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ON PUBLIC SPACE AND ARTISTIC INTERVENTIONS

Apstrakt: *Umetnici su oduvek bili fascinirani u pokušajima testiranja potencijala javnog prostora da omogući kreativnu afirmaciju. Danas se sve češće umetničke interakcije dešavaju na različitim lokacijama napolju, a umetnici se uključuju u monotoni tok našeg javnog prostora. Međutim, da li materijalna otvorenost tih mesta garantuje javnu prirodu ovih radova? Pojam javnog prostora podlegao je velikim promenama. Diskurs koji se time bavi danas je sveprisutan. S obzirom na to, kako se umetničke intervencije u javnom prostoru mogu shvatiti? I, što je još interesantnije, treba se usuditi da se postavi pitanje da li su efemerne, često nenajavljene i nepozvane umetničke intervencije napolju, u stanju da proizvedu smisao javnog prostora. Ako javni prostor označava izvesnu ideju dinamičnog prostora, gde su razlike priznate i gde im je omogućeno da uzajamno deluju, onda kratke, naizgled besmislene kreativne intervencije intenzivno doprinose tome.*

Ključne reči: *identitet, grad, umetnost, performans, javni prostor*

Key words: *identity, city, art, performance, public space*

Some artistic interventions in public space aim to bring poetics to our common space which slowly tends to become more and more monotonous. Other works are seeking provocation, either by being confrontational or more subtle. Through provocation artists are trying to raise awareness on crucial issues or to react, to protest against oppression on their view factors in their social environment. Issues of community or the “living together” are also representing a starting point in many actions performed in the public space. For some, it is simply the search for a dialogue with *the Other*, the creation of a *space for dialogue*, in the terms of the In-

ternational Situationists who were perceiving the public space as an ideal space for meeting and exchange.

When is Space Public?

At the present time, in a world guided by international economy, the role of the piazza, as main place for gathering, has been taken over by the “shopping mall” phenomenon. Kathleen Irwin points out that the construction of shopping centres has announced the death of the main street, has increased criminality and poverty in downtown areas, and largely changed the way in which we make use of the cities and think about public space.¹

The term *public* suggests meanings such as *collective, common, communal, open...*

The reality is that private and corporate forces (car traffic, outdoor advertisement) occupy a large part of the public space nowadays. Actually, the increasing invasion of advertisement in public space shows that it belongs, before anything, to the *capital*.

The discourse on *public space* is ever-present nowadays- in the our era of hypercapitalism. The art historian Rosalyne Deutsche analyses some of the ways in which this term “*public space*” is currently deployed and to what effect. According to Deutsche the term “*public space*” represents an element of a rhetoric of democracy that is in fact often used to justify less than democratic policies: “the creation of exclusionary urban spaces, state coercion and censorship, surveillance, economic privatization, the repression of differences and attacks on the rights of the most expendable members of society, on the rights of strangers and on the very idea of rights—on what Hannah Arendt called *the right to have rights*.”²

Public space is generally assumed to be an existent, pre-given factor of our society.

Critics of this presumption are expressed in the works of many intellectuals and artists.

It would be appropriate here to present the view of Oliver Marchart, who assumes that “public is nothing

¹ Kathleen Irwin, *Posledni trg/plaza: Ulični performans nasuprot gluvarenju u šoping centru*, in Dragičević-Šešić, Milena & Irena Šentevska (edited by), *Urbani spektakl*, Clio, Belgrade, 2000, p. 50.

² Rosalyne Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*, Cambridge Mass., MIT Press, 1996, p. 374.

that would be given beforehand anywhere.”³ The image of the public as space (including here media in equal terms as physical space) “which already exists and is only waiting to be conquered, is nothing but naïve fiction”, he claims. Marchart’s consideration is based on his belief that for a notion of *public space* to reach beyond a mere descriptive sense, it should leave behind the current simulacrum of the public (the *fictional* as he calls it). To reinforce the later idea of simulacrum, he takes as example the assumed public character of radio stations, which are in fact, not only restricted but are mostly inaccessible to citizens, in terms of programme creation and choice of contents. His reflection follows with examples touching the urban public space, denouncing its increasing mutation into pseudo-public, shopping-mall-like, fragmented realm, “in which political articulation is from the very start thwarted or even forbidden, and suppressed by private security services...”⁴

