

Group Terms, DSC, spring 2010.

## The Festivals (in the ex-Yugoslavia region) as a "microphysics of power" (Foucault)

The festival, in its primary meaning, understands a "celebration". At the same time, represents a substitute for socialization. It is polysemic and "hides" the ideas for community, liminal/liminoid, temporality, excess, production, real time, emancipation, present-absent, transformation, transfiguration, intertextuality, local, national, regional, international, hypertext, ideology, margin, centre, power, anti-utopia, Otherness, meaning, sign, deterritorialization, transnational, transitivity, fractalization, (de)construction, relaxation, new, interpunction, network...

In this text we elaborate the word/term festival(s) i.e. we analyze its origin, development, function within a particular context (in the ex-Yugoslavia region). We are following its development, that is, its use and function in the practice of a particular environment in order to pursue its position towards the socio-political and economical conditions of the society. We would like to indicate that this word/term nowadays can also gain a different meaning if its use is given a particular direction, that is, if it is used as a format where new production models, practices, tactics and mechanisms will be contemplated and considered; models through which it could be possible to intervene in the context and to point out the needs of the contemporary art and the system in which it functions.

Our endeavour is to establish a relation to what the festival as a format of a socio-cultural event offers, and also to point out the opportunities it offers; how it can be changed or how it can develop different functions that can be applied, in that way, gaining a different meaning

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in the actual social context. Accordingly, in the centre of our attention is the research which refers to the art festivals, and focuses on Macedonia and Serbia.

We consider that the festival as a format or model can represent a naming of an artistic, cultural and social practice which has been referred to as an "excess" in relation to the dominant, actual culture.

Modern as well as post-modern art is characterized with tendencies which, at a particular moment, become dominant and satisfy the general needs of the actual culture. The festivals, on programme and organizational level as well, either as content or inner structure of functioning, contain potentiality<sup>1</sup> that gives them an opportunity to construct themselves as "digression", as constant alertness, as "excessiveness" and as critical reaction at a specific moment in relation to the dominant culture. They, in a way, can serve as a corrective of the actual socio-cultural moment and promote new directions with regard to the content and format.

The festival can be considered as a performance. Identities, models, transformations are performed, and also collectivity, community, general social atmosphere, territory and genres are performed. At the same time, consequences are bared - since the festival is a very responsible "action", in which a collective value of a particular period and more spaces are being created in a single space. The festival either resumes or ascertains particular actual streams or opens new paradigms. Therefore, the one who undertakes such a "celebration" has to take the responsibility of risks and consequences.<sup>2</sup>

We witness that more often the festival is considered as a compromised and conformistic resuming and attracting, and not as something that establishes new practices and models.

This understanding always triggers a danger to turn the festival into a centred, authoritarian, homogeneous, self-sufficient, autonomous and self-centred segment within the society. Contrary to the above

1// See register of "Publication in process" by Bojana Kunst

2// Jon Mckenzie "Perform or Else" Zagreb, 2006, CDU (he addresses the normative function of the cultural performance nowadays and therefore refers to it as a liminoid practice, not liminal).

mentioned, the festivals could also develop their other functions. They could permanently open themselves for "text fragments" from various synchronic and diachronic backgrounds, to represent indexes of the actual and historical styles, forms of expression and presentation. The festival could permanently become a part of a peculiar "game" with numerous codes within culture. The festival could be a "digression" from the norms of the contemporary society, the temporary free space where the new mechanisms, work protocols, production formats are being examined and explored; by that, its meaning will also be reformulated into a space for democracy, examination and production of innovations. Establishing more of these "excesses", "digressions" and temporary free spaces could influence the context(s) and lead to change of its content.

### General terms of the festival as a need and phenomenon

Nowadays the interest to analyze and contemplate the function of the festival format and its development into new political, economical, social and theoretical conditions increases progressively. These conditions impose an increased level of need for new models of practice, organization, and production within the frames where one can experiment, and the experiment will become functionally applicable.

The focus is directed towards the art festivals in order to analyze, synthesize and (re)define their function, diachronically and synchronically, at the present time. This "action" is perceived dialogically and polemically, since we consider that the festival, in its fundament, has a strong communicative value and necessarily understands polemics in its postulates, as well as within the context, time, space, genre and theoretical paradigms it refers to.

