



REBELLIOUS CULTURAL CHALLENGE NUMBER 3

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BCC NUMBER 3 REBELLIOUS CULTURAL CHANGE

BY ZVONIMIR DOBROVIĆ

BCC is an international arts information environment, which has the goal to support, connect, present, empower and raise visibility of artists and arts organizations involved in contemporary and innovative performing arts from the Balkans. Giving space to young and emerging as well as established artists who are interested in researching and questioning different models of producing, creating and presenting their work is at the core of our attention.

Each issue of the magazine is the result of cooperation between several arts organizations, practitioners and theorists from across the Balkans. Cooperation and information sharing are the keys to sustainability of the independent arts scene in this region and beyond and we are filling the communication gaps between different stakeholders (be it between performers and their audiences or even between arts organizations in different countries).

In its most recent issue, BCC 3 is changing its meaning to reBelious Cultural Change as the writers and contributors are raising issues such as the ideals of protests, possibilities of change, performativity of the political within public space, reclaiming that space, voicing a culture of change.

BCC 3 is placing the public artistic actions and productions, as well as public protests in a wider social and political context, recognizing the bursting momentum and the creative energy that is emerging. There have not been developed enhanced interrogation techniques so powerful that could cough up the answers from those in local Balkan power to the questions of insufficiency of available resources, lack of visionary leadership and incompetence to plan for a cultural strategy or policy. But there is a reBelious Cultural Change ahead and BCC 3 is here to welcome it.

PARADES OF PARATHEATRE

Citizens who were raised on the military parades of the Yugoslav National Army now had the opportunity to pour out all the accumulated anger, and use it to show a high level of paratheatrical culture. The most important influence was reflected in the brief awakening of the consciousness that creating our own history is possible. It was an experiment which showed that **paratheatre** is a constant companion of the political expression of the masses.

Almost eleven years have passed since the great changes of October Fifth, when Serbia emerged from the Milošević period into a multi-party social environment. The speed of this relocation of social power caused a general uproar, during which many thought a real revolution occurred. On the other hand, those more cautious saw this historical event as just another “change”. This caution is justified by the historical fact that large social systems do not appear suddenly, and nor does society change overnight. Considering that today, eleven years later, those at the top of the Serbian government were Milošević’s closest associates in the nineties, we can see how the very notion of “change” is somewhat inadequate. And this brings us to the conclusion that we live in a system that did not make a substantial break with the legacy of the past.

The claim of one Yugoslavian psychotherapist, that “people who complain sometimes do so not to change anything, but to get recognition,” opens one door on the problem. In psychotherapeutic practice a large number of clients come with a problem, but not with the intention to solve the problem. Most of them are satisfied with just easing their soul, airing their problems, and then pay for the session and return home with their problems until they next accumulate. Although the formal restructuring of the former socialist societies has created a space for extra-institutional activities, an essential part is missing, and that is the liberation of the collective consciousness from the old practices and way of thinking. The inability of the transitional process to create an intellectual climate sufficient for the free expression of the citizens has led to the extinction of the **culture of complaint**. Which is why, in the region of the former Yugoslavia, quiet despair has once again become the dominant emotion.

Public protest as urban theater

Nevertheless, there is a point at which the mechanism of survival spontaneously starts to work among our people, when they snap out of lethargy, when we wake up with the hope that a different and better life is possible. These are rare moments in which we rise, take our civil rights down from their dusty shelf and go out into the streets. The question, however, is how much in that moment we really want changes. Let’s remember, for a moment, the success and failure of the 1968 student demonstrations, the series of anti-war and anti-regime protests in the nineties. All the way up to the October Fifth changes, whose failure is confirmed with the current indicators of corruption and poverty. All these historical events were attempts to make changes through urban spectacle and public manifestation of civil unrest, thus unmasking the regime’s ideology and preventing the fall into the abyss of the destruction of war. Why then, did the desired changes not happen? There is no definitive answer to this question. We can, however, shed light on the problem if we accept the idea of public protest as a modality of urban theatre.

The success and failure of the “**student protests**” in 1996 and 1997 have written new pages for the theatrical arts. It was the largest citizen action of the nineties, directed against regime structures that were, until then, leading the country into isolation of an unprecedented severity. Those who were present recall with satisfaction how Belgrade was revived and became a moveable feast – a walking **paratheatre** in which the street became the extension of the theatre. The city turned into a noisy stage, accompanied by innovative set design. Everyone was out in the streets. Even parents with children came, saying that children enjoyed the entire event. It was a sign that the bloody revolution had given way to a carnival, an ironic and grotesque image of a reversal of the world.

There were effigies of Milošević in a prison uniform, or as Pinocchio with a nose made from an inflated condom. The event was followed by a series of art performances – a flight attendant in a city bus serving drinks to confused citizens; “seeking” the president in the zoo; the decoration of the courthouse with condoms (as symbol of protection) and others. Even the regime felt the need to contribute to the performances. In an organised action, members of the ruling parties used detergent to wash the areas

Paratheatre

The term was coined by the late Polish theatre director, Jerzy Grotowski, to address a highly dynamic and visceral approach to performance that aimed to erase traditional divisions between spectators and performers. Paratheatre was also executed outdoors as non-performance events extending the boundaries of the theatre, which made it suitable for research of social groups and human behaviour.

Culture of complaint

The term implies culture of active participation in dealing with social issues. Culture of complaint signifies a culture of human dialogue which encourages people to talk openly about the things that bother them. It is contrasted by lamentation (“kukanje”), which became sort of a mass phenomenon in societies where free individual thinking is sanctioned. It is passive, inward directed, it forms and dissolves within our private space. Whining deprives our messages of all their power and emotional charge they create when invested into public domain.

Student protests of '96 and '97

Series of significant civil unrests in Serbia organized with the intention to end the Milošević’s regime and promote civil society. The regime was constantly pointing out that the protesters were mercenaries, backed by the foreign powers to end the real socialism once and for all. Even though the protests of '96 and '97 didn’t introduce any change in the Milošević’s path of self-destruction, they prepared the opposition for the next big thing – October Fifth of 2000.

where the rallies were held. They removed paint and garbage, sending one symbolic message about the power of the will over collective memory (erasing it), but another about the hypocritical claim that they are a constructive, and not destructive force.

One brave artistic intervention, however, raised the level of drama of the spectacle, when demonstrators confronted the police holding mirrors. The officers could see the protesters in front of them, but also their own reflection. They saw the police and the citizens as objective actors in a historical drama, surrounded by the urban scenery. Bringing mirrors out onto the street objectified the spectacle and showed that even a deadly serious matter, such as a civil rebellion, could be part of the theatre that extends beyond the field intended for it – **paratheatre**. This walking theatre chose key urban landscapes of the modern megapolis for its backdrop, and thus became life, the show we call “life”. The line between illusion and reality disappeared, at least for a moment.

Students began their march behind a large banner that read “Belgrade is the world,” which discreetly paraphrased Shakespeare’s famous verse, “All the world’s a stage.” Erving Goffman, famous anthropologist and founder of the dramaturgical approach in social sciences, said in 1959, “All the world isn’t a stage, of course, but it is hard to determine the moments when it is not.” Goffman’s studies of human behaviour showed how much, in everyday life, we rely on the ability to act, play, learn and change roles. This theory encouraged the use of the theatrical metaphor in the interpretation of human behaviour. In this, certainly, lies great freedom, but also danger, for in extending the idea of theatre outside the generally accepted framework of the artistic act, we lose the line that divides illusion from reality. In other words, with the idea of **paratheatre** we convey aesthetic categories into the domain of reality – and this is very dangerous ground. Some theatre theorists have even accepted the idea that the difference between theatre and life does not exist, which implies that the theatre is only a convention, which, in order to be accepted as theatre, has to be presented as theatre.

Researchers like Erving Goffman, Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz created a great dilemma in theatre and social sciences when they started to interpret human behaviour from the perspective of drama. Thanks to them, today we know that some modalities of our social lives become much clearer if viewed through the device of “role play,” according to familiar scenarios. This is why Milošević’s state media accidentally presented an accurate assessment when, in an effort to discredit the protests, they persistently stated that the protests played out like a “**well-established scenario**.”

A large number of leftist theorists agree with the assessment that those street demonstrations are a thing of the past. Brutal confrontation with the state is seen as an old paradigm that, over the last 30 years, has failed to inflict any serious damage to the liberal-democratic social order. Simon Critchley describes this situation as follows: “History is habitually written by the people with the guns and sticks and one cannot expect to defeat them with mocking satire and feather dusters. Yet, as the history of ultra-leftist active nihilism eloquently shows, one is lost the moment one picks up the guns and sticks.” We risk becoming a predictable seasonal occurrence, vaguely defined and vaguely directed civil unrest, the harmlessness of which the state can count on. Performances with a foreknown beginning and end. The aforementioned student protests of ‘96 and ‘97, unfortunately, did not lead to the expected upheaval. Milošević’s regime not only recovered from the civil unrest, but had enough strength to take Serbia into a war two years later, the consequences of which are still visible today. The rebellion stopped halfway, in a cathartic social phenomenon. It was a way to free the collective mind from the fear and nihilism of the nineties, a spectacle without tangible political consequences. Citizens who were raised on the military parades of the Yugoslav National Army now had the opportunity to pour out all the accumulated anger, and use it to show a high level of paratheatrical culture. The most important influence was reflected in the brief awakening of the consciousness that creating our own history is possible. It was an experiment which showed that **paratheatre** is a constant companion of the political expression of the masses, and that the thirst for spectacle is not enough if we want to impose structural changes in our environment.

