

**AN UNTIMELY BOOK**  
**Critical Practice (Made in Yugoslavia) 3**

**AN  
UNTIMELY  
BOOK**

**CRITICAL PRACTICE  
(MADE IN YUGOSLAVIA)**

**3**

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## IMPRESSUM

**AN UNTIMELY BOOK**  
Critical Practice  
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# INTRODUCTION: CRISIS AS A MODE OF BEING-WITH

007

ANIKO SZUCS

“The critique that there is nothing to criticize, nothing with which to criticize, nothing from which to criticize, no power to criticize, no desire to criticize, together with the obligation to criticize.”<sup>1</sup>

A few hours after my arrival to the city of Skopje, Macedonia, on a surprisingly cold early May day in 2016, to join the third cycle of the educational platform Critical Practice (Made In Yugoslavia), I took to the streets to find some coffee to at least temporarily clear my weary jet-lagged head. As I was dizzily walking towards the city centre, I stumbled upon one of the most vivid and populous protest marches I have ever witnessed in Central Eastern Europe and the Balkans (and one that I had most likely not seen in my homeland, Hungary, since the reburial of our 1956 revolutionary hero, Imre Nagy, in 1989). Tens of thousands of people, Albanians and Macedonians, were walking down one of the central avenues of Skopje, many of them holding colorful umbrellas or rainbow flags in their hands. For an instant, I believed that I was enthusiastically joining the city’s annual gay parade, and even celebrated the big crowd, surely unusual in its size and family-friendliness for most of the region. Soon, however, along with the other marchers, I arrived at the downtown area and encountered a most unexpected spectacle: an abundance of visibly newly built, shiny white neoclassical buildings and monuments along with gigantic statues of mostly male fighters evoking the socialist realist aesthetic of the former Soviet bloc. To my utmost confusion, the buildings, the monuments, and the statues were all covered with colorful paint stains: the

<sup>1</sup> Terry Hartnett’s paraphrase of Samuel Beckett’s axiom in *Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*: “The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.” While Beckett limits his discussion to the work of the artist, Hartnett, in the dialogue “Critics on Theatre, Critics, and Criticism,” proposes that the same axiom speaks for the critics’, and I should add theorists’, experiences too.

city, on this chilly evening, exuded a carnivalesque, subversive atmosphere that to me, that night, translated into the celebration of freedom and diversity, if not specifically the local gay community.

Only the next day did I learn that the protest was an embodied manifestation of the severe political crisis that had debilitated Macedonian political, social, and cultural life for the past ten years: the “Colorful Revolution”—for this became the official name of the series of protests that took place in Macedonia in the spring and summer of 2016—was a response to the nationalistic repressive government’s authoritarian and violent actions that culminated in the murder, and the cover-up of the murder, of a young local journalist. What struck me the most while witnessing the demonstration was that I could both feel the authoritarian government’s invisible presence and surveillance in this Agambean perpetual state of emergency and the potential of a performative interruption of the same perpetuum through the protesters’ commitment and enthusiasm.<sup>2</sup>

Macedonia was in colorful flames, and stains, when the participants of the third cycle of the Critical Practice (Made In Yugoslavia) programme arrived in Skopje by the invitation of Biljana Tanurovska-Kjulavkovski, cultural manager and curator, and director and of the arts organization Lokomotiva, Centre for New Initiatives in Arts and Culture, who, together with Marijana Cvetković, cultural producer and curator, and manager of Station: Service for Contemporary Dance in Belgrade, Serbia, initiated and organized this international project.

Critical Practice was announced as a “conceptual platform” that invited emerging authors (critics, researchers, theorists) and artists to participate in a series of short residencies to study, discuss, and reflect on contemporary performances and the state of contemporary performance criticism and theories under the mentorship of the performance theorist Ana Vujanović. The first two cycles of Critical Practice took place in 2014–2015 and 2015–2016, with the second one concluding in the publication of *A Problematic Book*.

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<sup>2</sup> The range of political performances that the group witnessed during this week of our stay in Macedonia, from the political marches, to the colorful defacing of the buildings, to the passionate debates between different generations of leftist and liberal political activists, was perhaps more of a defining experience for me, a performance studies scholar studying political performance, than to many of my colleagues who had witnessed Macedonia’s struggle from close and afar in the years preceding our meeting. Nevertheless, I want to propose that the crisis of Macedonia metaphorically, and perhaps even discursively, directed the working group’s focus on permanent crises and states of emergency, as well as on the performative responses that artists and theorists may give under such circumstances.

On this chilly May day of 2016, eight participants gathered as members of the new cycle of Critical Practice: Alexandra Balona, a researcher and independent curator based in Porto, Portugal; Nassia Fourtouni, a Greek dance researcher and dramaturg living in Brussels, Belgium; Aleksandar Georgiev, a Macedonian choreographer and performer based in Skopje, as well as in Stockholm, Sweden, and Sofia, Bulgaria; Nina Gojić, a dramaturg from Zagreb, Croatia; Ana Letunić, a Croatian researcher, curator, and producer currently splitting her time between Zagreb and Berlin, Germany; Ellen Söderhult, a choreographer and dancer based in Stockholm; Mateusz Szymanówka, a Polish dance dramaturg and curator based in Berlin and Warsaw; and lastly, myself, a Hungarian performance and theatre studies scholar and dramaturg based in New York City and Philadelphia. Besides our common interest in performance and dance studies, the art and practice of curation and production, we also shared a transnational lifestyle, as all of us had studied and/or lived outside our homelands and many of us continued to work in multiple cities and countries during the year of the program. In a way, we all had been pursuing a semi-nomadic life style, having had multiple homes, or perhaps no real homes at all, and were very much accustomed to the international setting and potential collaborations Critical Practice had to offer.

Throughout the year of the program, the group met three times and had multiple Skype discussions in between. After the first week that the group spent in Skopje, Macedonia, discussing theoretical texts proposed by the participants in a workshop setting, we met again from August 26 to 30 in Berlin to attend Tanznacht Berlin 2016 at the Uferstudios and collaborate on experimental writing practices with the Berlin-based International Notice artist writing group. Later that same year, in October, Critical Practice, Cycle 3, spent five days in Belgrade, Serbia, attending the Kondenz festival of contemporary dance and performing arts organized and curated by Station: Service for Contemporary Dance, and then five days in Skopje, again in residence at Lokomotiva. We got another glimpse at the all-pervasive sociopolitical crisis that had been lingering on in the country and witnessed again how severely it affected the cultural scene and the artists and curators working in the cultural sector. As Biljana Tanurovska-Kjulavkovski explained to Aleksandar Georgiev in an interview included in this volume, in such perpetual crisis, one is forced into a mode of constant reflection. This constant “self-exploration” or, in Gayatri Spivak’s words, “strategic essentialism,”

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perpetuated a state of vulnerability (032). In 2016, for the first time in nine years, Locomotion, the festival annually produced by Lokomotiva that the participants of Critical Practice were to attend, did not take place. The disappearance of the festival that “was happening most of the time of political crises,” was in itself a political statement: the interruption of a temporally structured, regular event, such as the annual festival, in a way powerfully highlighted and thereby “contest[ed] the stability of the crisis.” It simultaneously also prompted the curators to consider that ephemeral performances, temporary events, or actions might be more inspiring, both politically and aesthetically, in such critical times.

Crisis, perhaps inevitably as laborers of the art and educational fields, shaped our experiences both in- and outside of Critical Practice, all through the year of our program. As some of the articles in this anthology expose, many of us, most of us, were permanently operating in the mode of crisis: balancing day jobs and artistic pursuits, hitting and missing academic and writing deadlines, setting up and then flaking out of Skype meetings and other professional engagements, not to mention date nights, birthday parties, and important family gatherings. Still, I want to propose that members of this working group regarded, and continue to regard, crisis as the Beckettian “occasion”: one that “appears as an unstable term of relation” (Beckett, 1949) between the artist and/or theorist and the artwork and/or study of the object, and that “brings about the action of the artist’s [and/or theorist’s] work” (Roof: 176, insertion mine).<sup>3</sup> Even though Beckett dooms the “action of the artist’s work” to be an inevitable failure<sup>4</sup> and apprehends the occasion merely as an expressive vocation that “anything and everything is doomed to become” (Beckett, 1949), in my reading, the crisis as “occasion,” determined by unstable relationships between the artist and/or theorist and their object of work, as well as between the objects

of work and their audiences, is the productive space where our work emerges—it is the only space where our work, risking potential failure, can emerge.

It is *perhaps* for this reason that when the working group

4 Beckett provocatively proposes that “to be an artist is to fail,” because of the “[t]he acute and increasing anxiety of the relation [between artist and the art object] itself, as though shadowed more and more darkly by a sense of invalidity, of inadequacy, of existence at the expense of all that it excludes, all that it blinds to” (Beckett, 1949). In Beckett’s view, no authentic or non-exclusive relationship can exist between the “representor and representee,” and therefore the artist’s failure is inevitable.

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3 As noted in relation to the epigraph, Beckett originally limited his discussion to the work of the artist. His observations about the artist, however, are just as relevant to the critic and the theorist.

Critical Practice, Cycle 3, first was invited to consider what the organizing theme of this book should be, the group relatively fast came to the consensus that our volume should center on the concept of “crisis.”<sup>5</sup> This thematic focus, however, was never to be an exclusionary topical principle along which we would collectively accept or reject texts, for this volume, more than anything, from its conception intended to highlight the diversity of the group, both the wide range of national and educational backgrounds and the diversity of private and professional engagements.

Nevertheless, I will claim, though some of my fellow critical practitioners may disagree with me in this instance, that in one way or another, each essay of this book addresses, interrogates, or references crisis, or uses it as one—though not an exclusive—source of inspiration. The articles together underline some of the theoretical inquiries that the group considered in many of the meetings and workshops, and the juxtaposition of certain texts highlight the different methodologies and critical practices that we explored during this yearlong program.

The first section of *An Untimely Book* addresses the theme of crisis the most directly; the texts in this section give voice to artists, curators, and cultural managers whose work—and I should say existence—are fully determined by the daily challenges of the crisis in the Central and Eastern European performing art scene. While Ana Letunić’s texts report on two important professional meetings, the Dance vs. Circumstances Symposium that took place in August 2016 in Berlin and the meeting of the Nomad Dance Advocates, a gathering in Belgrade in 2017,<sup>6</sup> Aleksandar Georgiev conducted an interview with Biljana Tanurovska-Kjulavkovski on her work as a curator and cultural manager in Skopje. Each of these three texts highlight the precarious conditions in which artists and cultural managers work today—as Tanurovska-Kjulavkovski points out, “the only stable thing is the crisis itself” (032). For Tanurovska-Kjulavkovski, as well as for the participants of the Dance vs. Circumstances Symposium and the Nomad Dance Advocates, however, this crisis also becomes an *occasion* to surpass the limited and limiting possibilities

6 Letunić shortly introduces and theorizes over this latter event in her article “How to *ungovern* dance in crisis: Nomad Dance Advocates,” while in the Appendix she also provides a comprehensive report of the meeting, in which she summarizes each of the presenters’ talks in detail.

5 The conditional “perhaps” is especially empathetic here, as when I started to work on this introduction, I asked the group in an email to recall how and why we chose the theme “crisis”; not one of us could remember the conversation in which we set the theme and the basic parameters of the book. Yet another indicator of the perpetual crisis mode that characterized the group’s collaboration.

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and explore *both* new modes of collaborations and new forms of artistic expression. While the Macedonian curator emphasizes the importance of “think[ing] beyond fictional possibilities in the direction of trying to develop tactics *beyond* survival tactics” (031, emphasis mine) and embracing a more radical form of togetherness in an “economy of sharing or economy of exchange” (032), Letunić proposes “dance as a circumstance as an entity that is not separated from society by standing either *versus* or *with* circumstances” (025), subverting the title of the symposium. The artists, theorists, and cultural workers in this section are all preoccupied with the necessity to position themselves towards the poesis / praxis dichotomy that has characterized the contemporary dance and performance scene in Europe. Letunić warns of a new form of solidarity, what she calls *pragmatic solidarity*, that marks something of a contradiction since it simultaneously appropriates the post-socialist discourse and operates by neoliberal strategies. Georgiev, simultaneously, discusses the possibility of the “practice of dreaming” as a contest or a game to imagine the poetics of new curatorial practices.

Nassia Fourtouni and Nina Gojić’s piece, “Second Thoughts,” also addresses the precarious living and working conditions of the cultural laborers in capitalist societies. It does so through the two authors’ discussion of their jobs as dramaturgs, highlighting both the economical, and the even more anxiety-inducing existential uncertainties of this profession. The two dramaturgs first set out to coauthor a fictional interview, in which they would “explor[e] the relationship between the practice of the dramaturg and the idea of permanent crisis” (045). Their busy schedules, however, filled up with free and freelance work, day jobs and night rehearsals, prevented them from realizing their project as they had originally thought out. This “failed” dialogue is the epitome of the inevitable Beckettian failure of the creative process, one that also exposes that the Beckettian failure is always, inevitably, the performance of failure. For Fourtouni and Gojić, while failing to complete the task they set out to complete, find affiliation, companionship, and empathy through the performative act of writing (and failing).

Ellen Söderhult, in her essay “Out of the Body into the Earth: a.k.a. Earth-Self Meditation,” further interrogates performance’s potential to provide an opportunity for the performers and the audience “to practice forms of empathy” (057), more specifically a new form of empathy: one that does not presuppose the self’s identification with the other’s somatic, emotional, or cognitive experience. In other words,

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asks Söderhult provocatively, “[C]an there even be empathy without the self as a base or centered point of reference?” (058). In search of this de-self-centered empathy, the author proposes the exploration of “different senses of self” (059), and offers a meditation practice that helps participants to identify one such self that she terms “earth-self.” This performative text, similarly to Söderhult’s other piece in the volume, “Some Scores to be Practiced to *Rite of Spring* by Igor Stravinsky” choreographs new communal experiences that ask for radical attentiveness and sensibility, and selfless empathy towards the others.

The last two essays of this volume both reflect on performances that address the crisis of historical linearity and the discursive and political (pre)determination of historical materialism. Nina Gojić, in “This Scene Disappeared,” analyzes Bojan Đorđević’s *Future Read in Concrete and Stone* and Oliver Frljić’s *The Ristić Complex*, two performances that both problematize the historical and cultural legacy of the former Yugoslavia, while Alexandra Balona’s essay, “Were We Better in the Future?,” discusses three pieces of the Greek choreographer Kat Válastur. Both texts identify a utopian void in the artworks—Gojić in the potentiality of “prefiguration” and Balona in a “not-yet place”—that may transform, or be transformed, into a new form of social and political existence, a “Newtopia” in Válastur’s words. At the same time, the authors also recognize that these new visions of futurity are inseparable from the hegemonic discourses of history and memory, that the traces of the past pervade the futurities envisioned in the present: “[t]he future perfect is the memory of what is to come” (081), quotes Gojić Paolo Virno, while Balona, together with Válastur, acknowledges that “[w]e were better in the future” (089). Nevertheless, in both pieces, the utopian void is framed as an *occasion* that allows the artists, together with their audiences, to celebrate this potentiality as “a space of hope” (081) or an “opening for new lines for thought and change” (091).

“The only stable thing is the crisis itself”—it is a mode of being and a mode of operation for many of us, artists, critics, and theorists. Crisis, for the members of the third cycle of *Critical Practice* (Made in Yugoslavia), was also a mode of being together. Our collaboration has been an ongoing experimentation with how to “be-with” in, to use Jean-Luc Nancy’s phrase, the singular plural: how to

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understand, support, and inspire each other in- and outside of our workshops and meetings. Perhaps it is no accident that so many of the texts in this volume advocate for the necessity of rethinking forms of solidarity and empathy. This book is a testament to our evolution as a working group, and our becoming of an operative, loving, and (almost) selflessly empathetic community.

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# ON DANCE AS A CIRCUMSTANCE

015

REFLECTIONS ON THE  
“DANCE VS. CIRCUMSTANCES”  
SYMPOSIUM (AUGUST 2016, BERLIN)

ANA LETUNIĆ

Given the rising precariousness of Berlin's contemporary dance scene, and its influence on production processes, it seemed only sensible to programme a symposium on working methods and production conditions as a part of the ninth Tanznacht Berlin biennale. The three-hour symposium “Dance vs. Circumstances” was structured as four rounds of talks where speakers were grouped by their professional orientation: artists, curators, writers and a cultural policy maker, each of whom had presentations limited to 15 minutes, with only one short discussion with the audience following the final session. Although the four different discourses were indeed porous and there was interaction between them, this format made it difficult not to notice how some discourses made it virtually impossible to think outside of their basic postulates, due to the hegemony of the discursive formation of the market<sup>7</sup>.

Journalist Astrid Kaminski, moderator of the symposium, started the encounter with a call for self-reflection: “We need consciousness of what we're doing here!” During her introduction several loosely connected issues were raised in this spirit of a “permanent state of emergency” (Agamben, 2002). Kaminski warned about the scene sometimes being “too solipsistic and egoistic while not enabling enough space for critical awareness due to too much mutual dependency”, i.e. the precarious conditions of working in this context. Consequentially, she proposed thinking about creating conditions that would make criticality

7 Foucault first introduced the term *discursive formation* as “the general enunciative principle that governs a group of verbal performances” (Foucault, 1969). For the purpose of this text, the term is used on the basis of its definition from the SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies, i.e. “the discursive formation as constituted by repeated motifs or clusters of ideas, practices and forms of knowledge across a range of sites of activity” (Barker, 2010). More specifically, I observe the discursive formation as the configuration of discourses in the particular historical conjuncture that is neoliberalism at the present.

possible. Another relevant issue brought up during her introduction was one of accessibility: “Is art for the chosen few or should it be open to everyone?” In the array of dissonances laid out during the symposium, there were various responses to these subjects, as well as propositions to consider other concerns.

While communicating the responses of the speakers, I will try to disentangle the appearance of the discursive formation of the market – which signifies a post-political situation – that is wrapped around the presented topics. In addition to commenting on the symposium itself, this reflection will revolve around numerous fragmented and dichotomized issues which, hopefully, will make the need for a deeper, more, antagonistic discussion more visible.

## POIESIS VS. PRAXIS

The first participants, who were invited to propose the issues they considered most relevant, were the choreographers Jasna L. Vinovrški (Berlin/Zagreb), Martin Stiefermann<sup>8</sup> (Berlin) and Andrea Božić (Amsterdam/Zagreb).

Jasna L. Vinovrški expressed her concerns in the form of a letter addressed to the “beautiful, powerful dance community”, which she associates with a feeling of belonging. In the letter, she confides in us regarding neuralgic aspects of the scene: the lack of financing that pushes artists to work abroad in the residency system, and the “loss of the source of creativity due to running between projects”. While the latter has been heavily discussed as self-exploitation in project-oriented cognitive capitalism (see Kunst, 2015), Vinovrški mentions a problem that hasn’t been elaborated on nearly so often: what she formulates as “self-organization for selfish reasons”. This motif will continuously reappear during the symposium and therefore receive more elaboration in this reflection.

While Vinovrški partially employed the discourse of fatigue when discussing the work of organizing and curating, Andrea Božić considered doing “everything as a part of an artwork”. In her proposal she viewed gaps in supportive infrastructure as an invitation to change the modes of production. Božić mentioned examples of her

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own self-organized work such as BAU<sup>9</sup>, TILT<sup>10</sup>, SPECTRA<sup>11</sup> and the Come Together<sup>12</sup> festival. Additionally, while introducing the dichotomy of “artist in the studio” and “artist as citizen” into the discussion, she proposed the “reorganization of infrastructures, as well as af-

<sup>9</sup> BAU is a platform in Amsterdam that aims to support independent dance and performance art and to develop its working conditions.

fects”. From the position of a self-organized cultural worker, she perceived several problems in the field: standardization of the arts and the “impossibility of acknowledging diversity”, unsuitable quantitative criteria for evaluation of the arts and the large gap between project and institutional funding.

In my understanding, these recurring issues are a manifestation of the pervasive dominance of economic reason in the arts today. To be more precise, the commodification of the arts reduces cultural value to economic value, while policies reproduce that logic by shifting attention from state subsidy to market survival, which ultimately leads to the unsustainability of “unpopular” artistic practices in the cultural field. What remains to be discussed is how some of the practices that promote oppositional political content are appropriated and taken over by exploitative interests, such as the idea of “self-organization for selfish reasons” mentioned by Vinovrški. The phenomenon of curating and collaborating out of economic necessity, which I would like to call *pragmatic solidarity*, marks something of a contradiction to organizational culture since it simultaneously employs post-socialist discourse and neoliberal strategies of work.

Given all these issues, both Vinovrški and Božić called for change, as did most of the speakers of the symposium. Still, during the talks, the issues of the “artists exhausting themselves with non-artistic work” and “getting out of the passive artist’s role” were raised repeatedly. Unfortunately, to binarize poiesis and praxis in this way seems to contradict the demand for change, as it has long been recognized that the borders between them in today’s

<sup>12</sup> Come Together is an interdisciplinary festival in Amsterdam that gathers the artists of the independent performing arts scene, in a collaboration of BAU, Frascati Theater and Veem House for Performance.

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<sup>10</sup> TILT is an interdisciplinary platform founded in the Netherlands in 2009 by choreographer Andrea Božić, sound artist Robert Pravda and visual artist Julia Willms with the aim of supporting and inspiring artistic practice beyond disciplines.

<sup>11</sup> SPECTRA is a long-term project by Andrea Božić and Julia Willms (TILT) in which they engage with the whole space and the audience’s presence in it as part of the work.

capitalist society are deeply blurred. To be more precise, artistic production and creation (poiesis) is today inevitably intertwined with the political activity of artists as free citizens (praxis), especially when “dealing with their own conditions of work, which accompany the performing arts as their ‘political unconscious’” (Vujanovic, 2011). Therefore to call the artist’s role “passive”, as though the political aspects of praxis had never risen to consciousness, seems to be influenced by a modernist image of the artist as a “genius” working in isolation from the rest of society and, in my view, risks oversimplifying the discussion by enabling the spectacularity of that image, and this stems from the discursive formation of the market.

### INSTRUMENTAL VS. INTRINSIC

The second round of the discussion featured the curators and programmers Heike Albrecht (Berlin), Annemie Vanackere (Berlin) and Ash Bulayev (Athens/New York).

At the beginning of her presentation, Heike Albrecht called for a “more equal distribution of public money”. In that regard, it is important to mention a policy measure of participatory budgeting that would facilitate her request: the situation where members of the community directly (or through delegates) assume decision-making power in the distribution of public funds. Contrasting this straightforward demand, another perspective on culture she proposed seemed somewhat problematic: “Culture can be viewed as a strategy to enliven the city like the example of the European Capital of Culture shows us”. ECoC is a project that is supposed to contribute to the strengthening of European identity while having a significant economic impact; this makes it a well-known example of the convergence of cultural and economic goals, i.e. the instrumentalisation of culture. Ultimately, that kind of logic leads to the valorization of culture from an economic viewpoint only. At the end of her presentation, Albrecht’s call for the end of “application culture” was welcomed with applause, which underscored the fatigue caused by “project culture” and the need for more structural funding, with the possibly of it occurring within a participative decision making process.