In this way, we can detect a key distinction that is present within the phenomenon itself - whether the festival is a format of representation that propagates and resumes the elitist culture and exclusivity (similar to the understanding of the term culture in the post-transitional "traumatized"<sup>3</sup> societies), that is, whether it is about revue

3// Milena Dragicevic Sestic, from writing: New meanings of artistic festivals „artist practices and festival ethics in traumatized society - bottom up cultural policy, from lecture in Poznan, (explains that the Balkan countries are not societies in transition anymo-



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or "parade" of art production, which mainly has a decorative role or whether we ask for the festival to be a dialectical performance, developing punctum that will communicate and will critically position itself towards the present models of art practices, promoting a new and different role within the context.

We are advocating the second perspective and our key effort is to signify that the festival, in fact, can have a role of intervening practice, and it can be even close to the parameters of activism.

### A few points

The festivals have a very long history which dates back to ancient times, and its beginning was noted in 534 BC, when the first celebrations dedicated to the God Dionysius took place in Athens. In the medieval, the festival was mainly related to religious celebrations and its purpose was to bring the community together, on a religious basis. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, for the first time, occurred festivals which made a digression from the religious concept and gained a secular dimension. They were dedicated to arts (for e.g. Comedie francaise was performed in Paris, and in 1764 the actor Garrick organized the festival in Stratford upon Avon in honour of Shakespeare's birthday). Afterwards, followed other festivals dedicated to an artist or artistic form. Those festivals where the dominant form is the national or state representation were mainly established in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> These festivals promote a model related to the practice of the person, or to representation of the national/state achievements in the field of culture (for e.g. the Theatre Festival "Vojdan Cernodrinski" in Macedonia that is supposed to be considered as national, with an accompanying tune of the national tradition in the theatre creation; The Venice Biennale, where the countries represent themselves; May Opera Evenings, etc.).

It can be concluded that the festivals, the "celebrations", the "festivities" as a very close form of human need for a symbolic resume, but "traumatized" societies instead, which build their politics in state of trauma or post-traumatic state as a result of the events from the 1990s until present)  
4// Dragan Klaić, Theatre 4000 years, chronology (Pozoriste 4000 godina, kronologija), Belgrade, 1989 and other sources

and presentation of our own needs, wishes, visions, are organized throughout the history around several points:

- ~ Presentation and celebration of the Gods in ancient Greece,
- ~ Religious celebrations in the medieval,
- ~ Presentation of a particular idea – from revolution to an artistic form,
- ~ Celebration of particular personalities,
- ~ Representation of the state and national achievements in the field of culture.

A more free interpretation of the etymology of the word festival, as well as the experience through history refers to the fact that the festivals mean a periodical celebration that occurs usually on an annual basis (usually on a fixed date) and in the frames of which a particular human activity or his particular creative achievement is being celebrated. The festivals have a public character; they are always aimed towards the audience and hide, in their basis, the immanent human need to celebrate the achievement which is considered to be valuable. They rely on a particular programme and concept.

#### The festival format – paradigm for artistic and social orientations

The festival (with cultural-artistic contents) forms and reforms itself through centuries, thus becoming one of the most used formats in which the presentation of culture and art is organized. From a perspective of the cultural policies, we can notice that through the festival are articulated and organized, both, the visible and also the subversive cultural flows and powers. Therefore, the festival by itself represents an icon of the existing and also of the upcoming orientations, and not only to the artistic, but also to the social ones. The festival as cultural, and in some discursive registers, so to say, a pop-cultural phenomenon, represents a screen through which hidden social references of power, present and absent are represented and broadcasted.

Although there are attempts to classify the festivals, it seems that there is not a relevant division that can be considered as a general valid model and a corresponding intellectual paradigm.



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Dragan Klaić states that after the Cold War there is an expansion of festivals in Europe, and their number is unknown, perhaps two or even three thousand. He also says that because of this quantity we cannot talk about a sole, unique concept or profile of the festivals today and that it can be hard to find the real parameters that can help us differentiate them.

A particular, specific example are the festivals that emerged in this region, that is, in the frames of SFRY.

In the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia the festivals were established with a purpose to attract attention and to point out that the state builds a system -socialistic- which perfectly suits the human being, or „soft socialism“<sup>5</sup>, i.e. that Yugoslavia is a country of a tolerant and friendly self-governance and does not dictate, but in contrary, enables creation of climate in which the society will be re-examined, and experiments can be done.