Well-established scenario

A term used by Milošević’s propaganda to discredit street protesters, stating that they are mercenaries financially backed by the foreign countries to end real socialism once and for all.



PROTEST PERFORMANCE OR A REALISTIC OPTION – A GENERAL STRIKE

At first glance, but at first glance only, the heterogeneous Anti-Government protests as well as the protests that have been well organised by Pravo na grad [Right to the City] and Zelena Akcija [Green Action] in the Varšavska [Warsaw Street] case (Zagreb), show very clearly how even in today's meaning of the word protest – that is, as is succinctly explained to us in dictionaries, an individual or an organised public gathering at which the individual or group implement the act of protesting to express extreme dissatisfaction and disagreement – has not lost the meaning of the Latin verb *testari* meaning to bear witness. To bear witness from time to time to the brutality of the political authority of the powers-that-be can sometimes have no effect, of course, on the implementation of an illusory utopian objective quixotically aimed at achieving a qualitative freedom-respecting change. True enough, the above-mentioned protests still do not have – at least for now – the power of a general strike that would be the only feasible option for bringing down the current political system, despite the opinion of one respected member of the Opposition in the Sabor [Parliament], who stated that government is not overthrown on the barricades but in the Sabor. A really hegemonic idea.

In this article, we will be briefly focusing direct attention on the performance aspect of the protests, taking the examples of the two cases mentioned above – the Varšavska case and the anti-government protests that have been unfolding in an almost parallel manner as an *intermedia urbana* concept of sorts since the end of February, 2011. So, in a word, let's demonstrate...

The Varšavska Performance

What follows is the first example of a social movement as a particular type of performance and, at that, of oppositional performance, as the sociologist Hank Johnston terms such movements. Apart from that, the term protest art is often used for the performance aspects of political demonstrations and civil disobedience that also frequently contain activities aimed at attracting attention. As is known, the pooled performance strengths of the Right to the City and Green Action groups futilely endeavoured through performance protests during a five-year campaign to explain the city fathers – and not only to them – that Varšavska Street, which was being redesigned to accommodate an access ramp to Tomislav Horvatinčić's privately-owned parking garage, was losing its primary public function. According to collective memory, Varšavska had long been a traffic-free pedestrian area in the centre of the city, with seating for passers-by under a few shady trees. Let us take a look at the technology and dramaturgy of some of the performance activities of these two organisations. For example, when they organised a funeral procession on March 31, 2011, the one hundred and fifty activists taking part, as reported in the media were dressed in mourning black and the procession carried a large 'coffin' (five metres long and one and a half metres wide) that had PUBLIC INTEREST written in large printed letters on the side and was covered in the blue flag of the City of Zagreb. The final act was throwing of the coffin down into the entrance to the new "Cvjetni" garage project, by which the organisers of the protest action said that they had buried the public interest that the City had had in the Cvjetni Project. In that way, public interest was pushed in a symbolic fashion right down into the subterranean entrance, while workers, as also happens at the end of Krleža's Kraljevo [The Royal Fair] (in Krleža's case it was a matter of a street-cleaner and his broom), collected the remains of the "coffin" and threw them into a container. In this process, the number of activists in the performance procession was also chosen symbolically: 150 activists in funereal black symbolised the 150 activists who had been arrested during the demonstration in July, 2010, after which the works on the ramp to the underground garage had commenced.

We can also mention the very imaginatively conceived performance projects of the two organisations and the use of the wooden statue of a Trojan Horse in the "We're Not Giving Up Varšavska" protest on February 10, 2010. In that way, according to the activists there, the symbol of the protest – the Trojan Horse – figured as a warning that the planned Cvjetni Arcade was as fateful for Zagreb as the wooden horse of Antiquity had been for Troy. Unfortunately, cynical officialdom destroyed the Trojan Horse in its final expression of power, something to which, among others, the Croatian Society of Visual Artists [HDLU] reacted. As Mario Kovač said in his address to the crowd there, the contemporary meaning of a Trojan Horse is a programme, whether political or constructional or for a computer, which feigns to be like any other. As Kovač also pointed out, "However, when it is set in motion in a computer or a city,



then it reveals its true face. It starts to implement its destructive assignment. Most Trojans have a name that is very similar to customary programmes, such as for example 'Going to work with the President, let's get down to work.'"

Case: Varšavska street,
April 7, 2010
Action: Zagreb is calling you
(Zagreb te zove – title of a pop
song by a local band)

Apart from that, these two organisations also are reputed to have been the organisers of the largest Croatian performance, as the "March on the City Council" was announced on May 20, 2010 on the www.teatar.hr portal. Activists were called to come to this demonstration with suitcases and, with the altered verses of the song Zagreb Is Calling You (the song of the rock band Prljavo kazalište), the official anthem of that performance, to set out on the "March to the City Council" to demand that the mayor finally pack his bags (with the written destination, Remetinec, Zagreb's jail) and – in the end, to resign. On April 7, 2010 the activists had recorded a music clip with their official anthem, showing them holding plungers' plungers along with a large, Carnival plunger for unblocking drainage, symbolically indicating that Zagreb required major and detailed cleaning and unclogging because it was stopped up and blocked with corruption of all types. In the final protest on April 7, 2011, during the official opening of the Hoto Centre arcade, the two organisations used their remaining stamina to unfurl a white banner with red lettering reading A TOTAL SWINDLE on the so-called Radeljak building – Radeljak, along with Horvatinčić, being another of our respected "men of stature and substance". The message symbolically pointed to all the political and economic behind-the-scenes ruses of the Hoto Centre, which was covered on that day of its "festive" opening by a pink curtain that seemed on a more profound level to indicate how the majority of this country's citizens had sunk deeply into pink dreams, and that they cared more for the croissants and coffee being handed out by the Hoto Centre's management than for those "downtrodden and offended". The actress Urša Raukar was standing there somewhere beneath the pink drapery, holding the plaque that reminded everyone that – just imagine – the birth-place of Vladimir Vidrić, the celebrated Croatian poet, had stood in that very spot. So it is certainly worth mentioning that instead of having Vidrić at number 6, Preobraženska Street, we were presented on April 7, 2011 with the wondrous empire of the Hoto Centre.

Walking protest art, or how we became flâneurs, or saunterers

We can also demonstrate the performance aspects of the following protest case. The anti-government protests, heterogeneous at first glance since they really do cover all the political options of the "downtrodden and offended", are, nonetheless, systematically performed as protests with a strategic consensus – for now with the utopian objective of changing the Government. Initiated as Facebook

protests with politicking speechifying at Cvjetni [Flower] Square, some of which was similar – as noted by Mate Kapović, otherwise known as the prime mover of the Democratic Initiative against the EU – to a wondrous political “freak show”, some aspects of which are also present in the Sabor. However, at the Sunday demonstration on March 10, 2011, it was finally decided that these politicking addresses should be abandoned and that the self-appointed initiators and “leaders” of the protests, who were personalising them, should be moved aside. And that is what happened – fortunately. After that, the protests became somewhat akin (the emphasis being on the “somewhat”) to an elemental stream of demonstrative strolls around the city, so that the protests themselves were given the good-natured although ironic name, The Peripatetic Anti-Government Movement (abbreviated to PAP, 2011).

As we have seen, Flower Square was also chosen by the Anti-Governments protesters as the platform upon which the vox populi could be expressed, finally implementing the long-awaited people happening. Flower Square [Cvjetni trg], formally named Preradović Square, and known earlier as the Square of Brotherhood and Unity, has been subordinated entirely to commercialisation since the neoliberal transition of the 1990s. The chairs of the assorted cafés slowly but surely took increasing possession of the pedestrian zone which now, particularly after the opening of the Hoto Centre, cannot satisfy any “flâneur-ish” inclinations. Apart from that, the square in question is inscribed in Zagreb’s art history as the epicentre of numerous urban actions and interventions as a mode of infiltrating “live art” into urban everyday life.