Annemie Vanackere warned of the importance of cultural political work in finding a balance between the roles of institutions and independent initiatives in the art scene. She uses the term “ecology of an art landscape” that Markussen (2010) defines as “the complex interdependencies that shape

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the demand for and production of arts and cultural offerings”. In relation to this ecology, she emphasized a need for the mapping of positions, but it remains unclear what is the aim of this mapping. Since mapping is primarily a descriptive research tool, it is fairly neutral if not directed toward a particular, more defined goal. Vanackere responded to the title of the symposium by proposing a different one: dance *with* circumstances instead of dance *versus* circumstances. Although this change of (pre) positions implies a particular adaptation to the “unchangeable system” (capitalism as the only possible system of work), she advocated for a new form of solidarity. Again, without proper contextualization and implementation, the *new* form of solidarity might just as well end up being a motif appropriated to serve as yet another of the many ambiguities in the contemporary “marketplace of ideas”.

Ash Bulayev offered a more detailed overview of the areas where the symptoms of neoliberal discursive formation are blatantly visible. He started his speech with a quote from the cultural sociologist Pascal Gielen: “Artists are international or nobodies; curators are connected or nobodies” and immediately emphasized the relevance that strategies of internationalisation and networking have for the art world. He then mentioned “dance entering the museum” which could also be interpreted as a symptom of art market expansion, as well as the proliferation of intermediary organizations and networks in the performing arts field, which reproduce NGO logic. Further, in his discussion of how Culture 2000–2007, a European Union programme that prioritized intercultural dialogue and artist mobility, “pushed the artists to work in a different way”, Bulayev shifted his focus to the impact of cultural policy on programming strategies and modes of production. Finally, he made a case for reducing the discrepancy in national policies that reinforces the division between international and local artists, for investments in production as well as presentation and for rethinking quantitative measures of arts evaluation.

These last points, in my view, seem to be in strong relation: while the culture of presentation and the attention paid to the demands of spectators is developing more and more, an emphasis on financing artistic production is seriously lacking. The concern for the spectator, reflected in the current cultural policy priority of “audience development”, is in accordance with contemporary populist politics. It praises arts and culture in a utilitarian manner which, ultimately, leads to the impossibility of the arts to confirm

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their own inherent value as art – rather, this can happen only in economic, social, and political spheres – meaning it always has to be valorised through a logic other than its own.

## PROJECTIVE VS. INSTITUTIONAL

The third part of the symposium consisted of the presentations by the authors Dorion Weickmann (Berlin), Kirsten Maar (Berlin) and Bojana Kunst (Gießen/Ljubljana).

Dorion Weickmann warned of dance practitioners being “too busy with internal problems and artistic concerns rather than the public ones”. Her observation relates to the poiesis/praxis dichotomy established in the discourse around the artist, as well as to Kaminski’s statement in the introduction about the scene being “too solipsistic”. She notes another issue that was posed in the introduction: “Dance as an art form is made for the audience and should be understandable to everyone”. Again, there is a focus on reception by the audience in the overall discussion, now having to do with the matter of accessibility. I believe it is important to express the complexity of this issue, since the framework of “what is understandable to everyone” could lead to the perpetuation of standardized content at the cost of the emergence of new artistic paradigms. What Weickmann recommends is that if “we want diversity in the audience and not only on stage” the solution is to “offer content beyond the limits of contemporary dance and ballet”. Still, it is possible that this focus on the audience is coming from the discourse of this (economic) justification for the arts, which, again, has a consequence, that programmers might take greater care of their audiences than of the artists with whom they collaborate.

Kirsten Maar, whose presentation began with the discourse of collaboration, also points to the problem of collaboration motivated by economic needs, i.e. pragmatic solidarity. The recurrence of this puzzle in the discussion, in my opinion, only points to the fragility of the ideology of solidarity in the face of pervasive market reasoning and calls for more dialogue on these complex political questions of being together, thereby making contemporary dance a relevant space for discussing current social-political concerns. One of the issues Maar wants to interrogate is sustainability in collaboration: “How do we work together on the long-term level”, (beyond the project’s timeframe), and how do we make contributions “beyond institutions”? She re-formulates her questions even more broadly, asking the

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audience how can we “work beyond cognitive capitalism” in conditions where “artistic research gets more and more institutionalized”? Maar poses questions in a way that reveals her understanding of the institution as a fixed category, which provides a meaningful introduction to Bojana Kunst’s presentation, as she lays out a different perspective on the topic.

Namely, Bojana Kunst thinks it is important to conceive of “institutions from a temporal perspective, not approached as facts but as potential processes”. She observes a challenge in the simultaneous process of performing the institution and resisting the very process of it and asks: “What do we lose if we win in the process of institutionalization?” Institutions supporting dance, she continues, are especially interesting to capitalism: in the nineties there was an overall economization of the arts and the discovery of Eastern Europe, then the rise of support for the highly educated and nomadic grew into a continuous search for *young* artists until, finally, we are now being governed by continuous fear of insecurity, i.e. precarity. Kunst reflects on ways to reach rearrangements between politics, economy and value and suggests “a radical shift in temporal dimension” through a “restorative dedication to present time”, in contrast to the tensions of project logic and its projective sense of time. It is important to mention this might be an important layer of the “reorganization of the affective” Božić appealed for at the beginning of the symposium. Towards the end of her presentation, Kunst asks questions that not only conclude her presentation, but also, in my opinion, underline the variety of fragmented issues exposed during the whole event: “How to rethink the knot between cultural politics, cultural value and cultural production? How do we produce the artistic value? And how are artistic, aesthetic values created in society?”

## ARTS VS. CREATIVE

The fourth and the final part of the symposium was hosted by Sabine Bangert (Berlin), cultural policy maker from the Green Party (Die Grünen). This was the only presentation accompanied with a short discussion between the speaker and the audience.

Coming from a decision-making environment, Bangert warned about Berlin politicians not understanding “dance as a separate art form”, but perceiving it “as subsumed in performing arts and doing so well that nothing

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needs to be done". That is, of course, in dissonance with the array of imbalances the other speakers had previously mentioned, some of which Bangert reiterated in her presentation. Again, it is the lack of institutional funding for independent dance organizations in Berlin that makes "working conditions in dance unacceptable". Since there is "no possibility in Berlin to develop smaller productions", a misbalance occurs in relation to the number of graduates in the field of dance from schools such as the Inter-University Centre for Dance Berlin. Besides the deficit of space to show productions, Bangert warns about the lack of time as well, and proposes the implementation of a law that enables artists to have "the possibility to develop something in five years, since one or two years of funding are not sufficient". Also, following The Greens' focus on social sustainability, she calls for "funding bodies to implement minimum wages". As a means of resolving these issues, she proposes dialogue with government and cultural institutions "to arrive at long-term funding for the independent scene" as well as to reallocate the funds lost due to the "complexity of the application system", i.e. bureaucratization. Bangert stays pragmatic in saying that, while advocating for more funds, "this demand has to be somehow justified to the politicians". To *justify*, she would use the argument of culture as an "economic force which has extreme advantages for Berlin and is good for society" while opposing culture becoming a market with neoliberal tendencies in financing. In the struggle for better conditions of work and a stable dance house, Bangert claims "artists achieved a lot in the last five years in the political field, there is not much more to be done by the scene and it is up to the politicians now". This mind set might also stem from the established dichotomy of poesis and praxis since, at the end, she claims that: "When artists exhaust themselves in political work, the artwork suffers".

In the short discussion after this presentation, initial comments reflected on a change in the artists' language towards the funders, since they feel "they almost have to beg and are treated as children". In my view, the language currently adopted in the cultural sector by the funding systems in Europe is defective, not only because it fails to provide an adequate means of talking about culture, but because it is a language of dependency and supplication that fosters relations of inequality. Although other sectors (such as the army) are also funded by the citizens' taxes, only the arts are described as a subsidized sector, being not-for-profit (if we define profit in an economic sense). Another audience

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member continued with this line of reasoning saying that "we have strong tendencies towards neoliberalism in the arts but art and culture are not a market". Bangert responded to the discontented statement "everything we do points in the direction of creative economy" by saying that she as a cultural policy maker "fought against the 'creative economy', but other politicians let it pass". It seems, I would add, that the expansion the discursive formation of the market is candidly visible in the way we name our policies: first there were arts policies, then cultural policies and now, finally, we have creative policies.

The third comment from the audience offered a short overview of the development of the dance scene in Berlin saying that "forty years ago in Berlin there were just ballet and opera; then Tanzfabrik came into being with no money and a lot of engagement of the artists", thereby pointing to the relevance of artists' praxis. The speaker continued, saying that "in the eighties, the scene changed with the invention of the job of producer, first in Amsterdam and Brussels" and claimed that "this position should be more important again" since there are also "lots of big spaces in Berlin that are free most of the time". She also implicitly describes a manifestation of the impact of cultural policy on aesthetics, by mentioning that "we have to allow artists to work until the end, not this short way – then people will be convinced it is an art form". The discussion with the audience started to become almost antagonistic; it was interrupted due to the predetermined timeframe of the symposium.

## PRAXIS VS. POST-POLITICAL

In conclusion, Kaminski stressed the need for more discussion since "conditions are changing". Considering that the format of the symposium left a very short time for dialogue, it seems the antagonism that "forms the essence of the political" (Mouffe as cited in Kunst, 2015) was constricted. Or, as Kunst stated when comparing the political stance of artists to those of contemporary creative industries: "...they articulate their ideas by forming contexts and communicative social situations in advance, where particular relations can take place safely and without antagonism; this is where temporary communities can be formed, enabling the participation of different users, as well as the contingent and free-flow of various interests. It therefore seems as though it is actually the prevailing heteronomy that Žižek terms pseudo-activity" (Kunst, 2015). Furthermore, pseudo-activity

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produces a lack of real effect in society and marks the main characteristic of the post-political situation.

During the symposium, the call for change was often reiterated but still seems to belong to the normalised discourse of crisis and, without clarification of its normative relational system, exists on the verge of becoming drained of meaning. In my view, for the demand for change to achieve a real effect, its political nature should be brought to consciousness. But, due to the establishment of this poiesis vs. praxis dichotomy, it seems that a portion of the speakers were still relating to politics as something external to the arts. In my belief, in order to achieve the desired change, it is vital to overcome this separation of artistic work and the artists' activity as citizens of society.

An example of such public activity by artists that resulted in an intervention in decision-making processes happened in Belgrade, shortly before this symposium, in May 2016. Due to contemporary dance in Serbia systemically being pushed to the outer margins of the cultural sector, members of the contemporary dance scene in Serbia sued their Ministry of Culture. Concretely, they demanded the annihilation of the results of the yearly tender for culture in which nearly half of the budget for dance was given to a private commercial dance festival, at the cost of 99% of the local choreographers not being supported for their independent work. The jury who made this decision consisted of three members that do not have any education or experience in contemporary dance; only one of them works in the field of dance in a broader sense, in classical ballet specifically. Although the dance scene is still waiting for the reaction of the Ministry, this endeavour fostered a broader discussion with the aim of "a public and open dialogue between the independent dance scene and decision-makers in the Republic of Serbia through a long-term advocacy process".<sup>13</sup> In that sense, this action is an example of how members of civil society are equipped with the power to interpret and to transform the social and political structures with which they interact. In these times of the pervasiveness of the discursive formation of the market, it is necessary to remind ourselves of the role civil society plays as the social space of freedom and solidarity, in contrast to the state, but not reducible to the market.

Returning to the symposium, a few other contradictions underlined this situation of prevailing political articulation still being imposed by the market, alongside the

<sup>13</sup> The discussion dedicated to reflection on current policies for dance in Serbia, as well as proposals for future policies, can be found at the Kondenz festival blog (2016): <http://kondenz2016.blogspot.hr/p/reakcija-na-rezultate-konkursa-za.html>.

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recurring issue of poiesis vs. praxis permeating the discourse of the artist. For example, by proposing to dance *with* circumstances instead against them, as the title of the symposium suggests, Vanackere implied certain reconciliation with the way things actually are. Yet, such accommodation to current conditions often lacks a sense of history. It naturalizes the present, forgets the past, and cannot imagine alternative futures. Coming from a similar rationale, the previously mentioned phenomenon of *pragmatic solidarity* reveals the frailty of an ideology of solidarity in the face of the dominant ideology of economic servitude.

In order to abandon political pseudo-activity, it seems requisite to make these different discourses more porous and to orient them towards constructing an inter-discursive domain that is emancipated from the dominant ideology of the market, allowing for the antagonisms and articulations of being together without calculation. In that scenario, dance would not need to be positioned as an entity separate from society and standing either *versus* or *with* circumstances. Hence I believe a more powerful version of a highly heterogeneous discussion like this one would be to recognize dance *as* a circumstance – as an activity in society

– and, accordingly, to explore the grounds for possible cultural resistances that could lead to a more autonomous world of cultural production.

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# THERE IS NO PRIMARY VOICE SPEAKING, THERE IS NO ONE WHO IS SMARTER

INTERVIEW WITH  
BILJANA TANUROVSKA – KJULAVKOVSKI

ALEKSANDAR GEORGIEV

Biljana Tanurovska – Kjulavkovski is a cultural manager and curator, a co-founder of Lokomotiva – Center for New Initiatives in Arts and Culture and Kino Kultura- a new space for contemporary performing arts and culture (Skopje), and of the Nomad Dance Academy Network.

My name is Aleksandar Georgiev, aka Ace. I'm a choreographer from Macedonia living and working in Skopje, Stockholm and Sofia, a co-founder of Nomad Macedonia and the Garage Collective, and part of the Nomad Dance Academy Network.

Our conversation took place at KINO KULTURA in Skopje on April 21, 2017. We spent an hour and a half in an inspiring conversation that circulated around the topics of poetics and the management of crises within curatorial practices.

ACE

As you know, we, the Critical Practice group, are planning a publication, we are still debating how to construct it, and in what kind of format. The conceptual themes under discussion are the notion of constant crisis, the management of crisis and imaginary crisis. The idea of crisis is especially important for our generation born into it, who aren't familiar with any other social condition or at least have the idea of crisis as the closest social reference.

You immediately came to my mind while thinking about this subject, especially as someone with whom to discuss the aspect of curatorship. I

remember it was in 2015 or 2016 when you held a public event with Ivana Vaseva, the curator and program coordinator of FRU (Faculty of Things That Can't be Learned). I think it was called "Festival for 100 Euros or One Million Euros". I found interesting how you problematized the curatorial practice through the prism of capital and therefore crisis. Could you explain how and why it happened? Tell me more about it.

BILJANA

Sure. It is a collaborative concept, a discussion/game, developed in the framework of festivals or other events with partners working in that specific context. The concept was developed by Ivana Vaseva and myself, and for each discussion/game we invite seven players that perform the roles of dream makers, dream hunters, dream navigators and divine sublimators. Alongside them, the audience also plays the game and has its specific role.

However, this idea emerged from our text with Elena Veljanovska, "The Festival as a 'Microphysics of Power' (Foucault) in the Region of the Former Yugoslavia",<sup>14</sup> in which the notion of the festival, its transformation, structure, and meaning is overviewed along with the contemporary understanding of it in the context of the ex-Yugoslavian countries that once were part of a big federation.

After publishing the text in several books and magazines, we realized that is time to test the ideas presented by putting them into practice. We chose the structure of a game since it offers not only a playful and energetic atmosphere but also a different framework for speculation that can be at the same time serious but also imaginative and dreamlike. Our considerable experience working on or producing festivals helped us to rationally narrow the limits of our pondering, as searching for new festival formats and concepts on a theoretical level is not always analogous to practice, and most considerably might stimulate traps that are not so easily imagined and anticipated.

As rapid socio-economical and political changes influence art production, creative processes, curatorial concepts, selection procedures and formats (with the festival being the most dominant format), in redefining the roles of the curators, audiences, artists, etc. we wanted to investigate how these are shaping the context of art. Thus,

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<sup>14</sup> Biljana Tanurovska Kjulavkovski, Elena Veljanovska and Ivana Vaseva, "The Festival as a 'Microphysics of Power' (Foucault) in the Former Yugoslavia", in *Parallel Slalom, A Lexicon of Non-Aligned Poetics*, eds. Bojana Cvejic, Goran Sergej Pristas (Belgrade: TKH (Walking Theory) and Zagreb: CDU (Centre for Drama Arts), 2014), 354.

we challenged ourselves with the creation of the game/discussion in order to see if our speculations correspond, or open ruptures within the frames influence society today: how festival programs, or curatorial concepts and ideas are influenced by economic power, what directions art can take (curating as well), and at the end of it, what kind of art we believe in, but maybe more importantly what kind of society we envision in these precarious times.

We proposed a financial parameter as a limitation, as well as the structure of the game as limitations through which we wanted to confront expectations with possibilities, abilities, concepts and political ideals. In the context of Macedonia in the independent scene especially we always deal with limitations, economic in particular. The question however is if this obstacle is sometimes an advantage, or vice versa.

However people that work in the field are always invited to be part of this game – curators, artists, festival programmers, managers, producers – and somehow the game becomes a direct investigation of the context, it could be a larger festival context, the dance or theatre scene, or just a specific festival context. The game enables a detection of the symptoms within the context, or why certain issues are coming to their end, why some concepts cannot work anymore, etc.

At the end we have a winning concept, and that also is interesting, to understand which ideas we would, as certain community, go forward with to realize in future.

We had the game/discussion twice in Macedonia, first in Skopje under the frame of "Locomotion Festival", then in Bitola, another town in Macedonia, as "AKTO Festival for Contemporary Art". Afterwards, we held them in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in "CO-Festival", in Bucharest at the Piloting Biennale of Contemporary Dance, under the name "RE/DANCE" and in Vienna at the ImpulsTanz Festival, in a talk session for the Life Long Burning Symposium "Crisis? What Crisis?!, Dance & Aesthetic – Dance & Labour – Dance & Politics."

Participants or invitees are people involved in culture and art through let's say different communities: from the industry, from the independent sector or from the public sector, for instance. It was important to acknowledge these differing points of view in relation to the general sociopolitical economical context. Running organizations and institutions related to culture and art in a context of crisis is determined by the crisis itself to some extent and by the politics of the economy. We wanted to investigate how that

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would be perceived on an imaginary level in a context where this is not the case, or in some context where this is the reality, like Macedonia.

For example, one of the participants in Macedonia, who was the director of the Manaki Brothers Film Festival, said “But what is a million euros? That’s not really an issue, that’s not a monetary thing I should talk about, that’s nothing.” What she meant to say, from my perspective, was that from her position one million is not a sum that is not reachable and such a comment in my view depicts the unbalanced realities in the public cultural sector, and speaks to the unbalanced treatment of diverse domains within the policies of culture. However, in contesting these perspectives, you realize how economic politics, or the general sociopolitical climate, affects the situation in which culture and art are programmed and how their content is delivered. The important thing to take away from this is that it’s very different to talk about these diverse contexts, because they are framed on diverse ideological bases.

In Macedonia, these diverse contrasts are dominant and visible in the political system, and directly affect those who oppose the dominant ideology. Macedonia for more than ten years was under the conservative right-wing party in power whose policies converted the ideological frames of conservatism into corruption, clientelism, etc. It was a system of crises, and those kinds of crises based systems produce disadvantages that affect the art world in totality. In Macedonia you can see a dichotomy of two worlds: one, the traditional art system, is still based on an anachronistic way of governance and understanding of culture and its system, and the second from my perspective is the world of the independent cultural sector which critically reflects and tries to reinvent or to question cultural and artistic spheres.

ACE

I want to focus now on the direction of poetics. My thinking processes benefited a lot from the “game/discussion” you presented in the Locomotion Festival in 2015. To return and contextualize what you said above, you proposed a contest, a game, as a practice of dreaming. Basically, you invited different people who are working in different sectors and ask them what format of festival they would do with 100 or 1million euros. Eventually they would need to present their idea in the contest. Good.

You mentioned shortly before that the crisis and economic situation influence curatorial practice.

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Now, I would like us to think about contemporary choreography and poetics in relation to curatorial practice. Do you see any space for poetics in curatorial practices? If so, to what extent do you think that crisis frames poetics within curatorial practices? What type of poetics could the methodology of crisis bring to a curatorial practice?

BILJANA

I was just reading a text by Bojana Kunst<sup>15</sup> in which she talks about the poetic capacity of invention for an institution and about that poetic action can change the rhythm of work, now I quote: “...and the ways in which we operate and organize ourselves through work, how we organize ourselves inside this foggy mist.” The foggy mist is the imagination, or as she is saying, the “...imaginary field in which we are trying to institute something”.

In the text she gives some examples from Athena Athanasiou that discuss the paradoxical temporal structure of institutions; explaining that institutionalization is possible in the persistence between fiction and reality. This brings me to the answer to your question. You cannot create without fiction and you must deal with the contrast from this position between fiction and reality. I think the poetics of invention she is talking about comes from that place.

However, a situation of crises limits the possibilities for the realization of your fiction, a crisis produces the conflict between fiction and reality; this means that you are dealing with a conflicted situation in relation to what you are aiming for and what you have as palpable in the possibilities around you. In such terms you think beyond the fictional possibilities, in the direction of trying to develop tactics beyond survival tactics. Otherwise you would just survive.

If you are a victim, if you are living under scrutiny or in a situation that is not good, then the first effect on your body is that you struggle against something which is endangering your being, your body becomes a body of survival. In that sense you imply some strategies of survival, not military but poetic tactics, mainly because you deal with arts and culture. You try to negotiate with what you have. And what do you have? You have togetherness, you have a community of professionals, a community of practitioners, you have social capital and sharing.

<sup>15</sup> Bojana Kunst, “The Institutionalisation, Precarity and the Rhythm of Work”, *Kunstenpunt*, (2017).  
<https://www.kunsten.be/dossiers/perspectief-kunstenaar/perspective-institution/4450-the-institutionalisation-precarity-and-the-rhythm-of-work>

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In that situation you have an economy of sharing or the economy of exchange, on these bases you can build some environment that can exist, for some time. It is on this basis that we have tried to maintain the festival, for some time. Those were the means with which we could maintain the festival, since we didn't have support from the ex-government for around seven years. They were intentionally trying to forbid us from working, or as I say, they were applying "implicit censorship", in order to make us invisible, non-existent. Therefore, we had to recycle and exchange, using capital other than monetary. We produced systems of collaboration, solidarity and togetherness, coexisting in order to overcome the crisis, etc. But crises become constant, and our temporality, or symbolics became a permanent situation that perpetuated the precarious conditions.

Then the question becomes to what extent can you be vulnerable and be in a state of "self-exploration" or a certain "strategic essentialism", to quote Spivak.

Or how do you negotiate, plan and work?

Or I asked myself so what do we do? Is this festival a survival strategy? To what degree should we be implied in this strategy so as to not make ourselves so vulnerable? To the extent that we become the epitome of precarity in every aspect?

Anyhow we ARE.

ACE

Yeah, it is a constant measurement of pulling and pushing between recycled capital and "strategic essentialism" in order to keep activities visible.

BILJANA

Exactly, it is constant reflection and constant thinking. In one moment I thought of bringing in a logic of temporality that might facilitate the creation of some other poetics through different perspectives. Because festivals as such, which are temporal structures in themselves, but are also ongoing, should produce a crack in the system. I have said that it is fine that a festival ends, it has created its context, appeared and then disappeared. So I said is it ok that the Locomotion Festival event is happening for eight years and then it's gone? Maybe it will appear as a different festival one day. However, Locomotion was happening most of the time in political crises, and it was a temporal event because in crisis you cannot deal with stability; the only stable thing is the crisis itself, so to contest the stability of the crisis,

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probably you should invent even more temporal events or actions which would bring back poetics.