The following examples, Bitef, MOT, Eurokaz, MESS, Eksponato, were created to enable a "free" space without any censorship, or as Jovan Ćirilov, a founder and a programme director of Bitef says, the only thing they were not allowed to do was "not to throw dirt on the person and work of Josip Broz".<sup>6</sup>

The formation of such international festivals has a political connotation which points out that Yugoslavia is a country open towards the West, which digresses from the totalitarian regime and the communist doctrine of the Eastern block. Yugoslavia works to find its own way and these festivals are spaces where this way can be verified – the self-governance and freedom of expression, a free society where the social reality can be re-examined. It can be even said that the festivals are a paradigm of a well planned political strategy in order to communicate with/present and stress the "new look" of Yugoslavia in front of the Western world, on the other hand it can hide the other unfreedoms and weaknesses that exist within the state.

5// Bojana Cvejić, The Secret Vices and Public Skills of BITEF (Tajni poroci i javne vrline BITEF-a)  
6// Ana Vujanović, New Theater Tendencies: BITEF (Belgrade International Theater Festival)



These festival formats in their "state ordered freedom" as they are called by Ana Vujanović represent an illustrative example of the Louis Althusser's thesis, who refers to art as a "relatively autonomous practice" and calls it an "ideological state instrument".<sup>7</sup>

Some of these examples of Althusser's "ideological state instrument" have a significant role in the development of particular artistic practices, of the alternative expression and experimentation in the 1970s and 1980s in Yugoslavia.<sup>8</sup>

BITEF from its foundation in 1967 until the 1980s supports and generates the new tendencies and opens a space for a problematic thinking within art and culture which rejects the real socialism and does not accept the capitalistic consumerism.<sup>9</sup> This, in fact, is an example for that aim of the festival when considered as a phenomenon that promotes pro-activity with a need of development, intervention and criticism. In fact, this kind of "reading" of the festival is the one we should promote, upgrade and practice as a segment of the cultural policy. The festival conception that, in a way, starts from the bottom up, from the needs for an alternative contemplation of the dominant practices, is inherent to the phenomenon, in this age when there is a dissensus about what is culture (national culture, pop-culture, no culture, sub-culture, quality in culture, etc.).

Today, in the region more and more festivals are being established for a different reason, and some of them represent the bottom-up concept (for e.g. Action/Fraction, Kondenz, LocoMotion, Move!, Dispatch, Ring Ring, Perforacije, Festival Zensk...). The festivals that are created from the bottom up through a programme practice can develop a policy of varieties, decentralization (in the sense of organization and programme), solidarity, policy of memory and remembering<sup>10</sup>, can be based on self-organizing processes and by that can provoke a creation of space where the context, in which the contemporary art is created, will be critically contemplated. Some of them are created as a part of the context of neo-liberal capitalism they try to approach or simulate,

7// Ibid

8// Ibid

9// Ibid

10// Milena Dragicevic Sesic, from writing: New meanings of artistic festivals - "artist" practices and festival ethics in traumatized society - bottom up cultural policy, from lecture in Poznan.

and alike have also become some of the early socialistic festivals, for e.g. Bitef, MOT, etc.

A part of those festivals which were established in ex-Yugoslavia, even in the 1990s and post 2000 as an initiative of individuals or groups nowadays are adopted by the states and are presented as "good policy" of the power and governing structure which supports the development of the so-called creative industries (Skopje Jazz Festival, Bitef, Belev, Days of the Music Youth, etc.). Many of those as part of the creative industries have started to accept those parameters and become or strive to become profit or market oriented. By becoming a segment of that milieu, they erase or minimize the space for problem-thinking and contemplation of their own function.

In the 1990s and post 2000, in the Balkans dominates a state policy which recognizes and uses festivals as spaces where the national identity can be promoted, which at the time as well as nowadays, after the downfall of Yugoslavia, is one of the priorities of the Balkan states.

Other examples show the influence on different state policies, and they have the same aim - to minimize the space for problem-thinking, development and reflection with regard to the dominant policy. The example dating back to the Cold War period, given by Maaïke van Geijn<sup>11</sup>, talks about the policies of Western towards Eastern and Central Europe, and the relation to arts that come from the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. She states that the audience was interested in the performances coming from "behind the curtain" and by valuing them under the motto "window to the world" explains how the performances create exclusive and sensational values, and that is the case since the theatre productions are seen not only for their artistic value, but also as a reflection of the political ideals and processes, explains van Geijn.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall these performances became uninteresting for the western audience and media. All of a sudden, they were all rejected, interpreted and labelled as old-fashioned and ordinary, already seen, she says and points out how significant is the context in which the performances are given.

