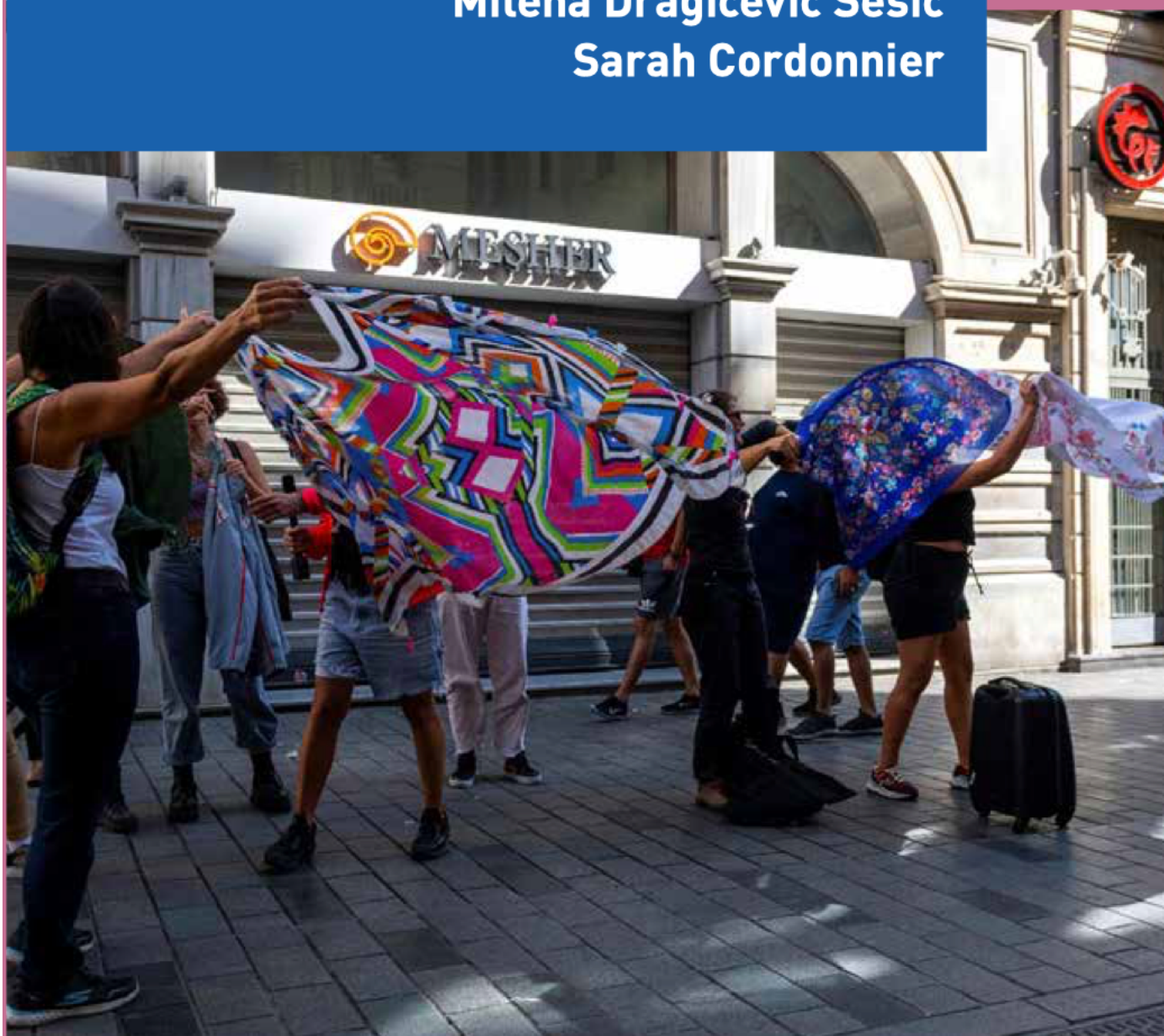


# SUBALTERN KNOWLEDGE IN CULTURAL PRACTICES

edited by  
Milena Dragičević Šešić  
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SUBALTERN KNOWLEDGE IN CULTURAL PRACTICES:  
FOSTERING FAIRNESS, COOPERATION AND CARE

Erasmus + Strategic project: SHAKIN' – Sharing Subaltern Knowledge  
Through International Cultural Collaborations (2020-2024)

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**Milena Dragičević Šešić**  
**Sarah Cordonnier**

**UNIVERSITY OF ARTS IN BELGRADE**

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# INTRODUCTION

MILENA DRAGIĆEVIĆ ŠEŠIĆ AND SARAH CORDONNIER

The conference “In from the margins – Sharing footnotes of subaltern knowledge and practices” was the final event of our project *Sharing subaltern knowledge through international cultural cooperation (SHAKIN’)* initiated in 2020 by the three universities – Lyon 2 (France), University of Arts in Belgrade (Serbia), and Bauhaus-University Weimar (Germany) – and three civil society organizations – Stockholm Museum of Women’s History (Sweden), Le LABA (France), and the Association Independent Cultural Scene of Serbia in Belgrade – with the support of the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships programme.<sup>1</sup>

The framework and the content of this conference, and then the present book, partly resulted from the work that we have been doing for some years now. And they were also an important step towards further implementation of the support systems for students, young professionals, and everyone else aiming at sustaining subaltern knowledge through cultural projects.

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1 The part of the conference name “In from the Margins” not only that reflected well the values of our SHAKIN’ project, but deliberately wanted to reference the famous project and the book developed in nineties by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe 1997), that quickly went to oblivion replaced by different, more ‘economic’ visions of cultural development (through creative industries and creative cities), visions that excluded neglected societal and cultural margins.

## **At the beginning: SHAKIN' members shared concerns for young professionals and inclusive cultural environments**

The SHAKIN' team began to work already in 2019, having a collective need to address issues of exclusion, depoliticization, and relevance in international cultural collaborations, and find ways to equip students and (young) professionals for dealing with those issues.

Cultural management, cultural policy, artistic research, and academic and artistic fields in general are transforming under the huge impact of market and consumerism logic, raising populism, globalization processes, ecological crisis, and digital technologies (Bonaccorsi, Cordonnier & Jutant, 2019; Brini & Vergès, 2021; Tomka & Kisić 2022). All those processes directly affect our work environments which are expected to be more and more specialized, competitive, standardized, controlled – more and more professional in a narrow and instrumental sense (Dragičević Šešić & Jestrović 2017).

We observed everywhere an increase of exhaustion and burnout, vocation crises, desire to go outside the institutional contexts, especially for young professionals. We also noted a reinforcement of inherited hierarchies and conservative forms of legitimacy within the traditional cultural sector. On the geopolitical level, huge disparities are appearing between the Global North and the Global South, including numerous semi-peripheries of the world. And finally, this situation comes from and reinforces the invisibility of excluded, marginalized, and oppressed voices, while on the other side academic knowledge is frequently disqualified today.

In our post-pandemic contexts, those issues are even more important. The meaning of our activities in the fields of arts and culture (including the academy) often gets lost in the way, as well as their living, political, and social relevance. Thus, the SHAKIN' project looked for ways to make room for invisible, marginalized stories and knowledge in academic spaces, heritage spaces, public spaces, archives or performance venues – where standardization and specialization lead to artificial separations, misunderstandings, and incapacity of hearing each other.

## **Localities. The UNESCO Chair in Cultural Policy and Management (Belgrade)**

All three university partners, within SHAKIN' but also through separate action research projects, tried to find adequate responses to the need of contemporary higher educational institutions to introduce subaltern knowledge in their curricula, but also to sensibilise students with values and abilities of different communities on local and on the global level. During the SHAKIN' cooperation, we always have been well aware of what united us, but also of our differences, depending on local contexts, complex histories, etc.

In this regard, the case of the hosts of our final conference, UNESCO Chair in Interculturalism, Art Management and Mediation (University of Arts in Belgrade) and the Association Independent Cultural Scene of Serbia, is quite unique. Both partners are contributing from their specific positions to the debate that is challenging the present North-South cultural relations, wanting to endorse fairness in international cultural cooperation, politics of solidarity and care, empathy, and epistemological turn in the diversity of remembrances of the world (Dragičević Šešić 2023).

As academic teaching and research mostly were created as a Eurocentric and developed as Anglo-American (especially after WWII) in their approach (thus enabling “competitiveness” on the global level and possibility to be accredited as a high-level quality institution), professors and researchers today are facing a challenge – how to change curricula and still be accepted by accreditation bodies that designed “universal” (meaning Western) criteria and methods of evaluation? If academic programme refuses to be formulated according to the present norms of the discipline (that might enable opening to the marginal and subaltern but in minor, additional dimension of the programme), it does not have much chance to be approved by university bodies and even less by national accreditation offices that have to follow the set of criteria that are universally designed for very different academic disciplines.

Thus, academia sometimes must use external project funding to go beyond approved curricula, to internationalise its horizons and perspectives (Mandel 2017) and, on the other side, to enable students to go

beyond cultural ecosystems in their countries that exclude numerous social groups (Dragičević Šešić 2024).

The UNESCO Chair of Interculturalism, Art Management and Mediation of the University of Arts in Belgrade and the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, participates and leads several research projects, supported both by the EU and national research funds, were used with this purpose to turn toward peripheral, marginal and excluded knowledge, to open space for co-creation and experiments. In the recent years, beside SHAKIN', those research projects are: ARTIS – Art and Research on Transformations of Individuals and Societies (Horizon 2020 - 2020-2025), Stronger Peripheries – Southern Coalition 2020-2024 (Creative Europe project) as well as with EPICA – Empowering Participation in Culture and Architecture: Activating Public Resources For and With Community (Ideas Programme of the Fund for Science of the Republic of Serbia)<sup>2</sup>, etc. Here we quote only ongoing research projects that are finishing at the end of 2024.

Through these projects, we are trying to engage students from all three levels of studies in research and knowledge/art production processes with and for communities. All projects usually start within existing curricula (linked to one specific subject and professor who is 'mentoring') but, during their realisation, they enabled substantial curricula changes that first were approved within the rule of a possible 10% change of curricula regarding the accrediting format, while for the next accreditation period the confirmation of changes would be formally asked. All these projects are based on participative field research, and students are asked not to be just respondents, interviewers, interviewees, and ethnographic observers, but also to propose, conceptualise,

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2 Quoting only projects developed and realised after 2020, while numerous others had been created with different partners inside and outside country with the same purpose, such as 'We and the Others' part of the wider project 'Migration Balkan Route and its Transit Societies: Serbia' developed by the University of East London, Belgrade UNESCO Chair, and The Group 484. Results of the project were published in 2019 in the journal *Interkulturalnost* (number 18). The diversity of topics and approaches depended not only on our partners, but also on the student generation as each individual student could, in accordance with his educational background and personal interests, and in a dialogue with relevant subaltern social group, develop subproject that was not even foreseen in the project submitted to donors by the researchers.

design and implement, together with communities, action projects and artistic interventions.

Important outcomes of those projects have related to continuous professional development in the field of culture. Usually, academic world, when designing such programmes, offers 'exclusive', elite knowledge, mostly produced in world's cultural centres, such as London, Paris, or New York. Foreign cultural institutes and powerful universities of the Global North are offering their latest achievements to the less fortunate colleagues, although the state of the art in some of the countries and their cultural systems cannot support application of such technologies. Aware of this, the Museums and Artificial Intelligence Network (est. in 2019, members are museums and academic institutions of USA and UK), according to the words of its member Oonagh Murphy, in accordance with its 'politics of decolonisation'<sup>3</sup> will offer their know-how (only) to Madrid and Rome contemporary art museums (tools to be translated into Spanish and Italian).

These projects enabled us to include in the curriculum the knowledge of and about local heritage, local artistic creative expressions, and indigenous knowledge and skills of subaltern groups (suburban communities, rural communities, Roma communities, women activist groups, so-called "naive" cultural expressions never studied before at art universities, such as "kuvarice/ kitchen-art" produced by the collective Unpractical Women, etc.). Rebellious artistic actions and culture of dissent became not only major objects of study, but objects of shared practices (in EPICA, several artistic groups, such as Škart, are part of action research).

Thus, culture and arts education interventions became culturally sensitive, going to suburbia (Almaš neighbourhood in Novi Sad), rural communities (Topli do of Stara Planina), but also are becoming more cosmopolitan and turned toward other continents and their achievements.

In this setting, indigenous and subaltern knowledge must become a part of artistic curricula. It is our responsibility to research and introduce subaltern and decolonised knowledge to our students (Gaio et al.

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3 Statement in her expose at the ENCATC congress, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 2023 in Helsinki shows lack of awareness of the real meaning of the word decolonisation and responsibilities of sharing knowledge on wider platforms.

2023), but also to arts and culture professionals and non-professional activists, to raise capacities of both the cultural sector and whole communities, to make them culturally sensitive to minority expressions and to offer art education as a platform where subaltern voices might be expressed and heard.

The TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training), especially vocational education and training in the arts and culture fields, should not only refer to gaining skills for creative industries (that is the present focus, stimulated also by UNESCO Convention 2005, and the Faculty of Dramatic Arts together with the Ministry of Culture of Serbia that is financing what is contributing to it by the programme: *Developing skills for digitalising movable heritage in culture*), but to play a role in creating more skills necessary for safeguarding and promoting intangible cultural heritage. Here, one of the key issues is: how to make intangible cultural heritage become a resource for TVET programmes? The possible example is the collaboration of the University of Arts (Belgrade) with local municipalities during its summer schools that happen in another city every year, to identify local intangible heritage and help local cultural professionals to safeguard and promote on one side, but on the other to enable students of the University of Arts to learn from it, and professors of the University of Arts to gain knowledge and use these examples in future TVET programmes that they lead.

## **The deployment of SHAKIN' project**

Although the needs of the future world of work cannot be easily foreseen, we think that artists and cultural operators, as well as other professions necessary for the work in the cultural sector, if educated in a balanced way, taking into account cosmopolitan global, but also local knowledge, learned to value acclaimed artistic expressions together with community arts practices, will be ready to develop their abilities and skills accordingly to the need (not always explicitly expressed) of the future job market. It will enable participation in policy-making as well as in culture to be used as “main tool for innovation in collective practices and for individual emancipation” (Dupin-Meynard & Négrier 2020)

The activities led within the UNESCO Chair show how research, integrated with art education, might play a role in reinforcing not only the future resilience of the cultural sector but also enhancing its innovation capacities built upon local artistic traditions, indigenous knowledge and skills, empowering local communities to be more self-confident on their achievements and values.

While having similar concerns, each university of SHAKIN', and also the other partners, are confronting with the same (kind of) issues, in their own ways. Within the project, one of the challenges, and strength, of our cooperation can be summarized in one question, which has been both a practical one, and the object of our productions: How can we work together from diverse positions?

Thanks to our specific SHAKIN' collaboration, we were in a unique position to gather intellectual, pedagogical, artistic and logistical resources. Our main issues concern professionalisation, learning, and research: they are often dealt with separately and, most of the time superficially, due to lack of time, expertise, and/or resources. On the contrary, we were able to tackle them together, with a constant attention towards: professionalisation of students in the Humanities and social sciences fields; reflexive exploration of didactic skills and innovations in teaching; social and political power of knowledge. Practically, those different layers are not to be separated; but analytically, we formulated our three objectives, and their articulations.

First, connecting academic and subaltern knowledges through sharing research methodologies in innovative forms of thinking, learning and teaching. We advocated for the constant imbrication of academic, artistic and subaltern knowledge, for the activation of critical theories in professional environments and the implementation of subaltern knowledge within academia. We also impacted our own existing curricula and developed training models for other institutions.

Second, professionalising (post-graduate) students with new forms of cultural consciousness, nurtured by theoretical tools and endorsed by practical skills. We empowered all the participants and participating organisations by giving them action research skills and by supporting innovative ways of working with others, based on the idea of collective creativity.



And third, supporting international cooperation through projects including subaltern perspectives. Culture professionals are growingly required to “go international”, at the risk of exoticism, depoliticization, standardization. We conversely promoted meaningful international projects that rely on mutual understanding, situatedness, specific expertise.

Once we agreed on the values and practices that we shared and wanted to promote in our environments and beyond, we put them in motion through various, heterogeneous operations: inquiries, testing phases, work with students, mentoring, workshops... Then, we gathered outputs in four complementary directions.

1. From the very beginning of the SHAKIN' project in September 2020 onwards, the research on theories, methodologies and past or current examples of other projects oriented towards subaltern knowledge was central not only for building up material for our projected online handbook but also to establish within the project team a common ground of knowledge and exploration where all partners could and did contribute to as well as they learned from each other. It resulted in WHO KNOWS, an in-process digital handbook aiming to disseminate subaltern methodologies<sup>4</sup>. The collected entries are structured through keywords and five “paths”: (Un)framing knowledge, Inquiring, Cooperating with(in) arts and culture, Learning / Education from below, Remembering. The main aim of the handbook is to add and maintain more visibility to all sorts of subaltern knowledge and methodologies and especially to the initiatives and persons dedicated to preserve, enrich, develop, create and transmit this knowledge.

2. Seemingly, we shared thoughts and practices about our teaching methods, and soon also collected inspirations wherever we could find them. We gathered them in SHAKIN' THE CLASSROOM, a toolbox aiming to innovate the learning and teaching practice<sup>5</sup>. The goal of this toolkit is to support teachers and learners in the field of culture and media who are looking for ways to decolonize and diversify their

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4 Krivanec Eva et al. (2022), *Who Knows. Online in-process Handbook on Subaltern Knowledge*, <https://shakinproject.eu/index.php/who-knows/>

5 Kisić Višnja, Tomka Goran et al. (2023), *Shakin' the Classroom Toolbox*, <https://shakinproject.eu/index.php/shakin-the-classroom/>

knowledge sharing processes. We found that very important because, following our general experiences, as well as a reflection process within SHAKIN', we see that our classrooms are disbalanced in terms of resting upon intellectual, cerebral, sedentary and visual learning styles and upon Euro-centric theories of knowledge and culture. In that respect, Toolbox delivers hands-on tools for experimenting with different ways of knowledge sharing (the collected methods are sorted in nine ways of sharing knowledge: ludic, collective, poetic, processual, contextual, communing, experience-based, corporeal, othering) and serves as an invitation to exploring them further.

3. Professional environments in culture fields can still be very hierarchical and conservative and are becoming more and more competitive and homogeneous. In this context, the partners agreed that students are not well enough prepared to face the transition towards professional life. On the other hand, it is urgent to develop initiatives that are more sensitive to ethical cooperation, to excluded or marginalized voices, within the professional cultural fields. Thus, we elaborated WORK ON THE WILD SIDE, a platform that supports (young) professionals engaged in international projects with subaltern perspectives<sup>6</sup>. This platform results from this diagnosis: to confront professionalization in a narrow sense and loss of meaning in the cultural field, there is a need for new forms of politicization of the cultural activities and practices. Translated toward the needs for (young) professionals, we identified four primary needs, which are at the core of the platform: *confidence* in one's own knowledge and skills, that are connected to professional and personal trajectories; and the same confidence, and thus respect, for knowledge and skills of others. *Fragility*: it should be accepted and claimed, to be able to adapt and adjust (not as an individual in a neoliberal situation – rather by being with others, in specific situations, in a reciprocal attention and mutual care). *Networking*: it sometimes experienced as an inauthentic, almost hypocritical practice in the sector; there is room for alternative networking practices based on listening, the openness of professional communities and a desire and curiosity for what we

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6 Jutant Camille et al. (2023), *Work on the Wild Side Support System*, <https://shakin-project.eu/index.php/work-on-the-wild-side/> See also the chapter "Work on the wild side! (Re)politicizing cultural careers, supporting subaltern knowledge in cultural projects" in the present book.

don't know or haven't experienced. *Solidarity*: more fraternity and sorority, help and cooperation, rather than competition. It resulted in a set of resources, a mentoring guide, and the frame for an international mentoring program.