But somehow, I think that inevitable subject is also an aspect of the politics of the economy.

When I was in Tanzquartier, Vienna, on a debate, Janez Janša said at some moment: "What would be the difference if Tanzquartier would be in Sarajevo?" I added, "or Skopje?" Of course, there are many issues to be discussed around what that would mean. But, in this context, the economics are limiting us; if we have specific economics to deal with, we can develop the community much more easily. Then, the working conditions and all the other things would be much more visible in comparison to a context dealing with ongoing crises. Being in such a context becomes very psychotic. Crisis (political, economic, life, social...) produces conflict and friction between fiction and reality. That can be a very productive thing because it can lead us to a new poetics of invention – all the time. Which can also become a psychotic thing.

When it comes to practicality and how you could effectuate it, the economy as politics appears as a regulator and limiter of the possibilities of what we are doing in cultural and artistic fields.

ACE

Clear. Now, I would like to introduce the level of normalization of crisis, to provoke further thinking.

It seems that crisis is in constant perpetuation, constant active shifting. Talking from an artist's perspective, participating in the programs you have created and seeing from the outside your curatorial practice throughout the years of crisis, I have noticed some really big changes, that I consider poetic ones; not necessarily connected to the politics of the economy, but to some other realms that for me are non-graspable at the moment, that's where my interest is.

For example, the Locomotion Festival in 2011, where a big number of artists were invited, you proposed a format related to communal living and constant sharing, where the presentation of artistic stage work was not the focus. Afterwards, the next year's festival was directed towards formats of criticality. It brought a lot of analytical and critical theorizing, also a lot of activist works were curated. Recently the festival presented a platform format. This is the opposite of everything we have spoken of before, in terms of temporal structures and their impact during

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a crisis. The festival was curated and programmed once per year, which constitutes a repetitive structure that mediates through time annually, but now, your platform is something that you propose as constant programming throughout the whole year. Could you talk about this?

#### BILJANA

Ok, now we are talking on conceptual basis very much influenced by collaboration. In the words of Rudi Laermans, I would refer to collaboration as the medium of collaboration, which is defined as being together, friendship, thinking together, co-existing, collaborating, etc. In a larger context that was produced through the Nomad Dance Academy Network, bringing possibilities to refresh, re-evaluate and question many different issues, such as:

What is a festival? Is it a format that can change meaning from its economic terms and become a space for possibilities? Or, is it a space through which we can form different actions that are not going to be selected and regulated through strict protocols?

What does it mean to co-curate? And, what does it mean to exchange opinions with people from diverse contexts, i.e. political, economic and conceptual?

What is a field? If we are talking about a field and a scene, what is that? How can we talk about the field in Skopje or Skopje's scene without having all the components that constitute the field? How we would contest the production of the field by thinking in theoretical terms, in the facilitation of artistic diversities?

Overall, by not having the possibility of constant programming of these aspects throughout the year, those that are locally important we tried to effectuate through the festival. We looked at it as a heterotopic space where possibilities can arise, and things can happen in cooperation with a reality that is not there. In some ways we tried to experiment with it.

I co-curated this Locomotion Festival with Iskra Shukarova. We had big discussions about what happened in 2011, and we asked ourselves "did this festival made us more self-referential, or more open to the audience?" But for me there is no answer to this question. You cannot see the festival as just one specific event, we must see it over the years, and ask what effects this festival brought. Then, the festival, as a body of different actions, can constitute a whole.

So, if I reflect on the 2011 festival I could say we used the "yes let's get self-referential" tactic in order to make it

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self-critical; to make us re-question what we are doing inside our community of practice.

Also we are questioning how to be open towards diverse types of audiences, because audience as a concept is, for me, very politically driven. An audience is not something that can we can produce through performance, or an institution, an audience is part of the whole and paradigmatic of the public sphere. It is related, it is not outside or an externality that we need to bring in, it is part of the environment already and we need to communicate with it. So, audience depends on how a certain paradigm is developed, or present in a particular society. Take the theater for example, what type of theatre, and does it belong to the public sphere, or is it a market? We have for example institutions with many audiences that do not belong to the public cultural sphere but a touristic or commercial one, and they produce content that is market driven and commodified. So a methodological dilemma is – do we produce or include audiences? And do we produce a commodified content so we can count tickets, or do we approach audiences as an inclusive part of the paradigm?

It is necessary to think about the steps forward and how can you deal with certain aspects in a certain time in relation not only to historicity but maybe to the future as well.

For me the 2011 festival was very important because it questioned selection processes, it directly related to curating. Is curation to select or to nurture? Is it to co-exist with some environment in which we will give the possibilities for art to arise? Then we need to think and to rethink what the art is in this context, and how we relate this festival to our close professional context, and yet keep it very culturally diverse. Such an approach must be inspected, and reflect how we present art, how we work with art, how we develop art, what influences working conditions, why, how, etc. Such reflections are important, because curating in the larger European context, especially nowadays, is mostly driven by economics. In this line of thought taste is a top down feature, driven by the most powerful curators (economically speaking) who can propose or display diverse concepts of dance, theater, visuals arts, and so on. In that sense it is a game of power, affecting the field or the scenes, their development, their visibility, and meaning.

The 2012 festival dealt with questions related to policy. From my perspective, theoretical thinking and imagination in the art world must always be in contest with current policy, because it is here, through this created friction, where the crisis appears. If we understand this as bringing

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critical theory towards policy to create a conflicted position probably we could bring about another model of curating, and of institutions. And YES, it will bring about another kind of poetics, because the field of policy doesn't work when completely removed from the field of poetics.

I'm talking about cultural policy, mostly influenced by the dominant ideology and those parties driving the decision-making process. The friction I'm talking about and the dialog can produce conflict and should produce conflict. Maybe through this conflict we can talk about new poetics that could bring us another mode of working and curating.

ACE

You mentioned couple of times systems of collaborating, co-thinking, togetherness and networking. So, would you say that constant management of crises brings the practice of networking and collaborating constantly in relation to other contexts as well? For example, all the countries from the Nomad Network are from ex-Yugoslavia, (except Bulgaria). They might seem to share a similar economic situation, but there are big differences. I know that the Nomad Network has been quite a big help in terms of sharing resources for the scenes' co-development, in order to balance the different economic possibilities of the different countries. Would you relate that practice to constant crisis in some way or it is connected to something else?

BILJANA

I don't know, for me it probably relates to more directions than one. While you were talking I was thinking of eighties networking in "Western Europe" and the idea behind related to "let's make a network so we can enable communication flow and exchange" to being driven by neoliberalism, becoming part of the flow market, the flow of ideas as immaterial goods, and so on. This was another atom within the whole body of the market in culture. Of course, it had its positive effects and those didn't come from the crisis, but it was driven by the neoliberal economy. On the other hand, what happened here was driven by certain needs that were not economically driven. The needs were coming from individuals, and from the core of their existence, of where they were at that point or are now. We never functioned as a formal network, it was never meant to become certain network as such or to be formed as a body. I could describe it now as a platform, because it is a trampoline from which

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certain ideas appear and certain thoughts are contested, tested, worked on.

Common issues and shared historical and cultural references were what put us in relationship. What is collectivism? What is to be a collective? How is it to work in a system that is not managed from the top down, but is self-managed? How to produce a system that can be alive, or constantly contested, or that can allow deconstruction of hierarchies, how are responsibilities not given but taken?

For example, solidarity for us was not the emotional driver, nor was empathy towards something to be developed, but rather a constantly driven working mode. In the period of ex-Yugoslavia, values that were developed in that socio-cultural and political space were part of our understanding when we talk about collaboration, or governance, or systems, or sharing, solidarity, and the commons. In that sense, we shared common understanding, inhabited in our bodies, from where we grew up (ex-Yugoslavia). We were all living in the same system and we got to know it through our education, through the way we work, even through the way our holidays looked. I want to say, we had similar points of departure, but now, our contexts are socially, culturally and economically both different and specific.

If I remember well, you mentioned during our conversation the neutralization of the crisis. I don't really know what that means. Do you mean, neutralizing the crisis by making something or to live in the crisis as neutral?

ACE

I talked about neutralization as a possible perspective to observe the crisis, because if they are constant, if they are perpetual, we cannot experience a moment of non-crisis.

BILJANA

Aha. I don't believe in neutralization. I don't believe in normalization, especially not in crisis and I don't believe in a neutral position. I believe in a real stand towards certain thinking. I believe in ideological distinction.

I would not agree with any post-ideological (non-ideological) neutralization of the crisis. Because living in a crisis as such, produces emotions and affects that you cannot neutralize. So, for example, positioning yourself as neutral towards someone who produces this crisis, it is no position. I believe in a position and a specific stand towards crisis.

I never believed, and I would never believe in neutralization or a neutral position, specially coming from the

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Macedonian context. I will never understand people who are neutral towards something that is happening. I cannot be neutral while they are cutting trees every day, for example. I must have a position. Furthermore, from my position I perceive the crisis in my personal context as a devastation of the society. This situation affects not only me; it impacts my child, everyone, everyday living, everything.

In relation to culture and art I cannot be neutral when I see that someone who is an outsider in relation to cultural practices produces the law and normative that should regulate me.

I cannot be neutral.

I cannot be neutral when someone produces symbolics that are fictional or that build fictional identities through the commodification of art. It is abuse of art.

I cannot be neutral.

I cannot be neutral when I see that in an economic crisis where people live on 150 euros, others spend a 100,000 euro budget to invite a certain someone from a certain somewhere to visit and produce a theatre spectacle.

I cannot be neutral.

I cannot be neutral when someone says that they will produce an institutional object called a theatre that will cost three million euros then spends twenty million, and its roof is still leaking when we have three days of rain! There are many more examples.

I cannot be neutral.

Because a crisis produces effects and you are in dialog with these effects, you correspond to the effects of the crisis, I do not believe in a neutral position.

I defend that the position that everything is affected by a certain situation. There is no neutrality.

If there is no such a thing as objectively definable social reality, is it then relative to the moment of experience? This means that what defines you is the moment of experience. From this point of view there is no model of how something should or should not be done. There is no primary voice speaking, there is no one who is smarter, who should say how things should be done. You will always have to contest, and you always have to question in order to develop better surroundings and understanding of your context.

ACE

Trying to dig down then, what are the regular practices the management of crisis would produce?

You have mentioned several times contesting, theoretically criticizing and having solidarity,

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maybe these concepts could be relevant to the answer of this question.

BILJANA

I do not know what the management of the crisis means because the crisis, no matter how constant, always produces different effects.

To manage different effects, you must constantly go through different experiences and then you face impossible things. I will add something from organizational theory, referring to post structuralism, "everything is a certain experience." Every individual experiences crisis in a different way, but there are some common denominators through which we can recognize crisis, especially in defined surroundings, such as in culture practice. How we manage crisis is probably negotiable, because it always depends on what we have or what stakes we are dealing with.

So, to manage is: to manage the resources, to manage the people, to manage the infrastructure, to manage things, etc. How do you manage something if you don't have it?

In the management of crisis it is necessary to have a consensual approach from the specific community we deal with, with whom we share values. Then as members of a community, we can negotiate a way to operate using management behavioral theory, or by negotiating political matters. I consider the ideological realm from which we approach crisis as a common denominator.

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# HOW TO *UNGOVERN* DANCE IN CRISIS: NOMAD DANCE ADVOCATES

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INTRODUCTION TO THE REPORT ON  
“MAKE ROOM FOR DANCE!” GATHERING  
(OCTOBER 2017, BELGRADE)

ANA LETUNIĆ

You were supposed to be a reading a much more elaborate introduction to the report but my laptop got stolen. Naturally, I hadn't backed up my recent work including this text, and after the initial shock I soon realized that the ways in which this incident impacted my work are highly symptomatic of the working conditions of post-fordist capitalism. Although the files from my completed projects were saved somewhere on the network and I could reconstruct them with some applied archaeology, what terrified me most was the loss of all the unfinished projects. It seems I had an unconscious belief that these projects in particular would determine my value as a researcher, cultural producer and even as a member of society, that completed work doesn't matter as much as future work. Keeping in mind my privilege to own a laptop and work in the arts in the first place, I soon realized that this laptop was my only permanent material resource for performing cognitive labor; under conditions of contingent project-based employment I feel extremely vulnerable without it.

At the end of October 2017, I attended the Nomad Dance Advocates gathering in Belgrade, which addressed the need for more stable positioning of the field of contemporary dance in the region. The dance scene's chronic lack of material resources such as permanent venues and structural grants clearly reflects a disintegration of state apparatuses due to multiple crises. As Tsianos and Papadopoulos explain, “Precarity is where immaterial production meets the crisis of the social systems which were based on a national social compromise of normal employment” (2006).

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According to their proposal, these are some of the characteristics of embodied precarity: vulnerability (the steadily experience of flexibility without any form of protection); hyperactivity (the imperative to accommodate constant availability), simultaneity (the ability to handle at the same time the different velocities of multiple activities); recombination (the crossings between various networks, social spaces, and available resources); restlessness (trying to cope with an overabundance of communication, cooperation and interactivity); unsettledness (the continuous experience of mobility across different spaces and time lines) and so on. Sharing the experience of these phenomena with the resource-less regional contemporary dance scene – especially now with a stolen laptop – provoked me to ponder how to continue working without a permanent backup of our practices. What happens to the software when the hard drive perpetually breaks down and needs repair, i.e. what happens to the dance scene when its basic material resources are missing? In a situation where every dance floor, every light switch and the temperature of every room is a zone of struggle, this gathering of Nomad Dance Advocates pushed the crisis into open terrain where it became possible to discuss its logic and appropriate tactics of engagement.

The intention of the gathering was, in the words of Marijana Cvetković (Belgrade), to “make decision makers and public administrators be with us and understand from a different perspective how the field of art works”. Since the gatherings’ horizontality might have produced connections that would disturb existing power relations, many of the local decision-makers invited did not respond positively to this invitation. This is not entirely surprising since, with cultural policies increasingly supporting market-oriented cultural actors, the institutions of the state appear to be blatantly complicit with the hegemony of capitalism. To put this in a broader context, political theorist Chantal Mouffe in her conceptualization of “radical and agonistic democracy” (2013) maps the lack of an effective democratic debate as one of the main reasons for the rise of right-wing parties and the hegemony of capitalism. Still, between disintegrating state apparatuses and the invasive mechanisms of the market, civil society actors provide the terrain where conflicting points of view are confronted and thus contribute to agonistic democracy. By bringing together the dissonant voices of policy makers, artists and cultural workers, and programming formats that entice effective debate (e.g. Temporary Parliament for Dance), the Nomad

Dance Advocates gathering enabled agonistic confrontation that took place in a multiplicity of discursive surfaces. These contributions indicate how the field of contemporary dance, due to its tendency for experimentation, claims of autonomy, expectation of critical viewpoints and attention to political matters, contributes in a variety of ways to the unsettling of the dominant hegemony of capitalism.

Therefore, following the proposition of Ramsay Burt in *Ungoverning Dance* (2016), wherein “ungoverning is continually engaging in the maintenance and protection of the commons” by opening up spaces “for interaction, negotiation, and contestation as well as for sharing”, we can recognize this NDA gathering as an ungoverned space. To clarify, the commons has become a key theoretical concept, due to its unifying potential for many ongoing struggles, that challenges current political and economic systems. According to Helfrich and Bollier (2012), public goods are those resources which are effectively controlled by the state and not by the people, which means that they are usually for the benefit of state elites and not for the public use. Harvey (2012) distinguishes between public goods and commons, similarly but also differently, through the medium of political action. For example, public space is the space of political power exercised by the state and not necessarily accessible to all. It becomes a common space through political action that contests this situation, like Magacin in Belgrade which operates as an occupied space that is free (with minor participation in basic operating costs) for anyone who wants to work in the independent cultural sector. Still, when considering the strategy of withdrawal from the public sector, Mouffe (2013) reasons, “The power of capitalism is not going to disappear because we have a multitude of self-organizing outside the existing institutions – we need to engage with those institutions in order to transform them profoundly”. It is relevant to understand how the concept of “commons” might translate into models of cultural policy; one possible way is participatory governance (mentioned repeatedly at the gathering), a model of governance that implies non-hierarchical relationships between public and civil sectors.

With social and economic crises being framed as consensually established problems, we are being governed “through continuous precarisation that establishes social links, structures, relations and dynamics in society precisely with the production of a pertinent feeling and fear of insecurity” (Lorey, 2015). We embody precarity due to lack of resources in terms of time (e.g. structural and long-term public grants) and space (e.g. dance centres adjusted for the

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body and governed by participation), while simultaneously rejecting hierarchical and vertical procedures, critically examining capitalism as a site of domination, and affirming the values of radical democracy. Within the integral report from the NDA gathering in the Appendix of this volume, you will encounter multiple diagnoses of the current situation, as well as suggestions on recommonizing the public in the field of contemporary dance, and thus *ungoverning* ourselves from this exhausting and normativized precarity.

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## SECOND THOUGHTS

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NASSIA FOURTOUNI AND NINA GOJIĆ

This was supposed to be a different text:

"By adopting the form of a fictional interview, we are exploring the relationship between the practice of the dramaturg and the idea of permanent crisis. From today's perspective, we are inquiring into such ideas as the elusiveness of defining dramaturgy, dramaturgical authorship, sustainability of the labour of the dramaturg, collectivity and collaboration, etc. and we are addressing these questions to a fictional anonymous dramaturg in the future. By writing a fictional interview, we wish to speculate or dream of a different future, as a kind of subversive act. We are aware of the manipulation and narrative of crisis that has been imposed on us, but still allow ourselves to hope in an era of hopelessness. Again, choosing to be a cultural worker in this jobless age can be seen as a political stance. Insisting on doing something which brings rare few job opportunities can be seen as a decision that will eventually transform the nature of the profession."

— Fourtouni and Gojić, April 2017

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However, for reasons that have everything to do with the above mentioned precarity and the unforeseen impossibility for the two authors of this text to meet in person or to work together offline, the text now takes its only possible form, that of an anti-manifesto.

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We are thinking it is preferable that we avoid any idea of an 'ideal' dramaturg – how can we fictionalize an example from the future without giving the impression of a one and only version? How can we include a kind of multiplicity?

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Working title: “Female Dramaturg Now on Duty”, inspired by the Sonic Youth song, “Female Mechanic Now on Duty”. Is the use of the adjective *female* a bit problematic? In terms of exclusion?

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We would still like to keep the idea of an interview with a future version of ourselves, so here is a promise: we, Nassia and Nina, promise to meet again in ten years to rewrite this text, whatever that will mean for us in 2027.

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We're partly inspired by Dalibor Martinis' self-interview from 1976 and 2010. He recorded a set of questions when he was thirty one years old in Vancouver, Canada. He answered these questions more than thirty years later in Zagreb, Croatia. After answering the first question affirmatively (“Is Dalibor Martinis still alive?”), the artist goes on to pose questions to his future self, and his present self answers the questions asked by his past self. It's pretty interesting, the whole interview is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SCQiKDxmhk>

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– *nassia, dear! how are you? i wanted to ask you if you'd be able to skype some time next about our plans with the text?*  
– *hi nina! i wanted to send you too about the same thing! and i just realized that i didn't answer your previous email... about our texts, yes, let's skype next week!*

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It really depends, but for me, working is always most productive when it happens in situations of polyphony, which is again somehow constitutive for our practice. This is the second time I'm trying to write a text about my practice and just like the first time, it takes multi-vocality as its method, which is not a coincidence; I think I wouldn't even have thought of writing this text for this occasion if the option wasn't to write it with you. Working with bigger groups is of course more challenging because there are more voices in the room, all searching for their channel, but it also creates productive dissent. Thinking back about what my practice has been, I can establish that my constant occupation is

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thinking, devising, proposing, writing, staging polyphony, even if I sometimes do it alone. Albeit slightly peculiar, maybe this supports the paradox of the dramaturg I am referring to elsewhere in this text. Moreover, the issues of working with different and differing voices is for me the point that is foundational both for dramaturgy and politics: finding equal ground and creating conditions to be present in space and time, and by shaping various modes of this presence, affect the inhabited time-space. Maybe I like the idea of multiple presences more than multiple voices because not every-body has a voice necessarily, or sometimes even because remaining silent is a more political gesture than constantly speaking without enacting what is being spoken.

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This is what the text could have looked like:  
– Would you consider it a fact that the practice of a ‘good’ dramaturg involves the advanced capacity to adapt oneself, the ability to understand the needs and desires of the other collaborators and to constantly shift your thoughts in relation to them, for example? Do you often feel like that in your collaborations? If yes, do you think of it as a problematic aspect of our practice or not? Would you make a connection between this aspect of adaptability in the dramaturgical practice and the conditions that capitalism imposes or would that be an invalid comment?  
– What you are asking about is certainly true to an extent, but only as a one-sided projection by one type of collaborator. Yes, adaptability is required as a desirable ability in any type of collaborative work. And yes, this is also a sign of capitalism, but if we learned anything from the failed neo-liberal capitalist experiments of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, it is that the paradigm of individualism, especially because it favoured and often nourished its socio-pathic aspects, is obsolete, unsustainable and harmful for the majority. We are still coping with the many consequences of rendering adaptability not only as a societal norm, but as our dominant mode of the treatment of our environment. A lot of energy is being utilised in handling the post-catastrophic situation we now live in. Am I digressing too much?

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And this is how the text actually looks.

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If we agree that the labour of the dramaturg is nowadays characterised by its pervasive precarity, what is the word or concept you would use to explain the state of our profession in 2047?

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I realize how hard it is for me to imagine an optimistic version of the future.

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I enjoy the difficulty because I am interested in the in-between space of knowing and not-knowing. I consider dramaturgical practice as a way of practicing how to cope with the unknown, how to be present and attentive during the stage/phase not only of the making of something but before the making. It is a practice of being aware of the conditions and all the contributing factors that are related to the creative process, not at all a product-oriented practice but almost the opposite. A practice of not automatically repeating old mechanisms and habits concerning what is possible, what might happen. This practice includes individuals in collaboration along with the spirit of each era – the political, the social, the financial, and how we relate to each other as well as to the *zeitgeist*. Artistic practice is always about the future, not in a capitalist sense, of constantly seeking the new in order to add value to it as a product but to state one's ability to think of the future as something we don't yet know, not as a mere repetition of the past. Nevertheless, the elusiveness of the practice frustrates me. Only two weeks ago I went to an improvisation workshop and the teacher started telling us that nowadays artists are prisoners of filters. And that dramaturgs are also filters. And I thought that it would be interesting maybe to discuss that, because I see a hidden misconception of 'authenticity', maybe rooted in Modernism, but by then I was too tired to defend myself and so I remained silent.

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*– hey, shall we confirm for tomorrow at 8? for now, it seems i'll be available.*

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That is my starting point, in terms of the conditions I want to provide for myself, the state of observation that I am

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trying to nurture for my practice in order to be a good listener and observer. And for sure I keep reminding myself to be attentive, to not act as if I am watching from above. I do that literally indeed, but in a humble way. In the end, I am just one more collaborator. I haven't developed a specific methodology. I improvise and steal a lot too. But of course, there is also the question of the separation of life and work – and I don't really believe in that separation. Whatever I do in my life is somehow related to my dramaturgical practice.

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One of the buzzwords that appears in relation to the dramaturg is 'invisibility' and this text certainly supports that. The word is mentioned most often with regard to the dramaturg's authorship in a process, and anything developing in the direction of the possibility of being recognised as a 'specific methodology' might actually reduce this presupposed 'invisibility'. While I do admit the word's pertinence in the discourse around our practice, I also think that whenever we are dealing with collective working processes, which we are most of the time, issues around the recognition of artistic contributions become much more complicated.