Marchart proposes a genealogical approach for the understanding of the public sphere. He denies limiting the notion of *public space* to its literal physical perception, and even to its understanding as an institutional sphere (such as media or traffic). Instead, he puts forward the idea of the public, only possible in moments of *antagonism*, of a public “which connects through conflict”.⁵ This argument is often more appealing, as it adheres to the idea of *event*, or better, that of *action*. In the author’s terms, the public only appears through the argumentation of the conflict, “in which various positions clash against each other and come into contact precisely by doing so. [...] the public is not the “product” of this clash; the public is the clash itself.”⁶

An antagonistic situation is an unpredictable one. Then, according to this vision, *public* cannot be easily prearranged or constructed. In fact, one cannot construct intentionally such a situation. Considering this position, how is one to imagine *public art*?

³ Oliver Marchart, *Politics and Artistic Practice: On the Aesthetics of the Public Sphere*, in *Frakcija: performing arts magazine*, n 33/34 *Save as...city.doc*, Centre for Drama Art & Academy of Drama Art, Zagreb, 2005, pp. 14–19.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Art in the Public

Despite the enthusiastic vision of the public realm as the space *par excellence* for artistic creation, as I mentioned at the beginning, one should acknowledge that *art* and *public* could be, in a way, perceived as incompatible terms. The distinctive relative autonomy of art diverges from the distinctly non-autonomous demands of the public.⁷ This is not to say that art should be perceived as a 'negative invader' of public space. The idea is that, as a barer of the *subjective* (the artist's vision) facing the *objective* (public space as a common good), art in public realm demands careful comprehension of the environment it is aiming to immerge in. Public space is not pre-given space for art. More importantly, public space should not be easily considered as an "extension" of the gallery, theatre or the museum.

What about the artistic interventions in public space? If today we are used to seeing works of art being part of our urban environment, the immaterial, *live act* of the performer is still a relatively unusual phenomenon for most citizens.⁸

Let us keep in mind that in its beginning, performance reveals an anti-art attitude by rejecting the cult of the object and the idea of art as consumption product. Performance on non-theatrical sites (from the end of 1960's) has the potential to deviate habits and practices, to perturb the usual perception (and use) of the public space. Artists "stayed away from museums on principle"⁹, as claims RoseLee Goldberg.

It is true that nowadays, many cities support festival activities (or exhibitions) based on commissioning of art works, promoting the *city identity*. These art works could also include scheduled performances in many (*relevant* or *unique*) city locations. These projects serve then the ambition of *product differentiation*, or as explains Know, "[they supply] distinction of place and uniqueness of locational identity, highly seduc-

⁷ This chapter was partially inspired by the reading of Mark Hutchinson's *Four Stages of Public Art*, accessed from: www.hints.hu/backinfo/forstagesofpublicart.pdf

⁸ Citizens of a big metropolis are more likely to witness performances and interventions by artists in public space.

⁹ RoseLee Goldberg, *One Hundred Years* in Adrian Heathfield (edited by) *Live: Art and Performance*, Routledge, New York, 2004, p. 178.

tive qualities in the promotion of towns and cities within the competitive restructuring of the global economic hierarchy.”¹⁰ City authorities may decide to carry out projects, with the aim to “strengthen community links” by organising free festivals for the entertainment of the citizens, or by commissioning programs of “impromptu” urban interventions. In France, increased institutional support and recent development of street arts (*arts de la rue*), meaning here practices ranging from street theatre to new types of circuses, resulted in a raising of *street festivals*. This phenomenon is not without critique. For instance, Mark Etc, from the Parisian art collective Ici-Meme, points out that there is a lack of risk taking in *street art* production nowadays, in France. Programmers and producers, as he explains, often have a tendency to support more *consensual* works and to limit the field of representation: many visual artists, performers and dancers, who through their peculiar practice intervene in public space, are not represented during festivals.¹¹ In fact, such festivals make possible public “venues” for artistic interventions but precisely by doing so play the same role as that of the art museums.

