sales themselves since these venues usually do not employ any staff. Due to the lack of reputation of "garage" theaters, performances have poor attendance, and acting companies have difficulties covering their expenses. The venues profit from the high influx of artists every July and are closed for the rest of the year.

Apart from these four types that characterize the majority of performance venues at the OFF d'Avignon, four others are noteworthy: (1) Usually, non-profit associations benefiting from regional subsidies invite and remunerate acting companies for the festival to promote artists from their respective territories. The Théâtre des Doms is subsidized by Wallonia and Brussels, promoting and disseminating their creations in Avignon and, thus, contributing to the presence and influence of Belgian artists. Similarly, in cooperation with the association TOMA (Théâtres d'Outre-Mer en Avignon), the performance venue Chapelle du Verbe Incarné invites artists from the French overseas territories to conceptualize and rehearse their new creations in May/June and to stage them in the OFF

d'Avignon in July. (2) Large production companies from Paris buy and equip their respective theaters in Avignon to exclusively stage and sell their own productions. The Atelier Théâtre Actuel, founded and directed by Jean-Claude Houdinière, opened the Théâtre Actuel in Avignon to present, on average, 25 of their productions at the Festival OFF each year. (3) Commercial businesses stage mostly one-(wo)man-shows, stand-up comedies, and magic shows. Le Palace on Rue de la République, a former cinema with five halls, claims to be the largest theater at the OFF and promotes TV celebrities, well-known comedians, and popular entertainment to a broad audience. However, artists performing at smaller theaters criticize these venues for launching aggressive advertising campaigns. (4) Private investors rent temporarily unused venues, like schools or cinemas, and transform them into provisional theaters for the month of July. Also, organizers turn the Île de la Barthelasse into a circus island during the festival. Acrobats, clowns, mime artists, musicians, dancers, and magicians present their performances in huge, temporary tents.

This overview illustrates that each theater director at the OFF d'Avignon independently conceptualizes, presents, and defends their program by choosing from a range of propositions submitted by acting companies. Consequently, the OFF unites a rich diversity of performance venues that differ in size, funding, reputation, and objectives. The lack of regulation also tolerates the immoral enrichment of some at the cost of others.

The Economic, Social, and Artistic Impact of the Festival's Commercialization

Fuelled by individual success stories, hit productions, and sold-out shows, the "Fringe myth of success" continually attracts newcomers who enter the competitive theater market as salesmen of their own productions. Participation at the Festival OFF is associated with the hope of being seen by talent scouts and curators on their "shopping trip" in Avignon to sign promising contracts and get booked for the upcoming seasons. Productions like *Adieu Monsieur Haffmann* (*Farewell Mister Haffmann*) by Jean-Philippe Daguerre stand as a pillar of hope for all aspiring artists. The play had its world première at the Festival OFF in 2018, was celebrated by the audience, praised by critics, and even received four Molières. Nevertheless, while only a lucky few experience the OFF d'Avignon as a career boost, most leave the festival indebted, exhausted, and frustrated. An economic framework has been set up to facilitate the success of individuals at the expense of an entire community.

Similar to the development at fringe festivals in Edinburgh and Adelaide, the OFF d'Avignon has become a model neoliberal market, which impacts the work practices of acting companies (Benzoni-Grosset 2003; Brunsvick 2005; Midol 2003; Rumello 2016) and aesthetic forms on stage (Rasse 2003; Léonard and Vantaggioli 1989). With the steadily increasing number of acting companies participating each year,[2] the spatial density of Avignon *intramuros*, i.e., within the city walls, and the fast succession of plays in each theater significantly restrict the artistic freedom. Following the results of my quantitative data analysis of the festival program in 2019, a performance venue at the OFF d'Avignon scheduled seven to nine productions daily, from 10 am to 11 pm, with the majority of productions averaging between 60

2 The Festival OFF d'Avignon started with one acting company in 1966, which was André Benedetto's Nouvelle Compagnie d'Avignon. Five years later, in 1971, altogether 38 theater plays were staged at the fringe festival, followed by a rapid increase with 120 in 1981, 394 in 1991, 660 in 2001, 1143 in 2011 and 1592 in 2019. These figures are taken from the following sources: Léonard and Vantaggioli (1989), Green (1992), Brunsvick (2005), Rumello (2016), and the annual statistics published by AF&C since 2006.

and 80 minutes. Due to spatial and temporal restrictions, artists present plays with a minimal stage design and few props. Besides, many performers act alone on stage to minimize financial risks. One-third of all productions in 2019 featured one performer only, which lets the fringe festival resemble a gigantic audition.

Festival OFF d'Avignon in July 2019. Photo: Hanna Huber

Organizations of such open-format, non-curated, bottom-up festivals, like AF&C, have a very limited radius of operation, as every performance venue follows its own artistic orientation and business model. To impose regulations and restrictions from above not only questions the original festival philosophy but also poses the problem of deciding *which* standards are to be defined. In order to reduce competition by counterbalancing the dominance of supply over demand, AF&C has the option to either limit the number of participating artists, which would contradict the festival's open-access philosophy, or to significantly increase the number of visitors, which is not done easily in view of the stagnating attendance figures. In addition, based on the model of a social market economy, political authorities might interfere with market transactions by imposing regulations and/or granting subsidies. In 2016, to prevent exploitative work practices, the French government passed a law that obliges fringe performers to take one day off per week instead of performing for three weeks without pause, as was the custom before. In some theaters, these "*jours de relâche*" [rest days] are then used to host public readings, panel discussions, concerts, or expositions instead of the daily scheduled performances, while others remain closed for this day. AF&C took another initiative to reduce precarious working conditions by setting up the Fond de Soutien à la Professionnalisation [Professionalization Support Fund], to support acting companies with limited financial resources, which, in return, allows them to remunerate their artists and technicians during the festival. More drastic measures would, for instance, include price controls and a cap on rental fees at a reasonable sum.

The festival's open-access policy and cultural diversity represent a rich asset, but it also constitutes a challenge to unite conflicting interests and head for common goals. Individual initiatives like the Théâtre Transversal,[3] with two halls for 40 and 47 spectators, actively steer in the opposite direction by launching an interdisciplinary laboratory for artistic creation. Laetitia Mazzoleni, artistic director of the Transversal since 2017, prioritizes human encounters and artistic exchange over economic objectives or profit increases. While most performance venues in Avignon open their doors only during the three festival weeks, the Transversal is among the few that host productions throughout the year, address the local audience, and offer artist residency programs.

3 The theater is located on Rue Amphoux, in the city center of Avignon.

The Théâtre Transversal

On 27 July 2021, I met Laetitia Mazzoleni for an interview in the foyer of the Théâtre Transversal. *"Actually, I am not a theater manager; I am a metteur-en-scène [director]"*, she emphasizes at the very beginning of our conversation.[4] In response to my question about where the Théâtre Transversal is positioned amidst this multitude of very different performance venues constituting the OFF, Laetitia points out: *"I feel close to the Cinq Scènes d'Avignon in terms of my local roots and the public subsidies that my theater receives. At the same time, I can relate to the Train Bleu, 11 Avignon, and the Manufacture with their focus on innovative, contemporary artistic creation"*.

Laetitia Mazzoleni. Photo: Marc Lacaze

4 All interviews were conducted in French. Direct quotations in this essay have been translated into English for reasons of better legibility.

When working with her acting company, Agence de Fabrication Perpétuelle, Laetitia has encountered a fundamental paradox: In order to raise funding or apply for an artist residency program, acting companies are asked to hand in a detailed project description, precise objectives, a thought-out schedule, and a calendar of future performance dates. *"That is* not *how our profession works"*, Laetitia claims, *"It is very important to simply be enthusiastic about engulfing in a certain topic without precisely knowing where the journey leads you"*. Forcing artists to theorize about their creation even before putting it into practice actually hinders them from freely creating. In contrast, Laetitia wants to offer residency programs for artists who need a stage to work on, experiment with innovative forms, explore, discover, and create without having to submit a precise work plan or time schedule in advance. The Théâtre Transversal, which was originally called Les Atéliers D'Amphoux and rebaptized with the change of management in 2017, constitutes an interdisciplinary laboratory.

Apart from that, the Transversal should also be a meeting spot for artists and audiences, a gathering place for culturally interested, open-minded, and curious people to exchange their worldviews. Often, theater audiences see a play and leave after the performance, which hinders artists from getting feedback other than the applause. *"When actors leave the stage after their performance, enter the dressing rooms to change, arrive in the foyer of the theater, and notice that their audience has already left, they experience a real moment of solitude"*, Laetitia points out. To counteract this tendency, the Transversal offers an aperitif after each performance and invites the audience to stay a bit longer, engage in discussions, and give the artists some feedback. The dense schedule during the festival in July does not permit such a convivial get-together, but an aperitif usually follows the year-round performances.

Artists and staff of the Théâtre Transversal at the OFF 2021. Photo: Vincent Bérenger

Such utopian ambitions also require sufficient financing. Public subsidies are absolutely necessary to maintain this theater-laboratory dedicated to exploring new artistic creations. In 2020, the Théâtre Transversal received the label "Résidence Tremplin" by the regional funding agency DRAC. This program is dedicated to young artists at the beginning of their professional careers whose work has not yet been disseminated by institutional or commercial enterprises. A regional partner structure like the Théâtre Transversal selects the acting companies and permits them to use the available infrastructure during a residency financed by the DRAC. However, *"these subsidies do not entirely cover the total expenses of the theater during the year"*, Laetitia acknowledges. *"In fact, it is the revenue generated at the festival that permits a year-round operation and maintenance of the theater"*. It cannot be denied that the OFF d'Avignon promises high profitability for performance venues, the Transversal still seeks to prioritize ecological awareness and sustainability.

The Ecological Footprint
of a Theater Festival

Since 2015, AF&C has actively worked on a joint strategy to reduce the festival's detrimental effect on the environment by, e.g., using recyclable materials, saving energy, separating waste, and sharing transportation. Since the festival's beginnings, printed posters to advertise individual productions constituted a paramount advertising strategy. Obviously, this visual transformation of the city center contributes to the festive atmosphere and has become a folkloric tradition. However, given the pressing climate crisis, locals and artists alike have repeatedly criticized this practice. It is estimated that in 2019 a total of 32 tons of posters had been printed (AF&C 2019, 10). In 2021, Laetitia advised acting companies featured at the Transversal not to print any posters for promotional purposes. While addressing pedestrians in public and distributing flyers does noticeably contribute to higher visitor numbers, Laetitia is convinced that posters are purely folkloric and serve no other purpose. Not all acting companies followed her advice. Laetitia has not yet dared to make it compulsory for artists at the Transversal, as she did not want to be made responsible for the missing success of theater productions.

Festival OFF d'Avignon in July 2019. Photo: Hanna Huber

"In general, theaters are extremely wasteful enterprises", Laetitia notes, *"We construct a stage, we buy props, and after the performances, everything is thrown away"*. In order to counteract this overconsumption, the Transversal seeks to work predominantly with recycled materials. During the second COVID lockdown in November 2020, the theater was renovated to reduce its ecological footprint. The entire lighting system of the public area was replaced by LED lighting that consumes less electricity. Old concrete walls were taken down and changed to lime plaster to permit better respiration. For the new paint, a mixture of natural ochres from Roussillon was used to avoid toxic fumes. *"Besides, it was terribly cold during the winter season, and the heated air rapidly left the building"*, Laetitia remembers. The new insulation now permits energy-efficient heating of the entire theater. During the renovation, rainwater was collected and reused for the construction works to save clean drinking water. Furthermore, the theater places great value on waste sorting and has changed the electricity supplier to a local cooperative that is 100% green.

One essential device—highly power-consuming but indispensable at temperatures of up to 40° during the festival—has remained in the theater: the air-conditioning system. Laetitia remembers that twenty years ago, acting companies advertised their plays by explicitly emphasizing that their theaters were equipped with air-conditioning. This bonus did indeed influence the decision of festival visitors on which performance to see, while today, air conditioning systems have been installed in every theater and are considered inevitable. Some performance venues have tried to find natural alternatives in recent years but have not yet achieved the same effect.

The renovation at the Transversal not only reduces the ecological footprint but also benefits the artists. Thus, a wall was taken down to enlarge the stage. While others would have suggested adding another row of chairs in the auditorium and increasing the number of tickets sold per performance, Laetitia decided to offer the artists better conditions to play and to grant the audience more comfortable seats instead of cramming in as many paying spectators as possible. One of the acting companies who profited from Laetitia's hospitality was the Compagnie Microscopique, with Eloïse Mercier and Vincent Bérenger presenting their creation *Une goutte d'eau dans un nuage* (*A Drop of Water in a Cloud*).

On a Poetic Journey to Vietnam

With her creation *Une goutte d'eau dans un nuage*, the author and actress Eloïse Mercier invites the audience on a poetic journey to Ho Chi Minh City, formerly known as Saigon. Together with Vincent Bérenger, responsible for the video, light, and sound design, Eloïse narrates how a young French woman adapts to this new environment, the Vietnamese culture and language, the humid atmosphere during the summer monsoon, the inspiring and sensual encounter with a local. Inspired by the novels of Marguerite Duras and her own journeys to Vietnam, the young actress creates a foreign and fascinating universe on stage. Between *seul-en-scène* [solo performance] and radio play, the audience witnesses the "imaginary chronicles of an expatriate in Saigon", as the subtitle promises. When Eloïse pauses her narration, she silently interacts with one of the miniature objects on stage that symbolize chapters of her fictional journey: a small pink scooter turning soundless on a record player, a little goldfish making its rounds in a fishbowl, a leather suitcase that is carefully unpacked, black high heels that are put on, and a pink umbrella protecting the actress from the audibly present monsoon.

Eloïse Mercier in *Une goutte d'eau dans un nuage.*
Photo: Vincent Bérenger

Having presented a short version of their creation at the Festival OFF in 2019, Laetitia invited the Compagnie Microscopique to an artist residency. In an interview, Eloïse recounts, *"After another journey to Vietnam to collect more audio and video footage, we had the chance to spend the Christmas holidays at the Transversal"*. While she worked on two additional chapters of her narration, Vincent conceptualized a new sound design and edited the video extracts. *"From time to time, we met and put our work together. We could immediately test on stage whether the décor and props worked or not"*. An artist residency taking place at an actual theater both nurtures and inspires creativity. The extended version of the play premièred at the OFF in 2021.

National and regional subsidies contributed significantly to the creation, presentation, and dissemination of this new production. For the short version in 2019, the Compagnie Microscopique was accompanied by the Scène Nationale de Toulon, Châteauvallon-Liberté, who took charge of the theater rental fees during the festival. A campaign launched on the crowd-funding platform *proarti*, which permits contributors to offset donations from their taxes, gave the acting company the necessary financial security to stage their new creation at the OFF 2019. This was particularly important as the Compagnie Microscopique was founded only six months prior to their first festival participation and, thus, could not claim public subsidies.

Participation at the OFF 2021 represented a lower financial risk, as the play had already achieved a positive reputation and profited from the good press. Despite the canceling of the festival in 2020, the Compagnie Microscopique was invited to participate in the alternative Le Paris Off Festival at the Théâtre 14. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, Eloïse and Vincent were increasingly active on social media and posted videos of their Vietnam journey as appetizers to their play. Their festival participation in 2021 was financially backed by the DRAC, the region, the department, the municipality of Toulon, and the urban community TPM (Toulon Provence Méditerranée). Besides, Laetitia offered them a rental contract on *coréalisation sans minimum garanti* [box-office split without guaranteed minimum], which is rare at the OFF d'Avignon and significantly reduces the financial burden of the artists: Costs and profits are shared without paying an additional guarantee to the theater.

Eloïse is convinced that an acting company without subsidies will inevitably leave OFF d'Avignon with financial losses. *"Yet, the COVID crisis this year has raised a general awareness of economic and social injustices"*, she notes. *"Performance venues and acting companies have received much support. This allows us to move forward in a good understanding, as it permits a real partnership between theaters and artists"*. The global crisis due to COVID-19 has, in fact, set rigid structures in motion and has uncovered long-standing problems.

A Performing Arts Festival Struggling with COVID-19

In April 2020, Emmanuel Macron announced the annulment of all large events until mid-July, which obliged AF&C to cancel the 55th edition of the Festival OFF d'Avignon. In response to the culture minister's permission to organize *petits festivals* with the progressive relaxation of the COVID-19 lockdown starting from 11 May 2020, several independent theaters reopened their doors and conceptualized their own micro-festivals in July in compliance with the official health regulations. Parallel to these developments, disagreements about the division of COVID-19 compensation payments fueled discussions about the general authority over the non-curated OFF d'Avignon. Altogether, 80 OFF theaters criticizing their missing voice at AF&C founded the joint association FTIA (La Fédération des Théâtres Indépendants d'Avignon) and published a manifest also to clear the negative reputation of private theater owners. Simultaneously, the federation of acting companies Les Sentinelles, together with the labor union of performing arts Synavi, the actors' association AAFA, and the playwrights' association EAT, launched a general assembly under the heading EGOFF (Les États Généraux du Festival OFF d'Avignon) to openly discuss the festival's future. As a grassroots democracy movement, they grant everybody, be it artists or journalists, theater owners or spectators, the chance to engage in discussions and form working groups to reinvent the fringe festival. In a nutshell, the canceling of the festival in 2020 has basically incited two developments: the foundation of alternative micro-festivals and the growing awareness of structural inequalities.

What followed was another year of fighting the rising infection rates, repeated shutdowns, and a long period of uncertainty under which conditions the OFF d'Avignon could take place in 2021. AF&C, under the new presidency of Sébastien Benedetto, hosted open-access *wébinaires* every two weeks to discuss the festival's short-term and long-term future. State authorities officially announced health regulations little by little: the full capacity of the auditorium could be used, but spectators had to wear facemasks during the entire performance. Hand disinfectant had to be made available at the theater entrance. Laetitia states, *"We set up an internal health protocol for the Transversal"*. The reception and ticket office were relocated to a window of the administrator's office to reduce the risk of infection, which permitted the audience to queue outdoor, in the street, instead of gathering in the entrance hall. *"This modification required additional reception staff, which financially impacted our already weakened sector"*, Laetitia acknowledges.

A timeslot of 45 minutes in-between performances had to be reserved to aerate and disinfect the theater halls. Due to the reduced number of timeslots per day, "only" 1070 productions were staged in 2021 compared to the record high of 1592 in 2019 (AF&C 2021, 2). By contrast, this relaxed schedule gave artists more time to set up the stage, warm up their voices and bodies, put on their costumes, and prepare their performances. While the Théâtre Transversal presented eight performances on a regular festival day, health regulations of 2021 permitted a maximum of six timeslots per day. Eloïse remembers, *"Two years ago, we just had ten minutes to set up the entire stage and often started the performance with a delay. This year it was much more relaxed"*. An important décor element of their play was a cloud put up in the left upper part of the stage. In 2019, the two artists invented a temporary device to attach quickly the décor that was aesthetically less appealing. In 2021, the longer breaks in-between the individual performances allowed them to create a more artistic cloud by putting up white-transparent silk cloths.

The stage design of *Une goutte d'eau dans un nuage* at the OFF 2021.

Photo: Vincent Bérenger

Due to the preceding cultural shutdown, many *programmateurs* had postponed their theater season by one year and, therefore, did not have an economic incentive to visit Avignon. In total, 2087 accredited professionals attended the OFF d'Avignon in 2021 compared to 3250 in 2019, marking a 36 percent decline (AF&C 2021, 4). The situation aggravated when the French government announced that on 21 July, every festival visitor had to present a *pass sanitaire* before attending an event with more than 50 participants.[5] Consequently, larger theaters decided to reduce their seating capacity to 50 to permit spectators to enter without a pass. Others simply ignored the new regulation and did not impose any controls at the theater entrance. Still, artists noticed a significant decrease in attendance figures on 21 July, and some repeatedly stood in front of a nearly empty auditorium.

5 The so-called *pass-sanitaire* meant that festival visitors had to present either a valid PCR-test or a confirmation of their full COVID vaccination, which dated back at least 14 days.

Despite the harsh circumstances, artists report the joy of being on stage again and gestures of solidarity among (competing) acting companies. Laetitia confirms, *"Everyone was happy to meet again. There was strong mutual support among artists, much stronger than in previous years"*. Time will tell whether COVID-19 has caused deeper structural changes that impact future festival editions. Some modifications might remain, e.g., the reduced number of timeslots per theater. *"We realized the quality of a more relaxed schedule for the artists and the audience"*, Laetitia notes, *"The result was: more time, less stress. So, we have decided to stick to this schedule for the upcoming years"*.

Conclusion

On non-curated fringe festivals, the balance between the liberty of artistic creation and the liberal logic of its economic processes is difficult to keep. To a certain extent, regulations and restrictions protect acting companies from precarious working conditions but inevitably limit each participant's freedom. In contrast, targeted subsidies to financially support morally virtuous and artistically ambitious projects promise to counteract structural inequalities at non-curated festivals. Both the Théâtre Transversal and the production *Une goutte d'eau dans un nuage* profited significantly from public funds, without which free artistic creation and sustainable work practices would not have been affordable.

Times of crisis—due to the COVID pandemic and the global climate change—have the potential to uncover long-standing dysfunctions and to incite fruitful debates on ameliorative measures. The essay examined how organizing systems—be it a festival or performance venue—impact work practices and artistic content. While self-employed fringe artists struggle for visibility in the competitive theater market and feel forced to compromise artistic quality for economic success, sufficient government funding permits institutions and individuals to cherish artistic freedom, social well-being, and environmental sustainability.

Since 2015, AF&C has increasingly worked on transforming the OFF d'Avignon into an *"éco-festival"*. Their agenda includes environmental measures concerning energy use, resource conservation, recycling, and regulations and subsidies to guarantee artists' fair and just working conditions. The canceling of the festival's 2020 edition has encouraged further initiatives, e.g., EGOFF, to rethink and reinvent the OFF d'Avignon. The aim is to place artistic quality over mercantile competition based on a social and ecological economy. By prioritizing human encounters, artistic exchange, and eco-conscious work practices, the Théâtre Transversal stands out as one of several positive examples.

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SAŠA BABIČ AND
MARTIN POGAČAR

Internet Community Radio: Invisible Networks, Living Collectivities

Funding acknowledgment: The research for this chapter was funded through the Creative Europe project CtC -> CtI and the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS) research programs "Historical Interpretations of the 20th Century" (P6-0347) and "Ethnological, Anthropological and Folklore Studies Research on Everyday Life" (P6-0088).

Every child recognizes that it is in the interest of radio to bring anyone before the microphone at any opportunity, making the public witness to interviews and conversations in which anyone might have a say.
Walter Benjamin

The radio is the water, the stream is the medium, the projects are the fish.
István Szakáts

Introduction

Radio is often "thought" in its analog form: a box filled with electronics that decode the radio waves bringing the voices and music from a studio somewhere far away through the speakers into the privacy of the home. Radio brings news, weather reports, tops of the pops, birthday wishes, talk shows, sporting events, war, sorrow, and joy from the outside. It connects us with others and lets us imagine far-away places, people, and the world, all arising out of the combination of voice, music, sound, and silence. Radio structures the space and time in its punctuality (cf. Gitelman 2006). The news in analogue radio, for example, was scheduled by the hour, introduced by a tic-tac sound that counts the seconds down until the aviso and the anchor read their text. At that exact same time, the community outside the home, the *imagined we* (cf. Anderson 2006 [1983]), tuned in to listen to the ephemeral words that conjured worlds. However, it was not just listening; it was also a practice of taking part. Inasmuch as she follows the words, the listener is absorbed into the imagined community, recreated and re-enacted at a predetermined, recurrent time that yields predictability and structure to the world—the waves (infra)structure commonality.

Sound, alongside vision and touch, is our pre-discursive sensory experience and creates a sense of intimacy. The creation of this intimacy, based on the development of trust and emotion, allows radio to create a symbolic transitional space where people can think and feel in a much freer and more creative way than audiovisual media and embodied voices allow (Breton 2013, 82). It does so by using

> storytelling [that goes beyond] the embodiment of gestures. Instead, the voice is distinctly disembodied—the body is replaced by voice mediated through technology. Closeness and presence are replaced by distance (from the auditory source) and displacement (one can now listen anywhere with anyone while doing anything). Benjamin explicitly points this out when he comments that children will never know if they meet him in the streets (Lewis 2020, 75).

Thus, radio creates a specific socio-technical context and embeds us into a process of making "interior and exterior concurrent, intimate and public simultaneous" (Mateus 2010, 64), through which our actions can acquire social meaning (Breton 2013, 83), inscribed into the imagined we. Moreover, by interrupting the visual sensory experience, radio sound invites the subject into the historical by its power to induce imagination and auditory alertness (cf. Lewis 2020, 64, 72, 92; Benjamin 2014) and thus into the communal. Perhaps not just by the enchantment power of the disembodied sound, as Saša analyzes in the case of the Community Radio Tbilisi (see section *The Story of Community Radio Tbilisi*), but also through the very material conditioning that the radio exerts on the forming and functioning of a specific community, as Martin explores in the case of Radio Pata (see section *Radio Pata, Pata Rât, Cluj*).

A radio program co-traces social life, informs and entertains people, and at the same time reflects the goings-on in society and sometimes even affects change. It can be a mere background sound, or it can bring sounds of the action. As such, it is a sonic marker of the exterior that interferes with the intimacy of the home and the interior of the subject. Benjamin observed "that the radio listener, as opposed to every other kind of audience, receives the programming in his home, where the voice is like a guest; upon arrival, it is usually assessed just as quickly and as sharply" (Benjamin 2014, 364). He adds, "It is the *voice, the diction, the language* […] [that makes] the most interesting shows unbearable, just as in a few cases it can captivate the listener with the most remote material" (Benjamin 2014, 364; added emphasis). Importantly, be it in its reassuring or disturbing yet always recurring ephemerality, radio is a material and ethereal medium that, through the disembodied voice and vanishing sound—always already revealed and lost in its passing (cf. Roy 2018)—constitutes the audible, emotional, temporal, and spatial structure of commonality.

This makes radio, culturally and historically, a socio-technical apparatus, the study of which may reveal the uses of the medium in co-forming communities and modulating individual lives. This is also the focus of our chapter: following a brief historical overview, we engage with the aforementioned community radios—Community Radio Tbilisi in Georgia and Radio Pata in Cluj, Romania, to trace how the medium of the radio, repositioned as digital media, "plays out" in and impacts two different locales and communities.

This, however, is not a comparative study of the two radios. Instead, it is an attempt to discuss how, in the context of the issue of the social impact of two very different, indeed barely comparable initiatives, agendas, and aspirations provide insight into, on the one hand, the technical aspect of forming commonality, and, on the other, into how radio with its content and sound shapes reception and weaves and structures communities. We base our analysis on interviews we conducted with radio crews in Tbilisi and Pata Rât, and the analysis of available online sources (YouTube, Facebook). Departing from the fact that apart from the technical conditions, the two radios have little in common, we designed the research process and the process of writing this chapter as a method to find out how a shared technological solution facilitates different applications and to probe whether such different applications may nevertheless reveal some underlying similarities.

Radio in History

Over the course of its life as both a technical medium and cultural practice, radio has changed substantially, yet has conceptually remained the technical quintessence of modernity, reinforcing temporality and historical consciousness (cf. Lewis 2020).

Radio is an audio medium that officially began public broadcasting in 1922, when in Britain, the Macroni Company gained permission to make regular broadcasts, which was also followed by the London station 2LO, both through the Post Office, which had existed for years as a monopoly company for the supply of radio waves (Crisell 1994, 18). At this time, radio was the "first mass medium to bring people to an event in real time" (Halper 2021). In the following years, radio became very popular, and licenses increased rapidly; by 1928, there were never less than 1 million radio listeners in London and the surrounding area (Black 1972, 26).

Due to the relative scarcity and inaccessibility of devices, listening to radio rarely (if ever more often, over the years) unfolded in the privacy of the home; instead, it was predominantly a communal practice with people gathered around the receiver at a neighbor's or at an inn, which created conditions for the intrusion of sound into a collectivity. Yet, the ephemerality of transmitted sound, which lacked the inscription characteristic for print or music records (cf. Gitelman 2006), enhanced the intraceablity of transmitted content and the affectivity of reception. In Germany, for example, radio gained prominence when the Nazi government recognized its potential to transmit messages into the everyday lives of Germans and, to do so, started producing the affordable *Volksempfänger* (people's receiver) (Meier 2018). Arguably, radio played a part in the rise of Nazism due to the very technical aspects of the medium, allowing for the reproduction of voice and instantaneous consumption. To illustrate, Mitchell and Hansen note, in a somewhat technically deterministic perspective that downplays public agency (Forster 2022), that "tongue muscles change with the pronunciations internalized from fascist speech on the radio" (Mitchell and Hansen 2010, 98, fn 1), which nevertheless highlights the power of the new medium to viscerally affect, touch, and stir the listening subjects. This power necessitates the investigation of media at the interstices of the "dimensions of individual subjectivity, collective activity, and technical capability" (Mitchell and Hansen xv, quoted in Forster 2022, 15), which we aim to achieve in this chapter through comparative analyses.

Building national broadcasting networks and infrastructures was key for post-WWII nation-states in both the East and the West (Katz and Wedell 1977; Petrinca 2019; Angelova 2019), as it provided a means and a way to employ a channel (in addition to newspapers, cinema, and later television) for defining and reproducing national collectivities. In socialist countries with centralized public broadcasting systems and institutions, radio stations played an important role that was often pedagogical rather than entertaining. This role, however, changed over time with the permeability of borders that radio waves, especially low-frequency ones, systematically disregarded. Thus, for many listeners in former socialist countries, it was Radio Luxemburg that brought the sounds of the 1960s' and 1970s' Western popular culture to the East, or Radio Free Europe, which according to Petrinca, "was the country's favorite radio station connecting Romanians to the world, unwittingly bringing them closer to the humanist social values that the communist regime advertised but failed to deliver" (Petrinca 2019, 180).

Over time, the number and thematic focuses of radio stations grew rapidly and widely in the West, as it did, notably after the collapse of socialism, also in the East. The rapid emergence of regional and local commercial radio stations ensued in the 1970s, and by the late 1990s, the number of radio stations globally was immense. At the same time, one of the characteristics of the global era is the acknowledgment of small communities and narratives alongside the cosmopolitan ones (Neiger, Meyers, and Zandberg 2011, 171).

It is estimated that some 44,000 radio stations are operating in the world ("Statistics on Radio"). Yet, with the increasing importance of music over spoken programs, radio became more and more an acoustic background. People started to rely on other media for information that was, an effect of digitization, also more "interactive" in terms of participation and content. In addition, more and more commercial radio stations emerged, preferring popular music and emphasizing the entertaining role of the radio, losing its pedagogical, or might we say social (activist) function apparent in Benjamin's writing and socialist countries later on. Nevertheless, radio is still today superior in reach to any other medium surpassing television, digital or mobile ("Radio Facts"). According to UNESCO, along with

mobile radio, it is the most accessible form of technology, reaching at least 75% of the population in developing countries ("Statistics on Radio").

What makes radio still relevant, allegedly, is its locality: "local news and weather, emergency notifications for road closures and severe weather, and community news including local sport" ("Radio Facts"). This suggests that the social function of the radio is at its most pronounced on the local level for its practicality, usefulness, and "real-timeness", that is, for its relatability of both content and the people who make the program. The large scale, national, or indeed nation-building role of radio thus may have to be put in a different perspective: UNESCO notes that "in most cases, the BBC achieved large audiences (20% and more) only where the choice of local services was limited to 5 or fewer stations. As choice grows, BBC audiences fall" ("Statistics on Radio"). Does this shift indicate the rise of the local in a global perspective or the inability of a top-down frame to accommodate local specificities and demands? This statement also calls for investigating what the local embeddedness of the medium suggests in terms of using the technology and building communities. We will investigate this aspect in discussing the two cases and consider to what ends users put technology.

Between Analog and Digital

Most recently, radio, as other electronic media gone digital, has become an on-demand service, interfering with the temporality and spatiality of consumption and experience. The program is no longer necessarily available only punctually at the time of broadcasting but is endlessly accessible through recorded shows and podcasts. Not only have existing radio stations appeared on the internet, but new digital radios without official status as radio began streaming their programs digitally and outside immediate state control (licensing). What is more, internet radio, as both our studied radios demonstrate, enables the development of radio as a medium that bypasses the formal and often heavily bureaucratized processes of national frequency licensing that often unfolds at the crossroads of political power and control and demands for profitability. Some use sound platforms that are to some extent free, such as Soundcloud, Mixlr, Spotify, etc., with extra content or functionalities behind paywalls, while others set up their own websites. By way of remediation, however, implying the adapting and assimilating of previous media technologies into newer, succeeding ones (Bolter and Grusin 2009), it still maintains (as it exposes) the traditional form of stitching together music, news, educational programming, contact shows, interviews, educational programming, and so on. Along the way, it may have become more available, more local, if at the same time temporally unmoored and struggling in fierce competition with social media platforms and digital listening services.

On a practical level, internet radio is often podcast-based, meaning that content is pre-recorded, uploaded, and streamed periodically. At that, it tends to provide less live programming or make some shows fully available as podcasts while only excerpts are punctually broadcast live. Based on our experience, podcasts and recorded shows available on websites provide content for the listener to focus on and listen to carefully, and they aim to convey new information; these programs are not set to be background sound. The music is chosen for style and purpose and is usually broadcast as some sort of special music show. In these cases, listening practice and experience are quite different: studies show that people listen to (traditional) radio holistically for some time each week, which implies that the sound is perceived in the totality of the soundscape without consciously listening to any single-person acoustic element. Analytical listening (Williams 1994; Barbour 2004), by contrast, presupposes we focus our attention on one acoustic element in a complex aural environment (Barbour 2004), meaning that we listen attentively in a relatively quiet space and concentrate on the content of the radio.

The waning of radio program punctuality on account of ever-availability opens a question on the societal role of the radio as a wider, technical, and cultural infrastructure of community building. Clearly, the availability of radio programs over a longer period extends their reach over time. However, at the same time, radio and listening as a practice lose the spatial awareness of (imagined) synchronicity of participation and experience, an affordance of punctual media. This may fragment temporalities of commonality among listeners, which are further affected by the fact that uploaded content can also be heard wherever the internet is available. At the same time, networked technology enables an opening up of the medium, to some extent even its democratization, allowing for smaller, underfunded, non-commercial players to more easily enter the field; this, as we discuss below, is particularly relevant in the case of smaller and or excluded communities.

Networking Collectivities, Seeking Freedom

Following the change in attitudes toward the design and content of programs and the changes in technological infrastructures and affordances and related differences in conceptualizing programming, we can understand and investigate internet (community) radio as a technology that partakes in community building. Neiger, Meyers, and Zandberg note in their study of Israeli regional radio, that their research "underscores the central position of the media in establishing and shaping collective memory. The media plays a key role in both consolidating and defining the boundaries of the collective" (2011, 171). This is the case, for example, also with Radio Pata, which engages the community and encourages individual participation in civil society or social activist projects and fosters the construction of a community not only emphasizing the "taking part" but also "being part" by creating, affecting, impacting life through personal involvement.

The Story of Community Radio Tbilisi

Community Radio Tbilisi is one of the first alternative podcast radios in Georgia to have appeared on internet platforms in recent years. It started broadcasting just shortly before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, exactly on 17 January 2020, on Art's Birthday,[1] which was organized by Canadian radio that year. Community Radio Tbilisi was one of the celebratory guests.

1 Art's Birthday is an annual exchange-art event celebrated on 17 January by a loose collection of artists and artist organizations around the world; it was first proposed in 1963 by French artist Robert Filliou (https://www.artsbirthday.net/2022/schedule.php).

The radio broadcasts through platforms Soundcloud and Mixlr[2]—mainly because they offer the temporal and conceptual freedom necessary to create the alternative and cross-border programming, as Barbora Gallo, co-director of Community Radio Tbilisi, points out in an interview. For pandemic reasons, the interview took place online and Gallo explained most of the radio concepts, ideas, developments, characteristics, and plans further discussed in the text (Gallo 2020). The target group of the Tbilisi radio is the younger generation that follows the temporary culture and radio scene and is familiar with internet platforms, so the creators did not even bother with traditional radio waves. In the beginning, the team was supported by a local cultural organization, Propaganda, which provided them with a free broadcast studio. There, they could do live broadcasts and invite people to give interviews. The official languages of the radio are Georgian and English: Georgian is the official state language, and English reaches a wider audience, including those who do not understand Georgian. Broadcasting on the platforms was initially planned to be live three times a week.

Programming On Talks About Lives and Thoughts About Art

Community Radio Tbilisi's programming differs from that of traditional or popular radio. The concept of the radio is to make an informative program in a place where people *"talk about their lives and thoughts about art, even invent new stories and share the sounds of the environment, present and draw the place through audio media and present cultural works"* (Gallo 2020). So if one wants to follow, one has to listen carefully. The goal of radio creators was to step out of mainstream radio programming—either locally or globally considered—and influence the listeners to get a new perspective on radio, different senses, and their connections.

Looking at the different broadcasts, it is clear that Community Radio Tbilisi makes full use of the audio medium—the silence, additional sounds from the background, and the voices in the room. The creators of the program take advantage of all the benefits that the audio medium can offer, including its "blindness" (Crisell 1994), which constitutes it as the ultimate auditory representation

2 See Community Radio Tbilisi, Soundcloud, https://soundcloud.com/communityradiotbilisi.

(Barbour 2004). As Barbora Gallo points out in the interview, this gives rise to the concept of combining different senses to sound because sounds evoke different sensors, including visual, taste, and scent. The mentioned concept can be viewed very well through the lens of Peirce's semiotic theory of signs, which predicts three types of signs: the icon—a sign that resembles the object it represents (e.g., a photograph); the index—a sign is directly connected to its object, usually in a casual way (e.g., smoke is an index for fire); the symbol—a sign that has no resemblance or connection to its object (e.g., red rose as a symbol for love) (Peirce 1960 [1932]). All these signs are presented on the radio in the shows, which also include surrounding sounds that evoke the memory of the scent, image, etc. (like cooking, traveling, etc.); they consist of sounds, silence, and the use of time rather than space as the main context structuring device (Hawkes 1977, 135): the listening or constructed spaces are undefined, while time as the duration of the broadcasting is set by sounds, voices, and silences, as well as purposeful and the environmental sounds.

As an unavoidable radio sound, the voice can be such a strong expression of personality that it can captivate the listener within seconds and become a marker of identification of the broadcaster or the station (Crisell 1994, 43). The voice on the radio can be interpreted as a mere index of human presence, but on another level, it is the index of a personality (Crisell 1994, 43). The listener can immediately tell what program follows. They can imagine the person behind the words and also their character and mood (cf. Benjamin above). Even in podcast radio, we can find similar things: the listener selects the show and expects the voice and the chosen vocabulary; if it is changed, the show is received or "heard" differently. This difference is usually expressed through comparisons and expressions of opinion.

Sounds are understood as "natural", as phenomena that exist "out there" in the real world. They are generally indexical (Crisell 1994, 44), which can be nicely presented in the observed radio in the program "Cooking Time" on Community Radio Tbilisi: the chef cooked/prepared recipes from a food residency with live audio cooking in a restaurant. The broadcast's audio is obvious: the voice sounds distant as the chef is in the kitchen preparing the recipe as he explains the process. The listener hears the chef's voice and water boiling, oil sizzling, etc., which puts the listener in the kitchen. The sound of the kitchen can evoke smells and visual memories, feelings, and tastes.

Another program that the radio started with the COVID-19 restrictions was "Sound Postcards from Different Cities". The radio began broadcasting sounds from different cities just to capture the sound image of a point in the city, like traffic sounds, birds, sounds of construction works, etc. In this way, the sound semiotically becomes a symbol, i.e., the sound introduces the city, and the radio creates an audio map of a place with sound galleries—on the principle of "close your eyes" and listen to the sounds that paint the picture of the landscape. The radio creates audio landscapes that give the listener a feeling of a place to where one could not travel due to pandemic restrictions. A bit of travel into listeners' lives was also brought by the show "Passport", in which foreigners living in Georgia told their different travel stories.

There is a catch to broadcasting different sounds, however: some sound stimuli can often sound or feel more "real" on the radio than the actual sounds themselves (Crisell 1994, 47) because we listen to them more attentively, like the sizzling of the oil, the hum of the highway. Music in Community Radio Tbilisi is very close to the station's sound policy—it is mostly classified as experimental and electronic. In contrast, aesthetic pleasure remains one of its main functions although this kind of music can easily function as background music, audio wallpaper. In this way, the stereotypical image of radio is changed: the listener is attentive to the sounds mostly running in the background, while the music becomes the background curtain either of interviews or even the listener's other activities.

In the various broadcasts, all the main functions that radio can have are distributed: informative, background, and place- and time-shaping, with different uses of sound and noises. Just as music can transport us to another place, different sounds can evoke feelings and memories and transport us to a particular memorable or desired event or feeling from the past, such as grandma's kitchen or lunch in a crowded, noisy room, etc. Precisely because of the power of audio media, the extreme situations of the pandemic lockdown offered even more creative ideas for the program.

Extreme Situations and Radio

The radio was initially conceived as alternative radio, but the pandemic quarantine in 2020 forced its makers to think even more creatively. Shows had to be pre-recorded and collages prepared; the team began to include local artists. All recordings had to be arranged in advance. For this reason, they decided to stream whenever possible.

With the new circumstances, new shows were born: the radio evolved and expanded, including, for example, one of the most listened to shows, "Casual Dinosaurs" (the show was created during the COVID-19 lockdown—Ben Wheeler, the radio speaker, locked in the gallery, collects and discusses the listeners' dreams and his own), and "Passport" (interviews with different passport holders discussing national identities and the limits of freedom of movement).

Unlike most art projects during the closure, the radio became more popular and gained more listeners. At its peak, 500 listeners heard Community Radio Tbilisi's broadcasts about distant places and new routines, the broadcasts with music prepared by famous musicians. The lockdown obviously forced people to slow down but at the same time to look for another way to spend their free time or to look differently for art projects. The quarantine opened up more conceptual space for the listener and gave audio media and creators more power to make an impact with their programming. In a sense, the audio medium regained relevance because the content is designed in a way that demands more focused, dedicated listening, not unlike in the early days of radio.

Although the radio targeted a smaller audience, who would have an interest and dedicate their time to "close listening" of their program, they have become more recognized and are already one of the most well-known radios in Georgia, despite the quality of the recordings not always being the same (the recordings are more or less DIY style).

So, listening to the program of Community Radio Tbilisi, it is clear that the radio's concept is to combine sound and space—sound as an important part of the place and the place as a ground for the sound, the space where the sound resonates. Many broadcasts (e.g., "Cooking", "Postcards", "Passport", and various interviews) give us an audio sketch or encourage the imagination of the place in which they were recorded. For example, when the chef cooks live in a restaurant, we experience not only the reception of the prepared food but also the environment in which it is prepared, the sounds of the customers, the sounds in the kitchen (frying, cooking, cutting vegetables, etc.), comments of the chef, etc. Audio postcards show us audio recordings of a particular place or environment, for example, a place near the railway station of Tbilisi, at the intersection of Tevdore Mgvdeli and Abastumani streets, or sound collages from different, primarily urban environments (motorway, town street, market, people chatter, etc.) in Spain, Turkey, the United States, the United Kingdom, etc. The experience of a place through sound is very different from the usual visual experience. The interviews (the shows "Emic", "Passport", and interviews on architectural themes) are also structured in such a way that the sound creates the place and conveys information about feelings in a particular place and the atmosphere.

In this way, the listener receives a complex experience with multiple concepts of feelings and senses. Radio listening is indeed complex: although the radio functions as mass communication and is impersonal, without a visible image, it provides an intimate experience and even creates individual memory and knowledge. That is also the intention of the Community Radio Tbilisi: to influence the intimate with impersonal media.

Radio Pata, Pata Rât, Cluj

The life of Radio Pata started on 24 September 2021, when after several years of bidding for funding,[3] the first programs went public from a shipping container in Pata Rât, an illegal settlement on the outskirts of Cluj, Romania. The settlement consists of four "districts" (Dallas, Coastei, Rampa, Cantonului) and is home to somewhere 1,500 (official) and 2,500 people (unofficial estimate), mainly members

3 After several unsuccessful bids, the Radio Pata community internet radio was realized through project funding via AltArt Foundation for Alternative Arts in partnership with the Community Association of Roma from Coastei, the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection Cluj, the Centre for the Study of Democracy, and Stiftelsen Bergen Internasjonale Teater/BIT Teatergarasjen (https://www.radiopata.ro/en/about-radio-pata/).

of the socially, culturally, and politically excluded Roma. István Szakáts, one of the people behind the radio and for a long time involved in with the Pata Rât community, explained that he got the idea while filming a community radio in the USA: *"I was filming the story of a church community radio that operated on monofrequency and solar panel radios, so they had no problem with batteries. [... they] organized distribution of food, but only if people first joined the church. I wanted to do community radio, but I didn't want to brainwash them [the people]; I wanted them to brainwash themselves"* (Szakáts 2021).

Pata Rât settlement, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Photo: George Popescu

The humorous tone aside, the idea of setting up a community radio in Pata Rât faced an immediate question: *"Those people are really the bottom of the society. It's a really fair question: Why the fuck do they need the radio? Why not rather put up a shop where they can bake bread or facilitate one more bus to take kids to school? There are really more basic needs"* (Szakáts 2021). Regardless, the idea started to unfold, building on an existing network of community members and NGOs in Pata Rât. István recounts: *"I borrowed a metal [shipping] container, put it in the middle of the ghetto, labeled it Radio Pata. We organized film projections, discussions, film director students came and redirected movies with kids"* (Szakáts 2021). Focusing on culture, they complemented other NGO initiatives tackling education, healthcare, and housing. They organized storytelling workshops for children in which they adapted a scene from a popular film to the Pata Rât situation and encouraged the participants to talk about their families and childhood (Stefan 2022; Szakáts 2021; cf. Pata Rât 2017).

This reveals the broader issue of structural inequalities and oppression and highlights the oft-cited critique of activist involvement that often reproduces unequal positions. Instead, the mission behind the Radio Pata initiative was to provide self-expression and self-empowerment, to detect and potentialize social priorities that exceed bare living: *"Somehow, I want to step down off this pedestal and equalize this relationship: you do it for yourself, it's your chance. I'm the background guy, and want to remain in the background; you're the foreground people, it's your tools, I only repair the tools if you break them"* (Szakáts 2021).