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I am not sure if it annoys me, but it makes me wonder for sure. When people ask me: "But, don't you want to make something of your own?" I think that this idea of ownership in the arts field is problematic and being a dramaturg is a kind of a subversive approach or an answer to the problematic nature of self-expression. Nevertheless, I am aware that it is a strange role. And I often notice how rarely a dramaturg is merely only a dramaturg. I am not talking about the dramaturgs that are employed in institutions, but the freelancers. Almost everyone I can bring to mind is also a writer, a curator, a maker, a performer, a university professor and so on. It seems that it rarely forms an identity on its own and I wonder if it is strictly a matter of financial realities or if it has something to do with the nature of that role – if it is a capacity intrinsic to other capacities, something that cannot stand on its own, something that needs others in order to exist. I don't know. I wonder.

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As much as these ambivalences result in paradoxes which tend to have economic and social consequences, they are also what makes my practice most comfortable. I don't have

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to identify with one certain type of work or aesthetic, I can always be someone different. My best friend once said that the dramaturg is a performer offstage and a spectator on-stage. For me this points to the empathetic aspect of the dramaturg's practice, of our ability to shift between perspectives all the time and what it's like to be someone or something else. I can't think of a better way to verbalise the in-betweenness inherent to the practice and paradox of the dramaturg.

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*– shall we be inspired by octopuses for the future dramaturg? i will think about it, if i can propose something more concrete. – yes please, i don't see the link yet. although i must have told you about my fascination with octopuses before. the only link i see now is the dependence on communities, or maybe even alien intelligences.*

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Distance gives the ability to see more clearly, to reflect, to mirror, to influence the process. That is compelling.

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There are performances I worked on as a dramaturg, where I'm fully aware of the dramaturgical flaws these pieces ended up having. This is partly my responsibility because I'm often unable to insist on my ideas, suggestions and remarks. Every new process is a new negotiation of how power is distributed and I often back out thinking I'm not the initiator anyway so my opinions are secondary. It really depends on who I'm working with and whether this person is used to working with dramaturgs, what s/he needs or requests of them, how narcissistic or modest they are, and so on. Thus, when it comes to learning, I don't think you can actually learn dramaturgy, neither its definition nor its techniques, you can only keep learning what you are in relation to others in a performance-making process and then devise your own techniques accordingly. This is reinvented anew and always, one performance at a time.

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I worked with a sociopath once. I learned a lot from the trauma.

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– Somebody told me that you have a tendency to collect things. And that you have piles of notebooks with quotes. Could you share with us a quote that you think is relevant and could describe your relationship to dramaturgy?

– It is the following: “I like to watch”. Peter Sellers in the film *Being There*. And I am aware of the relation to voyeurism and perversion. I prefer to interpret it in a more poetic way though.

– Isn't it too reductive to limit it only to vision?

– I agree. But I think that in the performing arts, the visual aspect comes first. The etymology of the word “theatre” means to behold and then, there are so many terms traditionally connecting dramaturgy to sight: gaze, vision, external eye, the first spectator.

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I'm confused by this word 'vision' because I'm tempted to understand it in a prophetic sense, on the one hand, and as a very mundane term on the other. I'll try to combine the two understandings and say that I believe we should take the idea of practice radically and see how can we start referring to our practice as something constant, continuous and always developing. Then we might also start articulating demands for institutional protection of our labour.

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The act of boycott is inflicting damage to my current financial status, but I didn't regret joining it one second. My principles are strong and I can get stubborn when it comes to defending them, but if I gave up on them, it wouldn't result in anything better than insomnia.

---

Part of my struggle at the moment is to devise ways of becoming more of an author without assuming a directorial position. I don't want to direct, I even have the most basic problem with the term itself. I will never know all the answers, I never know exactly what is the right solution at a certain moment, I don't want to know these things and I don't subscribe to that kind of ideology. Rather, I ask questions, pose problems, propose options, keeping in mind the overall sense of things. In my view, the practice of the dramaturg is

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to always keep track of what kinds of sense and knowledge are produced and distributed in performative contexts.

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– *yes, my voice does not want to improve. deep inside i want to be literally silent for ever*  
– *sounds wonderful! instead, i have to talk to unfamiliar people on the phone, freaks me out.*

---

Dramaturgs will not be treated as problem-solvers, ‘magicians’ that will transform a piece – actually I like the concept of a witch, and what that is to connect to it historically. I need to think a bit more about this idea of the witch. But I definitely hate it when people expect dramaturgs to do their magic tricks and solve all the problems that a piece has... I think that having a degree in dramaturgy doesn't necessarily make you a dramaturg, just as not having a degree in dramaturgy is not, or shouldn't be, an obstacle to becoming one. This keeps the profession open, and this openness is in my view fundamental because at the end of the day, everybody involved in the performance-making process contributes to the overall dramaturgy of the piece. Maybe this makes the dramaturg's position unique in relation to other contributors to a performance, in the sense that the scope of her end-product surpasses her own investment of labour, always. I would call that the paradox of the dramaturg. For me, it is quite obvious that an individual assuming the position of a dramaturg is not as responsible for the overall dramaturgy of the performance as, say, the light designer is responsible for light design. But that's not obvious for most people, even those who work with performance regularly.

---

– *nassia dear, can we set a skype meeting for this week? i'm okay tomorrow during the day, thursday afternoon (till 6), friday any time for now.*

– *tomorrow morning i am going to listen to brian massumi and erin manning, then i am working, i will be around 19.30 back home, do you have time then? i cannot on friday in the time slot that you proposed, i will be at the school!*

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I guess my reluctance towards positions of densely concentrated power determined the decision for me to go for dramaturgy in the end.

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In psychoanalysis, the moment of recognition of something, the moment of a revelation, always happens in silence. I think that it is an important virtue not to fear silence. I have witnessed collaborators at work with *horror vacui*, and it only leads to rash decisions, just to cover the silence with some noise, with something, anything. I prefer collaborators who are not afraid of silence. That is the space where something can be generated and not repeated.

---

Although I should have become used to it by now, I'm still regularly annoyed by how many supposedly progressive-thinking individuals fail at this most basic level: in acknowledging how much time words take in space and how an equal distribution of time spent in dialogue is just as important an aspect of thinking about the equal distribution of any other type of resource, really.

---

I feel that whenever I try to address common misconceptions about our work, I fall into the dangerous trap of making elitist mystifications out of something that seems insignificant on a larger social scale. Usually I solve this by using metaphors so I say I'm something like a tailor, a nurse, a friend, an editor, a forensic, an architect, an engineer of the performance. I use all kinds of associations, but always end up having to do more explaining. It's tiring, but I can't blame anyone for this other than myself, my patience and my explanatory skills. Again, I try to be careful not to mystify anything or patronise anyone.

---

After my studies, I started slowly working on performances as a dramaturg. I think that the practice of dramaturgy satisfies my curiosity about bringing together different directions I am interested in. And even if I love everything related to words, I find dance dramaturgy more intriguing than theatre dramaturgy, exactly because it challenges the

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logocentricity that dramaturgy is linked to traditionally and historically.

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*– sorry for the silence, i was working these days and didn't manage to even open the document and work on it, so i don't know which deadline i should promise to you because i am afraid i will violate it again.*

---

I apologize in advance that my answer will be too self-indulgent. Because, if I can say one thing that characterizes me, it is that I was always pulled in too many directions and I still am, and this can be really confusing. I was studying dance, but it wasn't clear to me exactly which direction I wanted to take within dance. I engaged fully in classes and workshops, experiencing my performative body, exploring different techniques and repertoires, watching performances, getting into improvisation and somatics, reading about dance, but I wasn't really fond of auditioning and I wasn't thinking of myself as necessarily being on stage. And that was a problem I had to solve. Or not.

---

Somehow I believe that self-organised, horizontal and undirected collectives are the most logical and pleasant habitats for the type of dramaturg I identify with. And I identify with non-identity.

---

I have a broader curiosity about things and I cannot imagine myself easily doing one thing only. It never happened to me to do only one thing. And I don't know why, but I was saying that I wanted to become a dramaturg – it's funny, but I didn't really know at that point exactly why or what I meant.

---

This means I see my legitimacy as a dramaturg through constant articulation of my position towards others. There is a certain beauty in that ambivalence: always alone but always with others. Writing is a solitary practice and

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constitutes much of the dramaturg's practice, but that's not the type of being alone I'm talking about. It's rather the loneliness of the in-betweenness as a constant of the dramaturg's labour in performance-making. A unique position without a definition, with very little or no visibility, clear role or strict duty, but always in dialogue with everyone else. It's not an oppressive type of invisibility though, but again, the terms of this invisibility are always elusive.

---

Actually, I find it somehow funny and, at the same time, I enjoy the fact that it gives me the chance to think about it again and again, when I am asked and say something different, just because I don't want to repeat myself. I think it makes sense that dramaturgy is invisible – and preeminent dramaturgs have elaborated on the subject. Furthermore, I guess that this is what it should be. Otherwise, if it is too visible, maybe it is a sign of trying too hard.

---

*– i am working and i will be back in the evening. we can skype tomorrow!  
– are we skyping tomorrow at 9.00 or should we postpone? i'm free tomorrow after 13.30 any time.  
– i can't reach you anymore.... should we try skype instead of facebook?  
– shall we meet at 16.00 to skype? i plan to work on the text during the day.*

---

There is a range of jobs I'm formally educated for, some of which can be done in the so-called creative industries. Some of my colleagues survive by writing soap-operas, working as copywriters or PR strategists, but I'm not sure I want to or could do that. Instead, I babysit and I might try bartending illegally, since my legal freelance status prevents me from working anywhere outside my profession with a contract. As long as I have a choice, I would rather exploit myself by working in other sectors than exploit myself by working in my own field in a commercial setup. The labour of the dramaturg has no commercial value really, so I feel it is my duty to defend its immeasurable, invisible, non-monetary values instead.

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Sometimes I wonder if being a professional spectator means being less innocent in a way. But innocence is a tricky notion anyway. And maybe nobody has the right to be innocent in this world, especially now. (I am going too far). Maybe this is connected to the aforementioned old idea of 'being authentic', a Platonic origin of an assumption that everything has a truth beyond reality. Sometimes I also think that even though I am watching performances quite often, I would never want to work regularly as a critic. Watching performances for the sake of writing reviews causes a dreadful feeling to me. Even though I admit that it is a good exercise, I hate it when I have to write a text about a performance I have seen only once. How is it possible to not be impressionistic? I prefer to research a subject before writing about it. But then, what does this say about the spectators who by default see a performance only once? Maybe indeed it is a perversion of the profession – when watching a performance only once is not enough. It also makes me think about a question that I keep returning to: When can we consider an artwork finished?

---

– you cannot beat me in violating deadlines! i wanted to ask you too for one more day!

---

Sometimes I think of my past collaborations, not as successful or failures, but rather as battles. I think that every time, before a collaboration begins, I have a kind of innocence that I realize I lose after it ends. Maybe it sounds too negative; what I mean is that this kind of work is alive and changes you in unpredictable ways. So, no matter how difficult a collaboration can be, there is something to learn. And again I would stress the relationship with the now: not arriving at the rehearsal space with preconceived notions, to be open; failure is not excluded from that, it is always a possibility, it is always there.

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It always happens, when I try to hide something, it gets highlighted in the end.

Athens-Brussels-Vienna-Rijeka-Zagreb,  
January-November 2017

# OUT OF THE BODY INTO THE EARTH

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A. K. A EARTH-SELF MEDITATION

ELLEN SÖDERHULT

1

A performance can be an opportunity to practice forms of empathy, identification with realistic or unrealistic experiences, or other emotions or visions that the embodied self has not yet experienced directly as such. In Swedish the word for “performance” is *föreställning*. A Swedish word for “ability” is *förmåga* and the word for a combination of “imagination” and “ability” is *föreställningsförmåga*, meaning the ability to imagine or envision. In this case, *capacity* to imagine might be more accurate; as it hints that you can learn and improve the skill of imagining. It is a skill and not a talent, or rather a talent defined as the commitment to working on something that one’s body might not yet consider realistic or possible.

The Swedish word for “performance”, *föreställning*, suggests watching or experiencing a performance as an activity related to practicing empathy. “Empathy” meaning forms of identification that require imagination and the realization of one’s own situated existence as a very particularized perspective, in that it is informed, shaping and shaped by collective and individual histories, norms and behaviors. The word “empathy” comes from the Greek word *empathia* and means “strong emotion”, “of passion”, or simply: “in feeling”. The Greek adjective derived from *empathia*, given the meaning “to show empathy” (or compassion), means literally “to suffer together with”. But differing from “sympathy”, which includes feeling *for* someone, “empathy” means that one feels *with* someone or something. Traditionally that person or thing that has been the object of the emotions has been someone or something with an emotional life, someone or something that human beings can easily perceive and identify with. The clearer the field of anthropology gets on the interrelatedness of everything in a network of complex interconnections and plastic relations where bodies give and take form, the more curiosity

arises concerning non-living bodies or other conceptions of self. This raises questions about both the trainability of the imagination and the capacity for compassion, as well as the potential for expanding the limits of perspective dislocation.

During the late twentieth century the word for “empathy” was used in Germany to describe the process one is absorbed in while experiencing an artwork. In some theories of art, appreciation of an artwork would depend on the viewer’s ability to experience empathy, which was then understood as one’s ability to project one’s personality onto the viewed object. Historically, the concept of emotion seems strongly associated with a sense of self and identity and looking within, into a stable internal world (an eternal soul for example) in order to understand what is outside.

Today, Wikipedia defines “empathy” as follows: “the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing from within the other person’s frame of reference, i.e., the capacity to place oneself in another’s position.” Note the shift from personality and identity to position! It continues: “There are many definitions for empathy that encompass a broad range of emotional states. Types of empathy include cognitive empathy, emotional empathy, and somatic empathy”.<sup>16</sup> Could this updated explanation indicate that the focus could be moved from a projection of one’s personality and identity into the viewed object, to a somatic, emotional, cognitive understanding of a different frame of reference, where the one experiencing the empathy is not self-referential to the same extent? Or where the reference to self is retreating as the foregrounded focus is on a differently situated experience? Can empathy even exist without the self as a base or centered point of reference?

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In addition to watching performance, other opportunities to practice exploring or refining the power of visualization and navigating the complexities of emotions include meditation, thoughtfully constructed sci-fi worlds, imaginings or the adopting of other perspectives, or they can be built on theoretical texts or poetry. This can include acknowledging different aspects and dimensions of an already existing, material or immaterial thing, idea or situation, the practice

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of identifying with other notions of self, and searching for or creating different senses of self.

The following power training exercise for empathetic strength is best practiced in a comfortable setting with one or more friends. There is a reader, while the others exercise a combination of empathy, compassion and imagination. The reader should sit in the center, and it is beneficial if the listeners have something soft to lie on, a cushion under the head and knees, and a blanket to cover them. If possible they can hold onto a stone. The stone is there to facilitate empathic relationships to other materialities and temporalities. This link provides good background music: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CH2o-FGrWdE>

#### READER

I will now guide you through a meditation exercise in which you will leave your self-image and delineated physical body for a while, instead identifying with a different aspect of yourself that I will for now call the earth-self. It might be easier with eyes closed, and this meditation might include sleeping. If you fall asleep I will wake you up at the end.

Find a comfortable position and start by thinking about the contact between the surfaces of the body and the ground. You can direct your attention to all the water in your body, and feel the body melt out and into the floor a little bit. With the next exhale, you can let go of the day, and put it behind you. Let go of what will happen later and stay for a while with my voice.

Now imagine yourself on the top of a huge staircase, over the clouds.

You are walking slowly down the stairs.

The humidity in the air decreases as the temperature warms.

You descend, and you are now standing on sand.

The sand is warm against your feet. You are standing at the edge of the shore, the waves are softly hitting some rocks a bit further away. The water feels cool to you, the air is soft and warm.

The same water that hits the sand has circulated as clouds, rain, snow, seas and oceans, by human measurement for an extremely long time. Dinosaurs might have drunk the same water. The same water may have melted from snow and trickled down the sides of the still very young Himalayas, perhaps forty

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or fifty million years ago, when they were, by mountain measure of time, newly born.

The water or the molecules that constitute the water might have been a part of a rock body, a plant body or a mammal body. Maybe this moisture was exhaled by a human being, or pushed through the skin as sweat. In the humid air there are even more water molecules.

You lie down on the beach and your body sinks into the damp sand. The body consists of about ninety-percent water, and a vast number of cells. Allow your body to rest heavily and softly against the sand, as if it were semi-fluid. Together the cells constitute organs, muscles, blood, fascia and all the other parts and materials of the body. A human body has a digestive system, and also mitochondria that transform nutrients into energy in every single cell. In all of the cells there is a semi-fluid cell juice.

The planet's round form with slightly flattened poles, also have a soft, partially fluid inner center within an enfolding crust. The average density of the earth is 5516 kilograms per cubic meter; this density is lower closer to the edges and higher in the middle.

The earth can be divided in lithosphere and asthenosphere. The lithosphere is colder and stiffer, while the asthenosphere is hotter and mechanically weaker. The lithosphere is divided into a number of individual plates, which "float" on the liquid-like asthenosphere. The liquid quality of the asthenosphere allows the tectonic plates to move and reform in different ways.

Where two plates meet, intensive geological activities arise, such as earth-quakes, volcanic eruptions and the birth of oceanic trenches. Most of the earth's active volcanos are situated at the plates' boundaries. While the crust of the earth at the bottom of the ocean is only around five to nineteen kilometers thick, the continental crust is thirty to seventy kilometers thick. The oldest part of the crust of the earth is around four billion years old. As the radius of the earth is 6370 meters, there is quite a lot of material under your body right now.

Now picture your body with roots penetrating down through the earth. The body is heavy and rests against the crust of the earth. Imagine the roots reaching down and out, spreading your body, making it porous. Far below the roots the earth transforms

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into magma, melted mountain, the interior of the earth-self. The same magma gushed out of that body in the creation of mountain chains. The temperature of the liquid mass of melted mountain is around 740 degrees centigrade, and can be as hot as 1200 degrees.

The Himalayans are one of the youngest mountain ranges on the planet. *Himalaya* in Sanskrit means "abode of the snow". The Himalayas reach almost 2500 kilometers in length, and between eighty and two hundred kilometers wide. The Indo-Australian Plate is still moving at approximately sixty-seven millimeters a year, and within the next ten million years it will probably move around 1500 kilometers further into Asia. The India-Asia convergence moves twenty millimeters per year, thrusting along the Himalayan southern front, being absorbed by it. This leads the Himalayas to rise by about five millimeters per year, making them geologically active. The movements of mountain bodies are so slow that they are hard to perceive for human bodies. But the Himalayas are definitely getting taller.

Now I invite you to take some time to relate or experience the time of the mountains, or to spend time with the earth-self and the movement of the magna and the plates underneath you. You can allow your consciousness to disperse; you may sleep, rest, ponder the time of mountains, or the movements of the earth-body.

Reader: Watch over the group for seven more minutes, still listening to Watson's recording of Vatnajökul. Then wake up anyone who might have fallen asleep, and inform them that the meditation session is over for now.

(The original version of this text was written by Ellen Söderhult for the artwork *Bodywood*. The artwork was initiated by Sandra Medina, Anna Efraimsson and Hanna Cecilia Lindkvist and realized in collaboration with Eliisa Erävalo, Andrea Svensson, Ellen Söderhult and Angela Wand in 2017.)

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SOME SCORES<sup>17</sup>  
TO BE PRACTICED  
TO *RITE OF SPRING*  
BY IGOR  
STRAVINSKY<sup>18</sup>

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ELLEN SÖDERHULT

1  
SCORE FOR A DANCE CALLED  
“THE CIRCLE OF LIFE”  
OR “THE BODY OF THE BALLET”.

Use *Rite of Spring* as soundtrack to the following dance score.

There are three roles:

1. The audience (no upper limit of people)
2. The corps de ballet (no upper limit of people)
3. The soloist (not so many or one)

“In ballet, the *corps de ballet* (from French, *body of the ballet*) is the group of dancers who are not soloists. They are a permanent part of the ballet company and often work as a backdrop for the principal dancers. A *corps de ballet* works as one, with synchronized movements and corresponding positioning on the stage”.<sup>19</sup>

Note 1: Notice that the task of the *corps de ballet* frequently entails camouflaging, i.e. forming a backdrop as a collective group body.

Note 2: Notice how by simply adding an “e” to *corps* we get the “corpse” *de ballet*. One can then imagine that the “corpse” *de ballet* revives the ballet, gives re-birth to ballet as an expression of a collective body.

The attention of the participants “recycles” through the score as follows:

17 Documentation of two scores proposed and practiced during the carrierbag festival, one score practiced while documenting the practice and one practice imagined. All scores made up by Ellen Söderhult, while dreaming about the carrierbag festival, and before, during and after the festival itself.

18 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FF-PjFjUonX8>

19 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corps\\_de\\_ballet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corps_de_ballet)

The audience pays strict attention only to the corps de ballet.

The corps de ballet pays strict attention only to the soloist.

The soloist pays strict attention only to the audience.

However, the corps de ballet tries to be the body of the ballet all together, so they should pay attention to one another as well. Both the soloist and the corps de ballet must pay attention to the dance they are dancing also.

The *corps de ballet* may consider themselves a dance choir or a body of any dance, not only the body of the ballet.

The *corps de ballet* may use the terms that were under discussion at the carrierbag festival:<sup>20</sup> “supporting” and “circling” the dance of the soloist. Synonymous with “circulate”:

to encircle, gather, wrap and curl around (a dance, or dance history, choreography; scores curling up around your dance).

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Some Scores  
to be Practiced  
to Rite of Spring  
by Igor Stravinsky

20 Hosted by DAN-  
SEatelier in Copenhagen,  
June 2017. See [http://dan-seatelier.dk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/FANZINE\\_thecarrierbag-festival-1.pdf](http://dan-seatelier.dk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/FANZINE_thecarrierbag-festival-1.pdf)

2

## SOUNDTRACK PRACTICE

Use *Rite of Spring* as a soundtrack as you read *Listening* by Jean-Luc Nancy out loud to your friends.

3

## SCORE FOR A CLOUD AROUND AUTHENTIC MOVEMENT (DANCE)<sup>21</sup>

The dance is called “Clouding Authentic Rite of Spring”. There are two roles: one watcher and one dancer.

21 Alice Chauchat has defined Authentic Movement as follows: Authentic Movement is a form created in the 1950s by Mary Whitehouse and developed since then by many of her followers. A person moves with her eyes closed in the presence of a witness, attempting to follow every impulse that emerges, in order to come in touch with her “authentic self”. Originally a therapeutic practice, Authentic Movement is a favorite of dancers who have been using and abusing it for decades (see Yvonne Meier’s work for example). In “Generative Fictions or How Dance May Teach Us Ethics”, *POSTDANCE 2017*: [https://www.academia.edu/34819483/Generative\\_Fictions\\_or\\_How\\_Dance\\_May\\_Teach\\_Us\\_Ethics](https://www.academia.edu/34819483/Generative_Fictions_or_How_Dance_May_Teach_Us_Ethics)

The dancer: Do Authentic Movement but use *Rite of Spring* as the movement generator (it should be played while dancing). In this case, doing Authentic Movement means moving with eyes closed, and being attentive to impulses. Normally the dancer prioritizes impulses from the inside while practicing Authentic Movement, but in this case: imagine *Rite of Spring* as your true outer environment, determining your movements as they meet with your previous experiences, memories and capacities. “Clouding Authentic Rite of Spring” in practice means making variations on it, for example do it with a focus on agency in following, or with a focus on mending and supporting, or plan your Authentic Movement further in advance, using your library of dance memories. The watcher watches or supports and may take notes but also takes care of the dancer.