11// Maaïke van Geijn author, edit. Dragan Klaić, [Future Of Festival Formulae](#)

However, our question is whether the festival is a space in which the context can be problematised, rather than to be re-affirmed. Should the festival be a space where the socio-political and economical context will be re-examined and reconfigured?

¶ Van Geijn also illustrates an example for a festival(s) which cares to increase the citizen consumerism through sensational stories and politically developed mottos, thus confirming that the same (citizen consumerism) is a result of delegating and shaping the cultural policy from the top-down, policy that passivated the audience.

¶ What can be seen from this example is that in, at the time, binary divided world in western and eastern block the situation was very similar, i.e. art was a "relatively autonomous social practice" and was an "ideological state instrument" where the policy of delegating and reshaping culture from the top-down supported and built the citizen consumerism by delegating exotics, exclusivity, sensationalism, prestige. The question is why the festival as a format supports (supported) that.

¶ Today, except for the national or state policy has also emerged a policy on a supra-national level, i.e. the policy of the European Union by which new parameters for measuring the cultural development have been defined and determined.

¶ The festival as a factory for new policy – critical parameters

¶ The supra-level policy shown by the EU priorities for cultural development, which formulate the principles and conditions for work and communication, conditions the building of a system in which art, cultural and also festival programme policy is established.

¶ One of the most prevalent is that the festivals can be defined as spaces that should educate and entertain (dolce et utile...). A long time ago, this idea was mostly applied in the theatre and is an idea argued by the Roman poet – scientist Horace in his Ars Poetica,<sup>12</sup> however, today the same can be seen in the programme policy of many festivals.

12// Schechner Richard, Performance Studies, Rutledge, 2003



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¶ The festival can be seen as one of the institutions and models that produce new forms of knowledge production. The festival, in that sense, for the participants and also for the audience should offer an emancipatory concept, an idea for education (though new approaches and programmes) by which it will help to complement the cultural needs for more social groups, and will become an impetus for a social growth.

¶ This emancipatory aspect of the festival can be offered through educational formats that the festival will establish within its content, above all, through transformation of the central component or through the concept of self-discipline, i.e. the concept of life-long learning, which belongs to the university circles, however, it is widely spread nowadays. As stated by Gerald Raunig this concept is not emancipatory anymore, in contrary, the idea becomes a life-long (self-) obligation, as an imperative and a life-long prison of continuous education. Hence, the festival transforms itself into a factory of knowledge<sup>13</sup>, which in fact is a part of the milieu of forms of social dominance, or subordination, in this case, of the audience as well as of the participants. The transformation of this component in space where the context will be contemplated and problematised, where new models and mooles of production will be experimented and explored, where potentiality will be examined, using the transversality, which is contained within the festival as a format and which offers a permanent relation of elements exchange<sup>14</sup>, is one of the possible functions that can reform the festival into space for intervention.

¶ Another priority of the EU policy which reflects in the festival practice is the "networking". On one hand, the "networking" upgrades the "mutual", on the other, stresses the transience of that association as well as its own. New communities are formed, whose function is transient and single, although the basic fundament is a formation of new social networks.

13// Gerald Raunig, In Modulation Mode: Factories of Knowledge, Translated by Aileen Derieg, excerpt from: [eipcp.net](http://eipcp.net)

14// Gerald Raunig, Art and Revolution. Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century, translated by Aileen Derieg, Semiotext(e)/ MIT Press 2007



However, today, the "mutual" has a different meaning that changes, and the one that connects is being created on different parameters, i.e. on those of the neo-liberal market discourse. According those parameters, for numerous festivals, is created a programme policy which satisfies wider needs, the needs of the majority, rather than the needs of the multitude.

By creating short-termness and transience, the opportunity to take part in the creation of the national cultural scene or of the one they temporary perform, is taken away from the participants. The short-termness creates an ambient in which there is not enough time to reflect on their own context or to reflect on the foreign contexts and cultural policies of the countries where they perform as guests.<sup>15</sup>

The audience is not an equal participant in the new "communities" and associations in the social, festival networks. Thus, in that dominant shaping of the festival, the communication with the audience becomes secondary, and the networking of the "active participants" primary. The aim is to promote priorities, the EU principles, i.e. mobility, creativity, cooperation, networking, exchange of experiences and similar (seasonal) "key words" whose meaning has become more and more empty; principles that point out the European policy which supports the free flow of "products", that is, gives a priority to the principles of the neo-liberal market. The orientation to build a system within the festivals which enables connecting, association and creation of transient communities of "active participants" minimizes the need for discovering new methods of communication with the audience which itself becomes more and more a "passive participant".

