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**Bunker**

**20 Years**

Publisher: **Bunker, Ljubljana**

For the publisher: Nevenka Koprivšek, Director

Editor: Alma R. Selimović

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Designer: Tanja Radež

Photos: Nada Žgank, Marta Keil

Print: Collegium Graphicum

Circulation: 100

Ljubljana, August 2018

Bunker, Ljubljana

Slomškova 7, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

**www.bunker.si**

The book is available in e-form free of charge on [www.bunker.si](http://www.bunker.si).

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REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA  
MINISTRSTVO ZA KULTURO

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CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji

Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana

334.012.46:7.079(497.4Ljubljana)(082)

BUNKER : 20 Years / [texts Andreja Kopač ... [et al.] ; editor Alma R. Selimović ;

photos Nada Žgank, Marta Keil]. - Ljubljana : Bunker, 2018

ISBN 978-961-93350-4-8

1. Kopač, Andreja, 1980- 2. Selimović, Alma 3. Bunker (Ljubljana)

296109056

# BUNKER

## 20 Years

# BUNKER 20 Years

In December 2017, Bunker commemorated 20 years of its existence. We celebrated the anniversary with a week-long programme that tried to present everything that Bunker comprises.

Within a week, Bunker's productions were staged, along with the arts and culture education programmes, also a large New Year's party. The programme was held at the Stara mestna elektrarna (Old Power Station) venue, managed by Bunker, and was rified with international co-operation, collaborations with a wide spectre of associates, etc. We also organised a series of brief round-table debates where we tried to identify the key turns, breakthroughs and changes not only of Bunker itself, but the entire environment it is part of and in which it has been active for the past two decades.

The texts in this collection of articles represent the continuation of round-table debates, their commentary and above all the attempts to encompass what Bunker means, what it creates and what its contribution is to the artistic landscape. Meanwhile, the texts exceed a mere reflection on Bunker and only take Bunker itself as a starting point for their reflection on the wider contexts. The writers of the contributions are Bunker's associates and fellow travellers.

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Thoughts on Aesthetic Changes  
in Performing Arts in the Period  
since the Establishment of Bunker in 1997



Andreja Kopač, dramaturge, pedagogue, editor and publicist

Andreja Kopač

## When the Public is Gone, but the Audience Gets all the Attention or Going on a Brain Diet

A Reflective Account Commemorating  
20 Years of Work in Arts and Culture Education

It is 2018, [allegedly] a period of economic conjuncture, and yet a new [c]rush of cuts in culture, art, science, and education is on the horizon. The public sector is bursting at the seams, and meanwhile the masters act as if they are in a major brawl with their people. All this is yesterday's news, returning in waves since 1991. What does appear to be new, however, is the soaring insolence of those in power; it is creating a breeding ground for structural cynicism of some sort. Instead of resolving the situation, those in power continue to blabber, make promises, and turn away from responsibility. Key decisions are made on ideological-economistic grounds and in complete absence of either expertise recommendations, public debate, or even the public as such. With this situation providing the context, I will be borrowing two allegories to contemplate the dynamics embedded in the contemporary arts and culture education. The first

allegory is actually the “story” of how science underwent a series of budget cuts – a matter recently brought up by the Director of the Jožef Stefan Institute, Jadran Lenarčič, in the light of our increasing failure to meet the benchmarks set in the Research and Innovation Strategy of Slovenia 2011–2020 (RISS): “Slovenia has been losing brain weight in the recent years”<sup>1</sup>, and the result of this brain diet can be seen in an immense brain drain and the diminished competitiveness of Slovenia in comparison to other states. The second allegory is based on a statement by an art critic and publicist, Rok Vevar, pointing to the discrepancy between the [f-actual] dissolution of the public on the one hand and the ongoing babble about audience building on the other. This very discrepancy furthermore points to the disparity inherently present in our approach to tackling actual issues, whereas this type of discourse naturally stems from the neoliberalist tendency inscribed in the pursuit of measurability, quantity, and the tangible outputs of arts and culture. Is it really art, though? Does art as such even still exist at this point, or has it actually been substituted by a culturological [non]model of the economist logic, instilled by a series of decrees [read: cuts]? The very same logic that perceives brain dieting as a completely normal process in its drive to demolish the healthy social tissue composed of educated and competent individuals, willing to take a constructive part in the decision-making processes of the future, when the most existential issues of the human race will need to be addressed. Science and art are the very spheres that can provide innovative and relevant answers to these dilemmas, epitomised by two simple questions: What is the future going to look like and what will it mean to live in it? *Future at the expense of the past or past at the expense of the future?*

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<sup>1</sup> The Director of the Jožef Stefan Institute, Jadran Lenarčič, conveyed this metaphor on several public occasions. It can be accessed via the Institute’s official website <https://www.ijs.si/ijsw>, (6th March 2018).

## Twenty Years - Two Hundred Questions

We shall consider what continuity of functioning in art means within the above situational context, from both the social perspective as well as self-reflective practice, by taking Bunker and its twenty years of functioning as an example. Let us therefore start with – questions! What does it mean to be working in the arts and culture arena continuously for twenty, or thirty, or fifty years? What to make of a country that disregards its Public Interest in Culture Act, the Article 8 of which states that the public interest in culture shall be exercised above all “by ensuring conditions for cultural creativity, accessibility of cultural assets, cultural diversity, Slovene cultural identity and a common Slovene cultural area”?

How to make sense of a situation where a certain organisation goes on developing a certain activity [among other things] for decades, whereby the investment necessary to ensure that this organisation keeps on running is significantly smaller compared to the “investment” this same organisation is actually making in the local habitat, in the ecosystem of the city and the state by acquiring, educating and empowering audiences, especially the youth? What does it mean when an organisation goes on setting the bar of success by providing consistent examples of good practice?<sup>2</sup> And what does it mean if continuous efforts by this same organisation actually shape these youngsters into audience members, who end up seeking performances that require reflection, independent decision-making and argumentation? So what does it mean to bring up a reflective, demanding audience? The legislative framework may well be in place, but the lack of sustainability in development of this particular area has triggered the erosion of the public on the one hand and a series of debates about audience building on the other.

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<sup>2</sup> Projects such as Igrišče za gledališče, Kulturstik, Mladibor, Drugajanje and the Leonardo da Vinci mobility project etc. are referred to here as examples of good practice.

# The Question Turned Backwards

Let us try and re-turn the question backwards on its spinning wheel to first and foremost catch the glimpse of ourselves in it. I shall adopt the reverse position in doing so by focusing on the question of an individual *viewer* rather than *audiences*. From general to the particular, so to speak. Let me give an example in the form of a somewhat paradoxical situation, brought to our attention by the theatre director Bojan Jablanovec, during a discussion panel celebrating two decades of Bunker's life and work: rejecting the idea of audience building as an impossible endeavour from the start, Jablanovec rather highlighted another communicational axis by asking about our own desire to know what the public is thinking, seeing and absorbing. The panel moderator, Alma R. Selimović, quickly answered: "I, for one, am very interested." Bojan Jablanovec continued in a rhetorical manner: "Are we actually interested in who our public is, are we even recognising this as something to be addressed?" By asking this question, Jablanovec drew our attention to something we may not be conscious of sufficiently in the arena of contemporary performing arts, as the passionate ardour we hold for our own affinities may sometimes mask the fact that they are, first and foremost, our own. What about the affinities of the other?

So our question here seeks to shed light on the nature of affinities pertaining to the present-day audience of contemporary performing arts. What is this audience interested in, what is the particular set of values it holds? Bojan Jablanovec suggests that we were perhaps too immersed in our own selves during these two decades and paid too little attention to our audience, while a change in generations happened right before our eyes. The old, punkish, alternative public is gradually departing, while the new one is not here [yet?] or is simply just rather different. In reality, this new audience doesn't really fit our expectations; it is less predictable and collectively unresponsive, but demanding content-wise. Jablanovec admits that he was caught unprepared by this, which is where a certain need emanates from – the need [for artists] to explain what [we] do, how

[we] function, which perspectives [we] open up and why all this, well, makes sense. I, for one, know all too well that anyone working in the field of art, culture, or any of its derivatives, is bound to constantly explain why one does the things one does, defend whatever it is that one does, and at the same time constantly explain what this thing one does actually looks like. Make no mistake; this person works itself to sleep. Not to speak of the fact that, historically speaking, the work this person produces falls under the scope of civilizational acquirements which, paired with science, constitute a symbolic universe, however the latter is regulated by none other than the bureaucratic discourse. So what we're actually seeing is a sort of a fashistoid regulation of the world according to bureaucratic principles that are impossible to keep track of. This actually resembles a perverted situation in the Žižekian sense of the word where, in order to get to "the bottom" of things, one first pours dirty water out of a bathtub and then throws out the baby, only to realise that there is nothing apart from the baby's documents underneath, and that even these are incomplete. Well, the baby passes away during the lengthy document check, but the show goes on regardless.

## A "Good" Performance

The other intriguing matter is our *self-reflection*. The sincere and painful kind. Perhaps this is why it is urgent to step over to the other side, on the side of the viewer, and to speak from their position. Meaning that the answers to one's own questions are to be contemplated from the place of utterance where the other resides. I'd like to highlight Bunker's hit *Show your face!* in this context, a performance with possibly the longest lifespan on the independent scene. This performance was also the building stone for Bunker to launch the arts and culture education as an example of good practice. Now this brings me to our first lesson to be summarised here: The prerequisite for any kind of audience education is – a good performance. So what does good stand for? To provide a suitable definition, one must step into the shoes of a young recipient of artistic

content and, first of all, determine whether the performance is suitable in content, what it is that it brings, how one may approach it, and finally, whether the young viewer can actually learn something from it. I would subsequently suggest that the essential prerequisite for a “suitable” performance is its complexity, engendered by [simultaneously] activated multiple theatrical signifiers. So when defining young audiences we also need to take into account both the altered mode of production as well as an altered position of the artist’s “gaze”, which is bound to follow the developmental curve and the trends in the pursuit of a young viewer’s taste. It is for this reason that an additional and unpredictable factor imposes itself in the relation between the author and the viewer. If we follow the view that the artist should be able to adopt both gazes simultaneously, namely the gaze leading from the author to the viewer and vice versa, from the viewer to the author, two vectors in one breath, the specific case of young audiences in particular brings about an imposition of something I call the “negative abduction” to convey a systemic discontinuity of development.

## The “Negative” Abduction

Coined by the American semiotician Charles Sanders Pierce, the term *abduction* designates a manner of reasoning that generates new hypotheses, which situates the concept alongside two general methods of research, deduction [from general to particular] and induction [from particular to general]. The term abductive reasoning is used to explain the very essence of the creative process, which Pierce ascribes the phenomenological attributes of *surprise* and *imagination* to as the core defining elements of content. This phenomenological constellation entails the confrontation with the unknown as the existing hypotheses become discarded and the new ones are formed. This, in turn, puts one in the state of constant *bewilderment* arising as the oscillation between *conviction* and *doubt*. Residing within the domain of cognition, the state of bewilderment comes to life through learning and memory, and grows

into a more elaborated form through *imagination*, where concepts expand and combine. Pierce directly links both of these processes with the decision-making process, while highlighting the most important aspects of this dynamics: the civil society discourses, political institutions and the public relationship towards democracy, as well as the mobilisation of discourses via institutions. Simply put, abduction denotes a reverse or re-formed explanation, which lies at the very heart of reflective thought in both, the arenas of science and of art. The core aspects activated in this process are the civil society, political institutions, and especially the mobilisation of discourses. It is exactly the immobilisation in our case that provides the *sine qua non* for the negative abduction to take place.

It would appear that abduction, or shall we say, the ability of abductive reasoning, is so very systemically perverted in Slovenia that its “excess” is actually measured in form rather than content. The rug somehow gets perpetually pulled from under the feet as these try to step up and upgrade the content [for the latter to result in either *surprise* or *imagination*]. The most obvious example of this is KSEVT, the future centre for the development of space technologies and procedures in art, the future centre for the cultivation of space, the centre visited by young people from all over Europe and beyond, to learn about the procedures and methods applied by scientists and artists from all over the world. Stop! Cut! Let’s move on! Abduction in its Slovene embodiment is castrated in the sense that, rather than radiating creative potential, the latter becomes forcefully perverted into an ongoing need for one to rationalise and apologise one’s activity by trying to adhere to all sorts of bureaucratic criteria and having to put up with a system of financing that seems more inclined to go on reshuffling things over and over again rather than provide support for quality programmes. Instead of functioning as a support environment, the Ministry of Culture actually functions as a new form of a conservative censorship in the light of a wider social atmosphere, which the Ministry is taking advantage of by maintaining its position and, for example, making applicants’ references count merely 20% towards the total score in calls for proposals. This means that the artist is

bound to substantiate over and over again who one is, why one does what one does and why one doesn't do something else instead.

Just imagine a young economist, who finds himself under a constant pressure to articulate his belief in the GDP, even though it is an artificial construct. The economic logic of this sort would be very simple if transferred onto the realm of arts and culture. If there was a general agreement that production of art is in surplus [which was indeed a popular view many times in the past], the logical move would be to export it. The state would then have to make the necessary arrangements for this export to take place. It could, for example, set up a postproduction agency. And the performance would roam into the world. But to be honest, it is so much easier to simply promote a fistful of most prominent subjects in the independent contemporary performing arts scene than it is to provide support for smaller projects with developmental aspirations. And it is, along those same lines, also more handy to simply suppress the supporting activities that have been reviving the arenas of contemporary arts, publishing, critical review, reflective practice, and also arts and culture education as well as audience building. The crux of the matter is that it is simply easier to organise a one-day event or a festival with one partner alone. Easier than to continuously invest in an activity, which strives to set up a sustainable "grassroots" system of networking that could, if provided with stable funding, outgrow its boundaries in a few years' time and transgress into a more sophisticated form. This sort of structural undercutting enacted by the state is essentially interrelated with the entire matter of audience education. I'm not talking about the youngest audience here, this is about the teenage audience with its emerging demands and expectations. This audience is actually very well aware of the sort of things that undergo systemic marginalisation, which is why many forms of entertainment have become easier to reach, more accessible and simply handier. *Brain dieting* therefore, which is also an inheritance of an entrenched structure, composed of a new, magical feudalism, featuring pirates in positions of power, and secretaries that fly into the sky. Meanwhile, young people leave and don't look back.