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# THIS SCENE DISAPPEARED: ON ABSENCE AS A GESTURE

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NINA GOJIĆ

In her text about theatre's relationship to (its) past, performance theorist Sophie Nield detects two parallel processes in current performance production and the scholarship that accompanies it. On the one hand, there is an "increasing absence, in the present, of the past (...) and its replacement with signs of "pastness": ghosts, sites, haunting, nostalgia, absence, ephemerality, loss, and mourning." (2014: 69). On the other hand, she recognises an "apparent obsession the theatrical present currently has with its own status as a future past" (ibid.), which is apparent in the current obsession of compulsive documentation in the performing arts. These phenomena motivate her to raise questions about the political potential of performances of the past that, as she claims, have to rethink the repeated employment of nostalgia and melancholy as the affective registers in which they primarily operate. While her analysis focuses on examples from British site-specific theatre collectives which inhabit semantically burdened sites signalling the post-industrial absence of visible production and labour, my examples come from a different geopolitical situation but speak of a similar shift, namely, those events in political contexts which were particularly affected by the fall of actually existing socialisms, together with all the side-effects it brought forward. Nield stresses how the absence she discerns is an affective one and this standpoint will also underlie my analysis of two performances which, although in very different manners, respond to the phenomenon of theatrical representations of the past.

Bojan Đorđev in his *Future Read in Concrete and Stone* and Oliver Frlić in *The Ristić Complex* both deal with experiences from cultural and artistic histories of socialist Yugoslavia, but approach their tasks with a much needed awareness of the topic's complexity, unlike many other representations of the same problem which appeared in

contemporary post-Yugoslav performance and visual culture. As I will try to explain, they understand the historical signifier of Yugoslavia as a site for new inscriptions and new interpretations which, in my view, represents a less frequent and therefore valuable tendency in the context where they appear because they counteract the increasingly radicalised right-wing discourse which attempts to erase and deny all positive aspects of the former socialist system and render them unimaginable from today's point of view. Moreover, the performances I will analyse can be interpreted as attempts to stage the exceptional status, now lost and exhausted, that the historical marker of Yugoslavia had, namely that of being non-aligned, as a political and cultural fact. Likewise, both authors enforce non-linearity in their narrative procedures and use the strategy of the void as a dramaturgical tool with which they aim to enhance the spectators' participation on a cognitive level, and in the case of Đorđev, physical as well. The phenomenon of the void will be central to my analysis, as I will look for particular connections between politics and the aesthetics that arise from this procedure. By positing the void as either the counterpoint (Frljić) or the main premise (Đorđev) of their performances, both authors undo the normative theatre-going social contract by cancelling usual communicative patterns, and attempt to formulate conditions for new ones.

#### THE SCENE THAT DISAPPEARED: THE RISTIĆ COMPLEX

I will begin by admitting difficulty in recounting my experience as a spectator of Oliver Frljić's *The Ristić Complex*.<sup>22</sup> More than anything, it seemed like a nightmare after a traumatic event, but one from which the dreamer, in a masochistic manner, doesn't necessarily want to be awakened just yet. This performance shares many similarities with Frljić's previous productions, which primarily have to do with the director's trademark style of working with actors who function as choruses executing body-art oriented scores, using music as the

22 I feel it important to note that I worked as a researcher-dramaturge during the pre-production of this performance. I was invited by Oliver, just like my colleagues Rok Vevar and Tomaž Toporišič from Slovenia, and Olga Dimitrijević and Ana Vilenica from Serbia, since the research had to take place in all republics where Ljubiša Ristić was most active before the breakup of Yugoslavia. Each of us had a specific research interest with which we were supposed to provide insight for the performance team, and I chose to focus on Ljubiša Ristić's usage and apprehension of the term political theatre. However, I did not witness any rehearsals during the production phase and saw the performance for the first time in Ljubljana's Mladinsko Theatre on October 1, 2015.

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main structuring principle of narration, and exhaustive images used to make unequivocal political statements. However, it also produces a surplus of meaning that cannot easily be absorbed by applying one-directional processes of decoding the signs on stage. Each piece of visual information cancels or calls into question the previous, and the following one, thus creating an almost schizophrenic feeling for the spectator, which is certainly one of the more pertinent aspects of engagement when trying to narrate the complex phenomena that lead to the dissolution of Yugoslavia. In my view, Ljubiša Ristić's<sup>23</sup> biography, along with the many contradictions it consists of, was employed by Oliver Frljić and Goran Injac, the dramaturge for this performance, as a narrative web that speaks of the collapse of an idea. Inevitably, this created consequences in the politics of aesthetics, as well.

Namely, so far Frljić has been invited to create performances in almost all former Yugoslav republics, resulting in public attacks and censorship attempts by the local cultural and political elites more often than not. His consistent topic, obsession even, is post-Yugoslav nationalism with all its hypocrisies, and the unwillingness of these societies to take responsibility for the crimes committed in the civil wars and the state building processes that followed them. Even a brief look at some of his performances done in institutional theatres in Croatia (*I Hate the Truth, The Trilogy on Croatian Fascism*), Slovenia (*Damned be the Traitor of His Homeland, 25.671*), Serbia (*Cowardice, Zoran Đinđić*) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Letter from 1920*) makes it possible to establish a through-line of Frljić's poetics claiming that he engages in the production of minority voices and interrupts the prevailing political consensus when addressing the many pathologies of the region. However, in most cases, even though these performances always display an awareness of the historical continuity from which these pathologies arise, they

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23 Ljubiša Ristić is a theatre director born in 1947 in Priština (today Republic of Kosovo). In 1977 he and his associates founded KPGT, the most famous mainstream theatre group in the former Yugoslavia. They began by producing experimental performances, introducing postmodernist aesthetics in Yugoslav theatre and often staging plays by contemporary Yugoslav writers. At the time, he was interested in promoting the idea of a unique Yugoslav cultural space and claimed to be novel in his aspirations, although this was also the aim of official cultural policies of the time. During the civil war in Yugoslavia, Ristić became a member of the JUL, a nominally leftist, but in fact extreme nationalist party founded by Slobodan Milošević's wife Mira Marković. Ristić continued claiming he is a radical leftist, although JUL was responsible for many atrocities during the wars. Today he is in charge of the Sugar Factory (Šećerana) in Belgrade where he occasionally stages plays under the name KPGT. He still claims he is a Yugoslav and a leftist, although his usage of these terms is at the very least peculiar.

usually address a specific nation-state with its respective dominant political discourse. With *The Ristić Complex*, the addressee becomes plural, therefore irreducible to a single idea of national identity, represented in the collective body of spectators. The reasons for this might be mundane: the producers of the performance are theatres and festivals from Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia, hence, most former Yugoslav republics. However, this caused a shift in Frljić's usual aesthetics: since he was not making the performance in a single country, he proposed a political problem that surpasses the context of singular nation-states. In the words of Draga Potočnjak, an actress who had also worked with Ljubiša Ristić on his canonical piece from 1980 *Mass in A Minor*, *The Ristić Complex* could be subtitled as a "mass for Yugoslavia".

Despite my confession at the beginning of this chapter, I will try to describe what happens in the performance before the counterpoint in the form of a void appears. This is by no means an easy task since the intelligibility of the performance somewhat depends on the spectators' knowledge of Ljubiša Ristić's works so I will avoid mentioning and explaining too many details and leave the work of deciphering all the Easter eggs to a different venture. For the time being I will reduce my ambition to conveying the impression of the performance's overall aesthetics and its representational mechanisms. Seven performers<sup>24</sup> sit at tables positioned on a blind map delineating seven former Yugoslav republics. Nika Mišković is dressed as a bride, wrapped in the Yugoslav flag. The partisan song *Bella Ciao* commences and the remaining actors form a tower using the tables from the beginning. The music changes to a song by the Budapest Gypsy Orchestra while the performers spit in each other's mouth and start to undress and run in

circles around the stage as the bride sucks a bottle of Coca-Cola. The music changes again, it's Rachmaninoff's *Liturgy of St. John*. Six performers pee for a while on the blind map of Yugoslavia and when they are done, a voice-over of Ljubiša Ristić's statement from an interview is heard: he speaks about the futility of civil engagement in movements for social change. Draga Potočnjak then cleans the urine from the map and weeps. Everything that

follows continues to obey the established logic of contradicting durational images and sounds, for example: the performers form the letters KPGT with sugar cubes and

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then chew them, they simulate orgies until Matej Recer, now dressed so as to evoke the appearance of Ljubiša Ristić, drinks a full bottle of Coke and positions the other performers as corpses on the map after which he returns onstage wearing a military uniform in order to give the command for the rape to begin while a choir version of Nirvana's *Smells Like Teen Spirit* is playing, and afterwards all performers wear wedding dresses and lick and kiss each other. And then comes the durational void. The performers form a pile of bodies in wedding dresses on the table, each of them wearing a mask with Stalin's face. One by one, they leave the stage and the bride from the beginning is left lying on the table. An animated puppet horse appears and Mišković slowly walks away from it, as though banished by an eerie force. The only image that remains, behind them, are words displayed on the wall: "This scene disappeared while the film was in the state's care". An almost unpleasantly high pitched musical score plays during a long fade out where only those words can be seen. The performers are gone and the audience is left alone with this empty space where the process of digesting what had just been seen can begin. Those words at the end produce a void so paroxysmal that it causes a strong and puzzling feeling of mourning and hope at the same time, as much as these affects seem mutually exclusive. To ask what any of these words and the images preceding them might mean completely misses the point, so I would rather choose to try and grasp what they do and how they do it.

Albeit in different ways, I find that both the image of Stalin's multiplied face and the missing scene function as emptied signifiers. According to cultural translator and theorist Boris Buden, it is impossible to understand the third way of Tito's Yugoslavia, and the concepts that support it, such as non-alignment, workers' self-management and Yugoslav dissidents, without examining its differentiation from Stalinism (2013: 103). However, he maintains that after 1989 the understanding of Stalinism became irrelevant, while the only thing that progressed on the path from the discourses of Stalinism via communism to totalitarianism was oblivion (*ibid.* 105). Thus, the mask of Stalin in the performance signals the absence of its meaning, or even functions like a projection of the simplified view of the actual historical development of Yugoslav socialism. In a way, this image summarises the political problem Oliver Frljić addresses in this performance: just how easy it was to forget and outright condemn the shared socio-political experience of a particular time-space. Certainly, the simplification at

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24 Beside Draga Potočnjak, the actors in this performance are Primož Bezjak, Uroš Kaurin, Jerko Marčić, Nika Mišković, Matej Recer and Blaž Štef.

stake is most often explained as the consequence of cultural erasure in the 1990s, which served to legitimise ethno-nationalist havoc as opposed to Yugoslav multiculturalism on the one side, and to pave the way for the prevalence of neoliberalism on the other, as opposed to self-managing socialism. However, if we take a look at Paolo Virno's idea of the *déjà vu* as the prevailing mode of perception in the so-called era of the end of history, perhaps we can find a different optic to look at these phenomena.

On the one hand, Frljić's performance can be seen as an exhumation of the collective post-Yugoslav unconscious. Some images resonate more familiarly than others and there is indeed absolutely nothing nostalgic about it. Quite the contrary, the aftertaste of each scene induces an uncanny feeling of seeing something before but not being able to remember exactly when or where. For example, the sexualised usage of the Coca-Cola bottle as a stage prop can be understood as a simple commentary on the alleged inevitability of transition to capitalism that the post-Yugoslav societies underwent, but also, if we abandon linear temporal logic for a moment, it becomes possible to think of it as a critique of the fact that Coca-Cola began production in Yugoslavia as early as 1967 and that capitalism was present in a nominally socialist country long before the 1990s, thus rendering the normalised narrative of transition less convincing. The performance is full of similar ambiguous signs the origins of which can be recognised throughout the repository of Yugoslav cultural memory and this feeling is compatible with the following words by Virno: "When we fall mercy to *déjà vu*, we seem to be repeating something, but we cannot say what is it that we are repeating: the specific content of the repetition is established only by the actual experience, and it is up to the 'now' to determine the 'already-been' retroactively" (2015: 44–45). As he maintains, during an experience of *déjà vu* an event seems at the same time virtual and actual, therefore disclosing its own potentiality. Since *déjà vu* creates a false feeling of repetition, a paradox occurs: memory takes the ever-evading moment of "now" as its object, while this moment is being re-evoked precisely when it takes place. The main premise of Virno's theory of *déjà vu* is contained in the idea that false recognition constitutes every philosophy of history. However, one specificity of postmodernism is the appearance of a millennial desire to stop or exhaust history and to erase the duration of time, while *déjà vu* affirms an everlasting present in this process. A devastating consequence of this affirmation is a feeling of paralysis, or a metastasis of the

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idea that there is nothing new anymore, and everything that appears as a product of culture is an operation of quoting previous artefacts. In his words: "The 'end of history' is an idea, or state of mind, that arises precisely when the very condition of the possibility of history comes into view; when the root of all historical activity is cast out onto the surface of historical becoming, and is evident as a phenomenon; when the historicity of experience is also manifested historically" (Virno, 2015: 33). Thus, a hypertrophy of history appears at the expense of the possibility to imagine the future. With this in mind, it remains to be asked what kind of operation in/on time does *The Ristić Complex* execute, and what kind of gesture towards spectators' emancipation does it yield in return?

"This scene disappeared while the film was in the state's care", the statement which proclaims the void at the end and potentially undoes all that preceded it, is a quote which was superimposed to a screenshot from Lazar Stojanović's 1971 film *Plastic Jesus*<sup>25</sup>. The screenshot replaced the censored original documentary scene which was, curiously enough, shot at Ljubiša Ristić's wedding. In the film, the scene that follows shows images of slaughter by Serbian nationalists ("*chetniks*") from WW2. According to the interpretation of the public prosecutor who sent Stojanović to prison, this sequence implied that the children born out of

25 *Plastic Jesus* is one of the most famous examples of Yugoslav (Serbian) black wave — a body of films that displayed a pessimistic attitude towards the then Yugoslav society. Although only a few films were censored, Lazar Stojanović was the only director to be imprisoned for his film-making because he insulted the state's symbols including Marshall Tito himself.

that socialist marriage will end up as nationalists and *chetniks* (Stojanović cf. Levi, 2009: 87), which allegorically ended up happening. However, film theorist Pavle Levi claims that the scene was in fact censored because both Ljubiša Ristić's and his bride's parents were highly positioned in the Yugoslav military, and the film itself was accused of mocking and insulting socialist Yugoslavia (*ibid*). Here I recognise a cynical twist: as much as *Plastic Jesus* may have been provocative at the time of its appearance because it voiced the absence of individual freedom in socialist Yugoslavia, from today's point of view, it actually anticipated the neoconservative nationalist discourse in sync with neoliberalism because of its, again simplistic and even dangerous, equation between the fascist and communist regimes. Quoting these words at the end of

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the performance, Frljić refers back to the discussion about censorship as such, and opposes the view that this practice belongs only to “totalitarian” socialist countries and only in the past, as if today’s societies and the West in general have no such experiences (see Buden, 2014: 68). When Boris Buden analyses the treatment of the black wave in Yugoslav cinema, he emphasises how the accusation carried out by the Party paradoxically came from a position of an already dead society, one which had exhausted its utopian potentials and faced its own historical ending, as well as its lack of future (*ibid.* 207). In a way, the words at the end of *The Ristić Complex* epitomise the idea that narrations about the phenomenon of Yugoslavia function only as narrations of a disjointed time. Furthermore, these words declare an impossibility of finding a referent anywhere in the performance, or attributing it with any kind of exact meaning because any one of them is as plausible as the next. If this peculiar performative epitaph carries out an act of claiming “this” scene from “the film” before finally fading out, it becomes evident that such a temporal operation leaves its trace only as a void, a hiatus, a deferral. Again, in Virno’s view, the logic of projecting potential only into the future should be revisited. With the help of Bergson, he explains that “the virtual takes the form of the past, thus becoming the prerogative of memory” (2015: 15). If we accept his claim, then maybe the memory of a void from a performance can acquire the status of an image of potential, not located in any specific time, but precisely in its being out of joint. The hypothetical scene that disappeared from the performance can be anything we want it to be and it is in this gesture of confidence in the audience that I see a rupture which sets up conditions for the invisible, denied and forgotten histories to reappear. This is the strong and ultimately unresolvable ambiguity of *The Ristić Complex* – the fact that it contains a void which emanates a hopeful signal while evoking traumatic failures, painful paradoxes and tragic misinterpretations of a history.

#### THE SCENE THAT WASN’T EVEN THERE: FUTURE READ IN CONCRETE AND STONE

By entitling his piece *Future Read in Concrete and Stone*, Bojan Đorđev also readily proposes a non-linear approach to narrating the past. The future, something by definition projected into a time that is not yet, is implied as content which can be read from petrified constructs, namely, modernist

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abstract monuments that were built all over Yugoslavia in order to commemorate and celebrate the victory of partisans in WW2. To introduce the topic, the director delivers a monologue while sitting in the audience with the rest of us. Stage lights gently flicker over an empty stage and there we have it: a place of pure potential, to evoke the well-known thesis of Peter Brook. Đorđev’s monologue, which he himself admits resembles a political speech, evokes the format of a lecture-performance. He begins it with Lenin’s quote claiming that artists are crucial for revolution because of their ability for abstract thinking and envisioning the impossible as possible: art should be the revolution, not about revolution, but we all know that already, as Đorđev presupposes. Further, he expresses his principal trust in the black box and white cube which are seen as places of potentiality, of the not-yet-realised: the theatre is “a rupture and a place for rupture” and consequently, any performance is rendered as a rupture in time, an openness towards the future. However, in contemporary times, we are freed from the future: the present is considered as the only time at our disposal, the past is turned into a nostalgic memory, and the future is devoid of its imaginative potential. The author continues by opting for a return to the communist hypothesis in claiming an egalitarian society, but says it has to be realised in a new way – we don’t have to learn about the communist hypothesis from failed historical experiments, but from artists like Vojin Bakić, Bogdan Bogdanović, Dušan Džamonja and Miodrag Živković. As he continues to explain, or lecture, these Yugoslav sculptors were famous for their construction of abstract monuments, which “perpetuate the revolution into eternity” and affirm the time and community of the not-yet. Finally, he voices the standpoint according to which the monuments of Yugoslav abstract modernism function as memorials of a lost future. The rest of the performance is an attempt to create blueprints for an emancipated community, which will enact the communist hypothesis by engaging the audience in a participatory event.

Namely, at the end of the talk, the audience is invited to choose between three monuments, each hosted by Đorđev’s collaborators for this project: Selma Banich, Fernando Belfiore and Damjan Kecojević. The monuments to choose from are the Kozara Monument to Revolution by Dušan Džamonja, and Kadinjača and Sutjeska monuments, both by Miodrag Živković. When I participated in the performance, I was drawn to Kozara for at least two reasons: because it is related to my family history, and because Selma was a familiar face. I’m usually not very responsive

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to participatory performances since most often I have the feeling I'm being manipulated, but not this time. Selma shares her analysis of the architectural disposition of the Kozara monument and starts forming a live sculpture from and with us, if we so wish. Peeking at the other groups I can see they are engaged by their "guides" in a similar way. We are then invited to form and perform a simple version of the *kolo* (circle dance), a familiar folk dance form throughout the Balkans and elsewhere. Different variants of that folk dance are employed until the end of the performance and the audience is welcome to join as long as they want to, choosing between different possible levels of participation. The appropriation of the *kolo* is used as a procedure for creating a temporary egalitarian collective of spectators who become co-performers, since its choreography is characterised by equal status among all participants. My main concern will be to analyse the specificities of Đorđev's approach to the void in the performance, also in comparison to Frlijić's gesture in the previous chapter.

Turning back to the beginning, since it's the moment where the void first appears as a premise, the juxtaposition of Đorđev's monumental monologue and the empty space we are facing seems like a dialectical gesture at first. A monologue overloaded with quotes and invitations worthy of a manifesto on the one side and a completely empty stage on the other – a thesis and its negation at once. It is obvious that the spectators' labour of imagination is expected in order for the synthesis of the performance to realise itself, but the question is where is this realisation supposed to happen, and how? Even the monuments have to be imagined and enacted with the help of images projected on the floor. As Đorđev ironically explains, his first idea was to bring the audiences to the sites of memorials, but due to the lack of budget available to the independent scene, he decided to bring those monuments to the theatre, and invites us, the audience, to help by imagining a field trip. However, there is of course more to that procedure. The idea that we need new images of the future is not new anymore, and Đorđev is right to recognise the theatre as one of the sites where imagination could be rehearsed so he aims to repeat the formal gesture of the monuments, albeit in a completely different time. In his words:

"These artists treated the avant-garde partisan revolution and antifascist struggle as a rupture of the landscape, as a radical modernist gesture of interrupting the status quo and introducing a new order – an on going revolution. The

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PLS<sup>26</sup> memorials open the space for political imagination by means of populist abstraction, which does not dictate meaning but instead, stages the interpretative situation. The monuments invite everybody to invest their own ideas in solving the abstract riddle. They create a void, an abyss, a chasm, a new space for the acrobatics of the mind."

Obviously, the void which is recognised as the operative gesture in abstract monuments to PLS is translated into a dramaturgical tool for creating conditions for communication between the author(s), the performance and the audience. However, there is an obstruction in this translation: if a performance sets the analytical mechanism for its own interpretation at the very beginning, how can this gesture remain emancipative for the spectator, even if it advocates this very same emancipation as the main motor of its mechanism?

Đorđev's speech, or lecture-performance, belongs to the stream of thought inherent to cultural, political and art theory originating from former Yugoslavia, which tries to avoid both extremes in representing the history of this region in the twentieth century: romantic passivity inducing nostalgia which longs for the "better times" of the past, and a much louder and pervasive standpoint which claims that Yugoslavia was a totalitarian regime just as were the collaborationist fascist puppet states from WW2. This formidable equation renders obvious the urgency of finding ways to resolve the tensions inherent in the politics of memory, even if the former Yugoslav public finds the topic exhausted. A return to abstract modernism in the arts, or more specifically, memorial culture, is certainly one of the ways of resisting processes of historical falsification upon which the current neoconservative mania relies. Slovene philosopher Gal Kirn offers one of the most elaborate analyses of the abstract monuments stemming from the former Yugoslavia, which also informed Đorđev during his performance-making phase. In a text co-written with architect Robert Burghardt they note a contradiction in the relationship between form and content when it comes to building monuments to revolutions. Monuments and memorials have a restorative function and embody the norms instilled by the regime, while revolutions are associated with the destruction thereof. This contradiction not only echoes the already mentioned discrepancy between the monumentality

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<sup>26</sup> Abbreviation for the People's Liberation Struggle (1941–1945), the international antifascist resistance that resulted in the foundation of socialist Yugoslavia.

of the lecture-performance and the empty stage, but also, incites a series of questions which are synchronised with the performative tactics employed by Đorđev: “How can a monument to the revolution, which celebrates the social power that leads to change, relate to the realities of social practice? How can the trap of a program of prescribed and formalized memory be avoided, thereby creating space for people to develop their own memorial practices, which would then relate back to this change?” (Burghardt and Kirn, 2012: 71). In *Future Read in Concrete and Stone* the answers to these questions are not explicitly given, and the openness of its structure implies that they will always defer to the realm of the social, as opposed to the artistic.