Let us return, however, to the performance aspects of the anti-government protests that were performed as strolls through the city, some also as marches, relating to the individual “stations” along the route that were regarded as the personifications of the evils of the political powers-that-be – for example, the Croatian National Bank, the headquarters of the Croatian Democratic Union [the HDZ], but also the headquarters of the other parties, the State Prosecutor’s Office, the Roman Catholic Chapter, and the flats of certain politicians. The protest processions and marches stopped (as in the liturgical Passion of Jesus Christ processions) at individual “stations”, not of the Cross but of political evil, assailing each location with loud shouting and chanting of short messages directed to the powers-that-be, or even with mantras of talismanic curses and hatred, by which they endeavoured to drive out political evil “FOREVER-AND-EVER”. So, for example, at the Zagreb demonstration on March 10, one of the protesters used a megaphone to convey his message to the Church Chapter: “I would ask the Chapter to start respecting the Ten Commandments” while those present then started to chant: “Thou shall not steal”, “Thou shall not lie”, and “Down with Paedophilia”. Further, on April 1, 2011 at one of the demonstrations – since the protesters are banned from the approaches to St Mark’s Square, the location of the seat of Government, they “brought” their own square to their demonstration, that is, they placed a model of the Church of St Mark, made by students at the Faculty of Philosophy, on Ban Jelačić Square. At the 9th demonstration (on March 12), the procession moved along a route that would, by their movements, “write” the words “Get out!” directed, of course, to the Government. Then, at the 12th demonstration, the protesters stopped at the Japanese Embassy as a humanitarian sign of condolence and placed paper cranes by its entrance; they then lit candles to pay their respects by a minute of silence to the victims of the catastrophic earthquake in Japan. Thus, through these anti-government protests with the activity of the masses as strollers through the city, pausing at certain political stations, they have been conveying angry apotropaic messages and curses.

Further, on April 8, 2011, despite the fact that it was attended by the lowest number of Anti-Government protesters until then, or, as the media said – brought together only around fifty protesters – the demonstrators organised an interesting airborne performance entitled “Today the Government flies away!”, symbolically launching into the air 180 balloons, each carrying the name of a member of the Government and all the members of the Sabor, but also of Ivo Sanader, the former premier. With this “Balloon Protest” and the symbolic dissolution of the parliament and the Government, the Facebook protesters announced a long pause in protests until the First of May, Labour Day. In this process, the protesters have been inviting people looking down from windows or sitting in their cars – in other words, from the safe distance of onlookers – to join them, as they wave and blow their horns as signs of solidarity with the protester processions.

Protests around Croatia

Let us also look at some of the performance aspects of the protests in other cities: in Rijeka, for instance, the protesters unfurled their “weapons” – rolls of toilet paper that they threw up onto the balcony of the HDZ’s headquarters on Jadran Square, thus giving them “a last chance to wipe away all their stench”. The Varaždin protest on March 5 was dominated by a banner bearing the words: “Some countries have a Mafia, the Croatian Mafia has a country”, as well as another carried by a lady who expressed her anger by playing on a fife. Her banner showed Jaca, the nickname of the premier Jadranka Kosor, carrying a fluffy toy sheep, with the words “We already have the sheep, all that is

missing are the shepherds from the State and the HDZ." The reference being to a somewhat awkward and ill-conceived statement by the premier, when asked about the high unemployment, that there were 150 vacancies for shepherds, for which none of the unemployed had shown any interest. So the banner with the toy sheep perfectly alluded cynically to the cynical comment on the shortage of shepherds in the Republic of Croatia, if we rely on Peter Sloterdijk's definition of the cynicism, that is, as the modus by which one can cynically beat all the spectacles of the ruling cynical powers.

The lively heterogeneous nature of the crowds has really brought together all generations, professions, and political, religious and various other orientations, which was most obvious on the banners, each of the groups trying to express itself through certain signs and symbols, style of attire or even manner of disguise, with instruments among which whistles, fifes, Luka Hodak's shaman drums – Hodak being known to the public as the "HDZ's shaman" – the drums of the Evil Drummers [Zli bubnjari] group, bells, pots and pans and their lids, trumpets and tin cans predominated, or, in other words, anything that could be taken from home for handy orchestration of the music of noise. In the style of general carnivalisation, there were masks of leading politicians such as the political "Holy Trinity" – Vladimir Šeks, Ivo Sanader and Jadranka Kosor, while the protesters made war-cry sounds "like Indians", native American Indians, that is, giving their subversive response to the comment on the protesters as "Indians", made by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Tomislav Karamarko. In the same way, the protesters performed choral bleating like sheep, again alluding sarcastically to Kosor's aforementioned comment on the shortage of Croatian shepherds. In addition to the people who took part in those protest processions, there were also masked dogs – as, for example, at the protest on March 17, 2011, in which a carefree white poodle took part, carrying a sign on her back that said "I've had enough, too. I, too, want elections". And when both dogs and people have had enough... In addition to this, when the HDZ's shaman lashes out at the Government for which he had voted in the previous elections, then it is obvious that something is rotten in the state of Croatia. [Laugh.]

The protest ethnography in these street protests as an expression of the vox populi designates the streets and squares as spaces for the performance of social revolt, as well as indicating a carnivalisation of public behaviour – the mundus inversus concept, which all follows the prescription of protest behaviour, marked, among other elements, by noise, chanting, and humorous and subversive word play on banners that express the subversive spirit of the "downtrodden and offended". Naturally enough, those banners which spit upwards from below, by way of humorous slogans directed at those who are trampling upon them – as was well put by Krleža when, as an Army officer in the World War I, he experienced that type of humour and an "expectoration" from a recruit called Kvakar, a fireman from Orosavlje – are opposed by the serious political banners of certain groups, such as the evidently politically sombre ones of MASA (the Network of Anarcho-Syndicalists). My apologies if I am mistaken in having detected a black banner with a message written in white letters, which I assume to be MASA's: "HEP [the electricity distribution company], water, forests, public health, education. . . Against privatisation! Against capitalism and the EU!" Or, for its part, when MASA's banner in white letters on a black background clearly calls for a "General Strike".

Never doubt that...

In conclusion, I should point out that although these words cannot, of course, have the same propulsive power as an act of protest activity, they do, nonetheless, try to put forward the idea of a general strike as the only option, since the Government has perfectly played its cynical role in ignoring the protest strolls. Admittedly, in that process, as a paradox once again, the call of "Everyone into the STREETS!" would be just one more utopia.

Apart from that, again naturally enough, this short paper cannot have the power of a collection of papers about the ethnography of protest, thinking here primarily of *On Students and Other Demons* that Gordana Gorunović and Ildiko Erdei edited in 1997 as an ethnographic collection of papers on the Belgrade student protests in 1996/97, protecting in a talismanic manner against Milošević's dastardly abominations. Therefore, I would have to say that a greater effect on reality is, of course, exerted by political performances – that is to say, protests and demonstrations, unlike performance art, actions and happenings that stem from aesthetic dimensions. Here I invoke the brilliant and revealing recognition by the multimedia artist Vlado Martek of the fact that aesthetics do not, unfortunately, have an effect on conscience. In other words, as was very clearly said by the political theoretician, Chantal Mouffe, "It would be a serious mistake to believe that artistic activism can itself bring neoliberal hegemony to a halt." On the other hand, however, I continue deeply, deeply to believe in the call that is usually attributed to the anthropologist, Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

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BY NIKOLA GELEVSKI

Creative resistance against “antiquisation” policies in the Republic of Macedonia

PRACTICING FREEDOM: INTERSECTING POINTS OF VIEW

Does anyone remember the infamous leader of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov, who died 5 years ago?! A reminder is in order, because Niyazov’s political and cultural visions in their most caricaturistic form bear a striking resemblance to the populist and dangerous ideas about cultural identity promoted by the current government in the Republic of Macedonia. Frustrated by the long-running obstruction from the Republic of Greece (the path to EU accession is blocked, the official name of the state in the United Nations is “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”), a few years back the current Macedonian government decided to take a hard-line nationalistic stance. The capital Skopje is the scene of a megalomaniac government project aimed at redefining national identity through architecture. Critics have called this project “antiquisation”. Based on the instructions stipulated by the government in the construction tenders, tens of buildings are currently being constructed in “antique” and “baroque” style, while more than fifty monuments have already been completed and placed throughout the city centre

Niyazov and his mother

Saparmurat Niyazov, similar to some of our current Macedonian leaders, harboured a fanatical conviction that Turkmenistan is in dire need of a new and potent national identity. That’s why he took it upon himself to redesign the state according to his vision. He renamed the city of Krasnovodsk, on the coast of the Caspian Sea, and gave it a new eponymous name, Turkmenbashi. He renamed quite a few schools, airports, even a meteorite, giving them his own name and the names of his closest family members. Statues of Niyazov and his mother grace towns throughout the whole country, even including one in the middle of the Karakorum desert. Special mention needs to be made of the gold-plated statue that rises from the top of the highest building in Ashgabat, which is constantly rotating so to ensure that his face is always turned to the sun and casting its reflection on the capital. He also built an artificial river running for several miles through the Turkmenistan capital. Furthermore, apart from the streets bearing his name, all others are marked numerically. He also succeeded in his plan to change the names of the calendar months, naming them after himself and his mother. During the broadcast of the national TV station, you could never miss the gilded image of Niyazov crammed into a sun-shaped medallion, turning in the corner of the screen. Still, Niyazov’s greatest love remained erecting spectacular monuments – in his birthplace, the village of Gypjak, he built a memorial complex in honour of his mother which also houses a mosque that cost 100 million dollars.