To mention another example, Milena Dragičević Šešić maintains that artistic festivals can participate in the attempt of rebuilding citizens’ identity in relation to their town (Belgrade, in this case). This also concerns the idea of community, or the common living (in a given city) but- in this case- deals with notions such as *memory politics* in particular. Then, the festival activity (she gives as example the BELEF festival) is perceived as the perfect opportunity for bringing together the spectrum of all “interrupted identities” of the city of Belgrade. Šešić claims: “Summer cultural programs [...] are bringing completely new experiences, artistic adventures and re-discoveries of forgotten or hidden angles and meanings of the city. [...] like the spread of visual literacy among the Belgrade population unaccustomed to look away from their usual walking or driving routes toward the neighbouring ruins or the ramparts of Kalemegdan [...]”¹²

¹⁰ Minow Kwon, op. cit, p. 54.

¹¹ Mark Etc, *Interventions Invisibles: De l’autre côté du miroir*, in Cassandre n 68, *Un espace de moins en moins public*, Paris, 2007, pp. 42–45.

¹² Milena Dragičević-Šešić, in the foreword of the BELEF catalogue, 2005.

Memory politics can refer also to politics of *remembrance and forgetting*, as develops Šešić.¹³ Public space is then often used to display performances dealing with issues surrounding collective memory, with the ultimate goal to incite dialogue within the urban, transient community of passers-by.

Naturally, different historical and cultural contexts of cities form different discourses and priorities. Let us also not forget that the aforementioned examples relate to performances, shown in a strict institutional framework. Nevertheless, there is a plenitude of artistic interventions in public space which are the outcome purely of artists' initiatives. Actions/ interventions in public space are often unannounced, unpredictable and ephemeral. How do they relate to their surroundings? How do they affect the community they are (eventually) addressing? What are their tactics or impact (if any)? These interventions appear as little disruptions in the everyday, their aim is to *intervene* in the "open arena" of the public space.

The term "intervention" is in itself negative. *Intervention* is contesting *integration*. And it presumes some sort of *violence*. Indeed, most of the examples studied here could be labelled as "challenging" or "aggressive". But they are so because they demonstrate, as the artists themselves have claimed, an opposition to oppressive powers and discourses, implemented in the society. Of course, artists go to the street in search for direct contact with the Other, member of the same society.

As points out Jan Cohen-Cruz in his writings on radical street performance: "The impulse to perform in the street reflects more the desire for popular access than its sure manifestation."¹⁴ Cohen-Cruz perceived the strength of public artistic actions in their potential to "question or re-envision ingrained social arrangement of power."¹⁵ This idea of contest of energies and powers brings us close to the Marchart's idea of *public as antagonism*. To develop even more on this vision, Marchart's definition of *public art* follows the aforesaid concept. He argues that public art does not

¹³ The following argument is based on informal sources given to the author.

¹⁴ Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Radical Street Performance: an International Anthology*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, p. 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

obtain its *publicness* that easily, because it merely abandons the semi-private space of a gallery for the “urbanistically determinable *public space*”. Marchart perceives art as being *public* only on the condition “if it takes place *in the public*, that is, in the medium of antagonism.”¹⁶ Therefore, in Marchart’s terms, it is impossible to estimate in advance which actual artistic practices will generate a public sphere.

Public space is in any case not a neutral space. It is a space of contest, a space “where different powers and energies are put in concurrence”.¹⁷ Outdoors artistic expressions often merge with political activism. When artists choose to perform in public space, they are disclosing both their artistic vision and their political view.

*Performance as Resistance: The Surveillance
Camera Players*

Surveillance cameras are nowadays ubiquitous elements of the urban landscapes in many countries. They have been introduced by governments with the concern to ensure the safety of the citizens in the urban areas.

Nevertheless, this implementation has been often criticised by citizens and activists for being far too excessive, abusive, or even ineffective. Among anti-surveillance cameras activists there is also a belief that the “cameras are not passive”, and that such surveillance is in fact masking high control mechanisms.

The Surveillance Camera Players are a group of activists striving *against the violation of the constitutionally protected right to privacy*, to use their own terms.¹⁸

They use performative tactics for their public actions. The SCP stage unexpected and ‘uninvited’ theatre plays in front of the surveillance cameras installed in

¹⁶ Oliver Marchart, op. cit, p. 19.

¹⁷ Paul Ardenne, *Un art contextuel : création artistique en milieu urbain, en situation, d’intervention, de participation*, Flammarion, Paris, 2002, p. 85.