Radio Pata, opening event. Photos: https://www.radiopata.ro

Radio in a Divided Community

"Do it yourself" is not easy in a divided community on the outskirts of the city and the periphery of society, subject to institutional racism and exclusion; a community with trauma as its immediate identification base (cf. Pata Rât 2017). Anastasia, the "station master", responsible for the program and projects and the management and social impact strategy, notes: *"There is a conflict between communities, they don't see they are living [in] the same dramatic situation, and share the same collective trauma. It's a heavy word, but we have to say it: they are confronting a serious collective trauma, increased by segregation, institutional racism, and discrimination"* (Stefan 2022). The trauma she describes is a consequence of years of exclusion, as well as the 2010 eviction when many Roma families (about 300 people) were forced from Cluj with no place else to go but Pata Rât (Gokcen 2011), a settlement whose residents are exposed to toxic pollution and contaminants from the nearby city dump.[4] In the context of exclusion and pollution and systemic failure to address the situation, Anastasia sees a way out also in creativity: *"In this traumatic process, creativity has to take place. Helping someone be creative and see their work exposed to the world in interviews, and hear what they are trying to say, is important for their self-esteem. And self-esteem builds up hope again"*. Thus at the very inception of the radio, the people who helped to set it up seemed to be well aware not only of the situation but also of the shortcomings of usual approaches that fail to see the specificities of excluded communities (see Pata-Cluj 2017).

The radio, thus, has an important social and cultural function and ambition beyond what we usually associate with it, e.g., entertainment, music, and talk shows. The practice of Radio Pata shows, it can have all these things while still serve the pedagogical and, and community functions also envisioned by Benjamin in the early days of the radio. Anastasia self-critically notes that their task *"to transform a guerrilla radio into a medium where you can heal this collective trauma may be a social cliché or an activist fiasco. But what we're trying here, is to let the community discover their own voice in a safe environment. We don't pretend we are the saviors of their world, but we are sincere, and show them that we are too vulnerable, we make mistakes"* (Stefan 2022).

Radio Pata thus has two general missions: to amplify the voice of the Pata Rât communities and to connect their voices to the greater community of Cluj. Having been conceptualized and built on an existing network of people (residents, activists), activities, and solution-seeking, the radio is thus not just a radio but also a collectivity infrastructure in the making. István notes it is *"a central narrative, a pretext for organizing things, ateliers, workshops, to tell stories, to remember the past, to reconnect relations, to record their parents, how was it when you were deported here?"* (Szakáts 2021). The radio, then, is a medium that utilizes technology and sound to create symbolic, intimate, emotional effects, yet also has very material consequences in the community in terms of organization of life. As such, it charts the possibilities for the community's future development.

To carve out the future, Anastasia sees the potential of the radio in assisting the preservation of memory through storytelling: *"What I observed in Pata Rât is that they keep talking about what happened with the eviction [2010] or racism; some are still crying and living their trauma. They keep talking about it, and this is a fight back, not to be forgotten [and] this is the main role of the radio: helping the people not to be forgotten, to preserve their memory"* (Stefan 2022). Recalling Benjamin from above, this is also the way for the subject to enter into the historical: coming at the side of existing complementary NGO initiatives, the Radio Pata initiative, its future conceptualization, and its community role engages the ongoing relations, people, and aspirations and builds on very real histories, an inherited network of detected social issues and individual actions. It also builds on the emancipatory history of the radio, using contemporary technology, and employing the technological promises of a medium that has been structured everyday life for more than 100 years, contributing as it does to the formation of collectivity.

In effect, Radio Pata is the digital realization of radio's promise before and beyond the mass commercialization of the medium, a manifestation, in a way, of

4 Pata Rât is listed on the Environmental Justice Atlas that documents social conflict around environmental issues and states about the Pata Rât: "The inhabitants often suffer from ear, eye and skin infections, asthma or bronchitis, high blood pressure, heart and stomach problems due to oozing substances and noxious smoke when waste is burned. Job opportunities are limited apart from those in the waste dump. Most of the children do not regularly attend school. While the social, economic and environmental issues around Pata Rât are complex, one thing is clear: the situation is the result of long-standing structural violence, including environmental racism, against the affected Roma communities" (see Alexandrescu 2017).

each new technological democratizing ambition (cf. Levy 1997). At the same time a cultural and social project, the formation, existence, and operation of the community radio is critically marked by the technological aspect of the medium: the technological affordance of the internet radio and social media platforms allowed the team to get past the ossified system of Romanian frequency licensing, riddled with political control and subject to economic interests (Szakáts 2021). Such relative technological autonomy enables the team to create and follow the program independently of existing state-sanctioned infra/structures and to repurpose the technology to promote and carry out cultural and artistic activities as a way of community building.

Complex Relations … and What About the Impact

The practicing of technological autonomy reveals a complex aspect of the relationship between the authorities, the NGOs, the community, and even the technology that may prove critical in providing the peripheral and excluded communities the tools to self-organize and connect outside. For example, *"Radio Pata aims to contribute to the inclusion of vulnerable groups in Pata Rât, increase their increasing resilience, assert their identity, claim their rights and access to social services (education, health), and, importantly, to assert themselves socially and culturally"* (Stefan 2022). As such, radio not only transmits sound and information but actively intervenes in the very material and symbolic tissue of the community. To do so, it "uses a horizontal approach that improves access to information, self-expression, self-representation, self-organization, social participation and resilience (with special focus on youth)" (About, Radio Pata). And, aiming to "combat racism and discrimination, while promoting the respect for human rights, specifically fighting antigypsyism and stereotypes" (About, Radio Pata), Radio Pata and indeed the people who made and make it, intervene also into the community through conceptualization that adheres to an informed understanding of how the community operates and reacts. The Pata Rât community, clearly, is not a solid entity but people who have their own expectations and interests. For some, it is to *"strengthen their power and position"*, which means *"you have to barter, and make sure you're not double-crossed … it's complicated"*. For others, it is different: *"I heard my voice on the radio, it's so cool!"* (Szakáts 2021).

To extend its reach across communities, Radio Pata utilizes various media, primarily the website and Facebook page, where they post events announcements, video recordings, etc. Both went online in late 2021 and are decidedly outwardly oriented in line with Radio Pata's mission. The event announcement from well before the official launch of the radio stated: "This is where you come in. Do you want to contribute? Do you have ideas, energies, a microphone, maybe (☺) other resources? Let's talk" (Radio Pata—radio comunitar în dezvoltare 2019).

Over the past couple of months, since the radio went live, there have been several shows published on FB and the website. The communications channels show constant activity and community engagement. The use of social media is thus a way to build and demonstrate the existence of a listening community, to disseminate programs by way of sharing live or recorded radio shows. It is also a way to reach outside the immediate community. This gives a different view on the medium: for example, national or regional radios, part of wider media networks or companies would rarely feature members of an excluded community and hardly outside their existing social framework, inattentive to the specificities of the people or the topics. However, the community internet radio in this respect is different: *"This may sound a bit cliché, but the radio gives voice. Community radio is an absolute right of democracy. What Pata Rât forgot, because it was forgotten, is democracy. So, Radio Pata is trying to structure the medium of democracy where we encourage free speech. We help structure their response to what authorities tell them it's not their right"* (Stefan 2022). This view entails the awareness of the specifics of the situation, the community, and its needs while framing them in the context of the freedom of speech, which due to technical or narrative, or conceptual limits, despite being a nominal right, might not be easily attainable in regional or national frameworks.

In this sense, we can see local or community participation as empowering. Furthermore, this reveals another important thing, that is, social agency. One of the radio's practical missions, as mentioned above, is also to facilitate better ways for the Pata Rât community to access state social services, healthcare, and education. On another level, the consequence of the radio initiative might be of a more generally societal nature, making explicit the awareness of the broader relevance of social activism as a way to not let the ossified state structures prevail: *"I see people try to make social activism like something normal. It is our responsibility as citizens to help the ones who are maybe not as lucky as us, so this [talk] of being a good person is total bullshit.*

We have to be responsible citizens, not good people" (Stefan 2022). As such, the radio as a medium and a social and cultural infrastructure may in the future offer ways to counter systemic violence and exclusion. Thus it can be a place of both action and relaxation, to take care of oneself and the community at the same time: *"Maybe it's stupid, but every one of us has something that makes us feel better, go to the theater, cinema, … so, I'd like this radio to be the comfort zone for them, you know, like, Hey, what are you doing this weekend? I'm going to the radio to be interviewed, to make a project there, something productive and comforting at the same time"* (Stefan 2022). The radio thus gives the community the tools and the infrastructure of care.

When asked about social impact as a concept, Anastasia sees it as *"engaging people under the same idea, purpose"*. This is quite unlike the bureaucratic understanding of the social impact that tends to ask for measured, planned, conclusive results. Smiles and self-esteem cannot be measured. *"It goes under EU propaganda, and propaganda is not something we work with in the reality of the process. Graphics don't have nothing to do with toxic air and children getting sick"* (Stefan 2022). Social impact, she goes on, *"is a thing from the EU, but we're concerned with real changes. We don't talk about social impact, we talk about purpose, and how we can implement purpose in a vulnerable group that lost this touch with having a collective purpose"* (Stefan 2022).

Although stated emotionally, this emphasizes a critical aspect of the questions of impact. A desire for quantifiable data, measurable headcount, detailed numbers, and graphs is hardly an answer for the complexities of a community that is necessarily multi-faceted, multi-layered, accidental, and random in its expectations and desires and articulations thereof. Likewise, measuring considers the historical dimension of a community only with great difficulty. Anastasia: *"When you're put through the trauma of segregation, evacuation, when you lose your home and belongings, you get to feel lonely, even if you have a community around you that went through the same. You feel abandoned, you don't want to see the rest of the community because they remind you of the trauma. It's a paradox. You want to talk about it, but don't want to see it living everyday anew"* (Stefan 2022).

When assessing the impact of a radio such as Radio Pata, it is critical to understand the historical background, the motives of the people evolved, and the technical conditions. Such scope is far too ambitious for this chapter. Yet, we hope that the discussion has demonstrated at least some of the socio-political complexities, emotional vectors, and ways of engendering social agency that are part of the formation and operation of community radio, as well as its role in the structurally peripheralized community.

Conclusion

Our two-locale investigation of the community radio phenomena started at the time of the COVID-19 outbreak, making it impossible to travel and hence challenging to conduct research. With some adjustments and concessions, we conducted several interviews with the people behind the Tbilisi and Pata Rât radio initiatives, which provided insight into the conceptualizing and the life of the two radios. The initial steps of the writing of this paper showed that both radios, widely different by design and ambition, as well as their creators' and audiences' socio-cultural, economic, and regional backgrounds, only share the technical condition; and that this might prove too disparate to investigate in one chapter.

Indeed, employing a similar technological solution, the analyzed cases in Tbilisi and Pata Rât could not be more different. In the case of the Pata Rât community, the radio provides an excluded community infrastructure of commonality, a technology of self-empowerment from within to reach outside. It is also a tool, on the one hand, for communicating and re-presenting community memory in the context of traumatic memory of the eviction and structural violence and a tool for bringing together people to take part in artistic and cultural activities not necessarily related to radio broadcast itself. As such, the Radio Pata may not function as much as a radio in its sound and voice capacity but instead presents an infrastructure of the community, an emancipatory initiative to not only empower the community in its societal self-awareness but also in their being together; and as such also opening a space of freedom.

On the other hand, the Community Radio Tbilisi enables creative freedom: to search for new approaches for creating the program's content. Although we could not get listeners' responses, listening to the program shows that the place itself presents an important element. The freedom in the creative process enabled the producers to make use of it in the times of lockdown. Radio brought different places into enclosed areas because of pandemics; this would be highly limited if the program were accomplished in the frame of official frequencies and radio institutions. The Community Radio Tbilisi started broadcasting just before the pandemic burst out. Therefore, the radio producers reacted immediately and adapted their broadcasts with different shows. The radio programming aimed to perceive places using soundscapes and engage different senses using audio stimuli: cooking in a restaurant with all its different ambient sounds, street noises, or describing travel from different angles could take listeners to different places.

Thus, as we moved along from conceptualizing this paper to writing it, we realized that despite their differences, the two initiatives share, in fact, a similar disposition: they both found a way to take the tech-enabled solution to reinvent, redesign, reclaim social agency, if not freedom. Despite their differences, an aspiration for freedom seems to be a common thread connecting both initiatives in that both made use of a technology to overcome the limits and constraints of their specific situations, to design their activities and content as they see fit, and decouple their activities from the immediate constraints of quantifiable measure of success, reach, and people reached. Nevertheless, perhaps even more importantly, the different technological applications demonstrate that different conditions and contexts, as well as people's social position, situation, ambition, and dedication, may be driven toward transcending the limits of the present condition by acting on the medium and each specific societal situation to affect the present and engender a different future. Benjamin's pedagogical function is, refurbished, still here.

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DAN PODJED

Transformation of a Project Network in the Time of the COVID-19 Crisis

Funding acknowledgment: The research for this chapter was funded through the Creative Europe project CtC -> CtI and the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS) research program "Ethnological, Anthropological and Folklore Studies Research on Everyday Life" (P6-0088).

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the project network *Create to Connect -> Create to Impact*, a joint project of fifteen European cultural and research organizations financed by the EU's Creative Europe program. The project brought together these organizations to create an impact in society in terms of change, innovation, empowerment, and emancipation through building powerful and long-lasting connections between artists and audiences.[1] Starting in 2018 and finishing in 2022, "embedded" social scientists were involved as project research partners to understand how to impact different audiences and obtain a clearer picture of interactions in the project consortium.[2]

Through an ethnographic analysis of project meetings, interviews, group discussions, and other interactions between team members and researchers, this chapter examines how people interacted and communicated—both offline and online—during different phases of the project. First, it discusses the "normality" phase, in which the project began with optimistic plans to conduct art productions that a team of social scientists would later analyze to understand how to impact audiences. The second part describes the phase of unexpected turbulence that came with the pandemic. Suddenly, the temporary "normality" was torn apart. Project partners were in shock and unable to implement their plans and interact face-to-face with team members. Finally, the chapter presents the "new normal", in which the artists and project partners found new ways to interact with their audiences and stay in touch through video-conferencing and other digital tools

1 For more information, see: https://ctc-cti.eu.

2 In-depth studies were planned in the following institutions and cities: Artsadmin (London, the UK), AltArt (Cluj-Napoca, Romania), Arts and Theatre Institute (Prague, Czech Republic), Bunker (Ljubljana, Slovenia), Culturgest (Lisbon, Portugal), Drugo more (Rijeka, Croatia), NTGent (Ghent, Belgium), Public Art Platform (Tbilisi, Georgia), Santarcangelo dei Theatri (Santarcangelo di Romagna, Italy), and United Artists Labour (Belgrade, Serbia). Based on research findings from the field, the team would develop recommendations and strategies for supporting co-creation processes at different levels and among stakeholders, as well as provide advice for reaching out to people at the local level and increasing impact at different levels, from national to international.

and finally in physical reality. The analysis compares the transformation of the project partnership to the rites of passage. It explains how and why the transpired events should be understood in this way and from a different perspective.

When we started researching the CtC -> CtI project network in the second half of 2018, the project's directions were pretty clear to the artists, producers, art managers, and researchers involved. The artistic productions were to be carried out according to the project's original plan, as were the research activities. The main goal of the research team was to find out how the different actors involved in the creative process of the participating institutions—from the artists to the managers and administration—work together to achieve an impact on the audience and also on a broader level, i.e., beyond the stage and outside the institutions. Therefore, the researchers intended to consider the impact on broader local communities in which the performances were embedded, as well as the impact on those who chose to attend them.

The implementation of the research plan proceeded relatively smoothly until early 2020. At that time, several ethnographic field studies were to be conducted, including those in Belgium. In March, a researcher from the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, i.e., the institution responsible for conducting the field studies, came to me and said she had booked a flight and arranged accommodation in Ghent but would rather not take the risk and travel abroad because of the COVID-19 pandemic. *"Isn't this just some kind of flu?"* I remember asking her at the time, not knowing much about the SARS-CoV-2 virus that would rapidly change the global reality in the coming years. *"Still, I don't want to take the chance and put myself and my family at risk"*, she replied. I could not have agreed more but thought the situation would calm down in a month or two. At the time, we did not know—nor could we have imagined—that the health crisis would last more than two years and significantly alter our research plans, in addition to causing turbulent changes in the project network.

This chapter thus presents the changes in the CtC -> CtI project network and attempts to shed light on them from an insider's perspective. (Indeed, the researchers were not just passive external observers but instead active participants in the project meetings and other activities.) Its primary purpose is to show how a project network can manage a crisis and deal with external changes in the local and global environment. It also illustrates how different means of communication affect interactions between individuals and their institutions and presents the innovative approaches that appeared during the COVID-19 crisis for keeping in touch within a network.

Methodology

To carry out this study, the author and other researchers involved in the project relied on two qualitative methods: ethnography *in situ* and online ethnography. The combination of the two approaches enabled getting in touch with network participants and stakeholders in an optimal way before and after the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent crisis.

Ethnography in Situ

The research team of the CtC -> CtI project initially relied on ethnography and its main method, i.e., participant observation, in which the researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people. The ethnographer thus serves as the primary instrument of data collection by living or spending time in a context over an extended period. She or he participates in a range of activities, both mundane and extraordinary, along with the people who are the full participants in that context. In addition to formal observation of work, he or she also conducts informal observations during leisure, unstructured and fun activities as an important part of data collection, which is sometimes called "deep hanging out" (Geertz 1998). The researcher also uses everyday informal conversations as a form of inquiry, records observations and thoughts, usually chronologically, in field notes in a variety of settings, and, most importantly for the project, learns from and builds on the perspectives of people in the research setting.

In the research process, the research team used the three main ethnographic techniques to gather information and understand people: participant observation,

interviews, and focus groups (group discussions). Participant observation, as explained earlier, is a central anthropological research technique that consists of recording and interpreting information gathered through participation and observation in a certain group or community. Such an approach helps researchers to partially assume the role of others and thus share something of the perspectives inherent in their social world.

Interviews that the research team also relied on in the context of the CtC -> CtI project are conversations or debates about a particular topic, usually conducted face-to-face and in person. Interviews are often recorded and later transcribed or at least interpreted so that the interview can continue undisturbed by taking notes, but all information is available later for in-depth analysis.

Focus groups are a form of group discussion that utilizes communication between research participants to generate data. This means that rather than asking participants to respond to a question, in turn, the researcher encourages them to talk to each other: asking questions, sharing anecdotes, and commenting on each other's experiences and points of view. This method is particularly well suited to exploring how people's knowledge and experiences come about. It can be used to examine what people think, how they think, and why they think the way they do.

These techniques were used to better understand the people involved in the art productions and to explore the network of project partners. Specifically, how do they communicate and connect during the project, and what do they think and feel about their impact on people, local communities, and the world?

Online Ethnography

The basic principle of participant observation—and anthropological research in general—is "being there" (see Podjed and Muršič 2021) in the same space with other people. This is an obvious necessity in purely human terms, but during the COVID-19 crisis, it was impossible to meet and talk with project partners in the same room. Methodologically, the researchers still tried to be "there" in other ways, for example, with the help of a digital camera and sound and images via contemporary means of information and communication technologies. As the CtC -> CtI project has shown, we can "be there" almost anywhere and at any time and rely on hybrid communication forms. As explained by Podjed and Muršič (2021), prior to the pandemic, few researchers in anthropology were using hybrid research techniques (Przybylski 2021)—mainly those researchers and methods interested in and involving virtual worlds (Boellstorff et al. 2012) or those who could not conduct their research in other ways (Coleman 2014). In fact, neither was the initial plan of the CtC -> CtI research team to rely on remote ethnography and digital research. However, from 2020 the team had to use the approach to stay in touch with people from the network and to study the impact the artists tried to make by using the digital tools themselves. The ethnography was thus combined with "netnography" (Kozinets 2020) since the project network was researched both in physical and digital reality.

Analysis:
Being Together, Being Apart

This section analyzes four aspects, elements, or perspectives of the CtC -> CtI project network. First, it presents the consortium meetings that took place both offline and online—in the latter case, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Next, it analyzes three online debates that took place during the crisis when project participants and their institutions were unable to practice their art. Then it studies a workshop prepared to better understand the (post)crisis period and gather impressions of the project partners. Finally, the section presents two debates with project managers at Bunker, Ljubljana, which took place in 2019 and 2021. In this way, the section attempts to highlight the transformation of the project network by trying to follow Arnold van Gennep's (1977 [1909]) three stages in rites of passage: separation, transition (liminal phase), and incorporation (reintegration).[3]

3 Van Gennep's model, which was later expanded and upgraded by Victor Turner (1974), represents the identity shift that occurs when an individual or group of people leaves one community to enter another and symbolically becomes someone or something else, e.g., a grown-up person.

However, van Gennep's model is used here in a somewhat different sense than in the explanations of rites of passage, in which the goal and purpose of transformations are clear, i.e., entering a new stage of life either on a personal or community level. In the case of the changes in the project network, on the other hand, the transformation was not planned or orchestrated in advance, as is often the case in the phases of rites of passage. On the contrary, it was unplanned, unprepared, and unstructured as well. In this analysis, the term "rite of passage" is thus used in a metaphorical and not its original sense since the transformation that took place in the network was not at all planned, and the transition from one stage to another actually took place accidentally due to the global crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the crisis clearly marked a transition from one phase to another, starting with (unplanned) segregation, followed by liminality and reintegration.[4]

Consortium Meetings

The first kick-off meeting of the CtC -> CtI project took place in October 2018. The setting in Ljubljana, Slovenia, was relatively informal, especially compared to other project meetings in which the author of this text has participated. Each participant in the meeting first introduced herself or himself and presented the participating institution. Many people attending the meeting already knew each other from previous projects; therefore, the atmosphere was friendly and casual.

The meeting in Ljubljana followed the classical social "dramaturgy" (cf. Goffman 1959) of European meetings. It was "staged" by the project coordinators (Bunker) and supported by the participants: presentation of the daily agenda, setting up the room, explaining the "housekeeping" rules, etc. After the official part of the agenda, an informal gathering took place, which helped to bring people together and form a permanent team for the four-year project. A similar situation could be observed in the following consortium meetings, including the one in October 2019 in Bergen, Norway, which the author of this study also attended: the feeling of being a "big happy family", with some occasionally grumpy participants and many informal gatherings in restaurants, at theater performances, etc.

A very different consortium meeting then took place in June 2020, when the pandemic reality began to show the contours of the "new normality". That meeting was not held in physical space but in digital reality via video conferencing. The atmosphere at that meeting was very different from those that took place before. First, each project partner presented in detail the COVID-19 situation in their country, pointing out the problems that artists experienced due to the actions of the government and the international community. Since the meeting was recorded, we could record and analyze the meeting and make a short video reflecting on the situation in the project's "liminal phase". The video, which is still available on YouTube, begins with an introduction reminiscent of those from the *Star Wars* movies: "A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away..".[5] The text later explains that, in reality, it was not so far away and highlights the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the CtC -> CtI project partnership. It was also explained that both the "dark" and "light" sides are reflected in a video that shows all partners in separate "boxes" on the screen—a speaker was highlighted in color, while other participants were quiet observers, presented in black and white. The video begins with Nevenka "Nena" Koprivšek, the founder and long-time director of Bunker, explaining, *"One day I am up and say 'We can do this' and the next day I am all down and say 'No, nothing can be opened until the New Year'"*. Each subsequent participant presented his or her own view from an individual separate box. In this way, the different situations in the participating countries were also presented. In the video and during the online meeting, the words "survival" and "solidarity" became two keywords; the artists and managers of art institutions tried to clarify their approaches to find new ideas and strategies to act during the crisis and prepare for the next steps in the unexpected future in the time of transition when the contours of a "new normality" were still blurred and uncertain.

4 In social sciences and humanities, there are several other models that try to explain the transition from one stage to another which resemble the scheme of rites of passage. One is the dynamic model of organizational change (Hatch 1993; Schein 1992; Greiner 1998; Podjed and Muršič 2008), which describes an organization as an entity in constant flow. It is not understood as a stable social institution but instead tends to take many different forms. The model is comparable to various explanations of change and transformation in times of crisis, e.g., the Tipping Point Model, the Threshold Model, and the Punctuated Equilibrium Model (see Ličen and Podjed 2020 for an overview).

5 "CtC -> CtI – Exploring the new reality in the time of the pandemic, Dan Podjed", Bunker Ljubljana, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sU40n_8AAXs.

All other project meetings took place online until October 2021, when the opportunity finally arose for project participants to meet physically again. The meeting situation in Paris was quite unusual for the participants, especially compared to the offline meetings at the beginning of the CtC -> CtI project: disinfectants, masks, and test and vaccination certificates, for example, became the new norm when entering the project meeting venue. In addition, the old "techniques of the body" (Mauss 1934) were replaced by new ones; the greeting hugs and handshakes were shy, hesitant, often awkward, and the atmosphere in the room where the meeting was held was somewhat uncomfortable for a while. Obviously, the consortium had begun to fall apart symbolically over the past year and a half, and the ties between project members had started to dissolve. The physical contact in Paris was, in a way, a symbolic new beginning that reshaped the project network.

Workshop in Paris

At the same meeting in Paris in October 2021, we held a research workshop to show how artists, other project participants, and representatives of institutions were dealing with the COVID-19 crisis. The main topic of debate was how to make an innovative impact in transitional and liminal times. First, the workshop participants clarified that "impact" is not a universal term but an ambiguous category defined differently by each participating project partner; for some, it means the direct effect of a theater play on the audience. For others, a long-term effect on the local community or society in general. Next, all the participating partners presented ways of making a difference during the pandemic and reflected on the advantages and disadvantages of different solutions. For example, digital platforms allowed more participants to participate in the activities, including a talk organized by Artsadmin for the *Arrivals and Departures* project. *"Normally, we would have had 30 people in the room", explained the project's representative, "and then there were 1,500 people online. We do not know who they were, but we were really shocked".*

Similarly, the so-called *Working Encounters*, i.e., a co-creation meeting of the CtC -> CtI project where new productions were designed in collaboration with project partners, was carried out online and thus impacted a broader—and different—audience. However, the main problem in switching from offline to online productions was the lack of direct feedback. Even though people in the audience were able to send their feedback via email, social media, and telecommunication tools, their reactions were not straightforward and visible; therefore, it was very difficult for the artists to know and especially feel the opinions of people who participated in a show or production.

Another group at the workshop emphasized the crisis of public space related to people being disconnected and atomized in their daily lives. A problem, said one workshop participant, is when art is put online so that it serves a *"decorative purpose"* rather than being transformative. A representative of another institution added that it was most meaningful for people to be together in an "unstructured" way when their festivals reopened. Such meetings enabled re-connecting and strengthening the existing ties beyond online gatherings.

Opening performances to the public via online video streaming platforms achieved another unexpected effect. A video of the performance *Ich Kann Nicht Anders,* which included nudity on stage, was posted online by a representative of the show's producer, Bunker. The show accidentally remained online for longer than it was initially supposed to. When the person responsible found out that it had remained online, she checked and found that it had over 9,000 views in a short time and had over 22,000 views some time later. Even if viewers had shared the video due to the nudity on stage, there was a surprising impact on a wider audience that had unexpectedly, and for other reasons, gotten in touch with artistic production. However, the question arises as to whether the high number of views guarantees that the video has had any impact. As discussed at the workshop, the expected impact may have been misdirected. Indeed, there were some unexpected results due to the use of digital media.

In addition, it turned out at the workshop that solidarity was an important—and perhaps even central—concept during the COVID-19 crisis (see section *Consortium Meetings*). As in all crises, there were some solidarity movements, but the most significant contribution was that, unfortunately, people and institutions tried to take care of themselves first and not the broader community of artists on the national or international level. Another message that emerged during the debate was that society does not pay enough attention to art during a crisis. A workshop participant explained that the COVID-19 crisis was first a health crisis,

then a labor crisis, then a school crisis, and finally an economic crisis. *"The crisis was not in the theater. It was instead in the rest of the world"*, said another participant and, in this way, tried to explain that the art institutions were often overlooked and seen as an "appendix" that needs financial support during a crisis but cannot meaningfully contribute to solving it.

Online Debates During the Crisis

In addition to group meetings, several one-on-one debates were held with representatives from three institutions during the COVID-19 crisis. The first took place in December 2020 with representatives of Santarcangelo dei Teatri. This Italian institution organizes the oldest festival of contemporary performing arts in Italy and is one of the most important in the European context for theater and dance.[6] However, for obvious reasons, the 2020 summer edition of the festival was not held in physical reality, and the winter edition was held in a hybrid way, i.e., online and offline. This was also the main topic of the group discussion with six of the institution's representatives, who were stuck in a *"strange void"*, as one of them said. They explained that they were artists used to improvising on and off the stage, and it was easier for them to respond to the crisis and quickly reframe the festival. *"It was also an opportunity for us to reshape the festival from within, without the people who usually come from abroad. [...] It was an amazing experience, something unforgettable for us and even for the citizens"*, explained one of the organizers, adding that the summer edition of the festival had been a chance to reboot, reset, and restart the event.

In the same month, an online focus group with the team of United Artist Labour from Serbia took place with three representatives of the institution and two representatives of an associate partner. Interestingly, the debate started in a very positive mood; the participants stated that the crisis was an opportunity to renew their collaboration within their team and with other art institutions. During this discussion, the main theme that emerged was the *"stalemate"* that had brought the global flows of people, ideas, and capital (cf. Appadurai 1990) to a standstill. According to participants of the meeting, even before the crisis, art institutions needed new and sustainable solutions that could make a qualitative difference in making art productions in local and global communities—and the COVID-19 situation provided an opportunity to change approaches in making such an impact. A curator and head of an art gallery who lives in Innsbruck added that making a long-lasting impact on visitors via Instagram and other social media can be problematic, as audiences are not used to longer posts that would provide more details about a particular artwork. On the other hand, however, social media opened up new venues for people and enabled artists to reach a much broader audience, which at the same time can be more locally oriented. Closure and lockdown, then, allowed for an opening to the world and realizing the old and worn-out phrase: *Think globally, act locally.*

Six months later, in July 2021, a similar meeting was held with two representatives of Artsadmin, an arts institution based in the United Kingdom.[7] They focused more on the administrative aspects of art production and outlined, among other things, how the British government took care of artists, for example, through the so-called Furlough Scheme. An important issue raised in the debate was the size of the organizations that survived the crisis.

As one Artsadmin representative explained, their organization appeared to be of a reasonable size. Some smaller organizations had great difficulty surviving, as did the larger organizations with infrastructure and higher overhead costs to pay. The "transition period" thus, unfortunately, enabled the realization of Social Darwinism's "survival of the fittest". However, the "fitness" had nothing to do with their actual preparedness for the change; instead, it was connected to the global circumstances, national support, and local acceptance of the situation. In the unexpected circumstances at the local and global levels, i.e., during the COVID-19 crisis, the "fitness" of art institutions often meant that they could continue doing various productions while receiving funding for activities. Thus, "fitness" was linked not only to the quality of activities but also to the quantity of financial support. As discussed with Artsadmin representatives, several institutions had to discontinue their activities due to insufficient funding even though their art programs would have reached a higher standard.

6 Santarcangelo festival website: https://www.santarcangelofestival.com/.

7 Artsadmin website: https://www.artsadmin.co.uk/.

The Coordinator's Perspective

Interestingly, the interview with two Bunker representatives, which took place in mid-September 2019, i.e., in the pre-COVID time, began with a debate about the crisis. *"We do not tend to create crises in our organization"*, one of them explained and described their organizational culture, which does not enable them to produce unnecessary crises, either for themselves or others. They constantly try to "dampen" them and, in critical situations, support each other. Moreover, as the interviewees explained, the Bunker team does not focus on making its efforts—and problems—seem bigger than they are. While they complain about external crises, they do not feel pressured by their own problems and mistakes. For example, they cited a crisis regarding the date for a show: they had mixed the dates in correspondence and the contract. The posters and media announcements were already prepared when they learned of the situation. *"I was on vacation"*, one of them said, *"and had a two-hour personal crisis, but I already knew it was solvable"*. Another debate participant added that calmly managing a crisis was grounded in their organizational culture. When something goes wrong, it no longer matters who is responsible for the situation; instead, they try to find a solution and soon even make fun of it. *"After twenty years, you realize that nothing special actually happens when we make a mistake—even if the festival is canceled"*, one of them said during the debate, which took place in their relaxed workplace kitchen, which was also an informal meeting place. Similarly important in resolving crises is that they know almost everything about each other—including their personal lives, such as who is having personal problems and whose child is ill. This way, according to the interviewees, it is easier to organize work, solve professional problems, and be flexible when necessary.

The next interview with the same two Bunker representatives and CtC -> CtI project coordinators was conducted again in mid-September, but two years later, in 2021. The interview focused on crisis management, however, this time, not primarily on the internal crisis of managing a festival but on the COVID-19 crisis that marked 2020 and 2021. As respondents explained, the worst time for them was in 2020 because the rules and regulations regarding the COVID-19 crisis were unclear. In 2021, the measures, such as tests, masks, and border crossing permissions, were clearer, including those concerning their productions and the *Mladi levi* festival,[8] an almost a quarter-century-old international event. They mentioned that Bunker is a well-trained team, so adapting to the crisis was not a problem. However, the biggest challenge was not dealing with the external crisis but organizing the work internally, such as working from home and staying in touch or organizing the technical details.

Before the crisis, they had been trying to impact local audiences and attract people. However, during the pandemic, the biggest challenge was to keep the art alive and present it at the *Mladi levi* festival. Therefore, they tried to make it as "realistic" an experience as possible that resembled the old "normal". For example, they tried to defend and keep the whole spectrum of theater productions, both online and offline: from experiences made by people receiving letters in the mail to online shows in Facebook groups moderated by artists, to physical shows and meetings before, during and after the festival activities. Later on, the desire to include everyone and everything possible did become a problem. They had invited many participants and institutions, thinking some might not make it—and were surprised because they did. *"We strongly decided not to do another Corona Festival"*, explained one of them, who said they planned to do as much as possible live and also indoors. Another reason for preparing a *"grande festival"*, as they called it in the debate, was that the Bunker's founder, Nevenka Koprivšek, passed away in early 2021, and they wanted to make a tribute to her contribution to the festival. Her death was a personal shock, but not an organizational shock, as it was often seen from the outsiders' perspective. *"Therefore, the preparation of the festival was a public statement that the event can move on and survive without her"*, she added, explaining that the team managed to restructure quickly after her death because *"Bunker was not a totalitarian institution"*. Even without the founder, the team was able to continue and maintain their *"brand"*, as they named the institution and their flagship festival.

Bunker reached an important milestone in May 2021, when their theater reopened. *"It was the most appreciative audience ever"*, one of the interviewees said, describing how only ten people sat at that time in the audience and felt the show was performed just for them. The show was special, ground-breaking, and

8 *Mladi levi* festival: https://www.bunker.si/festival-mladi-levi/.

extraordinary, even for the organizing team, after a long time of watching shows online on a computer screen. *"It was a magical moment. We were together"*, one of them described. After this event, many productions took place, and people have apparently become accustomed to showing the vaccination and testing certificate and wearing masks. However, part of the public was *"lost"*, as the Bunker representatives said, namely the people who did not want to follow the measures to combat the coronavirus. A group of people was thus *"cut off"* from art production—or they felt this way and changed their unofficial status from being regular guests to those who no longer attended art events due to the situation and COVID-19 measures.

Both interviewees from Bunker noted that the audience needs not only the art but also socializing, parties, and the feeling of being together. In the pre-pandemic time, each post-event party was an opportunity to rebuild the community and keep people together. Because many events were online only during the pandemic, it was very difficult—if not impossible—to keep the community together when an online happening concluded. *"The festival is, in fact, the glue which holds together different events"*, one of them said, explaining that the time in-between theater productions, concerts, roundtables, and other events is an opportunity to bring audiences and artists together—and make an additional impact on them and between them.

At the end of the chat in the outdoor garden of a bar near Bunker's headquarters, the interviewees added that the pandemic had significantly changed their work style. They did more things remotely; the team could no longer meet regularly in one place, etc. Both representatives of the organization wanted to (re)create a "new normal" where the team could meet again and get back on track. Finally, one of them said the most important thing is that everyone involved in the organization's productions and its festival *Mladi levi* can continue to make a difference: *"If everyone who works with us can say that they did something good with our help, that's really important"*. However, we should note that "making a difference" was not a universal category in the project consortium. Instead, it meant something different to each project partner involved and began to have a common meaning as the intangible and numinous "impact" sought in the CtC -> CtI project.

Discussion

So far, the text has presented the changes that took place within the CtC -> CtI network as a more fluid and unstable structure and in partner organizations as more durable and long-lasting institutions during the COVID-19 crisis. As we can see from the ethnographic examples shown above, the crisis definitely marked the relationships within the network. It thus could be understood as a kind of rite of passage if we follow van Gennep's (and Turner's) famous configuration of the three-phase structure of these rites: separation, transition, reincorporation. Indeed, even before the pandemic, every consortium meeting could be understood in this way, as people came together in an orchestrated way, formed a community, and went their separate ways—until they came together again (cf. Sandler and Thedvall 2017).

However, there is also a big difference. During the COVID-19 crisis, the CtC -> CtI team used various digital tools to stay in touch with each other during the "transition phase"; they were thus not able to form any kind of unstructured, liminal *communitas* in Turner's sense (Turner 1974). Most importantly, the crisis was unplanned and unexpected, allowing for its transformation into an unstructured form. In comparison, regular meetings are known in advance, and people can prepare for their dramaturgy (cf. Cerinšek 2020). However, the "dramaturgy" of the crisis was spontaneous, and the participants did not know what the possible outcomes could be. The "liminality" was thus global, external, and not communal, internal.

Therefore, it is too superficial and oversimplified to reduce the events during the crisis to a transformation that produces new outcomes when talking about societies, communities, organizations, and institutions. Nevertheless, the transformation in the CtC -> CtI network was evident, and the crisis actually managed to strengthen the connections within the network. And why? The transformation during the COVID-19 crisis was, from a global perspective, a common tragedy or, to use another term, a "tragedy of the commons" (Hardin 1968), i.e., a situation in which people or institutions act independently according to their own self-interest and, contrary to the common good of all users, cause depletion of the resource through their uncoordinated action. However, the "tragedy" was not universal, and the crisis had some benefits. For example, it seems that the crisis rebuilt the CtC -> CtI network and that the transformation strengthened the partnership relationships within the consortium, as was apparent at project meetings in 2021 when the crisis started to be normalized. The feeling at the meeting in Paris, France, was, for example, that the project team had weathered the storm—individually and collectively—and was ready to move on to the next project, which was announced at a meeting in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in 2022. In this sense, to paraphrase Winston Churchill's famous (and often abused) quote: the COVID-19 pandemic was not a (completely) wasted crisis.[9]

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of a project network, showing how it coped with the COVID-19 crisis and how project participants and institutions perceived the external and internal changes that occurred during the project. Its main finding is that crises can significantly affect and transform relationships in networks. In some respects, transformation can even be understood as a rite of passage delineated by three phases: separation, transition, and reincorporation. In the case of the CtC -> CtI project, for example, the crisis that separated people and institutions had a profound impact on the project consortium. While the project team was coping with its own difficulties, it managed to maintain links with other project partners. Moreover, they managed to better identify the art institutions' challenges and highlight solidarity, which became the central keyword during the crisis.

9 For further explanations of crises in different socio-cultural contexts see e.g. Das (1995), Oliver-Smith (1996), Lomnitz-Adler (2003), Hart and Ortiz (2008), Vigh (2008), Graeber (2013), Eriksen (2016) and Appadurai and Alexander (2020).

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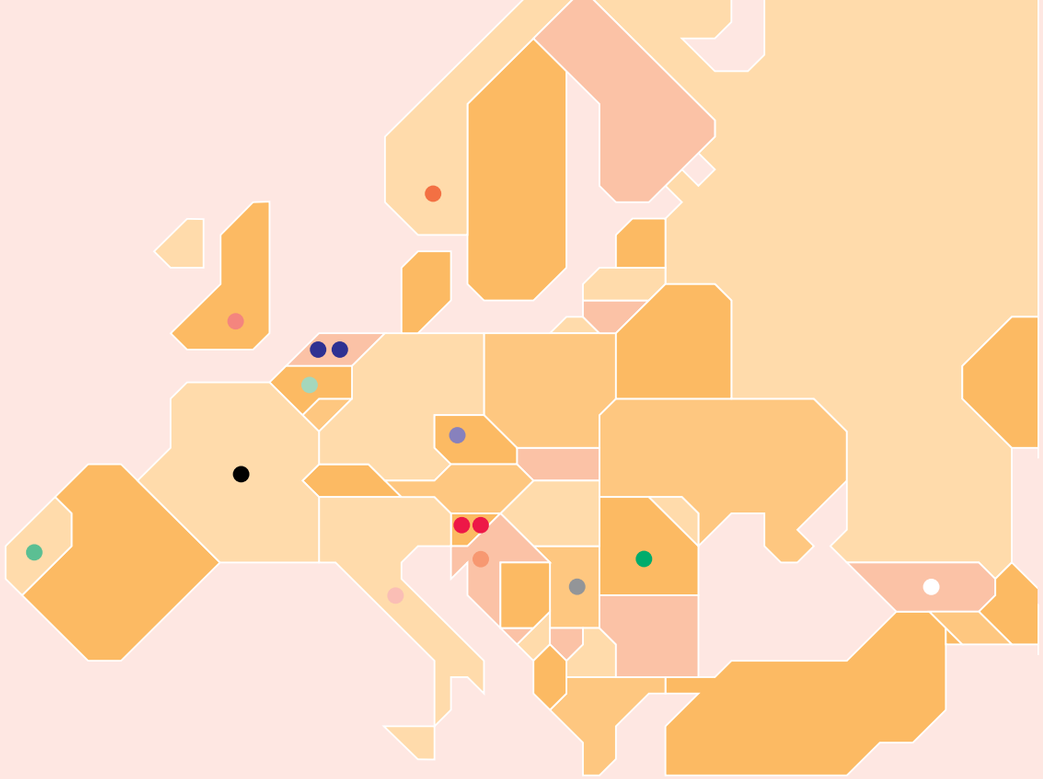
KLARA DRNOVŠEK SOLINA
INFOGRAPHICS DESIGN ZORAN PUNGERČAR

Connections and Impact in Numbers

During its four-year duration, the Create to Connect -> Create to Impact project encountered nearly two years when the COVID-19 pandemic limited public life and necessitated the closing of cultural institutions. Nevertheless, we can say that even during this time, art proved its resilience and reached people. Perhaps also because of these special conditions, two new radio stations were created during the project, in Tbilisi and Cluj-Napoca, respectively.

Such projects are defined by many numbers that only begin to be discovered when the partners dig into their archives and databases, when we all add up all the tickets sold, views and downloads of podcasts, radio broadcasts, and posts on social networks, when we add up the reach of audiences through posts in traditional media, and when—not least—we look at the financial and administrative infrastructure of the project. The data gathered in this way shed a quantitative light on the project: the numbers show the connections the project made with the communities that co-created it: as audiences, artists, and production associates. It lets us discover and revel in curiosities such as the lowest reported bill amount and the most frequently traveled airline connection.

The infographics below reveal some of these connections and make the project's invisible measurability visible.



15 Number of partner organizations in the project

- Bunker, Ljubljana, Slovenia
- Artsadmin, London, UK
- AltArt, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
- BIT Teatergarasjen, Bergen, Norway
- La Villette, Paris, France
- Noorderzon, Groningen, the Netherlands
- Theater Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- Arts and Theatre Institute, Prague, Czech Republic
- Culturgest, Lisbon, Portugal
- Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU), Ljubljana, Slovenia
- Drugo more, Rijeka, Croatia
- Santarcangelo dei Teatri, Santarcangelo di Romagna, Italy
- NTGent, Gent, Belgium
- Public Art Platform – Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia
- United Artist Labour, Belgrade, Serbia

2
Number of non-EU partner organizations at the beginning of the project

3
Number of non-EU partner organizations at the end of the project

Gender Structure

Directors of partner organizations

Start of the project:

7 out of 15
are women (47% are women)

End of the project:

6 out of 15
are women (40% are women)

Number of directors changed:

4

Share of women working on the project:

69%
women

Share of women authors in the artistic projects:

48%
women

Number of project activities: 120

- 26 Space to Connect activities
- 41 Create to Connect activities
- 2 Working Encounters
- 39 Adapt to Connect activities
- 8 network meetings
- 10 research activities

Number of invoices reported: 5,263

Lowest invoice reported: 1.50€

Highest invoice reported: 53,200.00€

Number of events

- Number of Create to Impact events: 58
- Number of Space to Connect events: 44
- Number of Adapt to Connect events: 57

That is ...

- 84 performances
- 27 discussions
- 19 workshops
- 6 concerts
- 29 installations
- 2 new radio programs
- 1 new software for reaching theater audiences

Working Encounters:

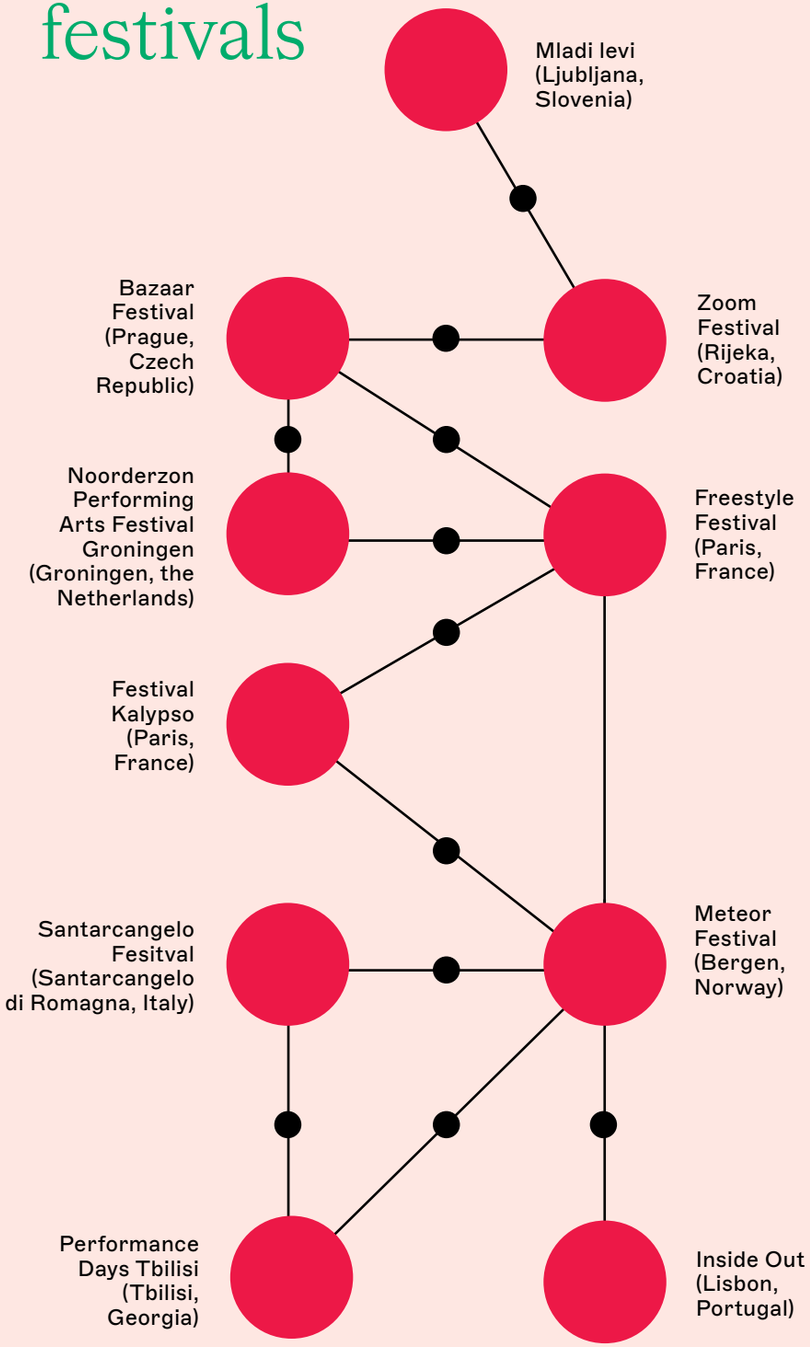
geographic distribution of participants

Artists from:

Lecturers from:

All artists met on Zoom and in Innsbruck.