I recall a fascinating film noir by Charles Laughton, *The Night of the Hunter* from 1955, in which Robert Mitchum plays a monstrous and psychotic priest stalking two children. The priest is a killer, a strangler with the word “hate” tattooed on one arm, and “love” on the other. This role is a precursor of the role that Mitchum later played in another film noir masterpiece, *Cape Fear* by J. Lee Thompson from 1962. There is a more recent remake of *Cape Fear* directed by Martin Scorsese in 1991, featuring a majestically tattooed Robert De Niro as a ruthless ex-con out to seek revenge. This newer version boasts

Antiquisation

A term coined by architectural historians to describe giving a city the appearance of classical mode, or make it resemble ancient times. The trend is under way in Macedonia where significant public resources are being spent to revive the spirit of antiquities.



Right to Skopje (Pravo na Skopje)

an anthological scene when an ageing Robert Mitchum and Nick Nolte are standing side by side in a police station, watching Robert De Niro slowly undress revealing his menacing sinewy body and the numerous messages and images tattooed on his convict body, which, to top it all off, is decorated with a huge, inscribed cross along the length of his spine.

Macedonia archeologically rebuilt

The new main square currently under construction in the centre of Skopje, which will be dominated by a towering, 22 metre tall monument and fountain dedicated to Alexander the Great brings to my mind echoes of the tattooed convict from Scorsese's movie. His richly decorated skin precisely illustrates the fascination of the current Macedonian leadership with the idea of the surface, the façade and stage props. The "Identity" (a key word in Macedonia in recent years) which is being marketed is reduced to an image, an attraction, a populist's trickery. Besides, this façade-prone identity is in essence a reaction of rage, hidden aggression, a veritable intertwining of "love" (towards its own nation) and "hate" (toward the Greeks, with whom Macedonians share some of the same symbols in their national "imaginariums").

The Republic of Macedonia today is a country which, in the second decade of the 21st century, through the actions of its political authorities is discarding not only the modernism of the 20th century, decidedly regressing towards the romantic nationalism of the 19th century, but is also pushing its people to unite around forms of mystical, ancient communities while at the same time producing instant and improvised "emotional metaphysics" and identities tailored to the daily political purposes and to the benefit of the ruling party. The values promoted by the government exude a highly collectivist spirit, based on the concept of the nation understood exclusively on ethnic grounds and as a tribe. Archaeology, in conjunction with erecting monuments and the process of **antiquisation** is given top national priority and enormous sums are dedicated to it (despite the fact that the country ranks among the poorest in Europe).

What is unravelling before our eyes is, in fact, a familiar story, already seen played out twenty years ago in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, as well as in Europe seventy-odd years ago. Fascist Italy spent enormous state resources in the 1920's in its effort to excavate imperial Rome – Teatro di Marcello, Forum Traiani, Forum Caesaris, Forum of Augustus, Marcus Cocceius Nerva, all these archeological finds

were dated 1500 years ago. Contemporary architecture in Italy at that time was forced to adapt to the newly promoted imperial aesthetics. This was quite an odd arrangement considering that the key principle of the modernism of the time was rationality (science and reason) before history. Modernism, rather, took ornamentation and decoration for crimes. Le Corbusier defined the “house as a machine for living”. In order to reconcile rationalism with the imperialistic turn toward the past, the Fascists came up with their Fascist Rationalism which is best embodied in the architectural poetry of Albert Speer, a distinguished architect, but a condemned human being because of the major role he played in Hitler’s death machinery.

More recently, a wave of archaeological discovery of “its” former glory also swept through Greece during the 1970’s and 80’s. Under the motto of being the most ancient nation in the world, the Serbs too entered into a series of wars in the 1990’s which they ultimately lost. Today, this wave of blood and soil (threatening to swell to a tsunami, which is why this article deals with this subject) is sweeping over the Republic of Macedonia, blocking any prospects for positive resolution of the chronic Balkan political and identity crisis.

Fortunately, there is one good thing that has arisen from the detrimental state cultural policies in the Republic of Macedonia: that is counter-culture. The emergence of an alternative culture scene (no matter how small or how limited its influence) represents the only positive response to the tens of millions of Euros spent seemingly on culture, although in reality this only resulted in a philistine flaunting of its vulgarity. Alternative culture has been one of the rare counterweights to this “new primitivism” of the aggressive governing elite, exposing them in their efforts to “popularise” (rather, devastate and brutalise) the overall cultural space, reducing it to fit their narrow-minded nationalistic worldview.

Singing Skopjans

I would like to point out one example of this newly awakened alternative scene: the “Singing Skopjans” choir. The choir provides public performances, mostly in the streets of Skopje. These performances mainly consist of one song, craftily selected (subtle, but incisive choices!) to present their relationship to the gloomy reality. Pretty telling was their reaction to a preposterous election statement by the Mayor of Skopje, Koče Trajanovski, who said that we ought to fix the clock on the Old Railway Station whose hands stopped at the exact time of the catastrophic 1963 earthquake. In response, the choir performed in front of the historical clock, singing an old hit song by the pop band Knockout, “Time Machine” (“Start the time machine, bring the disco rhythm back, start it and bring me back in time”). Provoked by another of the Mayor’s statements, that we should put back the old stone pavement on the city square, the Singing Skopjans staged a rousing protest march through the city, urging the protesters to wear big, cardboard, stone-like cubes. The protest led to the offices of the Mayor, where the choir performed the song “Skopje, You’ll be our Joy Again”. On another occasion, they performed in front of the Greek Embassy the song “Dirlada” by the local band Memorija (“She said no, which in Greek is yes, oh dirladadirladada”), adding an ironic twist to the twenty year old name dispute between the Republic of Greece and the Republic of Macedonia. Notably, the Singing Skopjans record their street performances (around twenty, so far) and post the videos on the internet.

The Singing Skopjans show us, through their practices, that the important principles of one’s own cultural heritage (subtlety, decency, respectability, dignity) often have to be defended from the destructive incursions which originate from that same heritage. Irony, for example, is one good tool to oppose the process of **antiquisation** which is introduced not only through archaeology and building monuments, but also by imposing a completely provincial and outdated classicism in the architecture.

The Singing Skopjans came about after pro-government thugs attacked and beat up students protesting against the building of a church on the main city square in Skopje on 28 March, 2009. The group was born as a reaction to the **antiquisation** of Skopje led by the joined forces of the national government and the Mayor of Skopje. The “Singing Skopjans” choir is proof that some of the means of resistance against an aggressive and unscrupulous nationalistic state cultural policy can be mockery, imagination, performance and creativity in general.

Carnival as strategy

Similar strategies of **carnivalisation** of resistance can be seen in many places throughout the world. Spectacle and imagination are becoming important tools in fighting the all-powerful state. These new rebels are creating a new language of civil disobedience. This language is a mixture of street theatre, festival, performance, and what could be termed non-violent struggle. Groups such as Ya Basta! and

Singing Skopjans

An ad hoc choir of citizens of Skopje who express their opinions on current matters through songs. They often use humour in their performances, and in the choice of songs. Their public singing is often video documented and put on YouTube.

Carnivalisation

In theory is the liberating and subversive influence of popular humour on the literary tradition, but it is used as a method of action in recent protests around the world. Spectacle and imagination are becoming important tools in fighting the all-powerful state.



Singing Skopjans

Rebel Clown Army rely on carnival humor as political strategy. David Graeber in his article *The New Anarchists* (*New Left Review*, 13, 2002) describes some of those phenomena: “Ya Basta!, for example, is famous for its *tute bianche* or white-overalls tactics: men and women dressed in elaborate forms of padding, ranging from foam armour to inner tubes to rubber-ducky flotation devices, helmets and chemical-proof white jumpsuits. The ridiculous gear seems to reduce human beings to cartoon characters—misshapen, ungainly, foolish, largely indestructible. The effect is only increased when lines of costumed figures attack police with balloons and water pistols or, like the ‘Pink Bloc’ in Prague and elsewhere, dress as fairies and tickle them with feather dusters. At the American Party Conventions, Billionaires for Bush dressed in high-camp tuxedos and evening gowns and tried to press wads of fake money into the cops’ pockets, thanking them for repressing the dissent.”

The influential British philosopher Simon Critchley claims in his book *Ininitely Demanding* (2007) that by using this policy of subversion, contemporary resistance practices apply satirical pressure on the state, for the purpose of proving that other forms of living are also possible: “Groups like the Pink Bloc or Billionaires for Bush are performing their powerlessness in the face of power in a profoundly powerful way. Politically, humour is a powerless power that uses its position of weakness to expose those in power through forms of self-aware ridicule.”

I have another reason to utilise these intersections between political and aesthetic speech. The French theorist Joelle Zask, in her book *Art et Democratie*, says that artistic, aesthetic and democratic criteria are similar. Art related activities have come to represent features that are symbolic of democratic life and vice versa; key ideas from the history of liberal democracy prove very useful in the development of artistic practices and aesthetic judgements.

Very often, politics reveals the point in artistic practices at which they turn from creative to conformist; art, on the other hand points out to politics the exact moment when it abandons the role of the servant and turns into a master, or even an executioner.

If we have to step outside politics in order to be able to assess and guide it, suggests Joelle Zask, then we also have to step outside of art in order to stimulate it. This intersection of points of view is in fact a way to practice freedom.