¹⁸ It is amusing to mention that online, the Surveillance Camera Players are often mistaken for surveillance camera merchants. They have received many emails from people, willing to install such cameras. SCP members explain on their website that this ‘communication’ is in fact interesting in the sense it shows, as one may say, “how the enemy thinks”, or allows to give insight of the motivations and attitudes of people, defending the increasing instalment of surveillance cameras.

New York City. Their performances need the public space in order to reach the wider audience, and thus to have a chance to manifest their struggle. But most interestingly, the subversive use of the cameras, installed in public, is the central idea behind their guerilla actions. In the SCP public appearance, the element of *surprise* is essential. Neither the location nor the exact time of any of the SCP's performances is ever given in advance. Every performance is carried out in a different place, at a different time.¹⁹ Passers-by constitute the curious eventual audience of their actions "on spot" (in front of the cameras), performances which permit the momentary action, as for most of the SCP plays are around two minutes long.²⁰ Due to its brevity, the action must be made to be effective. They must be able to interrupt the monotony of the routine and to attract people's attention. The other type of audience represents the surveillance agents, a truly "captive" audience indeed – as they have no possibility to choose whether to stay and watch, or just to pass by. The activists/performers interfere in their obligatory task- to survey. In such situations, the feedback from the audience cannot be observed, for the only "response" the SCP get directly from this type of audience is the operation of their authority: sooner or later, the police or the security guards intervene.

The SCP's subversive use of the cameras somehow brings to mind the Situationist International's concept of *détournement*.²¹ Even though that the latter is rather referred to as a practice of altering the initial

¹⁹ The first work performed by the SCP was in fact Jarry's *Ubu Roi* and took place somewhere in Manhattan on 10 Dec 1996, exactly 100 years after the play's first public performance. As Jarry introduced placards to announce the time and location of the dramatic action, and to take the place of scenery and on-stage crowds, the SCP are using placards for the very same motives, including also for the dialogue display, as the cameras mostly do not pick up sound.

²⁰ However, the SCP members can eventually repeat a performance as long as they are not stopped, so the whole event could last 30 min. to 60 min.

²¹ *Détournement*, the reuse of pre-existing artistic elements in a new ensemble, has been a constantly present tendency of the contemporary avant-garde, both before and since the formation of the SI. The two fundamental laws of *détournement* are: "the loss of importance of each 'detourned' autonomous element- which may go so far as to completely lose its original sense- and at the same time the organisation of another meaningful ensemble that confers on each element its new scope and effect." Definition drawn from <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/3.detourn.htm>

meaning of “pre-existing aesthetic elements”, the idea of *misuse* (through performance) of surveillance apparatuses (set up by the *society of the spectacle*) reveals peculiarly close kinship to the SI attitude. “*Détournement* is a game made possible by the capacity of *devaluation*,” wrote the Situationist Jorn in his study *Detoured Painting* (May 1959). I perceive that the theatre interventions of the Surveillance Camera Players are based on this very attempt to *devalue* an oppressive mechanism.

These performance actions represent in fact a radical use of the public space. Or rather a genuine *misuse* of it. They combine an experimental practice with guerilla attitude, in order to serve an activist impulse. Are they completely helpless against the influences they are opposing? Are they simply a part of a utopian vision? They might be. Or might not- as they succeed to inspire debate and gain followers.²²

To act in response to powers that one considers oppressive is a right, and it is before anything, a strong human need. A strong human need is also expressed when people take the streets to protest against inhuman conditions and/or violence, to claim their right to live in peace, their right to give their voice in the decision of *how to live*.

The following chapter will focus on outdoor artistic interventions, provoked as a reaction to a war-situation in Serbia. Under the rule of Milošević, Serbia found itself in its most difficult political context in recent history. Still, this crisis time incited very vibrant artistic activity, as creators wanted to raise their counter voices, in an attempt to make some sense.

I will continue with the example of Dah Teatar, one of the *new voices* in theatre, who were active during this time of oppression. Dubrovka Knežević depicted Serbian society as one in which, “even from the late 1970s, political street theatre was the first and only opposition movement in the one-party system of ex-Yugoslavia.”²³

²² The Surveillance Camera Players (New York) have their enthusiasts and find many followers. The San Francisco and the Tempe (Arizona) SCP are the most known one but similar actions have been introduced by artists/activists in other countries, such as Italy, Sweden, Austria, Latvia and Turkey.