Connected festivals



Number of reported travels

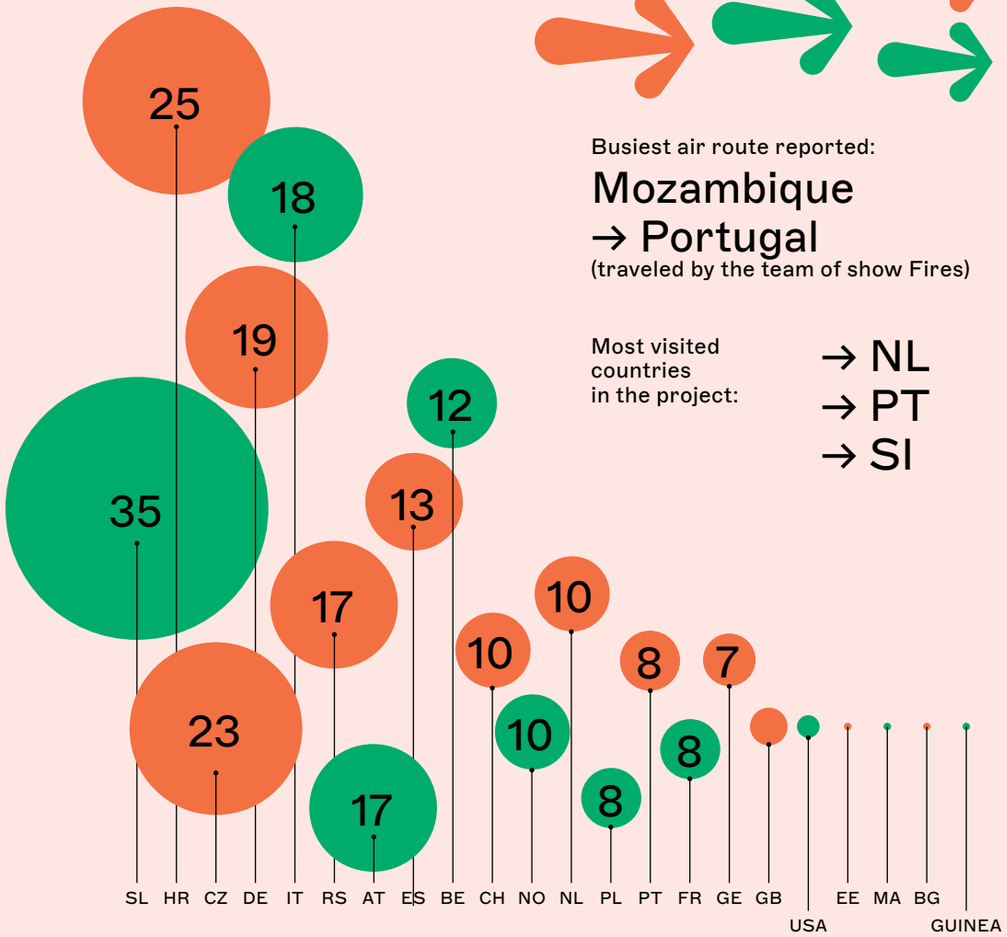
Busiest air route reported:

Mozambique → Portugal

(traveled by the team of show Fires)

Most visited countries in the project:

→ NL
→ PT
→ SI



Audience reached directly:

135,659

Estimated indirect reach:

130,000,000

Number of social media posts:

3,462


Politicize
Take Nothing
for Granted

ALDO MILOHNIĆ AND TOMAŽ TOPORIŠIČ

Toward the Aesthetics of Resistance: Oliver Frljić and Janez Janša

Introduction

The chapter concentrates on the political tactics of two theater directors from Southeastern Europe: Oliver Frljić and Janez Janša. By decentering the spectator's vision of world political events, touching society's raw nerves, and using theaterto create a public forum for open debate, they intend to shape theater as a specific producer of truth in the way defined by Alain Badiou: The thought of art is not extrinsic; it is art itself. Oliver Frljić transforms theater into a weapon of political action using the reactions of the public and non-spectators (politicians and members of religious communities …). The actors deliberately provoke the audience to generate responses and involvement during and after each performance. Theater thus transforms itself into a platform for social action and cultural activism. We will take a closer look at some of his performances full of what critics named Frljić's "overcompensating furor".

In theater projects by Janez Janša, perpetrators of aggressive and violent actions are either fanatic followers of the nationalist ideology of Slovenian political elites (such as a radicalized mob of local inhabitants expelling a Roma family from its local settlement in the performance *Slovensko narodno gledališče* (*Slovene National Theatre,* Maska, zavod za založniško, kulturno in producentsko dejavnost, Ljubljana, co-production: Aksioma – zavod za sodobne umetnosti, 2007) or representatives of the state and its repressive and ideological apparatuses (for instance, members of a special military unit in the performance *Republika Slovenija* (*Republic of Slovenia*, Slovensko mladinsko gledališče (Mladinsko Theatre) and Maska, 2016). His directing method (Janša 2009) of reconstruction and re-enactment of some traumatic events from the short history of Slovenia as an independent state creates a depressive atmosphere and provokes political frustrations. The chapter argues that unveiling the social pathology conveyed by these authors is the first step toward any kind of resistance, including the aesthetic one.

Oliver Frljić on Migration, European Identity, and the (Lack of) Collective Ethics

Let us start with Oliver Frljić, focusing on selected performances from 2008 to 2016, including *Preklet naj bo izdajalec svoje domovine!* (*Damned Be the Traitor of His Homeland!*, Mladinsko Theatre, 2010) and, especially, his international co-production *Naše nasilje in vaše nasilje* (*Our Violence and Your Violence*, Mladinsko Theatre; which premièred at Wiener Festwochen in 2016 and caused protests and scandals in Poland, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Czech Republic, etc.), dealing with the very fervent theme of migration and European identity and mixing political incorrectness with drastic physical theater scenes that can have a very strong, even shocking effect on the spectator's perception. The performance tries to "explain" Islamic terror in the wake of a long history of Western colonial and religious terror, fascism, and capitalist exploitation.

Some inevitable facts: Frljić, born in the Bosnian town of Travnik in 1976, was a refugee during the war in former Yugoslavia. He finished his studies of philosophy, religion, and theater directing in Croatia, where he lives and works most of his time as a director, writer, actor, and theorist. He soon became one of the region's most daring and influential directors and was invited to international festivals. His 2008 version of Euripides's *Bacchae* produced by Hrvatsko narodno kazalište (HNK) Ivana pl. Zajca Rijeka (Ivan Zajc Croatian National Theatre) for the Split Summer Festival in Croatia contained uncomfortable parallels with crimes committed during the war following the break-up of Yugoslavia, called the "Homeland War" in Croatia (1991–1995). *Bacchae* was abruptly removed from the repertoire of the HNK Split (Croatian National Theatre in Split) but eventually performed amidst the public and political scandal. Provocative was also *Turbo-Folk* (HNK Ivana pl. Zajca Rijeka, 2008), a postdramatic Molotov cocktail of sex, violence, and Serbian folk-pop that simultaneously caused a storm with young liberal audiences and offended the cultural mainstream.

Probably the most significant international success came with his 2010 *Damned Be the Traitor of His Homeland!*, a devised theater conceived with the actors of the Mladinsko Theatre. Svetlana Slapšak, a highly daring Slovenian intellectual, commented on this piece in the daily *Večer*:

> It is not the historical event of the Yugoslav war that is at the heart of this powerful and brilliant play, in which the Yugoslav political theater and its heroes are cynically mentioned, but the presence of the political problem today: The willingness for atrocities remains, you just have to press the right button. […] No one is safe from anything. In the historical cases that we know, the accusation of perversity has always served as an introduction to the purge of the enemies, then as a safety screen for a free implementation of the authority's perversity. Do we really want to go down the same road again? So, hurry to the theater, which is once again political, exciting, and educative. At the play's end, you once again exchange allied looks, refined by tears and laughter (2010).

In one of the interviews about this performance, Frljić stated that he had wanted to address the topic of the decay of the former Yugoslavia for a long time. His idea was to see what happened with this country, its cultural and political heritage, and why at some point, the citizens of all republics of former Yugoslavia betrayed the idea of Yugoslavia and its liberating potential in exchange for neoliberal capitalism and national identities. This meant a lot of discussions and improvisations with the actors, but (due to the experimental tradition of Mladinsko Theatre) that sort of experience was nothing new to them. He also knew that he could share the belief that theater should emancipate together with its audience in two ways: politically and aesthetically. And the political situation in Slovenia twenty years after its independence and the outburst of the conflicts in former Yugoslavia seemed a perfect time for the show.

Damned Be the Traitor of His Homeland! Author of the concept and director: Oliver Frljić. Production: Mladinsko Theatre, 2010.

Actors (from left to right): Draga Potočnjak, Uroš Maček, Primož Bezjak Photo: Nada Žgank, Archive SMG

Since *Damned Be the Traitor...*, Frljić has barely stopped to catch his breath. Success has turned him into the most talked-about director in the ex-Yugoslav region. His abrasive, socially critical performance on the verge of the documentary theater *Zoran Đinđić* (dealing with the assassination of Serbian prime minister Đinđić in 2003), performed in Belgrade's Atelje 212 in 2012, provoked both mass walkouts and standing ovations. With this performance, Frljić became the very director exposing the (lack of) collective ethics and has since remained the central topic of the post-Yugoslav theatrical landscape. The two years of his direction of the Croatian National Theatre in Rijeka caused many scandals, political attacks, and even death threats and led to his demission. His *Trilogija o hrvatskom fašizmu* (*Trilogy on Croatian Fascism*, HNK Ivana pl. Zajca, 2014/15), the artistic evoking of the WWII collaboration of theatrical artists with the pro-Nazi government provoked public protests of the War Veterans Movement.[1] Thus Frljić, together with Marin Blažević, his dramaturg and co-director, built up a case of a "national theater" as the institution exploring the theatrical strategies and tactics for dealing with extreme political ideologies. Theater became a platform for social action and cultural activism, a collective body disclosing and fighting today's fascism(s).

In his disturbing, shocking performances, he uses his own personal, wartime, and political traumas to ask the universal questions about the boundaries of artistic and social freedom, individual and collective responsibility, and tolerance and stereotypes. During the last ten years, Frljić has made a habit of touching society's raw nerves. The theatrical framework of his performative laboratory is provided by stories from different parts of the world. However, his main point of interest stays with the peripherical sphere of the European theatrical, cultural, and political semiosphere: the break-up of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s followed by the war in Croatia and Bosnia that led to genocide in Srebrenica.

The performances organized by Frljić challenge the theatrical representation of death and the idea of theatrical representation through compulsive attempts to stage both individual and collective deaths. The repetitions of death occurring onstage as well as verbal repetitions, pauses and silences, language and sound effects, such as interjections, thus present cessation of theatrical representational mechanisms.[2] In an interview, Frljić states: "What we actually try to do is to perform the institution; we don't try to create a good or bad show but to see how we can use that theater and all its resources as a performative tool" (Frljić et al. 2017). A double provocative approach, then, is a generative strategy of Frljić's performances: He deliberately and repeatedly provokes the actors to generate material from their own lives and reactions during the process, while the actors provoke the audience to generate responses and involvement during each performance.

1 War veterans (*branitelji*) and their associations are an influential part of Croatian society. They embody the spirit of the Croatian War of Independence fought from 1991 to 1995. War veterans themselves remain preoccupied with this Homeland War and see a need to defend Croatia, the values of the Homeland War in 1990. This makes it easy for political actors to manipulate them.

2 This holds true for his devised theater, such as *Requiem für Europa* (*Requiem for Europe,* Staatschauspiel Dresden, 2016) and *Gorki – Alternative für Deutschland?* (*Gorki – Alternative for Germany;* Gorki, Berlin, 2018), as well as the performances in which the starting point is his dialogue with the playwrights or other fiction writers, such as: *Medeja* (*Medea*, Slovene National Theatre Maribor, 2017), Lessing's *Nathan* (Schauspiel Hannover, 2018), *Anna Karenina oder Arme Leute* (*Anna Karenina or Poor People,* Gorki, Berlin 2019) based on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, and *Die Hamletmaschine und Europamaschine* based on Heiner Müller (*The Hamlet Machine and Europe Machine,* Burgtheater Wien, 2020), *Die Brüder Karamasow* (*The Brothers Karamazov*, Schauspiel Hannover, 2021).

Can Theater Disturb Society's National and Religious Formations?

A good example of this subversive political art is his 2016 international co-production *Our Violence and Your Violence*. It deals with the very "hot" theme of migration and European identity. In a time when refugees have become a "flood", in biblical, near-apocalyptic terms, Frljić mixed political incorrectness with drastic physical theater collage scenes that are meant to shock. The performance is full of overtly political references (including religious symbols and references to rape, torture, terror, fascism, and Islamophobia). It is almost old-fashioned in the sense of 1960s and 1970s political theater. Commissioned by the Berlin HAU Hebbel Theater as a critical homage to Peter Weiss's three-volume novel on radical resistance, *The Aesthetics of Resistance* (*Ästhetik des Widerstands*, 1975–1981), the performance is full of what critics named "the relentless stereotypical violence" in which "one cannot but sense Frljić's overcompensating furor, trying to 'explain' Islamic terror in the wake of a long history of Western colonial and religious terror, fascism and capitalist exploitation" (Birringer 2016).

The actors and the director delight in biting the hand that feeds them, namely the European theater festivals and left-wing producers. The production floods the stage with refugees and prisoners, who, at one point, perform a hallucinatory trance dance in orange Guantánamo detainee uniforms and, in the next moment, appear naked, with calligraphic Arabic inscriptions on the skin as if they had walked out of a Shirin Neshat video.[3] Jesus descends from the cross to rape hijab-wearing Muslim women; the dancing Guantánamo prisoners now sit in a circle and torture the new "Syrian" refugee who just arrived, while voiceover announcements request us to observe a minute of silence for the victims of terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels. This is followed by an unavoidable Handkeian attack against the audience: "I am most ashamed for you, the theater audience. For you, death is an aesthetic event".

3 Shirin Neshat is a contemporary Iranian visual artist best known for her work in photography, video, and film, which explores the relationship between women and Islam's religious and cultural value systems. She hopes the viewers of her work can take away with them not some heavy political statement but something that really touches them on the deepest emotional level.

Our Violence and Your Violence. Author of the concept and director: Oliver Frljić. Production: Mladinsko Theatre and HNK Ivana pl. Zajca Rijeka, 2016.

Actors (from left to right): Barbara Babačić, Draga Potočnjak, Blaž Šef, Uroš Kaurin, Matej Recer, Daša Doberšek, Dean Krivačić Photo: Alexi Pelekanos, Archive SMG and Wiener Festwochen

The performances of Oliver Frljić thus produce specific politics of spectatorship, as they are commenting on the current political processes. For example, let us focus on the controversies the performance of *Our Violence and Your Violence* caused in Split, Croatia, and Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. In both cities, the protests before the performance show the possibilities of contemporary theater to disturb the society's national and religious formations. Twenty-five years after the war in which Yugoslavia was torn apart, the political and economic crisis entered a new phase, showing the extent to which hate speech, homophobia, xenophobia, and religious fanaticism are fueling the social environment and public discourse.

Even before its opening, the performance generated a violent response from the mainly Catholic public. The right-wing "civil society" demanded the performance be banned and censored, thereby openly demonstrating the power of religious authorities to intervene in culture and subvert the secular state. In Split, a group of right-wing extremists, war veterans, and the members of the Archdiocese of Split-Makarska organized a demonstration in front of the church opposite the Croatian National Theatre, intending to stop the performance. The demonstration was marked by the public shouting and displaying posters reading "This performance insults me", Croatian flags, and images of Jesus Christ. The protesters entered the theater and tried to disturb and thus prevent the performance from taking place. However, the majority of the audience reacted strongly, and after a confrontation with the protesters, the performance continued. Nevertheless, most probably, neither the Catholic Church supporting the demonstrators nor the demonstrators themselves were aware of how meticulously they cooperated with Frljić's production of *Our Violence and Your Violence* and his intentions to deliberately provoke social actors in order to reveal a particular structure of symbolic power in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Poland, and elsewhere.

Frljić thus targets and undermines the dominant religious and national representation and symbols, transforms performance into a weapon of political action and while doing so, disrupts the *status quo*. The performance produces a specific political impact using the reactions of both spectators and the non-spectators as a specific weapon. However, this politics of staging sometimes produces a paradox. Johannes Birringer sums it up in *Critical Stages*:

> Frljić's heavy metal theatre using blatant, fetishized violence on stage can be called *plakativ* (in German), that is, trotting out shrill political signs, shoving them into our faces, and casually intermixing them with the archive of performance gestures that once resonated (for example, mimicking Carolee Schneemann's iconic *Interior Scroll*, a hijab wearing actress in *Naše nasilje in vaše nasilje* pulls an Austrian flag from her vagina). […] The propulsive in-yer-face theatre tends to privilege the political content through spectacular gestures that heighten the theatrical affect. It is the loudness of the affecting that turns me off. I wonder whether current dance theatre productions pursuing a more abstract spiritual technique of ritual, more subtle tonalities, are able to dig deeper, make us listen differently (2016).

To achieve his goal, Oliver Frljić uses radical means: insulting the audience in a specific version of parabasis, group insults of people of other nationalities, repetitive deaths, and resurrections producing *ostranenie* (defamiliarization) and difference. Frljić has described his approach to collaborative work and theatrical materials as follows:

> I invite the actors to deconstruct my power as a director in the process. In the beginning, I don't address this issue directly. Instead, I am trying to create the situation where they can start to think how the distribution of power in theatre is not something normal, although we treat it as such. These situations are set to create performative answers to theatrical normalisation of power divisions. Sometimes I start from the text and I use it to demonstrate how the Derridean theological stage operates. When this is clear, we go to higher levels and other questions. How can we make our work efficient outside the theatrical realm of symbolic exchange? How can we start to produce real effects in broader social contexts? The basic question is the question of performativity. In the words of Jon McKenzie, perform or else (Frljić and Soszynski 2013).

By using the technique of repetitions, producing a specific post-Brechtian *V-Effekt* (estrangement effect), Frljić's performances reinterpret Brecht's idea of the political and dialectic theater and deliberately blur the line between reality and fiction. Convinced that the performance is always the result of interaction between the performers and the audience, he expects the reactions from the public. The co-presence of actors and spectators is essential, but this co-presence includes the calculated power of the stage over spectators. Thus, it speaks about two connected topics: the politics of theater structured by the binary opposition actor/spectator, active/passive as well as the oppressive logic of the neoliberal society. While deconstructing established ways of performativity and impact, he attempts to de-normalize the social distribution of power reflected in the theater.

In an interview before the première of *Our Violence and Your Violence,* Frljić explains this deconstruction as the essence of his directorial poetics:

> I think that the greatest quality of the production *Our Violence and Your Violence* is precisely the situation in which the spectator is lacking a frame that would clearly determine in which mode the performance is operating—ironic or non-ironic. But let's remember: even Handke's *Offending the Audience* never got the right to citizenship in the institutional bourgeois repertoire, despite that being one of the key dramatic texts that break down different types of theatrical mimesis and the ideology upon which it rests. I've never set the goal for myself to become some type of moral arbitrator. I myself also participate in the manufacturing of the structural violence, which is needed for the "normal" functioning of Europe (Toporišič 2016, 4).

To make it short: Frljić tries to create a situation in which the audience can step away from its predefined passive role. Thus, he produces the specific quality Derrida describes when speaking in his famous essay about Artaud as smashing the hierarchical organization of representation that constitutes classical theater in order to coincide with the original force of life: "This new theatrical arrangement sutures all the gaps, all the openings, all the differences. Their origin and active movement—differing, deferral—are *enclosed*" (Derrida 1978, 242). His specific—to use the words of Antonin Artaud from his book *The Theatre and Its Double*—theater of cruelty ventures into the play of Danger, consumed in a total expenditure without reserve. Thus, Frljić produces the ability of theater to connect across sectors, priority areas, and audiences: to create a shared experience and a unique opportunity for social impact.

In the productions *Damned Be the Traitor of His Homeland!* and *Our Violence and Your Violence*,[4] Frljić warns that we live within a field of *transcultural business,* which persistently translates artistic actions into the logic of transpolitical, global, economic, and political exploitation. It is clear to him that theater today (just as every artistic work in the era of technical reproduction) cannot escape the domination of the social, economic, and technological conditions that determine its aesthetic dimension. Therefore, he fixates on the attempt to erase the general amnesia we are witnessing at the beginning of the 21st century.

Through the words and actions of the actors-performers onstage, he constantly reminds us that we are watching the physical bodies of the performers, which are what they are—actors—and they remain so even in the moment of "taking over" temporary roles. Like Handke, Frljić also shows that "this stage does not represent anything […] I don't see any objects that are pretending to be other objects […] The time on the stage is no different from the time off stage" (Garner 1994, 153). However, at the same time, he is aware that a complete withdrawal from representativeness is impossible, just as Schechner's or the actionist vision that the performative autopoietic feedback loop enables the surpassing of the logic of textual culture and referential function is impossible or naïve.

With his specific politics of theater, Frljić builds up the deconstruction of the postcolonial discourse of World War I or Western Europe. In her review in *Theater Heute*, critic Eva Behrendt precisely observes when she asserts that Frljić attacks and points out the unbearableness of "a different, superior taste of the Central European theater and cultural elite and its craving for the originality and the refinement" (Behrendt 2016, 7). Thus, his "theatrical fiction" causes real effects in

4 In a similar manner to *Damned Be the Traitor…* and *Our Violence and Your Violence,* in Poland, Frljić interprets *Klątwa* (*Curse*), a 19th-century drama written by Stanisław Wyspiański that tells the story of a young woman who has children with the village priest. A drought then occurs in the village, and the villagers, believing they are being punished by God for the young woman's sins, burn the children and the young woman in a sacrifice to God. But the priest is not punished. For Frljić, this story represents the contemporary problems that are linked to the power of the Catholic Church. His contemporary *Curse* does not retell the classic story, but highlights the hypocrisy of the power of the Catholic Church in state and public affairs. The performance is filled with scenes that symbolically address contemporary social problems, especially the state's guilt in protecting sex offenders and child abusers in the Church.

the social sphere, including the prosecution and court investigations of his performances. His performances create images violating cultural taboos to the extent that makes them almost "critical exceptions" in the European symbolic space. Frljić thus produces a specific social impact on the audience; satisfaction is enhanced by the feeling that others experience the cultural transgression of a part of the public as violence. Thus, his performances fulfill their tasks: triggering a long-term process of testing conditions of freedom of artistic expression and freedom of speech in contemporary societies.

With his performances, Frljić launches theater as a social laboratory, which provides knowledge regarding the state of democracy tested on the living social organism. In addition to the theatrical world (public, performers, critics …), he involves the key public authorities in his artistic and social experiment: judicial authorities, the police, members of political parties, and the media. They all have to take sides in the culture war raging in contemporary society.

Janša's Theatrical Reconstructions of the Past Traumatic Political Events

Like Oliver Frljić, who exposes social controversies, Slovenian theater director Janez Janša also deals with politically traumatic events, using the method of reconstruction and re-enactment as a mode of resistance. So far, he has directed several performances based on reconstructions of some key, even anthological neo-avant-garde performances. There are many interesting examples of Janša's reconstructions of past theater events (cf. Janša 2009; Milohnić 2016) but let us concentrate on his projects of theatrical re-enactment of political events. Especially two of them, both with generic names with double meanings (*Slovene National Theatre* and *The Republic of Slovenia*), show very well how his method of theatrical re-enactment of some traumatic events and political frustrations could provoke critical thinking and contribute to a potential resistance.

Slovene National Theatre (2007) was an audio re-enactment or "re-invoicement"[5] of a brutal and forced removal of over thirty members of a Roma family from their homes. The main part of the performance, its basic score, is a collage of sound recordings from television coverage of the event in a small provincial Slovenian town Ambrus in 2006, where a massive protest of the local population against the Roma family erupted. Four mediators—they could also be called "simultaneous interpreters"—repeat the statements made by politicians, local nationalistic leaders, and an angry mob. In short, the actors vocally reproduce the soundtrack they are listening to over headphones (in other words, the spectators cannot hear the soundtrack, they can hear only the performers' re-invoicement of it). While the four in the foreground stand in their places and try to catch words and other sounds from the headphones, the director—and in this case, also a performer—Janez Janša moves from one end of the stage to the other along the longest possible way, with hardly noticeable movements and so slowly that his journey takes the entire duration of the performance (more than one hour). During this moving mantra, Janša whispers, repeatedly and obsessively, the word "gypsies". Finally, when he joins the four in the foreground, he sings the song "Habanera" from Bizet's *Carmen* and jumps to exhaustion (in the manner of Slovenian football fans, who like to jump while screaming, "Whoever isn't jumping is not a Slovenian!") and loudly screams: "Gypsies! Gypsies! Gypsies!"

5 It is a neologism coined by Domenico Quaranta and elaborated in his article "Janez Janša: Slovene National Theatre" (2009, 107).

Slovene National Theatre. Author of the concept and director: Janez Janša. Production: Maska and Aksioma, 2007.

Actors (from left to right): Dražen Dragojević, Aleksandra Balmazović, Barbara Kukovec, Matjaž Pikalo, Janez Janša Photo: Marcandrea, Archive Maska

Slovene National Theatre is a theatrical re-enactment of a series of violent actions that led to the expulsion of a Roma family from their settlement. For instance, the hate speech against the Roma family and the humiliation of the entire Roma community; the unrestricted racist acts of radicalized masses; the use of police repression without a court order (for example, restrictions on the right of free movement of the family members); village guards, insulting the president of the state who attempted to bring humanitarian aid to the starving family, but the local population prevented it, etc. In short, this radical political propaganda, resulting in massive anti-Roma hysteria that we could watch on our TV screens at that time produced the effect that, after a certain period, we got used to the fact that in the state we live in, something like that could be done and remain unpunished. Metaphorically, the drama was written by the agents of these events themselves—the national masses and their representatives, local and governmental politicians, and print and electronic media—the creators of the play only needed to dramaturgically process the recordings and simply repeat them on the stage. Thus,

Slovene National Theatre is a reconstruction of an event that we could describe as a kind of reading performance, as a live radio broadcast, perhaps as a sound transcription of a street event into a theater declamation, or simply as a staging of a score of media reports. If we compare it with genres from the history of theater, it could be a mixture of Peter Weiss's documentary theater and Bertolt Brecht's learning play (*Lehrstück*). As in Brecht's learning plays, the way of performing in Janša's production is strictly distanced and disciplined, without any artificial acting. This includes the crucial role of the choir, which is also one of the key elements of Brechtian theater.

Theater critics mostly recognized the importance of using the choir to test spectators' sensibility to the normalization of hate speech and oppression in the Slovenian political landscape. The reviewer for *Radio Študent* pointed out the productive connection between the ancient choir and modern multimedia: "The conceptual framework of the ancient choir, which merges with modern multimedia, certainly tests the modern spectator, how much he (still) knows how to listen intensively. Despite frequent bursts of laughter, pictorial storytelling triggers a sense of shame, apparent helplessness, and testing of an individual's view of racist conditions in our country" (Dobovšek 2007). The theater critic of the daily *Delo* recognized "the discrepancy between the sublime form of the ancient choir, in which four performers persist (Dražen Dragojević, Aleksandra Balmazović, Barbara Kukovec, Matjaž Pikalo), and the vulgar diction of the crowd, recorded on several occasions, which the performers are now reconstructing with horrifying precision and intensity" (Lukan 2015, 134). The critic explores the ambiguity of the title of the performance when he notes that "Prime Minister Janša together with his ministers in Ambrus performed a performance of the Slovenian national theater par excellence, including all outrages, and at the same time 'performatively' (so to speak suicidally) dismantled the state for which he is a totalitarian synonym" (Lukan 2015, 134).

As the theater critic from the daily *Dnevnik* pointed out, "*Slovene National Theatre* does not deal with what the name is associated with (that is, with one or another aspect of specific theaters) but uses the phrase in its non-institutionalized meaning. It is a theater staged by the nation" (Perne 2007). In other words, the performance clearly shows that nationalist politics have a dangerous impact on the growing intolerance of the majority toward ethnic and other social minorities in

the local community. The method of re-enactment used in the *Slovene National Theatre* is not just an ordinary theatricalization of a particular political event. It unveils how the then right-wing government manipulated the accumulated frustration of the enraged crowd, resulting in a spectacular representation of the radical policy of intolerance and even violence against the Roma family. The power of theatrical representation lies in presenting the ideology hidden in the everyday—automatic, spontaneous, and unreflected—actions in such a way that it becomes visible. This is undoubtedly one of the essential preconditions for considering the possible social impact of any theatrical (or, more broadly, performative) practice.

Our second example of Janša's theater is the performance *The Republic of Slovenia* (2016). It is a theatrical re-enactment of the illegal arms trade organized by the transitional political elite in post-independence Slovenia. The performance brings us back to the time after the independence of Slovenia in 1991 and the military conflict when the former federal army left its territory. When the war moved to the territory of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, a period of illegal arms trafficking began in Slovenia. For some members of the political elite, this was a unique business opportunity. The performance is a typical example of documentary theater in which the acting is reduced to a minimum, and documents are pushed into the foreground. The first act is the testimony of a former military intelligence agent who was hit by the bizarre task of counting thousands of banknotes of various currencies that later disappeared. The second act is a peculiar reading of a transcription of the meeting of the leading Slovenian politicians, in which they agreed to stop the illegal arms trade (which did not happen then) and how to keep that information secret. The third act is the reconstruction of the "Smolnikar affair" (i.e., the brutal arrest of police agent Tone Smolnikar by the special military unit called Moris) from three perspectives, or rather, how the arrest has been interpreted by its protagonists: Smolnikar, members of the special unit of the Slovenian Army, and police officers who came to the scene of the event. This act is a kind of a crescendo of the whole performance, a spectacular reconstruction of the action in which the members of the Slovenian Army brutally arrest a civilian. So far, no one has been convicted of these criminal acts.

The Performance as a Platform for Reflection

The Republic of Slovenia is a reconstruction of criminal events, which are so eloquent that the mere reproduction of these acts on the stage is sufficient for an authentic effect of theatricality. "Documentary theater", says Peter Weiss, "avoids any invention and takes authentic material, which it then (in a slightly reworked form, but unchanged in content) re-enacts on stage" (Weiss 1989, 293–294). However, as Janez Pipan says, *The Republic of Slovenia* "is not a classic documentary theater, as it does not restore former situations in a literal, mimetic way but deconstructs them and establishes their reality for the first time". Before the production, the historical events with which it deals did not exist for many people. "It is only in the theater production", Pipan continues, "that events really happen before our eyes, for before that, in another, historical reality, they either 'did not exist', or their existence was pushed into the realm of the imaginary" (Pipan 2016).

The Republic of Slovenia. Author of the concept and director: officially not known (the anonymity of the authors is conceptual). Production: Mladinsko Theatre and Maska, 2016.

Actors: Katarina Stegnar and masked players (representing members of a special military unit).

Photo: Nejc Saje, Archives SMG and Maska

The Brechtian approach to de-normalize social and political anomalies in formally democratic societies, pointed out earlier when we discussed Frljić's productions, is visible also in Janša's *The Republic of Slovenia*. In this performance, the estrangement effect comes from the bizarre fact that the brutal banality of the illegal arms trade must be dealt with in theater because the Slovenian legal system has failed. Many authors of theatrical reviews in the Slovenian media also pointed out this paradox. For example, the theater critic of Maribor's *Večer* asks a rhetorical question: "If media revelations and judicial epilogues were not enough to clarify horrific events, let alone achieve catharsis, perhaps the stage is the (only) right place?" (Forstnerič Hajnšek 2016). According to the theater critic from the daily *Delo*, the production has a significant impact on the critical-minded spectator: "*The Republic of Slovenia* does not only talk about political scandals of arms trafficking and does not say everything, but also does not remain silent […]; it is a platform for reflection, which is left to the attentive and active viewer" (Arhar 2016). *Dnevnik*'s commentator has a similar opinion: "The show is a must-see. Not only so that we will (for a moment) understand and then sacrifice our astonishing views to new blindness, but, sometime in the future, perhaps, we will also take action. As citizens" (Pipan 2016).

Political commentators in newspapers also recognized *The Republic of Slovenia* as a theatrical production that goes far beyond the art sphere and achieves a particular impact in the wider social environment. *Dnevnik*'s commentator says:

> "The skeletons of independence are hidden in the groundwater of the Republic of Slovenia as an unresolved trauma, which soon after its creation deprived people of illusions about a new, better beginning, about different methods, common goals, and transparent procedures. The struggle for political supremacy and money was then served by another, this time a big systemic robbery, privatization, and this was also a time of horrific new injustices of denationalization and, above all, erasure" (Lesničar Pučko 2016).

One of the leading political commentators from the daily *Delo* emphasized the importance of *The Republic of Slovenia* for achieving a specific impact at the level of democratic standards in a country where neither politics nor the judiciary has performed their basic civic duty: "The theatrical production—along with the actors, former state collaborators, and journalists—has done what neither official politics nor the judiciary has been able to do in more than twenty years. Isn't this proof of how much Slovenia needs civil society and its culture?" (Markeš 2016).

At this point, we turn to Walter Benjamin and his essay "On the Concept of History" (sometimes translated also as "Theses on the Philosophy of History"). According to Benjamin, the idea of a continuous, uninterrupted period of historical progress is, in fact, the temporality of the ruling class. Slavoj Žižek reflects on Benjamin's famous essay in his book *Zgodovina in nezavedno* (*History and the Unconscious*), published already in 1982. Žižek's thesis is that in Benjamin's essay, there are two modes of temporality. The first mode is a homogeneous, namely continuous, empty time. It is the time of the ruling historiography: "The ruling class view", he says, "is the view of the winners because their view perceives history as the final continuum of progression that has led to the present dominance". The second temporal mode is discontinuous time. "In contrast to the views of the ruling class", he explains, "the oppressed class appropriates the past just as much as it is 'open,' it appropriates the past as much as it contains the dimension of the future" (Žižek 1982, 125; author's translation). Thus, the discontinuous time in Benjamin's essay "On the Concept of History" interrupts the linear continuum of the homogeneous historical movement of the ruling historiography, creating the conditions for the dialectic "tiger's leap into the past" (Benjamin 2003, 395). According to Benjamin, the tradition is a battlefield. It is an important moment that the oppressed cannot just leave to oppressors because the appropriated tradition is a tool in the hands of the ruling class. "Every age", says Benjamin, "must strive anew to wrest tradition away from the conformism that is working to overpower it" (Benjamin 2003, 391). In other words, a reconstruction can be progressive only if it "brushes the history against the grain" (Benjamin 2003, 392) and reintroduces the dimension of potentiality. This is also the position of Janez Janša in his theatrical reconstructions of past traumatic political events.

Does Contemporary Theater Have Any Social Impact?

In their theater work, both directors represent social relationships "as they are": Frljić by subversively commenting on the political processes in so-called "post-transitional" ex-Yugoslav and Eastern European societies, Janša by theatrically reconstructing some of the most traumatic events of the Slovenian "transition". At the same time, by relying on the estrangement effect, they open a perspective from which we can see them as unusual and destructive. All the mentioned performances could be categorized as "political" or "engaged" art, which addresses the audience as a community of critically thinking individuals. Of course, this strategy can also be very risky; it can function as a concession to spectators who fulfill their engagement in theater and yet can remain passive in everyday life.

In other words, the question arises as to whether political theater still has any social impact, especially on public policies in modern societies of neoliberal capitalism? Political theater is a concept that, on the one hand, has opened up a new epistemological field in the theory of the performing arts; on the other hand, this is a field littered with many pitfalls arising from its inherent contradiction. This has already been pointed out by many who have studied so-called political, engaged, or subversive art (Adorno 1978; Adorno et al. 1980; Rancière 2010; Vujanović and Milohnić 2011; etc.). Among the writings on this topic published in Slovenia in the last decade, we could point out the article "Možnost subverzije v umetnosti danes" ("The Possibility of Subversion in Art Today") by Lidija Radojević, who says that

> "what is now presented as political art, rather than a kind of emancipatory space, is a place of reconciliation where it is allowed to say anything, to express disagreement with the social order, that is, a place that replaces serious social resistance, a delegation that does something for us, that satisfies both those who rule (artistic freedom is inalienable) and those who sympathize with the revolution that runs from the couch" (Radojević 2009, 366).

Theatrical scenery has never been, and cannot be, a revolutionary barricade, but of course, this does not mean that theater artists are necessarily, and by definition, salon revolutionaries. Let us recall just a few prominent historical examples: the staging of Auber's opera *La Muette de Portici* at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels in 1830 (which encouraged performers and spectators to join the Belgian people's uprising against Dutch domination, which had just begun) or various front theaters and other resistance theaters that operated during the Spanish Civil War and during World War II on the Slovenian and Yugoslav territory (Milohnić 2021), etc.

Contemporary socially and politically engaged artists working in democratic countries are protected by constitutionally guaranteed rights and freedoms in their artistic creation, which is undoubtedly a great achievement of the democratic political order. On the other hand, until freedom is fully guaranteed in all social, political, and economic spheres (from freedom of protest and expression of political views to economic freedom of workers in production), all particular freedoms, including that of artistic creation, are often only a convenient excuse to oppress society as a whole. It is, therefore, a *limes* that political theater seldom crosses, not only because it would not be able to cross that boundary but also because it would have to make that leap together with its audience. In this, Oliver Frljić recognizes the limitations of the social impact that his—otherwise undoubtedly very engaged—theater can achieve: "My audience is certainly not the factor that will change society. Only the working class, if it exists at all, with a strong class consciousness can be the bearer of change" (Frljić 2016, 59).

A possible strategy could be to cut the Gordian knot of distanced audience and involve the spectator directly in what is happening on or around the stage—a participative strategy which we have often seen, for example, in the Via Negativa performances, among others.[6] In earlier times, e.g., in the neo-avant-garde theater of the 1960s, this could have meant a gesture of vivid representation of a collectively

6 Via Negativa is a platform for the research, development, and production of contemporary performing arts. Founded in 2002, it operates under the artistic direction of theatre director Bojan Jablanovec. Via Negativa explores different performing strategies, with an emphasis on ethics and liveness of performance practices, procedures, and genres. It deals with the relationship between performer and spectator as a complex flow of points of view, expectations, judgments, conclusions, stereotypes, fallacies, prejudices, tolerance or intolerance, and knowledge or lack thereof. More about Via Negativa at its website: https://www.vntheatre.com/about-us/.

interconnected theatrical community, a kind of fusion of actors and spectators that was supposed to take place spontaneously through a group/collective gesture. Today, this strategy of de-distancing is more individualized, spectators are addressed as individuals, and theater artists try to involve them directly in action. In these situations, the spectator must reconsider and decide whether to enter the action or not. He or she must deliberate about his or her own decision in dialogue with himself, in inner soliloquies, which can be quite annoying and anxious, if this is the nature of the staged event or if he or she is burdened by the weight of deciding whether to physically engage in the event or stay at a safe distance. However, even with the direct involvement of the spectator in an artistic event, it is questionable whether the so-called engaged theater, when it includes the spectator in one way or another in its artistic processes, contributes substantially to his or her involvement in social and political processes in everyday life. Namely, the played, represented subversiveness can produce the illusion of social and political engagement on the part of the spectator, which is merely an excuse that there is no need to achieve a real social impact outside the safe, "autonomous" field of art.

However, this does not mean that contemporary artists should therefore give in to conformism and defeatism—in our opinion, they cannot assume anything but an engaged stance and encourage the audience to critical reception unless they want their art to be reduced to a banal decoration (as, for instance, in commercially oriented or highly aestheticized art practices). One of the most authentic ways the engaged art could influence, at least to a certain extent, social and political processes is by using its specific artistic methods, such as disclosing the illusion of the ideologically prefabricated reality. As clearly demonstrated in Frljić's and Janša's theater, unveiling the social pathology is the very first step toward any kind of resistance, including the aesthetic one.

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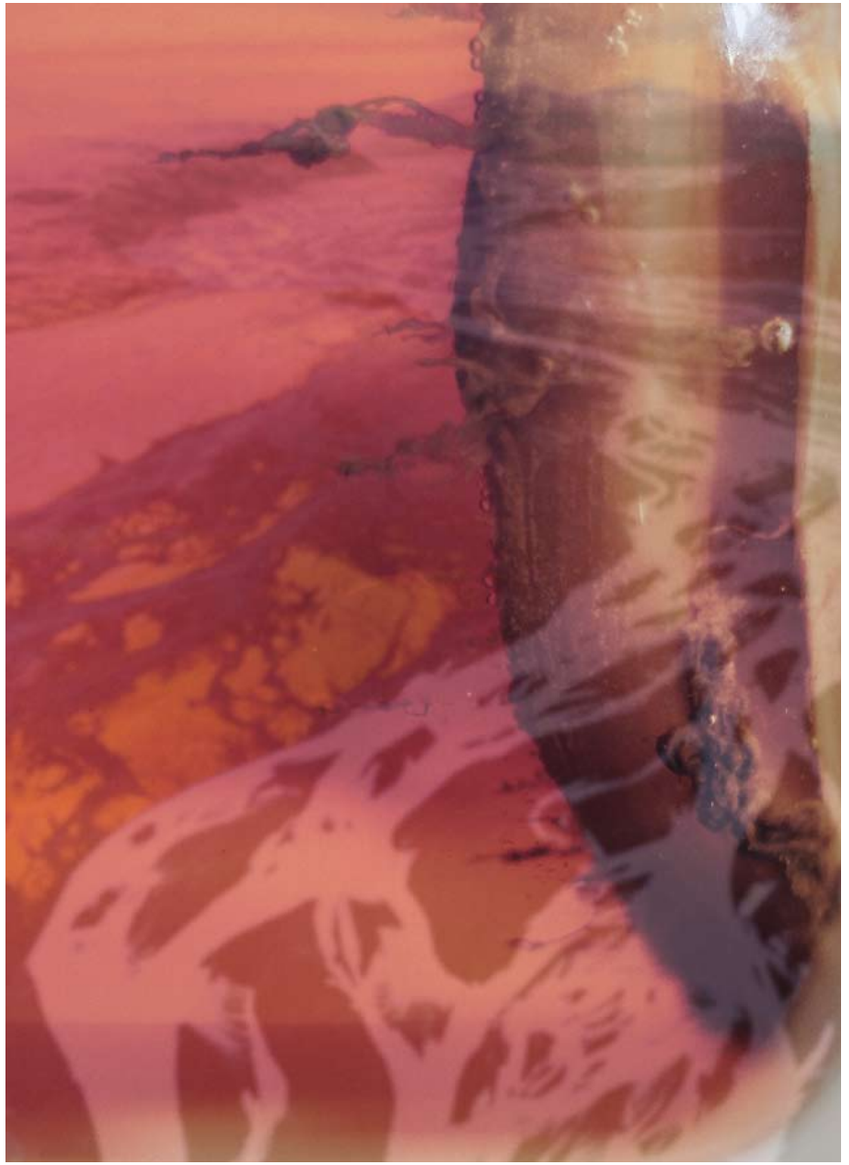
TERY ŽEŽELJ

Toward Holobionts: Cultivating More-Than-Human Experience



"Kombucha Landscape". Collage by Tery Žeželj, using freely available images: Tim-Oliver Metz (https://unsplash.com/photos/cZIiXRX9PqE); MatheoJBT (https://unsplash.com/photos/pLoaI7b3-eI). Free to use under the Unsplash License.

Dear Reader,

If possible and comfortable, please bring some food close to you and slowly snack while reading this text.

Cuts. Cuts draw lines and create the left and the right, the up and the down. They make divisions and create a territory where differences start to emerge. As deep as they manage to go, they break the connections and mobilize an immediate differentiation and change of the perception. But, there is always something underneath, something just a bit deeper than the cut reached. There is something that remembers the (two) newly made parts differently. From there, scars will emerge: new connections, new entanglements that remember and will always encompass a memory, a story of change. It is a story, for us humans, that emerges from two seemingly separated fields and gives them a place for new connections, all the while remembering their collective past.

Holes, changes in the terrain, in the landscape, hosts for new tryouts. That is how I imagine the impact—as a cut or a hole. But, thinking about it, I am fascinated by how a scar gets formed, about the new territory that holds the memory of the cut. So, about the process of transformation in the landscape and not so much about the abrupt interruption. It is the "in-between" that gets changed, and it is about the process of changing. Is an event a cut? Is an experience a cut? Could it be a scar? What is an artistic practice?

I am searching for a precise word for *impact* in the Slovenian language. There is the word *učinek,* which translates to "an effect", or the word *trk,* which is "a crash". Perhaps, impact could be defined as a *strong* effect, but it is also about the intervention that precedes the effect. To me, impact, in English as my second language, brings presumptions of something immediate, something powerful and quick that leaves a big effect. A collision, an explosion? But, an explosion is only the (last) point in a long process of building up pressure. It is a transgression of a border on the scale when something can no longer be sustained, contained. Or something that grows and exceeds the size of the place within which it is growing. Perhaps, it is the experience that can grow and overgrow the present and build grounds for a shift, a change. Or should I imagine impact more as a collision? An unexpected and sudden meeting of agents that flow in different directions. The change in their direction or even their shape. A change of direction. An impact. Furthermore, where are the new directions, the traces forming a new territory?

I have reservations about the use of the term *impact* in the field of arts. It sounds a bit aggressive, sudden, and immediate. Is it too big of a wor(l)d? How is it measured? Are there good and bad impacts? The impact *of* what? Events, practices, experiences? And then, an impact *on* what? On a participant, on sociality, community? Even though I have doubts about the term, even though I am not closely familiar with the existing discourses on the social impact of performing arts, it seems firmly embedded in the way I think about the field of performing arts. The shadow of questioning the transformative potentials in and of arts, of the *impact* they have or create, of the changes they are building toward, follows me all the time. What has had an impact on me? Toward what kinds of impacts do I aim? Perhaps my belief that performing arts can have an impact keeps me fascinated, holds me close to them, and gives me some sense.