In an attempt to disentangle this tension, I will reach for Valeria Graziano’s proposal to connect social and artistic strategies of prefiguration. Although she calls for fostering pre-figurative practices in artistic networks and institutions (Graziano, 2017: 199), for the sake of this analysis I wish to adopt her attempt to bring the concept closer to the realm of performance practice. Graziano’s theses are commensurate with the topics and performative procedures in *Future Read in Concrete and Stone* not only in the overlapping interest for horizontally structured collective bodies as agents of social change, but more importantly, in the understanding of prefiguration as a performative practice pertaining to an absence, be it because it is no longer or not yet. However, Graziano stresses how prefiguration makes performative and imaginal activities more present in social movements, while *Future Read in Concrete and Stone* examines a reciprocal relationship by implying the spectating collective as a potentially protestive collective. When explaining the genesis and development of prefigurative practices in social movements, Graziano notes that prefigurative practices appear as a response to traditional forms of organisation, which adopt antagonistic attitudes and reproduce the modernist ideology of linear historical progress. Unlike the latter, prefigurative practices appeared as a structuring principle in social movements and introduced “a different theory of the relation between organisation, practice and expression away from an antagonistic conception of conflict and towards a compositional one” (*ibid.* 182). Graziano explains that due to an understanding of power as a diffused force which is always present in any social situation, pre-figurative practices enabled experimentation with direct democracy, consensus building and self-organisation, implying the urgency to affect change on all levels of social relations (*ibid.* 183–184). As such, they have the capacity

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to surpass the moment and event in which they appear and contribute to the development of the social imaginary. While the same pattern of deferral is employed as a strategy in *Future Read in Concrete and Stone*, I wonder how can social and artistic practices share the same mechanisms of collective engagement, or in other words, how to represent that which defies representation?

To go back to the monuments and to PLS, they can certainly be a motive to look back at the contested points of Yugoslav history. This is the perspective employed by Gal Kirn in another text about monuments, in which he disagrees with the position of liberal art historians who depoliticise the monuments by glorifying their abstract aesthetics<sup>27</sup>. Secondly, modernism as such is not free from ideology, or in Kirn’s words: “The Yugoslav monuments cannot be regarded just as expressions of pure aesthetics, but should be analysed as being internally linked to the revolutionary events of the partisan struggle, which was based on international anti-fascist solidarity and socialist revolution” (Kirn, 2010: 125)<sup>28</sup>. However, he too, like

28 The perception of the monuments at the time was far from idealist. Most memorial sites were built by the 1960s, which was a period of crisis of its own. Like I explained in the previous chapter, it was a time when the first disillusionment with the very idea of Yugoslavia appeared: first workers’ strikes broke out, a market mechanism was implemented in the economy, student revolts erupted throughout the country. Moreover, Kirn warns of a negative effect of partisan memorialisation, namely, an emptying out of the anti-fascist struggle precisely due to an over-saturation of the partisan topic, which later proved dangerous because it resulted in first organised nationalist initiatives. The failure of the leadership at the time consisted of insisting on the mythologisation of the PLS which, as Kirn says, “translated emancipatory politics into a simplified politics of memory” (Kirn, 2010: 125).

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27 This position interprets abstraction as a break with socialist realist dogma and an expression of the artists’ individualism, but fails to acknowledge that socialist realism was never a dominant aesthetic doctrine in Yugoslavia, quite the contrary: the non-aligned, third way of Tito’s Yugoslavia wasn’t only a political imperative, but a cultural one as well. Namely, although after WW2 there was a tendency in the newly established Yugoslav cultural space, which employed socialist realist aesthetics, this tendency was abandoned as early as 1948, after Tito’s decision not to be part of the Eastern Bloc, which eventually led to the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement. However, theorist Leonida Kovač claims that even though the socialist realist doctrine was abandoned as an aesthetic paradigm, it remained present at the level of institutional organisation, i.e. through centralised top-down decision making, monopolised artists’ guilds, control of the media, traditional teaching methods, means of valorisation controlled by the state, etc. (for further reference, see her book *Tübingenska kutija*).

Dordev, speaks of a rupture when proposing an interpretation of the monuments' importance for the present moment; for Kirn the rupture has to do with favouring the abstract form, while Dordev, again in line with the idea of prefiguration, places an emphasis on social imagination as a collective performative endeavor. While both perspectives recognise the unimaginable nature of the anti-fascist struggle from the perspective of a contemporary post-Yugoslav society, Kirn is persistent in claiming that it was precisely the aesthetic novelty proposed by the authors of monuments that perpetuated the novelty of the partisan struggle, and so, potentially, the novelty of any new coming community. It seems like something was left out of the process of translating the monuments' emancipative gesture into the performance: while advocating a radical openness, which is certainly the presumption of any egalitarian political project, it lacks any proposition as an avant-garde gesture which Kirn recognises and opts for, both as an aesthetic and political procedure.

However, one should be careful when applying the "increasingly inoperative" (Berardi cf. Graziano, 2017: 183) term of avant-garde since it belongs to the logic of modernity, the obsolescence of which has already been elaborated. Also, in Graziano's words, "while the semantics of the avant-garde grounded its vocabulary into a military vision of the political, prefiguration is concerned with elaborating and performing different organisational proposals primarily concerned with social reproduction" (*ibid.* 194). In my view, *Future Read in Concrete and Stone* successfully captures the current preoccupation of leftist progressive politics with its own forms of (self)-organisation, means of innovation and conditions of plurality, but unlike with the PLS monuments, there is no aesthetic abstraction, no unidentifiable surplus which calls for its constant revision. The void seems to serve a function which is more didactic than it is aesthetic: although it succeeds in proposing non-invasive, comfortable and democratic practices of participation in performance, (its procedures do not surprise, confuse or estrange), they nevertheless remain open enough for those affective responses to occur as a possibility when a multitude of people come together.

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POST SCRIPTUM:  
"THE FUTURE PERFECT IS  
THE MEMORY OF WHAT IS TO COME"<sup>29</sup>

In this analysis, I have offered two different, yet complementary perspectives for looking at the notion of a void in post-Yugoslav performance, while speculating about the interpretative consequences it might entail if observed in a wider cultural sense. The void which arises from the logic of Virno's *déjà vu*, by seeming as if it were already there, functions as a glitchy encounter between the virtual and the actual, using operations of remembrance, recollection and wondering to grasp its perceptual agency. On the other hand, practices of prefiguration as explained by Graziano affirm what is not yet and employ operations of imagining, anticipation, envisioning. Both these logics advocate pure potentiality as a space of hope, which is something I believe in both politically and dramaturgically (as if these two were separate). Perhaps I should just leave it at that, for now.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted from  
Paolo Virno's *Déjà  
vu and the End of  
History*.

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# WERE WE BETTER IN THE FUTURE?

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ALEXANDRA BALONA

*“Less and less frequently do we encounter people with the ability to tell a tale properly. More and more often there is embarrassment all around when the wish to hear a story is expressed. It is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences.”*

— Walter Benjamin, *The Storyteller*

In his well known essay “The Storyteller. Reflections on the work of Nicolai Leslov” (Benjamin, 1968: 83-109), Walter Benjamin lays his central claim for the relevance of storytelling, as a way not only for the communicability of experience, but also for the staging, exploring and performing of new thoughts and concepts. Through the figure of the storyteller – who according to Benjamin may well be embodied as the traveller (the wanderer, the *flâneur*) or the craftsman – personal experience may be shared and perpetuated through *remembrance* and retelling, a process from which meaning is extracted. Through his own storytelling, Benjamin explores dreamworlds, fantasy, travel, estrangement and play, staging new topologies of thinking beyond nature, status quo and historical conditions. If dreams have the ability to disintegrate linear narratives and can hardly equate real life, they are also able to suspend natural law of time and space, which then become shattered and fractured, as well as substances, figures, desires and constraints. Thus, storytelling also plays a role in deforming existing meanings, narratives and, ultimately, destabilizing political concepts that remain anchored in Western critical theory and that impair the potentiality to think, voice and perform otherwise.

“We were better in the future” was the title of Greek choreographer Kat Válastur’s retrospective (Haus am Uber, Berlin, 2017) focusing on her last choreographic series “The Marginal Sculptures of Newtopia” (2014-2016), which comprised the works “Gland” (2014), “Ah! Oh! A Contemporary

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Ritual” (2014) and “OILinity” (2016), and included a parallel program of performances and installations, namely, a short solo work entitled “Kat Válastur was better in the future” (2017). This solo was created upon her “walk + talk” lecture performance, commissioned by Philip Gehmacher, which premiered in August 2016 in the framework of the 9th Tanznacht Berlin Biennale. Válastur “walk + talk” was my first encounter with her work within the context of the third-cycle meeting of Critical Practice Made in YU, and it will set the tone for this brief reflection. How may storytelling in choreographic contexts open new lines of thought, call into question existing narratives, or simply offer new world constellations through poetic performing encounters? How to unpack the potentiality of disrupting linear temporality, subverting historical material conditions, introducing parallel fictional realities, multiple dimensions and states of consciousness? How to perform the transference or translation between the linguistic mental layers of storytelling into choreography, and how does it encounter the public?

Wandering in fictional historical timelines, Válastur choreographs dystopian futures embedded in a sort of science fiction and “speculative fabulation” (Haraway, 2017) in the three choreographic worlds that constitute her “Marginal Sculptures of Newtopia”. In fact, all these three works – “Gland” (2014), “Ah! Oh! A Contemporary Ritual” (2014) and “OILinity” (2016) – share a common concern about spatiality, and result from the creation of topological force fields which, as choreographic tools, condition all elements of the choreographed worlds: the setting and lights design, the soundscape, the performers and their movements. Departing from mental storytelling, Válastur conveys in a single event different temporalities and references from various fields, namely, literature, science fiction, art, and history, in a virtual constellation that sets the frame and the scenario for her practice.

“When the work is vivid in the mind, when it is still a spiritual condition, it exists as an Utopia”, refers Válastur. Etymologically, “utopia” derives from the Greek οὐ (“not”) and τόπος (“place”), meaning “no place” (Válastur, 2014a). Válastur’s work departs from an imagined *topos* that exists virtually as fictional mental constructions. “The moment utopia is materialized”, adds Válastur, “it is transformed into a place, therefore into a land, and since it is a land that only I can imagine, it is a new place in the world. Let’s call this place ‘Newtopia’” (idem).

Thus, her solo “Gland” (2014) is anchored in an imagined topology which articulates traces of science fiction,

historical references and fictional literature and takes place in two dimensions: “dimension a” is the choreographic event and “dimension b” the complementary layer on the web.

Moreover, “Ah! Oh! A Contemporary Ritual” (2014), a piece for six dancers performed in darkness with an industrial electronic soundscape, evokes the circularity of traditional dance rituals. The performers seem to embody a dystopic fictional condition in a post-apocalyptic landscape, and the evidence of their trauma lies in some kind of oblivion, which is reflected on stage in the impossibility both of physical connection and oral communication. Movement is then the only source and means of expression in this “contemporary ritual” evoking an end-of-time human community.

Finally, “OILinity” (2016) is a choreographic essay for three performers that evokes the crude oil dependence of Western societies. The performers are disturbingly both human being and matter, and their gestures are animated by the fluid quality of oil, mimetically expressing the materiality on which they thrive. Hidden and uncanny sculptures punctuate the scenario, becoming idols and objects of desire in their anonymity and strangeness. These objects condition the performers’ movement and reveal, Válastur notes, “the spinning melancholia” of desire and consumption in the form of a “cylindrical object that has nothing more in mind than preserving its own system” (Válastur, 2016a), a metaphor for the alienating tendency of capitalism.

As previously referred, the solo “Kat Válastur was better in the future” (2017) was created upon the choreographer’s lecture-performance presented in the context of the “walk+talk” Berlin event curated by Philip Gehmacher. As the title suggests, the “walk+talk” format presupposes that the invited choreographers should talk about their work while performing it. Thus, each lecture performance becomes a singular event, wherein each artist moves while talking about their methods, ideas and references related to his or her choices of physicality, movement quality, vocabulary and methodology. As Gehmacher proposed, “walk+talk” is supposed to be a “doing and sharing in a public context as much as a practice that speaks about one’s practice. It is less about description and explanation than speaking becoming a gesture itself, a gesture of utterance running parallel to the movement” (Gehmacher, 2013). Moreover, Gehmacher focuses not only on the singularity of personal discourses and practices, but also in exposing the radical intertwinement between the curated pairs of choreographers’ works. With this in mind, each “walk+talk”

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evening presents two pairs of choreographers, in a minimum of two evenings' presentation, which means four different "walk+talk"s by four different choreographers set into relation.

The "walk+talk" stage scenarios are bare and empty (one of Gehmacher's conditions), and so it was on the second evening at the Ufer Studios in Berlin: the stage was reduced to a rectangular platform covered with white linoleum. Válastur appeared to the audience dressed casually, in black pants and a floral-patterned shirt. She carefully approached the stage and slowly raised her right leg, holding it still for some time before entering the stage, in a clear sign that she was about to enter a "new world", an hypothetical "newtopia". She then stepped onto the stage and began to walk along its limits: the figure of a white female exploring the bare stage was an inalienable reference to the Western white colonial explorer, in the long tradition of historical oblivion here and now transposed onto a futurist setting. The audience heard the amplified sound of her breathing in the same rhythm as her walking, with a deeper exhalation as if she were walking under special atmospheric conditions demanding greater physical effort. Adding to the awkwardness of this figure, Válastur performed eccentric bird-like head movements. She stopped in the centre of the stage staring at the audience and conveying a hybrid figure of a woman with bird's head, and she slowly turned her back to the audience. Bending her torso, Válastur stared at the audience with her head between her legs, and began to describe the landscape she had been wandering about in, as if a storyteller, with plenty of irony and uncanny humour:

Everything is still unexplored! All this green here... I have been wandering around this landscape until I reached this river, but then I saw that on the other side the nature is green, so I decided to go there. I stepped on six rocks, crossed the river and arrived to the other bank. The nature is so green...! The trees, the plants, the flowers... all share the same shade of green... So I decided to lie there and spend some time for a while.

Later on, I realized that there were no animals around, no birds, no insects or rats, not a human soul... except me! (Válastur, 2016b).

And she proceeded:

"It was a bit weird, but ok... I said 'I'll stay there for a while', but then I felt like that somehow my body was intoxicated... this green was toxic.

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So I was alone there in this tropical landscape, and I really thought that I had to find a way to get out of there. And then I heard a tiny little sound and I decided to follow that sound. But I realized I couldn't move, my body was really stiff, but though I really wanted to get out of there so I followed the sound and tried to reach something, something out there. And, finally, after crawling for a while with this stiff body, I finally found this very small, very, very small little lake and the water there was crystal clear. So, I really felt the need to put my hands inside the water, wash my hands and clean my face" (Ibid).

In this last part of the story, Válastur continued moving as if she was trying to escape from that landscape, but not in a conventional human movement, rather that of a strange creature whose gestures one could probably relate to a being existing in-between animal and automaton. She proceeded on to telling other short stories, narrating science-fiction events along with strange scenarios and parallel realities, while performing related uncanny figures and morphologies, on the frontier between the human and the nonhuman.

She suddenly stopped. Unexpectedly, and for the first time, she addressed the audience directly in the first person, and said: "I start a lot with stories. I need to be somewhere to create a certain condition to my body", explaining how she usually takes a collection of stories and references from different disciplinary fields, such as literature, science, politics, philosophy, travelling, among others, as points of departure for her creative work.

Válastur's "walk + talk" thus unveils the relevance of storytelling in her discursive practice, something not evident when first approaching her choreographies. In a direct relation to "Gland", the "walk+talk" offered an insight into the complexity and implication of meaning underlying not only the performance's "dimension a" and "dimension b," but also her work in general. In "Gland" – "dimension a" the public firstly encounters a minimalist setting composed of two light grey perpendicular walls, placed slightly diagonally in relation to the audience. Dressed in neutral clothes (grey jeans, basic shirt and sneakers), Válastur suddenly arises through one of the walls' thresholds, as if she had just jumped into the "space" from another parallel dimension. Walking along the walls and the floor, she explores the spatial setting and its multiple potential dimensions as if there was no gravity force, revealing her movement virtuosity when simulating

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such difficult physical conditions. The piece endured on this wandering and was punctuated by small events related to “Gland” – “dimension b.” On the web, the “dimension b” opens with the image of a vertical section drawing of the “Gland” machine, naming its five different stages: “The Castle”, “The Room with the Masks”, “Down by the Chromium River”, “The Asphalt Sphinx” and “The Miracle of Nutrition = The Ritual of the Infrared” (Válastur, 2014b). The image is paired with a lateral text that the reader may scroll in order to activate Válastur’s voice, thus becoming complicit listener to her storytelling. The story is built upon a multiplicity of hybrid and virtual scenarios wherein the narrator navigates, and where a series of events take place in parallel universes. From the text one may access to other linked references, expanding lines of thought not only with regards to “Gland”, but also to Válastur’s oeuvre as a whole: for example, an excerpt of Joseph Conrad’s novel “Heart of Darkness” (1899), a novel based on the author’s real journey through the Congo river under the colonial Belgian possession, a metaphoric investigation into the darkness of European colonialism, human horrors and atrocities; a drawing of the Neo-Sumerian Ziguratt de Ur as a reference to Iraq war; a reference to CERN’s Super Proton Synchrotron construction in late seventies and related virtual events; Picasso’s painting “Les Demoiselles d’Avignon” and synchronous happenings such as the fictional “Aluminium Vision” mutation; Franz Kafka’s essay “An Imperial Message”; ecological catastrophes such as the toxic chromium dumping in China; Alice in Wonderland falling through a hole, and Fred Astaire dancing on the walls, just to name a few. On stage, in “Gland” dimension a, the spectator cannot immediately perceive a relation between the complexity of these references and Válastur’s choreography, as her gestures are neither illustrative nor representational. There are though signs, micro gestures and movements within a “constellation of meanings” (Válastur, 2014a), that relate Válastur’s performance to the fictional and virtual landscapes of dimension b. As in a dream, the uncanny is fused with anxiety and mystery, displacing the threshold of rationality, and the subject’s physical and psychic self-consciousness and autonomy. Reflecting on “Gland”, Válastur raises the question: “[w]hat would it be if the transformation of Utopia to what I have named “Newtopia” is not a virtual condition but a visual condition in which the body acts in order to transform utopia into a real place?” And she answers: if the theatre is a place for Utopia, a body may “act as a gland and transforms the ‘not yet place’ into a new place for the existence” (Válastur, 2014a).

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“Art is by itself political” refers Válastur, and although her work is not intended as political commentary, it is sensitive “to the pressures of history, time and society” (Válastur, 2017). Thus, the choreographer tries to articulate what results from these “suffocating” contemporary conditions, “by restraining and forcing them to produce a multiplicity of vibrations inside the body, which will motivate it in a series of endless kinetic units” which she calls “dance units” (Válastur, 2009). Those meticulous micro-movements are articulated in the search for a personal process towards an artistic end, thriving for essential qualities, precision and acuteness.

By inventing post-apocalyptic “newtopias”, Válastur underlines the complexity of the contemporary metabolic context that prevents clairvoyance towards future spatial, social and political landscapes to come. Addressing these complex entanglements, Válastur’s work tries to carve out new spaces from which one can contest normative foundations, render legible capitalism’s spinning and hopelessness melancholia and its alienating and permeable (neo-) colonialism, while offering a stage for discussing eroding histories and possible dreamworlds.

“We were better in the future” is, then, an ironic statement, which I borrow in the form of a question to title this reflection. Will we be better in the future or will the future be a strange place from where we will be gazing back on the debris of the past?

As a statement that subverts historical linearity and the empty and homogeneous time of positivism, “We were better in the future” and “The Marginal Sculptures of Newtopia” are theoretically influenced by the cyber-futurist theories of Nick Land (Land, 2011) as escape routes to continental philosophy. Therefore, they also activate a historical conversation about futurity, technology, performativity, politics and capital, along with the radical theoretical responses of accelerationism and speculative realism, which accelerate and exacerbate neoliberal capitalism uprooting, alienating, decoding and abstractive tendencies. In addition, having at their core a disruption of the historical continuum, Válastur “newtopias” also invoke Walter Benjamin “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (Benjamin, 1968: 253–264). In this encrypted and complex essay, Benjamin’s criticizes historicism’s idea of a continuum of time and progress and its additive methodology. To the medieval theologians, the impossible attempt to master a “genuine historical picture as it flares up briefly” (Benjamin, 1968: 256) was one of the causes of great sadness and melancholia,

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particularly because historicism generally empathized with the victorious of history and their heirs, thus, those who had the power to write and voice history. With this in mind, Benjamin reminds us how “there has never been a document of culture, which is not simultaneously one of barbarism” (*ibid*) and, as an alternative to historicism, Benjamin argues how historical materialism should move away as much as possible from this process of transmission, calling for a history fulfilled by the experience of the here-and-now, that explodes the historical continuum. To “seize the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’”, but “to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger” (255), as a “tiger’s leap into that which has gone before” (261). In addition, in his very much acclaimed reading of Paul Klee’s painting *Angelous Novus* (1920), which he names as the “angel of history”, Benjamin reiterates his alternated view of past and progress, and how historical materialism should not only predict a revolutionary future, but mostly, save the past:

“Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise [...] propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.” (257–258)

“Be aware of the past in order to visualize the future”, one reads in Válastur’s notebook (Válastur, 2009). Moreover, in “Gland” fictional machine, one encounters a precise reference to Benjamin’s “tiger’s leap” (Válastur, 2014 b), a jump into and from the historical past, as a way of rewriting it and reimagine the future.

Reimagining the future while calling out the past has also been the purview of Donna Haraway who calls for an engagement in a “practice of storytelling in which the stories do not reveal secrets acquired by heroes [...] but proceed by putting unexpected partners and irreducible details into [...] a porous carrier bag” (Haraway, 2008).

We live in an entangled and troubled era of late liberalism and racialized nationalisms demanding new voices, new stories, new performances, ones not premised on the divide between culture and nature, subject and object, science and humanities because, as Bruno Latour has brilliantly shown us, at the end, “we have never been modern” (Latour, 2002).

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Given the present anthropological and planetary climate crisis, rooted not only in the grand divides set forth by the Enlightened modernity, which laid the legal and historical grounds for centuries of Western imperialism, colonialism and a globally pervasive toxic capitalism, but also in the crisis of the alterity of language inherent to the Western cogito, it is vital both to question past narratives and concepts, as well as to enact the ability for other voices and bodies to be heard and staged. This woven net of entangled and implicated existence entails the understanding that all things, living and non living, are inter-dependent. So, ours is not a time for monolithic knowledge, but a moment that requires a “parliament of bodies,” (Preciado, 2017), matter, hybrid networks and practitioners in a reassessment of the current situation, in order to deconstruct narrative boundaries, and decolonize knowledge and practices. Choreography creates a *Spielraum* (Benjamin, 2008: 45) a room for play as an imagined space, offering displaced expressions of the world, potentially opening new lines for thought and change. New constellations of meaning are mobilized when every gesture – each with a multiplicity of meaning – enters into a new relation to another. “What if”, asks Válastur – “there is no meaning but only gesture? (Válastur, 2014a) Or, how could we imagine choreographed physicality in a utopian future?