## Towards Systematised Education of Young Audiences in the NGO Sector

In cooperation with numerous international partners and networks on the one hand and supported by project funding on the other, Bunker has consistently been seeking to bring its participatory and inclusive programmes closer to systematisation, to provide this activity with continuity and thus allow it to keep on developing. I dare say that Bunker broke new ground in its attempt to systematise the network of audience education in the non-governmental performing arts. Several examples of good practice presented in Bunker's website and numerous publications speak of this. So yes, while the negative abduction may have taken its toll, let us nevertheless wrap up by highlighting the things that matter.

The first project to stand as good practice was called Kulturstik [project manager: Katarina Slukan]. Jointly supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and the European Social Fund, the project was carried out in eight primary schools under the direction of the coordinating school OŠ Sava Kladnika Sevnica. Implemented between February 2009 and October 2010, Kulturstik reached out to 596 students of the final elementary school triad and to more than 65 teachers of different subjects. The content of the project was set out by external partners, cultural entities with diverse, but distinct profiles: Bunker (performing arts), Kinodvor (art film), 2 Reels - Association for Reanimation of Storytelling (animated film), The Association for Circus Pedagogy Cirkokrog (circus), Forum Ljubljana (strip) in combination with dancers and choreographers of contemporary dance. With joined efforts, the above entities had set up a programme aiming to introduce contemporary, aesthetically more challenging and socially engaged artistic contents. Brought to an end with the Kulturstik festival on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2010, the project gathered all participants in a summative presentation of their creative outputs: comic strips exhibition, a cycle of animated films, short performances developed during contemporary dance workshops, circus skills and other disciplines represented in the project. Yet another project

worth mentioning, Igrišče za gledališče (Theatre Playground) [project managers: Alma R. Selimović and Katarina Slukan], was carried out between the years 2014 and 2015. It was perhaps this project that came closest to setting up a network of agents with the potential to systematise a compendium of good practices to be implemented in elementary and secondary schools and other educational institutions, initially by qualified expert pedagogues and then school teachers themselves. The project has been revived in 2016 with its second part, Igrišče za gledališče 2.0 (Theatre Playground 2.0). The Mladibor project [project managers: Alma R. Selimović and Katarina Slukan] was set up to facilitate the formation of new contents by enabling Maribor-based youth to access the artistic tools of their interest through active participation. The Drugajanje festival [project manager: Alma R. Selimović] has been bringing engaged and top-notch performances from Slovenia and abroad to the students of II. gimnazija Maribor every year since 2002. Let us not forget the Lovepangs project [2005] with 150 collaborating volunteers, the Create to Connect network, the Tabor Cultural Quarter etc.

Bunker with its connective nature is, also in this moment in time, closer to systematising arts and culture education and audience building than any other non-governmental organisation. This is largely due to its refusal to limit itself to a specific arena of performing aesthetics or genre and constantly aspiring to “cover” an entire string of practices and procedures, which need to be brought closer to youth in a distinct, innovative and at times also the quirkiest of ways. This enterprise requires a substantial amount of “abductive functioning” – as a matter of fact, the laws of abduction are already inherently inscribed in this process of work itself. One can only hope that this activity will soon be seen as an essential contribution to enable youngsters to bring their cultural, ethical, cognitive and other potentials to life in this world of increasing insanity. Hopefully this will lead the way into the next twenty years, because: “It would seem that we must first acquire the audience for the public to reappear.”

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Alja Lobnik, critic and theoretician of contemporary performing arts

Alja Lobnik

## Genealogy of the Non-Governmental Sector Commemorating 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Bunker

With twenty years of its existence celebrated last December, Bunker's primary sphere of action has over time come to revolve around at least two production activities: the Mladi levi festival, having walked alongside Bunker ever since its inception, and Betontanc – the most pivotal and the most comprehensive project that Bunker has brought to life. It has become the embodiment of the non-governmental sector's genealogy, arising through a series of struggles since the 1990s onwards. One could, roughly speaking, contemplate the genealogical path of Bunker as a journey across the desolate non-governmental landscape of scarce resources:

- 1) the internationalisation of the stifling post-Yugoslavian space which, withered and spellbindingly captivated in a narrative of a nation amidst winds of political change, propelled the lavish expansion of the non-governmental landscape and the erection of key players in the 1990s who remain a prominent force in the non-governmental arena up to this day;

- 2) the acquisition of infrastructure and the provision of work for home artists (Stara mestna elektrarna)<sup>1</sup>;
- 3) attempting decentralisation and setting up post-production with its younger festival edition Drugajanje in Maribor;
- 4) the formation of an educational programme in arts & culture in order to facilitate access to contemporary performing arts for the primary and secondary school audiences outside Ljubljana;
- 5) the inventive process of articulating a new profession of a producer-curator for contemporary performing arts, something non-existent some twenty years ago and having come to life as a result of Bunker's formative efforts through time. While this manner of functioning is far from unique, it does nevertheless introduce a specific approach to project management and involvement of new individuals. Having embraced role-specific diversification over the course of time, the Bunker collective is now endowed with a detailed knowledge of not only the internal workings of the theatre, but also the financial, administrative and organisational scope of work. The air of mental freedom embedded within the team allows the latter to manage projects with boldness and to breathe unforeseen content into their core, hence hoisting project management above and beyond administrative box-ticking;
- 6) the formative cultivation of emerging professionals in the realms of production and art, whom Bunker managed to recruit from its permanent cooperation with volunteers<sup>2</sup>;
- 7) conceiving the production of space as a programmed festival activity and, given the increasing erosion of the public realm, as a formative thread instilling space with communal aura and lifting the temperature in the Tabor quarter – a home to both the Mladi levi festival and the Stara mestna elektrarna;

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<sup>1</sup> Vevar, Rok. 2012. *What is the Alternative Actually? Thoughts on Commemorating the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Mladi Levi Festival*. Lion Tales. Bunker: Ljubljana.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

- 8) engendering a discursive realm of action, initially by mobilising and providing guidance for authors publishing in the festival newspaper Arena, and then last year – in the light of written critical perspectives withering away and with the majority of the public media having to cope in a rather difficult position – by undertaking an incestuous formation of the Kriterij platform;
- 9) the festival programme consistently communicated with the general public and its regular audiences, and the vibrant socialising as an immanent part of the festival's festive spirit, the exuberance of which comes to full bloom with the traditional Ulovka festival picnic;
- 10) festival programming steered towards the international community of young artists, in combination with more renowned and mature names, hence the latter group of performers acting as referees for the former. What we are seeing here is a strategy of emancipation. The most recent festival editions have been particularly inclined to nourish longstanding partnerships: last year, for instance, Rimini Protokoll made already its fourth guest appearance at the festival (presenting the works of Stefan Kaegi in previous years and the work of Daniel Wetzl last year), Milo Rau returning for the third time, and the festival welcoming once again Ivana Müller, Bojan Djordjević as well as Sofía Asencio and Tomàs Aragay. Consequently, Alma R. Selimović writes for the Sigledal portal that the festival programming of this sort stands as “a symbol of resistance against not only instant hits and seasonal works of genius, but also against ageism on both ends (i.e. either supporting exclusively young performers or exclusively prominent ones from the older generation)”<sup>3</sup>;
- 11) programming the festival into a middle-sized production while refusing to expand into a megalomaniac version of itself – not only in order to preserve its organic ties at the intersection of the local on one hand

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<sup>3</sup> Selimović, Alma R.. 2017. *Mladi levi*. Sigledal. (In Slovene) Available at: <http://veza.sigledal.org/festival/mladi-levi-f-1> (Accessed 8th April 2018).

and the international on the other, but also to maintain its negotiating position in allowing room for potential contents to become part of the programme, especially when these contents reach out towards embracing and introducing micro-politics and context-formation (social, ecological, educational, discursive);

12) conceiving the festival as a site of encounters between artists, the festival team, volunteers and audiences. We might as well call it festival-in-residence, given that it consistently encourages and provides guests, artists and their groups with the opportunity to remain in Ljubljana for the entire festival period.

## The Narrative of a Nation and the Stifling Air of the 1990s

The dissolution of a common state brought about, in the very first instance, the brutality of the job market, confining and captivating the market of culture within the orbit of the national while, in the same breath, triggering a distinct need for transnational cooperation. The claustrophobic feeling of thus contracted theatre space was a consequence to a retracted recantation of what used to be a taken-for-granted networking with cultural centres within the territory of former Yugoslavia and a substantially wider scale of audience<sup>4</sup>, “with the dissolution of old institutions or networks acting as areas of prominence, which independent culture would orbit around” (p. 7-8)<sup>5</sup> simultaneously propelled the emergence of the “new institutional and production practices” (p. 7-8)<sup>6</sup>. In relation to these changes reigning over theatre production, Breznik states the following: “In absence of either the social revolution or home-

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<sup>4</sup> Toporišič, Tomaž. 2012. *Comrades, Do You Still Remember? Or Festival Memories of the Pioneers*. Lion Tales. Bunker: Ljubljana.

<sup>5</sup> Radojević, Lidija. 2013. *Changing the Mode of Production in the Field of Culture*. Vol. XXVIII, Nr. 157-158. Maska: Ljubljana. (In Slovene)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

land, the seeming art revolution stretched out to the international art system and gained the support of international (non-governmental) organisations, which in turn used it to serve their own agenda of promoting social reforms in post-socialist states.” (p. 8)<sup>7</sup>

In *Lion Tales*, a compendium commemorating the 15th anniversary of the Mladi levi festival<sup>8</sup>, Vevar highlights the fact that internationalisation has been alive and well ever since the early 1980s. A particularly pivotal venue for Ljubljana in this respect was “the Party bunker by the name of Cankarjev dom, constructed by means of self-imposed contribution under the sway of the iron 1970s and then, in the 1980s, turned into a cradle of international programme for performing arts” (p. 40)<sup>9</sup>. Subsequently, productions reflecting new European cultural-production circumstances come pouring in Ljubljana, with some local art entities succeeding to export their own work into the West. Following The Slovenian Mladinsko Theatre’s guest appearance with Ristić’s *Missa* in a festival in Nancy, France, the famous French philosopher Michel Foucault writes a letter, critically scrutinising the theatrical representation of centralised power therein. In the late 1980s the NSK causes a media scandal at the London-based LIFT festival, as no one expects to see an Eastern European art attraction adapting its strategies according to a given context. Laibach and Borghesia are signing contracts with foreign record companies while the Lacanian school in Ljubljana awaits discovery with Žižek at the forefront (p. 40)<sup>10</sup>. Networking in both the Yugoslavian and wider international context already existed as a given fact in the 1980s, however it is not before the 1990s that the cultural arena begins reacting to this fact in the mode of festivals.

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<sup>7</sup> Breznik, Maja in Radojević, Lidija. 2013. *Changing the Mode of Production in the Field of Culture*. Vol. XXVIII, Nr. 157-158. Maska: Ljubljana. (In Slovene)

<sup>8</sup> Vevar, Rok. 2012. *What is the Alternative Actually? Thoughts on Commemorating the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Mladi Levi Festival*. Lion Tales. Bunker: Ljubljana.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

The Mladi levi festival forms part of the wider festival arena arising in the 1990s (the Video-dance festival, the Ex-Ponto international festival, the Exodos international festival, the Mesto žensk/City of Women festival and so forth). These festivals were actually manifestations of the 1980s cultural activism attaining their institutionalised format. At some point these festival entities started pushing for the mobilisation of their strategic assets by either pursuing individual education-related initiatives, enhancing fluidity between the local and the foreign productions, sector networking, developing venue infrastructure, advocating for a more sustainable financing of the non-governmental sector, devising proposals for institutionalisation etc. These agendas were pursued to ensure the attainment of a certain level of representation, hence inclusion, as arising from legislative or institutional basis (p. 42)<sup>11</sup>. The independent scene was gaining momentum as an increasingly relevant critical mass, making progressively articulated demands and adopting a more systematic manner of unification in resistance against the existing structures of power ever since the 1990s. Correspondingly, the beginnings of Asociacija, Association of Arts and Culture NGOs and Freelancers, also go back to the early 1990s, even though the association itself only attained a professionalised status in 2009 when it became a legitimate partner to decision-makers in creating improved conditions of work (p. 12-13)<sup>12</sup>.

Co-creating this frontline unification process as the artistic director of the Glej Theatre at the time, and engendering new mental spaces as a consequence to her leadership, Nevenka Koprivšek was producing a generation of artists who not only had international aspirations, but also a desire to delve in a more sustainable and profound exploration by way of transforming their production set-up into a system of companies (En-Knap, Via Negativa, Betontanc etc.). This direction will later on become the main trajectory for Bunker (1997) and the Mladi levi festival (1998).

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Koprivšek, Nevenka. 2012. *Mladi Levi – Our First Fifteen Years*. Lion Tales. Bunker: Ljubljana.

The Mladi levi festival – the Slovene version of the Junge Hunde – came to life in response to seasonal repertoires of institutional theatres and the occasional international programme offer in the Cankarjev dom. Normally intervening with big international names, the latter would subsequently leave out a considerable part of younger artists carrying most exquisite aesthetic potency. Between 1997 and 1999 the Cankarjev dom played host to two festival programmes under the title Lepota ekstrema/Beauty of the Extreme, which seem to have been one of the first to react to and embrace the paradigmatic changes in the aesthetic expression within the contemporary performing arts (dance and the art of performance) (p. 43)<sup>13</sup>. It was the Mladi levi festival that upgraded them in a more systematic and sustainable manner.