Personally, I am interested in the potential of an experience created in the field of arts to *impact* "environmental imaginaries". I came across the term "environmental imaginaries" in the article "Four Problems, Four Directions for Environmental Humanities: Toward Critical Posthumanities for the Anthropocene", by Astrida Neimanis, Cecilia Åsberg, and Johan Hedrén. The authors outline and reflect on the four directions they are encouraging environmental humanities to take: attention to diverse environmental imaginaries; rethinking the "green" field in terms of naturecultures and feminist posthumanisms; developing environmental humanities in a specifically transdisciplinary and post-disciplinary vein; and finally, increasing efforts in developing a "citizen humanities" (2015). Neimanis, Åsberg, and Hedrén write how "environmental imaginaries" strongly influence how the environmental crisis is dealt with (2015, 81). Personally, I am busy with the potential to change our attention and perception and broaden our awareness of the entanglements in which we are embedded. What is more, to impact the way I live *with* the world. Therefore, I want to dedicate the following lines to the "more-than-human experience" and its potential for *impacting* the established "environmental imaginary".

Could creating alternative environmental imaginaries be termed as social impact? Is it about extending sociality to other-than-humans? What are the

consequences of projecting human schemas to other-than-humans, or, perhaps a better term, "natural others" (Neimanis 2014)? What would be an equivalent for sociality that would include all the diverse bodies? Or, is it about impacting the existing social relations and infrastructures that are generating or mobilizing the currently established relationship with "natural others" in Western capitalist societies? Perhaps the latter.

We are non-negotiably embedded in the ecosystems in which we participate. Humans are merely emerging from relationships with other-than-humans. We are intensely and constantly entangled with the "natural others", but the relationships are often hierarchical because we tend to approach them in terms of possession. Nevertheless, our lives influence the bodies we share ecosystems with, and they influence us: our body, movements, our behavior. We have more-than-human experiences all the time, as we only can have those: our body is always already more-than-human; we live in a more-than-human world. But the way it is interpreted and perceived in mainstream narratives does not seem to be in touch with those interrelations. Vinciane Despret writes: "The world disposes us to feel, and our body makes the world available. Our feelings dispose our bodies, our bodies dispose our feelings" (Despret 2004, 127).

How to cultivate a more-than-human experience, and how to draw attention to the fact that it is never less than that? I believe that once we pay attention to it and bring it to our awareness, our relations can get changed and affected by it. So, maybe the question is not how to experience it but how to incorporate it into our discourses to become more kin to our natural companions, agents with whom we share our ecosystems. How can we bring those experiences closer to our awareness, and how can they teach us to live *with them*? How can we practice our lives as always more-than-human to dissolve the Western idea of the individual?

Astrida Neimanis and Rachel Loewen Walker write: "How we live in the world is contingent upon how we imagine that world to be" (2014, 563). I am arguing for working with environmental imaginaries because I believe that it is this shift that can change the way we imagine the world and, therefore, the way we live in it (Neimanis and Loewen Walker 2014, 563), relate to it. Relate in a mode that is not, as Haraway puts it, "reification, possession, appropriation, and nostalgia" (quoted in Neimanis 2014, 40)?

Even though it is hard to imagine a reconceptualization that would influence bigger systems and institutions, a small percent of all the human species that have ever inhabited the Earth perceived "natural others" as resources and lived with them in a possessive and extractivist mode. How could this schema be disenabled? What are the mechanisms that produce or enable such relationships?

Cuts. Perceiving them as borders and walls instead of places of entanglements. Perceiving them as isolated and not as a process of transformation that holds the two sides together. Binaries.

"We are all bodies of water", notes Astrida Neimanis (2019, 66). Such a conceptualization first and foremost dissolves the binary opposition between human and more-than-human, the opposition all the way present in my writing, thirsty for finding ways to reclaim the non-binary perception of us and *the other*. Extractivism and understanding nature as a resource is possible only through binaries that position nature on the opposite side of humans. They are conceptual grounds for thinking our *human*-rights, ethics, and power distribution—creating a valued side of species, race, class, gender, and a denigrated one. The established relations formed with other-than-humans in Western capitalist societies are the relations that erased the awareness of our interconnectedness, of our shared environments, and drove the erasure of our nothing else than more-than-human experiences that we have as natural and animal bodies.

Whenever I felt an intense pain in the upper part of my belly, in my stomach, my parents would give me *brinovec*, a spirit distilled from juniper berries, which my father's friend made following a different recipe than the one to make gin. *"To disinfect your stomach"*, they would say, and I still remember the amazement when I first tried it. Later on, brinovec was one of the first things I packed when I first moved from home, and it has accompanied me in all the places I have lived—an *antibiotic*.

If the human body did not host bacteria, it would not survive. Of course, there are various kinds of bacteria, but the bacteria from our microbiome protect us from the bacteria that could cause diseases. Without them, we could not break down sugars; digestion would be impossible. Supposedly, all the bacteria in the human body weigh as much as the human brain. Whose body is a human body, then? In the article "Holobiont by Birth: Multilineage Individuals as the Concretion of

Cooperative Processes", Scott F. Gilbert questions the concept of individuality on many levels by disrupting seven established definitions of animal individuality (anatomical individuality, genetic individuality, developmental individuality, immune individuality, physiological individuality, and evolutionary individuality). The concept of *holobiont* as a concept that draws attention to all the bodies and symbionts that a body of an animal hosts to live is, therefore, a very useful and powerful concept that enables me to dissolve the idea of a human body as an individual. You can probably recall at least one moment when the balance in your guts got disrupted. It might even interrupt your schedule and hence remind you that, hey, we are not individuals after all.

At the end of the summer, my dear life companion gave me a small kombucha SCOBY, part of a bigger SCOBY that she started living with during the pandemic. The SCOBY moved with her to Prague and followed her back to Ljubljana on holidays, and then traveled back. And the little SCOBY first went with me to my family and was taken care of by my parents. It accompanied me to Ljubljana and later to Utrecht. *"For your bacteria"*, my friend said while packing the SCOBY and some black tea for me as we parted.

For my bacteria. To feed them. To take care of them. To feed and take care of the bodies that I host. My body is an ecosystem emerging through relations between those different bodies. My skin is an interface emerging from the relation with its environment, constantly changed by dry air, by my eating habits. A landscape in constant change—adapting and responding to you, you are responding to the text, and the text is arising between you and me.

* * * *

Dear Reader,

I hope you are enjoying the snacks, if you have some.
At this point, I would like to invite you to read out loud
and memorize the following exercise:

Imagine how your gut looks from the inside. What kind of world is there?
What kind of landscape? Does it remind you of something?
How do all the microbes that found a place there, in your gut, look?
Trillions of microbes, only in your gut. The number is higher than
the number of cells in your whole body. Imagine that you are a body
of one bacterium in your guts, breaking down the resistant starch.
How do you feel? Are there any colors predominating?
What are your movements? How is the time passing?

Now, I would like to ask you to leave the book or the computer on a surface close to you and lie down comfortably, if possible, on the floor. Once you are lying down, put your hands on your belly and close your eyes—if it feels comfortable. Focus on the touch of your hands and the feeling in your belly. After some moments, try and go through the exercise.

* * * *

Welcome back to the paper or the screen. Here, you can write down or draw what you've experienced.

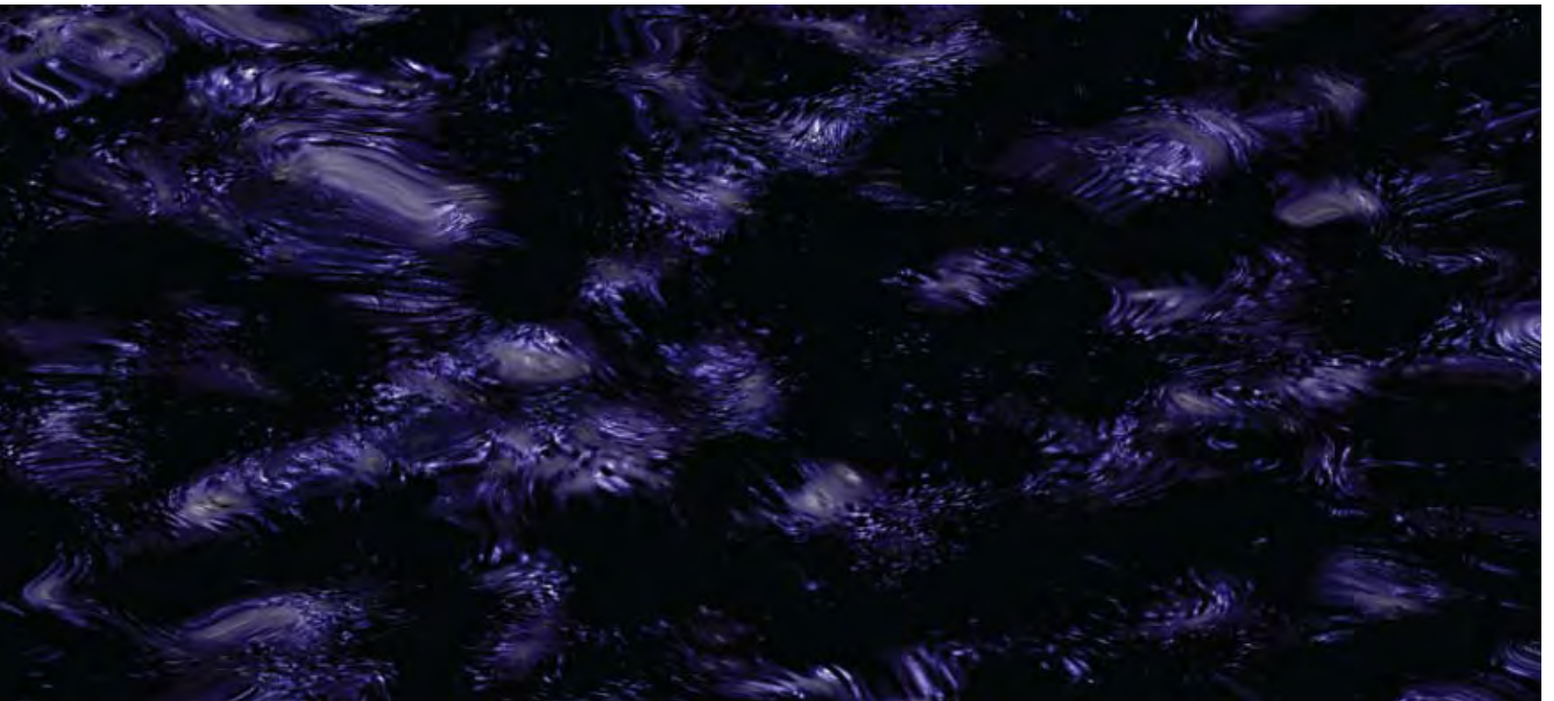
This short draft of an exercise is an attempt to see if that can be one of the principles for cultivating the more-than-human experience and the idea of a human body as a holobiont or, as Donna Haraway defines it in her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in Chthulucene*,

> symbiotic assemblages, at whatever scale of space or time, which are more like knots of diverse intra-active relatings in dynamic complex systems, than like the entities of a biology made up of preexisting bounded units (genes, cells, organisms, etc.) in interactions that can only be conceived as competitive or cooperative (2016, 60).

Why am I arguing for the importance of the impact of more-than-human experiences in the practices of imagination, even though we do experience them all the time? Because I believe they have the potential to increase the awareness of interspecies relations and affect the perspective through which we perceive the world around us. To say it differently, cultivating the idea that humans are holobionts might affect our environmental imaginaries, change our lenses and mobilize practices of, as Harraway notes, *making kin* to the living world we are inhabiting.

In such an exercise for imagination, in practices of imagining from a different perspective, the most essential part for me is the experience of being in otherness. So, it is not about becoming another body. Rather, it is much more about *becoming-with* another body, expanding the experience that might open a path for gaining new or different insights that may emerge from shifting perspective, or expanding it, making it more-than-human. I propose that such an experience of expanding the human experience is overcoming binaries, especially the human–non-human opposition. Dualisms are based on the differences that are perceived as borders. Opposite to that, the more-than-human experience expands our experience with the unknowable. It gives ground for being aware of the relations through which we are emerging, without aiming to know the other body totally. Therefore, it does not teach us how to be the other. Instead, we might learn how to be *with* the other.

Finally, we could say that more-than-human experience cultivates an awareness that the human body is not self-contained. Instead, it is an assemblage of diverse other-than-human flows, a landscape. Therefore, to reframe the sentence from the beginning, it is that kind of experience that might bring the potential for growing and overgrowing the present and build grounds for a shift, a change—it can *impact* the way we imagine the world. Can we perceive our bodies as landscapes, as patches of bigger landscapes?



How I imagine the bacteria in my gut.
By: Blaž Pavlica.

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SUZANA MARJANIĆ

The Art of Performance Against Neoliberal Dystopia, or "Down with this system that is leading us to *Nowhere*!" (M. Brecelj): Two Examples—Almissa Open Art and Adria Art Annale (AAA)

> But the student revolt failed. Fantasy never came to power. After a few months, order was restored (Bard and Söderqvist 2002, 110).

Introduction

This chapter reviews and analyzes select actions and performances from the Almissa Open Art Festival—a festival of contemporary art held in Omiš, Croatia—emphasizing its 12th edition, held in 2021 under the curation of multimedia artist Gildo Bavčević. The chapter also presents the festival and eponymous association AAA (Adria Art Annale), which participated at Almissa as one of the leading representatives of artivist practices on the Croatian scene.

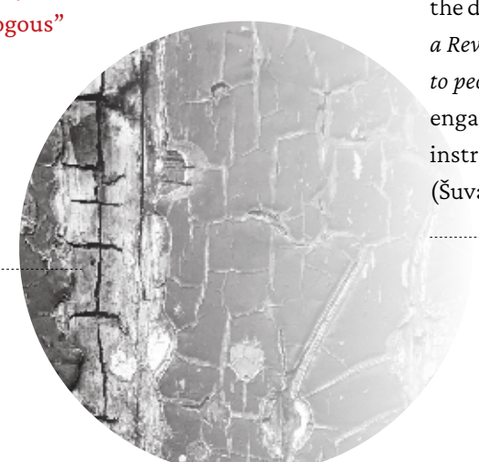
Gildo Bavčević—with the 2021 edition of Almissa presented with the activist theme *Slikati po platnu života* (*To Paint on the Canvas of Life*)[1]—gave an extremely strong document of *artivism,* the meeting place of art and activism (cf. Milohnić 2011, 66–79), that is, life. The curator-artist emphasized in the Almissa program announcement his understanding of art with the following statements by political theorist Gilles Dauvé about the Situationist International as the last great form of a radical critique of society, an endeavor aimed at revolutionizing life:

1 The title is taken from a meditative work, the happening *Slikati punim bićem po platnu života* (*To Paint with the Whole Being on the Canvas of Life*) by Igor Grubić which was performed by the artist in collaboration with others on the last day of the festival on the main beach of Omiš, spreading meditative energy on the canvas of life. The original version of Grubić's performance was created in 2020 in the form of posters and text, a kind of daily "to do" list of activities, which the artist conceived as part of the project of pandemic performances of the Domino Association performed at home. The first thing on the "to do" list of activities of the artist reads: "Exercise 25-45 min., warming up for the start of the day, stretching exercises, yoga, push-ups, sit-ups … instead of weights I'm using flower pots … (in the process, I exercise my green comrades …)" (Grubić 2019).

> In earlier times, artists who thought most clearly abolished the distinction between art and life. The Situationist International takes this demand to a higher level and tries to undo the distinction between life and revolution.[2]

Such a radicalization of the relationship between life and art nullifies ideas associated with the social engineering experiments ruthlessly carried out by Nazi, Fascist, and Communist states that art can bring about changes in the consciousness of the collective (Belfiore and Bennett 2008, 10). Social engineering works in a top-down fashion, while the radical equating of life and art equalizes the position of workers, citizens, and artists. In contrast to the statement above, which equates to all types of socialism, Miklavž Komelj shows how Partisan art in Yugoslavia acted differently from social engineering, which can be seen in the fact that they did not follow the directives of the Communist International. The most important aspect of Partisan art that came about with the revolution was a new relation of the masses to art which, similar to the Situationists, equated revolution, art, and life (cf. Komelj 2015, 23). The theater and literary critic, essayist, and translator Eli Finci commented on the issue of social engineering at the symposium Kazalište i revolucija (Theater and Revolution), organized in Jajce in 1977 by the editorial board of the Tuzla magazine *Pozorište* (*Theater*). In his concluding review of the symposium, Finci points out that the topic of Theater and Revolution posed a danger since one could conclude that they were inseparably connected:

> [...] their very complex reciprocity—a positivist understanding of the reciprocity of cause and effect, according to a widespread vulgar-materialist pattern, according to which all important social changes, and especially the revolutionary transformation of society, by themselves, automatically, so to speak, cause similar, "homologous" consequences in the sphere of the so-called social upgrade (from Husić 1981, 5).



2 From the artist's Facebook post on the festival page.

However, as Jean-Luc Nancy points out, the Situationist International was the last great form of radical criticism, period. Nancy points out that Situationist International has brought to light,

> although not to its fullest extent, the theme of referring society back to itself. The society of the spectacle is both a denunciation (of the generalized spectacle-market) and an affirmation of society facing itself and, maybe even more so, the affirmation of society as exposed to itself and only to itself (Nancy 2000, 54).

Situationist International chronicler Christopher Gray documents this revolutionary critique of society with statements from May 1968, when France was on the brink of anarchy as workers occupied around a hundred factories, when 140 cities in the United States were engulfed in flames following the assassination of Martin Luther King, when students took over universities in Germany and England, when the hippie ghettos clashed directly with the police state—there was a sense that the insurgency was happening globally at the same time; the new world came into focus (Gray 1998, 134).

The Situationist International especially gave rise to criticism of the spectacle of consumerism. Raoul Vaneigem published *The Revolution of Everyday Life* and Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* in the same year (1967). These works form the foundation of the Situationist International, which propagated the dominance of imagination while the society of everyday life is being radicalized and revolutionized, which is accomplished by consciously creating desired situations (Šimleša 2005, 41). Dražen Šimleša creates a great aphoristic link between the two manifesto books of the Situationist International: "*The Revolution of Everyday Life* is the best cure for the diseases offered by *The Society of the Spectacle*" (2005, 41).[3] Guy Debord wrote *For a Revolutionary Judgment of Art* in 1961 with the motto *Revolution is not "showing" life to people but making them live.* Situationism, then, did not strive for autonomous or engaged art but defined art (works, forms of behavior, actions, situations) as instruments of cultural activism that rendered capitalist, civil society meaningless (Šuvaković 2012, 587).

3 For more details on the Situationist International (1957–1972), refer to the movement's archive: https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/.

*

The 12th edition of Almissa confirmed that performance art must remain a struggle against the needs of the market logic of capitalism that leads us to "Nowhere", as the late Slovenian artist/performer Marko Brecelj stated, which is only corroborated by the pandemic and the stories of climate change (fires, earthquakes, floods, the melting of permafrost in Siberia) and something known as the "network",[4] with no public debate, and no radical criticism of society in Croatia and elsewhere. Exclamation point. Gildo Bavčević depicted the activist theme *To Paint on the Canvas of Life* in poster form using the work, drawing, intellectual graffiti by Romanian artist Dan Perjovschi's *Artist Today* from 2008, performatively replacing the canvas with protest posters. For his intellectual graffiti, as he calls them himself, Dan Perjovschi states that they stem from

> a particular theme, local or global, toward a general understanding and abstraction. They use humor. They are not cynical but empathetic, designed to create bridges of understanding and for visitors to recognize their own thoughts. My drawings are Gedankenbild [thought-image] (Perjovschi).

4 Referring to the computer virus *Stuxnet* (film *Zero Days,* 2016, dir. Aley Gibney) which began to be implemented during Obama's presidency, with Biden, the current US president, serving as his vice-president. Part of the self-replicating computer malware was launched by US and Israeli secret forces in a joint effort to destroy a key part of Iran's nuclear plant, with the virus ultimately spreading further than its intended target.

Dan Perjovschi, *Artist Today,* 2008. The mentioned intellectual graffiti, which thematizes the transition from the art studio to the street, from paintings to protest posters, was chosen as the festival poster of the 12th edition of Almissa 2021 with the theme *To Paint on the Canvas* of Life for which Gildo Bavčević acted as a curator-artist.

Almissa: Background

A special feature of the Almissa Open Art Festival, a festival of contemporary art founded by multimedia artists Vice Tomasović and Josip Ralašić in 2010, is that it "takes place in the middle of the tourist season, on the periphery (of Split)" and explores "all spatial resources which are plentiful in Omiš—such as a mountain, river, sea, and beaches, to urban neighborhoods, historic buildings, cultural institutions" (Tomasović 2019). The Split-Omiš festival scene gives opportunities to understand the city and performatively include neglected spaces that are typically invisible to tourists. The choice of space is also related to the theme of going beyond life/art, i.e., artistic independence from social and economic structures. As for the space of a particular festival, the 2015 festival themed *Independence* took place on Otok ljubavi (Island of Love) in the canyon of the Cetina River: "Artists came at their own expense to no man's land, which is flooded in winter so no one can legally appropriate it, and created art from materials found in the environment", said Vice Tomašević. He added: "We didn't want anyone to fund us this year, so we're organizing a festival with no funds whatsoever, completely independent, with the power of art itself" (Tomašević 2015).

Vice Tomasović acted as an informal curator until 2016, inviting colleagues and setting up the topics: 2010 *Event*, 2011 *Sensitivity*, 2012 *Artifacts*, 2013 *Error*, 2014 *Identity*, and 2015 *Independence*. The artists he invited suggested other artists. The edition in 2016 marked the beginning of curatorial concepts; it was important that the artists themselves take on the role of the curator. This, along with the mentioned location choice, meant that Almissa practices artistic independence from social and economic structures. The role of the curator is intentionally performed by mostly precarious artists who directly address real-life topics, which is sometimes eschewed by curatorial programs because they directly depend on funding from the state apparatus. As Antej Jelenić from the AAA Association points out, "Larger institutions only act as a memory bank" (cf. Appendix). In connection to this, Antej Jelenić, in the interview presented in this chapter's Appendix, implies that artists are freer the more precarious their situation, which once again affirms the existential characteristic of erasing the distinction art/life.[5] Almissa's thematic focuses examining social reality confirm this: Vedran Perkov, the 2016 curator, chose the theme *Spin*; Slaven Tolj, as a curator-artist in 2017, subversively selected a riff on a famous verse, *Neka tebi kušin bude stina, pizda ti materina* (*May Your Pillow be a Rock, You Stupid Fuck*), as a jab directed at Croatian social reality (this is a subversive reference to traditional *klapa* choir singing, more information will follow); Siniša Labrović chose the topic of post-truth in 2018 with the performative determinant *Shut Up, Please* (cf. Greiner 2018, 143–150); in 2019 Sandra Sterle chose the topic *Where are We Going?*; and Neli Ružić emphasized the topic of *Urgency* in the 2020 pandemic year; while Gildo Bavčević, with the 2021 incarnation of Almissa, chose the activist theme of *To Paint on the Canvas of Life* (cf. Marjanić 2020).

Digression: Subversion by the Truth in the Form of "A Capella Screeching"

A small but important digression: the eighth edition of Almissa was organized with the motto of *Neka tebi kušin bude stina, pizda ti materina*, which is the title of a song originally performed by the Split band Ilija i zrno žita in its punk version (cf. J.B. 2017). This is a critical inversion of the patriotic song "Croatio, iz duše te ljubim" ("Croatia, I Love You from the Bottom of My Heart") by Tomislav Bralić and the choir Intrade, performed in a popular style of traditional Croatian *klapa* singing. Omiš has a long tradition of *klapa* music, and the festival performance of this song

5 Here we can mention an episode from the 1990s, the transition period, when the non-institutional scene in the region was critical of government and its cultural policy but at the same time pursued neoliberal capitalist cultural policies influenced by "Soros Realism", engaged art supported by the Soros Foundation through its centers for contemporary art. Their goal was to support cultural and artistic projects that contribute to the creation of art deemed appropriate for a democratically organized capitalist society (cf. Šuvaković 2002). "Post-socialist Eastern Europe in the 1990s, would also witness its 'Soros realism', an ambivalent term that was developed by Serbian theorist Miško Šuvaković and is related to the independent or non-institutional scene (civil society sector) in the (European) transitional countries of the 1990s, and continues today as so-called 'foundation art'" (Tanurovska-Kjulavkovski and Vaseva 2021, 160–162).

in the *klapa* version with "a Capella screeching" by the band Porno Suicid and klapa Utvare presented a musical subversion to the Omiš Festival of Klapa Singing (cf. J. Mi. 2017). In the foreword to the catalog, curator Tolj explains the meaning of the performance: "We used this pirate act to directly address the general public and the residents of Omiš, inviting them to participate and to warn them that the current Almissa program will clearly speak about the reality we live in" (Tolj 2017). The organizers pointed out in their announcements that this was "an invitation to local residents and tourists, as temporary citizens of Omiš, to a collective action of civil disobedience, to show discontent openly and loudly, even to curse". The klapa used "a Capella screeching" to sing about the situation in the country and became a hit referencing the resistance to the sycophants of the political class, the political servitude to the ruling party (the Croatian Democratic Union, HDZ), the factories left to bankruptcy, the patriotic poor who believed in false ideals of togetherness.

The "anti-klapa" performance had an exceptional media response and was inspired by the idea of Tomislav Gotovac and his verbal performances of apotropaic curses, works such as the famous action *Pun mi je kurac* (*I've Fucking Had Enough*, 1977) (see Denegri 2011),[6] Jusuf Hadžifejzović's performance *Od kiča do krvi samo je korak* (*It Only Takes a Single Step from Kitsch to Blood*, 1991)[7] and the already mentioned punk cover of the Intrade klapa song "Croatio, iz duše te ljubim" by the band Ilija i zrno žita (2011). Unlike the punk performance, which involved covering the musical basis of a patriotic song, the performance of screeching along with the klapa matrix performed at Almissa deconstructed the verses from the perspective of workers' truth, of all the looted factories and evicted apartments from Croatia's social transition which was dominated by the party that is in power even today and has elicited great reactions on social media (cf. "Nova himna gastarbajtera?").

6 Avant-garde Virtual Museum, https://www.avantgarde-museum.com/hr/museum/kolekcija/umjetnici/tomislav-gotovac~pe4556/

7 The performance was held in 1991 at the first Biennale of Contemporary Art in Cetinje (Jergović 2018).

The band Porno Suicid and klapa Utvare:

"Kušin stina" ("Pillow Be a Rock")

You are a sycophant of the political class.
Servitude has always been your destiny.
Your kind came from cabbage and manure
and for years you have made us look like fools.
The chance of me listening to you is dwindling.
Fuck you and your party shit.
Fuck you and your party shit.
That's why I call you "swine".
May your pillow be a rock,
You stupid fuck, you stupid fuck.
You stole a bunch of factories,
fucked up five or six hospitals,
bought a BMW and a Hummer,
sucked up to Ivo Sanader,[8]
and you want me to sleep on a rock,
instead of a pillow,
to be part of the patriotic poor.
Fuck you, you stupid fuck.
That's why I call you "swine".
May your pillow be a rock,
You stupid fuck, you stupid fuck.

Bend Porno Suicid i klapa Utvare:

"Kušin stina"

Ti si ulizica političkog soja.
Služenje oduvijek je sudbina tvoja.
Tvoji su potekli iz kupusa i gnoja
a godinama od nas činiš stado konja.
Šansa da te poslušam sve je manja.
Jebi se i ti i tvoja stranačka sranja.
Jebi se i ti i tvoja stranačka sranja.
Zato ti kažem „stoko".
Neka tebi kušin bude stina,
pizda ti materina, pizda ti materina.
Ukra si hrpu tvornica,
razjeba pet-šest bolnica,
kupija BMW i hummera,
izljubija Ivu Sanadera,
a želiš da spavam na stini,
umisto kušina,
da budem domoljubna sirotinja.
Ma, goni se, pizda ti materina.
Zato ti kažem „stoko".
Neka tebi kušin bude stina,
pizda ti materina, pizda ti materina.

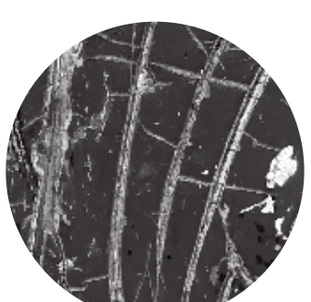
8 Ivo Sanader served as Croatian prime minister from 2003 to 2009.

From Socialism to Capitalism and Back

To further address the topic of bridging the gap between art and life, the following represents a brief overview of selected works from the 2021 edition of Almissa, for which curator-artist Gildo Bavčević chose the activist theme *To Paint on the Canvas of Life*. Visual artist and social practice artist Mak Hubjer, founder and director of the Gallery of Contemporary Art Brodac (Sarajevo), carried a sign with the inscription "*Prilaz žrtava kapitalizma*" (Street of the Victims of Capitalism) at various locations in Omiš, including the main beach, on 12 August 2021, from 10 am to 8 pm. Costume design: pandemic protective suit with a protective mask. The emphasis is on the meaning of the "victims of capitalism" because they are still alive and are still victims of an exploitative system that leads to abolishing human rights as well as encouraging imperialist expansion.

Marin Renić, an artist from Split, conducted a cleaning performance called *Tretman* (Treatment), in which he cleaned a single stone block in the main street Fošal for 24 hours. Marked with work clothes and an orange vest, he also presented the social story of despised occupations. The interaction with passers-by and bystanders was noticeable; numerous passers-by stopped, sometimes taken aback by the touching sight of a male body curled on the floor, polishing and cleaning a road stone. However, on the other hand, as stated by the organizers of the festival, this performance "caused the most controversy among the citizens of Omiš because of its various interpretations; the poor choice of stone for a new promenade that absorbs dirt, prejudices about artists who do nothing, socially useful work, etc". (Renić 2021).

At the Omiš Mirabela Fortress, Mladen Miljanović, an artist whose professional work is related to Banja Luka and Republika Srpska, presented the performance *Na rubu* (*At the Edge*) as an installation and situationist performance in which he hung from the edge of the fortress for ten minutes on his hands. In a later conversation with the organizer, the artist said, "I'm glad I'm still alive after the performance". *At the Edge* is a performance in which the artist attaches himself and hangs off the edge of museum buildings, galleries, religious buildings or public institutions, and has been performed since 2011, earning the performer the nickname "Spiderman from Bosnia" (Miljanović 2021). The chasm below Mirabela can be read as a symbol of the abyss of all necropolitics,[9] which makes this performance a reflection of the difficult and unpleasant position of the artist within the social relations in which they operate (cf. Vukičević, 2012). At the same time, the body is positioned between two realities, usually one which is protected, inside the building (symbolizing the protected space of art because, as the artist explains, the gallery is a room and art is a comfort zone), and one on the outside—the brutal unprotected reality (cf. Miljanović 2021). The liminal position of *At the Edge* signifies a suspended state of *betwixt and between/neither one nor the other* of social categories and personal identity (cf. Turner 1989), not only with the possibility of exit but also with the possibility of falling, but still fighting at this transitional point, as demonstrated by Dan Perjovschi with his 2008 intellectual graffiti *Artist Today*.



Mladen Miljanović positions himself as an activist, *a soldier of art*, an artist-anthropologist, *a social subject who acts critically in reality and takes self-responsibility for it*, as he points out in his biography, whereby the context of art and the context of life are never separated. The artist himself states that the inclusiveness of the idea is important to him, not the exclusivity of the position, which the audience recognizes (cf. Miljanović 2020).

In line with Miljanović's theme of being "on the edge" and his "spider performance" at the Mirabela in Omiš, Milica Tomić conceived the performative lecture *Od socijalizma do kapitalizma i nazad* (*From Socialism to Capitalism and Back*) (Tomić 2021) as a twofold journey: A journey through video documentation of Saša Marković – Mikrob's art practice (Marković, 1959–2010, was a key figure of the Serbian alternative scene and counterculture) and a journey through the personal stories of the audience, primarily from the participants at Almissa, about what it means to be an artist from post-socialist countries in the art market of Western democracy. Artists from the Balkans have often been positioned, especially during the 1990s, through the prism of a stereotypical Eastern European artist. Tomić often points out in interviews that two main

9 In his book *Necropolitics*, Achille Mbembe (2019), theorizes the shift from democracy to its dark side—what he calls its "nocturnal body"—which is based on the culture of fear and violence that drove colonialism.

categories of classification in curatorial programs have existed for artists from the former Yugoslav region—the Balkan or the Eastern European socialist context:

> One of the consequences of the revision of the World War II is the exclusion of Yugoslavia from the historical map of Europe and the world. This incapacitates and erases our universalist potential as artists. Our works were either part of a context of a bad critique of socialism or some kind of totalitarian society or brought us back to some grand postmodernist issues: Where are you from? Thus, we automatically ended up in the grip of the "wild" Balkans, disguised as some Balkan artists (Tomić 2017).

To resist such stereotyping, she insisted on seeing Yugoslavia as a concept, which led to misunderstandings and made it difficult to position her work, considering that she did not acquiesce to be determined by the Balkan or Eastern European socialist context.

> For those who could read in ideological terms, the introduction of the term Yugoslavia ideologically revealed and questioned both categories. However, mentioning Yugoslavia twenty years ago sounded almost like a curse. The word was simply not allowed to be said. If you came from Serbia, it was necessary to establish a distance and difference in relation to Serbia's war-imperial policy that appropriated the term Yugoslavia. In the Croatian context, you were immediately labeled a traitor. In European countries, you sounded militant, archaic, nostalgic. However, I insisted on my position no matter what, because I was aware that this was the only way to clearly contextualize my opinion and work. In that sense, I agree with Viktor Ivančić, who said that, for him, Yugoslavism is not a matter of nationality, but a matter of emancipation and engagement (Tomić 2017).

In the introduction of her lecture-like, self-interpretive performance, the artist contextualized that the performance was part of a larger project she started in 2005 as an analysis of the Western art system with an emphasis on the exhibition market and the colonizing of post-socialist countries.

We will focus on the first segment of the performance, which, in video form, documented a self-interview by Saša Marković – Mikrob. In 2007, Milica Tomić invited Saša Marković to conduct a narrative performance in front of a camera where he answered a series of questions on the transformations of his own artistic production and practice in relation to various social, economic, and political systems in which he has created art since 1986, from the Yugoslavia to the Republic of Serbia, from socialism to capitalism. From an anarcholiberal position, the artist thematizes what happens when a work of art becomes a product that, from an artistic point of view, can no longer be valued in the same way it was valued within the socialist system. Mikrob's exhibition *Budućnost je nenapisana* (*The Future is Unwritten*) (Centre for Cultural Decontamination, Belgrade, 1 February–16 May 2021) documented how the art of the 1990s in Serbia—including the actions of Magnet,[10] Škart,[11] and LED ART[12] was marked by various forms of resistance, which demonstrated how the conflation of art and politics must be thought of today. Mikrob also had a very rare ability to insightfully comment on social reality, which he practiced in his radio shows, music, and street performances (Dragićević Šešić 2018, 222).

Contextually, while listening to this twin story-performance, the anarchoid manifesto *Šest stranica Crvenog Peristila* (*Six Pages of the Red Peristyle*), published in the Split cultural magazine *Vidik* (*Horizon*) in 1968 (signatory of the manifesto: Filip Roje), came to mind. In this manifesto, among other things, members of the anarchoid group Crveni Peristil (Red Peristyle), the performers of the *Crveni Peristil* (1968) act, the first intervention in public space in Yugoslavia, point out that they are against the "posthumous bourgeoisie", against those "that blindly listen to the gods from the Olympus of art". This fluid group demanded the democratization of art and questioned the validity of artistic dialogue if it is displaced from social

10 Magnet's street actions with a mass media character were, as shown at their retrospective exhibition in Novi Sad, a kind of platform for the largest student and civic protest, lasting for three months in 1996/97 and which prevented the Milošević regime from committing election fraud (cf. Knežević 2021, 136).

11 For more on Škart see www.skart.rs.

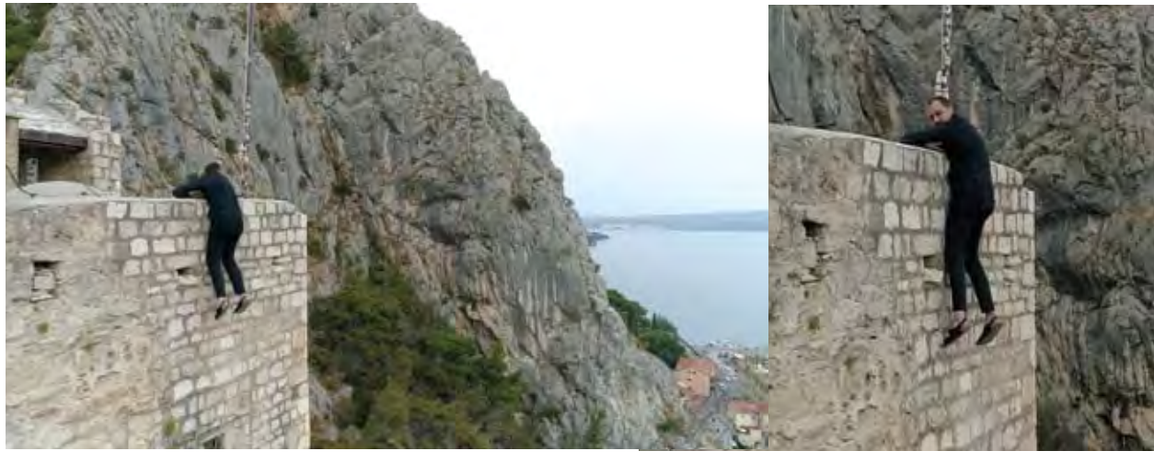
12 For more on LED ART see https://cargocollective.com/testament/LED-ART.

reality ("Šest stranica grupe Crveni Peristil" 1968).[13] Of course, this is a different socio-political context. However, it features almost the same marginal situation for the artists themselves, which is the theme of the lecture performance *From Socialism to Capitalism and Back*.

Mak Hubjer: *Street of the Victims of Capitalism*, 12th Almissa Open Art 2021. Photo: Goran Škofić

Marin Renić: *Treatment,* 12th Almissa Open Art 2021. Photo: Goran Škofić

13 On Crveni Peristil, see https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crveni_Peristil.



Mladen Miljanović: *At the Edge,* 12th Almissa Open Art 2021. Photo: Goran Škofić

Milica Tomić: *From Socialism to Capitalism and Back,* 12th Almissa Open Art 2021.
Photo: Goran Škofić

AAA, the Network of Anarcho-Syndicalists, and the Solidarity Network

The association AAA (Adria Art Annale), with its most prominent member Antej Jelenić, presented themselves at Almissa 2021 with the work-intervention of *Dioklecijanova 1* by artist Marieta Vulić. Both this work and AAA's other activities present distinctive cases of artivism and social action, aiming at creating solidarity. Below, I will analyze their actions centered on both the general public and workers from bankrupt factories.

With his father, Božidar Jelenić (one of the spiritual initiators of the *Red Peristyle* act from 1968) and art friend Milan Brkić, Antej Jelenić has been organizing a long-term manifestation of contemporary art, Adria Art Annale (AAA), for the last fifteen years.[14] In collaboration with the AAA art association and Mreža anarhosindikalista (*Network of Anarcho-Syndicalists*), he launched the project *Mreža solidarnosti* (*Solidarity Network*, 2012) as an initiative of Split artists, activists, anarchists, students, and others, trying to connect the various struggles taking place in and around Split during that time which involved a number of bankrupt factories in the wider Split area. The initiative resulted in a combination of artistic and political practice. As Anita Lunić, one of the then-members of the Solidarity Network, stated:

> We brought together artists, students, the unemployed, workers, etc. in the Split factory Dalmacijavino to inform the wider community about a problem in the city that is not adequately reported in the media. We wanted to show that support from the community is needed, as well as solidarity, not only among workers of different companies but among all classes of society. Spontaneously, a common base was created between workers and trade unions from several companies at the event (Lunić 2021).

14 The festival was founded in 1985. As the organizers point out, the first exhibitions arose from the need for active participation in cultural and intellectual life. Since 1990, the exhibition of classical paintings and sculptures has been abandoned, with a new imperative of searching for new principles.

We will focus on the work-intervention *Dioklecijanova 1* by Marieta Vulić, documenting the dispute between the City of Split, the AAA art association, and the company Lino d.o.o. (Lino LLC), owned by former Croatian footballer Darko Miladin. The subject of the dispute was a room of around fifteen square meters in Diocletian's Palace owned by the City of Split and used by the AAA association. In 2017, Miladin walled the passage to the room and appropriated it for his new hotel. He was then ordered to return the space to its previous condition and hand it over to the City of Split, but he did not comply. The Split Municipal Court is still conducting proceedings regarding the room (D. M. 2017; "Borba za prostor umjetnosti" 2021). The mentioned work-intervention *Dioklecijanova 1* (which is also the address of the space in dispute)[15] by Marieta Vulić documents the walled door of the AAA association, which was named the *Golden Gate (of Corruption)* in the media, as some media showed support for the AAA. The artist gilded the walled door and thus preserved the object; the title "Golden Gate" refers to the historical northern (Porta aurea) main gate of Diocletian's Palace in the old town of Split. The artist stated that this poetic act, adding a golden theophanic color to the walled door (of corruption), can act as a political gesture. In her own words: "I approach the purification of a space that is partly religious to me and partly hygienic. It is a pure deception. I enter where, by the very act of entry, I have been denied access" (Vulić).

In the context of the Network of Anarcho-Syndicalists (MASA, Mreža anarhosindikalista i anarhosindikalistica),[16] which ceased to operate five to six years ago and whose active member/organizer was Antej Jelenić, we also mention the documentary *Mreža solidarnosti* (*Solidarity Network*) (Bavchevicz 2014) by Gildo Bavčević (or as stated in the credits, the film is produced by a *collective author*), a document on the Solidarity Network and workers' struggles for the factories Jadrankamen, Dalmacijavino, and Uzor. These factories went bankrupt during the

15 The work was selected for the cover of the catalog Adria *Art Annale 2016–2019* (Jelenić 2019). The 30th edition of the festival presented newspaper documentation of the dispute as well as the text "Borba za prostor umjetnosti (The Struggle for Art Space)" in which the authors discuss the struggle between the operative and exploitative worldview on the one hand and art in its broadest sense on the other.

16 See https://masa-hr.org/.

post-socialist transition, as was the case with most factories during that period.[17] The Adria Art Annale events, held in 2012 and 2013, go beyond the framework of exhibitions and move into the sphere of real life in the form of civic activism, collaborating with workers and experimenting with the possibilities of "autonomous spaces" (possibilities of self-organization within the community without the state and market in the case of companies Dalmacijavino and Jadrankamen), while promoting the concepts of direct democracy and anarchism/anarcho-syndicalism (Kojundžić Smolčić 2013).

The Solidarity Network practices a kind of solidarity art that can be compared to the political radicalism of the art of the 1960s to which the following terms are connected—engagement, dissent, subversion, destruction, negation and anarchism, contestation (Dragićević Šešić 2012, 187).[18] This kind of solidarity art corresponds to the definition of "political theater" defined by British theater scholar Michael Patterson in his book *Strategies of Political Theatre: Post-War British Playwrights* (2003), in which he analyzed the strategy of a group of 20th-century British dramatists[19] who wanted to use their performances to persuade the audience into promoting a radical restructuring of society. Michael Patterson defines "political theater" as "a kind of theatre that not only depicts social interaction and political events but implies the possibility of radical change on socialist lines: the removal of injustice and autocracy and their replacement by the farer [sic] distribution of wealth and more democratic systems" (qtd. in Belfiore and Bennett 2008, 161).

17 Jadrankamen is a company with a long tradition of extracting and processing Brač stone of high quality, which was acquired by former tennis player Bruno Orešar in 1995, and which filed for bankruptcy in 2012 after several months of blocked accounts and an accumulated debt of HRK 213 million. Dalmacijavino d.d. has been in bankruptcy since 2012, and Tekstil Uzor d.o.o. since 2011.

18 Contestation means "rejection of traditional political divisions and political parties, rejection of the state as an institution, government, power, money, close to the anarchist view" (Dragićević Šešić 2012, 187).

19 The playwrights in question included Arnold Wesker Arnold Wesker, John Arden, Trevor Griffith, Howard Barker, Howard Brenton, Edward Bond, David Hare, John McGrath, and Caryl Churchill.

Furthermore, the work of the Solidarity Network is based on strategies of protest art and activist art, which Nina Felshin describes as a strategy of standing with one foot in the art world and the other in the world of political activism, similar to Milohnić's definition of activist strategies, a theme taken from Marion Hamm (Milohnić 2011, 66–79). Nina Felshin points out that what sets activist art apart from other political art is not its content but its methodology, formal strategies, and activist goals (2006, 9). As such, activist art is characterized by the following: engagement, a culture of resistance, document, testimony, confessions, acts of solidarity, and close cooperation with the community, as documented by the exhibition *Mreža solidarnosti* (*Solidarity Network*) ...[20] Baz Kershaw uses the notion of *radical performance* instead of the notion of *political theater* while referring to the definition of *radical* in Raymond Williams' definition in the sense of reasserting the need for vigorous and fundamental change (1999, 17–18). Considering the dramaturgy of individual protests, Kershaw points out that in this case, instead of searching for the political *in* theater, he focuses on investigating performance *in* the political (1999, 91).

However, there is one more reason for looking into the Network of Anarcho-Syndicalists and their practice, and that is their relation to violence and physical action. At the Split performance festival DOPUST (Open Performance Days)[21] in 2010, the Network of Anarcho-Syndicalists—Local Base Split staged the performance *Radnička klasa umire* (*The Working Class Is Dying*) and presented

> the fate of the working class in the current social circumstances in which it will "burn out", both because of the openly anti-workers politics pursued by the ruling class since the war by mirroring Western neoliberal reforms and because of the treacherous policies of trade union leaders who, instead of fighting for workers' rights, act in favor of politicians and employers (MASA; from Marjanić 2014, 1920).

20 Nina Felshin titles the collection on activist art in an ironic style, *But Is It Art?,* while also ironically responding in the very introduction to the book "But does it matter" (2006, 13).