²³ Dubrovka Knežević as cited by Jan Cohen-Kruz in his introduction to Knežević’s *Marked with Red Ink* in Jan Cohen-Kruz, op. cit, p. 52.

Performers and Society in Fragile Times

Dah Teatar

The students' protests in Belgrade, during the summer of 1992 and the winter of 1996/97, were the most powerful and long-lasting manifestations of this sort in the Balkans. But even if "the number of protesters became critical and the public performances numerous, still they did not represent a real treat to the regime. They did not change the current politics or society."²⁴

However, in my view, a very important phenomenon had occurred during those long days of *struggle*. Numerous *Temporary Autonomous Zones*, to use Bey's term, developed through the protesters' actions.

Dubrovka Knežević affirms that the role of the small experimental theatre group- Dah- was significant in embodying resistance, coming from the cultural and artistic field.

She maintains that while opposition on the streets, in forms of theatricised rallies and demonstrations, was taking over the role of the theatre, "Belgrade's institutional theatres- safe behind their shields during almost three years of war- were not able to get out of a vicious circle of lethargy."²⁵ This role of resistance was undertaken by alternative theatre companies.

Dah's first performance, , was based on some of the most daring anti-war poetry and songs by Bertold Brecht. This anti-war performance, using techniques drawn from several avant-garde models, took place outdoors, in the summer of 1992, in the centre of Belgrade, at a time when it was forbidden to even mention the war.²⁶ The pressing situation pushed the

²⁴ Alexandra Jovicevic in an email correspondence with the author. It is worth mentioning that, as explains Jovicevic, the situation for the protesters/performers was not 'black and white'. According to her, Milosevic's regime tolerated and/or ignored public performances and students' protests in an awkward way. People were never censored nor persecuted, only sometimes beaten on the street. It was only after the NATO bombings, that the regime became more repressive and dangerous.

²⁵ Dubrovka Knežević, *Marked with Red Ink* in Jan Cohen-Kruz, op. cit, p. 59.

²⁶ In 1992, Serbia is not officially proclaimed being in a war but people knew they were, as their friends and relatives were going to the army...

troupe to partly abandon the play they were working on at that time and to engage in the creation of this performance instead, as an act of resistance.

Driven by the need to react the four performers, in guise of black angels with golden wings, proclaimed their anti-war statements through Brecht.

Taking to the streets was a logical answer back then. This certainly can be understood as a brave and poetic answer, among others at that time. As “to say something against Serbian war policy, to say in off a “stage”, whatever that stage might be- was at that time almost a crime, a form of disobedience typical of small civil or peace groups.”²⁷

This form of defiance is bearing witness of, is interrogating the reality. Artists’ main aspiration, while engaging in such actions, is to initiate, to provoke a dialogue with the audience, as a common reality is at stake and is in urgent need to be questioned.

The following example is that of an art action and graphic design group, also based in Belgrade, whose artistic approach is aiming for the instigation of a “critical communication”, in the sense of inciting some sort of self-criticism among both themselves and the members of the audience they reach.

Škart

Škart’s works are cross-disciplinary. They are all self-financed, *samizdat* books and objects. Škart make interventions in the social realm through their public actions, in which they distribute their products and strive to establish communication with the audience of co-citizens/ passers-by. Škart members privilege collaborations with people, coming from different backgrounds, dealing with both social and artistic subjects.

Škart members make the choice to avoid the classical system of presenting art, through the gallery system, based not on the conviction not to participate in any kind of artistic system, but simply because they feel it does not fit their way of expression, as explains Đorđe Balmazović. This decision to create a parallel circuit of production and distribution derives from the more strongly perceived need and interest to “make com-

²⁷ Knežević, op. cit.

munication with people who are not involved in art.”²⁸

I would like to evoke here a few examples of Škart’s projects which I find particularly interesting in relation to artistic interventions and public space.