The festival therefore carries a remarkably vivid continuity with its programme trajectory and has, as such, been providing a window into the international contemporary scene ever since its onset. It strives to capture the hype rampaging across the international scene and stands, amidst the festival wave splashing over the Slovene culture, as one of the very few international performing arts projects steered by a contemplative curating hand. The working knowledge of contemporary international production is crucial for the movements of Slovene contemporary arts scene, as the latter can draw ideas from it or form resistances to it – either way, this knowledge helps navigate its steering wheel across the international space.

## The Acquisition of New Spaces

While still acting as the Glej Theatre's artistic director, Nevenka Koprivšek became involved in a research project exploring the shortage of existing non-governmental venues in culture. She also met the then editor of the performing arts journal *Maska*, Irena Štaudohar and it didn't

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<sup>13</sup> Vevar, Rok. 2012. *What is the Alternative Actually? Thoughts on Commemorating the 15th Anniversary of the Mladi Levi Festival*. Lion Tales. Bunker: Ljubljana.

take long for a lasting friendship to emerge, embroidered with passionate reflective debates and plans to facilitate the breakthrough of the eager independent scene. In a short period of time the roaring demands from (artistic) initiatives, calling for a revitalisation of cultural heritage, were beginning to erupt, with the discontent art scene highlighting the acute lack of available infrastructure and propelling discussions on the meaning and purpose of public space<sup>14</sup>. All of these processes culminated in a revitalisation of some of the unoccupied venues, namely the Stara mestna elektrarna (2004), the Španski borci (2009) and the Kino Šiška (2009). Actually, a substantial part of the space production matter essentially falls within the reign of the non-institutional scene, which was more often than not left depleted of suitable venues and therefore without the minimal degree of legitimacy and representation: “the infrastructure with stable financing, the place of autonomous programming and especially – the venue that stands as a synonym for proper conditions of work, the space arising as the legal site of practice” (p. 3)<sup>15</sup>.

The research project run by Mirovni inštitut/The Peace Institute was driven by the necessity to identify new (theatre) architectures, free of contamination with sediments of the bourgeois, and therefore suitable for the emerging generation with different aesthetic inclinations (Eda Čufar called them the 3rd generation: Ema Kugler, Matjaž Berger, Barbara Novakovič, Vlado Repnik, Marko Košnik, Emil Hrvatin, Marko Peljhan, Matjaž Pograjc, Tomaž Štrucl, and in dance Sinja Ožbolt, Tanja Zgonc, Iztok Kovač, Mateja Bučar, Branko Potočan, Brane Završan, Marko Mlačnik). It is therefore far from surprising that the 1995 performing arts journal *Maska* placed space in the spotlight with the eponymous central section title *Prostor/Space*. The editorial written by Simon Kardum raises the question: “What kind of architecture (place)

would adequately embrace different modalities of performance venues, how to avoid setting the variety of space possibilities into stone and, rather, maintain fluidity for performing arts practices in its potential future forms with a certain, specific theatre architecture, such as the Italian box of the Farnese Theatre in Parma (1618) – one of the most enduring architectural forms of theatre preserved for 400 years –, but on the other hand continue voicing the demand for venues – infrastructure where contemporary performing arts practices would enjoy secure conditions of work?” (p. 10-11)<sup>16</sup>.

It is evident from the central subject theme featured in the abovementioned *Maska* edition, as Vevar highlights, that those involved in the contemporary performing arts at the time saw the classical Italian box as a historically predetermined and anachronistic space formation, which failed to breathe life into new aesthetic proximities and induce a relation between the gaze (of the spectator, of the audience) and the artistic object (the performance). Instead, the scene at the time was rather searching for solutions – far from unfamiliar to the contemporary performing arts practices abroad – by inhabiting desolate industrial venues that would breathe the air of voluminosity, incite different ambiances and embrace each and every set design. This approach is very much akin to the avant-garde understanding of theatre space, “with some sort of an equation mark placed between (the fictive or the material) performance space and the theatre architecture along with all the accompanying protocols of the event” (12)<sup>17</sup>.

It was virtually from a place without a place that the *Mladi levi* festival and *Bunker* were starting out some twenty years ago, having to cope with a shortage of equipment and, most importantly, the absence of a proper venue to provide a sustainable habitat, and hence allow for these brisk impulses to be brought to life. With its office located on Rimska Street

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<sup>14</sup> From Butala, Gregor. 2017. *And Who Sits on that Bench Over There? Interview with Nevenka Koprivšek and Mojca Jug*. Dnevnik: Ljubljana. (In Slovene) Available at: <https://www.dnevnik.si/1042782053/kultura/oder/kdo-pa-bo-sedel-na-tisti-klopi> (Accessed: 8th April 2018).

<sup>15</sup> Vevar, Rok. 2014. *10 Years of the Stara mestna elektrarna: Infrastructure – Spaces – Places (Fragmentary Essay)*. Unpublished. (In Slovene)

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<sup>16</sup> Kardum, Simon in Vevar, Rok. 2014. *10 Years of the Stara mestna elektrarna: Infrastructure – Spaces – Places (Fragmentary Essay)*. Unpublished. (In Slovene)

<sup>17</sup> Vevar, Rok. 2014. *10 Years of the Stara mestna elektrarna: Infrastructure – Spaces – Places (Fragmentary Essay)*. Unpublished. (In Slovene)

back then, the accompanying modest infrastructure consisted of one computer with internet access (along with the step-by-step instructions on how to send an email attachment hanging on the wall), and a telephone with a fax machine. The team at the time counted altogether three members: Nevenka Koprivšek and Ira Cecić were joined by Mojca Jug, the present festival co-programmer and programmer for the Stara mestna elektrarna.<sup>18</sup> The very first festival edition took place in the Hribar Hall at the Ljubljana Castle, the technical equipment was provided at the courtesy of the Slovenian Mladinsko Theatre. Even before it claimed the Stara mestna elektrarna as its proper home (2004), the festival had already been sporadically inhabiting the venue with individual events in previous years. The Ministry of Culture initially selected Bunker to run the Stara mestna elektrarna on the 2004 public call for the period of five years. With its third mandate running as we speak, Bunker is to manage the Stara mestna elektrarna until 2021 with yet another public call coming up then. That is, if the Ministry of Culture signs the lease contract with Elektro Ljubljana again.

Playing host to production and education programmes within the arena of non-governmental contemporary performing arts, the venue actually became an example of the first collaboratively resolved provision of infrastructure for this sort of activity: Elektro Ljubljana as the owner of the building (which was, following the joint recommendation by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage and the Peace Institute working group, renovated in accordance with the restoration expertise) joined forces with the Ministry of Culture and the City Municipality of Ljubljana, with the latter two entities providing partial funding to cover the venue maintenance costs, as well as the financial support for art programmes carried out by Bunker and other non-governmental organisations appearing there. The Stara mestna elektrarna has, during the past decade, grown into a (free) domicile, surpassing a notion of a mere performance setting and providing a home to presentation, education and rehearsal activities. This venue is inclusive in nature and acts as a

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18 Jug, Mojca. 2012. *The Festival with a Face*. Lion Tales. Bunker: Ljubljana.

maintenance service, providing the contemporary performing arts production with the necessary space and technical support, without leaning excessively in favour of its own productions. Stara mestna elektrarna has in turn played host to a bulk of the most vibrant non-governmental programmes and to all those festival performance projects that were not tied down to a specific location.<sup>19</sup> It has shown a particular inclination lately to support the most vulnerable and therefore the most precarious segment of the non-governmental contemporary arts scene in terms of their access to public financing, hence facilitating the work of those in receipt of project-related funding instead of programme financing, with the former designating a slightly more unstable form of financing compared to the latter.

The Stara mestna elektrarna and the year 2004 stand as a culmination of mobilisation enacted by the independent scene which, by means of this acquisition, secured an important strategic point for the majority of independent production. This fact was highlighted by the slogan embellishing the opening event of the Stara mestna elektrarna: *If we didn't exist, we'd have to be invented*. At the opening event, Bunker paid tribute to the independent scene for its efforts in acquiring the venue, by featuring various installations to present the work of a substantial part of the independent production as the essence of contemporary Slovene theatre, dance and multimedia art since the end of the 1980s. The venue emerged from an authentic need and not as an act of some sort of top-down politics, which perhaps could have set up the venue, but would then struggle to inscribe content into it. All space-related acquisitions so laboriously won by the independent scene reflect particular solutions, since the systemic ones are non-existent to begin with. So, for example, the Stara mestna elektrarna is in receipt of funding to meet the expenses of passive standby, Vodnikova domačija/The Vodnik Homestead is eligible for programme funding and the Španski borci Culture Centre is entitled to direct reimbursement for its running expenses by the Municipality of

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19 From: Vevar, Rok. 2014. *10 Years of the Stara mestna elektrarna: Infrastructure – Spaces – Places (Fragmentary Essay)*. Unpublished. (In Slovene)

Ljubljana. Every new acquisition basically stems as a consequence to two prerequisites: firstly, the immensely selfless devotion of the scene, and secondly, the exclusively personal commitment of this or that decision-maker. In other words, decisions are made in complete absence of a systemic basis, which transpires through the contingent nature and political short-sightedness of developmental aspirations. What tends to happen is that subjects, who persist long enough in demanding loud enough, end up with solutions, however this leaves behind those without a voice, since the latter comes as an inheritance of a certain, acquired position. Similarly, Bunker's struggle for the Stara mestna elektrarna simultaneously reflects the accumulation of its political influence as well as its efforts as a production and political entity on the wider scene, which Bunker has been on consistently friendly terms with.<sup>20</sup>

Every emergence of a new venue brings along the expectations and hope that the needs of the scene will finally be met in their totality, which is naturally an impossible task for any single venue. The syndromes of great expectations and disappointments are an immanent part of the independent scene, which only makes its way forward with great efforts and pains. Up to the present day, the independent scene still awaits for suitable venues to meet its needs. There is a sore shortage of residential and rehearsal spaces, but what is most acutely lacking is a dance venue, which as an art form still remains devoid of its institutional platform, while programme financing for these venues faces soaring problems in its own right<sup>21</sup>. What Bunker will seek to nurture in the future, as its own developmental breakthrough of a sort, is its inclination towards more longstanding projects, process-orientated and residential in nature, with room to adapt to temporal requirements and meet the potentially increased spatial needs. Such projects would, in turn, allow Bunker to stand up against the catastrophic constraints of hyper-production as a manner of functioning recently adopted by repertoire theatres.

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<sup>20</sup> After: Lobnik, Alja. 2018. *Interview with Nevenka Koprivšek and Alma R. Selimović*. Behind the Bunker Dining Table. Bunker: Ljubljana. (In Slovene)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

## The Vicissitudes of the Festival and the Art of Curating Contexts

In her reflections on the past fifteen years of the Mladi levi festival, Alma R. Selimović<sup>22</sup> divided the festival into four crucial progressive stages, with each of them adding a distinct piece to the puzzling question of, firstly, how to instil continuity of the festival and maintain its programme vigour, and secondly, how to face the far-from-insignificant erosion of the public sphere by opening the festival as an emerging arena for various forms of accompanying (educational, discursive, ecological, communal etc.) contexts. The first stage took place in the period between its birth year, 1998, and 2004, when the opening of the Stara mestna elektrarna provided the festival with a home. It should be noted that, between 2001 and 2003, this new home was once again lost due to renovation; however the festival in this period discovered yet another desolate venue, The Railway Museum, which later on somewhat slipped into oblivion (p. 114)<sup>23</sup>. The festival in 2005 underwent reformulation into three distinct sections of international programme. These were to be carried out in the Stara mestna elektrarna as a condensed form of the annual international programme. In the same breath, the Lovepangs project started a period of participatory projects with emphasis on volunteering. During 2006 and 2008, the festival resumed its traditional 10-day August form, steering towards a more systematic fusion with participatory and locally placed projects, while embracing volunteers as a progressively vital part of the production team as well as the audience (p. 124)<sup>24</sup>. Ever since 2009 the festival has firmly stood at the intersection between international programme and local practices, as they were reaching out to the communal narrative and joining hands with “external” (theatre and

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<sup>22</sup> Selimović, Alma R.. 2012. *Dear Ladies and Gentleman. Some Thoughts on the Audience of the Mladi Levi Festival*. Lion Tales. Bunker: Ljubljana.

<sup>23</sup> Lesničar - Pučko, Tanja. 2012. *A Festival through Space*. Lion Tales. Bunker: Ljubljana.

<sup>24</sup> Selimović, Alma R.. 2012. *Dear Ladies and Gentlemen. Some Thoughts on the Audience of the Mladi Levi Festival*. Lion Tales. Bunker: Ljubljana.

social) agents: the Tabor Cultural Quarter, the Kriterij critical platform, the arts and culture educational programmes along with the Drugajanje festival in Maribor, joining forces with various activist impulses etc. As Rok Vevar pointed out during a panel discussion for the 20th anniversary of Bunker<sup>25</sup>, the 1980s and the 1990s were embedded with an incredibly vital support coming from the culture and art community, which stopped at nothing in its spontaneous construction of a fervent and vibrant public sphere. The erosion of the public, sliding into the abyss hollowed out by the neoliberal mechanism, austerity measures and intensified competition, subsequently resulted in a lot of effort having to be invested in what one might call a commodified form of public or, in other words, in audience that requires generating when the public dissolves<sup>26</sup>. Festival curating entered the arena of contemporary performing arts from the visual arts realm which, quite interestingly, took its own point of reference in the character of a theatre director as it underwent transformation from being non-artistic in nature into assuming the artistic position as some sort of a “stage traffic” coordinator on the verge of the 20th century (p. 111)<sup>27</sup>. The theatre director as a newly established artistic persona came forth with an expanded range of role-related activities and authorisations during the time of the theatre surge, with the latter undergoing a fast and intensive institutionalisation, while the more complex and demanding nature of performances superseded the once standardised articulation of text accompanying the generic image-based set design and lighting (p. 111)<sup>28</sup>. According to Beti Žerovc, the one feature that performances and exhibitions have in common dwells in some sort of a recognition of a non-specificity of means, where it is “utterly expect-

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<sup>25</sup> Vevar, Rok. 2017. *Roundtable Discussion: Breakpoints, Breakthroughs and the Future*. Bunker: Ljubljana.