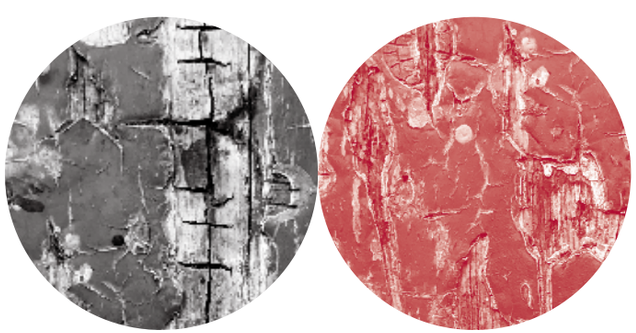
21 This is an activist platform that also applied artivist practices. See DOPUST, 6 February 2009, http://dopust-festival.blogspot.com.

The participants in the performance set fire to a plaque with the coat of arms of the European Union in front of a statue of a worker holding an anarcho-syndicalist flag in its hand. The performance took place on the plateau of the Youth Center in Split, which is a gathering place for alternative subcultures, primarily young people who are not yet employed (MASA—Local Group Split 2010, 6–7).

The Network of Anarcho-Syndicalists[22] stated the following in the biweekly publication *Zarez*:

> Although revolutionary syndicalism opposes all organized violence, regardless of the form of government, it recognizes that during the decisive struggles between the capitalism of today and the free communism of tomorrow, extremely fierce and violent conflicts will break out. It, therefore, accepts that violence can be used as a means of defense against the violent methods of the ruling class during the struggles leading to the expropriation of land and the means of production by the revolutionary population. As this expropriation can be successfully initiated and carried out only with the direct participation of workers' revolutionary-economic organizations, the defense of the revolution must also be one of the tasks of these economic organizations, and not the task of military or paramilitary bodies that would develop independently of them (2010, 6–7).

This view can be understood as a possible continuation of Peter Gelderloos's reasoning on how pacifists follow a tactical and ideological framework formulated exclusively by "white" theorists, camouflaged by the frequent and manipulative use of non-whites (primarily Gandhi and Martin Luther King) as puppets and spokespersons: Nonviolence is racist, is statist, is patriarchal, is tactically and strategically inferior, is deluded (Gelderloos 2007, 23, 45, 65, 81, 117). Furthermore, as a Virginia anarchist points out: while militant groups realize they must overpower the state, pacifists renounce conflict with the state and pretend to engage in a process of magical transformation of the state through "the power of love" or their "nonviolent testimonies", as well as heartbreaking performances (Gelderloos 2010a, 72; cf. 2007, 8). The motto of *How Nonviolence Protects the State* (2007)—which is thematically structured in chapters explaining how nonviolence is inefficient, racist, pro-state, patriarchal, and tactically and strategically inferior, how violence deceives—gives a kind of not-open critique of the students' protest of May 1968: "And they say that the beauty's in the streets but when I look around it seems more like defeat (Defiance Ohio)" (Gelderloos 2007, 3).[23]



22 As I learned from the conversation with Antej Jelenić, they did not manage to use the differences in sensibilities and tactics of local MASA groups as a strength. Antej Jelenić: *"The local group in Rijeka focused entirely on street protests, the group in Split opted for direct communication with workers and connecting through various actions (forums, film screenings, exhibitions, documentation of certain workers' struggles – best evidenced by the film* Mreža solidarnosti [Solidarity Network]*), while the Zagreb group was focused on studying labor laws and trying to cooperate with unions. MASA did not have a sufficiently developed philosophical (theoretical) and cultural strategy to continue. Through the practice of our Split group, we concluded that creating a spiritual, but also a physical space, in which the idea of direct democracy could come to life is much more complex than we could have imagined. To my great surprise, it turned out to be mostly an 'artistic' issue that first and foremost implies a certain vision, style, and inspiration that would serve as a driver or a magic carrot we would follow. The problem of the modern left is that it does not seriously take the side effects of art into account but has a technical-mathematical vision of the revolution in the political sense"* (from email correspondence).

23 Allusion to the street poster with one of the slogans from the revolutionary 1968. "Beauty is in the street! (*La beaute est dans la rue*)", cf. https://lenartlenartlenart.com/Beauty-Is-in-the-Street.

AAA, Marieta Vulić, Antej Jelenić: *Dioklecijanova 1*, 12th Almissa Open Art 2021. (https://studentbiennial.com/student-biennal/marieta-vulic/). Photo: Ana Petrović

The *Soft Terrorism* of Marko Brecelj

At the closing event of Almissa, Gildo Bavčević, in the role of curator for the 2021 edition of the festival, read *Bezbožni zbogom* (*The Godless Goodbye*) by Marko Brecelj (1951–2022), who defined his own artistic method as soft terrorism, with the final performative "Down with this system that is leading us to *Nowhere*!" With this exclamation, the artist warns us about the final dystopia and anti-utopia of the neoliberal program conceived by the economic crisis or the shock doctrine in 2008. As Branko Polić states, dystopia is negative, and anti-utopia is neutral or a sort of zero utopia—without a positive or negative attitude toward the future (Polić 1988, 19).

By choosing playful, post-Dadaist strategies within his own performance concept of soft terrorism, Marko Brecelj (Milohnić 2011, 66–79, Marjanić 2017, 355–359) constantly highlights the dangerous division in performance into the so-called terrorists and the so-called true of faith. Judith Butler, for example, wrote about this topic in her book *Precarious Life: Powers of Violence and Mourning* (2004). During the psychosis of binarisms after the September 11 attacks, the US media accepted the strict binarism of George W. Bush's rhetoric "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists!", which leaves the possibility of only two (exclusive) options. Thus, those in the United States who criticized the policies promoted by the Bush administration, such as Indian writer and political activist Arundhati Roy or Noam Chomsky, were stigmatized as sympathizers of terrorism.

With his *performative* soft terrorism,[24] Brecelj shows how individual terrorist actions can be neo-Dadaist in the way they amuse us, but at the same time seriously

24 As an example of his soft terrorism artivistic praxis, we can mention his performance *Žicanje žice* (*Scrounging*) in which the artist reflects his owns message on the refugee problems. Marko Brecelj skillfully and wittingly traverses between various meanings of words and perceptions. "*Scrounging* means displaying reels of the infamous razor-wire fence, cutting off pieces of that wire to the generous, exhibiting Palmedars (calendars with palm trees) and sing-marching Caucasian spiritual songs, as well as New Tunes, while non-violently attracting the attention of the present company" (Jeza and Artists&Poor's 2017, 40).

point out all the ethical pitfalls of the new world order, just as he anarchistically performatively pointed to the brain pitfalls of the former Yugoslav system and the current European system under a new unitarian-economic flag.

Conclusion: Sensitization Network

Žarko Paić also recognized that the energy of the Situationist International, the last radical critique of society (2004, 99), cannot be regained. He pointed to the today's impossibility of a radical and total revolution of global capitalism. This is the reason for using the terms *politics of resistance* and *culture of subversion* in contemporary theoretical discourses from Foucault to neo-Marxism (Paić 2014, 113). In his 1998 monograph on the Situationist International, Christophe Gray posits that there is no total revolutionization of life today; the revolutionary excitement that fired the 1960s is dead; there is no more counterculture in this sense—"To talk of life today is like talking of rope in the house of a hanged man" (Gray 1998, 134). Obviously, with its sensitization strategies, the activist art of today can be one of the answers involving work with the so-called "non-audience", with passers-by and bystanders. Sensitization works "in that sense as a necessity to act on awakening cultural needs and developing those human potentials and provoking emotions that will enable the 'non-audience' to experience a work of art more through emotion than through intellect" (Dragićević Šešić 2012, 196).

We can say that the Annale Art Festival, especially since its 2012 edition (when the *Mreža solidarnosti* (*Solidarity Network*) exhibition was presented), and Almissa, involving the Split-Omiš visual arts scene, are working on decontaminating and creating the possibility of criticizing society at the local level. These artistic, artivistic practices react to the cynical strategies of the state-building apparatus, while also making possible to work directly with non-audiences, passers-by, and bystanders. The Split-Omiš festival scene, consisting of Almissa and AAA, also practices the radicalization of the relationship between life and art in a situational manner by attempting to affect reality through the practice of direct democracy and intellectual, conceptual terrorism.

The door of art is open to all—detail from the opening of the 33rd edition of AAA, 2020. "The virus of freedom is slowly spreading through the capillaries of society". Antej Jelenić, "Ponosite se bolestima" ("Be Proud of Diseases"), poem.

Appendix:
An Interview with Antej Jelenić (of AAA, and once of MASA):

Suzana Marjanić: *How does artistic practice involving the social impact of art differ when a (small) non-governmental organization that targets social issues of the local population practices it than when a larger state-subsidized institution practices it?*

Antej Jelenić: A small group of two or three people with a wider net of art connections is the only organization that can create new ideas because symbolic death is always close to them, which also implies the Dionysian aspect that is crucial in creation. This is true especially today when culture is in the shadow of state power. Larger institutions only act as memory banks. In this timid age of bankers and pharmacists, the walls of these bunkers grow even thicker, but we should not worry because art always enters through the keyhole. Today, art needs to be unfaltering and show that it is more important than techno-science, substantiating these claims with concrete visions, inventions, and proposals. It needs to respond to the destructive analytical tools of the scientific age, which cuts society into ever smaller pieces, with an "aristocratic" synthesis. Today, it must be more scientific than science and more humorous than nature (although this is hard to achieve if we simply look at one giraffe) because health is a matter of different living conditions, and we know how banal the institutions' response to the current situation is.

How does the special edition of AAA (with its title coming from the quote "Affinity toward sugar is the affinity toward lie", B. Hamvas) from 2021 differ, given the concept of socially engaged art, from all other festival events held in its vicinity?

It differs in that it will be held in about 30 square meters of our association's space because today's science is afraid of art. It is afraid of art because this kind of reality is already too psychedelic for it. It has no more time for joy because it has to be worried. There is no courage for "immoral" thoughts that appear in art—for example, to talk about the impact of (media) discourse on health. This is why we did not get the approval for our event to be held in Split's city center, in the Cellars of Diocletian's Palace. This is the refined sugar in question—it must be purged of all of its nuances, and then they must be purged from life as well so as not to jeopardize the pure glycemic ecstasy that the modern scientific mind aspires to. The European Union is sitting on a nuclear arsenal and on medicines—it has ordered five billion vaccine doses for the next two years (11 doses per capita). This means that the current techno-medical despotism, as Agamben said, is behaving like a hard addict. We are one of the few manifestations that do not hesitate to expose this madness, and in doing so, we talk about fruit, integral flour, and integral poetry.

During the pandemic, arts and culture were affected by audience constraints or event cancellations, which inevitably led to financial problems with insufficient state support. How will the pandemic image of the world, in your opinion, affect socially engaged art and critical responses from art positions?

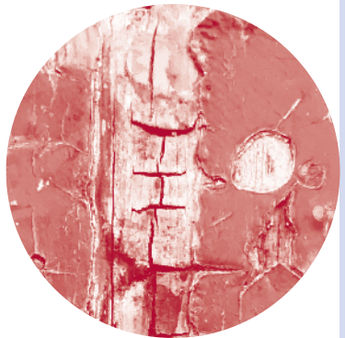
Now is the ideal opportunity for art, without the modifier "engaged". The central authority is behaving absurdly. The criteria determining which places you can and cannot enter without a barcode are completely provisional. An increasing number of the population is losing its basic thought coordinates. We have become psychologically destabilized. Our inner landscape is devastated, and only art can regenerate it. Good thought has become the most important currency. We can make do without food, but we fall into an immune and motivational abyss without a more or less orderly worldview. The words of Baudrillard are becoming clearer every day—the simulacrum, a world with illusion peeled off, a world perfectly disinfected from poetry, is beginning to collapse into a singularity. In such circumstances, art will be an increasingly important enclave of mental stability. Finances in these circumstances become completely irrelevant—the strongest work of art today is the act of gathering people in a physical space, in a park, or in front of a building, and talking. Art has become addicted to the sugar of production, so it has forgotten its basic meaning—ecstasy, enlightenment, risk, but also what Rancière said, that its role is to rebuild social ties where they were destroyed.

America recognized art as the most powerful rocket—it conquered half the world with sugar missiles fired from Hollywood. It injected its vision of life into people's minds, and now everyone is rushing West.

Jean-Luc Nancy states that the Situationist International, referenced by the Almissa program in 2021, was the last major form of radical criticism. To what extent has your personal artistic and activist practice been influenced by the situationist understanding of art, its role in revolution/social change?

Situationism more directly tells what Alain Badiou said in a more roundabout way, and that is the question of the Event or the Procedure of Truth or political invention. This Event or "Situation" is the moment when, in Nietzschean terms, "all values are revalued". It is not just a well-organized struggle for a particular human right but a moment when a new kind of sensitivity is established, one that is deeply connected to thinking. Love is a thought but also a sensory, almost electrotechnical category, which can change the perspective or polarities among divided groups of people. Today, doing so is harder than ever because people have unnaturally merged with their ideological views as though they were brands. They do not dare to propose new hypotheses and be creative, which is actually the key aspect of situationism. Since they can no longer detach themselves from their set-in-stone positions, there is neither an adequate circulation of ideas nor any tangible struggle between the left and the right. We have entered an era of political and even artistic boredom. Conformism has crept deep into our thinking, and real art seeks serious risk. For instance, the risk that someone will accuse you of being a right-winger, such as what happened to Godard or Alberto Moravia. Many are surprised that Pasolini was against abortion simply because they assume that a leftist must necessarily be in favor of abortion. In such circumstances, art with risk, one that sets coincidence in motion, as Baudrillard said, and opens up new possibilities for cooperation between people, that is not necessarily based on stock market logic, cannot be created.

Translated from the Croatian by Juraj Šutej.



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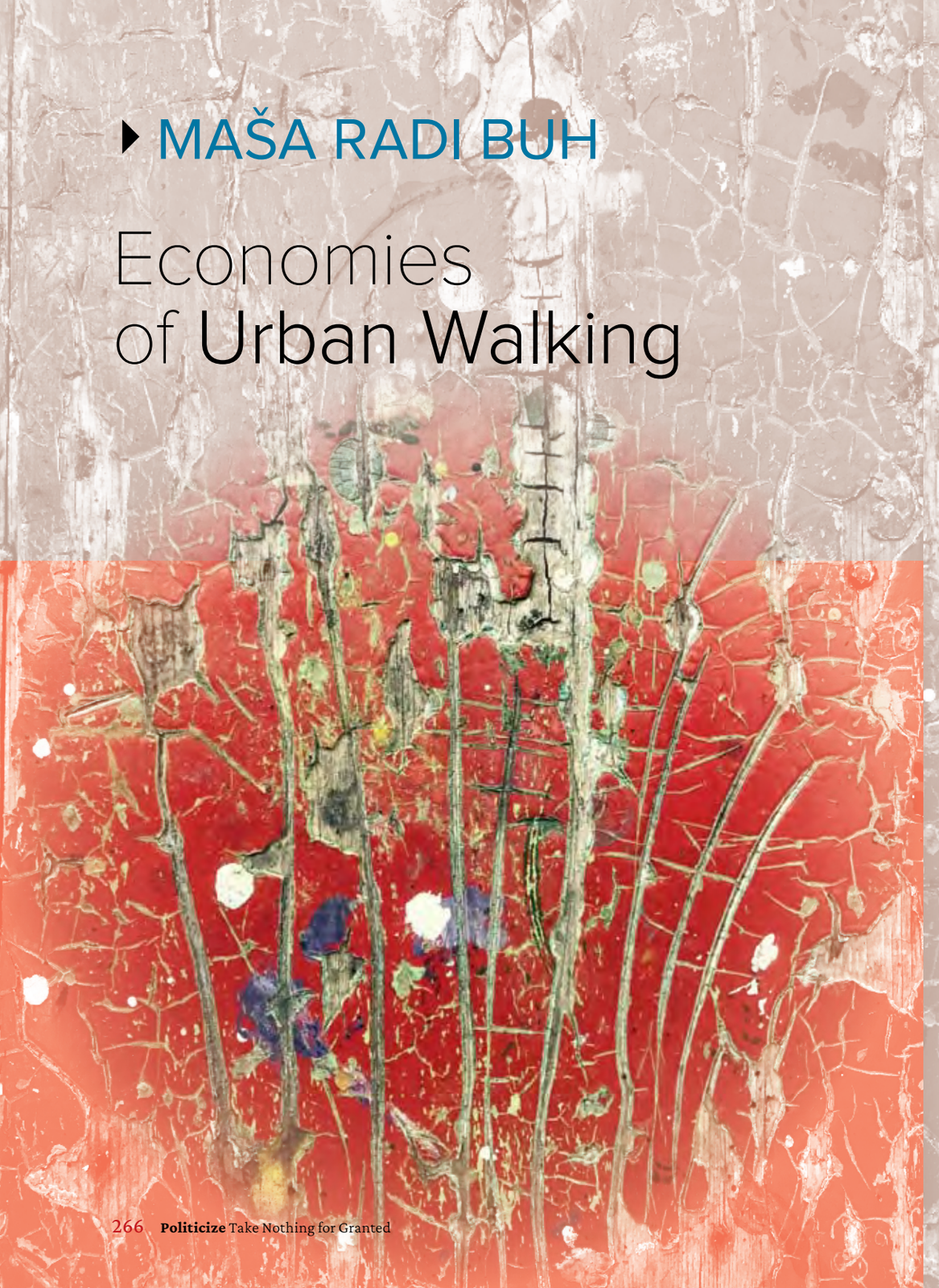
MAŠA RADI BUH

Economies of Urban Walking



Introduction

Mark Fisher (2009) argued that the current society of late capitalism is characterized by the fact that every aspect of it is integrated with mechanisms of capitalism and neoliberalism. He suggested that it does not matter whether a particular activity is primarily connected to the economy. Fisher uses the example of mental health to demonstrate such intertwinement of capitalism and everyday life: The cause of diseases such as depression is diagnosed as solely a fault in an individual's chemical structure of the brain, rather than acknowledging the harrowing living conditions of modern and flexible everyday life as other contributing factors as well. Solving the ailments of capitalism with capitalist mechanisms is most obviously at play in the process of treatment of such diseases. Instead of attacking the problem's origins, the system pushes workers into more and more precarious situations full of insecurity; at the same time, high-profit pharmaceutical companies sell medications to soothe the symptoms (Fisher 2009). Fisher's illustration establishes that no field is excluded from capitalistic economic mechanisms. Even the non-assuming citizen with no interest in the economy encounters them, for example, when walking in a public space or attending a cultural event. Public spaces such as parks or squares are exchanged for profitable apartments or shopping buildings. At the same time, the independent and experimental culture continues to operate under market mechanisms as state support mechanisms are dismantled. Citizens may experience this shift by having less space for protests or rest in green environments. Yet, they might not immediately explicitly identify connections between capitalistic mechanisms and changes in their local environment.

In this chapter, I explore how we can utilize the act of walking to reveal invisible economic principles at work in the public space and their ever-changing economic and social value. To do so, I inquire how multiple frameworks of performance, spatiality, and the social co-influence and co-create each other in telling a story of the specific path taken in a selected performance. I am interested in how a journey, in this case, a walk, is used to expose or bring to light the stories and histories of marginalized spaces, beings, and communities as phenomena happening in the time and space in which they are written. I argue that the analyzed selection of performances uses traveling through urban space by employing the dimension of moving to portray and offer a new perspective of a place by addressing

its economic dimension. In order to further explain this, I will use the framework of "nomadic dramaturgy" by Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt (2008) in combination with notions of nomadic theater by Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink (2015). In the following section, I argue that nomadic performances evoke moments of deterritorialization, which stems from the work of Deleuze and Guatarri (2011 [1987]). Later, I will take a more detailed look into nomadic performances by analyzing two Croatian artworks: *Šetanje napuštenosti* (*Walking the Abandonment*) by Siniša Labrović and *Priroda i društvo* (*Nature and Society*) by Nina Kurtela which take the action of walking and the event of a walk as building blocks for a performance deeply embedded in the local environment.

The COVID-19 regulations forbade border crossing, preventing me from attending these performances. So I decided to reconstruct them based on a combination of promotion materials and detailed descriptions submitted as applications for funding. Since all these sources include precise information on their location, their path, and their participants, I could, from these elements, sufficiently conclude that the practice of walking in their pieces not only touches upon the geographical characteristics of space but includes the social and more specifically economic sphere as well. Once I have discussed the specifics of performances and their integration of walking and moving, I will reflect on their impact on their local environment and the current context of contemporary performing arts in the final section.

The Socio-economic Background of Walking Performances

Culture and the public space both find themselves under the strong influence of capitalistic mechanisms. With diminishing public funding, cultural production must often enter the market space and use the principles of marketing and selling in order to survive. This shift affects not only culture on an institutional level but also individual art workers. Artists now often present themselves as brands and as sellable products. In addition, the precarious work nature dictates that they become their own managers and PR representatives, while the established structure of short-term projects and contracts offers no stability.

Similarly, the public space faces changes as well. It loses more and more of its public nature to the sale of spaces and lots to big corporations or to explicit architectural changes in the public landscape that are structured to prevent loitering by homeless people. Moreover, there is also an implicit for-profit, economic logic in urban planning. The architectural design of certain neighborhoods welcomes specific social classes. It includes planning of services so that their inhabitants do not need to leave their comfort zone when catering to their everyday needs. Homeless people are actively discouraged from sleeping in public places and sidewalks; advertising and panels often occupy the public space and limit or diminish walking space for everyone. Areas or buildings deemed unprofitable that occupy highly rentable or sellable land are demolished—often regardless of their cultural or symbolic value—and replaced by high-end and high-value condominiums.

The culture that exists or happens in public spaces is also under the influence of this economic mechanism. Under the pretense of creating safe or "nice" spaces, the government imposes strict regulations that impact people working in autonomous zones or staging public interventions. Artists from autonomous zones, the homeless, and the poor are increasingly pushed from the city center toward the periphery in order to create a clean and polished image of the city to be presented to tourists, investors, and the upper-middle-class living there.

Hence, resistance to gentrification and the exploration of the complex economic relations at work in public space often happen through performances that use the same public space to offer the spectators a different perspective on the city. One of the most famous examples of such artworks is *Call Cutta* (2005) by the German performance collective Rimini Protokoll. In this event, an employee of a call center in Kolkata, India, guides a single spectator traveling by foot through Berlin's Kreuzberg district using their mobile phone. The conversation operates both as navigation as well as a discussion of local specificities of both locations and uses the element of moving as a tool for local exploration. Kreuzberg's landscape is both a background for personal, sometimes flirtatious, and funny conversations and a map of hidden spots (like photographs of soldiers from India's past) which address India's struggle for independence and its Free India Legion, which actually sought help from Hitler. While the performance's goal is communication, it also unveils secret spots such as the parks, playgrounds, and cellars of Berlin's Kreuzberg district.

In my regional context of Slovenia, examples of performances that use walking as a performance mode are *Hodi.TI* (*2.WALK*, production: CONA, co-production: City of Women, 2017)[1] and *Peskovnik* (*Sandbox*, production: Ljudmila, 2020),[2] both created by Slovenian artists Irena Pivka and Brane Zorman. The specificity of their work is the integration of audio technology to accompany spectators or guide them along a path. In *2.WALK*, the artists dwell on the different experiences of women walking into public spaces on the experience of the potential danger of walking alone (at night), which is—or may be perceived as—different for women than for men. *Sandbox* portrays the degraded area behind Ljubljana's train station, where nature has reclaimed the urban landscape. One walks alongside the abandoned train tracks overgrown by plants—a relic of stalled construction processes—while wearing headphones and listening to a sound recording played through the geolocational app Echoes. The recording reveals the return of sounds from nature during the COVID-19 lockdown. Within the dramaturgical arc of the performance's sound element is a poetic story of a distant future without humans where the place one is walking along will be entirely overtaken by nature, weaving in an ecological note. All these mentioned performances use the situatedness in a public space to question its underlying construction and, importantly, posit moving as a strategy of knowing and exploring the urban landscape. They signify that walking is an important performance element that enables them to activate the spectator to rethink the city and its economic order of public space.

1 See: http://www.cona.si/hodi-ti/.

2 See: http://www.cona.si/blog/2021/06/02/irena-pivka-in-brane-zorman-peskovnik/.

Nomadic Performance

Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt introduce the term "nomadic dramaturgy" to refer to performances that "traverse everyday spaces, often taking the form of a journey" (Turner and Behrndt 2008, 197). They suggest that in these performances, both performers and spectators move through space as opposed to the usual performance perspective, with the spectator's fixed position and movement happening around or in front of them. For Turner and Behrndt, "the journey through the city proposes a structure that is deliberately open to the invasions of the everyday" (2008, 197). "Nomadic dramaturgy" thus refers to the spatial movement of public space performances and their spectators and to the publicness that makes them accessible to the interruptions and impulses of the everyday. In their suggested term, the authors only expand on these two indications. However, "nomadic dramaturgy" offers another layer of interpretation.

The choice of nomadic dramaturgy activates the (physical) engagement of the spectator and offers an experience of literal moving on the way. Opting for a nomadic dramaturgy can aim for an exploration of a larger place or a rejection of a classical theater box while simultaneously actively engaging the spectator physically through walking or traveling. Although Turner and Behrndt do not offer a more expanded explanation of such dramaturgy, I choose to interpret nomadic dramaturgy not only as a description of a physical journey. More specifically, I wish to argue that the aspect of geographical moving also radically defines a performance's internal dramaturgy. When performers and attendees[3] travel

3 Since walking performances avoid the traditional physical divide between the spectator and the performer, accentuated through the divide between the stage and the seats, I suggest the use of the term attendee.

through space during such performances, each choice of movement and location, or more specifically a movement in a location, is there to serve the building of the dramaturgy of physical and cognitive experience. In connection to walking, it can suggest a personal and individual (re)discovery of a place through paths. However, it can also be a more classical journey—an overcoming of certain obstacles to arrive at a final destination. Turner and Behrndt's concept of nomadic dramaturgy addresses only the physical aspect of moving but leaves undefined the consequences/impact of such dramaturgy.

On the other hand, Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink's (2015) work on nomadic performance, which explores various forms of performances on the move (not necessarily walking performances), suggests a reading of the concept of nomadic that connects physical displacement with a metaphorical one. When one is physically moving, it opens a moment for rethinking, revealing, and inverting a territory's conventions of codes. For her, nomadic theater concerns performances through which "conventions are questioned and hence become perceptible", that "traces counter-movements such as the inversion of conventions and the deregulation of code" and "adheres to distinct modes of displacement, that of traversing fields and cutting across territories" (Groot Nibbelink 2015, 25). Groot Nibbelink's notion of nomadic in theater and performance is allied with the strategies of de- and reterritorialization developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri (2011 [1987]; for an overview of territorialization, see Smith et al. 2022).

Here, I interpret territory as the specific codes of a system, such as a system of power or organization, that operate habitually. The two philosophers then refer to de- and reterritorialization as "the movement by which one leaves a territory", by which they discuss acts or actions that alter, avoid, or escape a territory (Deleuze and Guatarri 2011). More specifically, they talk of breaking and forming (new) habits. The notion of deterritorialization thus describes a contrary action aimed at revealing and/or fighting such codes and habits. Groot Nibbelink chooses to ally her concept of nomadic theater with re- and deterritorialization to point out how nomadic theater questions the notion of territory (Groot Nibbelink 2015, 26). One of the examples she uses to demonstrate how deterritorialization happens is the mentioned *Call Cutta*, where "the stage is deterritorialized, as it has no centre, clear-cut borders, or fixed location" (Groot Nibbelink 2015, 25). The revealed and altered codes are connected to a stage's operation and conventional location.

In my discussion of selected performances in this chapter, I opt for an interpretation of nomadic performance that combines the traversing component with deterritorialization; I understand it as a process of uncovering and/or changing granted or invisible layers and codes of particular spaces. Nomadic dramaturgy, as was discussed above, describes a specific journey (whether from one predefined point to another or not is currently inconsequential). Almost all of the time, it deals with public spaces, though not necessarily urban ones, which opens it up to invasions of the everyday. More importantly, nomadic dramaturgy is situated in the everyday. The everyday is from where it retrieves the symbolic frame under which it operates. These codes of everyday life—such as traffic rules—on which it sometimes relies or which insert themselves, sometimes unwillingly, into performances are the basis for deterritorialization in nomadic performance. By intentionally traversing and using public spaces, such nomadic performances (of walking) point out the systems of power at work, more specifically, the systems of (economic) value. Deterritorialization within this discussion is thus not meant to apply to every code of public space. Instead, it focuses on the economic codes that structure, shape, and influence our experiences in public spaces.

Before the beginning of the analysis, a short introduction and description of the selected artworks: *Nature and Society* is a public space performance based on the tale of Hansel and Gretel. The author, Nina Kurtela, starts her path on Zagreb's Trg Europe (European Square), the location of the headquarters of European institutions in Croatia, and slowly progresses toward the northern edge of the city until she enters a forested landscape. Inspired by Hansel and Gretel's bread crumbs, she leaves behind Euro coins during her walk. She aims to explore how the currency's worth changes due to environmental changes. If she begins in the center of monetary and institutional power, her journey takes her to the city's periphery, more specifically, into the forest, where the value of the Euro decreases since, in comparison with the city center, nothing can be immediately bought with it.

Nina Kurtela, *Nature and Society.* **City.**

Nature and Society. **Forest.**

Nature and Society. **Value.** Photo: Tanja Kanazir

Instead of moving further and further away from places of monetary value as well as an outside urban area, *Walking the Abandonment* by Siniša Labrović takes a walk down Ilica, Zagreb's central transport and economic vein. The choice of Ilica, Zagreb's high street—which has been slowly losing its vibrancy—reveals its economic decay and the fates of workers and owners behind the empty storefronts. Abandonment is everywhere. Labrović's companions on the walk are dogs from the local animal shelter who have been abandoned and left to fend for themselves or are taken care of by the shelter's volunteers and staff. Thus, he lets the attendee observe the comparison between abandoned dogs and abandoned workers, offering an analogy of beings left behind because of their supposed uselessness, which is not their own fault. In Labrović's case, walking the dogs alongside the abandoned shops of the Ilica high street brings out the consequences of the current economic problems. While there is a solidarity to be developed toward the abandoned dogs, walking and seeing the empty shops encourages the attendee to empathize with the redundant workforce from large companies or factories, now gone, that used to frequently purchase goods in these shops, which are now also closed. When the author asks the audience to give the dogs another chance, he is simultaneously asking for the rehabilitation of old and "useless" workers who lost their jobs and economic stability because they were no longer of value. The parallel at work in Labrović's concept, which reflects on the relationship between abandoned shops and abandoned dogs, invites the dogs' and workers' abandonment and guiltlessness for the loss of their security to jump off each other.

The choice of walking as a performative method thus reflects two dimensions of economic reality. Firstly, traveling with dogs gives both the walker and the dog a short experience of connection forged through a common walk, sharing the space and time. Moreover, for the abandoned dogs who come from the shelter, it is also a lucky chance to experience the outside world again and (re?)connect with humans. This activity returns to them their primary value in anthropocentric society: their ability to provide support and joy to humans, although only momentarily. Secondly, walking along the high street allows for a brief encounter with the emptying spaces. Also, traversing the Ilica reveals its changing face from its affluent beginning in the tourist-heavy and gentrified city center toward the periphery where economic degradation is not hidden, as it does not ruin the tourist image of the city.

Siniša Labrović, *Walking the Abandonment.* Photo: Tanja Kanazir

Walking along the high street is likened to "window shopping", a popular practice of passing shop fronts and admiring the products on sale, sometimes consciously being aware that one cannot afford them, similarly to Walter Benjamin's flaneur. A street wanderer, who substitutes ornaments of their high-class apartment for arcades, flaneur is, however, distinctly class-based since their wandering is a remedy for boredom that stems from the opulence of all things in life (Benjamin 1997, 36–37). However, another layer of economic value is at play in some cases. A traverse along the street from high-end stores to dereliction offers a change through time. This is the period of walking, just as a flaneur can also be interpreted as an observer of the damaging effects of modernity and capitalism. Abandoned and unvalued subjects (in this case, dogs who also are a metaphor for workers) who remain unchanged throughout this journey come into juxtaposition with the changing urban environment.

Formally, both performances introduce an object, whether human or inhuman, to address the economic dimension of spatial organization and the urban development. The choice of including an outsider, in this case, a bunch of abandoned dogs not usually present in such area, or Euro coins—still a foreign currency in Croatia and even more foreign in nature, which does not operate under economic rules—offers an option to draw parallels between the object and its surroundings. Both abandoned dogs and Euro coins enter the performance with their own connotations and values, whether economic, sentimental, or symbolic. More importantly, all of them are surrounded by the discourse on value. Labrović describes in the press material for *Walking the Abandonment* that the abandoned dogs' owners left them behind in the animal shelter because the dogs' value (emotional, sentimental, or practical) was, without their fault, overpowered by the nuisance they had become to their owners.

On the other hand, the use of Euro coins in Kurtela's performance sides the literal and symbolic value. In some parts of the city, the Euro can already be used as payment. At the same time, concerning Croatia as a country, the Euro be read as a complex symbol of questions connected to the European Union, nationalistic tendencies, and the loss of national currency. The question of where the authors decide to situate these elements or, more precisely, where they travel with them is as important as why they have chosen the particular objects. Euro coins would not have had the same significance if not placed on European Square, and the abandoned dogs would not have sparked a correlation between types of abandonment had they walked alongside preserved and vibrant neighborhoods.

What unites both performances, besides their origin in the local Croatian space and the choice of constructing performances by introducing outsider elements, is precisely the use of walking and their topical orientation toward reflection on the economy at work in a public space. Both deal with value, or more specifically, the process and factors of (e)valuation of particular objects and subjects. In *Nature and Society*, walking is thus posited not so much as a social act but as an act of mapping the change in value. Kurtela's movement, the physical displacement from the urban center to the city's outskirts, makes visible an untouchable and unmeasurable change in the Euro coin's immediate economic value. When she starts in front of important European institutions, someone picking up the coin after her can almost immediately use it to get something in return (although not everywhere, since the official Croatian currency is still the kuna). The further she moves away from the city center, the less (immediate) use and actual value coins will have.

Regarding the world's intensive urbanization, Kurtela's performance inadvertently provides a comment on invisible hierarchies within urban and rural spaces and the financial measures regarding them, meaning that some regions deserve more money because they can return more profit. Moreover, in relation to the performance's title, it also reveals how we approach the value of nature and the value of society. The city as a material manifestation of society and its inherent economic machinery possesses more value than nature, which is currently also reflected in the lack of concrete actions addressing the environmental crisis in the context of which the loss of value is intangible.

I argue that both performances, *Walking the Abandonment* and *Nature and Society*, use the act of traversing—or, more specifically, walking—to encourage a reconsideration or recognition of economic layers of public space. In *Walking the Abandonment*, the act of conscious walking alongside Ilica incites a different perspective. Instead of being there for shopping, the attendees of this walk are there simply to walk and observe, which, for a moment, enables them to put away the narrow-eyed image of shopping and consider the slow degradation in facing the empty storefronts. In this case, intentional walking is the thing that displaces the view on the standard codes of city living as well as the street's position within a city where the economic value is at the forefront. It also offers the participants a chance to escape these codes and enjoy the path as a part of a walk. The walk with abandoned dogs also contrasts with the cleanness and poshness of the city center, where the dogs symbolically do not fit since their owners have deemed them valueless. Had they been luckier in their past or if their future bore a prospect of change, they could be walking as pets and not as animals. Lastly, the abandonment and the metaphor for a contemporary worker that the dog represents challenge the participant to connect ideas about the abandonment with the surroundings they see.

Kurtela, in *Nature and Society*, uses the journey to reveal the economic code of value more explicitly, using the walk to reflect the shift in the coin's value. Leaving the coins on the ground of a city signifies their material value in relation to the space. The coin is put into dialogue with the high financial and symbolic value the physical location possesses. As Kurtela travels toward nature, it becomes more and more apparent that there is less and less value in the coin, telling us that in comparison to the city, monetary value in nature is not the most usable economic mechanism. In the forest, nothing can be immediately bought with a Euro coin. However, things that are of value to us in that forest (if we disregard the price of wood or an acre of land) are also often immeasurable in monetary value. The tranquillity, clean air, and the presence of the trees—all these have little financial value to the everywoman. The performance shakes up what we interpret as value and how inherently connected it is today to a financial interpretation.

Conclusion

The unique performance modes of *Walking the Abandonment* and *Nature and Society* exit the theater space's classic and often closed setting. Artworks in the public space present an opportunity to form a different perspective. They have also proven to represent a clever solution in times of COVID-19 when gathering inside is sometimes prohibited or strictly limited. At the same time, they implicitly reflect not only on the changes in our use of public space after the pandemic when at times even traversing them was prohibited by governmental regulations, but as we have seen, also bring forward the changes in the very role and configuration, as well as the use-value of public space. Set in a public space, the impact of such performances is often more visible, and they are more accessible or attractive to attendees. Symbolic connotations at work in theater can, to some extent, be more easily dissolved in public space, which is indiscriminately open to chance encounters and unplanned interruptions from anyone.

The concept of Labrović's performance is especially inviting in this sense since walking a dog is an ordinary activity and requires no prior cultural education to participate. Moreover, his choice of including local animal shelter residents is an action of tangible help since first-hand meetings with them may offer them a chance to be adopted. Nomadic performances in public spaces are distinguished by their deformalized character and the ability to invite varied groups of people to attend since no protocols (and in COVID times, fewer measures) are necessary to execute such pieces. *Walking the Abandonment* and *Nature and Society* comment on the economic mechanisms interwoven into our everyday. They remind us that these principles implicitly dictate the (public) places we encounter, inhabit, or move through. By opting for nomadic dramaturgy, the already available public space is once again questioned and explored through the act of walking. The traversed paths, which may be out of our daily routines of moving through the city, point out that human movement is generally also governed by economic interests—it depends on where we shop, where we work, and where we can afford to live.

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Audiences, Consider Reception

IVA KOSMOS

Understanding Impact as a Network of Acts: An Attempt at Measuring the Effects of *The Children of Colonialism*

Funding acknowledgment: The research for this chapter was funded through the Creative Europe project CtC - > CtI and by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS) research program "Historical Interpretations of the 20th Century" (P6-0347).

How can we measure the social impact of a cultural institution, cultural event, festival, or performance? This was the question I departed on in 2019 with representatives of Culturgest, a Portuguese cultural institution, before the pandemics halted—and then changed—our roles as curators, artists, and researchers. Our collaboration was a part of the Create to Connect -> Create to Impact (CtC -> CtI) project, which envisioned researchers visiting several European cultural institutions and using ethnographic methods—interviews, focus groups, and participant observation—to assess the social impact of cultural events, such as festivals or performances.[1] Culturgest had a month-long project, full of different events, from lectures to movies and performances, centered on re-narrating the Portuguese colonial legacy. When we started to discuss our research plan and possibilities to measure the impact of the mentioned project, we were immediately faced with pragmatic constraints: resources and possibilities. For how long are we going to measure something? Are we measuring one event or more events? How to define the sample? We decided to lower the scale of our measuring ambitions to stay as concrete as possible. We picked up one performance with a specific aim to trigger, question, change, and re-narrate the dominant cultural narrative on Portuguese colonial history: *Os Filhos do Colonialismo* (*The Children of Colonialism*), co-produced in 2019 by the company Hotel Europa and Culturgest. The performance was targeted to the general public, bult also performed for the high school population in collaboration with several of Lisbon's schools. This was our primary target: we would measure the impact of this performance on youth. In order to do that, I conducted semi-structured interviews with ten students and two teachers from three high schools from different social strata.

The first part of this chapter presents the lightly edited version of my report, as I presented it to Culturgest and the coordinating project partner in the international project CtC -> CtI. As the reader will see, the results of the report are hardly univocal, definite, and unambiguous, meaning that they could hardly serve to simply proclaim that the performance did or did not have some social impact. While there are indications that the performance moved, touched, and interacted with its audience, the question is, should we call this social impact? What kind of impact or effect should we then talk about? What did we actually observe, and did we use an appropriate method? These questions remained unanswered.

1 For more context, see my *Introduction* to this volume.

In the second part of this chapter, I self-reflect on my research and report to address the mentioned questions. First, I present a brief overview of social impact studies and the critique of this practice considering its methodological limitations and shortcomings. Then, I situate my own work in the context of the established practice and use it to reflect on the critical limitations of social impact studies. I also consider what is possible to gain or learn from this type of inquiry.

I

The Report: High School Audience and Their Response to the Performance *The Children of Colonialism* (*Os Filhos de Colonialismo*)

Introduction of the Research and Its Aims

The research was conducted in Culturgest in Lisbon, which acts both as a production house and a venue, offering content ranging from concerts and performances to exhibitions, movie projections, and conferences. The research was centered on the interaction between high school students and the performance *The Children of Colonialism*, co-produced by Culturgest and Hotel Europa and created by André Amalio and Tereza Havličkova. The performance had its opening night during the *Colonial Memories Cycle,* a month-long festival that included performances, cinema, talks, and lectures on the topic of Portuguese colonialism. *The Children* was a documentary performance created in the mode of verbatim and devised theater. It was performed by non-actors telling their own experiences and memories, considering their families' stories and the role of their parents in Portugal's colonial history and the Colonial War/War of Liberation (1961–1974). Performers also presented (recorded) testimonies from other people, mostly their family members, in the mode of verbatim theater: they used headphones to reproduce spoken words by other people. On top of personal and recorded testimonies, *The Children* used a wide range of other performative genres: collective sketches, singing, playing instruments, dancing and choreographed movement scenes, projections of photographs and archival videos, etc.

The Children was performed for students from different high schools in Lisbon on 25 September 2019. This research aimed to conduct interviews with selected students and inspect how they experienced the performance. To complement the understanding of students' reactions, I also interviewed two teachers. I wanted to assess how this performance interacts with students' everyday experience, their individual histories, and their knowledge of Portuguese history. I also inquired whether the performance opened any new perspectives, questions, and views. In other words, I intended to inquire about the possible social impact of the performance.

Description of the Sample

The interviews were conducted in three Lisbon secondary schools with ten students aged 16 to 21. The schools were diverse, considering different educational programs and students' socio-economic status. Students were selected on a voluntary basis.

School 1 is a public school with a so-called general, higher education-oriented program. The enrolment of students is based on their place of residence, and the school is located in an upper-middle-class neighborhood.

School 2 is a vocational-technical school offering a range of programs from technologies to multimedia. The enrolment of students is based on their place of residence, and they come from a lower socio-economic background.

School 3 is a private school with a vocational-technical program specified for audiovisual and multimedia. Unlike the previous schools, this one enrolls students from the whole country. This school mostly, but not exclusively, includes youth from middle-class families. These observations and the selection of schools were made in collaboration with Culturgest staff and the teachers I interviewed.

I interviewed three male and seven female students. Three students were of African descent: two described themselves as Angolans (first generation), and the third one was from Portugal. One student described herself as being from a mixed family. Six students were white and described themselves as Portuguese.

Method: Semi-Structured Interviews

The method of semi-structured interviews left enough space for students to express their own views and experiences. In the beginning, I described the CtC -> CtI project and assured the interviewees that this kind of interview had no right or wrong views and opinions. Then I introduced myself and invited them to introduce themselves. I also asked what kind of experience they had with theater and how and with whom they visited the theater. I then simply asked the participant(s) how they found *The Children*: did they like it or not, did they find it interesting or not, etc. From that point on, the conversations evolved in different directions according to students' experiences. However, I tried to assess two topics: First, their general knowledge of the recent Portuguese history and how *The Children* connected to what they already knew or did not know about the colonial past (e.g., did they learn anything new). Second, I inquired about their experience with the specific form of the performance (devised theater, non-actors and non-acting oriented theater, verbatim theater).

Interviews were conducted in the schools, in classrooms, and in the library. The intention was to set the interviews in a space in which students were used to and comfortable. There were three group interviews (twice including two students, once including four students) and two individual interviews. The method was decided on students' preference; I simply asked them whether they preferred to talk individually or in a group. The goal was again to use a setting that made them comfortable. Interviews were mostly performed in English; I conducted only one interview in English and Portuguese, as one student did not speak English, and the other student translated in her name.

Context

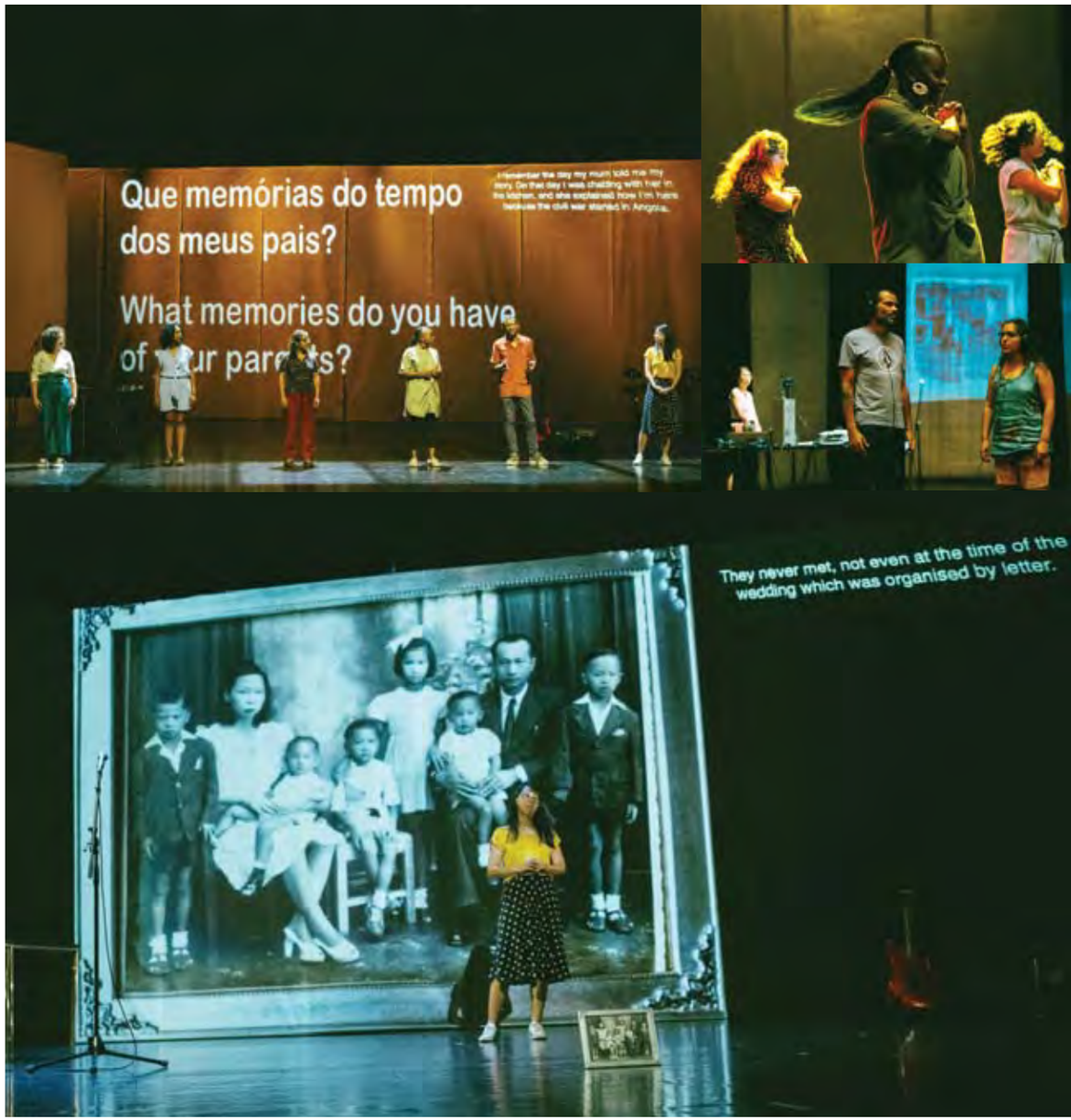
Both the *Colonial Memory Cycle* and the performance *The Children* were produced having a social impact in mind. They aimed to influence public opinion, raise questions, and open the debate about the recent colonial past. Portuguese colonialism ended in 1974 with the military coup and abolishment of the *Estado novo* dictatorship (1933–1974). With these events, Portugal granted independence to Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique, ending the thirteen-year-long Colonial War. However, this part of history is silenced or avoided in public discourse. The colonial period is traditionally presented in schools and media with the celebratory narrative of great Portuguese "discoveries". The discussion about oppression in the colonies and the dark sides of colonialism and war are silenced. The *Colonial Memory Cycle* and *The Children* are a part of the wider trend of "decolonizing" public thought and narratives in Portugal.