The *Sadness* project (1992-93) starts as a reaction to the social and political situation at that time, in former Yugoslavia. Again, the poetry is the instrument through which is expressed the disappointment, the sorrow, and the protest. The project emerges with the publishing, the making of editions of poetry, whereby every poem has to be *sadness*.²⁹ These poems, printed on cardboards, were being distributed to people, in front of the (very empty): train stations, shopping malls, marketplaces, and other places, depending on the nature of the *sadness*. These actions were intended to function as *slight provocation*, as explains Balmazović. They were tools, necessary to make communication with the passers-by, and hopefully, to provoke thought.

Survival Coupons (1997-2000), embodies the next project of street actions. It represents the distribution of coupons at country fairs, in queues for oil and bread, on makeshift street stalls, at other people’s exhibitions, at political rallies...The artistic actions were developed with reference to the *additional survival coupons*, introduced and used during the socialist times. With the *Coupons* actions, Škart found again a poetic way to bring about a critic of the oppressing reality.

All of these Škart projects seem to fit within a concept of *gift economy*. The distribution of the art objects, which circulate among a heterogeneous mass of receivers/ spectators, is creating furtive situations. Patrice Loubier explains that this type of practices characterised by *gratuity*, indicates a certain *zeitgeist*: abandoning of the work, almost without hope of response, and are participating in the dynamics of *gift*.³⁰

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ During nine months, twenty-three issues of *Sadness* were printed: *Sadness of the potential traveller*, *Sadness of the potential costumer*, *Sadness of the potential winner*, *Sadness of the potential vegetables*, *Sadness of the potential return*, *Sadness of the potential friendship*, to just mention a few of them.

³⁰ Patrice Loubier, *Enigmes, Ofrandes, Virus: formes furtive dans quelques pratiques actuelles*, in contemporary art magazine/ revue d’art contemporain *Parachute* n 101, *The idea of community*, Montreal, February 2001, pp. 99–105.

Thus, the distributed objects in public space strive to “trigger various degrees of encounter.”

The next project, *Horkeškart* (2000-2006) was built around the idea of *community*, in the sense of *common being*. The project represents in fact (the only) self-managed choir and orchestra in Belgrade, which was formed for the presentation of the project *Your Shit, Your Responsibility* in October 2000. The main principal is the open access to everyone- regardless to talent. *Horkeškart* has so far performed (songs and music) in the most diverse places: streets, parks, botanical gardens, refugee camps, and orphanages. The settings for these performances are a crucial aspect to this project. The members operate their choice for some of the places, animated by the impulse to make visible certain realities, or as one of the members puts it “the dark side of the reality in Serbia.”³¹ With the example of the performance in refugee camps, the artists’ concern is clearly to raise awareness about the pitiful reality of those places.

With the *Horkeškart*, it should be noted that the motivation behind this project was rather based on the desire to share ideas, for collective work or for common activity. It is animated by the idea of trying to work within a collective, making some ‘art products’, among other things. The development of the idea of a *collective product* goes hand in hand with the “fight against that selfishness through the work and pleasure”, with the provocation of feeling of solidarity, and a feeling of being part of a community. The central aspect of the *Horkeškart*’s performances is the repertoire. At the very beginning, the choice stopped on songs from the 1950s and the 1960s, the period of the country’s re-building and re-constructing. This, for the very simple reason- these songs are full with enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is felt by Škart members as missing these days. And as something “we desperately need”. Another reason for this choice is the artists’ wish to highlight “some good points” from the history of Serbia, moments that they perceive as valuable and not meriting to be “erased”.³² Another part of the repertoire consists of the poems from different critical voices, including poets and musicians from

³¹ Ibid.

³² Balmazović, *ibid.*

former Yugoslavia and Europe.³³ *Horkeškart* has toured in former Yugoslavia's countries and in few other European ones (Germany, Slovakia). During the Croatian tour, in 2001, *Horkeškart* was the first group of (fifteen) people who officially crossed the border since 1991, when the war has initiated.

Škart's actions could rely on the idea of 'sharing space', of experiencing the public space as a 'space of relationship', of the experience of the other.