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# APPENDIX: REPORT ON NOMAD DANCE ADVOCATES

"MAKE ROOM FOR DANCE!"

THE GATHERING AT STATION – SERVICE  
FOR CONTEMPORARY DANCE, BELGRADE,  
OCTOBER 2017

ANA LETUNIĆ

Over the course of October 20 and 21, 2017, Station – Service for contemporary dance hosted a gathering of over sixty policy makers, cultural workers and dance activists from Serbia, the Balkans, Europe and the USA, who addressed new policies for contemporary dance on local, national and regional levels. Nomad Dance Advocates is an initiative of the Nomad Dance Academy, a platform for contemporary dance in the Balkan region, created in 2012 as "a permanent program for advocating a more stable position for the field of contemporary dance in the region". Although contemporary dance is one of the most dynamic artistic fields in the region, it still suffers from a lack of basic working conditions and stable support. After meetings Skopje and Sofia, the NDA gathering "Make Room for Dance!" was organized in the space of Magacin, an independent cultural centre in Belgrade, with the intention of imagining and planning for a future where dance will be supported by policies that enable its genuine development.

The encounter started with a performance installation by Karkatag Collective (Belgrade) in front of Magacin, where our interactions were guided by preprogrammed instructions, received from ticket machines. As our conversations unravelled, Dejan Srhoj (Ljubljana) and Gisela Mueller (Berlin) choreographically guided us to slow down, and enter the space of Magacin while attentively experiencing our togetherness and interdependence. In the space, we were greeted with a choreographic game by Willy Prager and Stefan Stereff (Sofia) that consisted of using the positioning of

our bodies in space to map out our national and professional identities, as well as the mobility between them.

Soon after, participants were officially welcomed by Marijana Cvetković (Belgrade), a cultural producer from Station – Service for contemporary dance and Nomad Dance Academy, who explained that although the idea of this gathering was to facilitate the understanding of decision makers and public administrators on how this particular artistic field works, “There was quite a reluctance from many of them to participate.” Nevertheless, she expressed hope that those who are present “will take this passion from our field with them” and gratitude to all the participants for being there “to play, to talk and to share with us” while advocating for dance.



Installation by Kartakag Collective. Opseica, Vladimir, Belgrade : Station Service for Contemporary Dance. October 20, 2017.

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#### HOW TO USE EXISTING CULTURAL POLICY FRAMES TO MAKE THE MEANINGFUL CHANGES?

In the introduction to the first session, Biljana Tanurovska Kjulavkovski (Skopje), cultural producer from Lokomotiva and Nomad Dance Academy, briefly introduced Prof. Milena Dragičević Šešić (Belgrade), Head of the UNESCO Chair on “Cultural Management and Cultural Policy” and Professor of Cultural Policy and Cultural Management, as an expert who has been “very supportive to the work of the independent scene”. In a dialogue, they proceeded to address possible uses of existing cultural policy frames to develop a stimulating environment for contemporary dance.

In Prof. Dragičević-Šešić’s opinion, “In every epoch a certain kind of art takes the lead and, in this moment, it is really contemporary dance”. On the other hand, “cultural policy is, like all public policy, influenced by the routine”, which produces various setbacks in the field of contemporary dance. Firstly, contemporary dance has not yet been acknowledged as a specific art form in our region, which is visible in that experts from the field are not nominated for positions in the ministries (only experts from other

performing arts). In many cases, theatre is dominating the field of performing arts because it contributes to national cultural identity at a higher level than contemporary dance, which is “often perceived as a global and not a nationally specific art form”. Another issue is the neglect of the diversity of art forms when European policy instruments deal with working conditions in the arts. In present policies, great emphasis is put on sustainability as a task “in front of artists, enticing them to become self-sustainable, instead in front of cultural policy to create conditions when art actually could become sustainable”.

Still, in comparison with many other marginalized art fields in the region, the field of dance “has done the maximum concerning self-organisation and using shared knowledge as a basic resource”. Nevertheless, Prof. Dragičević-Šešić remarked that the contemporary dance scene (as well as the whole independent scene) has “not succeeded to involve media and to form a critical public opinion around the dance scene”. To overcome this lack, she said, “It is necessary to find links with other activists in other art sectors and, especially, the public sector”. Since cultural policies increasingly support those who have attained commercial success and sponsorship, there are fewer and fewer possibilities for research-based art organisations to receive funding. For this reason she said, “We need to focus on public cultural policies and use the unity of the independent cultural scene to create lasting systemic measures”. Judging from the experience of Nomad Dance Academy, who provides a case for strategies of collaboration and support making an impact at local levels, Tanurovska- Kjulavkovski posed a question about the possibility of systematic measures on the regional level. Prof. Dragičević- Šešić agreed on the impact of regional collaboration strategies implemented by various organizations (e.g. the foundation Kultura Nova, the platform Kooperativa and the now closed Balkans Art and Culture Fund), and reminded the audience that it was the independent scene that first started these collaborations after the breakup of Yugoslavia. In addition to recommending the continuation of those cooperations, Prof. Dragičević- Šešić suggested creating alliances in education and research sectors, since this might give impetus for “contemporary art to do some more research, as well as bringing greater visibility and more intersectoral collaboration”. Horizon 2020 is a good example of a research programme where such links might be created. Another alliance could be created with cultural tourism, since “Contemporary art can be understood as intangible heritage”.

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Appendix:  
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Dance Advocates

The issue of contemporary art as intangible heritage opened the second part of the session with audience responses from various contexts. For example, Madeline Ritter (Berlin) noted that a similar problem exists in Germany, since contemporary dance there is “not perceived as a part of cultural heritage and it is ascribed less value due to having no roots”. Currently, eighty percent of state funding goes to material cultural heritage (i.e. buildings and museums). Also, in negotiating contemporary dance as intangible cultural heritage, it is relevant to remember that “ascribing dance to a contemporary art field is already an exclusion”. Theo Van Rompay (Brussels) compared cultural policies from his context in Flanders with the French dance field. While in France, “there is a much higher number of contemporary dance artists and greater audiences, all these developments are happening due to top-down policy making”. On the other hand, there is a “very active and organized cultural field in Flanders”, which was able to develop cultural policy measures that were adopted by the government. When organizing on behalf of the field of dance he said, “It is increasingly vital to think about individuals, besides thinking of structures such as companies”. Since the “performing arts field tends to resemble visual arts in terms of working individually”, we need to come up with different models of organizing public funding. Additionally, it is “amazingly important to advocate for long-term funding in order to have quality planning”, as well as to allow time for research. Another strong remark on the topic of strategic alliances came from Bojana Mladenović (Amsterdam) who asked, “Why are we always looking to the models of Western Europe when we observe its enormous crisis?”, since there are many other places (such as South America and Africa) that share the same struggles, where valuable knowledge and discourses are being developed. In contextualizing our discussion on “who is standing behind us”, she quotes a performing art theoretician Ana Vujanović, saying the “contemporary scene needs to start asking: who are we standing behind?” and, thus, reminded us to rethink our alliances.

#### COLLECTIVE IMAGINING OF NEW DANCE SPACES IN THE REGION AND BEYOND

In order to open up space for various perspectives, the following session was structured as an “imaginary travel to the future of dance”, where several dance artists and activists

from the region were invited to dream about dance centers of the future. This session was intended to produce desirable scenarios, in order to compare them with the existing conditions for dance in the following “reality check” session. Thus, when thinking of a future centre, Dragana Alfirević (Ljubljana) claimed, “It is clear that such a heterogeneous and rich dance scene should not be represented by one person, but have at least three to five directors”. It surely should be an institution supported by the state, yet in terms of policy it should be framed beyond top-down and bottom-up dualistic cultural policy, and “rather make different kind, of waves or spirals”. Above all, since “currently the art scene is very atomized and everyone is enclosed in their own context”, the center would have to change the paradigms of organization and offer new ways “of being together as humans”.

According to Marko Milić (Belgrade), while this should be a space for exchanging interests with one another, it should contain “a room for sensory deprivation where you can withdraw”. As well, there should be a room called “who cares” for expressing unarticulated concerns by unshaped, small and insecure voices. Milan Marković Matthis (Belgrade) added that the centre should have supporting structures for families, as well as “an archival space for the documentation of everyday life (e.g. moments of people washing dishes)”. Also, a good balance should be found “between obligatory sharing and having a will to share”. Iva Nerina Sibila (Zagreb) suggested that the dance center has to be “built for dance and comfortable for the body”. It needs to have a strong connection to different communities and “bring dance deeper into society since it has more to offer besides performances”. In terms of policy, it should be artist-led and independent but “under the protection of the state”. Further on, it is a centre that is decentralized i.e. in the form of smaller, communal centres around the country “with activities circulating around and not being owned.” In that line of thinking, she quoted Aleksandra Janeva Imfeld (Bruxelles/Zagreb) who proposed “a dance center with transparent walls so we can openly share our practices”.

Rok Vevar (Ljubljana) advocated for a center that will entice the public to be more attentive “to the physical voices who are always present but seldom represented”. In his words, this center will “not have any audiences, but always the public”. In the view of Dejan Srhoj (Ljubljana), the center will be an institution where “you will be able to move in a way that will be no of economic value to anyone”. Therefore, he advocated for a space where “the body and human being

will not be instrumentalised". In addition, it will foster the transfer of knowledge we have in practicing communities to a wider public sphere (e.g. "awareness about listening, giving space, taking space, creating instant propositions all the time"). After several other propositions from the audience, such as regional dance centres and obligatory dance classes in schools, Selma Banich (Zagreb) elaborated on her imagining of a "space and practice of commoning for different communities". By creating a space that is "self-governed, with the means of labour brought back to the protagonists, the relationship between power, arts and profit would be broken". In conclusion, she reminded us of being privileged and of our responsibility to include it in our phantasies by imagining a center that takes social and political responsibility.

#### REALITY CHECK ON THE CURRENT STATE OF DANCE IN THE BALKAN REGION AND EUROPE

After the imagining session, we were brought back to reality through concise and briskly paced presentations by Angelina Georgieva (Sofia), Biljana Tanurovska Kjulavkovski (Skopje), Gisela Mueller (Berlin), Selma Banich (Zagreb), Rok Vevar (Ljubljana), Vava Stefanescu (Bucharest) and Ksenija Djurovic (Belgrade), who mapped out the current situation with dance centers throughout the region and Europe.

Angelina Georgieva (Sofia) presented the situation in Bulgaria, where, as a result of long advocacy for the need of a production center for independent arts over the last two years, the Association for Independent Theatre with the support of Sofia Municipality initiated a process of widespread professional and public discussion and concrete work on preparing written proposals for two new organizations. The first was the organizational model of the Center for Contemporary Arts Toplotsentrala, the reconstruction of an abandoned heating plant in the center of Sofia, now property of the city. The second was a model for the reorganization of one of the five or six existing

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municipal cultural institutes into a center for contemporary performing arts. Contemporary dance is represented in both cases. Additionally, in 2016 the Association for Independent Theatre with the support of the Sofia Municipality conducted a process for working out a strategy for the development of the independent art scene in the City of Sofia. This was the first policy paper to propose an individual approach to dance in cultural policy at the city level as well as the establishment of a center for contemporary dance by 2020. All of these proposals are still in written form waiting to be considered and voted on by the City Council. Besides these important developments, it is relevant to mention two initiatives acknowledged as successful examples of cultural entrepreneurship and private-public partnership. Derida Dance Center was opened in 2010 to provide regular training opportunities for professionals and non-professional dancers, to support new productions by securing working conditions, to establish opportunities for international collaboration, as well as to produce and present artistic work by Derida Dance Company. The other private space for contemporary dance was founded in 2015 when a former disco club in the National Palace of Culture was transformed into DNK, a space for contemporary dance and performance, which focuses on experimental work.

Biljana Tanurovska Kjulavkovski (Skopje) started her presentation on the context in Macedonia by claiming, "Contemporary dance is still not recognized in the framework of cultural policy, though there are different attempts by the scene to change the situation". Changes are most visible in the formal educational system, as there are currently three programs for the field of dance. The two public programmes are dedicated to dance pedagogy and to choreography (the most recently established), while a private faculty has a programme for the education of dancers. The scene is facing a situation with no spaces, no mobility and no research funds, which is a consequence of the political situation of the past eleven years, characterized by a right wing government oriented towards conservative arts support. In this period of the last ten years, there were a lot of private initiatives, mainly studios for dance oriented towards commercial purposes. In these challenging circumstances, Lokomotiva and Theatre Navigator (an NGO for performing arts) identified an old cinema space, built through private initiative in 1939, which in Yugoslavia became a public cinema. In the 2000s, it was given back to the private owner in the process of the denationalization of public spaces. In that moment, these two organizations acquired part of the space and rebuilt

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it into a stage, which is now a project space for various actors of the independent scene. At the moment, the space also hosts a program called “Free Scene”, that deals with developing models of participatory governance in the independent cultural scene. Also, the programme advocates “for the support of the whole building and bringing it to a larger sector of civil society”.

According to Gisela Mueller (Berlin), the Berlin contemporary dance scene started to ask for a dance house thirty years ago, although such a project has not yet come into existence. In 2000, the scene formed an association (which no longer active) for everyone working in the contemporary dance community to articulate their needs, for example education and space. After founding an informal network with various strong players on the Berlin art scene (such as the Berlin State Ballet), their demands gained visibility with the relevant politicians. The association identified large halls and warehouses that once housed trams and buses and the site was rebuilt with funds from the lottery foundation to become today’s Uferstudios. The space now hosts one BA and two MA programmes in the field of dance education (Inter-University Center for Dance Berlin and Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Art), as well as different players from the “free scene” (Tanzfabrik Berlin, ada Studio and Tanzbüro Berlin). Other spaces are rented out to the actors of the independent scene by a first come, first serve system, since it was very clear from the beginning that “Uferstudios are there to serve the whole scene”. The complex also contains a shared office for meetings, writing applications, etc. The space is to some extent supported by public funding since “most of the artists who come receive project grants”. Although this investment was supported with resources from the lottery foundation, the “actors had to take a significant loan” and would benefit from receiving additional funds for infrastructure.

Selma Banich (Zagreb) shortly presented the events around the “Keep Dance Autonomous” initiative and the Zagreb Dance Center venue. Currently, dance does not have an institution in Croatia where, she said, “It is entirely deinstitutionalized as a practice”. In 2009, an old cinema (Kino Lika) was renovated and equipped to become the first venue for dance in the country. One NGO was made responsible for governing the venue, but she said that last year in April, “The mayor of Zagreb decided (behind closed doors and based on political eligibility) to put the space under the management of the Zagreb Youth Theatre”. Currently, the management and the programming are carried by a single

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person, who runs both the Zagreb Youth Theatre and the Dance Center. Therefore, the “Keep Dance Autonomous” initiative is a struggle for a socially responsible dance centre and a demand for the establishment of an independent dance institution, based on a model of civil-public partnership. In that type of a partnership, the protagonists would take equal parts in establishing the institution with the city of Zagreb, being “not only subjects of a service but active participants in creating working conditions for the production of art as a common”. Banich takes part in a Zagreb Dance Center Assembly established by direct democracy principles, meaning it is “not only professionals taking part in it but a broader community that is interested in this agenda”. Besides the Zagreb Dance Center Assembly, the Association of Croatian Dance Artists is the main protagonist of the “Keep Dance Autonomous” initiative. The struggle about claiming self-governance also included a 90 day boycott, yet currently the problem is “again getting normalized while the majority of protagonists are put in a situation to make autonomous decisions about how to position themselves towards this political problem”.

Rok Vevar (Ljubljana) started his presentation by claiming, “Ljubljana is not lacking spaces for presentation of dance, but is in need of studios” and offered a short historical overview of the development of the Slovenian dance scene. The dance scene of Ljubljana “burst out of the cultural, social and political temperature of the period between 1977 (with the start of punk) and 1991”. In 1994, the Dance Association began its activities with demands for space and, shortly thereafter in 1995 received the first space for the production and presentation of contemporary dance. Between 1996 and 1999 contemporary dance and independent theatre production “grew by sixty percent so the independent cultural scene became quite large for this small city”. Between 2003 and 2005, the Municipality of Ljubljana introduced three (and later four year) funding programmes for the NGO sector. Between 2013 and 2016 the budget for culture was severely cut. On to the issue of space for dance, Vevar said, “The cultural and congress center Cankarjev Dom, opened in 1980, had a big influence on the scene since most productions were presented there”. Dance Theatre Ljubljana opens in 1985, but receives its own venue in 1994 from the municipality. Alongside these spaces that are currently available for contemporary dance, in 2004 The Old Power Station was opened for the presentations of NGO productions. Also, in 2008 Španski Borci and Kino Šiška began their activities, providing more spaces for the

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presentation of contemporary dance. In terms of education, a secondary school specializing in dance opened in 1990, and received its own theatre and studio two years ago. The issue that still presents the biggest problem for the scene is that dance requires more space in comparison with other artistic practices. Recently, the Association for Contemporary Dance, suggested that the Municipality of Ljubljana buy a 1,000 square metre space for dance studios, but the initiative has not succeeded. Most studios in Ljubljana are not adequate for studio practices (especially in the winter time), hence the Association for Contemporary Dance strongly continues its activities.

Vava Stefanescu (Bucharest) started her presentation by describing the activities prior to the establishment of the National Centre for Dance in Romania, which were formalized in the frame of an NGO founded in 1999/2000. Although this NGO functioned only for three years, she said, “An initiative grew from its activities for making contemporary dance a separate and autonomous art form on a policy level”. Due to the initiative and “the enormous support from the international independent scene, in 2004 a National Dance Centre was created under the Ministry of Culture”. The National Dance Centre was awarded a 3,000 square metre space in the building of the National Theatre in the centre of Bucharest. The mission of CNDB consists of sustaining, developing and promoting contemporary dance through production, education and research programmes. In 2007, a multi-year research programme on Romanian dance history resulted in a series of re-enactments and publications, and more visibility for the centre. Currently, there are great challenges in maintaining the continuity of the centres’ activities. To be more precise, the organization “was kicked out of the building of the National Theatre in 2011 and had no space for six years, which resulted in an Occupy CNDB that lasted for four months”. Recently, the government ascribed the former building of the Senate for the purposes of the Centre, but the building still isn’t equipped with the appropriate working conditions for the dance community.

Ksenija Djurović (Belgrade) emphasized that the Serbian context has “no infrastructural funding for dance, no dance centre, or any kind of support guaranteeing the security of the field”. The space of Magacin was founded in 2007 through the efforts of a joint initiative of independent cultural scene organizations, called the Other Scene. Efforts to make the City of Belgrade take responsibility for the development of its art scene were successful: “Oddly, there was

enough political will to realize the potential the independent scene has”. The first civil-public partnership run by the independent scene was supposed to have been created but, unfortunately, she reported, “It became another situation where a space is administered through a city institution and the organizations belonging to the independent scene were organizing the programme”. The space now exists for ten years, and for the first two years, organisations were given the right to work there through an open call. The contract was meant to be prolonged after that but this never happened, which implied that the protagonists in Magacin “could have been thrown out the space at any given time.” In this very long state of insecurity, the institution that was administering the space was very present in the beginning (exemplified by cleaning and guarding the site) but then its presence gradually faded. Two years ago, the Association of the Independent Culture Scene of Serbia was experiencing challenges with their space and Stanica invited them to come to work from Magacin in order to “make a joint effort to position Magacin as a space for everyone (which it already was)”. Since then, Magacin operates through an open calendar system, meaning that “Everyone who wants to work in any type of field can use the space for free with a small participation in the basic costs”. This model of an open calendar has been “somewhat challenging to organize because cultural workers are not in a position to properly plan their activities”, due to public funding timelines, in that grant application results take a some months to be publicized. Yet, in a situation with a clear lack of any type of structural support, Magacin produces approximately 1,000 programs per year. As a space that is open for everyone (and frequently used for the performing arts) it is currently the only dance space in Belgrade that is free.

In the concluding “reality check” session moderated by Marko Pejović (Belgrade), there were a few contributions from the audience on how to bridge the gap between “dreams and the reality” when reflecting on contemporary dance centres. The idea of a centre as “one monumental building” was contested, especially given the example of Movement Research (New York), which has never had a space of its own and is conducting its activities at five different spaces on a daily basis. Luciana Achugar (New York) explained that this has been “monumentally challenging, it is also a great advantage because it allowed the organization to work in multiple spaces and provide for different types of opportunities, audiences and artists.” Overall, there was strong support among the participants

for ideas of inclusion, horizontality, self-governance and inter-sectoral collaboration, with a reminder from Ivana Ivković (Zagreb) of the “huge infrastructures we already have, such as the national broadcasting system or the education system”.

#### TEMPORARY PARLIAMENT FOR DANCE: A PERFORMATIVE DISCUSSION ON DANCE CENTRES AND DANCE EDUCATION

After the “pleasant moving” session with Dušan Murić (Belgrade), the discursive programme of the second day started with a format partly borrowed from the British Parliament. The format was structured as two sides giving different point of views on certain topics, followed by the other participants taking sides and engaging in a collective discussion on the ideas and values that surfaced around the proposed themes.

Session moderator Igor Koruga (Belgrade) briefly explained the choice of topics for the debate, evoked by recent events in the local arts and cultural scene, since for the last several months the scene was very much engaged in a discussion on the draft of the Strategy of Cultural Development of Serbia 2017–2027. The document was sent out to the public for comments and suggestions on which the draft could, potentially, be rewritten and sent to the government. Among the stormy reactions from the professional public, he said one of the strongest arguments against the draft came from the independent cultural scene, stating, “the scene is recognized more nominally or superficially rather than structurally” in this document. Indeed, as Koruga claims, the independent cultural scene “has certain expertise and resources according to which it should be recognized as a valuable partner for the creation of strategies developed in cultural policy”. Keeping all this in mind (and the fact that no one from the Ministry of Culture or the City of Belgrade accepted the invitation to participate in the Nomad Dance Advocates gathering), necessary questions arose regarding any possibility of establishing collaboration with public institutions. Therefore, Temporary Parliament for Dance provided a framework to discuss these issues collectively and to “engage in self-diagnosis about the current situation in the local scene”, with the possible outcome of concrete suggestions of principles, partnerships and policies that could be developed in order to create specific collaboration with public institutions.

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The topic for the first debate with Ivana Milovanović (Belgrade) and Marijana Cvetković (Belgrade) was the “lack of space for dance”, already discussed at this gathering. The first speaker was Ivana Milovanović, president of at Belgrade Section of International Dance Council CID-UNESCO, cofounder of Orchestra Magazine and initiator of one of the dance centers that previously existed in Serbia. In her opening presentation, she acknowledged the lack of space for dance “as a huge problem” while reflecting on her experience in CID-UNESCO, which is “already engaged in the decentralization of dance since it has branches in Belgrade, Niš and Novi Sad”. On the cohesion of the local contemporary dance community she

said, “This is a time be wise, to build a very strong community and not to make unpleasant situations”. When referring to the position of dance in the Strategy of Cultural Development of Serbia 2017–2027, Milovanović strongly advocated for the formation of a “working group with a pyramidal structure and members from the public, private and civil sectors” in the framework of the Ministry of Culture.