PRACTISING FREEDOM: INTERSECTING POINTS OF VIEW

Nataša Rajković is one of the most famous and internationally recognized playwrights in Croatia. Being invited by the direction of Student centre (Studentski Centar) in 2004 to take the position of head of the Culture department of that university institution, she has initiated and, with a council of colleagues, established a pilot program called "Culture of Change" (Kultura promjene) which has since grown into a seriously guided, successful and fruitful long-term project that has been gathering the most dynamic and interesting groups, projects, initiatives and individuals, most of them at the very beginning of their research and activity, coming from different artistic and cultural fields.

Although in the beginning it challenged the previously existing 'old-school' cultural program, which, in a good bourgeois manner, strictly divided theatre, gallery, cinema and concert activities into their 'corresponding places' - and for that reason was harshly criticized in the mainstream media - Culture of Change slowly 'won' real attention, respect and, above all, the participation of young people. Such an open cultural space in the centre of Zagreb was also very soon recognized by many international artists and initiatives, some of whom showed interest in a further collaboration. As a result, a couple of years ago the Student Centre's Culture of Change was invited to join the European project Connection, and very recently has joined with seven European cultural institutions for a five-year project "Advancing Performing Arts Project – Performing Europe" which has just been granted a 5 million euro budget, within the EU program Culture 2007-2013.

Nataša has always also been very active in reclaiming a firm and fair cultural policy - which should be, of course, conceived and applied by Croatian State and Municipal authorities - taking part in protests and initiatives formed in this respect mostly within the independent, non-institutional, cultural scene. The most recent one, simply called Initiative for Culture, spontaneously happened as a reaction to the results of the competition for cultural programs, held by Municipality of Zagreb.



Nataša Rajković

What was the idea and the concept of Culture of Change?

When I was invited to the Student centre, I suggested that we establish a Program Council which would deal with programming and with the revitalization of this space. That idea didn't include any permanent jobs, it would be a body exclusively dedicated to the program. However, we found a strong resistance among people employed here. It was practically impossible to communicate with them and they were closed to any proposal. In the first month and a half, what I witnessed was only an irrational fear of change, or of any input that didn't correspond to their habits. We realized that the very creation of a new group of people with a new idea was kind of a program... we had to do literally everything, from 'kitchen psychology' to system structures and cultural policy... So the concept of Culture of Change has literally imposed itself. In choosing that name, we intended to draw attention to a fact that we, as a society, lack a culture of change. Obviously it is not natural to us, nor is it easy to implement any kind of change. That context, of course, makes any change much more difficult than it would be in some other conditions. The Culture of Change referred both to that problem - the lack of a culture of change - and to the real changes in the program. Finally, the name has survived because it probably underlined a kind of a difference to the previous concept. Slowly, we managed to resolve that issue with some hybrid models, we began to work on some completely new principles which, in my opinion, are much more appropriate to the cultural centre.

For example?

Our first project was Culture Fair. At that time, we didn't have the ambition to present it as a traditional kind of a festival, which is what happened. Its aim was to provide an open concourse, without any fixed criteria, so that it could bring to the surface everything that was done on the cultural scene at that time... no matter if it was 'dependent' or 'independent', institutional or non-institutional. We wanted to see whether the SC could function, although located in several different 'buildings', as a unified space with one centre. In our opinion, every project had to be produced and treated in the best way, at the most appropriate place, whether it was a theatre, gallery, or somewhere else... we made it really interdisciplinary... although in the past, different activities and places were strictly divided there. We

wanted the centre to function in the service of projects, not vice versa. The response to our first appeal was three times bigger than we expected. So it was clearly revealed that one more dynamic and active site on the Zagreb cultural map was needed, especially among younger people, which further directed our action.

Student centre is a complex with a long tradition, especially Theatre &TD - which has always functioned, from its beginning until today, as a real brand in our theatre context. To implement changes there was, I suppose, the most difficult task?

In the first stage, we functioned as a system parallel to the old one. Because, our policy couldn't find a common language with the previous one. I claim, with full responsibility, that the old repertory policy of Theatre &TD was wrong. Bourgeois theatre cannot have a place in a space called a student center. Today, we have three so-called modules. Modulus &TD includes our own theatre program with which we regularly apply for the concourses of the Municipality of Zagreb, just as any other theatre. Within this repertory, co-productions are also welcome – with festivals, associations, artistic organizations - if the proposals correspond to our ideas of theatre. Modulus &TD Lab is more related to students from the Academy of Dramatic Arts... which keeps us in direct touch with new emerging artists, and for them &TD represents an ideal place to realize their first projects. With &TD Edu projects our aim is to cover those parts of educational programs that are not necessarily included in the formal agendas of educational institutions.

The culture of the Student Centre functions as an interesting partnership between state and independent institutions, hosting at the same time practically the whole non-institutional cultural scene... it seems like an ideal financial structure...

Yes, I think this is the best model of partnership. The Student Centre is an institution which "takes care of students' standards" on three levels: accommodation, nourishment and culture. Food and accommodation are covered by the Ministry of Science. But Culture is financed by the income of Student centre and by regular applications to city and state institutions which give subsidies to cultural programs. And also by European funds, sponsors etc. This is an ideal combination because we have the whole infrastructure (space, technical equipment, salaries etc.) covered by the SC, and we only apply for the program money. On the other hand, people from non-institutional cultural projects are in constant search for space and infrastructure, so we host for free those projects which are free for the audience, and from those who sell tickets we take a percentage, which is really fair. And then, there is a number of projects that we support additionally... then it is a kind of co-production. We welcome all activities which we recognize as projects in the public interest. They also, of course, enrich our own program.

Many international artists and initiatives have already recognized your program as a serious cultural fact and as a great potential for collaboration, although your technological infrastructure is not necessarily of the highest profile. Most recently, the Advancing Performing Arts Project invited you to participate in an ambitious and complex project "APAP-Performing Europe", together with seven European cultural institutions. What are the advantages of taking part in such projects – other than, of course, the financial advantage?

As a kind of mentoring project, it is oriented towards young people. It is going to find, 'to pull out' - by some choice, or by some influence - young people onto the scene. In art, there is always the question of how to find some new names. This 5-year project is hosted by Szene Salzburg, and the co-organizers are: Maison de la Culture, Amiens, Bit Teatergarasjen Bergen, Kunstzentrum BUDA, Silesian Dance Theatre, Tanzfabrik Berlin, Centrale Fies and the Student Centre of Zagreb University - Culture of Change. The most important thing, I find, is the gathering of and communication among young people on the European scene. From our side, there will be Maja Budor, Maja Čule and Irena Čurik. They will work in Berlin, but parts of all these projects will be shown in Zagreb also – the essence of this project is an exchange. While participating in the "Connection" project, for example, I was astonished by the similarity of performances created by different artists in completely different contexts, with different mentors. Rona Žulj and Miran Kurspahić didn't differ much from each other. You could see exactly how the entertainment trend is actually, in this generation, very similar. For example, all the performances had almost the same opening. So, I find those projects interesting not only for those who work there, but also for those who just follow art production... one can see clearly what's happening. And, obviously, Europe is now going to support these kinds of projects.

What are, in your opinion, the crucial problems of Zagreb's cultural policy, especially within the frame of the non-institutional cultural scene?

I find that a cultural policy, particularly a developed cultural policy, is basically non-existent. If I had to stress just one problem, it wouldn't be a lack of money, but a lack of valid criteria of distribution. In my opinion, the main criteria should only be the artistic quality of the program, and here everything is mixed up. It seems to me that local cultural policy sometimes tends to be more social than cultural, but then not consequential in that way either... it is not constructed for the long-term. It does not take into consideration any kind of evaluation... This year especially, when they – with the excuse of the financial crisis – 'cut' subsidies indiscriminately with no regard for the minimum needs for some programs to be realized, it was clearly shown that no true interest in culture was invested there. By that act, people responsible for culture in the Municipality proved that they don't find anything important, which means that they don't support anything truly. And it happens again and again, and we have more or less money, whatever.

With the situation that happened this year, one gets paranoid and starts to speculate that it isn't only about a lack of criteria, a bad or non-existing cultural policy, but about a conscious attempt to destroy the non-institutional cultural scene... How would you comment on that?

If I said it was planned, I would have to admit that there is a kind of thinking, or rethinking, or strategy, in these institutions, but I don't believe there is. Even when they had money, and gave it to the non-institutional scene, it was not done properly. Okay, perhaps something good happened, for example, a significant dance scene was developed, but then no evaluation succeeded, ever – through results, success, quality, you name it. They give to everybody bits and pieces, completely arbitrarily and superficially... in the same manner that they gave them money, now they are taking it back. As a result, most people on the dance scene this year are doing solos, because the bits and pieces left after recent cuttings have become absolutely insufficient for anything else. Or, another example, they give you money to create a performance, but they don't take into consideration how and where you will present your work. Basically, you have to rent the theatre, for which you don't have enough money. They finance a project regardless of its sustainability. In my opinion, it would be much better to finance fewer projects, but fully, than to give bits and pieces to everybody, in conditions in which they don't have any chance to survive, or even to finish their productions properly. Consequently, I think we can not talk about the destruction of the scene by cultural politicians, because it has never been constructed or constituted by them. They don't know what they want.