Results

All the interviewed students appreciated the performance's intention to talk about what they referred to as "our history". On several occasions, they expressed that they felt the show was speaking directly to them and was about them. In contrast with their teacher's expectations, students expressed a strong need to discuss the recent history and learn from it. Most of them did not feel comfortable discussing their personal history at home. Seeing *The Children* surprised most of the students, as it presented facts and experiences that did not align with their understanding of the collective and individual past. Most of them said that the show had questioned their knowledge, and some said it totally changed their perspective. However, although the performance intended to encourage the audience to talk about the past with their families, students did not intend to go in that direction. They also did not think they would research their family history or Portuguese history on their own. However, they strongly felt that it is the school's responsibility to educate them about the recent history through the curriculum. They also expressed that they would enjoy similar performances and other media, such as documentaries, on the topic of recent history.

Students from all three schools and of different backgrounds appeared to have the same level of knowledge about Portuguese colonial history, and most did not talk about it at home. The only difference of opinion between the different students was about the form of the show. Students from the technical school and lower socio-economic backgrounds disliked the mode in which the performance was done—they were confused with performers using headphones (as in verbatim theater) and with the non-chronological dramaturgy of the events; they also disliked the minimalist scenography and the documentary approach of performers narrating their experience instead of "acting". In contrast, students from the other schools appreciated the aesthetics of the performance. It is possible to connect this to the student's general cultural education and the cultural capital they received in their middle-class families. However, even the students from the school that "disliked" the show were nevertheless attracted to the show in some way and closely followed it. This was expressed by their behavior, their attention, and close focus on the performance that was, according to their teacher, different from how they usually behave at similar events.

We can conclude that *The Children* engaged students in rethinking their past and answered their needs to talk about the past. However, as both teachers and students noticed, talking about the past is a process that cannot be concluded with a single play, debate, event, or artwork. Additional production(s) aimed at the high school population would complement this process and answer students' needs to talk about the past and hence better understand their present. In the following pages, I present a more detailed description of the topics that opened, often spontaneously, during the interviews—students' perception of the colonial past, the perceived role of the school in understanding the past, the appreciation of the aesthetics of the performance, and the experience of relatability to the non-actors, in contrast to professional performers.



The Children of Colonialism. Production: Hotel Europa and Culturgest.
Photo: Vera Marmelo/Culturgest

"I thought that this war was way more peaceful": The Impact of the Performance on Students' Perceptions of the Colonial Past

Asked whether the stories they had seen and heard in *The Children* were new to them, the majority of students (8) responded self-confidently that this is nothing new for them, as they constantly listened to stories about colonial times. However, as our conversations continued, this initial claim was relativized. Only three students said they talked about the colonial period at home (two African descendants and a *retornados*[2] descendant). Only four students (all from the same school) said they talked about the recent history in the history class and the school in general. The majority (8) also said they were not acquainted with the documentary programs on colonial history on the national television RTP. Thus, it remained unclear where they talked, listened to, and learned about the past. Students had a prevailing impression that the past is talked about a lot but also offered reasons to believe that their knowledge was vague and not systematized. In line with that, the information on historical events they had gathered from the performance deeply surprised them.

The two students who claimed they actively talked at home about their family's history were mostly familiar with their family's (side of the) story but lacked the wider historical context and other social groups' perspectives. One of these students, a descendant of *retornados*, was surprised to learn from *The Children* that Africans were included in the Portuguese army. On the other side, an African descendant was surprised that Portuguese inhabitants in 1974 had prejudices against *retornados*. As the conversation continued, several students said that the performance either questioned their knowledge or totally changed their perspective that the war was a minor episode in Portuguese or Angolan history.

> I have learned a lot about my culture that I did not know. War was tragic, people suffered more than I imagined (E., 19).[3]

> My perspective was changed. We do not know the poverty of people that lived in those days. I did not think that there were so many deaths, I thought that this war was more peaceful (B., 17).

> I thought that this war was not a big deal in my family, as my granddad [a Portuguese war veteran] did not talk about it, I had no idea that people suffered so much. It was not a drama, and now it is! I did not have a dramatic idea of it (C., 17).

> My father is from Angola. He has been in war, I do not know what he went through. This kind of made me question how and what I know about my father (S., 21).

On several occasions, the students negotiated between their personal family histories and the wider historical narrative and struggled to evaluate the role of their families in the wider historical context. This happened in one individual interview and a group interview with two students who were close friends. Perhaps both stories appeared due to the more intimate setting of the conversation. Students were white Portuguese, struggling to understand the role of their families in a colonialist context that they perceived as inhuman and oppressive, as was also underlined in *The Children*. One student struggled to explain the difference between the historical events, evaluated as positive, and their negative effects on personal lives: she underlined that she understands that the Liberation movements were necessary but also had a devastating impact on her family. She tried to reconcile contradictory views on the role of her grandfather, who moved to colonial Mozambique:

2 *Retornados* is a term used to designate (mostly white) Portuguese settlers in colonies in Africa, who "returned" to Portugal after the Colonial War and the proclamation of independence of Portuguese colonies (Peralta 2021).

3 Answers are lightly edited, mostly considering language, due to the fact that students were not talking in their mother tongue.

> My grandfather went to [...] work on a farm. He had to go because my grandmom left him, and he was full of debt. Nowadays, we look at that as a bad thing. He went there and kind of stole ... it is not stole ... like money from Africa. Part of me thinks that. But part of me thinks he went there to find a better life (B., 21).

Two students whose grandfathers were in the Colonial War said they could not judge them, as they did what they needed. The performance thus supported the process of re-evaluating the personal and collective history, at least in some cases. However, when asked whether they thought they would try to investigate their family's past or ask their parents about it, some students responded with an uncertain *"perhaps"* and most with a straightforward *"no"*. They explained that they knew their parents and grandparents were troubled with this topic; they did not want to hurt them. Most students also told at home that they had seen *The Children* and briefly described the performance. They reported that their parents showed no interest in the performance and did not engage in talking about their past. As one of the students said, the reaction was: *"No reaction"*.

When some students were asked if they would research more on the colonial past on their own, they responded that they might feel like doing it at this moment but that they most probably would not do it. The reason was simple: *"This is not something that teenagers do"* (E., 19). In other words, other obligations, events, and interests in their daily lives will not lead them in that direction. However, school is the place where they think they should learn about the past.

School as the Place to Discuss the Past

Students offered a range of articulated explanations on why the past is important, its connection with the present, and the possibility to learn from the past in order not to repeat mistakes. Only one student expressed the view "that the past is past, and the present is present"—hence, the past is not worth excessive attention. This is in stark contrast with the opinion of their teachers. One teacher said that students were not interested in the past, as they were focused on their individual lives (on their phones and social media), disinterested in the world around them, and passive. Another teacher expressed that students were not interested in the past, as the colonial story was not as defining for their generation as it had been for the previous generation. While the latter might be true, students themselves expressed that the past is important for society. They also did not talk only about their individual (hi)stories, positions, and needs. When talking about the past, they saw themselves as members of the wider community who have the social responsibility to learn from the past.

> This is important for us to know about that [past] and everything they went through so we can have an open mind (E., 19).

> In history lessons, we do not talk too much about it. It is an important subject for us, my grandfather was also in the war, but he does not want to remember what he has done and lived. But it is important to see other perspectives and learn more; it is too little what they teach in school (B., 17).

> We need always to talk about the past, that awful thing happened, and it is a reality. It is a part of who we are now as a society in Portugal. It influenced our lives, my mom could be a different person, and she is not because of that (B., 21).

> I am interested in the past. It is my story, the story of my parents, it can change a bit how people think. Sometimes people do not want to talk about it, but that decision from the past still influences us today, and we repeat it. If we could see it is wrong, we could just stop doing it (S., 21).

> From the past, we learn the mistakes and things that were well done (C., 17).

> I remember that a history teacher said that problems of humanity are cyclic, so we have to know what older societies have done in order not to repeat failures and have a good solution (D., 17).

As I have already noted, despite the perceived importance of history, the students responded that they were not going to educate themselves on their own. However, when I asked if they would like to learn more about the past in school, the answer was straightforward and even an enthusiastic "yes". This part of the conversation with one of the students included the mentioned enthusiasm:

Researcher: Would you like to talk about that in school?

Interviewee: Oh, yes. In school, yes. At least the facts and what happened on a political level. We talk about World War II a lot, a whole semester, but we do not talk about this [colonial past], we just pass it, and this is closer, it involves us, and we want to know what happened.

Researcher: Would you like to see more plays like this?

Interviewee: Oh, yes. Not only on the Colonial War but also on other things we do not talk a lot about, dictatorship. If we talked and learned a bit more about that. We talk about dictatorship in the school for two weeks, this is not enough! This is more important than World War II.

Appreciation of the Form of the Performance

The level of historical knowledge, the lack of conversation about the past in students' families, and the appreciation of the topic of *The Children* were the same in all three schools. The visible difference between students in the three schools was the way they appreciated the form of the performance. Interviewees in School 2 articulated that they did not like how the show was done, although they underlined that they appreciated the topic and the effort of the performers. They expressed that they would like *The Children* to resemble a historical drama with costumes and rich scenography, produced in a fantasy genre. They said they wanted *"fiction"* and actors who would *"act"*, as that would enhance their feeling of being in an imaginary world. They were also confused with the interviews performed with the headphones in the mode of verbatim theater. They dismissed them as incomprehensible.

> When I watch movies, I really feel like I am in the past. They represent everything, every detail. I like to hear the stories, to know what happened, but here I did not have a feeling that it is really the play, that they are playing the past … I want the play to feel like I am in the past with them (S., 21).

In School 2, I interviewed only two students. They claimed that theirs was the view most of their peers expressed. Their teacher confirmed that he had heard similar comments from other students. The teacher later explained that students' expectations were, in his opinion, based on the blockbusters and video games, which represent most of the cultural production they consume. However, although students expressed their dislike of the performance, the teacher said that they behaved in a way that was different from their usual behavior in the cinema or theater. Regularly, students can be loud, while during *The Children*, they were silent, did not use their phones, and clapped during the scenes, which are clear signs that the performance caught their attention. As the mentioned teacher said: *They saw the play. […] The show was a success, even if they said they did not like it.* The teacher elaborated that the reason that caught their attention was the same reason that made them dislike the performance—they were faced with an unpredictable series of events:

> It is a reason to get them and also a reason why they say they do not like it. It was not a suspectable succession of episodes. Performers can sing, march, talk to us, have interviews, show photos, big photos, small photos, big movies, small movies—a succession of unexpected. It keeps their focus on what will happen next. In the end, they say, "*It is not what we expected*" (Teacher).

The situation was different in the other two schools: the fact that *The Children* is different from the traditional drama was unanimously appreciated. It has to be noted that students from other schools have more experience with theater; some of them visit the theater with their families, and some of them are part of student theater groups. They also noted that they were sometimes confused with the technique of verbatim theater—performers performing interviews with headphones—or that they would get lost in the stories. However, they did not

report that that influenced their general understanding. The dynamic of the show, the energetic combination of music, movement, dance, interviews, videos, and other archival material, was appreciated as something that made them focused and caught their attention.

> It was more experimental, they were playing songs as they were talking about a serious subject, and that shocked me, but not in a bad way. It was different, cool … It is a thing we are tired of listening about, and seeing it in a different environment is nice, fresh (B., 21).

> The whole play mixed a lot of stories, so sometimes I could not understand … But, that was the thing that was making it different; we were not bored, you never knew what was going to happen, so you needed to follow (B. and C., 17).

The Relatability of the Non-Actors and Their Intimate Stories

All students expressed that they could easily relate to the show, as it presented stories from their own history but also because it was performed by non-actors, which helped them identify. The presence of non-actors on the stage made them feel the story was *"real"*, *"authentic"*, and *"genuine"*. Students also admired the fact that non-professionals gathered the courage to appear on the stage and perform in a professional manner. Several said they would not have related so easily to the show if actors had performed it.

They also appreciated that *The Children* did not concentrate exclusively on the "big historical events", such as war conflicts, but on everyday events and private lives. In other words, they appreciated that the performance did not construct the standard historical narrative but included personal memories. Several students also noted that the value of the performance is not only in the final show in the Culturgest but in the process that was, as they suggested, transformative for the performers and helped them establish communication with their parents.

> If these were just actors telling scripts, I would not be that interested. I would stop listening during the play. It is completely different when it is fiction […]. They showed that these are not only characters but real people, which has a different impact on the people [spectators] (D., 19).

> They surprised me, you would not think that non-actors are so good. I think because they were talking about themselves and that made them natural (J., 19).

> They [performers] were strong to talk about it. How they performed was "wow". I would probably start crying. It was amazing. It touched me a lot, it is part of my culture (E.,19).

> They [performers] were not only talking about the war itself, but about the living with the war, that is important (C., 17).

> When we think about the war, we think about soldiers, and we know it had an effect on their families, but we do not know how, we do not normally think about that … So, this is why I liked this show (C., 16).

> Another important thing is that performers got a chance to talk to the parents. There was a girl whose father did not talk. She knew he is suffering but could not help. For her, this must be important (C., 16).

> Great idea to have non-actors because they know the story better than the actors (B., 17).

Conclusion

The interviews conducted in Lisbon high schools reveal the high level of engagement between students and the performance *The Children of Colonialism*. Students felt that the performance personally addressed them and that the performance's topic concerned their family stories and the wider social history. The performance acted as a mediator between what students already knew and the multilayered, multi-perspective, and complex colonial past that is still not discussed in Portuguese society. It made students re-evaluate their perceptions about the recent past and, in some cases, question the role of their families. It made them question what they know about the past, how they perceive it, and how they position themselves toward history and the present moment. However, because of the sensitive character of recent history, students did not intend to talk with their parents and tackle this topic at home.

Nevertheless, they unanimously underlined that learning about the past is a social responsibility that all members of society should perform to avoid historical mistakes and improve society. They expected to learn about the past in the school, which should, in their view, offer a better curriculum and far more opportunities to fulfill this need. They appreciated the performance as a possible way of deepening their understanding of the past. As underlined by teachers and some students, learning is a process; a single lecture, performance, or event cannot fulfill it. There is a need for additional content, including theatrical productions, aimed at discussing the recent Portuguese past.

II

After the Report: An Overview and Self-Reflection of the Measuring Practice, Its Limitations, and Potential

Social Impact Studies and Their Critique

After finishing the report presented above, I departed into a deeper inquiry on the use of the term "social impact" in the arts and attempts to measure it. Regarding that, I would like to use the small-scale measurement in Lisbon to critically and constructively reflect on the critical limitations of established attempts to measure the social impact of the arts. Simultaneously, I also inquire about what is possible to gain or learn from such measuring attempts. To do that, I will first briefly present the social impact studies and their critique and then reflect on my own practice.

When thinking about measuring the social impact of the arts, as I discuss in the introduction to this book, one is redirected to the British context, where one can find the majority of reports on the social impact of the arts. Although the concept of social impact is influential internationally, the British organizations specifically insist on gathering measurable data.[4] However, the practice of measuring the social impact of the arts is also criticized for its methodological flaws, so we should not unreflectively adopt it as a pattern for future research.

4 As it was shown in the study covering the Belgian, Finnish, British, and Colombian understanding of social impact in music, "UK organisations often show a particular focus on measurable and specific social and personal outcomes (because many funders require this). Other countries focus more on general cultural enhancement" (Sloboda et al. 2020, 136).

Critics complain about the lack of robust evidence to support claims of the expected social impact and the fact that there is no unified methodology or consensus on how to study social impact; even more than that, few studies define what they actually mean by impact at all (Reeves 2002; Ramsey White and Rentschler 2005). Belfiore and Bennett state that shortcomings and methodological flaws result from the fact that reports are used for the advocacy for funding of the arts—thus, they tend to overlook anything that might testify against their case (Belfiore and Bennett 2008, 6–7).

The first and most influential report on the social impact of participation in the arts was Matarasso's famous report (Matarasso 1997) which is still referenced and used as a standard for presenting the social impact of the arts (cf. Wearring et al. 2021). Matarasso studied over sixty participatory arts projects and, as a result, listed fifty benefits of participatory arts projects, going from arts being "an effective means of health education", to "encouraging people to accept risk positively", and "opening critical dialogue between service users and providers".[5] Matarasso was part of an independent research agency, Comedia, which later produced a number of reports on different impacts; their biggest methodological contribution was the focus on studying outcomes ("long-term impacts on the participants") instead of outputs ("the artistic product") (Belfiore 2002, 98). Considering Matarasso's and Comedia's influence on measuring the social impact of the arts, it is worth discussing the direct criticism these reports received.

There are two issues regarding the research design of the social impact studies: the temporal frame of these studies and the missing link between the cause and effect (Merli 2002; Belfiore 2002). Namely, the social impact these reports claim to measure should be a long-term change or shift in society. However, the reports are centered on studying the participants immediately after the artistic events, which means that they might be studying short-term, if not even ephemeral effects, while having no method to confirm what happened with mentioned "impacts" after the artistic programs finished, i.e., what were the longer-lasting effects, if any.

Another issue is the (missing) link between cause and effect. In reviewing existing approaches to defining and studying the social impact of the arts, Michelle Reeves points to the fact that different researchers rely on the causal aspect of this idea. For example, they define impact as "a dynamic concept which pre-supposes a relationship of cause and effect", which "can be measured through the evaluation of the outcomes of particular actions" (Landry et al. in Reeves 2002, 21). However, reports "being able to show change in relation to a predefined indicator" are also ignoring that this "does not prove that the change was produced by the arts programme being evaluated" (Belfiore 2002, 99). In other words, there is no proof that the changes are resulting directly from the arts and not from some other source or multiple sources.

While these two issues question the basic logic behind social impact studies, other criticism tackles the lack of research rigor and transparency, which could be, in my view, corrected. This type of problem could be explained by either the lack of methodological skill and resources and/or by the already mentioned "advocacy" spirit, meaning that the "researchers" ignore the aspects that might not contribute to their case. For example, Matarasso based his report on the fifty hypotheses on the social impact of the arts on the data he gathered using a questionnaire answered by participants of artistic events. However, the report does not show the connection between what was measured and the questionnaire. In other words, Matarasso never stated which answers led him to conclude a particular hypothesis about the social impact of the arts, which also led critics to conclude that his research was not "internally valid" (Merli 2002; Belfiore 2002).

The second problem with Matarasso's method was framing the questionnaire: questions were often ambiguous and tendentiously phrased, leading people to answer in an expected manner (Merli 2002; Belfiore 2002, 99). The questionnaire had only three possible answers: yes, no, and I do not know, while the included questions were shaped in the following way: "Was doing something creative important to you?" or "Since being involved have you felt better or healthier?" In this way, correspondents were encouraged to answer positively (by yes) in order to preserve their sense of self-worth, as the questions imply that if participants say "no" they might not have been able to grasp and experience what was expected from them (Merli 2002, 109). Such a questionnaire, says Merli, cannot possibly measure social impact, but "the social desirability of the abstract concepts of 'happiness', 'empowerment' and 'confidence' used in the questionnaire" (Merli

5 More on Matarasso's report and its influence on the British and international understanding of the social impact of arts in the introduction to this book.

2002, 109). Additionally, Matarasso did not reflect on the social hierarchy between the interviewers and interviewees, which might have additionally encouraged participants to answer what they thought was expected of them (Merli 2002, 110). Also, while claiming that arts contribute to "social inclusion", Matarasso did not collect demographic data and was thus unable to state that the projects he inspected actually worked with "excluded" people (Merli 2002, 111).

Apart from the mentioned problems, there were also fundamental flaws in data gathering; for example, although Matarasso stated that he had used a variety of methodological tools (questionnaires, field visits, participant observation, formal interviews, discussion groups, observer groups, and agreed success indicators), the results mentioned in the report were based only on the questionnaire results and in "75% of the activities studied the questionnaires were not even returned" (Merli 2002, 111, 117).

This critique shows that we should be careful in applying an already available research design on social impact. However, this does not also mean that nothing can be measured. What can be measured might sound far less spectacular than the "brave" and direct promises of visible social change, such as the fifty impacts in Matarasso's report. This is shown by some current research which presented methodologically more rigorous attempts to investigate the impact of arts engagement on health and mental and social well-being (Perkins et al. 2022; Tymoszuk et al. 2021). These studies did not focus on any particular work, genre, or mode of production but on arts engagement in general, and they used questionnaires to gather and analyze large amounts of quantitative data, including demographics, engaging from 500 (Perkins et al. 2022) to more than 5000 correspondents (Tymoszuk et al. 2021). These studies confirmed the expected correlation between people practicing or consuming arts and their well-being. However, this correlation is far from definite statements about art as a tool to fight social exclusion or health problems. On top of it, they also found a correlation between depression and loneliness and high arts consumption in some social groups. In the end, such research recognized that without other contextual factors, they could not explain why engagement with arts is positive for some and negative for others (Tymoszuk et al. 2021). This conclusion brings us closer to the idea that has also been expressed in the conclusion of my report, that it is hard, if not impossible, to talk about the impact of one particular phenomenon but rather about an inter-correlated network of factors.

While the latter research is based on large sums of quantitative data, which has its benefits, especially considering the sample's representativeness, it is also critical not to neglect qualitative methods, offering non-numerical data and deeper insights into reactions and connections between audience and art. In order to comment on qualitative research on social impact, I will self-reflect on my Lisbon report, published in the first part of this chapter. First, I will observe how the already mentioned critique of social impact studies is reflected in my research practice and then look at the possible lessons and insights we can take from such research.

Self-Reflecting the Measurement and Rethinking the Impact

As I listed in the past paragraphs, social impact studies tend to focus on the cause-effect link and quantitative measurements or indicators of social impact. For this reason, I am reluctant to call my research a study of social impact. I find it clearer to say this was an attempt at analyzing audience reception, an effort to find out about individual responses to a particular play[6] . The concept of audience research leaves the doors open for different kinds of responses, not only "impactful" or measurable ones. Academic research on theater audiences focuses, on the one side, on theoretical consideration of the historical, cultural, and sociological conditions that form different types of audiences and define the possible positions and relations between the audience and performers/performance (cf. Bennett 2013; Bishop 2012; Rancière 2021). On the other side, there are attempts to study concrete experiences of concrete people by using quantitative analysis of demographic data and qualitative methods, like interviews and focus groups (cf. Edelman, van Maanen, and Šorli 2015; Wilders et al. 2015). Although research on spectators' experiences has been growing lately, it is still "an ongoing project that will reward further effort" (Edelman, van Maanen, and Šorli 2015, 222), so we could hardly say that there is a clear consensus or guidelines on the methodological approach. This small-scale study in Lisbon is thus also an attempt at testing the ground for the possibilities offered by such research.

6 I thank Blaž Lukan and Jana Renee Wilcoxen for proposing additional literature on theater audience research.

Let us first look at the studied sample: Ten students (and two teachers in the role of informers) from three Lisbon schools are not representative of Portuguese youth or youth in general. On the other side, they represent three distinct social groups, offering insight into the social differences in reception. My practice revealed some of the already mentioned problems in reaching the representative sample, considering including vulnerable groups in the research. The idea of social impact in both British and European contexts is centered around the concept of "social inclusion",[7] yet there was criticism that "excluded" groups are not involved in the social impact studies (Merli 2002). Although I nominally included students from a lower social background in my research sample, this did not solve the problem, as these students were more difficult to reach than their peers. Concretely, on the day I arrived at the school, some students I was supposed to talk to were simply not there. The teacher, who acted as my contact point, explained that there was a miscalculation in the students' schedule and that they unexpectedly went on a field trip. It was hard for the teacher to get other "volunteers" to speak to me, so he offered another opportunity to meet the students; however, I could not do it. My research was part of an international project; I was time-constrained and had to leave Lisbon on a set date.

The details that I am mentioning are only seemingly banal. On the one side, they reveal the complex social reality of the deprivileged class, which cannot easily fit into inflexible and time-constrained research patterns. On the other, they point to the project-based framework under which art and academic research are performed today. Due to time constraints and other restricted resources, projects tend to avoid difficult encounters in favor of simpler or ready-made solutions.[8] We could suppose that projects with a precisely defined timeline and steps in the research process—which is often required by the funders—are inclined toward avoiding dealing with social actor(s) or group(s) which require more time and effort while not granting the envisioned outputs or results.

At the same time, my research has shown that including the "socially excluded" is necessary, as the factor of difference in responses to *The Children* was students' cultural and social capital and background. Students from the lower class, who do not have an opportunity to become theatergoers and are not regularly introduced to theater by their families, were also not able to decode the theatrical format of *The Children* and did not enjoy it—although they were attracted to it, as witnessed by their teacher. In other words, the students were potentially affected by the performance while not enjoying it, which one respondent also confirmed. The dynamic between "not liking something" and simultaneously being drawn to the unfamiliar form points to the complex process of negotiating meaning and decoding the play. This could not be further assessed due to the small sample of interviews. However, a deeper insight into this could question the usual practice of offering simple(r) cultural forms to what is perceived as an uneducated audience. On the other side, there is another possible way to explain students' "unusual" behavior in theater. The research on young adults, who are not accustomed to cultural codes of theater-going, has shown that they experience theater on two equally important levels (Reason 2006). On the one side, there is the stage and everything happening on it. On the other side, there is the experience of being immersed in an unknown cultural setting; students thus focus on the context and observe who is in the audience, how they behave, how they are dressed, and how their peers react to the unknown setting and the performance—do they sigh, clap, etc. Again, we must conclude that if we want to go deeper into the question of (social) impact, we cannot ignore the wide network of contextual factors.

Another reproach of social impact studies is that they measure the short-term and not the long-term effect of artistic events and experiences. I had worked with Culturgest and the teachers from the involved schools to plan the interviews in Lisbon in the days following the performance. This reveals our implied belief that the effect of the artistic event is the strongest after the performance and slowly diminishes with time. Interestingly, even the interviewees offered a comment on this temporal aspect. Most of them claimed that they were *"touched"* by *The Children,* said that it had preoccupied their minds, offered them a new and unexpected view on their national and family history, and made them re-think what they knew about it. However, when asked about the possible long-lasting effects of these revelations and the performance, students were very skeptical. When asked about the possible changes in their individual behavior and attitude toward the past, they resisted the idea that a specific artwork could change them.

7 More on social inclusion and the critique of this idea in the introduction to this book.

8 An early critique of the project-based artistic events, including participatory art, was expressed already in the 1990s in the known essay "Artist as Ethnographer" by Hal Foster (1996).

This becomes even more interesting if I reveal another critical point of my research, and that is the fact that my questions were sometimes tendentiously framed. I envisioned the research as a semi-structured interview to avoid such questions and open the space for students to express themselves freely. However, this was not always realized: students' answers were sometimes short, and silence would reside after them. This was perhaps due to the power disbalance between us, the fact that I had spent a very short time with them, the language barrier, and the un-articulated expectations about the appropriate behavior (one of the teachers inquired if I was *"satisfied"* with their interviews). In order to foster conversation, I resorted to asking questions in line with: Would you talk with your parents about Portuguese history/your family history after seeing *The Children*? Or: Would you research more into Portuguese history after seeing the performance? Despite my leading the students in a particular direction and encouraging them to talk about the longer impact of the performance, they resisted this idea. They stated that they would (most probably) not talk with their parents and that they would not engage in historical research on their own. Even though the performance was *"effective"*—in terms of "touching" them, getting their attention, and making them question their historical memory (for a brief time)—students and teachers articulated that it was not enough for them to actively engage with and/or change their attitude to national history and cultural memory. One of the reasons for rejecting individual active engagement with the social memory was a pragmatic one: *"This is not something that teenagers do"*. With this, they resisted crucial ideas embedded in the notion of social impact: the principle of cause and effect and the idea that art could and should motivate individuals to change the conditions of their lives. Students did not recognize themselves in the role of the (collective) game-changers. However, they strongly felt that it is the school's responsibility to educate them about the recent history through the curriculum. They also said they would enjoy similar performances and other media, such as documentaries, on the topic of recent history. Their teacher articulated the same: only a network of different actions, including artistic events, could bring about the shift in social perception.

This doubt regarding the long-term effect(s) of an artistic event, along with the recognized potential of the artistic event to move and affect temporarily, raises two questions: A) Does it make sense to address and measure the social effect of individual artistic gestures; and B) Is it at all reasonable to measure the effect of arts in isolation from the wider context and social set-up? It is thus important to note that this research does not suggest that *The Children* (and arts in general) have no effect, but it raises the question of whether we should understand and talk of social impact as a singular act. Perhaps we should instead think about it in the plural. Or consider the idea of impact as the wider network of artistic and social gestures and acts gathered around some common agenda, such as opening the perspectives on the colonial legacy in our Portuguese case? In other words, as also said in the introduction to this book, should we not think about impact rhizomatically, as part of a network ingrained in the broader social tissue, defined and elaborated by the people, events, politics, expectations, history, memory, rituals, traditions, and also new social aspirations? Can we think beyond the cause-effect logic, which disregards the complexity of the social structure and social life? While recognizing the "failure" of the single artistic act to have a lasting social effect, the students' responses also testify to the power of art to capture them at the moment, to make them pause and rethink. This also testifies to the need to think about art, and social life in general, much more holistically and rhizomatically. If we stay under the typical modernist cause-effect framework, the ephemeral and elusive—and powerful and potent—effect of artistic events can even appear as its weakness. However, if thinking about social impact as a network or multitude of gestures and acts, the immediate effects (and affects) caused by artistic works are very important acts and steps in the slow process of shifting social perception.

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JASMINA JERANT

"Like Mushrooms After the Rain"

Social Impact of Feminist or Herstory Tours Around the Globe

Introduction

In recent years, the number of feminist, or *her*story, guided tours and walks has grown significantly worldwide. Some tours are promoted as tourism or cultural tourism products, others as exclusively artistic events, and some as pure activism. What they all have in common, regardless of their nature or the origin of the idea, is that they want to unravel the women's history, which is otherwise almost forgotten, invisible in the cities, where there are only a handful of monuments and almost no streets dedicated to women. As if women had been erased from history and collective memory. By mapping women onto urban landscapes, the tours enable the possibility of new, feminist, and gender perspectives on the cities and their histories, or rather *her*stories.

As a member of a global community of creators, authors, and guides of feminist tours, I have co-authored and guided four tours in Slovenia so far. In this article, I draw from my praxis and personal experience as a feminist, a woman, an activist, an amateur researcher of women's history, and a political scientist. I've observed the effects of the tours I've authored and guided for almost five years now, and I've noticed their social impact in various areas. Stemming from my personal and professional involvement, I present the observations in this article and ground my claims, above all, in the responses of the audience, the media, and various institutions.

To delve even deeper into the phenomenon of feminist tours, I wanted to compare my experiences with similar tours around the world. I prepared an open-ended questionnaire and sent it to the creators of three other existing Slovenian tours (in the cities of Ljubljana, Celje, and Novo mesto) and to the Global Network of Feminist Tours, which Urbana Vrana Institute co-founded. The Global Network of Feminist Tours presents "a map of individuals and collectives that run tours dealing with feminism, feminist movement(s) and women's herstory(-ies)" (Ptich 2020). For this article, I received responses from Buenos Aires, Paris, Rome, Reykjavik, Vienna, and Washington, DC.

In the questionnaire, I focused on who the authors, creators, and guides of the tours were, their backgrounds, their reasons and motivations for launching the tours, how the tours work, how they develop them, with whom they collaborate, what they have observed since the launch of the first tour, and their plans for the future. Additionally, I focused on their way of guiding, specifically whether they use a lecturing or storytelling approach (Wilson 2006; Frank 2012; Frlic 2020).

I was interested in this side as I prefer the storytelling approach instead of stating numerous facts. Storytelling leaves a stronger mark on the audience, so the stories stay with them even much later on. Hence, some of the (also political) battles for the revival of the *her*story have already been won just through the story. Hence, in this article, I explore the connection between storytelling and the feminist and herstory tours, regardless of their environment or origin, in achieving a particular social impact.

Perfectly enough to conclude this Introduction and before stepping into the transformative world of feminist tours, I need to mention that shortly before turning in this article, the team from Novo mesto succeeded in their years-long persuasion of the reluctant municipality to finally name some of the city's streets after women. The team's feminist efforts have finally borne not one … but *four* streets in Novo mesto named after women!

The Problem of the Invisible *Herstory*

Despite its long, varied and rich history, in the Slovenian capital Ljubljana, less than 3% of monuments and memorials are dedicated to women. It is similar with street names. Among Ljubljana's some 1,600 streets, less than 50 of them are named after women (Lešničar 2015). Most of these are short (some barely around 100 meters), often dead-end streets scattered on the city's outskirts or in industrial zones. Even in the very center of the city, only one street is named after a woman, Josipina Turnograjska, from the first half of the 19th century. However, it is a basically a short, hidden driveway that ends at the industrial warehouse doors of a large department store. It is as if women had created nothing and left no lasting impact, no mark on the city.

It is similar in other cities. In Celje, for example, no street is named after the world-famous writer Alma Karlin, one of the first European women who circled the globe alone. The capital of neighboring Austria has only 8% of streets named after women, says Conny Zenk, founder of RAD Performance, which has been running feminist art festivals and tours since 2014 (Zenk 2021). In addition, most of Vienna's streets bear only surnames, so one cannot discern whether the street is named after a woman or not. Furthermore, Zenk emphasizes that despite the lack of streets named by women in Vienna, *"there is an alarmingly high number of public places and streets that are still named after 'politically questionable' persons".*

All of the included creators of feminist tours were very critical of their cities' policies concerning the aspect of women's history. Even in Iceland, a country that, according to the annual Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum 2021), has the highest gender equality in the world for the 12th time in a row, the creator and guide of the Reykjavik Feminist Walking Tour (Reykjavík Feminist Walking Tour 2021), Tinna Eik Rakelardóttir, notes: *"Tourists sometimes get a little deflated to hear how things are really in the 'equality paradise' Iceland, but they also get inspired by the things we have gotten right, and there are quite a few that are fortunately going well"* (Eik Rakelardóttir 2021).

The reasons for the invisibility of women's histories are varied. The fundamental reason, however, probably lies in the fact that the mapping of individuals and their achievements, as well as highlighting their role in the co-creation of the space, also depends on the one who has power over what becomes history: "History is always the history of those who tell it. One of the reasons why this is probably so is that those who had the most words in public historiography, in the public discourse of historiography, were not interested in this particular part of history", explains Manca G. Renko (in Mayer 2021), a historian and co-author of the first Slovenian herstory tourist guide *A Path of Their Own: 25 Excursions into Women's History,* edited by Tea Hvala (2021), a renowned Slovenian feminist activist and author (see Hvala 2021).

Attempts at Elevating Women's History in Ljubljana

If historiography has been silent about women, and women, consequently, have been absent from public space; if history is the narrative of the one who tells it, then maybe women should tell the story (of) themselves if no one else wants to. "Today, a traveling woman is actively looking for something different, and to find it, she needs information from women about women because their version of history, the Other version, is in many places still undocumented or simply not known enough" (Slapšak 2021, 5). In order to achieve the optimal version in some indefinite future, we need to start changing the narrative right now. *"One of the biggest challenges in the urban landscape is making a different narrative possible. The utopia of a feminist city must have been lived today"* (Zenk 2021). Guided feminist tours and walks present an attempt at the feminist city through the elevation of herstory. The pretty much common stance of the interviewed tour creators reveals that they truly are going beyond the tourist offer: We want to finally expose women's history.

In Slovenia, the first walk through women's history was created within the International Festival of Contemporary Arts – City of Women, organized annually in Ljubljana since 1995 by the City of Women – Association for the Promotion of Women in Culture (see City of Women 2021b). In October 2013, director, performer, and architect Barbara Kapelj from Generator Institute set up the *I'm Walking Behind You and Watching You* guided tour (see Mesto žensk 2013). The idea for the concept stemmed from her interest in the history of women in her city, and especially in the Old Town, where she had often walked with her grandmother as a child: *"I wanted to explore how women lived there. I wanted to get to know my female roots and also look at how I can identify as an artist and whom I can take as an example"* (Kapelj 2021). The event had a distinctive artistic character: the guided tour presented various performances as an accompanying activity in the apartments and houses, on the paths through the Old Town, and at the junctions of those paths. Later Kapelj shortened this same walk and developed a new guided tour, *Ljubljana Women* (see Ljubljančanke 2022). She now executes it only as part of other projects but keeps its artistic character through the interpretation of poetry and excerpts from literary works of female authors. When asked if she sees any social impact from her tours, Kapelj answers briefly and tellingly: *"The tours began to develop and spring up like mushrooms after the rain"* (Kapelj 2021). And this observation is not far from the truth.

Since Kapelj's first tour, quite a few have developed in Slovenia, including those of which I am a part. In summer 2017, Gregor Bulc from the Urbana Vrana Institute conceptually designed the *Ljubljana Feminist Tour* (Urbana Vrana 2021), while Sabina Potočki, a coordinator and executive producer of many art projects, as well as a feminist activist, wrote the draft of the tour's content. I joined the Urbana Vrana Institute that year. I soon got their draft of this beautiful cultural tourism product in my hands to complete, adapt, and edit to my preferences in terms of content and locations. The tour was Ljubljana's first daily, regular tour on this topic for local and foreign tourists.

Ljubljana feminist tour. Photo: Nada Žgank

Since I also have a personal feminist background, I enjoyed this work. I aimed to convey the message about women from the history of Ljubljana as effectively as possible to as many people as possible. Like Kapelj, I drew ideas from my personal background. I added an element of storytelling and avoided listing years and biographical minutiae. I thought that narration might leave a more substantial effect on the listener. I did it purely by *feeling* and out of instinct and had no idea I was using many elements of the increasingly popular *storytelling* (Wilson 2006).[1] Some of the decisions possibly originated from my amateur background in theater, as I used to perform in various events and performances from my early childhood to my student years.

The *Ljubljana Feminist Tour* came to life in July 2017 and is still regularly performed as a guided two-hour walking tour through Ljubljana's Old Town to offer a reading of the city from a gender perspective. It takes audiences through past struggles for women's rights and present-day gender issues. They can hear stories of female artists, scientists, political leaders, urban architects, nuns, activist groups, teachers, etc., and relate them to the places we visit. In 2020, there were two new tours that I co-created, but because of the pandemic, they only had a few repetitions. One is the *Ljubljana Women of Letters Walking Tour,* and the other was the *Ljubljana Feminist Bike Tour* (for both, see Urbana Vrana 2021b) that took to the less-traveled paths out of the city center.

Finally, in 2021, I helped set up the fourth tour, which was also the first bus tour in which I was involved. The City of Women Association, the publisher of the abovementioned tourist guide, *A Path of Their Own: 25 Excursions into Women's History* (see Hvala 2021), put it together. "The bilingual Slovenian and English guide was published simultaneously with the guides to Croatia and Northern Macedonia" (City of Women, 2021a) as a part of the international *Women on Women* project (Creative Europe Desk Slovenia, 2021). The bus tour covered partial content from the Slovenian guide and went to four different places in the western region of Slovenia related to women from the local history.

1 That this was a form of storytelling became clear when two of the most acclaimed Slovenian storytellers—Ana Duša and Špela Frlic—explained so.

Ljubljana feminist tour. Photo: Katja Goljat, Urbana vrana

Common to all of the aforementioned tours is the desire to compensate for the lack of women's history. Transmitting the message, inscribing stories in the collective memory, and, thus, transforming the spaces through the audience that visits them. A noble intention. But does it actually materialize?

Responses of the Audience

Responses of the audience testify to the social impact of the feminist tours. From the start, the tour was mainly attended by female foreign tourists, aged 20 to 40, who were either personally or by profession or activism connected to feminism. The highlight came in 2019 when a visitor from Iceland informed us that she created her own tour in Reykjavik: *"I felt like the tours on offer [in Reykjavik] did not mention women's contribution enough, and I felt like this had to be rectified. [...] After going on that [feminist walking tour in Ljubljana], I got inspired to start my own tour with a similar focus in my country, and did so the following fall, after a few months of research"*, said Tinna Eik Rakelardóttir (2021), creator of the *Reykjavík Feminist Walking Tour,* in an interview.

The Slovenian public also quickly found out about the tours in Ljubljana. The media's interest in the tour was particularly important in spreading the word. Since the first media coverage in the autumn of 2017, daily newspapers, various magazines, and journals, including foreign ones, all sorts of online platforms, blogs, websites, and national and commercial radio and television stations have published about fifty interviews, articles, and reports. That also counts the last year and a half of a more or less complete freeze.

In 2018, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, Amnesty Slovenia gifted the City of Ljubljana a statue of Eleanor Roosevelt (Božič 2018). Her granddaughter Laura Roosevelt and great-granddaughter Truda, who visited Ljubljana at the time, also took part in the tour. After the tour, Amnesty Slovenia wrote: "[The Ljubljana Feminist Tour] left a lasting impression on the guests [...] by revealing the hidden female face of Ljubljana. [...] and Laura and Truda Roosevelt are already thinking about having such a great tour in their home town, too" (Amnesty International 2018).

At some point, the tour was so popular that it would get fully booked in less than two hours after the online bookings opened. People exchanged information through social media and personal communication. Some returned to the tours twice and brought others with them. In addition to individuals and private groups from abroad and in Slovenia, more and more cultural and academic institutions were booking the tours either as part of their events and festivals or for their guests. Political institutions were also booking the tour for the guests of their conferences or workshops.

Among all the institutions, we are the most honored by the educational institutions that bring their students. Some of the faculties of the University of Ljubljana bring them every year. Milica Antić Gaber from the Faculty of Arts brings two groups of students in the subjects Sociology of Gender and Sociology of Gender and Sexuality. One of the students, Luka Benedičič, wrote, among other things, in his lengthy commentary on the tour: "The biggest impression on us, I think, was how the tour was from the beginning to the end embedded in the context of space and time, which are not somewhere else or from someone else, but they are ours, here and now. Women have not been forgotten only abroad or by our great-grandparents. We also need to talk about them" (2021).

Veronika Tašner from the Faculty of Education organizes some of the pedagogical activities in her elective course Gender and Education through the tour. For this article, Tašner said she books tours every year because it allows students *"a different, interesting, and at the same time professional entry point into the topics that we discuss in more detail during our subsequent meetings in this course"*. Second, she says she finds the tour relevant because it *"is attractive, as it invites forgotten or under-represented women of our past to our collective consciousness and memory in an innovative way"*. Third, for her, the tour is inspiring and motivating: *"It gives future educational professionals the opportunity to think about gender in different contexts that they can use in their classrooms, in working with students, and in other activities that take place in educational institutions"* (Tašner 2021).

Two professors from the Faculty of Social Work, Vesna Leskošek and Darja Zaviršek, attended the tour in their free time. Vesna Leskošek, who has also researched the history of women's movements, took part in the bike tour and noticed how tours could work as a good means of communication, as the tour initiates discussions between participants and the exchange of information among people, *"There was a man who came out of curiosity about what new could be told about women, whether they had any role at all, or would there be only famous women (writers) presented or something else. And he left not only with brand new information but also with a changed view of history"* (2021).

Darja Zaviršek, who took part in this year's bus tour, believes *"Tours have a social impact as they popularize women's history, represent a form of education, and open up opportunities for informal and formal conversations on this topic"* (2021). Both Leskošek and Zaviršek agree that curricula in schools and colleges could include tours: *"They learn so little about women. Even in the first years at the faculty [...], they cannot list more than five female names from Slovenian history"* (Leskošek 2021).

The Faculty of Social Sciences was also interested in tours. Tanja Rener, professor emeritus of family sociology and women's studies, invited her PhD students to see the tour. Alenka Krašovec invited me to present the tours at a guest lecture (via Zoom application) in the frame of the Women and Politics classes; the students expressed their enthusiasm and asked many questions after the presentation. The Municipality of Ljubljana staff also attended the tour. Ljubljana Tourism, an organization established by the Municipality of Ljubljana that fosters

development and promotes tourism in Ljubljana and the Ljubljana region, brought its entire team and, consequently, also offered cooperation and promotion through its website (see Ljubljana Tourism 2018).

On the Social Impact of Feminist Tours

The Case of Ljubljana

In my experience and observations, the feminist tours in Ljubljana are popular for two reasons. Firstly, they present an obviously missing view of local history, which everyone in one way or another interested in it enjoys finally being accessible. Secondly, I claim that the credit goes to the storytelling approach, as I deliberately avoid lecturing or stringing together biographical data. Here, I present features of the feminist tours that classify them as contemporary, urban performative storytelling that envokes change (Frank 2012).

The tours are successful in making the audience remember the story. It stays with them; it "resonates". Thus, the tour also works as an important educational tool, as it helps them better memorize individual names and their stories. Much more so than if one read them and then tried to memorize them. Špela Frlic, performance storyteller and artistic pedagogue, draws attention to this vital aspect of storytelling: "My experience is that the stories you hear from other narrators (contemporary or folklore) are recalled differently than the ones you read. The narrative you hear imprints on you as an experience. If the performance was good, the physical presence of the narrator and the quality of the performance (voice, rhythm, tempo) will also be recalled" (Frlic 2020, 43, fn25).

This is the charm and power of contemporary artistic or performative storytelling, which, however, does not necessarily require an artistic acting background from the narrator. Still, "[M]any, if not all, storytellers [...] are applying many of the skills, techniques, and devices that actors use" (Wilson 2006, 39).