4. To raise awareness and empowerment through cooperation, we finally imagined UNLEARN & RELEARN, an extra-curricular seminar bringing subaltern knowledge and cross-disciplinary themes absent from mainstream cultural management programmes<sup>7</sup>. The curriculum offers not only a possible frame for multi-topic seminar, but also guidelines for a meaningful implementation in various contexts. Relying on the previous SKAKIN' productions, it aims to provide paths, expertise, and teaching materials that promote progressive, non-hierarchical, inclusive, and creative approaches to international cultural cooperation.

As part of "Work on the Wild Side!", we designed an exercise of cultural cooperation, in which students from the three participating universities worked together in international groups. From October to March, they developed an artistic and/or cultural projects. Within two editions (2021-2022 & 2022-2023) 13 projects were created<sup>8</sup>.

The goal of these collective international projects was to learn from others, open up to different forms of knowledge and experiment with research and production methods. The final form of the projects was very open: some chose to make an exhibition, other had a workshop, a walk, a game or a website... But they all had to be based on an investigation of one kind or another (gathering and analysing data, artefacts, narratives, contents, photos, etc.). And beyond the heterogeneity of the groups, their topics, and their working methods, all the projects should be guided by four principles: Being *experimental* – there was no "right or wrong" way to organize, research, produce, connect and no expectations or judgment on the topics. Projects were meant to be a space to engage with new ways of finding, evaluating and shaping information. Being *reflexive* – a way to understand how knowledge is produced and

7 Mihaljinac Nina et al. (2023), *Unlearn & Relearn Training Curriculum*, <https://shakinproject.eu/index.php/unlearn-relearn/>

8 Dive into the students' projects!: <https://shakinproject.eu/index.php/work-on-the-wild-side/implementing-cooperation-projects/dive-into-students-projects/>; see also the chapter "Perreo periferia: a feminist exploration of reggaeton" in the present book.

which dominant structures, dominant ways of seeing the world infuse the chosen topics. How can different narratives be interpreted and made visible? Reflection on the way of working or developing a project can be as important as the outcome. Being *socially engaged* – a way to develop critical analysis. Projects were about reflecting on how social issues can be addressed through cultural and artistic approaches. Being *collaborative* – the collective work was self-organized, but based on awareness of different context and backgrounds and tolerance about different values/thinking/views.

This exercise helped us activate, test and improve all the SHAKIN' productions mentioned just above. It was an opportunity to share references and context from different countries and perspectives and to search for ecological/ethical ways of working together at distance. It has been quite challenging for students, and for their mentors as well, which was necessary in order to avoid being too confident. Indeed, our SHAKIN' project, and its productions, are not without ambiguity: the risks of being predatory, of committing cultural appropriation, of being irrelevant, are very real. We identified those risks and tried to avoid them. During all the project, we worked for and with the students of our three Master's degrees in Lyon, Weimar and Belgrade, and we took their feedbacks into account, in order for our productions to be the more relevant possible for their (future) beneficiaries. Besides, we were especially cautious to always consider our "positionality" (Spivak, 1988). In this regard, the final conference of the project is a way to extend the vigilance, while presenting our results, *and* pursuing our work.

## **The conference and the book**

The six project partners of SHAKIN' were chosen on the base of a previous relation with at least one of the other partners (and at most with four of them): our previous relationships were a good basis to create new relationships within the consortium, to work together, and to trust the reliability of all the partners. Some would consider that this interpersonal basis is questionable; that it goes against the quality of the work (in the academic environment for instance, "objectivity" is often

put as a mere synonym to anonymity, “double blindness”, etc.). On the contrary, we think that our previous (and yet partial) mutual acquaintance is a strength, and even a requirement for our work: connecting and promoting diverse forms of knowledge (situated, embodied, professional, academic...), as we did, comes unavoidably with personal and professional fragility, doubts, need for attention and care. In fact, it would have been an epistemological mistake not to proceed in this manner.

We wanted the final conference, and the present book, to reflect SHAKIN’ collective effort and standpoint.

On the one hand, we respected all the steps that would guarantee the quality of the contributions and the event (call for proposal, assessment by a scientific committee, etc.). But on the other hand, we also subverted, or at least challenged, some principles of the scientific field that became counterproductive commonplaces: “neutrality”, scientific autonomy, etc. We largely spread the call, but we also specifically promoted it in direction of people that we wanted to invite. We kept scientific expectations, but also made room for artists, teachers, students, etc.

This way, the contributions came from worldwide artists, researchers, teachers and others. Positions, formats, expertise, and purposes were heterogeneous but / therefore deeply connected, and able to nurture each other. All together, we experimented from the margins – towards meaningful ways of sharing knowledge to challenge dominant discourses. It was joyful, important, challenging, and inspiring<sup>9</sup>.

In the same way as during the project, the conference allowed us to work with allies, and gave the opportunity for future allies to meet. It was all about building links, relations, associations (between places, scales, issues...), while making oneself aware of the position, ideas, practices of others.

The present book gathered twenty beautiful texts which reflects those flows: they are deeply heterogeneous in their topics and perspectives, but all contribute to enlighten the various intertwined aspects of our collective concerns. We gathered them in four chapters, which organize and showcase the diversity we are advocating for: “Othering global flows – people, objects, practices & knowledge in from the

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9 *In from the margins*, International conference, University of Arts in Belgrade – 26-28th of June 2023: <https://shakinproject.eu/index.php/in-from-the-margins/>

margins”; “Implementing, inhabiting & criticizing cultural policies”; “Within institutions: making room & working (with) subaltern”; “Sharing knowledge & shaking ‘the classroom’: One project at a time”; “Beyond Western rationality: Altering & widening Knowledge”. And finally, as an envoi, a “Non-conclusion. Being together, atmospheres.”

We hope that the reader will find as much pleasure in discovering these pieces as we did when we had the honour of hosting their authors in Belgrade and, then, when we composed the book.

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# I

**Othering global flows –  
people, objects, practices  
& knowledge in from the  
margins**





# “TAKING OTHERS SERIOUSLY”: THE ONTOLOGICAL TURN AND THE KNOWLEDGE FROM THE MARGINAL MARGINS

MARINA SIMIĆ

This paper deals with one of the latest “turns” in the social sciences and humanities that are usually labelled “ontological.”<sup>1</sup> The origins of the ontological turn presented in this paper can be tracked via contemporary anthropological research looking at the question of alterity that cannot be understood through the usual representational analytical approaches. The previous “turns” in the humanities, like the Reflexive Turn (Geertz 1988, Ruby 1982) and the Writing Culture Movement (Clifford and Marcus 1986, Marcus and Fisher 1986) dealt with the epistemological problem of “knowing and representing the other,” while the ontological turn transforms the epistemological question into an ontological one. It becomes a question of not how *we*<sup>2</sup> see the others,

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2 “We” are those who belong to European metaphysical tradition of modernity that is based on “naturalist ontology” (Descola 2013) of separation between nature

but what the world of the others looks like. Instead of treating others as a source of various world views that should be analyzed through the usual theoretical concepts that we provided (including those of ideology and culture), the authors of the ontological turn treat the ideas of others in the same way we treat our concepts. Starting from the marginal margins of European knowledge that were left out of cultural theory (like the culture and art of the Amazonian and Siberian native groups), it offers a radical platform for studying culture and politics, as well as for re-examining analytical apparatuses, including those of culture itself.

## The ontological turn

The roots of the ontological turn can be found in Latour's (1993) research of modernity, Actor Network Theory (Latour 2005), Deleuze's and Guattari's philosophy (especially Deleuze and Guattari 2005), and various other post-humanist approaches including object-oriented ontology (Bogost 2012, Harman 2018a) and speculative realism (Harman 2018b, Meillassoux 2011). Object-oriented ontology is a contemporary post-Kantian approach (as well as a theory of arts) that discards the idea of the privileged human subject and is often related to the work of Graham Harman. Different authors who forge this approach share dissatisfaction with what they perceive as a strictly epistemic model pivotal to the philosophy after Kant, which is characterized by the abandonment of the ontological questions about what there is. These non-Cartesian approaches refuse "correlationist *cogito*" built on "species solipsism," or a "solipsism of the community" based on the idea that it is impossible to think "any reality that would be anterior or posterior to the community of thinking beings" (Meillassoux 2011: 50). For a speculative realist, the aim is to formulate "conceptual frameworks that articulate true ontologies" (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017: 36), while I suggest introducing theoretical assumptions allowing for the new possibilities of conceptualizing reality based on radical approaches to alterity. The ontological turn aims

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and culture, world and its representation that "that made the human species the biological analogue of the anthropological West" (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 44).

at the provincialization of the forms of power within the modernist project by offering an alternative understanding of them. In that sense, the ontological turn proposed in this article is an attempt to devise theories of culture that seriously face the otherness it cannot assimilate within the commonly used conceptual apparatus. This is because this apparatus has typically consisted of a deconstructivist critique and discursive analysis that prevents understanding the worlds of the “others” without that conceptual apparatus (for example, ideology, culture, etc.). Aiming to provincialize European ideas of cultural theory, the ontological turn offers an alternative understanding of the others that enables the reconceptualization of the typical modernist analytical vocabulary and opens up the avenue of radical decolonization of cultural theory.

### **Perspectivism and multinaturalism**

The ontological turn originates from the work of the “new Amazonianists” Tania Stolze Lima, Aparecida Vilaça and Viveiros de Castro, whose work predates speculative realism: the first article by Brazilian anthropologist Viveiros De Castro about perspectivism was published in 1998 (Viveiros de Castro 1998), and Tania Stolze Lima’s paper in 1999 (Lima 1999). Viveiros de Castro, who is usually credited for the term (South American, cosmic, ontological), is also the best and most famous theorist in that realm.<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, his analysis emerges from the ethnography of the Amazonian native groups, and on the other, from the dialog about the nature of animism he had with the French anthropologist Philippe Descola also specializing in Amazonian native peoples. Following Deleuzian “lines of flight”<sup>4</sup> that are supposed to en-

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3 Different variations of perspectivism has also been documented outside of Amazonia in various ethnographic studies across the world (for an overview see Viveiros de Castro 2012).

4 *Lines of flight* is term by Deleuze and Guattari developed in *Thousand Plateaus* to denote “a path of mutation precipitated through the actualisation of connections among bodies that were previously only implicit (or ‘virtual’) that releases new powers in the capacities of those bodies to act and respond” (Lorraine 2010: 147). Their work is deliberately constructed to “foster lines of flight in thinking – thought movements that would creatively evolve in connection with the lines of flight of other thought- movements, producing new ways of thinking rather than

sure stepping out of the “infernal distinction” (Viveiros de Castro 2014), or “infernal alternatives” (Pignarre and Stengers 2011), South American native animism requires a turn in the common analytical coordinates of Western ontological naturalism<sup>5</sup> from not only its key binary oppositions such as that between the social/cultural and natural, epistemic and ontological, but also unity-plurality, universalism-relativism, representation and reality. It should be noted that dichotomies as such are not a problem (just as they are not the same as binary oppositions, either), rather it is assumed that the problem lies in their hindering the understanding of the systems that are not based on such principles.

The Amazonian, or “Amerindian” perspectivism, as Viveiros de Castro calls it – can concisely be described as an idea characteristic of many native peoples on the American continent “according to which the world is inhabited by different sorts of subjects or persons, human and non-human, which apprehend reality from distinct points of view” (Viveiros de Castro 2012: 45). The world is composed of a multiplicity of points of views and “every existent is a center of intentionality apprehending other existents according to their respective characteristics and powers” (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 55). Still, that does not mean that different actants have the same mode of apperception<sup>6</sup> (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 56), meaning that they do not see the world in the same way. On

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territorialising into the recognisable grooves of what ‘passes’ for philosophical thought” (Lorraine 2010: 148).

- 5 According to Descola naturalism encompasses four ontological possibilities of worlding that are based on “integrating schemas” that human beings resort to “in order to structure their relations with the world” (Descola 2013: 63). That means that faced with “some other entity, human or nonhuman,” we can assume that “either that it possesses elements of physicality and interiority identical to my own, that both its interiority and its physicality are distinct from mine, that we have similar interiorities and different physicalities, or, finally, that our interiorities are different and our physicalities are analogous” (Descola 2013: 89). The first combination is “totemism,” the second “analogism,” the third “animism,” and the fourth “naturalism” (ibid). Naturalism as the ontology of modernity establishes similarities between humans and other living beings and animals in particular through the continuity of their physical characteristics (nature – physicality), and difference on the discontinuities of their interiority (culture – mind). For Descola Amazonian perspectivism is one type or logical possibility of animist ontology.
- 6 In psychology apperception is a term that describes “the process by which the new experience is assimilated to and transformed by the residuum of past experiences of an individual to form a new whole” (Kraushaar 1955: 15). In philosophy, Leibniz

the contrary, how humans perceive animals, spirits, and other actants is radically different from the way those beings perceive humans and themselves. *Each species*, by seeing *itself as human sees* the other species as non-human – jaguars see themselves as humans, and humans (e.g. “us”) as peccaries, and so on (Lima 1999, Viveiros de Castro 2014). Thus, animals and ghosts see humans as animals and their own species as human.<sup>7</sup> From this, de Castro derives a basic tautology of perspectivism that can be summarized as follows: “humans will, under normal conditions, see humans as humans and animals as animals (in the case of spirits, seeing these normally invisible beings is a sure indication that the conditions are not normal: sickness, trance and other ‘altered states’)” (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 56). Thus, it could be claimed that perspectivism is the name for the Amazonian doctrine according to which all natural species, spirits, and other (natural) entities perceive themselves in the human form, whilst understanding their common environment in terms of the typical (native, which means human) categories.

Although this resembles the well-known European problem of “Eurocentrism” (we are all human to ourselves), the concept of the species used in perspectivism is not the same as the one characteristic of the Western variant. First of all, natural sciences do not take into account the point of view of the members of the species when describing and classifying the taxonomy of the boundaries, except in the basic form of mutual identification implied by a “community of reproduction” (Descola 2014: 86). “In the naturalist regime [...] the human species is the only one that has the capacity to objectify itself [...] while the members of all the other species remain ignorant of the fact that they belong to an abstract set which has been isolated by the external point of view of the systematician according to his own classificatory criteria” (ibid). Furthermore, people are gifted with “specific interiority” that make them capable of self-reflection.

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distinguishes between perception as “the inner state as representing outer things” and apperception as “the inner state as reflectively aware of itself” (ibid).

- 7 Most theorists of perspectivism talk about perspectivism primarily as a relationship between humans and animals. However, similar perspectivist logic also applies to other categories of beings such as plants among those peoples “that make use of hallucinogens,” or artefacts “among the peoples of the Upper Xingú” (Viveiros de Castro 2005: 66).

On the other side, in animism, all species are aware that their members make a collective of their own with its own specific characteristics. This collective self-awareness is “reinforced by the notion that the members of other collectives apprehend them with a point of view different from their own” that must be appropriated “in order to experience themselves as fully distinct” (ibid). That’s where the basis of the perspectivist and relational nature of animism lies. As Descola explains in naturalist ontology, “species A is distinguished from species B because species C says so in virtue of its human rational capacity, while in animic identification” a person experiences herself as “a member of species A, not only because” she differs “from members of species B by certain manifest physical features, but also because the very existence of species B allows” her to know that is she is “different since its members hold of” her “a different point of view from the one” she holds of herself (ibid). The perspective of the assumed signifier (“other”) must be absorbed by the signified (specific group) “in order for the latter to see himself as entirely specific” (ibid). Since the self is always relational and can be determined only in relation to the “others,” all ethnonyms are—like the self—necessarily relational. In perspectivism, “other” is always prior to the self, and subjectivization always requires assuming the others’ points of view.

In order to explain this logic without absorbing itself into the naturalist concept of *cultural relativism*, Viveiros de Castro suggests the concept of (ontological) perspectivism that assumes “a representational or phenomenological unity which is purely pronominal or deictic, indifferently applied to a radically objective diversity” (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 478). The term is derived from the linguistic term *deixis*, which refers to “those language situations in which the meaning of a term relies absolutely on the context in which it is uttered” (Pedersen 2011: 63). Viveiros de Castro (1998) claims that in certain Amerindian societies, “concepts that are not commonly thought of as deictic in the West, such as ‘person’ and ‘human’ are radically indexical” (ibid.). “Thus self-references such as ‘people’ mean ‘person’, not ‘member of the human species’, and *they are personal pronouns registering the point of view of the subject, not proper names*” (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 476). “Whilst our constructionist epistemology can be summed up in the Saussurean formula: *the point of view creates the object* [...] Amerindian ontological

perspectivism proceeds along the lines that *the point of view creates the subject*; whatever is activated or 'agented' by the point of view will be a subject" (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 476-477). In that sense perspectivism is relativism, but not of the type we usually consider as such (cf. Deleuze 1993). "Humanity" is the name for the general form that is assumed via the point of view of the subject. To say that animals and spirits are humans means that they are persons, which also means ascribing to them "the capacities of conscious intentionality and agency which define the position of the subject" (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 476). Viveiros de Castro and Lima emphasize that it *does not* mean ascribing human characteristics to animals based on our "human point of view," but acknowledging the possibility that animals and other beings are capable of having a *point of view*. The human bodily form and human culture constitute the scheme of perception and action embodied in the specific dispositions of each species. Those dispositions are deictic, pronoun-based self-determinations on which humans base their understanding of themselves, and "not literal and constitutive human predicates projected metaphorically (...) onto non-humans" (Viveiros de Castro 2012: 100). Put differently, what's at stake is "anthropomorphism," rather than the typical Western "anthropocentrism" (Viveiros de Castro 2012). Since humanity is "reciprocally reflexive," while "every mode of existent is human for itself, none of them are human to each other": Jaguars are human for other jaguars, humans are peccaries for the others and the recognition of humanity is never mutual: "as soon as the jaguar is human, the peccary ceases to be one and vice versa" (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 69-70). We can say that Amerindian perspectivism is an expression of logical equivalence of reflexivity that people and other beings have in their relationship to themselves – a salmon is for a salmon as a man is for a man, that is a man, but a salmon for a man is the same as man for a salmon – a salmon. So, the perspective is universal (human). What changes, is the world we see. One perspective – multiple worlds. "Any species of subject perceives itself and its world in the same way we perceive ourselves and our world. 'Culture' is what one sees of oneself when one says 'I.'" (Viveiros de Castro 2015a: 59). Thus if the usual formula of multiculturalism says: one world, multiple representations (culture), multinaturalist formula says: one representation (culture), multiple worlds.



This idea demands radical thinking about our concepts of culture so that they can *express* the differences in the world that conceptualizes them in a way radically different from ours, since as long as a typical idea of “what ‘the world is’ remains untutored, the notion of ‘different worlds’ will remain contradictory” (Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007: 13). How is it possible to fathom this via the existing conceptual apparatus used in contemporary cultural theory? It would typically entail claiming that Amazonian perspectivism constructs the world differently from ours and surely, multiple worlds can “be imagined – i.e. represented – because part of the very definition of the world is that it is single)” (ibid). However, the world of Amazonian perspectivism does not assume constructivist logic (which does not mean that it cannot be articulated in terms of that logic, but that’s precisely what we are trying to avoid). The Amazonian motto “one culture, multiple natures” must be understood not as a substantial characteristic of the Amazonian conceptual system, but as its *ontological* property that concerns the nature of alterity both connecting and dividing anthropological and “indigenous” concepts (Viveiros de Castro 2010).