You are taking part in the Initiative for Culture, which has just recently been founded by activist from the non-institutional scene. What was the main reason for that gathering?

The Initiative gathered spontaneously. We were all shocked by the results of a concourse at Municipality. They are really defeating. In my opinion, all serious people, even those who are satisfied with what they got, should react on principle, because I think it is inadmissible that these institutions, financed with money from the citizens, have such little interest in what they are deciding on. And they showed this lack of interest by outrageously cutting grants indiscriminately, in an attempt to be 'just'. It's total nonsense. We gathered with an aim to draw attention to the problem, to find out how that situation happened, and then to try to suggest a better way to resolve the situation – to influence and put pressure on politicians to make criteria much clearer, to make a more general agenda, regardless of particular interests. I think we are not allowed to skip over the direct responsibility of the Municipality for the bad work that was done there. Of course, they delegate responsibility to some individuals among them, but even that way you can not find out anything... I think even within our Initiative there are some too-particular interests emerging....but we'll succeed only if we insist on a broader perspective of the cultural scene.

I don't think that settling these things is so complicated. It is necessary to set the legal rules of the game, so that we don't depend any more on what somebody has said on the stairs of the Municipality – or not said. Responsibility includes good criteria, cultural policy and strategy, and direction on where the culture of Zagreb wants to go. They don't even respect the criteria they have already decided. Probably, they haven't even read them.

UPCOMING AND UP&COMING IN THE REGION



Philippe Quesne / Vivarium Studio: *Big Bang*



Yuyachkani, *El Ultimo Ensayo*, photo by Francsca Sissa



Matjaž Farič / Milko Lazar, SRH / *Shiver*, photo by Miha Fras

CROATIA (COLLECTED BY MILA ČULJAK)

Miran Kurspahić
OUR BEAUTIFUL (HOMELAND)
Teatar &TD, Savska 25, Zagreb
April 30, May 3, 4 at 8PM
(theatre)

This is a story about a famous singer of our time. We follow her from a very young age, through the painful process of argument, conflict and separation from her family, through all the changes of style and teenage rebellion. Her first guardian, her manager, a father figure who helped her to become independent and who, with his strong hands, led her thorny career in a patriotic charge. He took everything from her, and she was like a daughter to him; he would have done anything for her, and then he died leaving her sad, confused and vulnerable. We follow the whole spectre of the managers who came after him, from a self-denying, modest, pragmatic, but also calculating ex-commissar, through a handsome, conspicuous, resolute, arrogant and intelligent man from Dalmatia, all the way to her last manager who was a shy, insecure woman, who despite her mask of strength and determination, could not cope with the ubiquitous problems of her client. She, the undeniable star of these areas. The star who just sings, while the others write her hits. She also looks like a glamorous star, drives expensive cars, wears haute couture, goes to fashion events and all important social events. She is the necessity of every respectable party, the cherry on the cake, but she is also in the red at the bank and has huge loans to pay back. She exploits her beauty and sex appeal to the extreme, every once in a while she gets plastic surgery to look younger, more beautiful, more desirable, because the market is cruel, and she is unstoppable getting older and less beautiful. She is addicted to drugs, an expensive addiction encouraged by her managers. She buys those drugs abroad, but the money is gone, the addiction crisis is getting worse and she owes more and more. She has been associated with prominent people, politicians, "successful entrepreneurs", generals, managers and members of the national team. Rumour says that she had a lover from within the church. She is also associated with organised criminals, economic corruption. But she doesn't care. She just sings and goes on. She is Our Beauty...

Ivica Buljan
Joseph
Queer Zagreb Festival
Theater &TD, Savska 25, Zagreb
April 30 at 9PM
(theatre)

Interested in formal procedures, almost equally in being outside them, and radical, or at least seemingly radical steps, the plays and projects of Ivica Buljan are always dancing on the edge of the constrained meticulousness and the baroque, even sometimes the orgiastic. From the dramatic archive, thanks to which the lesser known volumes of European modernism are brought out into the domestic light of day, as well as some forgotten authors, from an affection for antiquity to an obsession with French and Francophone drama and culture in general, the least you can attribute to Buljan is an enrichment of the local repertoire, in every role that he has had and still has, as playwright, director and selector. Joseph, performed by Stipe Kostanić, belongs to the minimalistic current of the quite unique oeuvre spread almost symmetrically throughout the Croatian and Slovenian theatre scene. At the same time, it is a monodrama, and a little concert of reading that is an experiment with the theoretical basis and the hypothesis of the transformation of the prose text into drama without dramaturgical intervention, but with only the director's invisible directions, and with a performer who is cold to the empathy involved in the classical sense of the actor's work, away from psychological realism and beyond drama.

Red Room
Red Room cabaret @ Queer Zagreb
Pogon Jedinstvo, Trnjanski nasip bb, Zagreb
May 6 - 8 at 8PM
(circus / music / live art)

Red Room cabaret is a provocative blend of exceptional circus, twisted humour, new burlesque and contemporary variety masterminded by Ivan Kralj, the director of the Festival of New Circus. A decadent night of urban pleasure for adults is presented by performers whose references include Torture Garden, Palazzo or the Olivier Award winning variety La Clique. Between the bar and two stages, nine performers from three continents promise the experience you'll be talking about for a long time! The media proclaimed this show to be "a world-class delicacy" (Vjesnik), pointing out the "roaring wave of audience reaction" (Novi list) and "excellent acts" (Vijenac).
www.cirkus.hr

28th Dance Week Festival
Zagreb, Rijeka, Split
May 24 - June 3
(festival)

Dance Week Festival is one of the biggest and oldest dance festivals in the region. The program each year includes a series of Croatian dance performances as well as a host of international choreographers. Some of the artists presented this year are Jasmin Vardimon, Luca Silvestrini, Thomas Noone, Guillem Botelho, Didier Theron, Clara Andermatt and Chris Haring among many others.
www.danceweekfestival.com

Benjamin Noys
'The Art of Capital: The Artist and Equivocations of Valorisation'
net.culture club MaMa, Preradovićeva 23, Zagreb
June 20 at 7PM
(lecture)

Benjamin Noys from the University of Chichester, has focused his current research on the question of the negative and negativity in contemporary theory, psychoanalysis, and in art and popular culture. His most recent work is *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory* (Edinburgh UP, 2010), and he has published widely on theory, film, art, and fiction. This lecture is organized by the Centre for Drama Art as part of the program: *Problems of (self)-valorisation methodologies*

Eurokaz Festival, Zagreb
June 28 - July 5
(festival of new theatre)

Branko Brezovec (HR): Salome
Avenue Mall, Av. Dubrovnik 16
June 28 - July 1 at 10:30PM

Akram Khan (UK): Vertical Road
Croatian National Theatre, Trg Maršala Tita 15
July 1 at 8PM

Faustin Linyekula / Studios Kabako (Congo): More, more, more.... future
Zagreb Dance Centre, Ilica 10
July 2, 3 at 8PM

Philippe Quesne / Vivarium Studio (FR): Big Bang
Zagreb Youth Theater, Teslina 7
July 4, 5 at 8PM

Christoph Schliengensief (DE) – retrospective
Academy of Drama Art, Trg Maršala Tita 5
July 3 – 5

**FOCUS ON ART AND SCIENCE IN THE
PERFORMING ARTS – EU PROJECT (Culture
Program 2007-2013)**

June 28 – 30, various times

Santa Sangre (IT): *Bestiale Improvviso*
Dewey Dell (IT): *Cinquanta urlanti quaranta
ruggenti sessanta stridenti*
WE GO vzw/Vincenzo Carta (BE): *Gnosis #1*
Anja Maksić Japundžić (HR): *Njarabum*
www.eurokaz.hr

**12th Festival of Dance and Non-Verbal Theatre
San Vincenti**
July 22 – 28

In a very short time, this festival has established itself as one of the most interesting events in the region, attracting numerous dance artists, pedagogues, experts, critics and, best of all, a surprisingly numerous and faithful audience. The eclecticism of its program in the last ten years has reflected the desire of the organizers to present a wide range of contemporary research into the field of body expression: from conceptual ideas of its pure existence, to powerful emotional breakthroughs of dance theatre, exposure of hidden body imagery, the connection of dance with ritual and spiritual practices, and the virtuosity and playfulness of new circus forms.
www.svetvincenatfestival.com

KOSOVO
(COLLECTED BY JETON NEZIRAJ)

Playgrounds: between facts and fiction
Pristina

June 16 – 19

(International Theatre Conference)

The main focus of this conference is to present new plays from the Balkans, to discuss them, but also to bring together theatre makers and experts from different countries to reflect on the function of theatre, on new ways of artistic expression and possible playgrounds for them. Besides the panel discussion and presentation of specific projects the conference will be accompanied by stage readings.
www.qendra.org

Bekim Lumi

The Blood Shirt

Ethnological Museum of Kosovo, Pristina

May – June

(theatre)

Production: **Loja Theater & Qendra Multimedia**

The Blood Shirt is a play created as a result of a year-long process of creative research in the Loja Laboratory Theatre. Conceptually, this play is constructed around motifs and fragments of the Shakespearean tragedies Macbeth, Richard III and Hamlet, and around some of the motifs from the Albanian traditional code The Code of Lekë Dukagjini (Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit), which includes many old Albanian traditions and rituals. This play aims to be not only a creative act of stagecraft but also strives to offer an 'Albanian' decoding, deciphering and interpretation of some of the motifs and main characters of the bloody Shakespearean gallery, the dark, dramatic, creepy and tragic tableaux which strangely exemplify the monumental tableaux of the bloody and just as tragic landscape of the Albanian traditional code.
www.qendra.org

MACEDONIA
(COLLECTED BY BLAGICA IVANOVA)

Akto Festival

Bitola, different locations

August 10 - 15

(festival of contemporary arts, theatre, dance)

The program of this festival is based on two concepts: the first being space / location. Locations have been transformed in terms of their previous meanings. The basic idea of the Festival is for art pieces to come out of the standard locations used for presenting arts (galleries, museums, theatres), and setting them up in new locations. The re-moving of the pieces into new locations transforms the piece itself to the parameter space. The second concept is the topic of the festival, which in 2011 is "Work".