<sup>26</sup> After: Arhar, Nika. 2017. *Contemporary Performing Arts - How, Where and Whom Do They Communicate With?* MMC RTV SLO. (In Slovene) Available at: <https://www.rtvsllo.si/kultura/drugo/kakokje-in-s-kom-komunicira-sodobna-uprizoritvena-umetnost/440637> (Accessed: 9th April 2018).

<sup>27</sup> Žerovc, Beti. 2010. *The Art of Curating: The Role of Curators in Contemporary Art*. Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete. (In Slovene)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

ed and acceptable for the curator and the director to use any means available to speak to us, whereby the artistic space acts as the very arena of identification, which sets apart the artistic perception from an everyday one” (p. 114)<sup>29</sup>. The curating hand thus persistently pursues what acts as a vicissitude in art, namely the latter being unable to substantiate its intrinsic right to exist, therefore existing merely through factors external to it: political, humanitarian, ecological, cultural, etc. It is through these factors that art immerses itself in the critical discourse, which in turn joins hands with a wide array of other disciplines, such as sociology, political science, philosophy, anthropology – extensively inscribed in curator’s gestures and utterances (p. 18)<sup>30</sup>.

The question of space production, along with the social relations arising within and from it, clearly runs through Bunker’s programme priorities and can be traced back to its efforts to bring the Tabor Cultural Quarter into existence, whereas its cooperative networking with newly arising infrastructures can be seen as a logical continuance of this programme aspiration. Last year’s festival edition was, for example, braided into a twofold spiral of cooperation by joining hands with the Španski borci (Moste), a decentralised cultural hub with rising prominence in its own right, and a similar tendency to contemplate its place of utterance within the local community. Decentralised centres of this sort could be facilitated in becoming important topological-strategic sites, surpassing the gentrified city centre and opening their doors to visitors, artists and local residents alike. The managerial structures in charge of running these venues will play a crucial part in this process by devising a vision of how to embrace particular communities with distinct characteristics. However, Vevar does flag up the issue of general unresponsive attitude of new art sites to infrastructural changes and re-constellations of space. Non-governmental organisations, either renting, managing or running cultural infrastructure of the city, function as parallel worlds ingrained within systems of immunity that, first and foremost, protect themselves

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

against the intrusion of the communal or, in other words, that “compensate for the negative effects of the debilitating anti-production, which they – in the context of neoliberal capitalism – fall in as art programmes, by exercising exhausting survival strategies” (p. 16)<sup>31</sup>. Recent years have seen a boost in the attempts of (public and non-governmental) institutions to employ curating approaches that would facilitate the formation of communal (social and cultural) spaces, and thereby reinstate the role so very immanent to the essence of theatre as a public space, composed of temporary communities (the question of difference between the public and the communal surpasses the scope of this paper).

Many activities can pave the way towards communal horizons, either building networks with individual theatre communities, external in their nature (critics, other producers, other infrastructures etc.), or creating links with distinct social communities (residential, activist etc.). Such cooperative attempts can take place under the sway of cartel networking, which seeks to set up strategic alliances and devise survival strategies in order to reinforce its position on the network map. The constellation in formation still functions within the parallel realm, however it will be clustered entities now operating within systems of immunity and, more often than not, dubiously ignoring whatever it is that takes place parallel to them. It is about moving away from nonreactive new venues and setting the gaze on strategic alliances (“negative selections and mechanisms of personal acquaintances and affiliations”<sup>32</sup>); instead of this being seen as a mere homogenisation of a certain realm within the scene, it should rather be understood as an enduring persistence in recognising key (minimal) differences that in turn reinforce individual subjects in their distinct places or positions. Therefore, the formation of communal spaces does not necessarily translate into the non-neoliberal manner of functioning, and before we hasten to subject the communal to fetishisation and proclaim the formation of the latter as the opposing force to its erosion, we should first not only consider possible forms of governance

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<sup>31</sup> Vevar, Rok. 2014. *10 Years of the Stara mestna elektrarna: Infrastructure – Spaces – Places (Fragmentary Essay)*. Unpublished. (In Slovene)

<sup>32</sup> Sinanović, Muanis. 2017. FB post.

and functioning that arise in consequence to certain principles of community formation, but also re-examine and reformulate the seemingly inherent division between the private and the public, the governmental and the non-governmental, the institutional and the non-institutional (p. 43)<sup>33</sup>.

It would be inconceivable, however, to merely surpass some important attempts aiming for the re-conceptualisation of the Mladi levi festival, which has remained persistently devoted to and increasingly more proficient in setting up various contexts, while propelling the revitalisation of eroded public surfaces and the public as such (community). While igniting these revitalisation processes with great fervour, Bunker could also tell when it is time to move away and allow these processes to breathe independently. The decision for the festival inauguration to take place out in the open is a step towards democratisation and de-elitisation of this type of events, as is the move towards voluntary contributions to replace ordinary tickets, however this in turn brings us to the strained crossroad between art democratisation on the one hand and complimentary culture on the other – a crossroad not to be taken lightly under the constriction of progressive financial drainage. It was the international project *Sostenuto* (2009) that triggered Bunker’s exploration of revitalisation opportunities in its local habitat, the Tabor quarter. It started out by defining the areas of particular importance and sensitivity for the local residents: “... the deprivation of green surfaces, the absence of suitable spaces for socialising and the pervasive sense of standstill” (p. 146)<sup>34</sup>. On the outskirts of the Tabor quarter stand, side by side and only meters apart, institutions of cultural prominence (The Slovene Ethnographic Museum, The Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova, The National Museum of Slovenia, Kinodvor and Kinoteka), arenas of alternative culture (Metelkova and Rog) and the eruptive bubbling of autonomous cultural practices, which is why the decision to set up the Tabor Cultural

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<sup>33</sup> Bobnič, Robert and Lobnik, Alja. 2016. *Critics, Theoreticians, Janitors*. Adept. Revija sodobnih gledaliških in filmskih ustvarjalcev, Vol. 2, Nr. 2. (In Slovene) Available at: [http://kumba.agrft.uni-lj.si/ZAC/prenosi/ADEPT\\_2\\_2016.pdf](http://kumba.agrft.uni-lj.si/ZAC/prenosi/ADEPT_2_2016.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> Slukan, Katarina. 2012. *Leaving Residents Something to Dwell on*. Lion Tales. Bunker: Ljubljana.

Quarter as a culminating orbit is to be seen as an important attempt to open up the festival and the Stara mestna elektrarna in terms of their spatial coordinates. In cooperation with the prostoRož collective, Bunker facilitated the revitalisation of the Tabor park (to emerge as a space of socialising and exchange), it launched the Garden by the Way initiative and joined efforts with the KUD Obrat to transform the desolate construction site on Resljeva Street into the Beyond a Construction Site community allotment (p. 16)<sup>35</sup>. Bunker, furthermore, invested efforts in setting up a consolidated community of volunteers and joined hands with the Faculty of Social Sciences as one of the practical placement providers, offering students to join the festival team as part of the coursework. Various other networking activities of Bunker also reached out to address different generations and settings: the Daily Activity Centre for Senior Citizens, the members of Meikyo kan Karate Club, the staff working at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, the Focus Association members, the local retirement home residents, and so forth (p. 129)<sup>36</sup>.

The comprehensive and highly relevant education programmes in arts and culture have underpinned Bunker's guerrilla work towards decentralisation of contemporary performing arts and provided an incentive for a post-production network of a sort, which is yet to be granted a systemic support. An enduring project worth highlighting in this context is Drugajanje (2002): taking place in II. gimnazija Maribor and primarily devised for secondary school audiences, this spectacle of contemporary performing arts also seeks to provide a discursive context. Programme constellations of this type are more of a rare finding in Maribor, especially if one turns their gaze towards public institutions. However, for quite some time now has the younger art scene been erecting parallel institutional structures amidst the city landscape. Acting as half-private self-organised platforms, these entities stand as incarnations of the present-day survival tactics. Not only do they defy the growing trends of market flexibilisation and precariousness, but they also mitigate the

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<sup>35</sup> Koprivšek, Nevenka. 2012. *Mladi levi – Our First Fifteen Years*. Lion Tales. Bunker: Ljubljana.

<sup>36</sup> Selimović, Alma R.. 2012. *Dear Ladies and Gentlemen. Some Thoughts on the Audience of the Mladi Levi Festival*. Lion Tales. Bunker: Ljubljana.

standstill following the European Capital of Culture, which failed to provide a sustainable solution. These new formations of “the communal” inhabit the city centre, where they lie - scattered in various distances and proximities: GT22, Gallery K18, Salon of Applied Arts, Vetrinjski Dvor Mansion, Nagib on Stage (while awaiting for Maribor to acquire its own independent contemporary performing arts venue, Nagib (for the time being) has no other choice but to temporarily reside in Narodni dom, whereby a two-way productive-parasitic alliance is formed between public and non-governmental)<sup>37</sup>. The abovementioned entities play an important role in co-forming the city landscape and “invoking sustainability as they set up their own self-reproducing micro-communities, social networks and value systems”<sup>38</sup>, which in a way bear resemblance to performative formats in their aesthetic utterances. The Drugajanje festival embraces and breathes the context it resides in, particularly in its drive to form co-production alliances with individual self-organised structures (Moment Maribor in GT22, Nagib on Stage etc.). By pursuing this direction, the festival successfully cleared the air of discomfort around the fact that, rather than being born in Maribor, the team and the programmes bringing it to life reside within the culture and art scene of Ljubljana. Essentially, it all comes down to contextualising, which unequivocally echoes the distinct disposition of the city of Maribor, either in selected performances, both appertaining and dissolving in pure coincidence of the context, or in links that Drugajanje bred with individual local communities. Reconceptualising manoeuvres of this sort can be seen emanating from the critical platform Kriterij set up during the last year's Mladi levi festival edition (with Alma R. Selimović and Muanis Sinanović as editors), perhaps best described in plain terms as bringing the corpse of art criticism back to life. The Mladi levi festival once had its own publication Arena, which went quiet as time passed. The death of art criticism – which seems to coincide with a certain (conceptual) project as

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<sup>37</sup> Kraner, Kaja. 2014. *The Maribor Alternative Scene: On the Forms of Cooperating and Networking*. Pogledi (In Slovene). Available at: <http://pogledi.delo.si/druzba/mariborska-alternativa> (Accessed: 9th April 2018).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

well as (economic) automatism, both of these instilling the normative place of utterance within the media realm – is lately undergoing reversal with the onset of the new wave of institutional art criticism. This time the reflective momentum does not emanate from a realm separate to art, but rather arises from the very core institutional arena of art and culture, embedding individual institutions not only with practices of art criticism, archiving and promoting, but also with the impetus to engender new public discursive spaces or temporary arenas of vigorous intensity – the zones of speculative uncertainty inciting cutting-edge scenes of obscenity (where one dwells on the edge of the scene) (p. 39)<sup>39</sup>. The conceptual project *to do away with the judgement* thus shifts the uttering position of criticism and brazenly and daringly lays bare its assimilated nature while immersing itself in the process of “miniaturisation” in its withdrawal from universal postulates.

## Concluding Thoughts

Present-day Bunker is a highly diversified organisation that performs a substantial amount of work away from the spotlight. One must spend a considerable amount of time with this well synchronised and longstanding team (Nevenka Koprivšek, Mojca Jug, Maja Vižin, Alma R. Selimović, Tamara Bračič Vidmar, Polona Vozel, Igor Remeta, Andrej Petrovčič, Duško Pušica), to gain insight into all the micro-capillary dimensions it embodies in its simultaneous quest to enforce its own position on the networking map and facilitate the development of a wider contemporary performing arts scene. The scope of activities that Bunker takes part in ranges from participating in decision-making processes in cultural politics (which, according to the team, lacks a more comprehensive discussion to set a more sustainable and different path, for example by making contemporary performing arts practices increasingly accessible across

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<sup>39</sup> Bobnič, Robert and Lobnik, Alja. 2016. *Critics, Theoreticians, Janitors*. Adept. Revija sodobnih gledaliških in filmskih ustvarjalcev, Vol. 2, Nr. 2. (In Slovene) Available at: [http://kumba.agrft.uni-lj.si/ZAC/prenosi/ADEPT\\_2\\_2016.pdf](http://kumba.agrft.uni-lj.si/ZAC/prenosi/ADEPT_2_2016.pdf)

Slovenia, or by setting up new residential and rehearsal venues etc.), organising educational events and workshops, setting up arts and culture education programmes, managing the Stara mestna elektrarna, consecutively running two separate festival cycles, supporting and producing various art projects, weaving social networks locally and internationally, engendering discursive spaces, and so forth. However, the most far-reaching momentum should be recognised and highlighted in its efforts to set up perhaps the most vital of all projects: arts and culture education for youngsters living outside Ljubljana, where the force of subsequent shifts and movements is most apparent to the eye. In her interview, Alma R. Selimović stated<sup>40</sup> that amidst increasingly arduous conditions of work, with Bunker almost falling short of programme funding this year and in the face of funds reduction for programmes that have previously been substantially supported, it is precisely in the arts and culture education that the fruits of one’s labour are most apparent. Here Bunker does not try to convince the convinced, and even though breathing art and its arena every single day, it is still a completely breath-taking experience to set up a programme with fifteen mentors, each of those teaching at least 600 children. Now this is a true breakthrough.