Amazonian ideas of nature, culture, humans, and “others” are not taxonomic, but ontological. The aim of comparing them to the Western ones, as noted by Viveiros de Castro (2010: 327), is equivalent to “the *deformations* suffered by the ideas of nature and culture, when we decide to subordinate them to the reference frames of other intellectual traditions”, which may have important theoretical consequences. In that sense, the very analytical procedure proposed is “perspectivist” and not “naturalistic”. It aims to bring to light “Western anthropology’s presuppositions by analyzing them through the conceptual apparatus of Amazonian anthropology” (ibid). In order to do so, we need to reconceptualize the very concepts with which we are working including those of nature and culture.

## **Ethnography, Beliefs and the Politics of Interpretation**

The ontological turn uplifts the ethnography to the starting point of a theorization treating it as a challenging, concept generating machine that should alter the theoretical apparatuses and concepts tending to assume the status of the absolute (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017: 287). Obviously, this is a take on the old theoretical problem of ethnocentrism, but with an important twist – the question is not how best to see things, but rather what is there to be seen in the first place. That allows the ethnographer to be grasped by “the native’s point of view”, rather than the other way around (Viveiros de Castro 2014), making the anthropological theory and its concepts dependent on ethnography itself.

Ethnography is not “the collection of different worldviews,” but “systematic rethinking” of “fundamental matters of category” (Paleček and Risjord 2012: 10). Thus understood ethnography “is more than the collection of different worldviews” and it is more akin to philosophy than methodology (Paleček and Risjord 2012: 19) and forces us to take seriously “what intellectuals cannot take seriously” (Viveiros de Castro 2011). Defining that what we cannot take seriously, which is the plurality of the point of view, predetermines that what cannot be taken seriously. To call something a point of view (which is the same as a belief) is sufficient for the justification of not taking something seriously. The plurality of the point of view is a “Pandora’s box”: untruth, delirium, hallucination, and other diabolic lies (Viveiros de Castro 2011: 132). The Devil, Viveiros de Castro reminds, is father of all lies, lies are multiple, “but the truth is One” (ibid). If there is a plurality of the point of view, it automatically follows that they simply cannot be true. To understand the thought of the “others” seriously does not mean neutralizing it through questions, beliefs, or logical propositions (which can be true or false). Nor does it mean neutralizing it through the idea of the native thought either being the expression of the generative characteristics of the human mind (as in Levi-Strauss) or containing the wisdom that the moderns have lost.

Viveiros de Castro (2015a) explains the opposition between the traditional academic project of the interpretation of the native “beliefs” on the one hand and, on the other, the approaches that take the native

thought seriously enough to identify the consequences it has for our own thought. The ontological turn does not explain the ways in which the “others” understand what a person, culture, or anything else is, but rather what it is in Western epistemologies and ontologies that causes the need for additional explanations – the framework enabling our understanding of the reason why jaguars are humans (instead of the usual idea that for some people, jaguars are humans or that some people think that some other people think that jaguars are human). Hence, the question is not whether some South American peoples believe that jaguars can be human (which might be different from both Araweté **and Serbian meaning of the word *ljudi***), but what the native inhabitants of the Amazon say when they say that jaguars are humans (Viveiros de Castro 2015a).<sup>8</sup>

The basis of this alternative cultural theory is the problem of otherness and implies an alternative anthropology, the inverted symmetry of which requires not only the application of the same ethnographic method for understanding those we call “premodern,” “in development,” or “archaic” and those who call themselves modern or “developed” (Latour and Miranda 2016: 333) but also the perception of perspectivism as a theory, a philosophical doctrine. The very concept of perspectivism has not been adopted because it is loaded with the philosophical understanding of that term that can be found in Leibniz, Nietzsche, Whitehead, and Deleuze (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 55). In order to explain perspectivism in a way that does not distort its basic assumptions, it is not enough that a theorist discovers “what the point of view for the *natives* is,” but what the concept of the point of view operating in the Amerindian culture is.

Such a concept of the point of view is simultaneously “the indigenous point of view on the anthropological concept of the point of view” (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 77). This “reflexive dislocation” (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 78) enables the perception of perspectivism as a concept that has the capacity to change the Western concept of the point of view. In that sense, perspectivism necessarily includes an epistemic

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8 If the approach of the natives (any natives, regardless of the way in which they are defined (Achuar, Yoruba, Serbs, etc.) to their own discourse is perceived in terms of beliefs, culture becomes a kind of dogmatic theology (Viveiros de Castro 2015a). If the meaning is reduced to a belief or dogma, we are “forced into the trap of having to believe either the native meanings or our own” (Wagner 1981: 30).

level, which Viveiros de Castro regards to be "political," albeit not in an ordinary sense of the political determination of all point(s) of view, but rather it could be said that this epistemic level is ontological. Alternative approaches to the study of culture would have to consider that ontological level without turning it into "yet another" of the many points of view. The ontological turn offers a change of the framework for the understanding of "others" that ensures the establishment of truly contingent cultural studies of "others."

This way of conceptualization – from ethnography to theory may be achieved by using two interconnected ideas: ontological self-determination and permanent decolonization of thought (Viveiros de Castro 2011: 128) that may be achieved through "controlled equivocation," as suggested by Viveiros de Castro (2011). It serves to transform epistemic relativism inherent in the understanding of "others" into a "comparison of comparisons" that emerges when we compare ours and native modes of understanding of analogies between domains. Controlled equivocation thus develops as a conceptual necessity that arises from the meeting between our and indigenous anthropological regimes. This intersection cannot be solely a matter of translation of one paradigm of the perception of the world into another (Paleček and Risjord 2012: 12), since controlled equivocation enables *perspectivization*. Its goal is to transform our assumptions by scrutinizing them through the lens of the theoretical perspectives of "others" and subjecting them to an authentic alterity intervention, which is not based on a simple concept of otherness that could be incorporated into the Self as an inverted mirror image.

The idea of self-determination of "others" is premised on the key principle of anthropological ethics that Viveiros de Castro has repeatedly articulated as the motto: "*always leave a way out for the people you are describing*" (Viveiros de Castro 2015b: 11). We can find this idea in Deleuze (2001: 261) when he writes about the Other as an expression of a possible world, stating that the main rule of the analysis should be "not to be explicated too much", which means "not to explicate oneself too much with the other, not to explicate the other too much, but to maintain one's implicit values and multiply one's own world by populating it with all those expressed that do not exist apart from their expressions" (ibid). That does not mean that people "agree with you *completely*," but you will be able to talk with people you study and to write about them in the way

that does not offend or ridicule (Viveiros de Castro 2015b). The main motto of the ontological turn: “take others seriously” does not mean “to be in awe of what people tell you,” or “to take them literally when they do not mean you to (not an easy distinction to make at all)” and to make into “a profound dogma of sacred lore” (Viveiros de Castro 2015b: 14).

Following this idea, we can say that the aim of theorizing and teaching about others should not be searching for the universal substance of all beings as proposed by Western naturalist ontology nor it should mean “celebrating some numinous mystery that they might hide, but rather refusing to actualize the possibilities expressed by indigenous thought – choosing to sustain them as possible *indefinitely*” (Viveiros de Castro 2015a: 27). In that sense, the idea of ontological self-determination does not imply espousing ethnic essentialism, primordialism, or any other form of socio-cultural realism. On the contrary, Holbraad, Pedersen, and Viveiros de Castro (2014) state that it “means giving the ontological back to ‘the people,’ not the people back to ‘the ontological.’”

## **Conclusion: from Ethnography Toward the Politics of Ontography**

The political basis of ontologically oriented approaches in cultural theory is not expressed (solely) as propaganda or as a critique of the current political regimes. Instead, for some authors, it is a political program in its own right. Its key value lies in what Derrida calls “philosophical resistance,” a resistance through intellectual means to metaphysical structures themselves (Skafish 2014).

The ontological turn may be understood as theoretical, but also political and ethical resistance to the dominant modes of knowledge. In an ontologically oriented analysis, the political is the very form of thinking, and “being political” is an immanent feature of theoretical thought (Holbraad, Pedersen, and Viveiros de Castro 2014). In that way, ethnography turns into the “politics of ontography” (Holbraad 2012), which is not merely a presentation of particular political programs, but rather its quite literal demonstration. Drawing a parallel between the politics of ontology and the ontology of politics on the one hand and,

on the other, self-determination of the other and its decolonization as a reconfiguration of thought, Holbraad, Pedersen, and Viveiros de Castro suggest two basic premises for ontological politics. The first one is "*to think is to differ*" and the second one is "*to differ is itself a political act*" (Holbraad, Pedersen, and Viveiros de Castro 2014). According to Holbraad, Pedersen, and Viveiros de Castro (2014), "a thought that makes no difference to itself is not a thought." Using the idea of "motile truth" developed in his research of Cuban divinations, as well as the notion of invention offered by Roy Wagner in his analysis of the idea of culture among the Daribi of Papua New Guinea, Martin Holbraad contends that the common "political" terms such as power or domination, are relative to the possibility of power and control, where domination is understood as "a matter of holding the capacity to differ under control—to place limits upon alterity and therefore, ipso facto (...) upon thought also" (Holbraad, Pedersen, and Viveiros de Castro 2014). If we follow Povinelli (2014), we can say that if ethics is, among other things "the practice of effort that opens the conditions and cares for the entities that are this division's otherwise," and politics is "the struggle to demonstrate that this is simply one arrangement of many possible arrangements," then the ontological turn is a way to extend the possibilities of agency of "the others" that can be made equal to our own. In this way, as Bessier and Bond (2014) put it, ontological anthropology aims at localizing the forms of power in the context of the modern project, simultaneously devising robust alternative paradigms. Diverting from Marx, they offer an understanding of being radical as an attempt "not to grasp the thing by the root but to tend to a different plant altogether" (Bessier and Bond 2014: 441). In that sense, an ontologically inspired cultural theory could also be an alternative to both universalist rationalist and constructivist social theories. It could help us develop theoretical strategies aiming at diverging from an anthropocentric theory of culture.

Anthropology and a theory of culture have to a great extent kept the question of culture untouched regardless of the numerous transformations this notion has been constantly undergoing. The ontological turn makes us ponder it, yet not by deconstructing it in light of the familiar paradigms, but rather by confronting it with an entirely novel paradigm. That can be done only if we give up on the idea that "others" are the source of the examples of anything including our understanding

of culture. Therefore, the point is not to say: look, the Araweté do not understand the world in the way we do (such instances are countless), but rather to realize the logic behind our understanding of culture and to try to imagine what the disciplines grounded in that idea would look like were they based on alternative conceptions. In that, “the metaphysics of others” becomes the basis of metaphysics as such, and ethnography is no longer the source of data to which the theory is applied, and instead becomes the generator of notions and theoretical-epistemological frameworks. Suppose we treat the thoughts of others as thoughts and not a worldview, then it is possible for *our* concepts to be transformed by theirs. For that reason, what this article proposes is not a deconstruction of (our) idea of culture, but a prolegomenon to a long-running systematic decolonization of the scientific and any other thought. In a certain sense, it is an impossible endeavor, which is its advantage. To paraphrase Deleuze who is paraphrasing Marx, it is safe to say that “mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve” (Deleuze 2001: 186). However, I am quite certain that those are not the most important ones. As our disciplines (cultural studies, anthropology, philosophy...) are completely dependent on the concepts of modernity, recognizing ontologies of others as *ontologies*, and not beliefs, symbolic representations or “cultures” may enable us to transform our own conceptual thinking. Focus on the knowledge from the marginal margins of modern thought can be the way to take others seriously and develop truly cosmopolitan cultural studies. Embracing the “alterity challenge” – thinking, writing, and teaching about our contemporary non-moderns, those from other ontological traditions, maybe the only way to make cultural studies leave its safe zone of sameness and open up the space for other possible worlds.

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# THE YUGOSLAV WORKING CLASS FROM EMANCIPATION TO SUBALTERNITY: THE *FIAT 600* AS ITS SYMBOL IN THE WORKS OF MRDJAN BAJIĆ

SONJA JANKOV

The small four-seat city car *Fiat 600* was designed by the FIAT<sup>1</sup> team led by Dante Giacosa, as a replacement for the very popular two-seater *500 Topolino*. It was launched at the Geneva Motor Show in 1955 where it was sold at a lower price than the *500 Topolino* and it soon became a great international success (Giacosa 2014: 173). It motorized several countries because its production and maintenance were simple and cost-effective.

The launch of the *Fiat 600* coincided with the period when FIAT began investing in countries without developed automobile industries, such as Spain, Argentina, Brazil, Yugoslavia, Poland, and later the USSR. Knowing that in these countries the car market would have to expand, while the local Italian market will become saturated, FIAT “provided start-up capital and licensing rights, and received a long-term combination of fees, royalties, guaranteed parts purchases, and bartered goods” (Vuic 2010: 61). As a result of this international production policy, Spain and Yugoslavia each produced almost a million *Fiat 600* vehicles,

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1 FIAT (Fabbrica Italiana di Automobili Torino) was founded in 1899, and started working in 1900 with only 24 employees. During the 1950s and 1960s, FIAT became one of the leading car manufacturers, with production facilities or license production agreements in Western Bloc, Eastern Bloc and non-aligned countries. It owes its international success to designing small and medium-sized city cars. In 2014, it became part of the corporation Fiat Chrysler Automobiles N.V., and in 2021 it became part of the multinational corporation Stellantis N.V., which is the fourth largest car manufacturer in the world.

becoming the second largest producers of this model after Italy who produced over two and a half million.

In all three countries, the *Fiat 600* was a fundamental element of the “industrial miracle,” that is, the development of industry and economy, the creation of jobs, the beginnings of exporting industrial goods, and the gradual increase of living standards. In addition, it was assembled from fully imported or partially locally produced parts in Australia, Malaysia, and Colombia (60% of the parts were locally produced and 40% imported from Yugoslavia), Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. As a result, *Fiat 600* became a cultural icon and part of the working class emancipation in many countries. It became the first car associated with the beginnings of consumer culture and an inseparable part of collective memories related to the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Because of this, the *Fiat 600* was considered “ours” in all the countries where car parts were produced, not only assembled, but, in general, it was Italian, Spanish, Yugoslav, and Argentine. It was and remained an international icon, with undiminished symbolism even decades after its production ceased. However, due to economic, social, and political changes that followed the break-up of Yugoslavia, the *Fiat 600* began to be associated with the former Yugoslav working class in a specific way that is different from those of the other countries. Such specificity was fully embraced by the contemporary artist Mrdjan Bajić who included the *Fiat 600* in his works on several occasions. For that reason, we are giving a detailed analysis of those works, after explaining the wider Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav experience with the production of the *Fiat 600*.

## ***Fiat 600: Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav perspective***

Already in 1956, Yugoslavia had the right to produce and sell<sup>2</sup> the *Fiat 600*, based on an extended ten-year *Contract de licence cession et technique collaboration* signed in 1954 by FIAT and the Yugoslav factory

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2 To markets which were not in conflict with Italy’s interest – “border countries except Austria; Iran, Ethiopia, Turkey, Israel and Burma, with the written consent of FIAT and to other countries, except France, Austria, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, South Africa, Ireland, Mexico, Italy, Argentina, Brazil” (Gašić 2017: 29).

Zavodi Crvena Zastava [Red Flag Factory] (Micić et al 2013: 101). This contract was historically significant for two reasons. It was the first contract on economic cooperation between a Western company and an Eastern European country, which for Yugoslavia represented “one of the symbols of the change in the course of the external and internal political development after Tito’s break with Stalin in 1948” (Miljković 2014: 71). In addition, it was the result of self-management, a specific feature of Yugoslav socialism in which the means of production and profit belonged to workers who decided what to do with it; not to the state. The contract is an indirect result of the decision that employees of Crvena Zastava made in a referendum of the workers’ council in 1953. From 5,000 employees, 94% were in favour replacing the basic program of producing weapons and ammunition with car production, and using the then surplus for investing in new technologies.

The production of the *Fiat 600* in Yugoslavia began as part of a knowledge and technology transfer, because Yugoslavia had little experience in the automotive industry. It had, however, ambitions to be the first socialist country to produce a “people’s car,” which was “an indicator of the process of development of consumer society and the formation of a middle class without which such a society is not possible” (Miljković 2016: 56). Production began in 1955 in the form of assembling parts that arrived from Italy, and in the first few years, about 20 or 30 vehicles were assembled per year for the purpose of training the workers. Large-scale production in Yugoslavia began in 1962, in an expanded factory, whereby already 50% of parts were domestically produced. Until 1964, all parts were produced in Yugoslavia in over 60 factories with which Zastava cooperated (Miljković 2020: 161). In 1965, Yugoslavia exported 5,000 *Fiat 600* vehicles to Greece and it became “a real success: exported to many countries around the world” (Chivino 2014: 22). *Fiat 600* vehicles produced in Yugoslavia were named *Zastava 750*,<sup>3</sup> while the car locally gained its famous nickname *Fića* (little *Fiat*, *fiatito*).

The *Fiat 600* had a distinct symbolic value for the Yugoslav non-aligned path, the Yugoslav connection with the West and the primacy

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3 Over the years, Yugoslavia produced *Fiat 600* under several names that referred to models with minor design improvements: *Zastava 600*, *Zastava 600 D*, *Zastava 750*, *Zastava 750 M*, *Zastava 750 L*, *Zastava 750 S*, *Zastava 750 LC*, *Zastava 750 SC*, *Zastava 750 LE*, *Zastava 750 SE*, *Zastava 850*.

of Yugoslavia in comparison to other socialist countries. The *Fiat 600* was the first mass-produced car, the first car available to civil society, a vehicle whose shape “hides, in its small size, many important things: a general view of the world, a small picture of the national economy, a certain psychology of the nation, luxury and social status” (Mandić 1976: 17, cf. Pogačar 2016: 206). It became the symbol of the working class which was producing the new society. The *Fiat 600* “became the symbol of the entire Yugoslav socialist era” (Stanković 2017b: 878), it was “an ideal vehicle on the ‘non-aligned’ Yugoslav path to communism, a symbol, and proof that Yugoslavia was more liberal and more successful than other socialist countries and, at the same time, fairer in the distribution of wealth than the countries of ‘rotten communism’” (Miljković 2016: 49). For a long time, it was the most popular car in Yugoslavia, even though Yugoslavia had a wider selection of manufactured and imported cars than other socialist countries.

The production of the *Fiat 600* gradually ceased in Italy (1969), Spain (1973), Argentina (1982), and Colombia (1982). In Yugoslavia, it ceased in 1985, although it was “still a very popular car” (Stanković 2017a: 256). Under the name *Yugo 850*, it was exported to Turkey with complete technology for its production, where it was produced for several more months. In Yugoslavia, people used to drive it for many more years, especially after the break-up of Yugoslavia, when it was difficult to afford a new car. Once seen as the vehicle that motorized the country, “at the end of the Yugoslav experience, it became a mocking pile of iron and an assortment of failures” (Pogačar 2016: 209). From the symbol of the emancipated working class, it became the symptom of the “degradation and destruction of social, cultural, historical and, above all, existential human values on the territory of the butchered Yugoslav state” (Bogdanović 2013: 16).

## **Subalternity of the Yugoslav working class**

“The working class” is a common term for the social stratum of factory workers and service workers (blue-collar workers) who had an important role in the construction of the unique Yugoslav socialism

based on self-management. They also had a distinctive role in the industrialization of the country and the subsequent economic growth, which is why

the system enabled them to have programs for continuous professional education and academic education (paid by factories that guaranteed them free time for learning and passing exams); to get decent apartments in apartment blocks where their directors and managers also lived; to spend summer and winter holidays with their families in resorts that belonged to factories; to have cooked a meal within eight hours working time, etc. (Dragičević Šešić 2024: 5)

However, after the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia fell apart, the majority of workers lost their jobs, while the factories and other means of production were no longer social property. During the hyperinflation that hit some republics and post-socialist transition, “[a]ll Yugoslav brands in electronics, automobile, pharmaceuticals and other industries disappeared” (Dragičević Šešić 2024: 5). Many enterprises and factories declared bankruptcy and were put in the liquidation process, some of them still owe social contributions to their former workers after over a decade, while some are using their last ounces of strength to keep the production and workers, but reduced in numbers.