According to Frlic (2020, 39), these are rhetorical figures, non-vocal means of expression, facial expressions, eye contact, movement, and a striking presence. I use some of these elements, including the storytelling arc, dramatic pauses, voice acting, humor, and interaction with the audience through gestures and looks. Veronika Tašner notes that it truly makes a difference if the tours are properly conducted: *"The tour has charismatic guides who spice up the tour with their unforgettable presence, virtuoso ability to tell stories that attract and resonate with it us long after the tour. Their wide range of knowledge in various fields and the passion with which they guide is what certainly contributes to the success of the feminist tour"* (2021).

Ljubljana Feminist Tour. Photo: Nada Žgank

However, as storytelling guides, we are neither actors nor traditional folklore narrators; we are "non-traditional storytellers" who educate (Frlic 2020, 40). According to Ben Haggarty, we are probably placed among amateur or hearthside storytellers. According to Joel Schechter, we are among unofficial storytellers, as we serve not those who have power but those who do not have it (see Wilson 2006, 17).

The narrator's personal investment is as important in contemporary storytelling, the "organized storytelling events for adults" (Frlic 2020, 157), as it is in the feminist tours. Walter Benjamin understands the storyteller as a political critic embedded into the community he serves (Wilson 2006, 56). What is more, "Benjamin identifies the storyteller as a subversive, an artisan whose job it is to offer meaningful narratives as a way of developing strategies for change. The storyteller is not only a community's link with its past, its history; it is also its connection with its future" (Wilson 2006, 56). We, feminist tour guides, are similarly personally invested in the stories. Stories are important to us. We are feminists. This is our personal and political engagement. At the same time, we are a part of the community. In a subversive way, we want to connect the community with the past through the stories we share to make changes in the future.

However, the audience is not a silent and passive observer but is a co-creator of the story, as, without the listener, the storytelling cannot happen (Frlic 2020, 30, 45): "The listener is not merely a listener, but a potential storyteller, whilst the storyteller is also a listener-in-waiting" (Benjamin in Wilson 2006, 57). We see the immediate relation to feminist tours. Stories about the history of Ljubljana's women would not have been heard. They could not have had an effect if someone had not listened to them. Women's history is recreated and reborn through a listener who is also a "potential storyteller" who will share the story on. A guide, a "listener-in-waiting", shows up on each tour when I learn something new from the audience. We discuss their personal stories and the materials that upgrade the tour during the event or even after it when having coffee, sometimes chatting for hours, exchanging opinions, deepening knowledge, and our relations. We are becoming a community with the same goal. To learn as much as possible about women's history, to spread it even further. However, not every audience internalizes the stories in the same manner. Usually, I observe the audience and adapt to it; I change the narrative approach according to the context, which is also a feature of contemporary storytelling (see Frlic 2020, 23, 39).

Through connecting to the audience, the tours, just like contemporary storytelling, co-create community as "a verbalized collective or individual experience reminds us of our personal stories and experiences" (Frlic 2020, 45), which makes us all realize, and partake in the emergence of mutual connection, is that we all share the same human destiny (Niles in Frlic 2020, 45). In fact, through perpetual reassembly, "stories become one of the bases around which collectives assemble, from couples to social movements" (Frank 2012, 15).

Ljubljana Feminist tour. Photo: Katja Goljat, Urbana vrana

Furthermore, stories work symbiotically with people, objects, and the environment— the space in which they are told. The environment influences them, and stories then, in reciprocity, morally mark the space, which then again reminds people of the stories heard (Frank 2012, 39). Thus, through the unfolding of a story, even tours live in symbiosis with the spaces through which they move. They mark these spaces and remind people of what they have heard. Because stories, even after the tour, if I use Frank's point, "live in objects" (2012, 39). I get a common response from my audience even much later after the tour that confirms this: *"I will never see the city the same way again. Every time I pass that location, I remember the story"*. The story resonates out of an object.

As already indicated by Tašner, the tours also contribute to collective memory. Moreover, Iva Kosmos wrote in ZRC SAZU's newsletter *Gender and Science*: "[The Ljubljana Feminist Tour] carries out so-called 'memory activism' and makes sure that the achievements of past generations do not disappear from the collective memory" (2019). An essential aspect of remembering is that the story stays with the listener. It deals with the past to foretell or warn of the future, succeeding in it by preserving the memory as stories.

After all, the true narrator engages politically and, through stories and storytelling, creates a set of strategies for confronting the present, reversing injustices, and exposing the lies of those in power (Benjamin in Wilson 2006, 58; see also Frlic 2020, 83). "The easy location of [stories'] resonance is in human's memory traces; stories are held deep in memory" (Frank 2012, 40). This is only possible not through information or data with its "short life span", but through storytelling, as it "preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time" (Benjamin in Wilson 2006, 56). Benjamin's storyteller is supposed "to pierce the myths perpetuated by the dominant governmental, religious and social institutions. Since these institutions legitimize themselves by fabricating mythic systems justifying and extolling their power, the genuine storyteller is by necessity a subversive. Wisdom in a world of lies is subversive" (Zipes in Wilson 2006, 56–57). Certainly, this ties to feminist tours as well. They break the myths of history, they are subversive in their core. They are more than just a performance, and instead "a tool for cultural empowerment, education, social regeneration, therapy, reconciliation, raising of political awareness, and so on" (Wilson 2006, 119).

A storyteller, concludes Frlic (2020, 155), is, according to Zipes, an anti-authoritarian who reveals the mechanisms of social power and connects people to the community (in Frlic 2020). His or her act is, according to Cristina Bacchilega, also a social act that, besides being artistic, also points toward cultural transformations (in Frlic 2020). Relatedly, Arthur W. Frank claims that when storytelling focuses on "people experiencing various kinds of disadvantage and oppression", it is also an "enactment of resistance" (Frank 2012, 77).

Feminist Tours Around the Globe

Besides Ljubljana, there are currently two other tours in Slovenia—*Women's Footsteps* in Celje and *The Forgotten Half of Novo mesto* in Novo mesto (see Pozabljena polovica Novega mesta 2019). Both premièred in 2021. The city of Ptuj also launched its tour, but it came to a standstill after the première in October 2020.

From a global perspective, several tours, including the Slovenian ones, joined the Global Network of Feminist Tours, which allows tour operators to communicate via an online application, share examples of good practice, help each other with advice and information, as well as support local activism through sharing stories online. The network plans to set up a website and other tools in 2022 for even more effective networking to spread the word about herstory.

Online data show that the first-ever feminist tours can be dated to a decade ago. Unfortunately, I did not manage to get in touch with their authors, but it seems that the first was launched around 2011 by Viennese professor Petra Unger. Sometime around the same time, or in 2012, Andrea Pető, a lecturer at the CEU, and the guide Anna Lénárd set up the first tour in Budapest. Then, in 2013, the first Ljubljana tour was born, and in 2014 the media artist, Conny Zenk, launched the first artistic bike tour in Vienna as part of the art project RAD Performance.[2] Later on, in 2017, the Ljubljana Feminist Tour was established. Other tours mentioned in this article were created between 2018 and 2021.

Most of the tours operate in cities and high-density metropolitan areas. They are set in or around city centers, except for the bike tours that lead away from the city center or even to the *"suburbs, the periphery of the city (and even) connecting small villages"* (Zenk, 2021). Some of the tours connect their paths with natural surroundings. The *Reykjavík Feminist Walking Tour*, for example, goes around a pond, while the Celje and Novo mesto tours take participants along rivers. All tours, though, largely lean on the buildings and surroundings as a reference point. Even more, Paris's *Street Art & Feminism Tour* (see Feminists in the City

2 RAD Performance, whose founder is media artist Conny Zenk, provides diverse bike tours in Vienna and in Graz: *City Of Our Own, Sound X Tracks, City Of Noise, Dance Your Bike!, Ratchet Bike Hike, Art Ride X*, etc.

2021) bases its feminist conversations on the immediately present street art and interprets it through the "feminist gaze".[3]

Most of the authors and guides are female, between 35 and 44 years of age; a few of them are younger. In Washington DC's *A Tour of Her Own* (2021), they are also between 55 and 60 years of age, differing from the RAD Performance (2021), which, rather than separately, brings different people and institutions into dialogue in a co-created tour—revealing as it unfolds—as opposed to a scripted tour.

Paris. Feminists in the City. Photo: Thomas Billaudeau)

Authors and guides are generally highly educated or very experienced, the majority coming from the humanities and social sciences, and sometimes arts backgrounds, including journalists, writers, media and visual artists, entrepreneurs, as well as museum curators and tour guides, and as in Paris, also students. All of them, however, are in one way or another connected to feminism, either through personal interest or educational or professional backgrounds. They all also decided to create the tours due to the lack of women's history, or herstory, in the public spaces and/or existing tourist programs. However, in Celje, the tour was created to accompany an exhibition at the Celje Museum of Recent History (MNZC 2022). Curators and tour authors decided to add the tour to the exhibition as a more innovative and effective approach to presenting biographical details of the women included in the exhibition. Then, in Novo mesto, the tour originated from the unsuccessful bid to the municipality to place thirteen sculptures dedicated to women. The collective around the project decided to do the tour to remind the city of its "forgotten half" and to transform the project's operation to reach its initial goal. As a result, if not monuments, Novo mesto just recently got the aforementioned first four streets named after women.

Generally, the tours focus on particular women's history that they want to highlight. For example, the Paris tours were initially meant to focus exclusively on feminism to break the taboos and negative stereotypes and bring feminism across to those who are not feminists. However, with time they realized they were doing much more than just talking about feminism: *"We suddenly were not just talking about feminism, but also about women who were erased from history as we realized there were none"*, says Julie Marangé, co-founder of the tours (2021). Then, the *Walk Buenos Aires With Feminist Perspective* (see FemiTour Buenos Aires 2021) focuses on the role of several fundamental women in the conquest and expansion of gender equality rights and their presence in public space. The *Feminist Tour in Rome* (see Witty Tours Italy 2021) also includes stories on how rapes changed the city's history, while the Vienna tour wants to conquer the city as a utopia of feminist urban history: *"Public spaces, squares, and streets are questioned and staged in the context of subversive perspectives"*, said Jeannete Pena (2021), the tour's author and guide. Or, as in the case of Novo mesto, "pointing out also the obstacles women had to overcome in their personal and professional life; highlighting the pioneering roles of these women" (Pozabljena polovica Novega mesta, 2021).

When preparing and creating the tour, the authors of different tours around the world were surprised by many findings, even though they thought they were quite informed in women's history: *"[That] the most famous sculptor in Iceland had a wife that was a sculptor too, and that she had paid for the majority of his studies with her salary, [was a very] negative surprise. To discover the little credit she has gotten in Icelandic*

3 The Parisian collective Feminists in the City runs seven different feminist tours: *The Witch Hunt, Street Art & Feminism, Louvre & Feminism, Visit Montmartre/Pigalle with Hysterical Feminists, Women at the Musée d'Orsay, The Life of Simone de Beauvoir,* and *The Women of the Père Lachaise Cemetery.*

art history", says Tinna from Reykjavik (Eik Rakelardóttir 2021), who majored in art at high school and was shocked to learn how many female artists Iceland had. In Celje, though, they were up for a nice surprise that involved interested public: *"The granddaughter of the first headmistress of the girls' school, whose life no one has researched yet, contacted us and sent us her biography that she made and various materials she kept about her"* (Repar 2021). In Buenos Aires, they found out "that there were very few (monuments) and at a great distance, so it was impossible to unite them in a walking tour" (FemiTour Buenos Aires 2021). Therefore, they decided to tell the story of women represented in the streets.

Buenos Aires. Photo: FemiTour Buenos Aires

A Tour as a Responsive Organism

In my experience, tours are constantly developing. I call it "a constant work in progress". There is always some new information or finding, and even though tours have a basic backbone, they are like a living organism. Other creators' answers suggest the same. Many of the tours have been enriched since their launch, and some of the content also came from the audience. Barbara Kapelj wants *"to make it as personal an experience as possible, a personal experience of various stories. I know a lot of stories; I'm just adding them. It's about performance. Always alive, different, connected to the audience"* (2021). Similarly, the *Street Art Tour in Paris* is never the same, as *"the street art is always evolving, so the tour is evolving as well"* (Marangé 2021).

An interactive audience is an important and necessary element of the tours. Even in Reykjavik, the local audience is up for a surprise. *"Locals always mention that even though they knew about feminism, it's good they get reminded of the issues, and how they didn't know most of the things mentioned on the tour"* (Eik Rakelardóttir 2021). While in Vienna, the *RAD Performance* puts special emphasis on the interactions and contributions from the audience, as well as a program with workshops and the dinner or party time after the tour: *"I find the opportunity to exchange the ideas after a ride particularly important"*, emphasizes Zenk (2021) as do other tour guides who mention the vivid and rich discussions with the audience during and after the tours. Often tour creators keep communicating with the audiences after the tour via emails or social networks, sometimes developing new collaborations and collectives.

As has been made clear above, most of the tours prefer the storytelling approach. The Icelandic tour takes their audience through storytelling and pictures to a particular point in time and uses artistic tools of expressive facial mimic and voice. In Rome, they do a combination of storytelling and a lot of historical data, which makes for *"a mix of education, while still creating a dialogue"* (Pena 2021). Meanwhile, Austrian tours are very artistic in approach, using dramaturgy and collaborating with artists and collectives while also using music as a landscape, even concerts along the way, video projections, sound and video installations, etc. In Buenos Aires, they, at some point, also included costumes and performances.

Occasionally actors or other artists, writers, philosophers, famous feminists, or professors join the tour to add an extra touch. RAD Performance once *"invited a queer-feminist bicycle collective to perform together on various locations in the city"* (Zenk 2021).

Buenos Aires. Photo: FemiTour Buenos Aires

The variety of approaches shows that contemporary storytelling does not have one common denominator. It confirms Frlic's claim that performers span their skills "between informal storytelling, standup, improvised, pantomimical, highly stylized movement and theatrical storytelling and so on" (2021, 38–39).

Inevitably, as the tours resonate with the city, they are in direct relationship with municipalities and institutions. Some cities openly support the tours, like in the case of Buenos Aires, where the Buenos Aires City Legislature, a central part of the Government of the City of Buenos Aires, declared the project "of tourist and cultural interest". In Reykjavik, on the other hand, the city has not responded to the tour at all. However, the media has covered most of the studied tours. In Novo mesto, they estimate that they have had a greater reach through the media than usual cultural events in Novo mesto do. The general public is very supportive of the Novo mesto project, particularly elderly women: "We recently published a survey about the project with our partner DRPD NM, where we received a very good response and a lot of support from those responsible" (Pozabljena polovica Novega mesta 2021). The social impact extends to different lengths, as indicated in the above examples.

Importantly, the creators and guides also stand by their tours with a political stance: *"I talk about several sensitive topics that I don't want people to have any doubt over where I stand, like racism, ableism, LGBTQ+ issues, etc".*, points out Tinna from Iceland (Eik Rakelardóttir 2021). Along with the same themes, she also adjusts the tone, voice, and face in response to the context and the audience. Washington, DC's tour aims to create a sustainable culture of women's guided tourism for its *"ability to ignite social change"*, points out Kaitling Calogera (2021), founder of *A Tour of Her Own*. The RAD Performance, on the other hand, connects different institutions, associations, activists, artists, experts, and collectives in each of the tours: *"I have developed a strategy of cooperation in order to address the widest possible audience from different areas"*, says Zenk (2021). Furthermore, Novo mesto reached another milestone by having high schools book the live and online tours, while the Paris tours also get many tour requests from high schools.

And finally, the pandemic situation. During COVID, some tours from the Global Network Feminist Tours ceased to operate. Others occasionally managed to transfer their activities online. In Paris, some tours were upgraded with *Feminist Masterclasses*; others hibernated, waiting for better times and making tours only by request. *"The pandemic forced us to reinvent ourselves and think of a new format, online. Currently, we are returning to the on-site format, and we do a tour of approximately two hours. But we also do online experiences that last between an hour and an hour and a half"*, says the Buenos Aires collective. Interestingly, during the pandemic, Novo mesto tours expanded its offer to high schools, enabling the tour to operate and survive. RAD Performance's *City of Noi*se tour was actually a reaction to the COVID situation as the cooperation with record companies enabled concerts in public spaces on bicycles.

In any case, tours are more effective when going live, with direct contact with the audience. Hopefully, the pandemic times will stop and enable the feminist vehicle to continue in its best possible version to bring the herstory to the world from one person to another.

Conclusion

Feminist tours around the world are springing up like mushrooms after the rain. Despite a few setbacks due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the tours are lively, growing, and are getting new versions and new places. I could only present a few here, but more and more new tours are growing on almost all continents. Hopefully, they will not get discouraged by the current situation but instead will gain new motivation from their own social impact through the storytelling of the much-neglected theme. Such tours strengthen communities by their inclusion into the educational arena and thus provide an opportunity for political and social action; they can even change the perspectives of new generations. To finish with a storytelling touch, the tours will persevere even after COVID-19—as, after the rain, there is always sunshine that elevates, nurtures, and empowers.

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KATJA KOBOLT

Negotiating the Impact of Literature for Children in Early Socialist Yugoslavia

Funding acknowledgment: The research for this chapter was funded through the EU Horizon 2020 research and innovation program project "Picturing Modernist Future: Women Illustrators and Childhood Conceptions in Socialist Yugoslavia" (2021–2024; Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 101024090).

In the chapter, I follow the concept of the social role of literature for children in the first decade of the post-war (re)establishing of publishing for minors in socialist Yugoslavia (1945–1955). On the ground of a close reading of selected sources, I follow the questions: What was the envisioned place of literature (and also *pars pro toto* other fields of aesthetic experience) in the socialist society in becoming, particularly in children's lives? What could or should artistic (particularly literary) production do *for* children? How ought it do that? These questions will help portray the complex picture of the revolutionary historical experience in socialist Yugoslavia, particularly regarding the envisioned impact of literature for children in the socialist society in becoming and the general place of children in it. My particular focus thus belongs to the envisioned relationship between artistic (mainly literary) articulations and their primary addressees—children.

I consider different writings and sources on the role and modes of literature for children. I especially regard the legacy of the "conflict on the artistic left" of the 1930s, with the central question of how and what kind of artistic production is needed to impact the renewal of society in socialist terms. Even though the selected writings discussed here are of different genres and when first published, they surely experienced different receptions in terms of their cultural, political, and/or professional reach, they can nevertheless be considered as objectivations of past discourses concerning cultural, literary, and artistic production, here, especially for children.

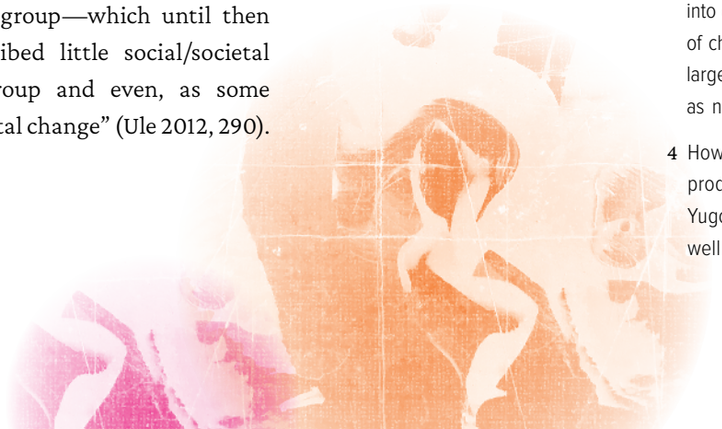
The sources I pay attention to in my search for historical articulations of the role of literature for children are as follows: an artistic manifest—the foreword by Dušan Matić to Aleksandar Vučo's surrealist narrative poem for children *Podvizi družine "Pet petlića"* (*The Fine Feats of the 'Five Cockerels' Gang*) from the year 1933; the programmatic essay on Soviet children's literature and publishing for minors by Maxim Gorky from the same year, which also reverberated in the post-war Yugoslav publishing for children; and the 1955 speech by Mira Alečković, a writer, poet, and editor in publishing for children, active in different cultural-political initiatives at the time. I especially read Alečković's contribution in relation to Gorky's programmatic essay on socialist publishing for minors and in regard to the question of the autonomy of arts (and science), which marked the pre-war "conflict on the artistic left" as well

the post-war Yugoslav socialist cultural-political discourses. Alečković's speech allows for a "view" into the then-pertinent questions about the impact, troubles, and aims of the socialist Yugoslav literature and publishing for children.

(Situated) Historical Context

To understand the discussions about children's literature, it is important to note the relationship between (the production and reception of) works of literature and the subjectivation of children, all embedded within the subsequent ideas and discourses around art and its social role in general. Ever since the Enlightenment and particularly since the French Revolution, which was followed by a proliferation of different emancipatory, mainly socialist or liberal ideas in the 19th century, the question of subjectivation, and the place and the role of culture and art in it, advanced to socially and thus politically important questions. Artistic institutions joined other social fields, where people not only came together as masses but also in a specific manner (e.g., cf. Lessing *qua* theater; cf. Anderson 1983 *qua* print; etc.). In the institutions, here predominantly of culture and art, a *persona publica* in/of civic life was cultivated, and societies were collectively imagined. However, the subjectivation into *persona publica* was also regulated and restricted to those allowed to *res publica i*n the first place, mainly bourgeois men. Following the October Revolution and the democratization processes of the 20th century happening elsewhere, the question of the masses' entrance into the public domain intensified. Thus, the questions of the social role of culture, and art, whose addressees obviously proliferated in terms of class, gender age, and sometimes also race and ethnicity, were reopened with a new urgency.

In the context of socialist modernist teleology and the endeavor for improving the lives of the masses, children as a demographic group—which until then was (especially outside the bourgeoisie class) ascribed little social/societal significance—advanced to a significant societal group and even, as some researchers claim, to "a symbolic representative of societal change" (Ule 2012, 290).



After World War II, which in Yugoslavia was won along with the socialist revolution,[1] children thus started to enjoy not only greater attention and active social protection (Jeraj 2012) but also more intensive social and political subjectivation, especially through the consequent promotion and implementation of education, including aesthetic education, that was supported by different sectors.[2] Consequently, as already in the post-revolutionary Soviet Union[3] and elsewhere in post-war Europe, also in socialist Yugoslavia, literature for children developed remarkably.[4]

1 The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was founded after World War II in 1945 and as a state existed until after the Yugoslav-dissolution wars, which are dated differently in various parts of ex-Yugoslavia from 1991 until 1995.

2 Already before the war officially ended, the periodical *Pioniri* published an appeal from the Pioneer organization to children, to prepare, once the enemy is defeated, for their new task: Learning (Ognjanović and Prelić 1982, 210). Following the Soviet model and attaching to the pre-war Communist periodicals for children and also, even if tightly structured, pre-war Communist organizations of children as well as the armed units of pioneers (children) within the armed resistance in 1942 at the 1st Congress of the United League of Antifascist Youth of Yugoslavia (USAOJ) in Bihać, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Pioneer Organisation of Yugoslavia was established. After the war, the organization substantially supported the extra-curricular education of children (Duda 2015, 40). Among the priorities of the Pioneer organization in supporting children in this take is explicitly mentioned equal access of all children to "cultural goods (theater, film, radio, and similar)" (Duda 2015, 40). Thus, alongside schools, diverse publishers for children and Pioneer Homes (Pionirski domovi) were established, where writers, artists, and cultural workers worked for and with children (Ognjanović and Prelić 1982, 216, 217).

3 The recent, integral study of Soviet publishing for children *The Pedagogy of Images* (Balina and Oushakine 2021) offers an extremely well-founded investigation into Soviet publishing projects for children, its phenomenology and discourses accompanying it. There we read that within the Soviet context as early as in 1920s not only political but also research endeavor was invested into children's literature. Next to political commissariats, bringing "together experts in the field of children's readings" also "new think tanks and research units" were organized and the first large-scale investigations started, e.g., on children's reading practice by Pavla Rubtsova, as well as networks of professional exchange and collaboration (Balina and Oushakine 2021, 12, 13).

4 However, it took a while for the metadiscourse on literary production (and later also other artistic production for children) to articulate and institutionalize a valuable bibliography regarding the Yugoslav socialist context of literature for children is provided by Idrizović and Jenkić (1989) as well as for the Slovenian context by Blažić (2021).

However, the immediate post-war revolutionary time was, like all other areas of social and private life, marked by a search for new revolutionary forms that could support socialist subjectivation. This search started already before the war and revolution. Following the two revolutionary decades in the Soviet Union, which especially since the 1930s took an authoritarian path,[5] global revolutionaries of the interwar period searched for appropriate socialist forms. Also, Yugoslav revolutionaries in the interwar Yugoslavia (1919/1929–1941) fought over the proper new forms that would truly lead to emancipation.[6] At stake in the realm of culture, artistic, and intellectual production was not only their autonomy but *pars pro toto* the freedom also *in/of* other realms of life. The fight over the question: What is freedom, and how can it be achieved was also articulated on the level of "stylistic formations" (Flaker 1986). On the one side, there was the social, political, and thus educative tendency of socialist realism; on the other, the (artistic) freedom or the autonomy of modernism, especially in the avant-gardes—in the Yugoslav case, particularly its surrealist, constructivist, or Zenitist articulations, or *l'art pour l'art* in Miroslav Krleža's words (1952). The Yugoslav experience, already before the war and before the establishment of the socialist state, was thus marked by "conflict on the literary left" *in* and *out* of which the post-war discourses on art, culture, and knowledge production evolved.

Dušan Matić's collages.
From: Vučo 1933.

5 Caesuras in Soviet culture were the years 1932, when many cultural and artistic initiatives established in the 1920s were canceled; and the year 1934, when per decree of the Writers' Union of the USSR, socialist realism was proclaimed as a norm.

6 The debates on the appropriate forms marked the Communist movement globally: From Moscow and Leningrad (especially in the 1920s), to Madrid/Canary Islands (magazines like *Octubre, Nueva Cultura and Gaceta de Arte*), New York (the magazine *New Masses,* 1926–1948), Mexico City (*Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art* by André Breton, Diego Rivera, and co-authored by Leon Trotsky in 1938), to Belgrade (magazines *Nadrealizam danas i ovde,* 1931–1932 and *Danas,* 1934) and Zagreb (magazine *Pečat,* 1939).

"Desire-picture"

Even if for surrealists, as also other avant-gardists (and artist/literates in general) and thus also for the Belgrade surrealist circle,[7] children were not the primary addressees of their creativity, in the following, I turn to the first publication of the "novel in verse" or a "narrative poem" for children by Aleksandar Vučo, *Podvizi družine "Pet petlića"* (*The Fine Feats of the 'Five Cockerels' Gang*) (Bošković and Morse 2022, 2).[8] I particularly pay attention to the foreword authored by Vučo's surrealist colleague Dušan Matić, who also contributed visual collages to this 1933 Surrealist Edition, a Belgrade-based book series. With its method of surrealist photo collages accompanying poetry, and with different surrealist methods and concepts repeated on the textual level ("the wall, the marvelous, spacing/doubling, and the interval"), the edition is "a rare example of an avant-garde photopoetry book for children […] and simultaneously a seminal representation of the collective surrealist movement […]" (Bošković and Morse 2022, 4, 2). In their recent translation and study, Aleksandar Bošković and Ainsley Morse (2022) analyze *The Fine Feats of the 'Five Cockerels' Gang* in relation to surrealist methods and aesthetics as well as within the historical context of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Communist movement. They observe that due to the active censorship in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, production for children offered a realm where authors could speak freely and "get away with it" (Bošković and Morse 2022, 12).[9] They also acknowledge the aesthetic programmatic nature of the work—in "[… positioning] an example of how the new Yugoslav children's literature could look"—and the orientation toward the Soviet avant-garde production for children on the one hand and folk tradition and fairy-tale on the other (Bošković and Morse 2022, 14, 17). In addition, with Matić in his foreword as well as with Vučo in his poem and a later interview, Bošković and Morse observe the promotion of childhood as an age of specific historic agency due to children's nonacceptance of "norms and conventional morality" and "the borders between the real and imaginary" and following the path of their own truth and freedom and are thus "genuine surrealists" (Bošković and Morse 2022, 15).

In the foreword to this photopoetry edition, Dušan Matić, who after the revolution advanced to different important positions in cultural institutions, from theater to literary ones, following Vučo's poem, departs from the description of the pre-war childhood as the age of intensified (social) violence (Matić in Bošković and Morse 2022, 48).[10] The art of storytelling, mastered by adults, nurtures children's imagination and is a way for children to escape the violence imposed on them by adults (Matić in Bošković and Morse 2022, 48).

> And if the grannies and aunties and mamas have told all the stories they know, the kids beg them: "Go on, tell it again!" And those stories would never have an end either. It's only fatigue and bad moods that lock the babbling lips tight. Only kids live amidst this magic and wonder. They shut their eyes tight and think that just as soon as they reopen them, they will really find themselves in the magical lands told about in those stories and tales. And woe to the grannies if they mix up even one word! Then the kids will settle down. They'll forget about the slaps and smacks, the drudgery. And the grown-ups know how to pinch them where it really hurts. […] But these grown-ups really are incomprehensible creatures. They know how to tell stories so marvelously. And Ivan forgets everything. He just thinks: "If only they'd keep telling stories without ever stopping and if only I could live in that land!" (Matić 2022, 48).

7 Members of the Belgrade surrealists circle were also actors within the debates on the artistic left.

8 Vučo's poem was first published in 1931 serially, in the daily ***Politika*** (Bošković and Morse 2022, 4). Vučo being blacklisted after the introduction of dictatorship in 1929, the poem, along other Vučo's works for children (*The Journeys and Adventures of Brave Koča, The Bicycle Gone Mad*) was published under the pseudonym Askerland.

9 *The Fine Feats of the 'Five Cockerels' Gang* marks in the Serbian literary history in the opinion of researcher of literature for children Jovan Ljuštanović "[t]he poetic discontinuity" to previously established styles of lyrical expression, especially by Jovan Jovanović Zmaj (Ljuštanović 2016, 118).

10 The *topos* of unhappy childhood in pre-revolutionary world, is also characteristic of Gorky's novel *Detstvo (My Childhood)* from 1914, which Gorky in his 1933 programmatic writing explicitly names as the norm to outline the pre-revolutionary childhood experience.

Further, next to making the violent experience of childhood more bearable, literature invites children also to verify the reality over ethical principles and transcend it with imagination. Matić writes about children's work and the work of women and men of the working class, who cannot live properly from their work, while rich bourgeoise children can play. The insight into social injustice is embedded in skepticism toward religion: How could God create the whole world in only six days if "twenty-seven workers [were] working dawn to dusk across the street from his apartment, building a house for the rich grocer Toma?" (Matić 2022, 50). With reference to Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Matić repeats a surrealist thesis on the construction of the new, more just world by the ways of imagination and art:

> this enchanted land is here, quite nearby, somewhere right next to him. He senses that wonderful things didn't only happen to fairy-tale princesses or magic winds—they also happen to the children and grown-ups all around him [...]. They [children] know that the current of a river can be changed, if people put their minds to it; or that seas separated for centuries can be reunited across great distances (Matić 2022, 51).

Matić concludes with an artistic-political manifest, inviting the readers to decompose the usual order of images and things and recombine them into new forms, enabling new functions:

> Scissors draw. Books without pictures are useless, says Alice in Wonderland. Books with pictures can at least be looked at. In Russia all the children's books have pictures. When you've looked at the pictures a hundred times and get tired of them, let the scissors out to graze on them. Scissors are quicker than a kangaroo: snip off that fellow's mustache and paste it onto the stove. Cut off the little girl's legs and glue them to a door. Why should doors always been only open or closed, let them take a walk. [...]
>
> This is how you get a cut-and-paste picture. A picture-opportunity, a picture-feeling. This is how you take immobile picture-tombs and turn them into a living picture, a life-picture. This is how you bring together pictures parted forever and how you get the pictures you want: desire-pictures. In order to make a better order for people and for children, an order that would not be a tree-lined alley, a model, a bench, that would not be torture, what needs to happen is to scatter the existing pictures, alleys, models, benches etc. in every direction, and that these pictures, alleys, models, benches etc. humanely explode (Matić 2022, 52).

Matić's loud articulation (in the foreword and by the visual collages) of the importance of the decomposition of traditional forms *qua* artistic interventions led by imagination and play toward autonomous and free life corresponds with Vučo's textual level. In the poem, children who need to obey and be bent by (social) violence into obedient servants are involved in the collective feats, where at the end, each one of them invests their talents to establish as a group their own happy life on an island away from the norms of adults and social violence. The picturing of children as historical agents of an anti-conventional, self-determined life, who are led by imagination and technological development, transcends the realm of literature and art dedicated to children and corresponds to the modernist insistence on the autonomy of art/life, typical for historical avant-gardes, to which Matić dedicated himself.

Give Children Their Literature. From: Gorki 1945.

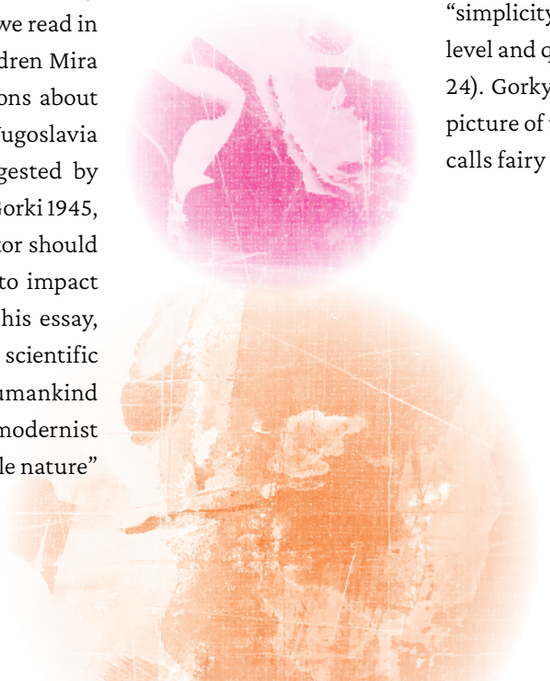
The Soviet Model as the Mold for the Yugoslav Socialist Publishing for Children?

Maxim Gorky also adopted the idea that children represent a demographic group equipped with the potential of powerful non-normative and non-conventional historical agency and are thus promising active revolutionary subjects. In his programmatic essay on the envisioned Soviet publishing for children, published the same year as Vučo's and Matić's photopoetry book (1933), Gorky articulates yet a different, more normative position on *how* literature ought to impact children. His paradigm differs from the one proposed by Vučo and Matić, especially regarding the question of the autonomy of art and what kind of children's agency literature is supposed to impact.

Gorky's essay was published in the magazine *Pravda* (1933) under the title "Literaturu—detiam" ("Literature for Children") and translated to Serbian in 1945. In his essay, Gorky presents his vision of the organization, themes, methods, styles, aims, and impact of the Soviet literature for children during the 1930s' centralization of the publishing sector as well as against the background of the pre-revolutionary and first revolutionary decade of the Soviet Union. The program was, as we read in the 1955 speech by the Yugoslav author and editor in publishing for children Mira Alečković, discussed in "a closed forum discussion in youth organizations about the aesthetic values of literature for children" that was held in 1947 in Yugoslavia (Alečković 1955, 367; all translations of Alečković are mine). As suggested by Alečković, the 1947 forum discussion was inspired by Gorky's "scheme" (Gorki 1945, 24) on how to establish a publishing sector for minors and what the sector should look like and what the writers should write about, and how, in order to impact children's development into socialist subjects (Alečković 1955, 367). In his essay, Gorky firstly puts forward the importance of knowledge, especially scientific knowledge, but also the knowledge of the historical development of humankind through the prism of the materialist thought: grounded on socialist modernist teleology of a man in "working collectives" not only mastering the "hostile nature" but actively creating his "second nature—culture" (Gorki 1945, 14; all translations of Gorky are mine). The goal of this endeavor is to create better living conditions and a longer, healthy life for people, who could thus enfold all of their talents and creative energies (Gorki 1945). Gorky also defines the role of literature for children as a clearly "educative" one (Gorki 1945, 6), following the goal of children's "cultural development" (Gorki 1945, 9). Thus, literature for children should familiarize them with the contemporary and historical reality of the labor of (scientific and humanist) development and evolution (Gorki 1945, 9). Gorky further lists in detail mainly scientific themes (from physics, biology, geology, etc.) and states how not only the discoveries of these disciplines are to be transmitted to children but also methodological insights into their research processes and the ways of their practical application in everyday life (Gorki 1945, 11–24). A children's book needs to transmit that the "freedom of thought is possible only in complete freedom of labor", which is "the right of everyone in socialist order" (Gorki 1945, 13).

Even if Gorky's descriptions of the content that children's literature should report on are very detailed and also normative, he nevertheless outlines that Soviet books for children do "not need to be didactic, nor roughly tendentious" (Gorki 1945, 9). Style and artistic elements are for Gorky clearly in the educative function: enabling and supporting the "cultural development": "[A children's book] needs to talk the language of pictures, it needs to be artistic", and scientific books need to be "emotional" (Gorki 1945, 23). In a socialist realist manner, Gorky stands in favor of "simplicity and clarity of style", which "are not achieved by lowering the literary level and quality of the work but come as a result of original creativity" (Gorki 1945, 24). Gorky also adds that writers, when writing for children, should have a clear picture of the children for whom they are writing and their age (Gorki 1945, 23). He calls fairy tales a "fantastic hypothesis" (Gorki 1945, 13) and pleads:

> We must understand that there are no fantastic fairy tales that do not validate work and science [...]. Children need not only learn how to count and measure but how to imagine, fancy, and predict.
>
> We must not forget that the meagre imagination of the bare-handed primitive people foresaw that man could fly, that he could live underwater, that he could increase the speed of movement on Earth



> to extreme limits, transform matter, etc. Today, fantasy can rely on the real facts of scientific experience and thus infinitely enhance the creative power of reason (Gorki 1945, 22).

On the ground of his arguments about why and what kind of literature children need, Gorky pleads for specialized publishers for minors, where the best scientists, artists, and cultural workers would work in the best possible technological conditions (Gorki 1945, 22).

Autonomy in the Development of the Yugoslav Socialist Forms and Subjects

Gorky's programmatic essay on publishing for children surely left an impact. Not only in the socialist East but also in other European countries, where publishing for children proliferated, especially from the 1960s. Considering the fact that even in the midst of the Cold War, there were official contacts between (Western) European and Soviet publishers for children at least through IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People), we might assume the Soviet model of publishing for children did play a role, even if only an inspirational one, also in other non-socialist contexts (Veler and Ilc 2021, 62, 63).

In the post-war revolutionary Yugoslavia, which too bound itself to the socialist modernization process, if in a different geopolitical and historical context,[11] the search for adequate politics and tools to achieve emancipation *qua* modernization took a slightly different path. The so-called Informbiro conflict in 1948, which was due to Soviet-Yugoslav conflicts about the questions of foreign policy, led not only to the political and economic split of Yugoslavia from the Soviet model but also to different ideological articulations and cultural materializations. The split from the Soviet model in art, culture, and science was proclaimed in two attention-grabbing cultural-political speeches, which both took place in Ljubljana: the first one by Edvard Kardelj, the seminal constructor of principles of Yugoslav self-management, in front of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1949; and the second one by the writer Miroslav Krleža, who was the leading figure of the pre-war "conflict on the literary left" and who spoke in front of the 3rd Congress of the Yugoslav Writers' Union in 1952.

Kardelj's and Krleža's insistence on "free creative activity" for the "universal treasury of progress and culture" (Kardelj 1949, 1100) and their rejection of all programmatic bottom-down interventions—like the one by Gorky (1945 [1933]) are especially relevant for understanding the role of children's literature in the Yugoslav socialist society. For "the further development of socialism and socialist democracy" and "the development of socialist forms", both authors insist on the autonomy of cognition and art. On the other hand, they also underline the "situatedness" or *partijnost* in the context of the material living conditions, describing the Yugoslav history and thus also the Yugoslav search for "socialist forms" as singular (Kardelj 1949, 1100, 1102; Krleža 1952, 218, 222). In their argumentation, they both define the Soviet model as unsuitable due to its anti-dialectical, anti-scientific, and idealist nature (Kardelj 1949, 1101; Krleža 1952, 215–216). Only on the ground of autonomous production, "when artists, who, with their gift, their knowledge, and their taste will be able to 'subjectively reflect these 'objective motives of our left reality'—will our own Art be born" (Krleža 1952, 243; all translations of Kardelj and Krleža are mine).

Krleža's seminal cultural-political speech symbolically ended the more than two-decade-long "conflict on the literary left". Surely, with his speech, neither socialist realism nor other declinations of normative aesthetics, or politics, were dispelled from (the art and cultural production of) socialist Yugoslavia, but how have his claims echoed in the realm of children's literature?

11 The countries united in the Yugoslav federal socialist state experienced centuries-long imperialist governance of different European and before also Ottoman empires.

Literature for Children in Search of a "Contemporary Language"

Mira Alečković, a cultural-politically active writer and poet and editor for children, held a speech at the 4th Congress of the Yugoslav Writers' Union that followed (Ohrid, Macedonia, 1955) in which she outlined the first post-war decade of the Yugoslav socialist literature for children in the light of the broader geo- and cultural-political context and the role, aims, problems, and envisioned impact of children's literature in post-war Yugoslavia. In front of the congress, she particularly asked: How to accommodate artistic freedom in the context of children's literature, which historically and at the time still followed mainly didactic goals?

Alečković also regreted the still inferior place of literature for children in terms of aesthetic, infrastructural, metadiscursive, and thus also social relevance within the broader literature and publishing sector in post-war Yugoslavia (1955, 364–365). She underlines the need to improve production conditions and professional democratization (Alečković 1955, 364–365).[12] Regarding the first post-war years, Alečković reports on the tendencies to get rid of allegedly "bourgeoise education" and "channeling it [children's literature] in the direction of rough tendentiousness and didactic" (Alečković 1955, 364–365)—which we need to read as a reference to Gorky's (1933) positions. Supporters of such a didactic direction of children's literature, Alečković notes, were mainly pedagogues and partly editors or publishers, who were "afraid of the new": "[…] because it is easier to orient oneself on the ground of clear norms and ordered didactic instead on the ground of literary texts which at first sight invisibly carry in itself didactic burgeon" (1955, 364–365).[13] She advocates for "'directing' this literature in the name of 'education and community'" (Alečković 1955, 364–365). In addition, she renounces the infantilization in the style of children's literature, which, when used, "belittles" a child, who is, however, "a whole human" (Alečković 1955, 364–365). As a characteristic of good literature, she sees the introduction of a whole new attitude to a child and a child-adequate style and especially praises fantasy literature (Alečković 1955, 366). Alečković particularly stresses the quality of literature if it approaches children with "childhood alike purity" and the "depth of a psychologist" (Alečković 1955, 366). The quality of children's literature, following Alečković, is decisive for a child's development, as it determines if children are to become "human towards other people or a cripple, who will go through life incomplete and devastated, instead of feeling life and relating to himself as a creator" (Alečković 1955, 366).

Alečković praises original literature for children (especially that written by union members) as adequate in how it addresses children. However, she regrets the loose societal control and lack of writers on editorial boards (Alečković 1955, 378, 385). She sees the latter as the reason for unworthy, commercial print, mostly translated (Alečković 1955, 378, 385).[14] Like Gorky, Alečković pleads for more genre diversity in literature for children and praises the content of children's literature, which addresses the everyday of children living in post-war times. However, unlike Gorky, she avoids detailed listing and normative descriptions about what and how the literature of different genres should narrate (Alečković 1955, 367–368).

12 According to Alečković, writers could usually write for children only in their spare time. The copyright law, author fees, production times, literary awards, and the conditions of membership in professional associations did not correspond with adult literature standards (Alečković 1955, 367–368, 378, 384). Alečković laments also that teachers and the Friends of Children Association (Društvo prijatelja dece) did not pay enough attention to the (infra) structural support for publishing for minors (Alečković 1955, 366).

13 Alečković particularly mentions the attempts by the Pioneer organization to influence the production of literature for children and comments that this will "deprive this literature of fantasy and freedom, dry it and unleash it, bind it in the molds of didactics and in school repetition, cut it of the enthusiasm that was obvious" (Alečković 1955, 366).

14 Alečković states that only one-tenth of the entire printed books (150–200 books yearly) are originally written for children in Yugoslavia, while the rest are translated (Alečković 1955, 378, 385).

Alečković also notes that literature for children has gradually become also more complex in its conception; thus, this literature addresses all: children, youngsters, and adults (Alečković 1955, 367–368).[15] Alečković further regrets the poor layout, quality of paper, and print of books for children and underlines the need for critical and scholarly reflection on the literature for children, as only through such professional dialogue can literature develop further (Alečković 1955, 367–368).

Like Gorky, who promotes pan-Soviet literature production for children, Alečković particularly raises the question of "Yugoslavhood" (*jugoslovenstvo*) in literature for children but also in terms of broader literature production (Alečković 1955, 379).[16] It is, following Alečković, exactly literature that can transcend mentioned boundaries and obstacles in the search for Yugoslav "socialist civic men". However, this can be achieved only through cooperation between different organizations and political bodies and the inclusion of professionals in decision-making (Alečković 1955, 379).[17]

Further and again, in correspondence not only with Gorky's demands but also with Vučo's and Matić's example (1933), Alečković advocates attaching to the folk tradition, however, without superstitious *topoi* (like "religious-mystic scarecrow", "witches and werewolves", "false sentimentalism and corny tales about the servants and their good masters, the workers, and their noble chefs"), in order to connect the legacy of the folk tradition with "contemporary affects" and "our socialist relations" (Alečković 1955, 366, 383).

Like Gorky, she is also in favor of strengthening fairy tales related to real life with a "positive influence on children's psyche", "not to impoverish fantasy but achieve it by educating patriots", "cosmopolitans", "socialist citizens" to be "brave" and not "cowards", to "raise principles of socialist ethics and aesthetics, get rid of lack of ideas or even worse foreign ideas" (Alečković 1955, 383).

She particularly opens up the question of a "contemporary language"—thus, style in literature for children—and underlines that "this notion cannot be identified nor can it take on the same meaning that it has in the polemic of modernism and realism", and this is something that producers of children of literature should reconsider (Alečković 1955, 367). The latter is a direct reference to the conflict on the literary left. In this context, Alečković regrets that literature for children is still bound either to realism or to folk fantasy and rarely succeeds in a synthesis of both, which is again a principle found already in Gorky's essay (Alečković 1955, 367). However, while with Gorky, this synthesis should be achieved through "simplicity and clarity of style" (Gorki 1945, 24), Alečković explicitly positions the search for the "right artistic form to express what it wants to say" within the practice of writing for children itself and not like Gorky in positioning normative stylistic demands (Alečković 1955, 384). Alečković grants the educative value of literature but insists that "literariness", thus aesthetic impact, is a precondition for educatedness and a clear priority. This aesthetic aspect can only be achieved beyond norms regarding content, motifs, and forms and beyond tendentiousness (Alečković 1955, 384).