By engendering contexts and new spaces in this way, Bunker nurtures what may be the most essential dimension of its being, namely the expansion of paths that would normally fall in the domain and scope of individual art orientations. All of these parallel incarnations pave ways to the politics of mutuality and reciprocal support amidst the diversified horizon of different communities. It is exactly through cooperative relationships of this type that the true political nature of these communities shines through, alive rather than passive in its vivacious essence, and therefore actively disruptive to the existing relations of power. As a subtle and indispensable part of the independent scene, Bunker has for years remained true to the grand enterprise of bringing the most vital artistic inclinations to life.

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<sup>40</sup> Lobnik, Alja. 2018. *Interview with Nevenka Koprivšek and Alma R. Selimović*. Behind the Bunker Dining Table. Bunker: Ljubljana. (In Slovene)



Tjaša Pureber, bachelor of political science and researcher of grass-roots movements

Tjaša Pureber

## **Bunker, Two Decades Down the Line: Persevering at the Nexus of the Margins**

It would be difficult to envision the cultural landscape of performing arts in Ljubljana without the Stara mestna elektrarna (Old Power Station). Having come to life in 2004 when Bunker started managing the venue, the current incarnation of the Stara mestna elektrarna is no more than fifteen years old. It hosts hundreds of artists, non-governmental organisations, performances, initiatives, projects, workshops, discussion panels, lectures and numerous audiences every year. The venue stands for a prototypical nexus of contemporary performing arts under the managing hand of a non-governmental organisation – one that keeps on expanding its sphere of action far beyond the walls of the building it inhabits, in both a physical and a metaphorical sense. It provides visitors and artists with the sense of stability and a can-do attitude; not only affirming that contemporary and critical art can exist in Ljubljana, but also setting up the conditions of high professional standard for those working in the cultural arena of non-governmental sector.

However, beyond this initial impression of stability, one encounters the reality of ongoing precariousness and financial uncertainty, the incon-

gruity between managing demands on the one hand and insufficient funds on the other, of having to live in the state of recurrent dependence on calls for proposals and, finally, the need for Bunker to re-examine its own position and role – not only within the Tabor city quarter amidst the growing intensity of gentrification and tourism promotion in Ljubljana, but also in transformative expression of the city in general.

Bunker is one of the 27 non-governmental organisations in culture receiving programme funding from the Ministry of Culture, eight of these function in the field of performing arts. Bunker is also a prominent part of the European “success story” with a track record of longstanding success of getting EU funds. A successful organisation therefore, by all accounts. However, this very organisation forms part of a strikingly financially malnourished non-governmental sector in culture which, 25 years down the line, remains subject to similarly debilitating conditions as those existing in the beginning of the 1990s. Despite all the achievements these conditions fall short of providing stable employment, growth or development, let alone investments in infrastructure.

The microcosmic reality of an organisation such as Bunker epitomises the paradox inherent in the entire politics of culture: every single entity setting the bar of excellence in a given sector within culture inevitably falls subject to triple marginalisation.

Firstly, Bunker persistently strives to address the very issues that provoke discomfort in the mainstream social arena. For instance tackling topics such as migration, capitalism, poverty, intolerance, etc. Subsequently, Bunker is bound to become a sitting duck, directly or indirectly, for conservative populism. This can bring about devastating consequences, namely cuts in funding, with every reshuffle of the structures in power. It is also far from insignificant that its role of managing the Stara mestna elektrarna entirely depends on a targeted public call every few years. Secondly, as it is a non-governmental organisation, Bunker falls within the part of a sector that suffers from a systemic malnutrition of legal provision that would regulate its functioning, as well as mechanisms governing calls for funding and financial instability. The third aspect of

marginalisation stems from the fact that Bunker’s sphere of action falls within the domain of culture, one of the first targets of austerity measures amongst all of the existing sectors in the country. Slovenia, for example, was one of the very few countries in the EU that saw a significant budget decrease in the realm of culture following the recession period after 2008, while some other EU countries were left with their budget for culture intact or even increased it.

Following two long decades of ups and downs and breakthroughs, how can one think the role of an organisation such as Bunker, and of a venue such as the Stara mestna elektrarna, amidst permanent crisis and insecurity? How does one articulate numerous outstanding achievements, not only in the arena of performing arts, but also within the scope of education in arts and culture, and those arising from intense work on the local-global axis? And, how (if at all possible) can this margin, which the non-governmental sector always finds itself in as a consequence to decision-makers’ interventions, arise as a space of emancipation?

## A Venue that is More Than Just an Organisation

Before Bunker started to manage the Stara mestna elektrarna, the venue was sporadically used for artistic purposes, with several theatre and film directors in the 1980s and 1990s having discovered its potential as a setting for performance. It was here that the Mladi levi festival, one of the most prominent and still vital activities of Bunker, made its guest appearance at the end of the 1990s. However, a systematic transformation towards the contemporary cultural centre we know today came about through a longstanding collaborative process instigated by several initiatives, including Asociacija - an association of non-governmental organisations and freelancers active in arts and culture, which Bunker has been actively participating in ever since its inception.

For long years Ljubljana had to put up with an acute deprivation of training and performing venues dedicated to contemporary theatre and dance

(which, to some extent, still remains the case today). In response, several initiatives in independent culture decided to embark on a systematic search for potential venues to emerge as new contemporary centres of the non-governmental landscape and fill this void. In this respect, the Stara mestna elektrarna was immediately perceived to be suitable. Bunker took over after longstanding advocacy processes in 2004, result of the Ministry of Culture releasing a public call and thoroughly renovating the building. That same year, on August 21<sup>st</sup>, the Mladi levi festival opened the hall.

Alongside this specific process of rebirth that Stara mestna elektrarna was undergoing at the time, there was also a growing awareness of the immense responsibility Bunker carries not only to its visitors through its programme, but also towards the entire community of artists. Stara mestna elektrarna has subsequently evolved far beyond being just a space, managed by an organisation – it has grown into a venue for production-education-performing purposes, inhabited by a wider scene, where numerous initiatives have the opportunity to explore their own creative expression. Bunker and the Stara mestna elektrarna therefore stand, hand in hand, as one of the most prominent hubs of contemporary art in the city, the country and the wider region.

Stara mestna elektrarna as a facility is owned by Elektro Ljubljana, and regardless of its historical elements and the industrial interior of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the venue now functioning as cultural centre still forms part of the infrastructure that continues to provide electrical energy to a third of the country's capital. A tripartite contract formed between the Ministry of Culture, the Municipality of Ljubljana and Elektro Ljubljana initially stipulated that the venue was to be used for the purposes of culture in the form of a free lease to meet the needs of contemporary performing arts, with the Ministry making a commitment at the time to provide part of the funds for maintenance purposes. The most recent contract signed between the parties substituted the term 'free lease' with the term 'rent'.

The precarious abyss hiding behind this, seemingly positive, symbiosis became sorely apparent in 2016, when the Ministry of Culture suggested that, after almost fifteen years, the Ministry actually has no legal grounds to take up a lease for the purposes of public cultural infrastructure from a non-public body, even when free of charge. A paradoxical situation arose where, first of all, a (para)public enterprise (Elektro Ljubljana) was still willing to facilitate the lease for the purposes of culture. Secondly, this very collaboration was still fully supported by the Municipality, also in the form of programme funding. And thirdly, even though the Stara mestna elektrarna stood as an embodiment of outstanding practice in how a private infrastructure can be managed to facilitate cultural programmes in public interest, the Ministry remained adamant for several months that the longstanding symbiosis is no longer legally feasible.

By going ahead with this move, the Ministry *de facto* jeopardised not only one venue and/or organisation, but the wider community of non-governmental artists and freelancers in art and culture, functioning on the axis of this venue. It was only after a longstanding legal and advocacy battle of several months that the Ministry was finally willing to agree to make amendments to the framework law for culture, which in turn allowed for Stara mestna elektrarna to remain a performing arts hub. While admittedly resulting in a happy ending, this entire muddle nevertheless clearly speaks of the brutality embedded in the bureaucratised co-financing system reigning over non-governmental culture and the acutely precarious habitat imposed upon non-governmental organisations, who find themselves at a mercy of the arbitrary subject in power at a given point in time. The non-governmental sphere remains trapped in the perpetual loop of dependency on public finances, the good will of financing subjects, the precarious nature inherently embedded in their professional functioning, and the development of neuralgic points of art, should the support provided by the Ministry or the Municipality cease or fail to exist.

Most non-governmental organisations managing venues will inevitably find themselves facing tremendous difficulties: even though most will be in receipt of (municipal or state) co-funding to facilitate programmed ac-

tivity, the latter as a rule falls short of covering the actual execution of all programmed activities. More significantly, the co-financing provided fails to specify itemised budget categories for staff, for investments, for programme and for the so called passive standby, namely for all those maintenance expenses required for a smooth functioning of a venue, ranging from electricity and water consumption, to costs arising from the provision of security and cleaning services. Each of these expenses ends up biting off a chunk of the programme funds and eating away the manoeuvre space for decent staff fees and improved programme quality, while covertly forcing non-governmental organisations to generate a high number of applications towards calls for proposals. These, admittedly, bring in more funding and programme content, but on the other hand, they trigger new waves of bureaucracy and hence suffocate creative processes. Even though Bunker is in receipt of public funding towards venue maintenance costs (which, to be honest, is more of an exception than a general rule), the organisation itself cannot offer anything beyond the venue to the external artists, given that programme funds allocated to production activities cover only in-house productions and fall short of bearing the full programme curation costs. In response, the professional sphere has been consistently calling for concessions to be given to a number of non-governmental organisations and allow for planning and pursuit of their long-term development with greater ease. This solution, however, would only make sense under the provision that all other support mechanisms for the non-governmental sector in culture remain in place (from annual and recurring calls for project proposals to recurring calls for programme funding).

The process we see unfolding at the moment is, however, treading down a very different path. Not only does the state fail to enable the development of innovative approaches and new collaborative entities within the independent scene, it also appears to shy away from acknowledging/legalising/supporting these innovations. For years Bunker has been setting the bar of excellence in the educational realm of arts and culture, expanding the concept of audience-building to its broadest connotation to encom-

pass everything from educational work with the youth to regular reflective sessions for audiences. From this perspective, the architectural formulation of its stage is anything but a coincidence, with the notorious fourth wall having already collapsed ages ago – struck down by the vitality of performances, as well as by numerous inclusive discussions about and reflections on individual productions: from the recent launching of a critical art review portal, to the now well established Zbor za publiko (The Audience Council) sessions organised in collaboration with Via Negativa, Maska and Mesto žensk/City of Women. Despite the obvious lack of both systematic support and opportunity to tackle the basic issues stemming from the relationship between cultural politics and the non-governmental scene, the latter had begun to form a tapestry embroidered with new connections, exchanges, examples of good practice and collaborative functioning, thus not merely rising above the question of individual organisation or its sphere of action, but also surpassing linguistic and regional boundaries.

Since the state failed to provide enough institutional support to facilitate networking formations of this sort, the theatre season ticket Transferzala was brought to life, clasping together independent stages of contemporary performing arts in the capital, including Bunker with Stara mestna elektrarna. As their member, Bunker plays an active role in numerous international networks and was, in this context, also in charge of coordinating the Balkan Express, a vital nexus for artists within the Balkans. And yet, despite the magnitude of its international collaborative endeavours, Bunker has never lost sight of its local neighbourhood known as the Tabor quarter, which opens yet another arena of its functioning.

# The Challenges and the Pitfalls of the Cultural Enhancement of Local Neighbourhoods

The City of Ljubljana has been undergoing extremely rapid socio-geographic changes recently. Its city centre is on a fast track to become a mere scenery for the tourist eye. This explains why the announced end of the economic crisis by economists and politicians has set a new cycle of investment projects in motion, also those instigated by the City of Ljubljana. The construction works and their complimentary machines were seen gradually migrating from the centre of the Capital towards the closest circumference of neighbourhoods, which have preserved their dense population profile. Having said that, it is highly essential to keep our eyes open as to whether any tendencies to push the residents out might silently arise and to stand up against the processes triggering social desolation in the districts of Prule, Šiška, Upper Vič and, of course, Tabor.

Tabor, as an organic extension of the city centre, is actually a community with all the elements of an urban district: with Metelkova and Rog as two autonomous zones charting down its external borders, the district harbours the scattered facilities of a community-driven sports hall, primary and secondary schools, a nursery, a park, small grocery shops, venues inhabited by institutional culture, office buildings, a health centre, a retirement home and, finally, the cultural centre for contemporary performing arts, Stara mestna elektrarna. The residential population of the Tabor quarter is ageing rapidly, the rent prices are on the rise, and while one can still find smaller, privately owned, apartment units where, even after decades, doorbells go on ringing for the same surnames, this neighbourhood is actually transforming into a landscape of new facades, window frames and soaring rent prices. Those seeking to present this district as a synonym for delinquency and trouble would handily use the fact that Tabor also provides a home to a centre for asylum seekers, to a methadone clinic, to squatters in alternative outfits and lately also to homeless people,

banished out of the polished city centre by security officers and the police. As a result the air of this district vibrates the multiplicity of the often dissonant and persistently complex polyphony, echoing a multitude of initiatives and their interests.