The Crvena Zastava factory, which produced *FIAT 600*, used to have 53,337 employees in 1989, but “at the time of the sale, it had only about 1,500 employees” (Gašić 2017: 12). Jugoplastika (est. 1952), one of many factories that used to produce car parts for Crvena Zastava and other brands, used to employ 12,900 workers, the majority of which were women. They produced over 3,200 products, including footwear, clothing, haberdashery, thermoplastics, but at the time of its liquidation, the factory had only 1,000 workers. Generalexport (est. 1952) used to have over 60 companies and representative offices around the world, yet, its 6,500 workers have been waiting for over 13 years for social contributions after its bankruptcy. A similar experience is shared by former workers of many other Yugoslav factories.

Trudbenik (est. 1947), one of the largest construction companies in Yugoslavia had built over 3,000 buildings, many thermal power plants and factories, the Clinical Center of Serbia, the airport, and the Sava Center in Belgrade. During its best years, “Trudbenik employed over

seventeen thousand workers and was one of the leading construction companies in the world” (Radnički muzej Trudbenik 2019: 242). At the time of its closure in 2008, it had only 400 workers, and the sale of the company also included the sale of the property that belonged to it, so that “the workers who were left to live in the workers’ barracks and single persons’ hotels in Konjarnik and New Belgrade lost the ground under their feet” (*ibidem*: 243).

These are only a few details from the general post-industrial, post-Yugoslav picture within which the former working class without a job feels like “people who are not important anymore” (Dragičević Šešić 2024: 7). They have become invisible, subaltern, excluded from the society, denied their social rights, without having their experiences known by the younger generations of the general public. Within such a context, even their children have “deep feelings of humiliation, social rejection, and neglect” that concern their whole families and all citizens in the neighbourhoods who used to build the industrial society, only to subsequently “became unemployed at once, without being offered any option for their future” (*ibidem*: 6). In such contexts, of special importance are the artistic practices that thematize such drastic changes and present the former working class as people who are part of the contemporaneity, not only of the past.

Many artists working in the post-Yugoslav region thematize the ceased Yugoslav industry in their works, especially the relation of socialist industrialization and the current state of the industry. For example, in 1995, Association Apsolutno applied a method of investigation to approach two 105 meters long transoceanic liners whose production ceased in the Shipyard in Novi Sad when Yugoslavia fell apart. Other shipyards, former factories (of glass, paper, metal, car parts, etc.), entire industrial cities have been inspiring to artists from different disciplines (visual arts, dramatic arts), but also to curators and cultural workers who dedicated several cultural manifestations and events to the topic. The disappearance of industry, memories of it and the post-socialist position of the working class have been approached by many artists and cultural workers such as Igor Grubić, Andrea Kulundžić, Milica Ružičić, film director Mina Đukić, Tilva Roš, Milena Marković and Oleg Novaković, Hristina Mikić and others. Their practices, often using approach from social sciences, help preserving memory of neglected industrial heritage,

but they also help us to bear in mind that the people, the working class, is still a part of us and the society.

## **Relation of the *Fiat 600* to the working class and contemporaneity in works of Mrdjan Bajić**

The *Fiat 600* is one of the most frequent elements taken from popular culture in the oeuvre of Mrdjan Bajić (b. 1957). Apart from the *Fiat 600*, Bajić also included in his works other cars that were assembled in Yugoslavia (among other countries) such as the Citroën 2CV (1950), the Citroën Dyane (1970), the Renault 4 Clan (1978) and the Volkswagen Beetle. However, he turned to them in small and medium format drawings and sculptures, while only the *Fiat 600* became part of his assemblages of monumental format. There, the real *Fiat 600* appears as *ready-made*, an industrial object produced by the working class within a specific social and historical context.

Bajić began incorporating industrially produced objects into his sculptures by the end of the 1980s, combining them with constructed objects and sculptured and/or cast elements. During the 2000s, he made appropriated objects “equal, if not the central part of the work, thus intentionally weakening the domination of the plastic, sculptural aspect” (Merenik 2022: 62). Many of those objects represent ideologies that aspired to stability, progress, and duration but ended in wars. By incorporating them into his works, Bajić points toward the permanent state of instability, impermanence, and imbalance in post-Yugoslav areas, but also in the contemporary world in general.

In order to illustrate the point, Bajić creates an appearance of instability at the compositional level of his sculptures. He is always looking for “forms in unstable balance, placed in such a position in space that we have the impression that they will fall, that they will break, that they are on the verge of overturning, in an impossible balance” (Bajić 2013: 139). This artistic strategy, apart from introducing dynamism into static works and causing a feeling of anxiety, results in images of a social situation characterized by tension, destabilization, pressure, agonizing anticipation, anxiety, and loss of the center of support. In Bajić’s practice



during the 1980s, this approach resulted in sculptures denoting “an unrestful position, false peace, and fragile balance, a symbolic view of the loss of center and reliable worldview, tension, gruesome expectation” (Merenik 2022: 42).

On the one hand, that expectation was related to the broader picture that at the end of the 1980s resulted in the end of socialism. On the other hand, it was related to a closer context and the period when Yugoslavia’s growing external debt drastically weakened the value of work, self-management, and social ownership, because all efforts were spent on obtaining foreign currency for debt repayment. The increase in economic instability during the 1980s in Yugoslav republics was followed by the growth of nationalisms that escalated into civil wars in the early 1990s. In this context, Bajić’s asymmetrical, distorted, tilted, decentered sculptures of unstable relationships created a symbolic vision of a broken world and anxious anticipation of the impending end. Bajić has continued creating such sculptures up until today, and in all that time, they haven’t been less relatable to contemporaneity than they were in the 1980s.

In this context, the *Fiat 600* appears in Bajić’s works. As a movable object, the *Fiat 600* introduces into sculptures an even greater impression of impermanence and instability, in contrast to the usual conceptions of sculpture as a permanent, stable, balanced, immovable object. It appears in Bajić’s oeuvre as early as 1993, in the drawing *Projects*, where it carries a factory at its top, while another *Fiat 600* is beside it, also carrying a factory, but placed upside-down. Already in that work, the *Fiat 600* appears as a symbol of the working class and foundation of industrial development, because both factories in the drawing are apparently working. Moreover, the whole composition creates an illusion of *perpetuum mobile*, at a time when in the early 1990s hundreds of thousands of workers in Yugoslavia lost their jobs, industry was shut down, sanctions continued and energy supply was restricted.

As an object, the *Fiat 600* becomes a part of Bajić’s sculptures firstly in the form of models and small-scale sculptures in terracotta, wood or aluminum. In the work, *May 1 and Little Later* (1996/2013) the *Fiat 600* carries a stone and a large machine gun, as a symbolic connection of International Workers’ Day and the violent end of the state that was based on workers’ self-management. Another sculpture with the same title (2013) shows a tank carrying a pyramidal cement shape on top of

which is a *Fiat 600* with a large black stone on its roof. To our knowledge, this is the only work by Bajić that depicts the *Fiat 600* as an object that is being carried, while in all the other works it is the *Fiat 600* that carries the load. If we understand the *Fiat 600* as a symbol of the working class, this inversion creates a narrative about the period in history when workers suddenly had to become soldiers.

Apart from that, the *Fiat 600* appears as a real vehicle in two Bajić's assemblages of monumental format. *Working Class Goes to Heaven* was first installed in 2011 as part of a solo exhibition at the Rima Gallery in Kragujevac, then in 2015, in front of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb [Image 1]. *Born in the House that Sings La La La* was installed in 2022 as part of a solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade [Image 2]. Both works feature a white *Fiat 600* that carries objects that are disproportionately large in relation to it. In the first case, a *Fiat 600* carries large black boxes, one of which is tall and from a distance looks like a scale model of a skyscraper. In the other case, it carries a wooden sculpture in the shape of a single-family house that is placed upside-down, so that only one side of its gable roof rests on the *Fiat 600*. These objects are fixed to vehicles by ropes or belts, but, in accordance with Bajić's poetics, they look as if they could fall at any moment. In addition to the *Fiat 600* and the load, both works have a third common element – a supporting structure made of scaffolding and metal beams that at first glance make the assemblages stable, but in fact, only make vehicles defunct, turning them into immobile objects locked in one place.

These large-format works were preceded by a series of drawings and smaller sculptures that Bajić created over the years. Thus, the genesis of the *Working Class Goes to Heaven* includes the sculpture from 2008, which instead of a *Fiat 600* contains old black bicycles (also a former dream of the working class), and the sculpture from 2014/15 which contains a small, sculpted trailer. Neither the bikes nor the trailer are *auto-mobile* vehicles, but they both carry many stacked boxes topped with Mickey Mouse's head. In addition, several smaller-format works with the same title contain mock-ups of the *Fiat 500*,<sup>4</sup> either serially produced or hand-made, all carrying heavy loads.

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4 Bajić also used models of *Fiat 500* for series of small-format sculptures in which the models carry hearts so large that they melt over them – *Unconditional Love*, 2009/2011/2013 and *Heart of Ice*, 2013.



*Image 1: Mrdjan Bajić, Working Class Goes to Heaven, 2015,  
Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb.  
Photograph: from the archive of the author*

The title *Working Class Goes to Heaven* also refers to a drawing that shows a baby blue *Fiat 500* that carries a five-pointed star larger than itself. Bajić kept this motive in his work *Mass Production* (2013) in which the star is carried by *Fiat 500* models, each facing in a different direction. Apart from the clear image of disorientation and an effort to maintain the heavy load, the composition symbolically shows that ideologies are mass-produced on the strength of workers. This composition gradually evolves into the complex installation *11070 New Belgrade* (2020–2022) whose base consists of five *Fiat 600* sculptures cast in aluminum, on top of which is a residential skyscraper.

According to Bajić, the forms of these works evoke failed utopias because *Fiat 600s* represented the promise of a better life for everyone, while “too heavy forms visually flatten it and make its mission impossible” (Bajić 2013: 139-140). Those too-heavy forms can carry all the dreams, hopes, projections, and ideals of the working class when it disappeared in transition from a social factor into a consumable material of the free labour market (Milovac 2015). The boxes that the *Fiat 600* carries indicate, according to Ana Bogdanović, that the working class’ beliefs, ideals, hopes, and dreams of the promised better future, which never came, can be packed, transported, stored, and deposited (2013: 81, 85). However, the *Fiat 600* blocked in one place indicates that the working class did not manage to migrate to a better place, instead, it disappeared, that is, went to heaven. Bajić’s sculptures thus become monuments in the true sense of the word.

The title *Working Class Goes to Heaven* also refers to two small-format sculptures that represent the transition to a cycle of works in which a vehicle carries a house on its roof, the culmination of which is the large assemblage *Born in the House that Sings La La La*. The sculptures in question include a *Fiat 500* sculpture of wood (2011–2015) and a Citroën 2CV sculpture. They are both carrying a house that is inverted in such a way that reinforcement beams (armature) protrude from its base like plucked roots. A specific precursor to these works is the sculpture *Trash: migrations* (2000/2007), in which the model/sculpture of the Serbian monastery of Gračanica (1321) is flipped onto its roof and loaded onto a trailer.

During the 2000s, Bajić explored the composition of a car carrying a flipped house through several small-format drawings and sculptures

in which the *Fiat 500* model was gradually replaced by the *Fiat 600*. *Second Home* (2010) comprises of turned-up white house with torn-out concrete foundations carried by two white *Fiat 500* models tied like two white horses. In the small sculpture *House* (2020–2022), the ‘plucked roots effect’ was created with tubes and needles for transfusion. Bajić retains this element in the large assemblage *Born in the House that Sings La La La*. At the base of the house are transparent tubes through which an engine pumps a liquid, like a pacemaker. This element gives a mechanical and dynamic aspect to an otherwise immobile sculpture, while the process is reminiscent of heart management, auto-transfusion, or even dialysis. In contrast, in the drawing *Black House that Sings La La La* (2021-2022), blood-like liquid oozes from the foundations of the



*Image 2:* Mrdjan Bajić, *Born in the House that Sings La La La*, 2020–2022 (in the back: *Self-Portrait with 13 Heads*, 2020/2022, Syria, 2015/2018), exhibited at the solo exhibition *Unreliable Narrator*, MCAB, 24.9.2022–23.1.2023. Collaborators and executors of the piece: Boris Šribar, Nemanja Ladjić, technical help: Dragan Mirić, sound effects: Collecting Musical Memory – Heartefact, editor: Aleksandar Jovanović, sound designer: Dobrivoje Milijanović. Photograph: Bojana Janjić, from the fundus of photo-documentation of The Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), Belgrade

black house, which creates a strong image of the dream of the Yugoslav working class being ended in war.

Through the windows of the house, one can see a television screen with static noise, which indicates not only that there is nothing left to broadcast, but also that there are no emitters or receivers of any potential message. The effect of being displaced is enhanced by the fact that the *Fiat 600*, as in the installations in Kragujevac and Zagreb, is prevented from moving, although it is apparently in perfect condition. From an international symbol of the early years of the working class, the *Fiat 600* is now “blocked, frozen, immobilized, as if to indicate the end of a story that was told in fragments, which have vanished, and which have left nothing but sorrow and confusion” (Tolve 2022: 81).

*Born in the House that Sings La La La*, by the presence of a *Fiat 600* that cannot move, becomes a narrative about losing foundations, without having moved at all. Using the real vehicle whose primary function is to move, Bajić creates a narrative about migration, an absurd migration in which one cannot move, leave, improve the current state, progress, or settle. That narrative reflects numerous changes that have occurred since the collapse of the SFRY, changes that include revision of history, the devastation of values on which the SFRY was based, and, in general, plucking and erasing everything that self-managing socialism achieved.

However, this work, like other Bajić’s works, should not be seen as relevant only to the post-Yugoslav context. Even when references to the end of Yugoslavia appear in Bajić’s works, they become only part of a wider narrative about impermanence, instability, and changes in geopolitical, social, economic, and cultural maps. Impermanence and instability are not something experienced only by the inhabitants of socialist countries in the 1980s and 1990s when Bajić started making assemblages that looked like they were about to fall apart at any moment. Impermanence and instability are permanent features of contemporaneity due to continuing conflicts in the Middle East, Central Europe, Africa, and the Pacific, social constraints within ostensible democracies, the uncertain prospect of a US emperium, the question of European polity, the crisis of post-World War II international institutions as political and economic mediators (UN, IMF, World Bank), the accelerating concentration of wealth in a few countries and within those countries its concentration

in the few, ecological time bombs everywhere and the looming threat of societal collapse, contradictions within and between regulated and coercive economies and deregulated and criminal ones, the coexistence of multiple economies and cultures within singular state formations, etc. (Smith 2006: 706).

*Born in the House that Sings La La La* is, thus, a specific continuation of Bajić's works under the title *Working Class Goes to Heaven* in regard that the cargo carried by *Fiat 600* will never arrive at the final destination and get unpacked because it is no longer known when the state of stability begins and where that final destination is.

## Conclusion

In Bajić's artistic practice, the *Fiat 600* is a product of a society that no longer exists, a working class that no longer exists, and a state that no longer exists. It symbolizes the unfulfilled dream of a better future that was not dreamt of only by workers in Yugoslavia but by all workers during the 1960s and 1970s. As *Fiat 600* was not only a Yugoslav car, nor was it motorized only the Yugoslav society, it becomes in Bajić's works a means that connects the Yugoslav experience to the experience of the working class in Italy, Spain, Argentina, Colombia, and other countries where this model had similar cultural, economic and historical importance. As such, it makes the experiences and values of the subaltern former Yugoslav working class viewed as part of the wider narrative about the working class that transcends divisions into states, socio-political systems, and continents.

Furthermore, the *Fiat 600* in the works of Mrdjan Bajic becomes a means of critically approaching the global themes of migration, movements, oblivion, instability, and impermanence. It is intentionally motionless, trapped in unfinished constructions and ideals that are gradually disappearing from collective memory. Bajić, therefore, does not approach the *Fiat 600* nostalgically, but as a critical subject through which the impermanences and instabilities of different historical periods are problematized, of which Yugoslav socialism and the wider post-socialist transition are only a part. When we take into account

the origins, process of production, consumption, and symbolism of the *Fiat 600*, we see that it is something much more than the history of its production and the history of the countries that produced it. Precisely through artistic practices, the *Fiat 600* becomes an apparatus for a critical approach to contemporaneity and its relation to the subaltern working class, former and current.

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# PERREO PERIFERIA: A FEMINIST EXPLORATION OF REGGAETON

TANE LAKETIĆ, LENA PAFFRATH, AND  
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## Introduction

The project ‘Perreo Periferia: A Feminist Exploration of Reggaeton’ is a result of interrogating the Latin American music genre “reggaeton” through a feminist lens. Our methodology began with the question: How is it possible that feminists can enjoy this music which from its beginnings has included sexual and abusive content against women? This research explores the subaltern position of women, LGBTQI+ and Latin American communities within the music industry; and has tried to answer this question through a multidisciplinary event (quiz, dance class, and exhibition) as a part of the SHAKIN’ project.

The origins and evolution of this musical genre were investigated together with different feminist events in Latin America, with a special focus on Chile, in particular the *ni una menos* movement (connected to the *MeToo* movement) which sparked protests against machismo, domestic violence, sexual harassment, and sexist behavior in universities and schools, and for abortion rights.

Through interviews with experts on the subject such as writer and researcher Andrea Ocampo Cea and music historian Katelina Eccleston also known as ‘La Gata’ (‘101 Perreo - Reggaeton con la Gata’), these questions were answered to a large extent while others emerged. For instance, they both emphasize the roots of the genre that comes from black and indigenous origins which are being whitewashed under

the current state of the industry. They also refer to *perreo*, the dance that is always political, because the body and more so the sexually objectified female body is always under attack. Moreover, they both show appreciation for the new mostly female artists who are coming up with their own interpretations of reggaeton and showing each other support.

Andrea O. Campo, describes reggaeton as an important musical tool in the development of Latin American and Chilean youth in different spheres. In Chile, recently many artists have been emerging with new lyrics speaking of their harsh realities. In their songs, rhythms, and lyrics they tell of realities from their point of view: drugs, poverty, and abortions, while also freely expressing their sexuality; especially women. Since the 1990s the reggaeton genre was considered vulgar, mainly led by men, who mixed romantic songs with macho, misogynistic lyrics that reduced women to sexual objects. It was even banned in Puerto Rico for some years. However, over the years this reality has changed, now women also express their sexual and romantic desires through the music.

## **Questioning Positions of Latinx Women and LGBTQI+ community**

Parallel to the mainstream reggaeton industry, overwhelmed with machismo that perpetuates sexist lyrics and the lack of valorization of women in the music industry etc.; a new generation of women and LGBTQI+ artists started creating an alternative movement called neoperreo (*perreo* - a dance similar to twerking) which provides an environment for the ones whose rights are violated by the aforementioned industry. According to Angela Dimitrakaki who refers to feminist curatorial practices '*the global capitalist economy that structurally produces inequality*' (Dimitrakaki 2017: 3) may be introduced since the global capitalist economy is located in the Global North whilst the Global South takes a subordinated position, that is, the music industry almost doesn't exist and artists are forced to partake in the global capitalist economy of the Global North which further leads us to an obvious issue of the globalized world where cultural appropriation happens along with neocolonialism.