> [A child] fantasizes about flying a rocket to the moon, and it believes that it will take off. And we must not cut the wings. Many things that were fantasy are now a reality. Children are looking for new fantasies. Many stories of feats have been overcome. They are looking for new feats. They mature faster in the new century. Literature for children should prolong their childhood with beauty. Children are often deprived of nature. They need to be refined by nature […]. And we want them to be cheerful and easy-going, and above all, to take on the characteristics of a cultured man, to carry the characteristics of humanity and love for beauty, not to be alien to science or art, or our country, nor the socialist spirit, which is somewhere just grafted or is yet to be born, and somewhere is already born and lives in new people.

15 Alečković further mentions that in the course of the popularization of literacy, books for children are also used for working with adults (Alečković 1955, 373).

16 Alečković resents that the affect of Yugoslavism is usually contextualized in terms of relating toward foreign countries, while "in the country itself everyone usually rather wraps themselves in their own bursa" (Alečković 1955, 373). Thus, some publishers still prefer to follow local, even if less articulated, writers, than to also look for titles among writers from other Yugoslav republics (Alečković 1955, 373).

17 Alečković promotes the practice of translation between Yugoslav national and minority languages. She also underlines the importance of encouraging Yugoslavism in school programs, especially in the field of common history, geography, and literature (Alečković 1955, 373).

It would be an unforgivable sin not to use the child's curiosity and not to manage it the way we want. Not giving them an artistically valuable work would be no less [an unforgivable sin] for a writer (Alečković 1955, 386).

Conclusion

In all the presented texts, the authors consider the role of literature, art, culture, and intellectual production in children's lives in the envisioned socialist societies. They particularly articulate the ways in which literature for children should impact children in terms of socialist modernist subjectivation. Children's literature is to promote the historical progress of humankind through technological and scientific development, imagination, and social agency, grounded in the socialist organization of labor as well as the general organization of power distribution in a socialist society. The teleological relation toward aesthetic impact as an incentive to "imagine and predict", on the one hand, and to "make learning easier" on the other, is something that Maxim Gorky (1945 [1933]) and Mira Alečković (1955) share. The major difference between the discussed authors regarding the "proper" ways that literature for children should impact children's development seem to be grounded in the historical divergencies of the political, economic, and also social organization of both socialist societies.

Dead Bird. Riko Debenjak's illustration accompanying the published version of Mira Alečković's speech. From: Alečković 1955.

While Gorky promotes a centralized and prescriptive (in terms of genre, content, form, and production) paradigm, the authors from the pre- and post-war Yugoslav context insist that only autonomous art, which could develop its content, style, and production framework in a contextualized however methodologically self-referential way, could lead to emancipation. Vučo's and Matić's (1933) insistence on art as socially relevant only if it is autonomous must be understood in relation to the global surrealist avant-garde principles as well as the development and consolidation of the local, especially the Belgrade surrealist circle within the Communist movement and partly also within the "conflict on the artistic left". The autonomy paradigm reverberated in post-war, especially post-Informbiro Yugoslavia, and should be situated not only in the aftermath of the "conflict on the artistic left" but (as the "conflict" itself) also in the general Yugoslav socialist search for democratic participation and collective democratic governance, later articulated and systemically introduced with the principles of Yugoslav self-management. Hence, Mira Alečković's insistence that practitioners of children's literature (especially writers) should more intensively co-define cultural politics and decision-making within the publishing and education sector should be understood within the specific organization of Yugoslav socialism. In addition, her position—that literature for children ought to and can address children in the contemporaneity of their living experience and "affects" embedded in "socialist relations" only if writers are to freely search for "contemporary language", beyond the normative aesthetics and beyond tendentiousness (Alečković 1955, 366, 384)—is to be contextualized within the Yugoslav search for "socialist democracy" (Kardelj 1949, 1100, 1102).

What is the relationship between the outlined historical, particularly Yugoslav, reflections on the impact of children's literature and the contemporary neoliberal ideas and implementations of the social impact of art? As indicated in the introduction to the present volume, today's impact of art should be measurable: in terms of audiences, their participation, and the transfer of different capacities. In addition, if art is to be socially impactful, it should follow the cultural-political agenda. The latter is, as a rule, already implied in the call for proposals. Thus, in terms of its content, form, temporospatial, and production frameworks, today's artistic production should attach to and take over different social agendas and activities, which were previously, in a social welfare state, attached to other public sectors from agencies for work, health care to social work, etc. In contrast to the contemporary model, the outlined historical, particularly Yugoslav, reflections on the impact of children's literature underline the importance of art's autonomy. However, picturing the production process, reception and social impact, evaluation, and decision-making (Alečković 1955) as grounded on art's internal principles and decided upon by practitioners in the artistic sector itself, particularly in the outlined Yugoslav cases, also alludes to some of the features of the contemporary discourse on social impact, particularly to the critical ones.

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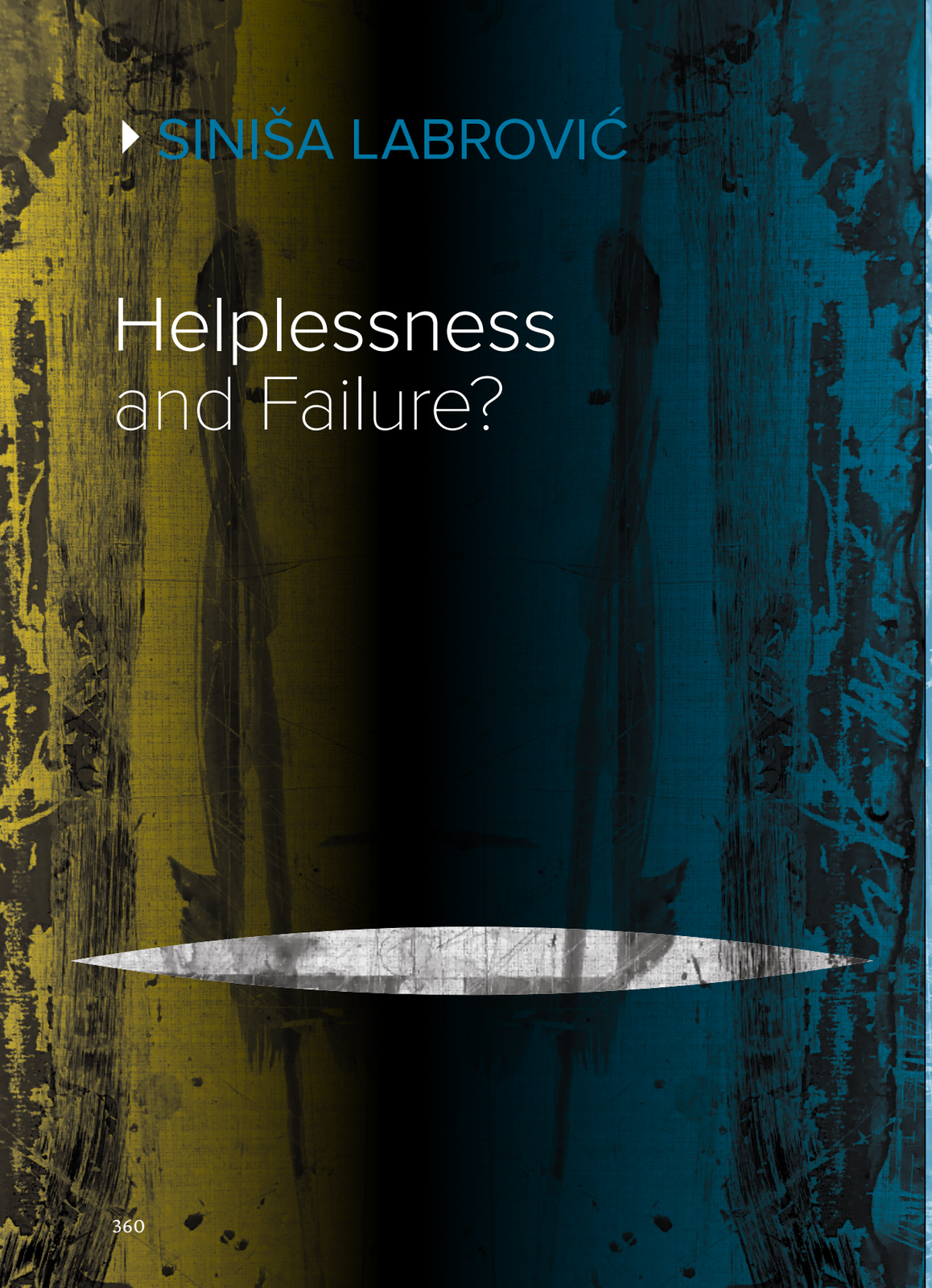


SINIŠA LABROVIĆ

Helplessness and Failure?

It's hard to talk about one's helplessness and failure. People celebrate victors, first places, prize-winners. They're all over front pages; they give interviews; their names are found in history books, on monuments; their lives are studied; they become role models; they publish autobiographies. Winners have names, while the rest of us plow through self-help literature and anti-depressants, united in envy, anonymity, and hope, hoping that there exists a formula for success.

I'm really bad at navigating the past. I don't recall the dates or years of events, so when I say I was invited a year ago to write a text for this publication, then with a the working title "Social Impact and Art Beyond the Time of Crisis", I'm probably wrong, but it feels like it was ages ago and that the unwritten text, which I am commemorating here, certainly should have been written. I haven't succeeded in shifting my "art" "beyond the time of crisis", rather the crisis is the very heart of that unsuccessful attempt.

27-01-2021 15:43, siniša labrović wrote

Dear Iva, dear Martin,

I would like to submit my "strong" intention to write something on this topic mentioned in the Open Call.
I am associating artist in CtC -> CtI project and I have intention to write either a poem or some short story for the project, but it is too early to say what it will be.
Also, I am just in the process of another moving in Berlin, I will need some time to settle in my new apartment and I could also be without a wifi internet connection for February...
So, please, answer me is this enough to be included in the project or I need something more...
I saw a time schedule and 200 words explanation of the idea, but since I don't know precisely what I will write, it will be a little fake if I write anything...
So, what do you think :)

Thank you!
Best regards,
Siniša Labrović

wed, 27. jan 2021. at 22:13 Martin Pogacar wrote:

Hi Siniša
No problem, the call is more a kind of a rough guide, so you can submit either a short story or a poem (or both:).
So we can count on you?

bests
martin

27-01-2021 23:10, siniša labrović wrote:

Dear Martin,

Thanks for the quick and soothing response :)
Yes, you can count on me

Best wishes,
siniša

p.s. forgive me for not speaking Slovene.

I remember that when I replied to the invitation I had a clear idea of what I would write. I said I would write either a story or a few poems. Perhaps those ideas are written down somewhere, among the hundreds of other notes and ideas I never managed to develop. Since there was "enough time" for the writing, even too much time, swept away by other obligations and problems I forgot about the publication. In June 2021, I set off on a Balkan tour that, with breaks, lasted almost five months—in that time I collaborated on the making of two films, performed at a few festivals, took part in a few exhibitions and, after a long time, visited my hometown.

On 28 September, during one of my Berlin breathers, I fell off my bike, landed on my head and earned six stitches. And the whole time there was COVID-19 to deal with and all its bureaucratic, travel and living restrictions. Not long after the bike fall, Martin Pogačar called to remind me, ever so gently, that the date of publication was approaching. I think at that time we agreed on New Year as the final deadline. Of course, that deadline moved a few more times, and Martin displayed Job-like patience with me. I wouldn't forgive myself for all these postponements, nor do I. Yet, Martin showed himself to be a wonderful and creative person—thanks to his idea and suggestion, I am writing this text, a small chronicle of failure that will accompany the e-mails we exchanged.

mon, 6. dec 2021. u 08:57 martin pogacar wrote:

Dear Siniša
I hope you're well in these bizarre times…
Just to remind you about the publication I'm editing with Iva.
Do you perhaps have something?
bests
martin

03-02-2022 18:50, siniša labrović wrote:

Dear Martin,
I've not got anywhere. I'm really ashamed.
Forgive me, both of you forgive me. Since starting work on 15.11. I don't have time for anything; I'm tired and can't concentrate. This month I start working three days a week so I'll have more time. I can only promise that I'll try to write something from Saturday, 5.2., to next Wednesday, i.e. 9.2. The problem now is that, thanks to some crazy, blackmailing maneuvres by T-com we don't have internet, but I'll fix that somehow.

Sorry again.
If you can, give me until 9.2. to see if I can manage something.
Thanks so much.
Best wishes,
Siniša

10.02.2022., at 08:30, user martin pogacar wrote:

Excellent, I'm looking forward to your story!
Hm, at least it's never 'dolgcajt' [boring]. I hope things work themselves out.
bests
martin

10-02-2022 12:43, siniša labrović wrote:

[...]
P.S. wasn't Dolgcajt the name of a Pankrti album (their first album?)?
Thanks for reminding me I was young once

And when, at the beginning of November 2021, I drew a line, primarily financial, under the cursed period, it turned out that my earnings would allow for only a few more months living in Berlin, and no other artistic invitations were on the horizon.

I began working as an artist in 2000, and for the first ten years of my artistic career I was also an unemployed professor of Croatian language and literature. The constant uncertainty of those years got me down—in 2009 I gave up on education and being a professor and in 2011 I wanted to leave it all behind and head with my wife to Hobart, Tasmania, to flee to the other side of the world and run a restaurant, but bureaucracy got in our way. As an unemployed freelance artist, I lived in constant expectation of the next call, and that really wears you down. So, in November, I had enough savings for a few more months, and in October, my friend, the writer Nenad Stipanić, had moved to Berlin and started work packing tea. He was satisfied with the job—a relaxed atmosphere without stress, a great boss, and a small team of colleagues that included four visual artists. I asked him to ask the bosses whether they needed another worker, and since they were entering the pre-New Year season, when they have the most orders, they took me on and I started work on 15 November. I worked full-time until 1 February 2022 and Wednesday to Friday since then.

I take public transport—train and bus—to and from work. The closed space in which you travel with a group of people, albeit for only a short time, creates a feeling of togetherness. That togetherness isn't personal; you don't know anyone. Precisely that discomfort, averting your gaze from the people sitting opposite and paying no attention to their personalities, the kind of situation in which everyone is left to themselves but not alone with themselves, creates a situation in which you are often completely aware of the presence of everyone in a common space.

It was from such situations that the first idea came to me: an internal monologue of several characters traveling together for a short time in a carriage, sentences alternating one after another but without it being completely clear which sentence comes from which character. The only element of narration would be those alternating sentences of internal monologue. From a multitude of sentences from several characters my intention was to create a sense of their togetherness in loneliness or togetherness in non-communication, at least verbal. One carriage and a short, random period of time that united them in solitude would provide the framework of their togetherness.

And then the war in Ukraine began. The concentration and skill required to realize this concept gradually drained away; the necessary polyphony required meticulous realization, and after several starts, I had less and less will and strength. Then I turned to a new idea—a woman of Eastern origin starts work in a company. Eating with chopsticks at the next table, a noodle sticks for a moment just below her mouth. She sucks it into her mouth and licks up the trail left on her face. Her colleague becomes obsessed with the scene and buys chopsticks and Chinese food in order to recreate within himself the eros that he felt was embodied by the woman from the East. But he just can't awake in himself that sense of vitality, immediacy. Enjoyment keeps evading him. In the end he buys a bouquet of roses that he thinks to take to his colleague at work, but he puts that off too until the roses wither almost completely in his apartment. Anonymously, he leaves the bouquet for his colleague on the table where she usually sits, and when she takes the bouquet from the table a few rose petals are left behind. When everyone else leaves the room, the man approaches the table, takes a single petal, places it in his mouth, chews, and swallows.

08-03-2022 21:13, siniša labrović wrote:

Dear Martin,

I haven't written a word yet, forgive me...
I wanted to get in touch but my bureaucratic hassles are still going on and this war in Ukraine has really unsettled me. I don't have the concentration or desire to do anything creative... Please, if you're finished with the others, publish it without me.
If it's not ready, if you're still waiting for other texts, I can try to write something next

weekend, i.e. by 13.03. But I can't promise anything. I have two ideas, two synopses, but I haven't managed to write them out.

Forgive me, I'm sorry.
Bests,
Siniša

09.03.2022., at 08:21, user martin pogacar wrote:

Dear Siniša
I completely understand, thanks for letting me know. We'll wait until the 13th.
bests
martin

But very soon I became completely occupied by the war in Ukraine. I've been surrounded by violence my whole life. My father was a violent drunk and remained one until he got sick, and as a child, I could hardly wait to be big enough to fight him. We had our first fight when I was 15 years old and it went on for the next 30 years. If, with the passage of years, we didn't clash physically, we remained completely distant from one another with the occasional outburst of mutual contempt and hatred. Bullies were part and parcel of growing up in a village and small town, as well as all through school, until I left to study. Yugoslavia was also a militarized state: the army and police were the spine of the system, while World War II, crimes and heroism were everyday themes of education. And the constant expectation of enemy attack. Then, in 1991, came the collapse of Yugoslavia and war, and after the war—militarism, nationalism, corruption, and plunder. Utterly worn out, I left for Berlin in 2018. Out of a desire to put to bed the demons of the past once and for all, I went for the first time to my father's grave on All Saints' Day 2021. I never understood my father, and I never will, nor am I sure I can forgive him, but I wanted to come to terms with that past and move on.

04-05-2022 00:09, siniša labrović wrote:

Dear Martin,

Unfortunately, i didn't manage to write it.
it's just not going for me, I don't have any inspiration right now,
or for the last two months...
I have a framework and a few narrative moments, but I can't manage to write it all out.
I've been trying these days, but it's all a long way from "art".
I don't know. That's it...
I'm sorry, I'll contact Bunker
Forgive me, but sometimes it just doesn't work
Please, anyway, let me know when you finish "putting together" the publication and sending it to be printed... Perhaps I'll relax now it's all over and something will come of the next few days... I need a day or two of peace and concentration, flow, but I never quite manage it. I'm stuck...

Sorry!
Forgive me!
Thanks for the patience
Best wishes,
siniša

[...]

wed, 4. may 2022. at 08:25 martin pogacar wrote:

Dear Siniša
Thanks for agreeing to this and making the effort over the text.
No worries, I completely understand.
I'll let you know when it goes to be put together, and we'll see then (which means, no more pressure:).
In any case, i hope we'll see each other in august!
best wishes
martin

04-05-2022 21:59, siniša labrović wrote:

Dear Martin,

Thank you so, so much for the understanding.
I feel bad that I didn't manage it
Best wishes,
Sinisa

thu, 5. may 2022. at 10:57 martin pogacar wrote:

Dear Siniša
I have an idea:
since this publication thematizes the question of social impact of art and in part the question of quantifying and measuring results, deadlines etc, Iva and I think something good might be done after all:
what do you think if we tried to thematize in a way our efforts to reach an agreement in the context of the question of creative work, art, that is caught up in the forces of deadlines, financial terms, a project's imminent end, promised results ...
but art doesn't work like this.
In a way, if we used our emails (with some contextualization) we could try to "rehabilitate failure" (so to speak) as a legitimate process of investigation, effort, creation...
what d'you think?
bests
martin

08-05-2022 21:40, siniša labrović wrote:

Dear Martin,

i think the idea's great, brilliant
let's talk tomorrow by phone and work it up in a bit more detail, in the sense, does something need to be added on top of that email communication and if so what
Thanks a lot
I hope we can talk
Best wishes,
siniša

18-05-2022 02:08, siniša labrović wrote:

Dear Martin,

the text is attached. Can both of you please read it and let me know of if you have any critical suggestions, whatever you think makes sense.
Off to bed, working tomorrow :)

Endless thanks to you and to Iva.
Best wishes,
siniša

Last year, I stopped following the political situation in Croatia; I wanted to get away from that destructive hole. And then came the war in Ukraine. I went back to following the news obsessively. The concrete horrors of the war on one side, and on the other the very obvious possibility of nuclear holocaust sucked all meaning from me. Violent maniacs and psychopaths had won again. Like morning travelers who share 20 minutes of joint fate in a train carriage, I feel like, since the start of the war, I'm sharing the same space and time with Putin and villains like him. Joined with them in the everyday destruction and evil as well as the potential of an atomic bomb. Humiliated and tired I sat at the table, but there was not an ounce of eros or creative passion within me to produce a story.

P.S. To end on, a completely impromptu haiku:

Wind between fingers.
Hands brimming with but nothing.
Fate rests in a palm.

Translated from the Croatian by Matt Robinson.

MARTIN POGAČAR

Afterwor/l/d: Art, Control, Afterimpact

> To create difference—to establish strangeness—then
> to let the fiery arc of human emotion leap and close the gap.
> *Ursula K. Le Guin*

Art moves. It moves audiences, individuals, and groups. It moves artists, performers, singers, actors, writers, readers, spectators, and sometimes passers-by. It engages, enrages, and pleases, it upends and provokes and offends, it makes some laugh and others cry (or both). It pokes at boundaries, playing with them; it moves them, attacking or transgressing them even when nonchalantly ignoring them. It moves minds and bodies, makes the hair stand up and tears well up, makes us feel and think, and act and do.

It is space. It is in space. It takes space and bounds it. It defines it with the *mise-en-scène,* the stage, the lights, the sounds, the voice, the body. It is sculpture, theater and literature, words and music, image, still and moving. It defines and limits, and along the way, transgresses space. It makes a place out of space. A place that is not of this time-world but conjures a new, different, out-of-place imaginary alterity, distant otherworldness embedded and suspended and arrested nevertheless in the imminent here. An affective imaginary reality superimposed on the here and now.

It is time. It is out of time. It is revealed as it unfolds and it is gone, as in music or in a performance. Inherent othertime, otherness, othering, endness. And yet it rises above the finitude in what it leaves behind after the place becomes space again. If but as a vestige of the bygone, the trace of the forgotten, corroded by time. In the mind, in a feeling, in the environment, as a scent, a text, a picture. Imagined, felt, desired.

It questions. Why us, me, you, them? Why here? Or there and for what purpose? Why this way and not the other way around? Today? Why not yesterday? What are we up against? Is there a tomorrow? Who are you me we? What makes me:us different from you:them? How to bring others in, to take part or take apart and make whole again, to make us:them come out different? With a different take on things? (And, what is different?) This, in the words of Joseph Beuys, responds to the ultimate unresolved question "about the impetus and source of art, [that is] the need for the world to develop and evolve through art" (Harlan 2012, 9); it is the question of what Beuys called social sculpture, a concept "infused with both

political intention and spiritual values. As spectators became participants [Beuys] believed, the catalysis of social sculpture would lead to a transformation of society through the release of popular creativity" (Moore).

Art is a dynamic force that operates in a specific spacetime and radiates across. It shapes, transforms, confluences, entangles, and enfolds humans and the environment, their pasts and their presents, our:their emotions, hopes, fears, and desires. It stirs memories, shakes knowledge, upends bias. It opens. It operates, invariantly, at the interstices of the field of experience and the horizon of expectation, to refer to Reinhardt Koselleck and his writing on history, the past time (2004).

It is the epitome of multiplicity: spatial, temporal, identitarian, historical, performative, symbolic, literal, lateral: it makes change and it changes and it reflects change: it reflects on its own unsettled and often conflictual histories and devices; and, as it does so, it reflects on our:their histories and pasts, enfolded in the fluid presents. And it futures (verb).

Art is bound to have effect and to affect. Wants it. Strives for it. Engenders it. It may fail and it may not, and fail (again) next time. It is implicated in the material, biological, neurological, and technical, the ideological conditions of creation, conceptualization, production, and consumption and nevertheless reflects on and tries to transgress them. As much as it is in the wild, out there (a theater, the street, a record, or a book), it is in the mind (cf. Barnier and Hoskins 2018). Jean-Pierre Changeux notes that the brain "this conscious milieu, a 'simulation space' of virtual activities, provides a meeting place for current perceptions of the outside world, for representation of 'self', and for memories of past experiences, somatically marked with emotional valence" (Changeux 2010, 3).

Art thus works with, in, and on the exterior, molds it, shapes it, questions it, but also soaks the interior, the mind with it, takes part in social sculpting. Again, Beuys: "This idea—that it is from art that all work ensues—needs to be borne in mind, if we want to reshape and re-form society, because it will also have a bearing on economic questions and issues to do with legal and human rights" (Harlan 2012, 9).

Not least, art means the birth of neosis. How? Bernard Stiegler noted in his lecture that exorganisms, more commonly called "human beings", make use of exosomatic organs (tools and instruments) that become more important than endosomatic organs (Stiegler 2019). Once the interior, the feeling, the fear or joy, memory, and expectation had been exteriorized on the wall of a cave, it reached out beyond to affect others (millennia later) in very profound ways. Georges Bataille observed:

> [A]t one point night gave birth to day and the daylight we find at Lascaux illumines the morning of our immediate species. It is the man who dwelt in this cave of whom for the first time and with certainty we may finally say: he produced works of art; he is of our sort (quoted in Stiegler 2019).

Stiegler went on to speculate that "if it is true that the one whom Bataille calls Homo Ludens makes exosomatisation into art [...], this nascent art, by this making, marks the emergence of those who, having made possible the experience of a clear evidence of art, we can call 'us' [...]—exorganisms belonging to the human race because they recognise themselves in this art" (Stiegler 2019).

> Art as the origin of noesis means that all noetic exorganisms are artists in potential, which is equally to say, philosophers in potential. All are sculptors, which is true, firstly in the sense that the gardener sculpts the living by pruning what they have planted in a soil that is plasticised, loosened, enriched, like humus that must be metabolised in multiple ways, from the best to the worst, and secondly in the sense that education [...] takes care of and treats noetic life, insofar as such a form of life is pharmacological is also technical (Stiegler 2019).

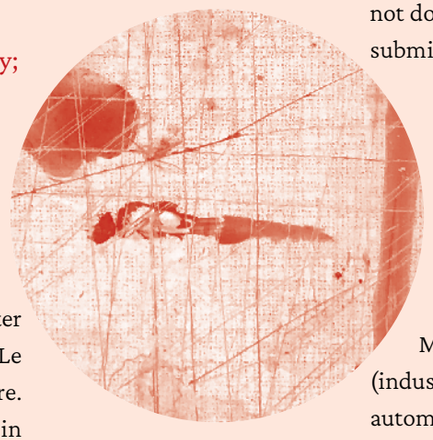
Alas, in the era of industrialization of cognition and knowledge, of enjoyment and fun, of *savoir faire* and *savoir vivre* (cf. Stiegler), when life is subjected to proletarianization and the destruction of commonality, obsessive measure, and quantification, art is increasingly subordinated to "having impact", and is thus subjected to the paradox of exerting and evading control.

* * * *

Control is not a universal. It can only be in a specific spacetime, it is historically, politically, technically defined. For us in the Western intellectual-political reaches of socio-technical culture, it is inherently tied to science, to technology, to measure and quantification, discipline and surveillance. It is modern. Deleuze says:

> Foucault located the disciplinary societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; they reach their height at the outset of twentieth. They initiate the organization of vast spaces of enclosure. The individual never ceases passing from one closed environment to another, each having its own laws: first, the family; then the school ("you are no longer in your family"); then the barracks ("you are no longer at school"); then the factory; from time to time the hospital; possibly the prison, the preeminent instance of the enclosed environment (Deleuze 1992).

Control is extractivist: it is after space as much as it is after time. It is after resources and it is after terrans (human and more-than-human alike), to use Le Guin's word for inhabitants of the Earth. It wants the planet, its history and future. And it wants (it) now. To discipline. To enclose. "To concentrate; to distribute in space; to order in time; to compose a productive force within the dimension of spacetime whose effect will be greater than the sum of its component forces" (Deleuze 1992).



It forecloses space and time. It disfutures. It delimits the mind, the body, and the environment to make them appropriable, extractable, exploitable. It is mechanistic and, today, cybernetic, operationalized on input and output. Yet it evades self-control and becomes a "modulation, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point" (Deleuze 1992).

It is excessive and thus self-defeating.

It sanctifies endless subservience and criminalizes disobedience.

Excess (self-)terminates and it can no longer future (verb). It is terminal, but there is no terminus. There is no end to conquering the terra/i/n.

It non-realizes that each new transgressed border reveals but new borders. Each new knowledge reveals further fields of new non-knowledge: as a magnifying glass that brings things closer, it enlarges, but in the (non-)end it always reveals further structures of unknown.

Bernard Stiegler rightly asks: "How could it be, then, that control societies are not domesticating societies? How is it that this 'control' fails to make possible the submission of the human beast?" And goes on to answer:

> The answer is that when human beings are controlled, and when this control deprives them of their desire, that is, their singularity, they become bestial and furious, in the sense that their drives are unleashed, until eventually they become radically uncontrollable (Stiegler 2012, 11).

Modernity engendered the loss of control by appropriating the *savoir faire* (industrialization) and then *savoir vivre* (mass media) and brought us with the automation of life to the loss of attention (digital media and surveillance) (Stiegler 2021). Excess control exerted through technical means and the devaluation of reason breed uncontrollable, destructive subjects.

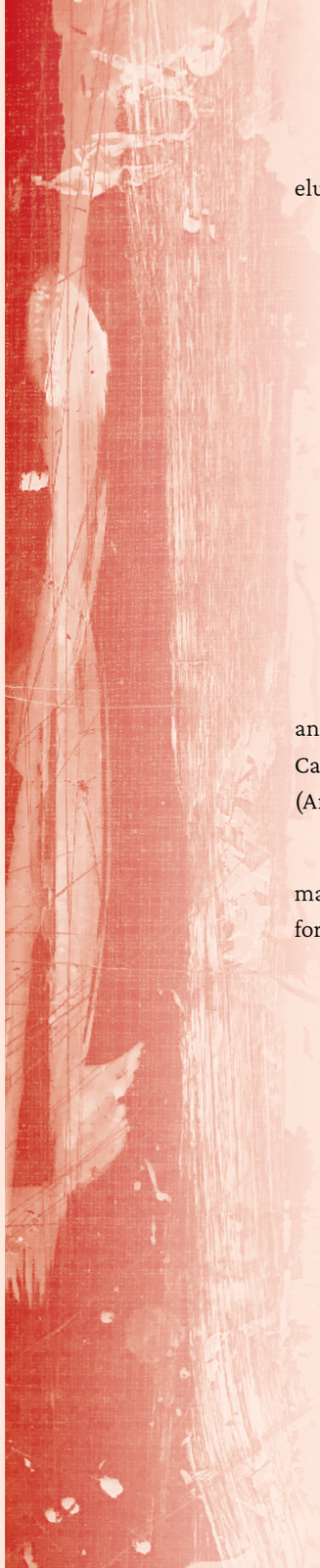
* * * *

Art is, still, also about control in that, in relation to the artist and the world, it is at once subservient and transgressive. It is the artist's desire to say, perform, do, and, in that, she can only follow the structure, the convention, the code; the artist controls … if "merely" to dismantle control. There is no thinking out of the box. Always in a different box with a different set of rules and codes, expectations and devices, tools and instruments. To make or point to different places, times, worlds and epochs, limits, potentialities. These, likewise, can and must always be questioned. There is no end to revealing.

As such, art is not only subject to internal:creative control, i.e., what and how the artist wants to say, make, do, and with what effect in mind. It is also subject to external-ideological expectations or demands, i.e., what it should do, for the society, the community, the we. That it should (have social) impact.

The demand for quantifiable impact is about control. Who gets funding, who gets access, who gets the audience and media coverage, the likes and shares, and who the right to form and define the contours of what the meaning of it all should be. Impact is the tool of the control society to grant (or not) living conditions to whatever, or whomever, is deemed valuable, profitable, and calculably so. And now. Not tomorrow or perhaps.

Much like control, impact *in prescribio* works as a modulation from above: it has to be defined in advance, with the criteria and measuring methods in place to decide or rule what it is worth. There are no firm criteria on the modulator's side: rather, the criteria, deemed objective, depend on an individual project reviewer's situated knowledge, also the whims and intimate limits, and on their expectations and desires. On the disappointments, grudges, inattention of the pressured-by-the-time, the overworked and underpaid: to impose impact as criteria is to impose a modulating sieve. As such, the very idea of impact as control comes forward, to refer to Hartmut Rosa, as the "driving cultural force of that form of life we call 'modern' […] that we can make the world controllable" (Rosa 2021, 1).



But control and controllability, as much as the world itself, are inherently elusive:

> Do you still remember the first snowfall on a late autumn or winter day, when you were a child? It was like the intrusion of a new reality. Something shy and strange that had come to visit us, falling down upon and transforming the world around us, without our having to do anything. An unexpected gift. Falling snow is perhaps the purest manifestation of uncontrollability. We cannot manufacture it, force it, or even confidently predict it, at least not very far in advance. What is more, we cannot get hold of it or make it our own. Take some in your hand, it slips through your fingers. Bring it into the house, it melts away. Pack it away in the freezer, it stops being snow and becomes ice (Rosa, 2021, 1).

Is art like snow? (Life, as is mind, sure is perishable, fugitive, fragile, recurring, and, in that, resilient.) Can it be frozen in time, can it be prescribed and forecast? Can it, in the end, be controlled? Can it be required, demanded to have impact? (And should it be?)

The urge to control, as in "everything that appears to us must be known, mastered, conquered, made useful", Rosa notes (2021, 6), seems to have constituted for modern humans the world as a point of aggression: as a series of objects that

> we have to know, attain, conquer, master, or exploit. And precisely because of this, "life", the experience of feeling alive and of truly encountering world—that which makes resonance possible—seems to elude us. This in turn leads to frustration, anger, and even despair, which then manifest themselves, among other things, in acts of impotent political aggression (Rosa 2021, 4).

But, essentially, for a thing to be known, it can only be approached through acknowledging that there is no ultimate knowledge, no ultimate reason, no terminus. Anything else may lead either to cultural devastation or even radical uncontrollability in Stiegler's sense as the ultimate manifestation of failed control over hyper-controlled subjects; both outcomes are inherently destructive for terrans and their environments, producing and riding on political emptiness and dysfunctionality (or at best creating the conditions for reinvention of sense at an indefinite point of postend).

* * * *

In the meantime, art invariantly became implicated and complicit in the world in which it seems it can only survive if it acquiescently plunges into the conception of the world that is ours for the taking: "[world] appears to us as something to be known, exploited, attained, appropriated, mastered, and controlled. And often this is not just about bringing things—segments of world—within reach, but about making them faster, easier, cheaper, more efficient, less resistant, more reliably controllable" (Rosa 2021, 14); in short, everything must be made visible, accessible, manageable, and useful (Rosa 2021, 15–17).

Intuitively, and declaratively, art is what denies and defies the imposed limits. It is essentially uncontrollable as a practice and force that drives engagement, participation, collaboration, and change … that questions and moves. It cannot be thought of in terms of input and output, for as Jean-Pierrre Changeux notes:

> The human brain proceeds in a direction opposite to
> the "input-output" mode long proposed by cybernetics.
> It always projects onto the world, in a spontaneous and internally
> generated fashion, mental representations that it tries to test
> against an external reality that is intrinsically devoid of meaning.
> This projection, as a generator of mental forms, represents an
> essential predisposition of the human brain toward creation
> (Changeux 2010, 1).

Art makes things elusive and instable, imposes questions on stuff taken-for-granted, it is an opposition to a *Denkverbot* that control(freak) society is bent on imposing to secure and extend its operating milieu. Control subdues or denies or cancels whatever falls outside measure, outside the designated box, whatever fails to reach calculable, measurable, predictable objectives.

But, to refer again to Rosa and to the multilayeredness and ambiguity of controllability: "It is only in encountering the uncontrollable that we really experience the world. Only then do we feel touched, moved, alive". Ultimately, "A world that is fully known, in which everything has been planned and mastered, would be a dead world. This is no metaphysical insight, but an everyday experience. Life happens, as it were, on the borderline" (Rosa 2021, 2).

In the age marked by the fusion of mechanization, automation, and digitization, and the desire to exert full control over lives and environments, art is (can it be?) the futuring domain.

It has the potential to not only poke at the systemic boundaries but to envision new takes on the present predicaments. It is a way to do social sculpture.

It can, from its own incongruence, uncertainty, instability, address and process societal instability and precarity, the immediate consequence of the oppressiveness of control.

It is what preserves the promise of hope and care: for alterity, for other-than-this, a not-of-this-world, for other times and different potentialities, for different dreams beyond the limits of the known.

In the (non)end, if control is taken to its extreme, or, if we accept Rosa's assessment that "the only way to obtain full control over one's own death is to commit suicide" (Rosa 2021, 84), then art as a practice and a force—that creates difference and establishes strangeness (Le Guin 2005)—is what utterly denies control and death and affirms life by, Le Guin again, letting the fiery arc of human emotion leap and close the gap … and open a new one, pose evernew questions, charting evernew terrains, opening evernew the doors to what (we) may (want to) (be)come.

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Contributing Authors

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LANA ZDRAVKOVIĆ is a researcher, publicist, political activist, producer, and performer. She holds a PhD in philosophy with the dissertation "Politics of Emancipation: Thought-Practice of the Militant Subject" and an MA in comparative literature with the thesis "Samuel Beckett, the Innovator of Romanesque Form". In her work, she nurtures synergies between theoretical, activist, and artistic approaches in passionately rethinking issues such as the power of presentation and excess of representation, the potential of subversive artwork, the opening of the spaces of equality as processes of redistribution of the sensible, the scandal of embodiment, identity, and belonging. She has carried out numerous projects both solo and as part of the artistic tandem Kitch and is a co-founder of the institute for art production and research Kitch. She actively cooperates with the Association for the Promotion of Women in Culture – City of Women, the technoburlesque collective Image Snatchers, and Via Negativa, a platform for the research, development, and production of contemporary performing arts.

ANA ADAMOVIĆ is a Belgrade-based visual artist primarily working in the fields of photography and video. Her work was exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions in Serbia and abroad, most recently at the 34th Bienal de São Paulo, or institutions like the Museum of African Art in Belgrade, Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje, Museum of Yugoslavia in Belgrade, Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, NiMAC in Nicosia, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rijeka, Museum of Photography in Thessaloniki, Osage Art Foundation in Hong Kong, Museum of Photography in Braunschweig. She graduated from the Department for World Literature at Belgrade University, studied photography at the Art Institute of Boston, and holds a PhD in Practice from the Institute of Fine Arts and the Institute of Art Theory and Cultural Studies, Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna. She is a co-founder of the Belgrade-based Kiosk-platform for contemporary art. She lives and works in Belgrade.
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HANNA HUBER has been employed at the University of Vienna (Austria) since 2019. She is currently working on her PhD project, "Performing on the Fringe: Narratives on the Festival OFF d'Avignon"; conceptualized as mixed-method research, it draws on qualitative interviews, quantitative data evaluation, and performance analyses. Hanna Huber has successfully completed theater, film, and media studies, English and American studies, and Romance studies at universities in Vienna, Malta, and Avignon.

DAN PODJED is an anthropologist dedicated to developing ethnography-based solutions and innovative research methods at the intersection of different scientific fields. He is a research associate at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, an associate professor at the Faculty of Arts, and a senior advisor at the Institute for Innovation and Development, both of the University of Ljubljana. He was the convenor of the Applied Anthropology Network of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) from its inception in 2010 until 2018 and continues to be active as one of the executive advisors of the network. In 2013, he was the founder and, until 2018, the main organizer of the annual event *Why the World Needs Anthropologists*, which has become the most important meeting place for applied

anthropologists in Europe and beyond. In 2020, he published his book *Indoor Anthropology* (in Slovenian), in which he shared with the public how he came to know society and himself during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the book *Why the World Needs Anthropologists* (2021), he brought together the discipline's leading experts to highlight the value of anthropology in today's world. His most recent edited volume, *The Invisible Life of Waste* (in Slovenian, 2022), presents waste as an important factor in global production and consumption networks. As part of the project Create to Connect -> Create to Impact, Dan Podjed explored the role of formal and informal networks in art production.

SAŠA BABIČ is a folklorist at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Her main interests are short folklore forms, i.e., greetings, swear words, proverbs, riddles, incantations, prayers, etc., their textual usage and cultural meanings, and their integration into folklore events and communication. Her research includes folkloristic, ethnolinguistic, and semiotic approaches, with the primary goal of searching into the deeper layers of culture. She does archival research to gain materials needed for diachronic comparisons and fieldwork to collect materials and explore the integration of short folklore forms in society. Her special interest is given to contemporary usages, changes, and adaptations of short folklore forms.

MARTIN POGAČAR is a researcher at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Institute of Culture and Memory Studies. His research interests include memory in digital media ecologies, technology and memory, and Yugoslav popular culture and industrial heritage. He is particularly interested in the influence of the media on the processes and practices of transmitting, recording, and re-presencing the past and the social imaginaries that emerge from the intertwining of technology, media, and memory practices. His recent publications include "A Microphone in a Chandelier: How a Clandestine Recording sparks Mnemonic Imagination and Affect" (Memory Studies) and a coedited volume *Zgodbe iz konzerve* (*Stories from the Tin Can: History of the Fish Canning Industry in Northeast Adriatic;* in Slovenian, translated to Croatian, 2020).

ALDO MILOHNIĆ is an associate professor of the history of theater at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, University of Ljubljana (UL AGRFT) and the head of the UL AGRFT Theatre and Film Studies Centre. He is the author of *Theories of Contemporary Theatre and Performance* (2009), *Art in Times of the Rule of Law and Capital* (2016), and *Theatre of Resistance* (2021). He is co-author of several other books, editor of numerous anthologies and special issues of performing arts journals, and author of numerous articles in academic journals. He is a member of the editorial boards of the performing arts journals *Amfiteater* and *European Journal of Theatre and Performance,* a member of the Association of Theatre Critics and Researchers of Slovenia and the International Federation for Theatre Research, and a board member of the Slovenian Theatre Institute and the European Association for the Study of Theatre and Performance.

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TERY ŽEŽELJ is a self-employed dramaturg and artistic researcher currently based in Ljubljana and Amsterdam. She holds a bachelor's degree in dramaturgy and performing arts from the Academy for Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, University of Ljubljana, and a master's degree in contemporary theater, dance, and dramaturgy from Utrecht University. In 2022, she started a two-year research project at Bunker, Ljubljana, on attending to multispecies environments and researching the potential for reconceptualizing the relationship with the environment. She is also involved in a longer practice-based research which she initiated with Madison Jolliffe, the day after yesterday, a practice of speculating utopias. Besides that, she works through different engagements as a dramaturg, productional ally, editor, etc.

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IVA KOSMOS is a researcher and cultural studies scholar. The core of her interest lies at the intersection of cultural production, art, and society; she studies the relationship between the cultural and literary field and social system(s), such as politics, ideology, memory, history. She has extensively written on contemporary post-Yugoslav writers in the international literary field and on the politics of memory in post-Yugoslav literature and theater. Kosmos graduated from the University of Zagreb (2015), was a Fulbright fellow at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (2014), a guest researcher at the Centre for Southeast European Studies at the University of Graz (2016–2017), and a researcher at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Institute of Culture and Memory Studies (2017–2022). She has published in Slovenian, Croatian, and international journals, including *East European* Politics and Societies and *The Slavonic and East European Review.* She co-edited the monograph *Priče iz konzerve* (*Stories from the Tin Can: History of the Fish Canning Industry in Northeast Adriatic;* in Slovenian, translated to Croatian, 2020).

JASMINA JERANT completed an MA in political science at the Central European University, specializing in political and social theory. She used to work as a journalist and editor. At the community radio station, Radio Študent, she hosted the feminist radio show *Sector Ž* (*Sektor Ž*) [Ed. Ž is the first letter of the Slovenian word for woman and the last letter of the Slovenian alphabet.]. Today, she collaborates with the Urbana Vrana Institute and the City of Women in preparing and organizing guided educational tours and publications on women's history. She is studying the universal basic income as a doctoral student at the Faculty of Social Work, University of Ljubljana. She writes short stories because she sees both life and places as narratives.

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SINIŠA LABROVIĆ was born in Sinj, Croatia, in 1965. A freelance artist, he has exhibited all over Croatia and abroad. His works are in the collections of museums in Zagreb, Split, Rijeka, and Dubrovnik, as well as in some private collections. He is represented by the Galerie Michaela Stock from Vienna. In 2009, he exhibited at the 11th Istanbul Biennial. In 2012, he was part of the Croatian representation at the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale. He lives in Berlin.

Social Impact in Arts and Culture:
The Diverse Lives of a Concept

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Infographics design Zoran Pungerčar

Publisher Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU
Issued by ZRC SAZU Institute of Culture and Memory Studies and Bunker, Ljubljana

Represented by Oto Luthar, Tanja Petrović, and Alma R. Selimović
Založba ZRC Editor-in-Chief Aleš Pogačnik

Print ABO grafika, d. o. o.
Print run 300
First edition, first print run.

Co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

This publication was funded through the Creative Europe project Create to Connect -> Create to Impact / CtC -> CtI (https://ctc-cti.eu) and the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS) research programs “Historical Interpretations of the 20th Century” (P6-0347) and “Ethnological, Anthropological and Folklore Studies Research on Everyday Life” (P6-0088).

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji
Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana

7(082)
008(082)

SOCIAL impact in art and culture : the diverse lives of a concept / edited by Iva Kosmos, Martin Pogačar ; [authors Josipa Lulić ... [et al.] ; translators Juraj Šutej, Matt Robinson ; photographs and images Alberto Martin ... et al.]. - 1st ed., 1st print run. - Ljubljana : ZRC SAZU, Založba ZRC, 2022

ISBN 978-961-05-0654-6
COBISS.SI-ID 117300739

ISBN 978-961-05-0655-3 (PDF)
COBISS.SI-ID 119480067

Social impact seems to be the buzzword of the past decade, a term dominant not only in the art of project writing but also in thinking and talking about—and practicing—art and science.

However, apart from the principles of measurability and predictability of the desired impact, there is a lack of sources to explain the concept. Just what kind of art, society, and the relationship between them does it envision?

The source of motivation for this book was the dynamic between social impact as defined by funders and social impact as understood by practitioners. This book is thus a joint effort of curators, critics, essayists, artists, producers, and researchers. Some reflect on the concept, some write about their own practice, and others give practical examples of what they have found to be social impact in the arts and how to achieve it.

We thus hope to bring the diverse lives and ambiguities of the concept to the public eye and to explore its effects on—and in— artistic and cultural practices.

Through different ways of social engagement within art—historically and geopolitically—the book follows the red thread through poetically, theoretically, analytically, and most importantly, transgressively written texts about existing ways of dealing with art within society and vice versa. From the social role of art in general as a must-have in socialism to the social impact that art should produce in neoliberalism, the book makes a unique crossover of different academic, activist, artistic, and/or organizational perspectives dealing with the sociality of art today.

Jelena Petrović, Institute for Art Theory and Cultural Studies, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna

This volume is valuable, timely, and educative, both theoretically and in the selected case studies. It is a fine contribution to performing arts studies exactly because it comes from a somewhat "unexpected" interdisciplinary set up.

Blaž Lukan, Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, University of Ljubljana

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