The Tabor quarter has seen several attempts of deliberate culturalisation play out over time. Rather than creating a community hub, the unfortunate 'museum island' experiment gave stillbirth to a platform of desolate space, where community-driven initiatives now unfold in complete absence of any dialogue with nearby institutions. Both the state and the city have managed to bureaucratically entangle the official lease requirements for these spaces to such a degree that these venues now only rarely get to provide home for external events. And from yet another perspective, this very territory resembles a battleground for space, where graffiti artists, skaters and youngsters – persistently accused of making too much noise and thus banished from the nearby park – make their presence known to the opposing forces of security officers and the police. Following the intense period of social upheaval in Slovenia, this very space also played host to a civil assembly of the Tabor quarter dwellers in their self-organised attempt to collaboratively rise above the highly individualised coordinates of contemporary lifestyle.

As we turn to the question of the differences that arise between private and public spaces under the sway of urban gentrification, it becomes obvious that the manner of managing public spaces, such as the Metelkova museum platform for instance, drastically differs from management approaches applicable for community spaces. Regardless of who may be their managing authority (i.e. a private entity or state/municipality), both private and public spaces are managed in a hierarchical manner where residents can access resources only through third parties and, furthermore, only when abiding by very clear normative standards defining both, behavioural propriety and the acceptable manner of how space and content can be adequately consummated. As Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis argue (see [https://academic.oup.com/cdj/article/49/suppl\\_1/i92/307214](https://academic.oup.com/cdj/article/49/suppl_1/i92/307214)), the formation of a communal entity essentially revolves

around the ability of this community to access resources directly in their totality without involvement from third parties, and depends upon whether these resources actually suffice to meet the needs of the local inhabitants.

So what happens when a non-governmental organisation instigates the entire realm of collaborative networking and resuscitative interventions aimed at degraded or desolate spaces in a city quarter such as Tabor? Similar examples from abroad clearly teach us that what tends to follow is the alienation of indigenous residents, whereas the gradual “import” of new service users results in them settling down permanently in the area, triggering the subsequent erosion of original communities out of their traditional residential habitats.

Bunker’s interventions aimed at the local city quarter have engendered an ambivalent response. It should be noted that projects aimed at revitalising the Tabor park (together with prostoRož) or setting up the Beyond Construction Site community garden (together with KUD Obrat) did manage to take up their own path in the end: in this case, in particular, the garden project gradually emancipated from the initial input that set the process in motion. The actual effect and value of these projects can only undergo critical evaluation in a few years’ time, when realistic parameters of change within this part of the city will start becoming apparent to the eye. The necessary prerequisite for these projects was for a community to form itself in the first place, which is why the project content instilled within those topographical units was to act as a platform for participants to get to know each other.

On the other hand, the culturalisation process aimed at such spaces and neighbourhoods harbours an imminent danger that by increasing the quality of life for local residents, the process simultaneously ends up eroding and pushing out the community it tries to build. This not only applies to the case of the Tabor quarter, but holds true for all similar experiments, engendered under the sway of contemporary art and culture, in residential areas either composed of traditionally working-class or migrant backgrounds, or considered “degraded” in some other way from the perspective of capital.

Ensuring that such practices do not become instruments in the expansive hands of capital does not mean one should not engage with them in the first place; it rather means that these practices need to have a political connotation embedded in their core. As long as a garden is merely a garden, rather than a setting allowing for a community to form, capital will easily appropriate it and make it fit into an urban trendy expansion of the city centre. As long as a garage sale is merely a sale, rather than an intervention critically addressing hyper-consumerism and the production of goods, the latter will remain nothing but a little spot in the newest tourist guide.

If organisations and institutions shy away from adopting a reflective mindset in order to critically examine their own place of utterance and, furthermore, if they fail to seek out coalitions with autonomous movements, venues and local residents in the spirit of loyalty that transcends institutional and project limitations – then these organisations and institutions will themselves become a part of the destructive force crippling the image and life of the city. But if, on the other hand, they prove to be able, not only to endure and tolerate this critique, but also instigate it, take part in it and take a stance on it – then they, in collaboration with other initiatives, actually stand a chance of holding a mirror to the social landscape of the city and the destructive processes ravaging it.

## Against the Oblivion of History

Regardless of the institutional restrictions all non-governmental entities, including Bunker, are bound to live with, it is important not to lose sight of certain crucial events that surpassed the statutory mechanisms of funding and therefore became communal rather than public in nature, arising as a critical force by taking a stance towards contemporary political and social issues. It just so happens that archives of history tend to forget events of this sort, but it is precisely here that the capacity for re-

flective perspective becomes apparent in terms of how far an individual organisation is able to go in contemplating its own social position.

In the 2012-2013 period of social upheaval, Stara mestna elektrarna temporarily played host to civil assemblies of local residents, facilitating the abovementioned self-organising of the Tabor quarter residents for a few months in their fight against the exploitative maintenance management of blocks of residential flats. This was a completely autonomous initiative, spontaneously ignited here and there across the Tabor quarter area (a similar initiative emerged in the Šiška district), which Bunker opened its gates to without attaching any kind of conditions of entry to it, either in terms of content or production.

In the beginning of 2016 Slovenia stood witness to an attempted right-wing uprising, with anti-immigration graffiti spreading across the buildings of Ljubljana and sexist slogans calling for action, for instance “Let’s Rape Leftist Women” (as a vengeful countermeasure for solidarity with migrants). Mass protests were held in smaller cities and towns where rumours of planned asylum centres for refugees had begun to emerge. The announcement of a right-wing protest gathering to take place in front of the Centre for Asylum Seekers in the Kotnikova Street, literally across the road from Stara mestna elektrarna, triggered a wide counter-mobilisation of autonomous movements, non-governmental organisations, and others wanting to take a stand about what kind of a city they wish to live in. Immediately when the civil mobilisation calling for a tolerant and open Ljubljana had begun, Stara mestna elektrarna opened its gates and offered its facilities as a place of refuge, providing shelter to protesters as skinheads went marching after them.

As the nearby Centre for Asylum Seekers has no communal space for its residents to spend time in, Stara mestna elektrarna offered to hold socialising events for them. It also acted as the press conference venue for self-organised activists who tackle the issues of borders and migratory regime of the EU, also addressing the negative role Slovenia plays in this context. And finally, the traditional gift-giving event for children as part of the New Year’s celebrations has now for two years in the row provided both,

the children of those working in arts as well as the children of migrant parents, with the joy of a present.

None of the above is really something to be submitted to a call for proposals. Actually, activities such as these would be much more difficult to execute under the restraints imposed by the funding-allocated logic, and could perhaps even be seen as jeopardising it by critically examining its purpose and the reasoning behind the multi-layered restrictions inflicted upon non-governmental functioning. These are the contents essentially defining every space and individuals functioning within it. These are the very contents that explain why it is possible to persevere on the margin, why it is possible to see it as a space of emancipation and cooperation, in spite of all the systemic hurdles and perpetual insecurity. Persevering on the margin is possible because it is communal at heart, arising either as a community of artists, a community of local residents, or a community of all those striving to see the society change for the better. It is crucial to remember though, that no community is a given fact, an inherent pre-existing category of a subject or a certitude one can simply leave to its own devices once formed. It is a slippery form of functioning and networking, which requires a constant reflective force to re-examine its own position of utterance in both society and the world. But at the same time, a community embedded in the heart of a non-governmental entity is just about the only safeguard that protects the NGO from becoming a museum artefact, a dampening pillow for social discontents and a caricature of itself. In other words, it is community that propels the perpetual process of searching and becoming.



Grzegorz Reske, performing arts producer and curator, part of ResKeil tandem

Grzegorz Reske

## Recognised in the International Discourse and Embracing the Local Contexts

This text was written in several places: from a desk in my temporary Warsaw home, to a small armchair in a remote corner of the Frankfurt airport lounge, until it finally saw the light of day in a small hotel room in San Sebastian.

This last decade of my life has been a never-ending adventurous journey around the world of artists, looking for challenging works, meeting beautiful souls, and experiencing diversity of thought about what art is and whom it is (or not) meant to serve. With so many ties having emerged over the years, I find myself wondering every now and again how exactly do people from Ljubljana link in with this adventure of mine. Regardless of whether I try to count, draw, or describe their part in my journey, I could hardly overestimate their impact.

This is a story about pure coincidences, or, for those who choose to believe in providence, a story about destiny. As a member of the artistic community myself, I wasn't a great believer in international exchange, and most definitely didn't see much value in investing in this activity.

It therefore took quite some time for me to start wondering what lies behind the horizon. Having worked in the Polish theatre world for a couple of years already at the time, I began looking for opportunities to encounter different models to the one I was familiar with. Subsequently, unexpected support arrived from the CEC ArtsLink Foundation in New York, which accepted my application, and decided to fund my residency in the US, in the Autumn of 2007. Finally, here I was on my first transatlantic flight (and missing the connecting flight along the way). Upon arrival, I had the opportunity to spend a few days with other fifteen young Central and Eastern European fellows before departing toward our respective places of residence. Fifteen I said, and each of them much more internationally connected, with a much clearer understanding of what they wanted to get out of the experience, and last but not least, most of them also with a much better command of the English language. Honestly, I still wonder why I was awarded the grant back then.

But this is not a story about me, it is a story about the organisation called Bunker. Well, it would seem that I had to take a transatlantic flight first to learn about its existence. It just so happened that one of my ArtsLink fellow colleagues in 2007 was Tamara Bračić. It wasn't until later that I came to realise that finding a Bunker representative among ArtsLink fellows is anything but unusual. Actually, almost every member of the Bunker collective went through that programme, which definitely says something about the organisation itself, but I will come back to that later.

So this is how I met my first Slovene colleague (well two of them, to be precise, as Barbara Novakovič was also with us) and learnt a few things about Bunker, the organisation Tamara was (and still is) associated with. I also came to realise that I wasn't the only one planning to extend my stay in New York after the official programme closure. Soon after I was on my way to the other side of the US where my residency was awaiting for the next couple of weeks, while Tamara stayed in New York for her own residency experience.

Upon our reunion following the completion of the programme, Tamara acted as a real tourist guide for those of us who extended our stay, show-

ing us around organisations and communities of New York. This made our stay not only far more interesting (given that we had fun in places we would probably never have encountered otherwise), but it also provided the opportunity for building a network of connections, which I go on cultivating up to this very day. All of this due to a coincidence.

I most certainly couldn't have guessed at the time that this was just the first in a series of coincidences yet to come. The time in New York literally flew by, and by the end of it I did feel a bit more at home in the international context, and my English improved as well. So here I was on my way back to Europe, already looking for opportunities to continue the adventure. Actually, I had been hoping to check out one of the IETM meetings for a while and when I shared my thoughts on this with Tamara, it turned out (coincidentally, of course) that the upcoming meeting was to be organised by Bunker itself in its home town, Ljubljana.

Yes, I took that opportunity, and popped up in Ljubljana several months later. With Tamara acting as my guide once again and feeling warmly welcomed by the friendly Tabor quarter, my first steps into the network couldn't have gone smoother (and who would have thought at the time that only three years down the line I would be organising the IETM meeting in Poland myself). So what do I mean when I talk about smooth first steps into the network? The meeting in Ljubljana was friendly in atmosphere and calmly executed (which, as I realised later on, is something the Bunker team is famous for), but also discreetly curated so that no one felt disconnected or not belonging. I wonder how much all of this played a part in my decision to keep in contact with the network since.

These two episodes formed an image in my mind as to what Bunker and its people stand for: facilitating networking with ease and generously sharing contacts, knowledge and ideas. Quite a rare set of features, at least for someone coming from my context. Let me assure you at this point that the rest of this text will not talk much about me anymore.

Once one starts carefully observing and analysing the Bunker phenomenon, it is its unique structure and manner of execution that really come shining through.

# The House

Or, rather, two houses. Bunker had existed long before the Stara mestna elektrarna (Old Power Station) became home to its activities. It is difficult to imagine the present Slovene performing arts scene without the venue at the Slomškova Street. Knowing that space from both, the audience and the stage perspective, it stands as an example to my mind as to how a contemporary performing venue should look like. Before we go into details about the repertoire it covers, it is worth re-emphasising that the existence of such space in a cultural landscape holds an immense value for both, the city as well as its artistic community.

Let us not, however, forget about the other “house” - the one regular audience members, or even most of the visiting artists for that matter, rarely get to experience. Only a few blocks from the Stara mestna elektrarna, right on the same street, is Bunker’s office. And when seen from up close, this office can actually say a lot about Bunker as an organisation. Without kilometres of files stored away everywhere, one can tell that these are the headquarters of a serious entity. It does not appear too keen to exhibit the memorabilia left behind after a project is over and done (though quite an exhibition that would be), which is why the Bunker office is first of all a home. It is treated as such by the team and its visitors immediately feel like they belong to the family. Regardless of whether you are hanging out in the kitchen or the garden, or perhaps working hard at one of the desks, the feeling of a family home stays with you.

# The People

It is not the walls, or a good coffee machine – it is people who fill the space. Run by its founder, Nevenka Koprivšek, Bunker seems to be a radically horizontal collective, where everyone is equally responsible for what happens behind the project, but also equally visible in its forefront. It is hard to find another art entity, where the project would be community-led to such a degree and run by a wide group of collaborators rather than a

single leader. What seems important here is that this group of collaborators has stayed the same for many years, and it doesn’t look like anyone is interested in building a brighter future elsewhere. And then again, where could this brighter future possibly be? Over the years, Bunker as an organisation has extended into areas far away from its original programme core. This has happened because the organisation was able to recognise new needs emerging in its surrounding environment, and partly also by adopting contemporary trends. But first and foremost, these steps into new areas seem to have been driven by the curiosity and interest of individual team members. Perhaps not providing the highest financial payback, but the efforts invested bring immense self-esteem as a reward. Some time ago, as we were discussing planned team downsizing (due to an unstable financial situation of Bunker at the time), one of the team members told me openly that there was nowhere one could progress to from here in Slovenia. True, lots of places would probably provide a better payment, and perhaps some of them could also add other benefits. But once you’ve made it into Bunker, you’ve reached the top, at least in the performing arts field. Whether driven by the necessity to cut down in team size, or perhaps wanting to open new paths of development for its former members, Bunker subsequently provided numerous Slovene organisations and institutions with highly skilled new employees. They seem to carry Bunker’s legacy of work methods, ethic and enthusiasm with them wherever they go – I speak from personal observations. But still, how can one recognise Bunker team members in a wider context (say, at an international festival, or a conference)? For one, they will be smiling all the time, and the moment you’ve been introduced to them, they will bombard you with contacts, opinions, and proposals. And not just in theory, they will usually drag you to meet other people at once. And last but certainly not least, they will probably be the last to leave the bar.