For instance, a clear appropriation of Latinx<sup>1</sup> identity can be noticed when famous Spanish singer Rosalía has been nominated and awarded in many categories of Latin music. Besides, she stated that she feels like a Latina herself.

All of these reflect what was previously mentioned about violence as *a structural factor of the patriarchal, capitalistic system within which we live* (Verges, 2022: 18) upon which the music industry is constructed. These narratives are then reproduced by the members of the music industry; mostly men. But Verges stresses that violence is *inherent to patriarchy and capitalism, not men* (ibid: 18). This is reflected in the engagement of the reggaeton producer Deltatron, who noticed that the reggaeton scene was exceptionally heteronormative, limiting the influence of the experimental elements he advocated for. Upon meeting Tomasa del Real and Ms Nina, he realized that it was time to create a more inclusive space for minorities. This materialized in the underground subgenre of reggaeton known as neoperreo whose further impact is to be explored in the future.

## Conclusions

Popular culture is a never-ending topic inspiring its researchers but also a field of many conflictual positions. In our project we preferred a rather light approach to the feminist struggle, by getting closer mostly through music, dance, and visuals. The emphasis lies on the celebration and recognition of the artists we researched rather than dwelling on injustices.

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1 Latinx refers to people of Latin American cultural or ethnic identity in the United States. Instead of suffixes -o or -a, suffix -x embraces gender-neutrality, including non-binary and genderqueer individuals.

# ON DIFFERENT KNOWLEDGES

## SCIENCE SKEPTICISM, ALTERNATIVE TRUTHS AND POST-COLONIALISM

MONIKA MOKRE

In recent times, the societal effects of science as a general way of understanding the world have become a contested issue. This contribution discusses debates on science based on post-structural and post-colonial literature as well as the approach of sociology of science.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (quoted after Stolterman 2008), science is defined as “knowledge or a system of knowledge covering general truths or the operation of general laws especially as obtained and tested through scientific method,” whereas the scientific method consists of “principles and procedures for the systematic pursuit of knowledge involving the recognition and formulation of a problem, the collection of data through observation and experiment, and the formulation and testing of hypotheses.” (Merriam-Webster, quoted after Stolterman 2008). The assumption that there are general truths that can be discovered by human beings is one of the main statements of the Enlightenment replacing God as the (universal and omniscient) center of the world with a universal understanding of rational man as able to shape and understand the world. As usual with universalist approaches, this universalism has, in practice, been exclusionary of those seen as not (or not yet) rational: women, people of color, and the lower classes.

From the 1960s onwards, the objectivity of science has been doubted from different perspectives – feminist and post-colonial approaches showing the patriarchal, respectively eurocentric character of science systems, the postmodern and especially post-structuralist understanding that there is no possibility of understanding phenomena outside

of discourse, or the evidence collected in sociology of science on the contingent character of scientific theoretical and empirical work (cf., e.g., Foucault/ Deleuze 1972, Laclau/ Mouffe 2001, Spivak 1988, Bloor, D. 1996).

However, even in 2004, Bruno Latour, one of the figureheads of critical sociology of science started to wonder if skepticism towards science was not going too far and in the wrong direction, e.g., by giving arguments to right-wing deniers of climate change: “While we spent years trying to detect the real prejudices hidden behind the appearance of objective statements, do we now have to reveal the real objective and incontrovertible facts hidden behind the illusion of prejudices?” (Latour 2004, 224) Debates on “post-truth” as a political challenge, e.g., with regard to climate change or the Covid pandemic are certainly cases in point for this fear. Latour (2004, 225) uses a terminology of war for his argument: “Would it not be rather terrible if we were still training young kids—yes, young recruits, young cadets—for wars that are no longer possible, fighting enemies long gone, conquering territories that no longer exist, leaving them ill-equipped in the face of threats we had not anticipated, for which we are so thoroughly unprepared?” The ultimate consequence of this argument however, would mean that scholars change (or should change) epistemologies in the same way in which generals change war strategies: As the enemy is no longer the general public blindly believing the patriarchal and imperialistic objectivity of science, one should defend precisely this objectivity against the public appeal of conspiracy theorists.

While this argument seems doubtful in itself, even from a strategic point of view, one would have to take into account that not only is there a “battle” between science and conspiracy theories in the Global North but arguably the “war” between hegemonic Western epistemologies and excluded and oppressed forms of knowledge in the Global South is still going on. Is it really possible to defend scientific objectivity on one front while fighting against epistemic violence (Spivak 1988, 282–83) on another? As an alternative to this deeply unsatisfactory solution, this paper discusses ways to uphold post-structuralist and post-colonial claims without falling into complete arbitrariness.

A second contemporary development also opens questions regarding academic knowledge production, namely debates on identity politics,

cancel culture, and the freedom of science. Here, we have on the one hand, the claim that the significant over-representation of white men in academia must be countered by rigorously privileging underrepresented voices – people of color, women, sexual minorities. This demand for changes in representation is frequently combined with the claim that only those with experiences of oppression and exclusion are able and entitled to speak about these themes. Against this position, freedom of academic thought and – again – the possibility to acquire and impart objective knowledge are positioned. Considerations on this debate form a further part of this paper.

## Post-Structuralism and the Universalism of Enlightenment

According to post-structuralist thought, the Enlightenment consisted of two main parts – the *political* project of civic emancipation demanding equal liberty for all men, and the *epistemological* understanding that (1) all men are equal and (2) capable of rationality so that (3) universal values, rights, and ways of understanding and knowing can be defined (Balibar 2007; Laclau/Mouffe 2001, 12). The political project was legitimated by its epistemological foundations, i.e., in the area of knowledge production in definitions of science as presented at the beginning of this paper. Out of a post-structuralist perspective, however, the relationship between the political and the epistemological project must be seen in reverse: The civic revolution aiming at the abolishment of aristocratic privilege needed and, thus, constructed its epistemological justification (Balibar 2007) By separating the concept of universalism from its historical context, it became a phantom (Laclau 2002, 114).

This form of re-articulating the concept of universalist rationality can be understood as a deconstructionist endeavor, as *affirmative sabotage* in the terminology of Spivak:

I used the term sabotage because it referred to the deliberate ruining of the master's machine from the inside. The idea is of entering the discourse that you are criticising fully, so that you can turn it around

from inside because the only way you can sabotage something is when you are working intimately with it. (Nazish 2014)

Thus, the deconstruction of the principles of enlightenment does not mean to completely refute them but “(p)ersistently to critique a structure that one cannot not (wish to) inhabit.” (Spivak 1993, 284). The task is, thus, to show the concrete consequences of the concept of enlightenment, and, above all, at which costs for whom it is brought into play.

## **Post-Colonialism and the Eurocentrism of Universalism**

These costs have been analyzed above all with regard to the Global South – after all, enlightenment and the concept of universal equal rights were not only contemporary with slavery and colonialism but philosophers of the time (among them Immanuel Kant, see Bouie 2018) also tried to develop a “science of the races” legitimating, directly and indirectly, oppression and exploitation. Universalism was clearly born as white and male universalism.

What holds true for the Enlightenment in general, arguably, also holds true for the concept of objective science developed at this time. “Research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake that occurs in a set of political and social conditions [...] and the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism” (Smith, 2012 :5) This argument follows Michel Foucault (1973, 72): “Political power is not absent in knowledge, it is interweaved with knowledge.” After the Enlightenment, truth is found by academic knowledge and research. Truth is understood as eternal, existing everywhere, and repeatable but it is produced in this form by incorporating rituals of its production in the processes of finding (= producing) truth, i.e., by academic research. As truth is objective, it is in principle accessible by and understandable for all. However, one needs specific techniques to access truth and these techniques are scientific methods only mastered by scientists. The acceptance of eternal truths as presented by those with access to these truths, i.e., scientists, is the base of the modern regime of governmentality.



Science also created knowledge about the colonies and, thereby, exerted “epistemic violence” (Spivak 1988, 24-25): The “other” and their knowledge are constructed as different from and inferior to “us”. Thereby, the “other” is silenced and their knowledge devaluated. The claim for (Western) rationality as the only valid form of knowledge generation and for scientific methods as adequate means to translate rationality into empirical knowledge is, thus, a form of silencing other forms of knowledge production, either by completely ignoring and excluding them or by appropriating them in a way seen as adequate for academic work.

The ability to make oneself understandable, to speak, comes out of “intercourse with society” defined by “economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life.” Spivak (1993, 72) Spivak’s term “subaltern” refers to those outside of the societal structure:

Outside (though not completely so) the circuit of the *international* division of labor, there are people whose consciousness we cannot grasp if we close off our benevolence by constructing a homogeneous Other referring only to our own place in the seat of the Same or the Self. Here are subsistence farmers, unorganized peasant labor, the tribals and the communities of zero workers on the street or in the countryside. (Spivak 1993, 79)

These people who cannot even be defined as a group (or as groups) without, again, speaking for them or assimilating them cannot make themselves understood; they are not part of knowledge production, not even about themselves. Every attempt to directly include the subaltern is futile – the task of the intellectual is to render visible the mechanism of exclusion, to use their privilege for an analytical approach to this question, not to render vocal the individual. Thus, from a post-colonial perspective, the deconstructionist task is to show the mechanisms and effects of the claim for scientific rationality on a global scale, its “worlding” effects in the words of Spivak (1985), a re-inscription of territories out of the perspective of the (former) colonizer.

## Sociology of Science

While post-structuralist and post-colonial theories aim at deconstructing the worlding effects of the discourse of science on a meta-level, (critical) the sociology of science has focused on the concrete developments of scientific work, thereby showing the contingencies of assumedly rational and objective research. David Bloor (1996, 840), one of the figureheads of critical sociology of science defines knowledge and cognition as a “social institution”. “Institutions exist because we believe in them. They can be thought of as realities created by references to them.” (Bloor 1996, 842) Institutions are based on a form of consensus in a community, on normativity, and uphold this normativity; they create a standard and deviations from this standard are not defined as unusual but as wrong (Bloor 1996, 848). They incorporate and produce meaning. Institutions, normativity, and meaning are finite, changeable (Bloor 1996, 850-853).

With regard to science and research, this emphasis on institutions does not mean that the material world and its properties are denied neither does the sociology of science assume that scientists do not deal with this material world.

But the important point, says the sociologist, is that reality, so experienced, under-determines what the scientists say or think about it. (...) an analysis of their knowledge must further assume the role of organizing principles and orientations derived from elsewhere. For example, we should take account (among other things) of the scientist’s received culture and cultural resources. We need to study the role of tradition, authority, shared models and paradigms, and styles, as well as the scientist’s interests or purposes. (Bloor 1996, 841)

Definitions and theories are never final but “conceptual change, adjustment, redefinition, reclassification and negotiation play a central role in science.” (Li et.al. 2010, 421) This can be observed when theories fail to make correct predictions and are adapted due to empirical evidence. However, the so-called “strong program” of sociology of science, represented inter alia by Bloor, maintains that finity also applies to “successful” theories which also might need adaptation after some

time. Such adaptations are always a question of choice and cannot be explained by pure rationality.

The concept of finity can also be found – although in another terminology – in the work of Thomas Kuhn (1970) on paradigm shifts in science. According to Kuhn, “normal” and “abnormal/revolutionary” phases alternate in science. In normal phases, scientific work is based on one theory which is applied to different phenomena in the form of puzzle solving. A wide spread of failures of a theory will bring the theory into a crisis and lead to a paradigm shift. Different scientific paradigms are, according to Kuhn, incommensurable (Kuhn 1970, 182).

## Trust and Doubt in Science

All hitherto-described approaches to science shed doubt on the objectivity of science and its claim to access to truth. However, while Bloor understands himself as a relativist in that he does not accept an absolute scientific truth, he rejects forms of relativism denying any possibility to discern truth that he sees in post-modernism (Briatte 2007). Also, Kuhn emphasizes that the reasons for scientific revolutions lie in science itself, not in societal or political power relations (Bird, 2022). Still, sociology of science was accused together with post-structuralist and post-colonial theory of anti-scientific relativism by “scientific realists” during the so-called *science wars* of the 1990s (Collins, n.d.).

After a pause of about 15 years, these science wars found new fuel in controversies about “fake news”, “alternative facts” or even an era of “post-truth”, declared the word of the year 2016 by Oxford Dictionaries who gave the following definition: “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” (Oxford Languages, 2016) Recently, these terms came up again in debates about the Covid pandemic. Some authors upheld that post-modern relativism has been one of the culprits of the devaluation of facts and truth (see e.g., d’Ancona 2017, 92) or make Kuhn’s concept of changing and unrecalibratable scientific paradigms responsible for science skepticism (see e.g., Horgan 2023). While one can certainly see some of these contributions

as unnecessary polemical, the question remains how one can assess the value of discourses without reference to their truthfulness, respectively how one can assess truthfulness without reference to the assumption of objective science.

In general, the problem becomes less grave when one rejects the concept of one, universal “Truth” and, instead focuses on concrete questions which can be answered in a right or a wrong way (and in many ways between these two poles). None of the representatives of sociology of science have denied the possibility of defining and finding correct solutions; their claim is that right and wrong solutions, i.e., theories that are empirically proven or disproved, are developed under specific social and cultural conditions that must be considered.

If we apply this approach to the Covid debates, we must first state that these debates were mostly carried out in a situation of deep insecurity and ignorance. Scientists in the field developed hypotheses which they later partly rejected. These are normal parts of each research procedure but due to the high public attention and the strong impact of scientific recommendations on everyday life, such changes furthered science skepticism. On the other hand, it seems plausible to assume that scientists published results earlier and with less caution than they would usually do due to public and political pressure. Furthermore, many recommendations – of scientists as well as of non-experts in the field including conspiracy theorists – were based on prognoses rather than empirical evidence, e.g., with regard to the effects of the vaccine, on one side, or of different forms of more or less dubious medication, on the other.

Furthermore, these discourses partly defined different aims for their recommendations. While scientists mostly focused on the prevention of contagion, others (including a minority of scientists) emphasized the negative effects of lockdowns, closures of schools and businesses on public health and the economic situation of the population. Obviously, the debate here was not about scientific methods and results but about ethical questions – but these ethical questions also formed framing conditions not only for the public but also for the specifically scientific debate.

From the perspective of sociology of science, it seems fruitful to take all these contexts into account when analyzing the development

of scientific research and discourse during the pandemic. This can and should be done independently from the question of the correctness of measures, i.e., their effectiveness with regard to specified goals.

Out of a post-structural approach, the question of whether the correctness of a discourse can be assessed is more difficult to answer. Even if it is certainly polemical to peg these theories as “anything goes”-understandings, it is true that, e.g., Laclau/ Mouffe (2001) only differentiate between hegemonic and non-hegemonic discourses, thus, they focus on power relations, not on trustworthiness (or see trustworthiness as a result of power relations). However, this does not mean that post-structuralism denies the fact that different discourses also differ in their relevance for the solution of a specific problem; rather, this question is not dealt with by them. The possibility of objectivity is rejected and understood as a specific and very effective way of creating hegemony. Thus, scientific objectivity cannot be expected to give access to a universal truth. Still, scientific methods can be more adequate to answer certain questions than other methods.

While neither populists nor intellectuals can claim access to Truth, the type of truths political propagandists and specialized experts produce are of a different order and quality. Promoted by billionaires from the oil industry, the idea that there is no climate change does not have the same normative quality as the ideas that a community of specialized climate researchers has produced through scientific procedures. (Angermüller 2018, 6)

Still, also scientists have individual and collective interests not only related to scientific results but, e.g., financial gain or gain of reputation. And post-structuralist and especially post-colonial theory maintains that they also serve specific interests, namely those of the Global North. These interests were obvious during the pandemic. While billionaires from the oil industry profit from denying climate change, billionaires from the pharmaceutical industry profit from the propagation of a vaccine, and many scientists are employed or financed in other ways by this industry. This becomes obvious when we do not look at research results but decisions on the topics and aims of research.

Health care and research have been strongly shaped by colonial, neo-colonial, and post-colonial influences. During colonialism, medical

experiments were carried out on African people without their consent and such practices can even be found in more recent times (see, e.g., Smith, 2011). During the Covid pandemic, French doctors proposed to test vaccines in Africa (Rosman, 2020). At the same time, people in the Global South and, especially, in Africa are frequently not properly medically treated due to a lack of pharmaceuticals. Existing medication is not available due to high costs and the patents of pharmaceutical businesses:

Despite receiving billions of dollars in government funding and advance orders which effectively removed risks normally associated with the development of medicines, vaccine developers have monopolized intellectual property, blocked technology transfers, and lobbied aggressively against measures that would expand the global manufacturing of these vaccines. (Montealegre, 2022)

More importantly for this paper, traditional health and healing practices were devaluated by colonizers on the base of Enlightenment and modern, scientific medicine. “These hierarchies dubbed African knowledges as ‘traditional,’ ‘intuitive,’ ‘practical,’ ‘sensuous,’ and ‘superstitious.’” (Meek, n.d.)

According to Meek (2023a, 166), rejections of the vaccine in Africa and conspiracy theories around the pandemic can be explained by the desire “to similarly denounce and refuse the legacies of ongoing imperialism and anti-Black racism.” At the same time, scientific prognoses for a terrible death toll of Covid in Africa (see, e.g., Jahn 2020) proved wrong (University of Edinburgh 2023). This clearly shows that specific framing conditions tend to be overlooked in medical (and other) research when they do not apply in the Global North. Also, medical progress made in the Global South is frequently ignored: “While Western media ridiculed and discredited Artemisia, Madagascar’s remedy for COVID-19, Europe and the USA conducted clinical trials to extract—and patent—a treatment derived from the very same plant.” (Meek, 2023b)

All these phenomena can be explained from a post-colonial perspective. They also prove Spivak’s assessment that the subaltern cannot make themselves understood; that they cannot speak. The possibility that an African plant extract could heal Covid had to be brought up by the Global North in order for it to be taken seriously, and negative

reactions to medical exports from the Global North were read (quasi-automatically) as primitive and based on a lack of education and knowledge. The relation of this skepticism to colonial and neo-colonial experiences was simply ignored and silenced.

## **Identity Politics: Empowering the Subaltern to Speak?**

Identity politics can be understood as a way of self-empowerment of those who were hitherto not able to speak. The term and the concept came first up in the Combahee River Collective Statement (1977):

This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression. In the case of Black women this is a particularly repugnant, dangerous, threatening, and therefore revolutionary concept because it is obvious from looking at all the political movements that have preceded us that anyone is more worthy of liberation than ourselves.

This is a clear and plausible political statement. It is embedded in a text that emphasizes "the fluidity of forms of oppression, the dynamic nature of identity politics, the ontological variability of different types of identity (...)" (Harcourt, 2021) It is also an attempt to get out of the muteness of subalternity. When black women can speak, when they are heard and can make themselves understood, they are no longer subaltern. And, fundamentally, the elimination of subalternity must be one of the central goals of societal change. "If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression." (Combahee River Collective, 1977)

In recent times, however, identity politics have been defined in a much more rigid way. The message is no longer that oppressed people must speak about their oppression, that their knowledge is significantly

different from any kind of abstract knowledge about oppression but that *only* those with experiences of oppression, those who suffer oppression can legitimately speak about it. In this form of discourse, the fluidity of identities is also neglected. Frequently, identities are essentialized instead of recognizing their constructed character.