And as Paul Ardenne proclaims, "[...] the notion of 'shared space' seems to be the only one allowing a correct definition of what 'public space' is and where to find it."³⁴

Here, the community is perceived as an openness to the other, and not as an adherence and assimilation to some common world. This brings to mind the idea of *community* as developed by the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy. Nancy rejects the idea of *common being* as an attempt to define the notion of community, and offers the ordinary *being-in-common* or *being-with* as an alternative definition, against the widespread notion of the community as a coherent and unified social formation.³⁵

Conclusion

It would be interesting to introduce here a quotation by Adrian Heathfield, highlighting the militant potential of performative actions. As he claims: "Frequently deploying a contemplative and 'wasteful' expenditure of time, performance continues its long wrangle with the forces of capital. A recurrent tactic is to slow things down [...] meaning production not only *as* a process, but *at* a significantly slower speed. [...] Such slow moves provide an opportunity to de-habitualise and de-naturalise perceptions of time [...] Performance can thus reintroduce less hasty understandings and modes of being."³⁶

³³ Just to name a few: Dušan Radović, Vasko Popa, Mak Dizdar, Duško Trifunović, Arsen Dedić, Jarboli, Chinch, Georges Brassens, Georg Harweg.

³⁴ Paul Ardenne interviewed by Franck Senaud, June 2004, text available on: http://www.prefigurations.com/17artsurbains/html/arturbain_1ardenne.htm

³⁵ Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, *La communauté désœuvrée*, Editions Christian Bourgeois, Paris, 1983.

³⁶ Heathfield, op. cit, p. 7.

From the 1970s to the present time, artists using performative actions as their means of expression, have strived, through their work set in unconventional places and/or public spaces, to bring about answers to questions touching the complex societies they live in. Prejudices, stereotypes, created by dominant discourses, and political oppressions have become crucial sources for “*artist*” actions.³⁷

Performers, creating in the public realm are all very different, but they are all brave in their endeavours. By putting a frame on artistic gesture, they approach pressing questions surrounding us, concerning our manner of living together, with others, in the city.

In an ideal vision, notion of public space should be that of a shared space, of an *agora*, allowing to experience the city as a place of exchange, meeting, and humanity.

Nevertheless, like community, *truly public space may be ever longed for but non-existent materially*.³⁸ Only, the creation of *Temporary Autonomous Zones* allows for moments of common, ephemeral experiences.

Public space is not a passive or neutral space. In public space, the art work has no architectural distancing as provided by the theatre or the gallery. Also, by avoiding the symbolic and real barriers of the “black box” and/or the “white box” the artists performing outdoors meet in a more direct way their (potential) audience.

Contemporary public space is a space where sociality is conditioned by a prevailing individualism and any type of action is strictly regulated and surveyed. As we saw in the example of the Surveillance Camera Players, activists develop performative actions as tactics to react against an oppressive apparatus. In a society where *ignorance is strength*, raising awareness about the issues of surveillance cameras’ abusive expansion proves efficient when dominant discourse is re-questioned and also reveals its relevance, for the SCP movement has progressively gained many followers.

In the permanent contest of the public space, Ardenne perceives the importance of the ephemeral character of the outdoors artistic interventions. These events articulate a consciousness of their own

³⁷ I am borrowing this term from the editorial team of the Slovenian Performing Arts Journal *Maska*, n. 101.

³⁸ Jan Cohen-Cruz, op. cit.

contingency. They touch the heterogeneous audience, composed by passers-by, invited people and people attracted to the event by word-of-mouth. An audience, consisting of a transient community, a community of strangers, of separate individuals, sharing the common space of the common experience, of the transient *being-in-common*. Then, artists have the potential to incite temporary communities, to provoke encounters which may result in interesting articulations of the idea of *community*.

Common memory is often connecting the citizens of one same city, or country. Especially when it is linked to distressing experiences. Then, as it was shown through the examples of the Serbian artists, creative individuals are acting in a hope to rebuild values and re-create sense. Even if those “strategies of small steps” bring about only small changes, it is essential to acknowledge the importance of such small changes, in times when Utopias no longer exist.

Performance artists do not give answers, they rather raise questions. Going into the public translates the universal desire for exchange, for communication with the Other. Most of the works appearing only for a brief moment in the public realm are not advertised. Are they official? Often not. They are accidentally encountered and this is in equal parts their strength and weakness. Sometimes, such “appearances” seem *pointless*. However, the *pointlessness* of a temporary intervention that does not create anything concrete and may not cause any permanent social change also challenges the ideology of “*reason*”.

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