# The Community

Talking about bars, the Mladi levi canteen was quite the discovery for me when I came to visit the festival. Not because people were being fed at the spot - every festival should do that, and many of them actually do adopt the idea of providing food (sometimes as a way to cut down the daily subsistence costs). What I found surprising in Ljubljana was the idea of sharing a table and presence, thus bringing together the hosting artists from all around the world, as well as the local technical team. In other words, the discovery for me was seeing the equality of inclusion, and here I am referring to the technical team in particular, as central to the festival. This does not apply to daily meals only, it is equally obvious in the context of the picnic. And what a great idea that is! Just think about it - in the era of efficiency, when a festival (and I mean a real festival) has become more of an exception than a rule, Bunker decided to make an exception within the exception by launching an uber-festival in the core of the festival. It places the idea of celebrating life within the programme dedicated to the arts. And here again I must highlight the radical equality of this experience: A picnic day is a picnic day for all - the audience, the artists, and the team. Everyone together. And still, one of the warmest festival memories for me was seeing Bunker team members quarrelling with the technical team about whether a serious production problem should be solved before the picnic (preferably), or afterwards. In the end, the prospect of the next day's performance potentially not happening did not drag technicians (neither local nor visiting) away from having a free day out of town with everyone else. I will not disclose which theatre company or production I am talking about, but as a member of the audience the next day I can assure you that all technical problems were solved by then (despite the fact that a substantial amount of juniper schnapps had been consumed at the picnic).

# The Artists...

Bunker, and the Mladi levi festival in particular, evoke this (seemingly) contradictory impression in me: while essentially focused on artists and the artistic process, Bunker and the festival do not place the artists at the forefront, or above everything else. They are exactly where they are meant to be - next to the audience and all the other professionals required for the project to be carried out. This might actually be the reason why the visiting artists tend to have such a good time in Ljubljana. Not as performance stars (even though this is exactly what they are in many cases), but as a part of community.

The same goes for local artists that Bunker produces and promotes: unpretentious, easy-going, inclusive and friendly. This is the Bunker export quality you can expect to host at your venue with uncompromised high-level output.

## ... and the Festival

Let us now once again take a closer look at the Bunker flagship - the Mladi levi festival. To understand the festival (as well as the people behind it) one needs to look beyond a single festival edition. Created and run by the same (growing) group of people, the festival celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year, which is a good opportunity to try see things in a wider perspective. What starts to emerge is an ideal matrix for a diverse artistic event from very early on. Over the years, Bunker brought to Ljubljana both acclaimed artists with their most renowned productions as well as those less known, found in the most remote parts of the world. This mixture of visiting artists combined with the contemporary Slovene performing arts gave rise to a platform for artists to meet, and for audiences to immerse in the local and international languages of art. Over the years, the festival programme would encompass everything from intimate solo performances to productions expanding over the entire space of the Stara mestna elektrarna. Several artists were invited to perform

numerous times, thus not only allowing the audience to experience their artistic development over time, but also providing these artists with a stable and honest support environment for the development of their careers. The impact of the festival on local Slovene artistic community cannot be overemphasised here. Diversity of styles, backgrounds, languages and approaches, mixed in an intensive cocktail and poured in front of the local audience and the cultural milieu to digest.

## The Audience

Okay, mixing a cocktail like this isn't a radical move when you have a Ljubljana audience around. It is absolutely amazing how quickly translations of contemporary cutting edge works in humanities emerge in Slovene bookshops, and how rapidly a simple bar visit with the locals can turn into a highly advanced philosophical discussion. It is difficult to say how much of that is a reflection of the old education system, or the need to rise above the small local context and language, and how much initiatives like the Mladi levi festival have helped make this happen. It is, quite possibly, the mixture of all of these. Festivals such as the Mladi levi could hardly survive without the willingness of local audiences to embrace programme challenges. And this attitude of openness is in turn constantly nourished by Bunker as it goes on looking for supreme performances from all around the world to bring them home to its audience.

## The Struggles

If everything that I wrote so far seems like paradise, everyday practice shows that reality is far from it. Even though Bunker is one of the most important and recognised organisations in Slovenia (or even broader, within the region), it nevertheless seems to be continuously floating between moving forward on the one hand and barely keeping its head above the water on the other. What seems wrong with this picture is that even though Bunker acts as a bridge between the local and the international,

and despite all its successes, the recognition of its efforts and achievements comes mostly from the outside rather than from the local authorities. For years now has Bunker maintained its role as a crucial partner in international project consortiums within the performing arts. What is crucial here is that, through such activities, Bunker not only provides the door for foreign artists to access Central Europe (which is definitely the case), but also acts as a platform for regional artists to gain prominence in international context (which is an important factor in Bunker's efforts). But first off all, Bunker acts as a discourse facilitator amongst artists, providing theoretical reflections and nourishing contemplative accounts of artistic presence in the society.

This is where I see both, the greatest value and potential of Bunker, as well as the greatest threat for its future activities.

## The Political Institution of Art

What Bunker team pursues and what we see manifesting in each edition of the Mladi levi festival, as well as in its continuous activities throughout the year, is a deep recognition of the fact that art is political. And here I mean "political" in the most essential connotation of the word. If we take a look at international projects with Bunker as a partner (and sometimes also as the initiator), it becomes clear that despite being different in their artistic outcomes, these projects all had one thing in common: All of them were set up with a deep understanding of the fact that artistic activities underpin the very essence of the social system. Both in its participatory, socially driven projects, and in the most speculative, conceptual projects it brought to life, Bunker strives to pursue the common good, and basic values of the open society as crucial forces propelling the artistic expression. And finally, the critical approach Bunker promotes in the arts is necessary to foster a dialogue in the civil society, which helps to prevent possible hazards, and when this is not possible, it can at least determine and describe them.

It is simultaneously brave and precarious to work in the context of a post-

regime country, with a young tradition of democracy and with fresh bases underpinning deliberative society in formation (which indicates fresh and fragile structures of political institutions at play).

It must be quite a dangerous adventure to act as a pioneer in bringing new roles and languages of art into a structure, which used to (and in some cases still does) see culture as a tool for strengthening national identities, promoting local heritage, and being first of all an entertainment, one carefully chosen and delivered according to a social class of its recipients. Instead of being offered some nice and easy-going after-work entertainment, the Bunker audience is rather exposed to topics of global warming, migration, human trafficking, the fight for freedom, gender identity, poverty, as well as post-conflict reflective sessions or discussion panels considering alternative economies. Even though this might seem like a plate full of difficult topics at first sight, it is really just an agenda of topics related to our everyday lives, much more than the media would have us believe.

If Bunker (and the Stara mestna elektrarna as its designated venue) provides a home to those believing in and pursuing the abovementioned role of artistic expression, then bringing this mission to life is not only highly important for the formation of the Slovene social tissue, but also dangerous for anyone striving to politically destroy the reflective nature of Slovene society. And we can only hope that this will never be the case. We can only hope that the stakeholders involved in decision-making on municipal and state levels will rather follow the example set by Bunker over the last two decades and draw inspiration accordingly to form unique democratic alliances.

Europe needs Slovenia and Bunker, and there will undoubtedly be a prominent place for Bunker in many European initiatives yet to come. Furthermore, Slovenia also needs Bunker for further formation of bridges and for the consolidation of cooperative relationships with its neighbouring countries, Europe and the world. And finally, Central Europe needs Bunker (with organisations of this type being so few and fragile) to stay connected with the rest of the European Union, in the moment of crisis.

## The Urgency of Action

The statement: “This house is on fire,” has in the last decade turned from being a mere quote into an increasingly accurate reflection of the reality we live in. The economic crisis rampaging around the globe, the rising challenges of the rapidly changing climate, the rise of populism, xenophobia, nationalism in response to an unprecedented migration flow, all of these factors exert impact – directly and on a daily basis – on national, regional and local communities. Even though the countermeasures devised by local authorities to address the abovementioned challenges have at best had a mixed success, politicians and public officials in many countries, especially in Central Europe, continue to believe in these same solutions. It is, however, becoming more and more evident that sustainable solutions can only come from rearticulated positions within the society itself, and through actions initiated and facilitated by people. For such a shift in perspective to come about, the role of institutions such as Bunker will be crucial: institutions simultaneously engaging in the international discourse, and embracing their local contexts; institutions that perceive issues from the continental perspective while maintaining their awareness of the regionally specific contexts; and finally, institutions that embody their artistic nature by situating artists within the society instead of above it. The word institution has to be underlined here. Although Bunker comes from an independent movement and was established as a non-governmental organisation, the latter has proven over the years that its impact on the surrounding arena, the meaning it produces and the outcomes it generates can often be more substantial than the outputs from a structured institution. It is down to stakeholders now to show that an entity fulfilling its role so splendidly does indeed deserve support to ensure stability and sustainable conditions for its further functioning and growth on the level of a public institution.

I firmly believe that the third decade of Bunker’s existence will bring about the long-deserved recognition of its role in the local and regional contexts, thus providing Bunker with conditions enhancing its service to the art world as well as the community. All seeds are now in the soil, waiting for proper care to allow them to flourish.



Rok Vevar, dance activist and archivist

Rok Vevar

## Thoughts on Aesthetic Changes in Performing Arts in the Period since the Establishment of Bunker in 1997

Should we examine the artistic production of the Bunker non-profit organisation, founded in 1997 and debuting with its first edition of the Mladilvi festival in 1998, and the programme of Stara mestna elektrarna (Old Power Station), managed by Bunker since 2004, which has so far mostly showcased guest appearances of the most representable artists of the home non-governmental production in performing arts, we must of course establish that in the period of the Bunker activities in the field of (performative) arts, not only the production of art and culture has changed, but also the ways of thinking and writing about art, culture and their production. In addition, there have been changes regarding where we can do that, using what aspects, concepts and methodologies, as well as how much interested public we are able to address in the process. This article has no intention of enumerating aesthetic changes in the period from 1997, nor does it wish to exclude specific productions by Bunker in its artistic programme or residency capacities. I would like to think that

the artistic and cultural production of the non-government sector in the field of performing arts in Ljubljana is, in spite of all productional demarcations, inevitably a matter of community dynamics in which Bunker is very fundamentally incorporated, so the subject of this article will not exclusively be Bunker.

The series of thematic talks organised by Bunker upon the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its activities was held in December 2017, while this article is being written more than half a year later. As always during the past years, my work is being blocked by a basic obstacle: the value of our artistic, cultural and publicist precarious work, which renders all answers to the comprehensive artistic, expert or even scientific questions possible only in case we transfer our errands to “proletarian nights”. In case we try to articulate, verbalise, reflect the artistic processes and products in the time otherwise set out for sleep or holidays. In order to harmonise our contentment with work with our criteria, expectations and not least competencies. In the period discussed here, setting up the basic and minimal conditions for work became our main activity, while under the rule of neoliberal ideology, activism and advocacy became the main part of our cultural and artistic fight. This is one of the fundamental changes that the artists and publicists outside of cultural public institutes in the Republic of Slovenia began to gradually experience in the past two decades, after the relatively optimistic time of cultural and artistic transition from the socialist to the parliamentary-democratic and capitalist system. Cultural politics and production, as well as creating performing arts, also became part of the latter.

Let us be honest. The issue of aesthetic changes in the mentioned period is a subject fit for a PhD thesis, due to the changes in all fields that combine the artistic and cultural system. Perhaps in the last period, creation in the field of performing arts was most strongly marked by the more intense awareness of all that, for the mentioned elements of the system (theorisation, production, distribution, production process, the process of history of performing arts and its cultures, etc.) began to enter per-

formances, events and festival programmes more strongly through a series of artistic works in the form of meta-textuality or in other ways.

The institutional regime in the field of performing arts, by which I mean the part of their production, distribution, reception and reflection that is socially represented (included into social systems, namely most of all public cultural institutions) and not simply present (recognised as belonging to a certain cultural environment, namely: non-governmental organisations), is exceptionally conservative, because due to its collectivity, its cultural production is outstandingly expensive and therefore always in one way or another “protected” from artistic risks. Zdenka Badovinac, Director of the Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova (MG+MSUM), set a thesis in a private conversation I witnessed, but before that probably in some public situation or even an article, about how the criticism of institutions, such as it has been known since the 1960s by visual arts in Europe and the USA, has been practically abolished in the network of home public cultural institutes. If the MG+MSUM as one of the rare museum institutions tried to implement its heritage during the mentioned period into the manner of its operation and artistic and curator programmes, we can safely say that in the network of public theatre cultural institutes, the forms of such approaches have maybe sometimes been used only by the Slovenian Mladinsko Theatre, even though its reflection at home did not exceed the level of recognition of an institutional exception. Meanwhile, the rest of the national, local and audience-wise or genre-wise profiled theatre institutions with their programme and organisation inertia mostly totally lacked critical reflection or comprehensive theorisation tackling their institutional models and programmes. It is precisely because of that that the form of criticism towards the public cultural system and aesthetics produced in this field at home – without calling itself institutional criticism and without directly addressing or artistically formalising this type of reflection – appeared in the form and content production of what has since the beginning of the 1990s been called: non-governmental sector in the field of art and culture. In more or less intense stages, it has been formed

from the end of the 1960s: (a) as an alternative to the closed socialist cultural institutions (in the 1980s, it expanded as their isolated parallel) and out of the need for a different organisation of art processes, (b) with the affirmation of its historical reference field – theatre modernism, but above all historical avant-gardes (in the case of Slovene theatre mostly: constructivism), (c) with the opening to the international artistic space (from the 1960s neo-avant-gardes to the European and American theatre and dance subculture of the 1980s), (d) with the introduction of new models of cultural production into the home space, (e) with the activist abolishment of boundaries between the high and low, the elite and mass art and culture, between the glorification of canonized “artistic genius” and egalitarian profanation of the performance, (f) with the expansion of the network or new or adopted public spaces and the activist public sphere (alternative media with their diverse technologies), etc.