SERBIA
(COLLECTED BY VANJA NIKOLIĆ)

Ivana Inđin

My Name is Unspoken

CK 13, Novi Sad

April 11 at 8-11PM

(theatre)

Performance is a result of a project theatre and psychological workshops on women's sexuality.

Filip Markovinović

Rabbits Opera

Art Klinika, Novi Sad

April 23

(performance, music)

Concept: Nikola Džafo; Composer: Nineta Avramović Lončar; Libreto: Vesna Grginčević
Performance with music. The concept refers to first operas including solo singers, chorus and instrumental parts.

Pod Teatar

Balkans on the edge of the world

Kulturni Centar Rex, Belgrade

April 26

Project dedicated to the 10 year anniversary of Pod Theatre.
www.podteatar.org.rs

Ana Vučković

Femix Update

Kulturni Centar Rex, Belgrade

April 29 at 7:30PM

(performance, live art)

All night program dedicated to women on stage.
Performed by Ana Vučković.

Rabih Mroué

The Inhabitants of Images

Yugoslav Drama Theatre, "Studio" Stage,
Kralja Milana 50, Belgrade

May 11 at 8.30PM

(non academic lecture)

TkH (Walking theory) presents a video-lecture by Rabih Mroué, *The Inhabitants of Images* (2009), a playful complex analysis of the use and misuse of images for political and ideological purposes in Lebanon and the Middle East, and a coproduction between Tanzquartier-Wien, Bidoun Magazine and Ashkal Alwan/Beirut.
The hosting of this performance in Belgrade is made possible by the BCC project, the Deschooling Classroom project and JDP.

Art collective IRWIN: Dušan Mandič and Borut Vogeltnik

Magacin, Kraljevića Marka 4, Belgrade

May 21 at 8PM

(public presentation)

TkH (Walking Theory), Belgrade, in collaboration with Kontrapunkt, Skopje, within the project Deschooling Classroom, presents a public presentation of the Slovenian art collective IRWIN by its members Dušan Mandič and Borut Vogeltnik.

Dah Theater – festival and conference, Belgrade

Passing the Flame

June 11 – 18

DAH Theatre – founded by Jadranka Anđelić and Dijana Milošević – will celebrate a significant achievement this June: the 20th anniversary of its founding. DAH is the only professional theatre group in Serbia that has been in existence for so many years. In contemporary Serbian culture, continuity and endurance in the arts is a pressing concern. They consider the longevity in an artistic organization an inspiration to future generations of working artists. Passing the Flame is a project to symbolically and concretely confirm the importance of the long life of artistic groups in our culture and beyond. Passing the Flame is a project consisting of a festival and a conference whose main themes are: the encounter of different generations of theatre practitioners, the importance of continuity and endurance in culture, the passing on of knowledge in the field of theatre, and how the knowledge existing in an ephemeral art form such as live performance might be documented and preserved for posterity.

The invited artists include the most important great theatre masters of our time: Eugenio Barba and Odin Teatret (Denmark), Peter Schumann (USA), Yuyachkani (Peru), Jill Greenhalgh (Wales), Rena Mirecka (Poland) and Gennadi Bogdanov (Russia), Theaterlabor (Germany), 7 Stages Theatre (USA), Teatret OM (Denmark), Secos y Mojados (Mexico/USA), Plavo Pozorište (Serbia), Ister Teatar (Serbia), Grenland Friteater (Norway), Tricklock Company (USA) and Sequencia Production (Brazil), ArtSpot Productions (USA), Prodigal Theatre (UK), Fragment Teatar (Switzerland) and Ansambl Mirage (Serbia).
www.dahteatarcentar.com

SLOVENIA
(COLLECTED BY JASMINA ZALOŽNIK)

Marko Bratuš

Misterio Bufo

Glej Theatre, Gregorčičeva 3, Ljubljana

April 8 at 8PM

Produced by: Glej Theatre

(theatre)

www.glej.si

Superamas

Youdream

Španski Borci Cultural Centre, Zaloška 61, 1110
Ljubljana

April 9, 10 at 8PM

www.spanskiborci.si

Exodos and Balkan Dance Platform

Ljubljana, different venues

April 15 – 24

Production: B-51 Cultural Society (KD B-51)
(festival)

festival.exodos.si/sl/2011/kdaj

Platforma, Maribor

Maribor (different locations) as well as touring with choreographer Zambrano to Ptuj, Murska Sobota, Hrastnik, Kostanjevica na Krki, Kamnik, Radovljica, Tolmin, Koper, Dutovlje.

April 15 – May 7

(contemporary dance festival)

“Platform of contemporary dance” is connected to the program of education of contemporary dance, which Plesna Izba Maribor performs in the format of all-year-round dance education and offers a springboard from which many dancers have taken to the world of professional dance. Platforma sodobnega plesa is providing space where our former students, who are now professional dancers and often live and work abroad, can present their creative artistic work to the wider domestic audiences. One of the main values of Platforma is to emphasise current political issues. In this year we will focus on the decentralization of contemporary dance through the motto ‘contemporary dance to every Slovene town’. Platforma enables the conditions for presentations and focuses on interdisciplinary approaches, intercultural collaborations and wider artistic activity. Along with former students the festival hosts makers from all over the world, this year in collaboration with David Zambrano and his dancers.

www.plesnaizba.si

Matjaž Farič, Milko Lazar

SRH / Shiver

April 21 at 8.00 PM

Linhart Hall, Cankarjev dom, Ljubljana

Organizer/Producer: Flota Institute

www.flota.si

Rabih Mroué

Theatre With Dirty Feet

A Talk about Theatre Transformed into Art

Cankarjev dom, Kosovel Hall, Prešernova 10,

1000 Ljubljana

May 9 at 7PM

Produced by: Maska

www.maska.si

Rabih Mroué

The Inhabitants of Images

Mini Teater, Križevniška ulica 1, 1000 Ljubljana

May 10 at 8PM

(lecture performance)

www.mini-teater.si

Sanja Neškovič Peršin

Say Hello

May 10 – 12 at 8PM

(dance)

Španski Borci Cultural Centre, Zaloška 61, 1110

Ljubljana

www.spanskiborci.si

Ivan Peternelj

Nosorog

Museum of Modern Art

Ljubljana, Tomšičeva 14,

1000 Ljubljana

May 14, 15 at 8PM

(theatre)

Production: Flota

www.flota.si

Lemi Ponifacio

Tempest: Without a Body

Cankarjev dom, Linhart Hall

May 19 at 8PM

(dance)

www.cd-cc.si

Barbara Kapelj Osredkar

Explosion

Glej Theatre, Ljubljana

May 25 at 8PM

(performance)

www.glej.si

Boris Kadin

The Scream

Glej Theatre, Ljubljana

June 7 at 8PM

(performance)

www.glej.si

3rd International Competition of Young Dance

Performers OPUS 1 – short dance piece 2011

Slovenian National Theatre Celje

June 11 at 5PM

www.jskd.si

Festival Kluže 2011

Kluže, Slovenia

June and August 2011

Production: B-51 Cultural Society (KD B-51)

exponto.net

Culture is Media III

On-going participative project

Maribor, Celje and Kranj

August (2nd half)

Production: Plesna Izba Maribor

Beneath the paving stones - the sand! is a collaborative, action art project/playground that attempts to seduce, activate, include, awaken the potential for a creative dialogue through interventions in a public space which include the city and its inhabitants in a variety of ways. It investigates the participatory turn within contemporary art and opens up public space as a collective, free, reactive ground that can be moulded into a playing field of different opinions and voices testing the boundaries and self-evident public behaviour.

www.plesnaizba.si

Emonska promenada 2011

Emonska street, Ljubljana

August 25 – 28, from 6 – 9PM

Production: Kud France Preseren

(International Street Festival)