The second speaker Marijana Cvetković, cultural producer from Station – Service for contemporary dance, offered a different point of view. She claimed contemporary dance needs to get into the official cultural system through different aspects, one of them being the space, because “Everything the contemporary dance scene has done in the last fifteen years is very rich, but stays in the air since there is no physical space for artists to feel their own territory and achieve continuity in their work.” Cvetković advocated for a civil-public partnership by saying, “Public authorities have to invest in this space as a starting point for the real development of a contemporary dance system in the future”. This model would allow the dance scene to be autonomous when it comes to programming and decision making processes, as well as being able to follow the principles of “openness,



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inclusiveness, invitational to all members of the scene and for other art practices that are also without a space". The space would work on a daily basis and different levels of public funding would finance it, while public authorities would "have the right only to follow the financial dynamics, and never interfere in artistic programming".

A short debate between the two speakers and the audience on the "missed opportunity of a dance centre in 2007" followed the opening presentation. Milovanović stated that this was a great political moment for the realization of a dance center, highlighted her strong personal involvement in this initiative and was puzzled "why the contemporary scene did not want to work there". Cvetković stated why this initiative failed: "It was not an inclusive process but a top-down process with no debate, so people did not feel this was their place". For her, this was a clear lesson that this manner of operating does not work and that it needs to be done in a totally opposite way, "starting with discussions, debates and agreement, to then be followed by action".

After positioning themselves in the space according to the viewpoint they supported, audience members joined in the discussion. Dijana Milošević (Belgrade) proposed that instead of "fighting for one dance space that could be controlled and closed down, we need to think of many spaces that would be connected as network". Furthermore, she proposed that instead of advocating for "institutional structures to recognize us, we should see what can we recognize from them and start negotiating from that position". Angelina Georgieva (Sofia) mentioned the example of a good practice in Bulgaria, where, after the advocacy session in Sofia in 2014, the scene managed to establish a civil-public partnership art centre with support from the municipality. Also, separating dance from theatre and positioning it as equal to other forms "was an important step" for the independent scene. Madeline Ritter (Berlin) added that it is important to "sit together with the politicians with the goal of realization, not only planning" and to "speak to them with one voice" because "only with integration can something really new happen". Ivana Milovanović (Belgrade) said, "This strategy is the last chance for the scene, since currently we have such strong politicization of cultural space". Cvetković replied that what is happening is "not politicization, but profit making and elitization". She insisted, "If we make decisions in a pyramidal structure, it will fail again, therefore it is necessary to start from the dance community and make a horizontal structure". Selma Banich (Zagreb) perceived that the major difference between these two models is how

decisions are made. She claimed, "Neither us nor any kind of practitioners should be treated as the ones who not are following up on a specific cultural policy". What she sees as one of the main problems is that politicians "like to see a person to represent a cause" and therefore, by advocating for horizontality "we are actually trying to build a change in politics" since then "these processes cannot be appropriated towards anyone's private interests". Dragana Alfirević (Ljubljana) advocated for "fearless subjects instead of instrumentalised objects full of fear" while reporting, "Last night some contemporary artists were arrested for carrying photos of the Serbian president." Rok Vevar (Ljubljana) recognized that "there are institutions founded in our region that don't represent anything but a few people at the top", meaning "policies made without any politics". To establish a kind of institution which would represent multiple presences would mean that "the process of making policies would also include politics".

The second topic for debate was education, since, as Koruga framed it, "Whenever we speak of the recognition of non-institutional expertise, a big part of it is that dance practices are being neglected within education". Therefore, contemporary dance still remains somewhere on the edge of being institutionalized or taken into any institutional framework. The first speaker was Gisela Mueller, dancer, choreographer, teacher, and artistic and pedagogical director of Tanzfabrik Berlin School and initiator of the BA programme at the Inter-University Dance Centre in Berlin (HZT). In her opening presentation, Mueller reviewed the period when she had the opportunity to initiate a program for education in contemporary dance at the Inter-University Centre for Dance Berlin, a program that started independently but is now integrated with the Berlin University of the Arts. Reflecting on education in contemporary dance today, the founding team was guided by the thought: "What is necessary is to educate people in a different way". Therefore, in the framework of this program of study, she said, "Students are able to discern the societal and political implications of the artistic approach to the body but are also able to understand its ethical and philosophical dimension". The idea behind this educational project was to be "radical and oppositional by influencing and shaping contemporary aesthetics from an academic context". In establishing an "intelligent method of self-guided study and research", Mueller presented these guidelines: "doing dance without relying on techniques, proposing theory as a practical thing, history as an open-source situation,

willingness to produce work in non-market oriented terms, to imagine performances without a public and to imagine public situations without a performance”.

The second speaker was Dijana Milošević, cofounder of a DAH theatre and a Professor at the Institute for Dance, which is private and currently the only accredited institution of higher education for dance in Belgrade. Milošević began her opening presentation by saying “This is a little bit off a constructive debate because I can’t agree more with the first speaker”. When reflecting on the current socio-political context, she offered a quote by Jan Fabre who said that “It could be okay when art and power are flirting, but when they are married, their children are propaganda and dictatorship”. The other point she considered important is that “there is not one student currently in the room here” which she perceived as a serious symptom of students lacking “the idea of owning the dance scene themselves, which should be transmitted through education”. The reason Milošević, (who comes from the independent scene) chose to teach at a private school, is that she was “given liberty to design the programme, unlike I would have been if I had accepted the invitation to teach at a state-funded school I consider conservative”. Although the disadvantage of the private school model is that funding is scarce and directed by one person, she considers it a positive opportunity since there are “accomplished professionals teaching there, coming both from the independent scene and institutions”.

In reflecting on why no students were here, Mueller added that, already within the education, it is crucial to “give a base for people to understand their field, the conditions of work and tools for organizing their own art form because that is what they will face later on”. Ivana Ivković (Zagreb) claimed she is “not surprised that students are not here because this is a question of ownership, feeling that you should be invested and that there is a common ground”. She went back to the proposal of the dance theoretician Ramsay Burt, who in his recent book *Ungoverning Dance* speaks about the commons. She shortly explained the term *commons* “dates from British history, where it meant a big field where everybody can bring their cattle to graze”. Ivković suggested, “Contemporary dance has this idea of the commons at its base, and that is why this top-down, institutional, hierarchical structure always fails”. She compared it to open-source software programming since there is also “a huge commons of how people share knowledge”. In conclusion, Ivković said the younger generations did not attend this gathering because “they have authorities and do not feel

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they can claim ownership over the field” unlike “most of the professionals from the middle generation who did not have the schools but were educated by sharing practices with each other”. Aleksandra Janeva Imfeld (Brussels/Zagreb) reflected on the experience of Nomad Dance Academy as one of the possible causes of the subsequent establishment of two official higher education programs for contemporary dance in Skopje and Zagreb, since those institutions “were constructed after we moved”. In connection, Iskra Sukarova (Skopje) added a contribution about “how challenging it is for her to bring the experience from Nomad Dance Academy into an official educational framework”, but that she is also very rewarded when it happens. Both speakers, Mueller and Milošević, reflected on raising the awareness of the students about their ownership of the education process, since “dance is political” and already “creating a different platform for learning makes a change.” Selma Banich (Zagreb) warned about the dangers of knowledge becoming a commodity, when institutionalized in a contemporary context. She views “education as a question of privilege, i.e. class, an entrance point for specific social networks and a mirror to one’s future professional networks”. Furthermore, she elaborated on the difference between the public and the common good, since the public good is “governed by the authorities and commons is governed by whoever wants to take part in the process”.

Barbara Bryan (New York) brought up the issue of the discourse around dancers that “infantilizes in an almost colonial manner, like there is no knowledge there”. According to her, dance has the power to shift the system “that is not working or working only for the privileged”, adding, “It is up to us to make the younger generation know that the knowledge is already there”. Ivana Milovanovic (Belgrade) mentioned the state ballet school with three departments (ballet, contemporary and traditional dance) in the context of many other informal education frames that are not recognized by the government. The problem she perceived is that there is “bad selection and questionable teaching” on which basis she questioned who will teach the teachers. Igor Koruga (Belgrade) replied that there are many practices for “teaching the teachers” (e.g. Nomad Dance Academy), but the problem is “how the institutional frameworks recognize these practices”. He added, “When we are speaking of public and private, there is always the question of financing and how it controls and structures all these issues”. Rok Vevar (Ljubljana) answered the recurring questioning of the missing students: “Students are in the school in the 1930s so it

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is almost impossible for them to come, especially with the past constantly changing.” Iva Nerina Sibila (Zagreb) shared the insights from her teaching experience at the Academy of Drama Arts in Zagreb. Her concerns were “who the students of our academies are and how we can reach students of different backgrounds and social classes”. In her opinion, enabling wider access to higher artistic education will lead to a broader change of the educational system.

Towards the end of the collective debate, there were several observations made by participants not involved in the regional context who have “the benefit of an outside eye”. They felt there are already “a lot of people implementing effective strategies since this gathering feels like one of the previously discussed phantasy places”. Also, they perceived a disconnect between helping the students to “feel empowered while a lot of people in the room refer to the people in power as if those people are not themselves”. Another question was raised as to how one can establish a horizontal structure when the funding comes from above, in a vertical manner. This also led to the contradiction of “being outside of the system but wanting recognition by the system”. In conclusion of the Temporary Parliament for Dance session, Koruga emphasized that, “it is crucial to be recognized by the institutions” and that this is the moment when this change could happen.

#### TANZPLAN DEUTSCHLAND AS AN EXAMPLE OF A SYSTEMATIC DEVELOPMENT FOR DANCE

Madeline Ritter, a lawyer, arts manager and dance curator from Berlin, was invited to speak about the cultural initiative Tanzplan Germany, which worked as a catalyst for the German dance scene from 2005 until 2010. In 2002, German Federal Cultural Foundation was founded and in 2005 it decided to allocate 12.5 million euros to the non-profit association Tanzplan Deutschland, directed by Ritter that would carry out the Tanzplan Deutschland project over a period of five years. In the beginning of her presentation, Ritter expressed her “personal feeling of frustration with local and regional funders because they would look at her as a person who was asking money” during her work as a dance curator. Therefore, she decided to “use the Tanzplan to change that relationship”. A condition for this change was that local and state decision makers had to start working together with the local dance scene and vice-versa.

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Concerning the phases of the Tanzplan project, she said its team first conducted research in the country as a whole in order to map out the existing structures for dance, then “The team sent out official invitations to the scene (forty people from different sectors) for meetings with members of local and regional governments”. As it was the first encounter of local dance scenes with those representing cultural policy, the Tanzplan team asked a simple question to establish an ongoing dialogue: “If you had a chance to receive sufficient money, what would you change in your city for the betterment of dance?” What is relevant to mention is that the Tanzplan team made a rule that fifty percent of the funding for the projects had to come from the local or regional governments. After a competition and jury selection process, nine projects were been awarded with the funds, such as Inter-University Dance Centre in Berlin (HZT), the Centre for Choreographic Development and Promotion at Kampnagel Hamburg, the residence center in Fabrik Post-



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dam, Bremen Festival touring for independent and city theatre companies, etc. Also, at the time when Tanzplan was being established, ten institutions for higher education in dance did not communicate among themselves, so the Tanzplan team decided to use the new educational centre in Berlin to create cohesion in the educational system. That resulted in the Dance Education Conference that now regularly brings all eleven state-run dance training institutions together around one table. After the first year, the Tanzplan team along with the local partners started a discussion with politicians about sustainability, i.e. finding the model by which the fifty percent funding levels would continue beyond 2010. But, after the state funding through Tanzplan ended, these local and the regional governments did not continue advocating for the funding to continue with the state partners. Therefore, in the last five years, she said, “A pressure group was created

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to really work with the local and regional governments to advocate for the state to participate". Due to this initiative, at end of last year a five-year funding scheme with six million euros was created for local and regional structures, again with the obligation of fifty percent match funding from the state. Still, prior to that there were five long years of "bringing people to the table, talking and creating a field of shared responsibility".

According to Ritter, Tanzplan made a strong impact on two levels: "Inside the dance scene, the organizations from all sectors became much better at dealing with the cultural political field, rather than just being applicants for projects". Secondly, Tanzplan serves as an example of how dance has the potential to become a model for other art forms since many similar initiatives (e.g. "Transformation Project") were developed after it, in different contexts (such as Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland and Belgium). It is possible to deduce that "dance has this quality to do so since it is not organized within institutions and has to find its own way to reconnect." Ritter concluded that Tanzplan "changed the value of dance for the community", which is also visible in the first mention of dance in the German "coalition contract", claiming that "state should engage responsibly in funding dance as it is an important art form in society".

#### SUPPORTING CONTEMPORARY DANCE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Towards the end of the Nomad Dance Advocates gathering, a session with representatives from international dance houses and international funding bodies covered the topics of financing models for contemporary dance in an international context.

Robert Alagjovovski (Skopje) is the current Minister of Culture of Macedonia. In 2015, he was appointed head of the opposition's Commission for Culture, after being

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involved in the "independent cultural scene as one of the few ministers who came from the field and represents the non-party structure". After eleven years of rule, autocratic government was finally overthrown this June when the opposition allied with many individuals from the civil sector, so currently the "new authorities are many non-party people".

Madeline Ritter (Berlin), a producer and ex-coordinator of Tanzplan, suggested, "Funding has the duty to be as innovative and adaptable as the art form itself".

Milica Ilić (Paris) represented ONDA (*Office national de diffusion artistique*), described as a "national agency for the distribution of contemporary performing arts, funded by the Ministry of Culture, with the objective of making sure that French audiences will be confronted with the most diverse and artistically experimental performing arts". ONDA provides "advice to professionals, a platform for collaboration and financing to support programmes or projects that are considered experimental".

Julia Sundberg (Stockholm) came from the Swedish Arts Council, which is "a public authority under the Swedish Ministry of Culture whose task is to promote cultural development and access, based on national cultural policy objectives". The Council achieves this by allocating and monitoring state funding, alongside other promotional activities. It allocates one third of the state budget for culture (which is eight-tenths of the overall state budget) keeping national cultural objectives in mind: "culture as a dynamic, challenging and independent force based on the freedom of expression; opportunity for everyone to participate in cultural life; creativity, diversity and artistic quality as integral parts of society's development."

Marie Christine Baratta (Vienna) has been the coordinator of international communication for ImPulsTanz – Vienna International Dance Festival for more than fifteen years, and is currently working on the Life Long Burning (LLB) project supported by the Culture Programme of the European Union.

Marya Wethers (New York) is the director of international initiatives at Movement Research, a laboratory for the investigation of dance and movement-based forms. She is also the director of the GPS/Global Practice Sharing, a platform for the international exchange of practices surrounding dance and movement, currently supporting exchange projects between the U.S. and Eastern and Central Europe, with the support of the Trust for Mutual Understanding.

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ANA LETUNIĆ  
Appendix:  
Report on Nomad  
Dance Advocates

Nevena Tudor Perković (Zagreb) heads the Development of Culture and Art Sector at the Croatian Ministry of Culture's Directorate for Cultural and Artistic Development and International Cultural Cooperation. After being a part of the arts and cultural scene in Croatia for many years, she is currently leading the sector whose mission is to "establish financing that enables the development of arts and culture, in different phases of the production chain".

Kristina Kujundžić remarked that, even though she is a moderator, she would like to speak from the perspective of the Swiss Cultural Programme, which gave special grants to the independent and contemporary art scene in the region from 2001 until 2010 and supported, among others, Nomad Dance Academy.

While discussing whether fundraising is about "making compromises or innovations", Ritter suggested that it is "important to understand the intentions of the funders and move from compromises towards understanding and dialogue." Baratta offered a critique of the Creative Europe programme by saying "It is not an artistic but an economic program that has nothing to do with artistic priorities in performance and contemporary dance". She believes "compromise is not in the content of the artistic objectives of the networks, but rather in the wording of the application". Therefore, Baratta concluded "it is very important to have a network with partners that have artistic priorities on which they are not ready to make compromises; because only through confidence and common values, can we work." Tudor Perković proposed that the ideal funder is one in constant contact with the artistic scene, giving the example of the foundation *Kultura Nova* as one of most important measures in Croatian cultural policy in the last ten years. Its relevance consists in "coming from the civil sector in a bottom-up procedure".

Continuing the session, Alagjozovski explained one of his first actions as Minister of Culture: his team restructured an existing call on a premise of decentralization, which had allocated funds from the state to municipalities to distribute the funds further. Now, these funds are distributed directly from the state to the beneficiaries in the civil sector, according to new criteria that should prevent prevailing clientelism. Also, he said that since "calls were very sectorial", the Ministry introduced a "new line of support for interdisciplinary projects in order to match different project-based initiatives". Still, Alagjozovski observed, "Whatever your political will is, it cannot just be put in the system, since the staff is very clientelistic and

hesitant to change". Ritter continued on the topic with the remark that the "administrative staff has to be educated and has to research the field to make any change". Sundberg elaborated on a big cultural reform called the "regional collaborative model", which Sweden instituted three years ago. This decentralization model consists of "all the state funding distributed to the regions for them to decide how to allocate the money". In a collective process, all regions are presenting their plans to the Art Council that then makes its judgements and assessments, according to national cultural policy priorities. So far, he said "In the evaluation of this reform, there haven't been any changes in the priorities of the regions or a single regional application with dance as a priority". Baratta brought up the study by the Flanders Art Institute called "Reframing the International", that shows how, due to funding cuts on national and regional levels, the increase of artistic coproductions rose in Belgium to eleven percent per year. Baratta considers that, although this means "added value to the development of work, the funding is even more fragmented". Coming from an institution "that partly provides funding and has a corrective role", Ivić was interested in looking into how the "cultural policy of a nation state can respond to the practices of artists that are everything but national" and "how can we stop looking at artists as a way of promoting the glory of our nation". Ritter also mentioned the example of "sub-funding set-ups such as the International Co-production Fund run by the National Performance Network, first established with *Tanzplan* and now functioning as a permanent fund". Wethers explained how the National Performance Network and the National Dance Project in the US supports the creation, development and touring of new dance works and connects artists, cultural organizations, and audiences across the nation: "The touring subsidy goes from NDP to the presenter, while the creation fund goes directly to the artist".

Participants then reflected on the importance of continuity, starting with Sundberg who said it is crucial to "work on a long-term basis and evaluate everything along the way". The Swedish Arts Council has the possibility to allocate funding for only one year but tends to "go around this rule a bit, in the field of dance, because artists couldn't continue working without long-term support". Baratta noticed that the "precarity of the artists is only increasing" and, ideally, structural funding on a national and European level should last at least for two years. Ilić reflected on the importance of "continuity of dialogue and pressure since institutions have this tendency of looking for a status quo".

Kujundžić then went back to the issue of labeling dance as heritage (an idea that was briefly discussed in the first session of the gathering), and its implementation through interministerial working groups. Baratta reacted by observing, “Nowadays, dance is dealing with its own heritage, since the pieces that are presented are mostly reruns and repertoire pieces.” For example, part of the Impulstanž Vienna program is curated as “Classics” (with artists such as Rosas). She also noted the visible connection between dance and heritage “in the strong presence of contemporary dance and performance in museums, i.e. institutions which deal with heritage”. After reflecting on the case of the choreographer Boris Charmatz opening the program of Volksbuehne, an iconic theatre in Berlin, she concluded that there is a dialogue in “dance bringing ephemeral communities, which no other form of art can bring, to a context of heritage that is not ephemeral”.

Tudor Perković proposed that “We need to detect needs and react to them by creating multiple sources of funding”. She gave an example from the Croatian Ministry of Culture, where her team “succeeded in inserting culture into European Structural Funds, so now there are three open calls within the European Social Fund than can be used for contemporary creation: Art and Culture for the Young, for those aged fifty-four-plus and for national cultural centres.” Also, the Ministry is very active at the moment in creating new funds with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance and, recently, Ministry of Tourism, starting from the premise that “culture is everywhere”.

Minister Alagjovzovski concluded the session by wondering “why the dance scene hasn’t received more structures and more reliable funding so far, since dance is such an innovative and progressive art form”. In that regard, he emphasized that we need “more advocacy, alliances and pressure but also to rethink the values and additional social benefits for why we need dance”. He proposed concrete multilateral initiatives



Day 2 of Nomad Dance Advocates. Opsenica, Vladimir. Belgrade : Station Service for Contemporary Dance. October 21, 2017.

with different ministries and governments allocating funds for the cause of contemporary dance.

## TOWARDS CONCLUSIONS OF THE “MAKE ROOM FOR DANCE!” GATHERING

After two intense days of collectively discussing a variety of issues and providing arguments for dance supported by rich local case studies, the Nomad Dance Advocates gathering came to an end with a wrap up session moderated by Ivan Medenica (Belgrade), Marijana Cvetković (Belgrade) and Ana Letunić (Zagreb).

Parallel to the previous discussion on supporting contemporary dance in an international context, a session with the directors of the Belgrade and Novi Sad theater houses was held in the gallery space, on possible ways to bring contemporary dance back to the Belgrade theaters. Ivan Medenica, artistic director of the Bitef Festival, briefly shared the main conclusions from the session, focusing on options for a future collaboration between the dance scene and the Bitef Festival. The structure of this potential collaboration would consist of an open call for the independent scene, which would result in three or four projects per year at Bitef Theatre since “other venues are too institutionally weak to support the collaboration”. In these partnerships, Bitef would provide “longer tech and rehearsal residencies with marketing and festival touring”. Medenica proposed a “bottom-up-bottom” model for these types of collaborations, and creation of a fund where the “venues would apply for a project, together with an artist.”

Ana Letunić, participant of the Critical Practice-Made in Yu programme, offered a summary of the two-day gathering by bringing up some of the points that might be relevant in helping all of the participants think about their future activities and actions together. In the end, the host of the gathering, Marijana Cvetković, thanked all the participants for sharing their insights into the potentialities of “making room for dance”, with the strong intent that this dialogue continue..

## **THE CRITICAL PRACTICE (MADE IN YUGOSLAVIA)**

The Critical Practice (Made in Yugoslavia) programme was created through collaboration of Station Service for contemporary dance, Lokomotiva – Centre for New Initiatives in Arts and Culture (as partners of Nomad Dance Academy) and Ana Vujanović as the programme's mentor. The programme is oriented towards empowering discursive reflections on contemporary performing arts while enabling their breakthrough into the larger public.

In contextual terms, it is focused on, but not restricted to, the post-Yugoslav region. Among the reasons for such an orientation are, on the one hand, a lack of continual and publicly visible critical writing about contemporary performances and performing arts events in the region and, on the other, the strong recent development in performing arts theory coming from this context. Therefore, this venture draws on the already existing platforms generated by the magazines TKH (Belgrade), Maska (Ljubljana) and Frakcija (Zagreb), as well as the Nomad Dance Academy (The Balkans). Its purpose is to advance the professional development of emerging authors (writers, critics, researchers, theoreticians) from the region and elsewhere and to encourage a more profound, more visible and more accessible critical reflection on the contemporary performing arts, enhancing their visibility and stimulating dialogue with audiences.

Within this programme we understand the notion of critical practice not only as a topic to be studied and an activity to be done, but also as an all-compassing politics and ethics of working together. This obliges all of us involved in the programme to engage in self-reflection, to give thought to our doings in critical dialogue, learning how to question our approaches and positions by means of analysis and argumentation while fostering processes of learning by doing. Accordingly, the participants and the mentor are seen as a working group of colleagues facilitated by the mentor, wherein mutual respect and confidence constitute the backbone of collaboration.

The Critical Practice programme is part of Life Long Burning project.  
[www.criticalpractice-madeinyu.info](http://www.criticalpractice-madeinyu.info)