Furthermore, this demand is not only made in the political sphere but also in academic realms. In this vein, e.g., old white male academics are hindered from speaking about their lifetime research even if a clear anti-colonial and emancipatory stance of their academic work is recognized (see, e.g., Schyga, 2021). One must also mention that interventions of this kind are still rather rare although they are the theme of threatening scenarios of right-wing politicians and of (usually old, white, male) academics conjuring up the end of academic freedom while still holding the vast majority of academic positions. Still, it seems useful and necessary to critically analyze identity politics from a deconstructionist and post-colonial perspective. In the same way as regarding colonial and oppressive hegemonic discourses, one must ask for the motives, interests, and guiding ideas of identity politics. Obviously, this cannot be done in a general way; instead, each discourse in this field must be deconstructed individually. A useful question to these discourses would be if they, in fact, aim at an academic setting in which only those directly concerned by an issue are allowed to speak about it. This would considerably limit academic research. On the other hand, such interventions can also aim at shedding light on the current (white, male, exclusionary) academic world by rather radical means.

Still, the immediate (potential) successes of identity politics are limited. Usually, no subalterns are enabled to speak but rather those token people of color who are already part of academia and help to hold up the self-image of universities as color-blind and diverse. Furthermore, Spivak (1988) makes the important point that one's ability to take a societal position and, thus, to be able to speak, comes out of one's relation to society. Thus, arguably, the ability to speak must come out of changes in societal structures and relations and cannot be reached by creating protected spaces.



## **Conclusions: Matters of Fact and Matters of Concern**

The promise of the Enlightenment was emancipation and a better life for all – or, at least, for all who seemed relevant to the theorists of the Enlightenment: Objective science would lead to progress in all parts of collective and individual life and rationality would be the base for a universal consensus on what progress would mean. The self-defined task of deconstruction is a similar one. By doubting the paradigm of rationality and objectivity, the relation of this concept to power is shown and those excluded by this concept should be empowered. “Deconstruction is justice,” says Derrida (1992, 15). But what comes after deconstruction? How can we decide what is right and what is wrong, both in a factual and an ethical sense?

The first task here is probably deconstruction again. While rejecting the proposition that one form of knowledge is superior to all other forms, one also must reject the proposition that all forms of knowledge are of the same value which is universalist in itself (Balibar, 2007). But in the absence of absolute truth as the benchmark for the validity of knowledge, one must define the value of a specific form of knowledge: When the main goal is to reduce contagion by a virus in the Global North, Western medical research may well deliver the most valuable results. However, this might not be true for the same aim in the Global South. And while the results of medical research might be correct (in the sense of effectiveness) under certain conditions, their value can be contested by differing ethical aims, e.g., a broader public health perspective.

Similarly, one’s own experiences and suffering certainly create knowledge not accessible to those who lack these experiences. If, thus, knowledge about individual or collective suffering is the main aim of research, reports of the directly concerned are the only valid source. However, for a more structural understanding of the reasons for this suffering, of the interests of those who caused this suffering, or also of the best ways to end it, it might be legitimate or even necessary to include those with another perspective on it.

In the absence of absolute truth, we cannot rely on understanding “matters of facts”, we must identify “matters of concern” (Latour, 2004).

Enlightenment as one way of many to produce knowledge can provide us with important means to do that. Even though the Enlightenment has become a phantom by the division of its epistemological assumptions from its political part, it can be a “good ghost” “protecting us from the dangers of fundamentalism” (Latour, 2005) when its phantom-like qualities are recognized. After all: “A theory is exactly like a box of tools. It has nothing to do with the signifier. It must be useful. It must function.” (Foucault/ Deleuze, 1972)

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Conference audience, "In from the margins: Sharing footnotes of subaltern knowledge and practices", Belgrade, University of Arts, 26–28 June 2023.

## II

# Implementing, inhabiting & criticizing cultural policies



Keynote speaker Basma el Hussein with Biljana Đorđević, Chair of the session; "In from the margins: Sharing footnotes of subaltern knowledge and practices", Belgrade, University of Arts, 28th June 2023.

# A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO CULTURAL WORK. WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

BASMA EL HUSSEINY

In this chapter, I will try to share with you a few thoughts and questions about the relationship between the two fields of human rights and culture, and to unpack some of the problems that exist around the human rights-based approach to cultural work; with the understanding that cultural work is the vital field for artistic creativity. My aim is also to stimulate discussion that would make this relationship more effective in terms of protecting human rights, as well as in terms of promoting artistic creativity and cultural work.

Allow me to start by trying to state some common understandings that I think we share:

- I think that we all agree that there are serious and continuous violations of international human rights principles everywhere, not just in Global South countries where brutal dictatorship is almost the norm of governance, but also in the democratic countries in the North that legalizes the killing of thousands of civilian immigrants by drowning in the sea every year. And if one wants to talk specifically about the field of culture, also by legalizing depriving thousands of artists and cultural workers of their basic right of mobility and thus affecting their basic right to decent and fair work.
- I think that we might also agree that freedom of artistic expression is restricted, not only in conservative Islamic countries in the Global South, where many taboos are imposed on artistic freedom,



but also in the open and tolerant societies in the North where it is very difficult for an artist to tackle certain topics that are regarded to be challenging to dominant values in these countries, and where racist artistic practices limit the artistic scope of those coming from the South to certain roles, topics, and audiences.

If we agree with this brief and generalized description of some of our common understandings, then we would agree that our challenges are global full stop, not Global South or Global North. If you have doubts about this, allow me to remind you of three peculiar political incidents that happened in the Global North in recent years, and that were previously perceived as impossible to happen in this part of the world, while they are common in the Global South: First there was the storming of the White House by Trump supporters in 2021, then there was the attempted military coup in Germany at the end of 2022, and finally, more recently, the mutiny by the Wagner Militia in Russia. I would also like to draw your attention here to what happened in Documenta Fifteen last year [2022], and the disputes over artistic content that led to confiscating works of art accused of being antisemitic and the resignation of the curators, the Indonesian collective Ruangrupa.

These incidents are of course totally disconnected and perhaps do not stand in court as evidence on similarities between the North and the South, but I think it is important to consider them as potential indicators that things are not what they seem in the North. I'm not suggesting that we ignore the huge disparities that divide the World, but rather to regard these disparities as common challenges that those working in the two fields of culture and human rights everywhere should address, preferably in a coordinated way.

**The first task at hand is for them to look at some of the common conceptions, or rather misconceptions of the relationship between culture and human rights, and to question the so called “human-rights-based approach to cultural work”.** Many of those working in human rights understand this approach as an endeavor to make artistic work more of a conduit for disseminating human rights principles within society. This understanding focuses on the content of the artistic work, or rather the “message” that such a work attempts to convey. In some

cases, this understanding extends to the methods and relationships of production of these artistic works in terms of their respect for the principles of human rights such as color-blind casting, for example. According to this understanding, the work of art functions as a bridge between clear, constant, and universal principles of human rights on one side and society on the other side.

However, many artists and cultural workers look at this understanding with great skepticism for various reasons. One of these reasons is that they consider the content of a work of art as a substantial element of artistic creativity, and therefore it is the territory of the artist. For them, using the work of art to spread the principles of human rights would weaken the agency of the artists on their work and would eventually lead to damaging the status of artists and their control over their creative fields. Another reason is that they believe that artistic creativity is a dynamic process that is full of fluidity and surprise and therefore binding it to the fixed universal principles of human rights could lead to stagnation and shallowness, even if the artists agree with these principles.

Despite this, there are some successful examples of cultural experiences that played an important role in spreading the universal principles of human rights, with reasonably good artistic standards. However, one must admit that these few good experiences, cannot hide the hundreds of poor-quality artistic works that sought to enhance the role of women, fight racism, advocate religious tolerance, etc., and that in fact, and due to their artistic shallowness, failed in increasing the respect for human rights among their societies. It is important to note that this understanding is promoted by donor organizations from the Global North that provide a large part of the funding of the arts in Global South countries,

On the other hand, many artists and cultural workers interpret the human-rights-based approach as a means to defending their right to free artistic expression, and protecting them from political and social oppression, similar to the way journalists and media practitioners are defended. However, it is important to take note of the fact that artistic freedom is not given the same priority by human rights organizations as freedom of the press, and that persecuted artists are deemed less entitled to defense than journalists are. It is possible that some of this

neglect is caused by a lack of appreciation of the social impact of cultural work, something that repressive regimes are well aware of.

The most substantial problem embedded in this dichotomy is the fixation on the universal principles of human rights as a recommended basis for the artistic content. I believe that any positive relationship between cultural work and the field of human rights must go beyond established universal principles and written texts; it must explore and question the human need for justice, which is the foundation of all human rights principles.

From this perspective, the relationship between culture and human rights becomes a dynamic relationship based on questioning and imagination, and not on advocacy and endorsement. In my opinion, a work of art that is most successful in promoting human rights is one that questions the axiom of these rights and their meaning to the individual and society. By doing so, it would also explore the impact of the violation of these rights in the past, present and future, and thus contributes to giving life to the texts that are preserved in United Nations conferences. I believe that a work of art is not required to advocate human rights by reproducing them through artistic tools, but rather to give them renewed validity through questioning.

**The second problem in the relationship between culture and human rights, lies in the prevailing tendency in the field of human rights itself to give priority to individual rights over collective ones, and to political and civil rights over social and economic rights.** Some may disagree with me on this and say that economic and social rights are also covered by international human rights laws, and this is true, but it cannot be denied that the liberal concepts that emphasize individual freedoms have a clear supremacy in the agendas of human rights organizations worldwide.

On the positive side, this supremacy gives importance to the role of the individual artist and helps protect his or her rights in free artistic expression, as is evident in the agendas of international human rights organizations that have recently focused on artistic freedom and the protection of artists. However, in the literature by the major international organizations that advocate artistic freedom, one hardly finds any reference to the social context where this freedom would be

exercised, let alone any mention of collective cultural rights such as access to culture. It appears as if artistic freedom stands alone with an intrinsic value that surpasses social conditions.

I think that this is very much a Global North perspective, where access to culture is not a major issue, and the connection between it and artistic freedom is less clear. In Global South countries the lack of access to culture lies at the root of the societies' failure to respect artistic freedom and protect artists. In my opinion, separating artistic freedom from its social, economic, and sometimes even political context would inevitably lead to exposing artists to more danger since they become alienated from their society, and thus denied the possibility of solidarity and protection within their communities.

In the current set up of international human rights systems we can say that artistic freedom and the protection of artists have become situated within the international system of civil and political rights, and not within the framework of social and economic rights. This results in a significant lack of interest in collective cultural rights on the part of international organizations that is manifested in the scarcity of international literature on the subject, as well as in the lack of administrative structures and financing programs that support these rights.

To better understand the importance of recognizing the collective nature of cultural rights, it is important to remember that during the past four decades, the world witnessed more than thirty civil, regional, and tribal wars in Africa, Asia and Latin America. These wars have caused the displacement of more than 90 million people, the destruction of the infrastructure of more than twenty countries, and the imposition of economic sanctions on fourteen countries, resulting in the impoverishment of tens of millions. Add to this the implementation of economic policies designed by the World Bank and other mega economic drivers that increased extreme poverty and widened the gap between the poor and the rich in many countries in the Global South.

The overall impact of war and liberal economic policies has not just been the loss of lives and livelihoods, but also the loss of the historical and contemporary cultural assets of vast communities and the inability of hundreds of millions to access basic cultural services. In most Global South countries today, one could estimate that more than one third of their populations do not have the opportunity to attend a live theatre

performance, a music concert in a concert hall, nor an exhibition of visual arts during their lifetime. In many cases, they also cannot afford access to their natural and cultural heritage. In addition to this, most forcibly displaced people are alienated from their original language and not allowed to practice their cultural traditions, and are forced to submit to social integration policies that erase their cultural identities and thus negatively affect their ability to create art.

**The third problem related to the human-rights-based approach to cultural work is related to the relationship between the UN institutions responsible for the protection of human rights on one side, and the UN cultural institutions on the other side.** There are significant differences between the work modalities of the international tools and institutions in the two fields. The international tools and institutions concerned with human rights, such as the International Council for Human Rights, appear to be more effective and influential because they rely on quantitative measurement of the implementation of human rights principles, and then link the protection of human rights with the political and economic privileges of states. On the other hand, the international instruments and institutions watching over culture, such as UNESCO, are politically softer and depend on narratives and tools of international cooperation in the monitoring of the implementation of the relevant conventions.

The impact of this difference has become more visible recently with the increasing use of the term “cultural rights” in international circles since there is no documented description of the position of these rights in the international human rights system, not even of the areas covered by these rights, despite the important contributions provided by the Fribourg Declaration and the efforts made by Farida Shaheed, the first UN special rapporteur on cultural rights.

Therefore, it is not clear how to measure the violation of these rights, nor the mechanisms for defending them, and whether this is the responsibility of international organizations working in the field of human rights, or those specialized in culture. Cultural rights fall in the darkness of the many cracks that exist between UNESCO conventions and international human rights laws, and especially in the large gaps between the work of civil society organizations working in the field of culture and those concerned with human rights.

**In Action for Hope, the organization that I'm the director of, we tried to find answers to some of the questions around these three problems:** the fixation on human rights principles as the basis for artistic content, the perception of artistic freedom as an individual rather than a collective right, and the ambiguity around who has oversight of cultural rights.

Action for Hope started in 2015 with the premise to address the cultural needs of marginalized communities and to advocate for cultural rights. The first and most difficult question was about maintaining a good balance between upholding human rights values and the artistic quality of the work we support. The starting point of our work was to provide artistically talented youth and children from marginalized and refugee communities with training and production opportunities. But almost all of them did not receive any prior education in the arts, and some did not receive any kind of education at all. Consequently, their artistic taste was limited to what they receive in the media. To address this weakness, we encouraged them to search for artistic references in their cultural heritage that could possibly inspire them artistically and empower their creativity. We did our best to provide them with the technical tools and types of knowledge that they need for creating art. We also focused on introducing them to contemporary artistic experiences and connecting them to the central cultural scene in the countries in which they live. And finally, we encouraged them to apply critical thinking to everything that we provide and everything around them in general.

The second question, and perhaps the most important one, was about the relationship between our work and the communities that we work with. Most of these communities are socially conservative and are very skeptical towards anything that deviates from the norm and the tradition, especially if it includes a departure from the known social roles of women and their relationship with men. We had to earn the trust of certain segments of these communities who could influence others, and we had to do this with honesty, seriousness, and all the time. This is not easy at all, and the difficulties continue until now, but we succeeded in forming critical masses that are supportive of arts and culture within these communities, especially among women and youth.

Our adoption of cultural rights as collective rights was key. We did our best not to support an individual artist or a work of art in isolation

from the cultural rights of the community from which the artist comes or to whom the work of art is presented. Some may ask: What if a community rejected a particular artist and persecuted and abused him or her? Of course, this is very possible, but the solution we propose is not to isolate this artist from the community, but rather to facilitate and manage negotiations between him or her and the community, while providing temporary protection if necessary. We dream of a day when marginalized people would defend artistic freedom and not view it as a threat to the value system they embrace.

The third and final question that we faced, although we did not pay attention to it until four years ago, is how we can protect cultural rights from an institutional and structural point of view. Firstly, we realized that this is something that we cannot do alone as a small organization that specializes in the field of arts and culture. Rather, it requires broader collaboration among several organizations working in various fields because cultural rights affect and are affected by many other rights, individual and collective.

We also realized that the challenges standing in the way of protecting cultural rights are global in nature: war and poverty are the most long-standing ones, and the impact of climate change is very pertinent, so we need to learn and share experiences with peers from different parts in the world. Our response to this was to create a platform for cooperation and solidarity among organizations working in various fields that are aware of the importance of cultural rights. This is how our initiative “Landscapes of Hope” started in 2019 as an exploratory process, providing tools for cooperation and solidarity among those seeking social justice and attempting to address the impacts of war, poverty, and climate change, while enhancing and supporting the role of cultural work in this endeavor. The network now consists of twenty-five civil society organizations working in fields such as gender equality, digital empowerment, environmental rights, freedom of expression, as well as arts and culture.

We are also aware of the importance of dialogue between civil society organizations on one side and United Nations organizations that lead the fields of human rights and culture on the other side, and we hope that this dialogue would help bridge existing gaps and find ways of joint action towards protecting cultural rights. We also hope that such

dialogue would bring about a clearer understanding of cultural rights and a more prominent position for them in international agendas.

**For us, the human rights-based approach to cultural work means a commitment to advocating and protecting cultural rights as part and parcel of humanity's quest for justice.** For us, justice means that every human being should have the right to enjoy theater, music, poetry, sculpture, film, and dance, and should have an equal opportunity to create art, even if they are living in a slum area or a refugee camp. We also understand that this involves a responsibility to address the reasons why people end up living in slums or refugee camps.

Finally, we modestly recognize that our work is a small drop in the ocean, and that the value of this work is confirmed only through continuous questioning, and through dialogue with people who ask similar questions. After all, questioning is the first function of creativity.



# **EMOTIONAL CLUSTERS IN PLURALIST ATTEMPTS OF CULTURAL POLITICS. Exploring the Season of the Commons in Naples**

GIULIANA CIANCIO

With this paper, I aim to scrutinize the ‘Season of the Commons’ (2012-2021) in Naples, sharing critical reflections on the cultural policy process. A central research question guides my empirical analysis: ‘*How do emotions function in negotiating between top-down cultural policymaking and bottom-up cultural practices?*’ Drawing upon Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, I explore this question by examining Naples through a lens that considers its historical and cultural complexities. This approach illuminates how power dynamics, cultural narratives, and the transformative and political role of emotions influence policy and political negotiations. Furthermore, it allows me to view the commons as a political territory that challenges dominant illiberal neoliberal narratives and political inequalities, while also promoting democratic pluralism and creating space for ‘subaltern knowledge and practices’.

## **Understanding emotions**

I want to start with Mark Fisher, who in his book *Capitalist Realism* (2009) emphasizes that the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism marked a move from top-down control of production to a decentralized system focused on: targets, missions, objectives, and results. This shift has not only transformed organizational mechanisms but also emotional aspects. In a post-Fordist society, workers are expected to display a form

of affection and emotional commitment that has become a benchmark for assessing their professional effectiveness and quality. In turn, various thinkers including Gielen (2009), Harvey (2007), Mouffe (2005), and again Fisher, have demonstrated how capitalism and neoliberalism have entered the personal sphere, shaping needs, mobilizing desires, and influencing personal preferences. As a result, neoliberalism has emerged as the dominant paradigm for democratic development and the pursuit of personal happiness (Fisher *ibid.*) limiting our capacity to envision alternative social or political paradigms. Addressing the concept of happiness, Zygmunt Bauman (2016) has shown another crucial transition from the declaration of a universal human right to the pursuit of individual happiness. Bauman highlights that this shift has underpinned the social fragmentation in advanced capitalist societies. Pursuing individual happiness necessitates confronting fear, which is exacerbated by right-wing populism, identifying public enemies as sources of societal unhappiness, thereby polarizing the political, cultural, and economic landscapes. It is here that the concept of projective disgust (Nussbaum 2015) comes into focus. It hinges on perceiving the self as 'quasi-human', attributing the human nature such as bad smells and dirtiness to any form of diversity. Such sentiments of disgust rationalize segregation under the guise of aversion to diversity beyond specific circles of concern. What emerges from this landscape, as provocative as argued by Mouffe (2018), is that political theory frequently underestimates the pivotal role that passion and emotions play in our societies. Politics relies on passion, which in turn, mobilizes desires and acts as a binding force. Positive emotions are essential for sustaining political struggles, such as the cultivation of enthusiasm arising from the proliferation of social, political, and cultural interactions within larger communities, serving to maintain momentum even in the face of setbacks (Graeber 2011).