Contrary to this, the festivals should develop models of communication with the audience which will enable the audience to become a more active participant. The festival should use its timely framework, its "temporality" and to point out its openness and excessiveness, through which it will establish new unity based on new practices that will reshape the local context. It should contemplate ways, formats and

15// Ana Vujanovic, writing: Politicality of Contemporary Performing Arts - Aspects and (that can be) Tactics: Subjects, Media, and Procedures of Work (prepared for the eponymous workshop in Weld, Stockholm 2009 and a segment of the workshop Strata-games by Bad.co, Steirischerherbst, Graz 2009)



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new contents that will minimize the distance between the creators and the audience, that is, not to take the distance into consideration, as by the act of recognition emerges a larger gap which should be bridged.<sup>16</sup>

On one hand, the exchange of experiences, networking, mobility are opportunities for the very xenophobic contexts to be gradually transformed through short-term experiences with the "others"; and on the other hand, that mobility determines the short-termness and marks the shallowness of the system by taking away space and time which disables deeper contemplation, re-examination, that is, disables the opening of a new space for problem-critical-thinking.

This dominant top-down festival policy can lead to a creation of a specific type of individuals (above all, programme editors and artists who go from one festival to another hoping that they will establish contact with some of the "programmers") whose life turns into a festival itself, as Rok Vevar calls it in one of his lecture-performances. Through self-ironization, he makes a specific profile of cultural workers pointing out on that what they have turned into as the time passes by. He states a couple of characteristics adopted by the festival systems and ironically explains: Performing a professional, Selfpromotion, Performing smartness, Competition about references, etc.<sup>17</sup>

The festivals create temporality, transience and they can be even called heterotopias<sup>18</sup>. In the fourth principle Foucault explains: "Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time - which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time". Additionally, he explains that there are different heterotopias "there are those linked, on the contrary, to time in its most flowing, transitory, precarious aspect, to time in the mode of the festival. These hetero-

16// Jacques Ranciere, The Emancipated Spectator, La Fabrique, 2008

17// See text R. Vevar in „Publication in process“

18// real places - places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted in Michel Foucault. Of Other Spaces - Heterotopias (1967).



topias are not oriented toward the eternal; they are rather absolutely temporal [chroniques].”<sup>19</sup>

¶ Hereupon we can continually link to the question of what exactly means the overflow and development of festivals after the World War II up to present, that is, whether it represents a construction of factories for creation of new policies which result in temporality, transience, shallowness, numbers, and system of distribution of money, profit, parameters of work which are propagated by the neo-liberal market, or the festivals emerge as a result of the need to use the temporality, the space out of time, to create a continuous excess that considering the context in which the festival takes place, will create a space that will not only reflect, but rather will change it from the inside out.

¶ This text addresses questions, opens and points out the conditions, affirms a particular need for reforming the festival practices and formats and does not tend to give an answer to the opened questions. By this text we would like to stimulate the contemplation of how the mechanisms and policies can be redirected in turning the free spaces into spaces for “action” – efficiency, contemplation, correction. We would like to stress that the festival as a format contains in itself an intervening potential which should be much more examined and implemented. By this text we affirm the perspective that can give a different meaning to the term festival(s).

¶ (As an annex to this text – we enclose a draft-proposal for classification, contemplation and reading of the functions and conditions in which particular festivals exist and are being realized).

\* The essay “The Festivals (in the ex-Yugoslavia region) as a “microphysics of power” was conceived in the process of collective writing by the members of the working group Terms, as part of the project Deschooling Classroom (o^o): (in alphabetical order): Ivana Vaseva, Elena Veljanovska and Biljana Tanurovska Kjulavkovski with assistance from Bojana Cvejić, Iskra Gešoska and Ana Vujanović. Skopje/Belgrade, spring/summer 2010

19// the use of heterotopia is in another context, however, it is an inspiration to read Foucault’s text that opened and explained some of the relations we have been elaborating



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