During the last weekend in August, Emonska Street transforms into an open-air theatre and

creative tour with puppets, mime shows, acrobats, workshops and more. Special attention is given to outdoor activities for children. Young adults can experience more than 30 artistic theatre events from different counties. Visitors can try their artistic skills and participate in different social activities

www.kud.si

MLADI LEVI

Stara mestna elektrarna –

Elektro Ljubljana and other locations

August 19 - 29

Production: Bunker

(international festival, theatre, dance, music)

International festival Mladi Levi is one of the more prominent annual events of Bunker, bringing the most current stage performers from all over the world to Ljubljana at the end of each summer. It bears the mark of a demanding artistic profile, placed within the arena of contemporary progressive theatre, and takes pride in its reputation for discovering young talents. The festival has a distinctive atmosphere, marked with creativity and vibrant spirit, curious audience and social nature. In the last years the festival is also a generator of community and cultural vibe in the Tabor district of Ljubljana, addressing spatial and environmental challenges through participatory and site-specific projects.

www.bunker.si

6th FRONT@ OF CONTEMPORARY DANCE

Murska Sobota, Slovenia

Venue(s): Mestno gledališče Park, Murska

Sobota, Slovenia, Mikk Youth Centre, Trubarjev

dvored 4, Open stage in front of Mestno

gledališče Park

August 24 – 27

Production: Flota

Front@ of contemporary dance is an art festival whose aim is not only to entertain, but also to open important questions on our world and existence.

www.flota.si

NagiB, (international) festival of experimental movements

August 29 – September 11

Maribor, several locations: KC Pekarna, SNG

Maribor, Kino Udarnik, Amfiteater - II. gimnazija

Maribor

Produced by: Plesna Izba Maribor

www.plesnaizba.si



TOURS

Silvia Marchig, Darko Japelj, Nataša Govedić

This is (not) my forest

Bourges, Au Nadir / L'antre-peaux

26, route de la Chapelle-Bourges

April 7

(dance)

project W-EST_WHERE

theaterszene europa 2011

Cologne, Germany

June 11-18

This is (not) my forest, performed by Silvia Marchig and Darko Japelj, uses as the point of origin of this performance the choreographer and dance artist Pina Bausch. In the period from the 1970's to the 1990's, her shows brought into question the conventional borders between dance, drama, and opera. The Rite of Spring (1975), Komm, tanz mit mir (1977), Bluebeard (1977), Café Müller (1978), Arias (1979), Carnations (1982) and Palermo, Palermo (1989) forever changed the map of artistic expression. Pina Bausch introduced us to the world of a specific bestiary, bloodthirsty and merciless, where victims pleaded for mercy long after their "last cigarette" was put out.

The forest of Pina Bausch is magical and creepy. At the end of the story about an artist, as well as at the beginning of the story about an artist, there is a forest. In the forest, there is "once upon a time", which will come to pass again. Who will come to pass? A wolf. And a lot of unintentional wandering.

Banana Gerila: Tea Tupajić, Petra Zanki

The Game with Objects

ModernaDansTeatar, Stockholm, Sweden

April 14 - 17

(video-installation, 30')

The video-work, The Game with Objects is the result of the work completed during the artistic residencies for the "Curators' Piece" project featuring curators Sven Age Birkeland, Barbara Raes and Lane Czaplinski. The video was filmed during 2010 at several venues and festivals in Europe and the USA where the artists visited the chosen curators during their research for the performance. This video-installation resulted from a work in which the artists Tea Tupajić and Petra Zanki presented various objects to the curators asking them to imagine the objects as artists and performances and chose 10 among them in order to make their festival or season.

www.curatorspiece.net

Every House Has a Door

Let us think of these things always.

Let us speak of them never.

Fusebox Festival

Salvage Vanguard Theater, Austin, USA

April 21 - 23

(theater)

Under the direction of Lin Hixson, artists Selma Banich and Mislav Čavajda from Zagreb, and Chicagoans Stephen Fiehn of Cupola Bobber and Matthew Goulsh, propose an encounter between Croatia and the US through responses to an unlikely, "equidistant" third entity, Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman. Yugoslavian responses to Bergman, derived from the work of Dušan Makavejev (Sweet Movie), and American responses to Bergman (and Makavejev) extracted from philosopher Stanley Cavell, provide the foundation for a theatrical work that engages in the histories of utopianism and revulsion/revolt in an unjust world. Film becomes a basis for choreography, a catalogue of abandoned practices offers a degree of humour, and theatre frames an encounter of difference in the delicacy of the present.

www.everyhousehasadoor.org

Janez Janša

The Wailing Wall

Festival a/d WERF

Stadsschouwburg, Utrecht, Netherland

May 25 - 28

www.maska.si

BADco.

Responsibility for the Things Seen

54th International Art Exhibition - la Biennale di Venezia, Italy

June 4 - November 27

BADco's. site-specific installation and intervention under the working title "Responsibility for the Things Seen" conceptually defines the space of exhibition, the ways in which artworks are inscribed into it and are perceived, in order to access their own obsessions with the "responsibility for the image" and the "politics of attention" in the sphere of widely defined performing arts. The Venice installation, conceived as theatre by other means, constructs a field of friction between the power of images to mobilize our collective imagination, their capacity to open or foreclose the horizons of the future, and of different modes of viewing.

www.badco.hr

ekscena / Isabelle Schad

Glazba

theaterszene europa 2011

Cologne, Germany

June 11 - 18, 2011

Glazba - the Croatian word for music and score - is a work that searches for comparable ways in writing dance, considering the body as an instrument. Glazba looks for relationships between the visual and the auditory, between musical terms and its translation into body language and aims to compare musical terminology and concepts with physiology, choreographic writing or compositional elements in dance.

with Selma Banich, Nino Bokan, Saša Božić, Marko Jastrevski, Marko Kalc, Nikolina Komljenović, Rina Kotur, Nina Kurtela, Maja Marjančić, Sonja Pregrad, Ivana Rončević, Karolina Šuša, Martina Tomić, and Ivana Vratarić

www.ekscena.hr
www.isabelle-schad.net

TRAFIK (Transitive-Fiction Theatre)

Diva (theaterszene europa 2011)

Cologne, Germany

June 13, 14

(lecture performance)

The DIVA project has been conceived as a multimedia lecture performance which explores and elaborates the notion of a diva in a sociological and cultural sense. It is a kind of demystification of that notion, inspired by the interesting study by Richard Dyer, Heavenly Bodies, in which the notion of the star is analysed from the beginnings of the film industry until today, taking into consideration the relationship between private / public, individual / society, true / fabricated, body / mind. Dyer analyses how someone becomes a star and what makes the star famous in the perception of the public, what is the machinery (media, fashion, marketing) that makes it and what is true background (the truth) of that industry. This lecture performance has been imagined as a presentation of true data from the lives of the divas which marked the "golden age" of Hollywood, such as; Mae West, Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Joan Crawford, Marilyn Monroe, Ava Gardner, Bette Davis, Anna Magnani, Sophia Loren...

What is it about the divas that fascinates us and how do we contribute to that "big illusion"? We can learn everything from a diva behind this performance: Edvin Liverić.



TRAFIK, DESTINATION TRAFIK: DEER;
photo by Dražen Sokčević

TRAFIK (Transitive-Fiction Theatre)

Destination Trafik: Deer

theaterszene europa 2011

Cologne, Germany

June 17

(dance)

What, how and who do we watch on stage? A forest wallpaper duet, an armchair and an old furnace undergoing an exorcism, a pop-corn clad woman eating herself to the bones and giant legs tap dancing through a tiny theatre curtain challenge our expectations of authenticity. Throughout the show a performer impersonates notable celebrities, lip synching Italian hits of the early '60s. and Cuba Gooding Jr.'s unforgettable Oscar acceptance speech. We move from San Remo to Hollywood and female to male drag in a stage experience gathering borrowed, sampled and re-enacted performances, so that we might better comprehend who we are when we perform and what we actually witness by performing the other. This witty and touching performance gets under your skin, not only through its hilarious quoted content but also by questioning the concept of authenticity of every individual, both on and off the stage.

Authors: Selma Banich, Mila Čuljak, Edvin Liverić, Magdalena Lupi, Silvia Marchig
Co-authors and performers: Marin Alvir, Mila Čuljak, Edvin Liverić, Silvia Marchig, Gordana Svetopetrić / Kate Foley
www.trafik.hr

Via Negativa

Katarina Stegnar, Drop death

Barbara Kukovec, Spotlight on me

Uroš Kaurin, Tonight I Celebrate

International Performing Arts festival: A Part, Katowice, Poland

June 17 at 6PM

(performance, music)

www.vntheatre.com

Wanda & Nova deViator

Frozen Images

Arnolfini, Bristol, UK

June 23 at 9PM

www.emanat.si

Wanda & Nova deViator:

Transmittance

Imperfetto, Gambetolle, Italy

June 2011 (TBC)

(residency and presentation)

August 15 - 31

Jadran Polis Pula, Croatia

(residency)

www.emanat.si



BALCAN CONTEMPORARY

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