How did the organizational-producing situation containing such phenomena unravel? From 1974, when the Republic of Slovenia amended the Associations Act, to the beginning of the 1990s, when private institutes joined associations as a legal and organizational form with the Institutes Act (1991), the number of such organizations, even in the field of culture, in the Socialist Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of Slovenia grew by over 100%, especially in the transition from the 1980s to the 1990s, which coincided with the beginnings of the more intense public financing of such organizations. It was the latter that largely enabled the expansion of aesthetic diversification, which began to take place in the performing arts field after the years 1968–1972, but very intensely between the years 1977–1991.

In the 1970s, another process unraveled with long-term consequences for the configuration of the relation between the network of public theatre institutions and the non-governmental sector: under the pressures of the steel 1970s, the relation between the central (state, national) and peripheral (audience-wise and genre-wise profiled, mostly municipal) institutions was reconfigured, in which the latter suddenly disposed with a large

amount of creative freedom (e.g. SLG Celje and Slovenian Mladinsko Theatre), so in certain periods, their programmes could be artistically more progressive, since they also ensured work for the artists of new generations. Already at the beginning of the 1990s, the survey done by the *Sodobnost* magazine tackled some of the key agents in the field of institutional theatre production and articulated concern connected to the “un-unified” and “dispersed” aesthetic specter and the fact that there emerged a generation not interested in theatre institutions anymore. The mentioned reasons helped pave the way for the artistic production that was developing continually in the 1980s and 1990s and in 2003–4 finally got financing for several years from the state and the Ljubljana Municipality. In 2004, the venue of Stara mestna elektrarna opened and the story would be incomparably more optimistic if that did not happen practically directly before the first real switch of Slovene political specter to the right. It was in this period, coinciding with the erosion of Slovene media space, that the NGO sector began to expand the list of its financial sources (European Commission Funds, Swiss Culture Foundation, etc.), which increased financial control over the contents and artistic processes.

These are only some of the aspects that have to be considered when we discuss aesthetic changes in the field of performing arts in the past two decades, for these were the decades when artistic production of NGOs (mostly) had to constantly prove its public cultural legitimacy to the state cultural politics, through which it gains access to public resources. The reason for this is the switch of political elites after the millennial turn, because the party line-ups that emerged from the cultural and civil society movements in the 1980s were gradually replaced by new political elites, entangled into neoliberal economic communities, or else the first were seen to have drastically moved towards the right-wing political specter. With the move towards the right, art and culture, as well as science and education in Slovene society become a luxury, a democratic ornament and of course – a financial cost. In relatively unstable conditions, the field of performing arts thus goes through some fundamental changes.

In the last decades, the field of performing arts in their different forms and formats (the latter typically took on forms which are engraved with some specific spectators' score) can easily be seen to contain a relatively strong dismantling of the dramatized (condensed or compressed fictional) theatre time (character, plot) at the account of different embodied or disembodied presences, which perhaps are more a product of contexts than the bearers of some of their own final, evident specific texts. The heavy make-up and virtuoso modernist mechanisms of stage performances which can be remembered from the 1980s and 1990s were replaced by the dismantling or taking apart the mechanic stage elements, in which the dramatic anomalies (complications) in the finalized order of society was mostly replaced by unsolvable contradictions of political, social or cultural systems.

In the new aesthetic inclinations, the dramatic locations charged with some specific neurotic social or individual conflict expanded into the landscapes of social tensions that the artistic processes refuse to finally close, conclude to the level of a sign, but must instead stay on the level of presences in order for their systemic contradiction to be alive, developing (perhaps agonistic), open for audience interpretation. If twenty years ago in his work *Theses on Theatre*, Alain Badiou claimed on the basis of a very classical insight into the art of theatre that theatre art is undoubtedly the only one having to complement the eternity [of the drama material] with a portion of the present moment it lacks. We could claim today that in the past decades, performing arts are trying to contextualize their badly visible instantaneity through meta-texts, a lot more typical for curatorial, scientific, exploratory-press than for traditional choreographic or directorial artistic practices. The neurotic or compressed particularistic time of the drama has expanded into the chosen constructions of the accumulated time of meta-texts, the contexts that usually await the creators in libraries, museums, databases, research documentation, archives, etc. These inclinations could be ascribed to the dysfunctionality of public institutions, to the changed, sharpened and accelerated forms of artistic

production and work, to the erosion of the media sphere, the theatricalisation of the everyday (hypertrophied form of the society of the spectacle) and the general deficit of relevant content in the public sphere in the time of neoliberal occupation of all systems of society. I read the phenomenon of documentary theatre, durational performance, lecture performance, different appropriated and participatory performative formats, the use of non-theatrical venues etc. through this prism, for the mentioned art formats or approaches became a refuge for those institutional and media contents that have no space in the current system of society.

Regarding the use of time, something else has changed in the field of performing arts in the past two decades: the history of performing arts (especially contemporary dance and neo-avant-garde theatre of the 1960s) entered the stage in its different readings with the trend of different forms of reconstructions or historiographic documentarism and began to tackle its own historical potentiality, all of that (the social, political, cultural and artistic) which was left misplaced, overlooked, unperformed, but telling at the same time. This has to do with the expansion of the internet as an archive of available historical references, as well as with the social climates which seem to have been suddenly robbed of their future. It has never before happened that such an amount of stage works or their commissions would suddenly also enter museums or galleries, which perhaps simultaneously expresses the issues and potentialities of museum science in the field of contemporary arts, the new attempts to historically contextualize artistic practices, and not least even the curatorial hyperproduction under market pressure. Thus, a historical revision is happening in the field of performing arts, where the relations between the politically dominant and marginal cultural contexts are changing. In this sense, the abovementioned dramatic uses of time in Western theatre also perhaps enter the logics of cultural (de)colonialism.

In the past decades, we saw a fundamental change and hardening of the conditions in which we are able to tell ourselves stories of ourselves in a consistent manner, for the contemporary torture houses in the produc-

tion of abstract selves (commodified production of subjectivity, perhaps most drastically reflected through the inflation of contemporary dance solos) and authoritarianism of individualism, when “life becomes biographic solving of system contradictions”, according to Zygmunt Bauman, have insufferably occupied our lives, began to disrupt communities and the public, and have, last but not least, managed to turn into a class issue. Theatralisation, dramatization and the fictional character of contemporary everyday (culture, society and politics), which humanistic works expressly began to cover already in the 1960s, have modified the ways of production of contemporary performing arts. We are thus able to perceive a change of attitude in the staging of identities in the production of verbal and bodily stage texts in the past two decades, because in this way, we can perceive an inclination in playwriting to extremely destabilize the recognizable characters (the relation between the playwright’s text and the drama text, while the metatexts, contexts and comments assume the main role, the structure of inner styles of text changes, the structure of texts is modified into non-orientable organisms that wish to become another body, etc.; for example the texts of Simona Semenič), while in performance, which has since the end of the 1970s (in Slovenia especially in the 1990s in the programme of the Kapelica Gallery) been dealing with other (marginalized society and individual) bodies and their presences, we can perceive the inclination towards a shift from the marginal bodily presences to the marginalities of (inter)bodily banalities (Via Negativa), including the very problematisation of theatrical protocols and rituals (regimes of looking at theatre and everyday) and the material conditions in which they are generated. In general, we could say that everyday became an arsenal of fiction, which is exceedingly subjected to dismantling when it comes to production of performing arts. In case of playwriting as well as performance and performative theatre, we can perceive a shift from composition to construction, from montage to dismantling, from unification to taking apart, from merging to setting against each other, from accumulation to either reduction or hyper-accumulation of elements.

The mentioned changes have very thoroughly modified the artistic as well as viewing processes. If the first began to become transparent even with the classic separation of performative events to the venue and the auditorium, the latter became unambiguously transparent in a series of participatory formats. In both cases, procedurality has revealed how the artistic as well as the spectator’s work is something uncertain, something that demands its time and the different phases and stages in it. In performing arts (above all in drama theatre and the narrative forms of contemporary dance) of the past decades, proceduralisms (a specter of different artistic procedures, the way the artwork is produced) have completed a fundamental task: interpretation as an institutionalized, dominant artistic procedure that has, so to speak, subjugated the entire technical arsenal of the modern theatre (playwrighting, acting, dramaturgy, directing techniques), has been robbed of its primacy at the account of other procedures, spread by a series of other operations (tasks, partitures, orders, principles, agreements, improvisational settings and signs, etc.). This enabled the hierarchical structures of ensembles and groups to permute into horizontal organizational forms of collectives, because language operations (creative artistic agreements) for collective negotiations, as well as divided responsibilities of artists in the production of an artwork have stepped in in place of the director, choreographer and their interpretational theatre and choreographic machines as centers of knowledge. With proceduralisms, the field of performing arts suddenly also saw a certain specific abuse: all of a sudden, their time slot has legitimized the acceleration of cultural production in public cultural institutes as well as NGOs.

If we look at the last two decades in the field of contemporary performing arts, we can establish that the notion of “contemporaneity” as a specific aesthetic paradigm, as well as “performing arts” as a specter of different genre and hybrid products of such artistic practices, have actually begun to articulate more strongly precisely in that period. One year before the establishment of Bunker, Emil Hrvatin compiled and edited *Pristotnost*,

*predstavljanje, teatralnost – Razprave iz sodobnih teorij gledališča* (Presence, Imagining, Theatricality – Discussions from Contemporary Theatre Theories) (Maska, 1996) and thus introduced Maska's collection Transformacije. Knjižnica MGL (Ljubljana City Theatre Library), then edited by Alja Predan, in 1997 published Pavis's *Theatre Dictionary*, which among other things tries to standardize the English-American term "performing arts" with the Slovene translation "scenske umetnosti". The publishing houses Maska, Knjižnica MGL and Emanat, and in the last years also the Slovenian Theatre Institute publishing department, have in the past two decades and a half printed an outstanding theoretical and historical book and periodic corpus from the field of contemporary performing arts, as well as the field of media, political theory, philosophy and, last but not least – aesthetics. Some key home monographs were published within the framework of these publishing programmes (by Bojana Kunst, Aldo Milohnić, Eda Čufer, Katja Praznik, Tomaž Toporišič, Blaž Lukan, Primož Jesenko, Nenad Jelesijević and others), some essential historiographic projects by home theatres and authors were completed (Pupilija Ferkeverk Theatre, Glej Theatre, Pekarna, Dragan Živadinov, Via Negativa, Laibach and NSK, home experimental theatres of the 1950s and 1960s, etc.), the NGOs from the field of performing arts have published a series of documentation publications. But during all this, one cannot shake the feeling that the home community of artists, producers and cultural workers producing in the field of performing arts has managed to enter into inner dialogue mostly exclusively regarding the conditions of production, but only minimally regarding artistic and aesthetic issues.

I see Bunker within the context of home cultural production and its incorporation into international space as a distinctive product of cultural and artistic optimism of the 1990s. It is one of a handful of NGOs in the field of home cultural production in this period that have asserted themselves to their contextual limits and hit against their development edge (one could say that they crashed into the "technical obstacles" of home

cultural development). Bunker managed to develop their Mladi levi festival into the only home festival brand from the field of performing arts, a brand balancing between the curatorial risks and the maintained numbers of audience. The aesthetic changes I am surveying in this article actually traverse their programmes. Among all comparable home festival programmes, these are most strongly informed with the streams of international stage production, but are, in their space and financial capacities, limited by the mentioned technical obstacles. A certain symptomatic contextual turn can be detected in Bunker's programmes: while during its beginning, Bunker was distinctively marked by its artistic showpiece, namely the ever changing art collective Betontanc (directed by Matjaž Pograjc), which united a series of culture freelancers, today, its derivative Beton Ltd. comprises a group of artists who are – as some of the former members of Betontanc – regularly employed in the home public cultural institutes, so their work in the mentioned collective is some sort of territory for occasional and collective artistic autonomy. More than to the production of artistic continuities (which also goes for the other programme-financed NGOs in Slovenia), Bunker manages to assure perpetuity to its individual programmes. One of the biggest merits of Bunker, connected to the personal traits of its Director Nevenka Koprivšek, is its feeling for its own cultural community: the community of audience, of cultural workers. This also has to do with the importance of Nevenka Koprivšek's talent for recruitment and education of production personnel which today manages Stara mestna elektrarna as a distinctively inclusive space for artistic and cultural production in Ljubljana and Slovenia, sharing this very community gene with the Director. It was perhaps precisely this that enabled Stara mestna elektrarna to become the generator of cultural identity. With the rest of the NGOs in the field of performing arts and culture, such inclusiveness cannot be perceived in their programmes and in their management of their capacities. Despite that, I would like to add – and I say that as a slightly older member of the generation that sits in the office of Bunker and in the offices of the similar institutes and associations – that the leaders of the leading NGOs in art and

culture in Slovenia (Nevenka Koprivšek, Janez Janša, Iztok Kovač, Živa Brecelj and others) nevertheless manage their organisations as the owners of means of production, and that the cultural capital which helps their offices to create their programmes will not be able to have the opportunities that have been provided to them.

From my heart,  
I wish for a successful future of Bunker!

bunken



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