With these premises in mind, I intend to highlight essential aspects for our understanding of emotions. Firstly, emotions possess a relational dimension in cultural politics (Ahmed 2015). They extend beyond the private realm, linking and transforming individuals within social groups. By entailing other feelings and effects, they are an integral part of any political project. Secondly, emotions have tangible consequences in daily life with far-reaching social and political implications. As Nussbaum and Bauman demonstrate, they influence critical issues

such as segregation toward migrants, black cultures, or the Palestinian community, while other emotions like passion and compassion act as common societal catalysts. All these emotions often start operating from the personal sphere. Lastly, to reinforce this latest concept, emotions transcend class distinctions and are again performed on a daily life basis. As pointed out by David Harvey (2016), struggles over the quality of (daily) life converge on broader, cross-cutting issues are rooted in everyday matters. These struggles can prioritize common public interests, surpassing class distinctions (or professional roles) often stemming from personal experiences of inequality and displacement, carrying significant implications in the social and political spheres.

Building upon these first critical insights, I would share a first definition of the central concept I will elaborate on in this paper, i.e., the emotional clusters (Ciancio 2022). In my empirical research, these have emerged as temporary informal value-driven groupings, where personal issues converge, aiming to critically react to neoliberalism. They have been inhabited by top-down and bottom-up actors who have expressed (loudly or quietly) their urgency to engage in struggles over the quality of (daily) life i.e., to place matters of common public interest at the centre of their actions and to react to the (emotional) colonization of neoliberalism. They have experimented in co-imagining/co-designing new policy/political deliberations in favor of a pluralistic democracy and they operate within the interplay of individual happiness and human rights.

## **The Emotional Biotope**

To navigate this slippery territory, I have settled a conceptual framework: the Emotional Biotope. This has emerged by combining two empirical models: the *Civil Sequence* (Gielen and Lijster 2017) which explores the change of emotional status in the rise of cultural organizations within a transnational civil context; and the *Creative Biotope* designed by Pascal Gielen (2018), an ideal-typical abstraction of four domains: domestic, peers, market and civil. In my exploration of Naples (2012-2021), the Emotional Biotope enabled an examination of historical

events, global and local phenomena, and the intersections between top-down and bottom-up actors, with a focus on the analysis of emotions in this landscape. Within the Emotional Biotope, the domestic domain regards the personal sphere where I have scrutinized value-driven choices at the start of the Season of the Commons (2012–2014). The peer domain covers informal exchanges. It has provided insights into the fluid nature of interactions between top-down and bottom-up actors (2012–2015). The market domain pertains to market regulations including public norms. Here I have delved into the overlap of policy paradigms, cultural trends, forms of pluralism, and monoliths (2014–2019). Lastly, the civil domain addresses the analysis of civil actions in the public sphere. Here I have examined the analysis of conscious efforts aimed at fostering enduring pluralistic changes (2015–2021). Drawing on Gramsci's theory of hegemony (Gramsci 2014), I critically examine power dynamics. According to the Italian philosopher, hegemony refers to how dominant groups maintain power not only through coercion but also by winning the consent of subordinate groups. This is achieved by establishing a 'common sense' and shaping values and norms that are accepted as natural or universal.

Traversing these domains, I was conquered by cultural, policy, and political actors driven by their commitment to center matters of public common interests in their actions. They served as my guides in navigating the intangible realm where opinions are formed, and decisions are made in culture and politics. To closely follow and participate in their endeavors, I adopted various qualitative techniques, including autoethnography; scrutinizing their feelings in contextual events and in the multiple interactions they engaged in. This methodology has enriched my analytical approach within the Emotional Biotope, providing the coordinates to scrutinize various emotions and their role in cultural policy and political realms. With these theoretical and methodological references in place, I will now illustrate how these emotional clusters were at work in the Season of the Commons. I will explore how they have challenged dominant narratives and suggested trajectories for creating a stage for excluded voices in the political landscape. I will share the insights gained from the intersections of the four domains and their mutual influences to elucidate the political role of emotional clusters in this urban setting.

## The 'freezing' of democracy

Looking at Naples through the lens of the market domain, we encounter a city shaped by an intricate overlap and interplay of influences, from a rich history of grassroots activism to a celebrated intellectual and artistic scene since the 1970s and beyond (Dines 2012), and radical forms of *clientelism*. The political scientist Percy Allum (2008) defines clientelism as “a form of political participation in which politician-citizen linkages are based on a general exchange regarding non-specified, but personalized, services rendered in return for electoral support” (Allum & Allum 2008: 341). He shows how clientelism has evolved beyond this exchange, spreading its tendrils into various realms including culture, enabling loyal individuals to secure influential positions through informal networks, at both local and national levels. This was the case (with various substantial differences) with both right-wing and left-wing governments. This phenomenon has inevitably spilled into the cultural sphere, where publicly funded institutions have become attractive tools for political campaigns as they expand and draw larger audiences. Interviews conducted during my fieldwork reveal a division in the management of large-scale institutions (and not only there), where, for example, some highly qualified professionals were responsible for compensating for others selected on criteria unrelated to professional aptitude. It is not a coincidence that in Naples, I identified a phenomenon I labelled the ‘emotional diaspora.’ This emotional diaspora is a result of political pressures stemming from regional changes in 2012 and national austerity measures following the 2008 global financial crisis. My interviews with various interlocutors pointed to a scenario where conflict of interests and clientelism, coupled with limited economic resources, significantly restricted opportunities for creative expression, resulting in a de facto emotional and physical diaspora. This diaspora was marked by feelings of disengagement, individualism, mistrust, heightened competition among peers, and widespread emotional struggles, including depression and burnout.

This emotional diaspora can be attributed to the simple, sometimes rudimentary, yet effective consensus-building strategies employed by the dominant political group in power at that time. In a nutshell, between

2012 and 2014, the local cultural realm witnessed a form of 'democratic freeze.' This entailed the gradual consolidation of the group in power's influence, resulting in micro-realms characterized by informal alliances and loyal individuals. Key manifestations included an extended spoils system within major cultural institutions, the appointment of one super-director (Bandettini 2010; Santopadre 2015) in the two most publicly funded cultural institutions in town (with evident conflicts of interest), and the influence of Berlusconi delegates (the former Italian prime Minister) in cultural decision-making at the local level (Bandettini 2011; De Fazio 2011). The symptoms of this democratic freeze included the dominance of a specific artistic 'taste' (privileging commercial or conservative cultural representation), the arbitrary allocation of economic resources to loyal groups, limited spaces for cultural visibility, heightened competition among peers, and a lack of information-sharing within local public bodies, hindering the growth and international connections of the cultural ecosystem. All these were components of what Gramsci calls 'common sense'.

Cultural actors vying for economic resources pursued distinct paths in response to this environment. Some sought local political alliances while adopting competitive attitudes and maintaining internal trust within restricted groups but often expressing distrust toward their peers akin to Banfield's *Amoral Familism* (1958). Others explored economic sustainability through private funding, foundations, and international collaborations, enabling them to endure while awaiting changes in temporary hegemony. Some even changed careers or sought opportunities elsewhere, potentially disconnecting from the root causes of their discontent and diluting the radical nature of their political actions. In all cases, the peers' domain, as described in the Emotional Biotope, emerged as a space marked by intermittent relationships within the local context, while cultural players endeavored to navigate their way into the market domain for their economic survival.

## Mirroring

The Season of the Commons began during these frozen democratic dynamics, with its origins rooted in the realm of the performing arts. The commoners initially navigated between the intricate aforementioned monolithic cultural expressions and the locally diverse cultural ecosystem, performing within a context deeply marked by a blend of socio-political trust and mistrust. This multifaceted scenario unfolded under the overlapping jurisdictions of the State, the EU, and regional, and city policies, all operating within the local context. Within this complex framework, numerous cultural, policy, and political actors, between failures and success and with all their contradictions, embraced unknown behaviors, striving to reshape the landscape in favor of diverse cultural endeavors and looking for new territories for their cultural survival.

In 2011, the election of Luigi De Magistris as the mayor of Naples marked a pivotal moment. He represented a civil movement within local politics, aligning with a broader trend where former judges and civil society representatives entered the political arena, advocating for citizens' rights. De Magistris, unaffiliated with major lobbies or political parties, garnered support from the extended middle class and social movements. According to political observers (Treccagnoli 2016), he brought a certain left-wing populism to the city. In 2012, the occupation of the ex-Asilo Filangieri, a historic 16<sup>th</sup>-century building, triggered a transversal political and cultural debate, giving rise to a new landscape of local activism, characterized by greater diversity in terms of class and interests. It was within the Season of the Commons that these diverse actors found a political meeting point by bridging their political isolation. The emotional clusters initiated here, a product of these interactions, emerged from the personal needs of some top-down and bottom-up actors, including the mayor, some councilors, and cultural activists. They aimed to find 'comrades' with whom to share enthusiasm for international movements, such as Occupy, and to bring national debates surrounding the commons to the local stage. This collaborative sphere became a space for transforming negative emotions (burnout, stress, solitude, frustration) into positive ones (enthusiasm, passion, compassion), and to react to the prevailing sense of political solitude and discomfort. One interlocutor

aply summarized the sentiment: “What is the sense of doing theatre when you have a desert around you?”

Examining the emotional clusters here, we can identify an initial, perhaps unconscious, ‘mirroring’ strategy at play. Drawing from David Harvey’s perspective (2016), spaces of resistance in today’s societies often arise mirroring established power dynamics, showcasing organizational similarities with both local hegemonic structures and counter-hegemonic movements. However, they are rooted in distinct sets of values. Within Naples, this mirroring strategy is marked by certain dimensions not traditionally associated with power relations but rather considered components within the broader scope of interpersonal and group dynamics. One of these is ‘informality’ in the relationship between cultural activists and the municipality. It refers to interactions that were not bound by rigid formalities or strict protocols, but, on the contrary, reflected the flexibility and fluidity of their interactions while navigating issues of authority, influence, and control. This informality served as a hallmark of cross-cutting alliances deeply rooted in a critique of neoliberalism, thus bearing certain resemblances to the clientelism, but grounded in a distinct set of values. A certain ‘intimacy’ between the mayor, the councilor of the commons, and cultural activists is another noteworthy dimension that I encountered in their interactions in public arenas and debates, which is a rarity when compared to similar dynamics in other urban settings (Vesco 2021). This relates to a level of closeness or familiarity, that in power relations suggests that the parties involved share a deeper understanding, trust, and cooperation. The third facet of this mirroring strategy involves ‘ambiguous’ behaviors embraced by the parties between the political and civil realms. Ambiguity, in this context, is not necessarily negative (Gielen & Haq 2020), it serves as a tactical approach, evolving into a strategic one, aimed at recalibrating power dynamics and securing influential positions within the urban landscape. In contrast to the established hegemonic structures described earlier, the adoption of ambiguous behaviors aligns with Gramsci’s term ‘war of position’ (Gramsci 2014). This encompasses engaging in different territories and adopting a hybrid political approach that merges activism, law, cultural dynamics, participatory methods, and the establishment of loyal and trusting relationships, despite the inherent contradictions these concepts may carry.



Informality, intimacy, and ambiguity observed within these transversal alliances had the function of attributing a fluidity in the behaviors of the parties involved as well as being symptoms of a sort of process of shared responsibility and informally supporting a decision-making mechanism. For example, consider the case of the ‘revolutionary’ mayor (and some councilors) who built his political journey beyond his traditional institutional space. This coexisted with the ‘institutional’ approach of the cultural activists who were deeply engaged in the realm of legal norms and the co-design of public policies. This dynamic unveiled an unknown interplay where the mayor’s ‘explosive’ nature, rooted in left populism, was ‘moderated’ and ‘radicalized’ by the cultural and political activists working alongside the councilor, looking for norms to create the legacy of the efforts embraced. Returning to the Emotional Biotope, the peers’ domain was vital here. The extensive interaction between the mayor, the councilor for the commons, the cultural activists, the jurists, and the occupied spaces in town collaborated in challenging existing local narratives. By legitimizing each other, even in complex negotiations, they questioned the local cultural and political imbalances and envisioned possible new cultural, policy and political trajectories (and spaces). For them, this meant learning to perform between the given market coordinates and efforts toward its reconfiguration, between hegemony and counter-hegemonic struggles, and between dominant illiberal narratives and what we can understand in this context as subaltern practices.

## **The empirical policy/politics**

As highlighted earlier, these emotional clusters initially arose from irrational feelings, guided by intuition, affinity, and the beliefs of a select group of top-down and bottom-up players. They were primarily more personal than professional in nature; reminiscent of the dynamics within the domestic domain. Over time, these emotional clusters evolved into a necessity, serving as a space for the mayor, the councilor for the commons, and the cultural activists to test one another. During this transitional phase, the passion for democracy (Mouffe 2018)

became the unifying force in their ongoing exchanges, akin to the dynamics within their peers' domain. These groupings were at the core of opinion formation mechanisms, where social and political interactions influenced the shaping of their preferences (Graeber 2011), determining their stance to challenge the market norms and identifying allies within the market domain. Consequently, the emotional clusters remained the driving force, becoming a civil matter, where enthusiasm, passion, and compassion acted as vital catalysts for co-designing policy and political regulations, as observed within the civil domain.

Viewed through the civil domain lens, the policy model that surfaced from the Neapolitan case appears deeply rooted in an empirical approach, characterized by its bottom-up nature, even in the presence of top-down policy initiatives. It's an irreverent approach aimed at challenging the established order and creating space for marginalized cultural and political practices. Unlike traditional policy cycles, which typically encompass phases such as problem definition, implementation, development, and evaluation (Hill and Hupe 2002), the Neapolitan case seems to forego the evaluation phase, instead favoring constant interactions among its key players. To clarify, in conventional public bodies, the 'problem definition' phase is often entrusted to experts or internal functionaries. However, in the Neapolitan case, this phase featured extensive peer exchanges between the municipality, a group of jurists, and cultural and political activists in public squares, assemblies, and informal exchanges. In-depth analyses of crucial city matters contributed to framing the 'problem' and suggesting potential directions to explore. An illustrative example is the 2015 political endeavor known as *Massa Critica* (critical mass), where diverse city movements engaged in in-depth analyses and discussions on topics such as culture, education, and wealth, ultimately working together to propose new ideas for the city. Here, national and international debates on issues like the commons, widespread ownership, illicit public debts, and municipalism made their way into the city.

Moving to the 'implementation' phase, in transnational institutions or public bodies, is typically marked by negotiations mainly among legislators. In the Season of the Commons, once again, this phase saw extensive participation. Negotiations within the city council and at the government level, spearheaded by the mayor, received substantial

support from bottom-up mobilization. For instance, the rejection of the city's public debt by the city government, thanks to the support of local activists and intellectuals providing studies and concrete political proposals, reflects this participatory nature. Similarly, the adoption of old norms, such as civic use, based on the non-exclusive use of public properties, for the co-management of public properties, exemplifies this trend. The 'development' phase in traditional public institutions plays a crucial role in understanding innovations and in evaluating and incorporating gained insights into policy or political programs. In Naples, this took shape through a variety of steps: designing procedures to identify the urban commons in the city context; extending the norm of civic use to previous local political occupations; defining a system of emerging commons (initially comprising seven occupied spaces referred to as 'freed spaces') with empirical protocols (e.g. the Declaration of the Civic and Collective Use). These protocols defined the duties and responsibilities of the involved parties, considering the asymmetries of positions between the municipality and the activists. These procedures gave rise to the development of a common vocabulary, which found its place in city communal resolutions between 2014 and 2021. In these resolutions, the realm of the commons was defined as a 'context of civic development' (Comune di Napoli 2014).

Consequently, the Neapolitan policy/political cycle appeared to constantly necessitate adjustments, assessed through attempts to find new equilibriums in the city. This entailed ongoing experimentation in the emerging commons, points of exchange, frictions between activists and the municipality, continuous negotiations, and new public acts derived from these interactions. To enhance this mechanism, popular observatories were established (one for the Commons and one for the Public Debt) within the city government, involving cultural and political activists, experts, and intellectuals.

In this policy/political process, the role of emotional clusters was to infuse a sense of circularity. They served as the driving force behind cultural and policy experiments while posing a critique of neoliberalism, and promoting efforts in favor of participatory democracy in the local context. Consequently, we can understand these participatory political endeavors as an attempt to respond to the growing divide that has emerged between civil and political society since 2008, and even

before that; a challenge often attributed to the crisis of representative democracy (Bauman 2019; Gielen 2018; Graeber 2011; Mouffe 2018; Rodotà 2013). According to Gramsci (Marci 2016), civil and political society are intertwined within modern governments, challenging the traditional separation. Gramsci emphasizes that civil society necessitates hegemonic struggles to counter existing projects to establish new hegemonies. Thus, with Gramsci's insights in mind, the policy experimentation that unfolded during the Season of the Commons signifies one more shift in the role of public institutions from being the 'who' that makes decisions to the 'how' decisions are made in the city (Micciarelli 2017). It reveals, amidst its contradictions, unfulfilled promises, failures, ingenuity, and populism; a fertile ground can be cultivated for the emergence of bottom-up neo-institutions. This notion stands for a new context where public/private relationships can be established, and a context of shared policy (Dragičević Šešić 2006) can endure over the long term. These neo-institutions have come to play a pivotal role in deciphering societal emotions, providing a space for heterogeneous local communities to flourish and diverse societies to cohabit within our cities in order to discover ways of meaningful interaction.

## Conclusions

History, as we know, is a mosaic of diverse perspectives and experiences. In this paper, my aim was not to impose value judgments on what is good or bad but to shed light on the changing spaces of resistance in cultural, social, and political realms, starting from the case of Naples. I have demonstrated how a process of negotiation, initially rooted in culture, has evolved into an experiment deeply embedded in cultural policy. The cultural realm, as a permeable terrain for experimentation, has become the foundation for shaping the policy and politics that intersect with the commons, the city, and knowledge production. In today's context, there's an urgent need for more organic spaces of interaction within cultural and political processes, maintaining their bottom-up, independent, revolutionary, and inherently contradictory nature. Future research could explore the capacity of these city networks to act

as potential neo-institutions and their long-term sustainability. This raises a crucial question: how can this process become an integral part of 'making the city,' transcending shifts in political governance and persisting as a cornerstone for pluralism?

Returning to the emotional clusters, they seem to have played a significant role during a period of 'organic crisis,' as described by Antonio Gramsci (2014), which encompasses economic, political, social, and ideological dimensions. In this crisis of hegemony, emotional clusters acted as guides for navigating a fragmented world characterized by irregular overlaps of cultural policy and political regimes. By functioning as political agents, they have introduced a sense of 'porosity' (Benjamin 2020) into policy dynamics, allowing civil and political society to find a temporary balance, and collaborating to facilitate transformative changes. This has meant that the civil society did not reproduce social and political hegemony. On the contrary, it addressed political issues, creating a tension in the hegemonic representation.

From my analysis, the role of emotions in political theory and cultural studies often receives less empirical scrutiny, especially at the meso and micro levels, in understanding opinion formation and subaltern practices. We cannot ignore the overproduction of emotions in today's world, which fuel populism, new-nationalisms, and hyper-localisms, including emotionally driven reactions to global geopolitical shifts and political inequalities. Throughout my inquiry, emotions and personal perspectives have been central, particularly in their empirical observation. Recognizing the complexity of this terrain, I advocate for a deeper understanding of emotions in their transformative and political capacities. It is essential to view personal emotions, both positive and negative, as societal expressions rather than confined to individual private spaces. As Mark Fisher suggests, these emotions require political scrutiny to be understood as social phenomena.

To conclude, I want also to advocate for understanding the cultural policy process as a lively and political matter, especially in times of crisis. This requires a multidimensional approach that includes the political function of emotions and considers its empirical development in commons-based experiments where we are all called to perform against 'emotional colonization, repression, and manipulation'.

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**EFFICACY OF INTERNSHIPS  
IN HIGHER EDUCATION**  
**A Pedagogic Reflection on the Cultural Policy and  
Management Traineeship Programme in four  
undergraduate courses at the University of the  
Witwatersrand (WITS)**

MUNYARADZI CHATIKOBO AND SMANGALISO NGWENYA

**Introduction**

A combination of the 17-year time lapse since the inception of the Cultural Policy and Management (CPM) Internship, the 2015-16 #RhodesMustFall<sup>1</sup> movement, the 2020-22 Covid-19 disruption, the ongoing transformation of South African higher education, the global epistemological decolonisation discourse and the associated complexities, warranted the need for a reflection on the efficacy of the CPM experiential learning pedagogical model. Using Ndlovu's (2018) decolonial conception of education and Kolb and Kolb's (2017) experiential learning theory, the paper reflects on the triangular alignment or lack thereof of the university, students and the cultural and creative industries' expectations and experiences. The central question that the paper attempts to answer

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1 #RhodesMustFall followed a refusal and active stance of students who noted the colonial and racial significance of the Cecil John Rhodes statue on the University of Cape Town campus, which also was pointed out as a "symbol of the continued racism and alienation they experienced as a result of the incomplete transformation project 21 years into South Africa's transition to democracy" (Ndelu, Dlakavu & Boswell, 2017, p. 1). This initiated the efforts in students to remove the colonial statue of Cecil John Rhodes

is how students' expectations, and those of the cultural and creative sector, are met within the broader Higher Education conception of employability of university graduates and complexities caused by historic decolonial disruptions and natural pandemics such as Covid 19. Within a qualitative research paradigm, answers to the question are drawn from analysis of CPM curriculum documents, external assessors' reports, the experiences of the Internship Coordinator, students' traineeship reports and round table discussions with representatives from the Cultural and Creative sector. The central argument being made by this paper is that the efficacy of the CPM internship programme remains elusive until a decolonial overhaul of both the South African higher education pedagogical and epistemological models and the cultural and creative industries management practices. Some successes have been achieved, but more could be done.

The research is an in-depth pedagogical reflection on experiential learning with particular emphasis on the dialectical relationship between theory and practice in the field of cultural policy and management. The study, framed by Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) conception of decolonised education and Kolb's (2014) experiential learning theory, is informed mainly by qualitative data gathered from four undergraduate courses offered by the Cultural Policy and Management (CPM) department of Wits School of Arts in Johannesburg. The paper documents, reflects and critically analyses the effectiveness of the traineeship programme, which is an internship offered to undergraduate students who are registered for courses in the Cultural Policy and Management department. It focuses on the expectations of students, cultural and creative industries stakeholders and the University. The ultimate goal of the traineeship is to find pedagogical and professional alignment between Higher Education and the cultural and creative economy sector. Some of the questions that the study answers are "What are students' expectations, the expectations of the cultural and creative sector, the CPM department, and how are they met within the broader Higher Education conception of employability of university graduates?". Finding goal alignment with key stakeholders in the employability of university graduates is one of the key endeavours of this study. The research will contribute to the viability and sustainability of the cultural and creative industries which are driven by critical-thinking university graduates

with the practical and entrepreneurial skills to navigate the complex cultural economy in Africa and globally.

## **The Cultural Policy and Management's (CPM) Internship programme at Wits University, Johannesburg, South Africa**

The Cultural Policy and Management (CPM) Department in the Wits School of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, offers interdisciplinary undergraduate and post-graduate programmes covering fields of cultural policy, management, urban cultural governance, cultural economy, cultural entrepreneurship, arts management, audience development, arts marketing, community arts centres, and cultural diplomacy. All CPM Courses strive to balance theory and practice in unpacking the cultural and creative sector, with the internship programme providing a critical bridge between the university's theoretical perspective and the sector's practical experiences. This paper focuses on the internship programmes for the two third (3<sup>rd</sup>) Year Courses namely *Introduction to Cultural Policy and Management* in semester one and *Funding Contexts in Creative Industries* in semester two. The two fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) Year Courses are *Cultural Entrepreneurship* in Semester 1 and *Arts Marketing: Contexts, Strategies and Practices* in Semester 2. Every year, the four courses mainly draw approximately fifty (50) Students from Wits School of Arts' five departments, namely Theatre and Performance studies, Music, Film and Television, Fine Arts and Drama for Life (Applied Drama and Theatre).

To meet undergraduate (CPM) course requirements, 3<sup>rd</sup> Year CPM students need to complete thirty (30) hours of learning and professional management service in an arts organisation in the Johannesburg area. In comparison, 4<sup>th</sup> year and Honours students are required to complete forty (40) hours per course. Cumulatively, 3<sup>rd</sup> year students complete sixty (60) hours of internship per year, while 4<sup>th</sup> year and honours students complete eighty (80) hours. The traineeship hours occur over one semester (university calendar time frame). Our 2023 students CPM

students were placed in seventeen (17) placement sites, which varied in size and structure from freelance artists, start-ups, creative hubs, private theatres, public theatres, museums, dance companies, event management and coordination, galleries, as well as government institutions. Student placements are arranged, coordinated, and supervised by CPM's graduate assistant, who ensures the alignment of students' professional interests, which are articulated in their biographies and internship organisations' profiles.

A basic traineeship agreement is signed between CPM and the Internship Organisation/site to outline terms of engagement which entail a commitment by the organisation to provide a working environment that allows the trainee to gain experience relevant to arts management. CPM commits to ensuring that students conform to the professional regulations of the internship organisation through regular contact with the students throughout their placement. In the organisations and under the mentorship of one supervisor, students are assigned different roles and responsibilities which range from menial administrative duties, events coordination, stakeholder engagement, funding proposal writing, research and marketing, to mention a few. At the end of the placement, the mentor evaluates the performance of the students and submits a report that forms part of both the formative and summative assessments of students.

## **Background of the South African and African Education Context**

This paper is one of the outputs capturing outcomes of the ongoing South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)'s University Capacity Development Programme(UCDP) aimed at enhancing student access through research-informed teaching. The research that informed the Performing Arts Management internship programme in the early 2000s, later to become the Cultural Policy and Management Internship programme, is now outdated, hence this study. Since the inception of the internship programme, the teaching and learning terrain has significantly shifted, as confirmed by Hlatshwayo

(2021) who argued for the re-conceptualisation of epistemological access beyond simplistic formal access to education after #RhodesMustFall. This proposition resonates with one of the motivations for this paper. This pedagogic reflection of the internship programme in the cultural policy and management is done with 2015-2026 #Fees/RhodesMustFall movements, which Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p. 222) described as “a decolonial symbolic gesture of confronting a system of coloniality” as part of broader continental episodes of decolonial movement across Africa.

Apart from the shape-up of the South African Higher Education sector by #Fees/RhodesMustFall, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020-2022 disrupted teaching and learning in ways that left universities needing to re-imagine pedagogic and epistemological approaches in preparing graduates for society and economies which also experienced tumultuous shifts (Motala & Menon, 2020). The Cultural Policy and Management Internship Programme and the Cultural and Creative Industries sector were not spared by the Covid-19 shake-up. Hence, reflecting on the experiential learning programme became crucial to evaluating its efficacy.

The CPM’s internship programme is not only a response to the call by the cultural and creative industries but also a response to South African Higher education, which, according to Kruss’s values (2004, p. 673).

The tacit skills, knowledge, and attitudes formerly developed through work experience are now expected to be an integral part of higher education programmes and curricula, to provide the ‘soft’, ‘transverse’, ‘life’, or ‘high’ skills—as they are variously termed by different sectors.

As indicated earlier, the question is to what extent does the CPM Internship programme foster soft and hard skills needed in life and professional spaces?

The pedagogic and epistemological shake-up by both #RhodesMustFall and the Covid-19 pandemic is argued by Gaio et al. (2023); Hlatshwayo (2021); Joffe (2020); Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018); Nyamnjoh (2022); Prah (2016) and Sunnemark and Thörn (2023) to have reignited and accentuated the decoloniality debate in one way or another in the African and South African high education sector. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p. 222) specifically states that “ at the centre of the #RhodesMustFall is

an ideological amalgamation of radical black feminism, black consciousness, Fanonianism and Pan-Africanism as constitutive parts of decolonial thought”, thus acknowledging the anti-colonial protest of the 1950s, 60s, 80s and 90s. These histories in African higher education provide an inspirational backdrop for a decolonial reflection on the efficacy of the CPM Internship programme and, inevitably, the curriculum.

Nyamnjoh (2004) asserts that education in Africa is a victim of Western epistemological export of science as ideology and hegemony, and we agree with this assertion which we see permeating throughout the CPM curriculum as an unquestioned desire to formalise the cultural and creative sector to the detriment of informality. The South African and African education sectors face an uphill task to dislodge Western ways of knowing which see the world in dichotomies and replace it by imagining alternative possibilities. It is an uphill task because it entails reversing the effects of what Msila (2021) described as three centuries of colonial education, which was devoid of African philosophy and later became Bantu Education which restricted the development of learners by distorting knowledge to control the intellect of learners and teachers. Against this backdrop, we reflect on the efficacy of the CPM Internship programme. One becomes pessimistic as the legacy of colonial and apartheid education seems to be embedded in the DNA of teachers, learners, the creative economy and the whole society. Nyamnjoh (2004) sees possibilities in African traditional epistemologies, which he argues have a competitive edge over Western epistemologies because of the proximity to application sites.<sup>2</sup>

## Study design

This study assumed a qualitative approach combining a case study of the CPM traineeship and an interpretive analysis of it. This design

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2 The Bantu Education Act of 1953 is an apartheid legislation which was enacted to separate the financing of African education from general state funding to link it to direct taxes paid by Africans. This resulted in provision of inferior quality of education to Africans <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/bantu-education-and-racist-compartmentalizing-education>.

emphasizes the reflections of mentors/ supervisors from 17 Internship organisations, 27 third-year students and 25 fourth-year students, the Traineeship Coordinator and three CPM Lecturers who teach the two cohorts of students. The ten(10) month study gathered feedback from all sources, which were structured, semi-structured and unstructured interactions. These include email correspondences, formal meetings, informal conversations, class reflections, students' oral and written presentations as well as the external assessors' feedback. The paper was also informed by document analysis, which included a review of course outlines, traineeship documents, external assessor's reports, students' traineeship reports and email correspondences with traineeship organisations. The aim was to use this traineeship programme as a case study to analyse the traineeship to "give it meaning about its key issues or questions" which we have asked in this research (Ellet, 2007, p. 2). In addition, this research design utilises an intensive, systematic investigation of the individuals aforementioned, "group, community" where we examine in-depth data relating to several variables of the traineeship programme (Heale and Twycross, 2018, p. 7).

In addition, it includes two roundtable discussions, one in August and the other in November 2023, providing deep and rich reflections on the successes, challenges and new directions toward effective traineeship programmes. The facilitators of the two roundtable discussions used open-ended questions such as; "What should be done to foster a more knitted relationship between the traineeship practical "content" and the theoretical content? What new skills are important for students to learn? What modes of working should students be taught to enable them to cope when placed in a traineeship? Do the existing traineeship guidelines and learner contracts need to be revised, what needs to be added? All these questions were considered post-COVID. We take an interpretive analysis approach in reading data collected from diverse sources, which, according to Elliott and Timulak (2005), is subjective, context-specific and seeks to understand phenomena in their own right. In addition, it is integral to note that this interpretive analysis "argues in favour of thickly contextualized renderings of social realities and of recognising the inescapable subjectivity of the researcher as well as of the researched, along with the intersubjective making of situated meaning" (Yanow, 2014, p. 134). This research design does not refute

the subjectivity of the researchers and the research participants - it is in the analysis of the instances above that the core findings are rooted in the study.

One major limitation of the study is that it is of 10-month duration which predominately collected data from the current cohort of students. The research design did not systematically collect data from past CPM students apart from a few former students who are now employed by some Internship placement organisations. Given this limitation, there is a need for a more comprehensive study dating back to 2006.

## **Brief Conceptual Framework and Literature Review**

The efficacy of the CPM internship, which takes the form of practical engagement of the students with the actual work environment is read through Kolb et al. (2014)'s experiential learning theory, which explains the central role of experience in knowing and knowledge generation. We have decided to use the experiential learning theory within the South African and African context, which is currently dominated by the decolonial discourse and hence the application of Cordeiro-Rodrigues (2022) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018)'s conception of decolonised higher education and Van Wyk and Higgs (2004) and Waghid (2004)'s conception of African Philosophy of Education.

According to Kolb (2014)'s experiential learning cycle learning occurs through a four-stage transformation process which involves Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observation (RO), Abstract Conceptualisation (AC) and Active Experimentation (AE) – see *Figure 1* below. The stages provided a clear framework for the reflection on the CPM Internship programme, where we first checked the four stages that appeared in the triangular relationship of the university curriculum, the students and the internship organisation. In our analysis of feedback from students and the internship mentors we also critically reflected whether the elements of African Philosophy and decolonised education were present in the learning environment. The transformation experience in Kolb et al. (2014) entails two sets of opposites; the first set has concrete experience on one end and abstract conceptualisation on the



other; the second set has reflective observation and active experimentation. In the first set of dialectical experiences, students can either choose concrete experience, which is a tangible and felt aspect of the real world, or the opposite, which is the perceptive absorption of information and translating it into a symbolic representation of knowledge. In the second set, students may choose reflective observation or active experimentation, depending on their capabilities (Kolb et al., 2014). Application of the learning cycle gave us the language, the analytical tools and possibilities for intentional restructuring of the CPM internship programme.

The Experiential Learning Cycle and Basic Learning Styles (Kolb, 1984).

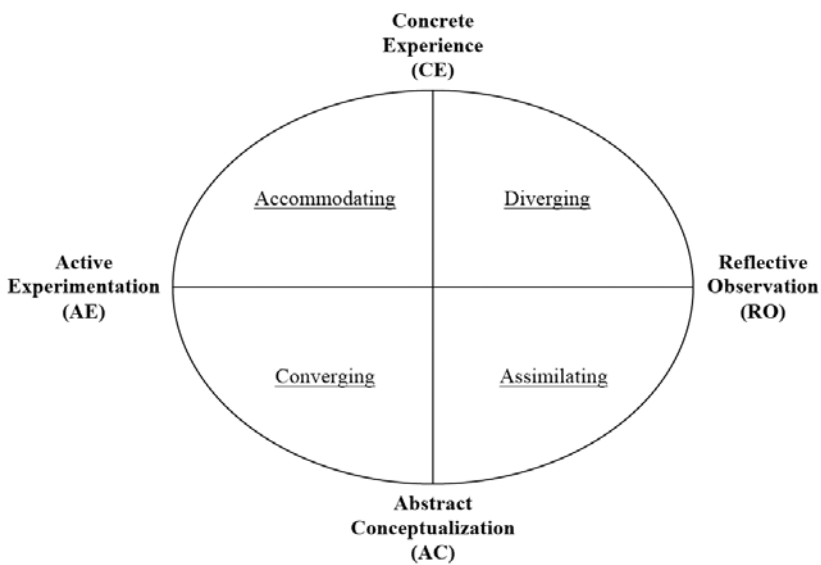


Figure 1: The Experiential Learning Cycle and Basic Learning Styles (Kolb et al., 2014, p. 39)

The African Philosophy of teaching and learning, which upholds indigenous knowledge systems, can enhance African societies (Msila,

2021). I agree with Waghid's (2004) assertions that acquiring knowledge entails thought and action that enable one to understand, explain, explore, and deconstruct the lived experiences of a people. Waghid (2004) emphasises understanding human occurrences in their context, or rather their situations, as opposed to understanding them in abstract terms. The author goes further to state that;

an African philosophy of education accentuates the importance of being reasonable; the ability of people to articulate clear, logical and defensible arguments, on the one hand, and to demonstrate a willingness to listen carefully to others, on the other hand (Waghid, 2004, p. 57).

Another layer of African philosophy added by Hountondji (2002) is the importance of active criticism, as opposed to passive acceptance of, other people's views as this helps in the achievement of a higher level of understanding phenomenon (Waghid, 2004). The question which is answered in this paper is whether the environment in the Internship organisations allows CPM students to exercise the key aspects of African education. The conception of an African philosophy of education, which entails thought and action, directly speaks to Kolb et al. (2014)'s theory of experiential learning, hence the complementarity of the two concepts in reading the experiences of CPM students in their internship organisations.

The African philosophy of education (teaching and learning) recognises and privileges 'spoken traditions' or orality, which is often taken for granted as scientific (Ramosé, 2004). Intellectual prowess in African knowledge systems is not determined by the ability to write, as Ramosé (2004, p. 144) further argues, noting "that Socrates qualified as a philosopher without having written any philosophy". The place of "spoken" traditions in African Philosophy of education allows us to spotlight oral lessons offered by mentors in CPM Internship organisations and the possible role of spoken traditions in formative and final assessments of CPM students. Citing Oluwolé (1999), Ramosé (2004) argues that oral traditions are predicated on the argument that human beings have the freedom to choose the modality and style of reasoning and interpreting their experiences and that there is no modality with automatic universal validity and application.

Acknowledging the impact of coloniality in South Africa over the past three centuries, legacies of coloniality and neo-colonial philosophies of education, the concept of decolonised education has varied meanings. Hence, it takes varied forms depending on the historical, economic, social, cultural, and many other positionalities of the scholar (Saurombe, 2018). Gaio et al. (2023) who specifically focus on the decolonisation of the cultural policy and management curriculum acknowledge multiple decolonisation approaches, including Mignolo's (2009, p. 178) radical and activist approach, which is "epistemic disobedience," i.e. "de-linking (epistemically and politically) from the web of imperial knowledge" but they recommend a humanising pedagogy which allows students to foreground their Global South perspectives in their engagement with western canons of knowledge. Humanising pedagogy involves what Wa Thiong'o (1993) described as moving the centre of knowledge not only from the West to many other centres in the world but also moving the centre of knowledge from universities to other spaces such as internship sites in the case of this study.

## **Study findings and discussions**

Kolb et al.'s, (2014) conceptual cycle of experiential learning with four cardinal points, namely Concrete Experience(CE); Abstract Conceptualisation(AC); Active Experimentation (AE) and Reflective Observation(RO) is critical in providing yardsticks against which the experiences of CPM is measured to bring out evidence of success and efficacy. This is done in the context of the African philosophy of education that is characterised by what Ramose (2004) described as the philosophy of ubuntu, humanness and community.

Through the traineeship and its implementation process, we have noted multiple areas that work well and others that require reconsideration. When assessing the efficacy of the traineeship, we realised the need to have a triangulated conversation between all three parties: the academic programme and the facilitators, the trainees and the placement organisations. As aforementioned, we conducted a panel discussion in August 2023 as part of the Performance Studies international (PSi)

conference, and based on those findings, we continued to unpack themes of reflective observation, concrete experience, abstract conceptualisation, active experimentation, collective learning, informal learning, ‘blinker’ of course outlines and literature and flexible learning, in a roundtable which was held in November 2023. Both instances facilitated a three-way conversation which, in turn, contributed to a process of innovation and brainstorming towards realising the efficacy of arts management internships. In these encounters, all three parties highlighted the lack of synthesis between theory and practice, an attribute which is not peculiar to South Africa as Michael Kaiser, President of the Kennedy Centre of Performing Arts in New York, conceded when stating that many universities across the United States of America are too academic in their approach (Cuyler, 2013). For Michael Kaiser, the possible explanation is that the field of Arts Management is still too young to have found the balance between theory and practice (Cuyler, 2013). The disconnection between theory and practice in the data gathered was due to multiple themes: the challenge of time, communication, flexible curricula and course outlines and the lack of industry-specific attributes and traits in students and the shortfall of host organisations also experimenting with different engagement models to facilitate a conducive learning experience.

### **Sector & Students: Expectations, Experiences, Successes and Challenges**

One of the main intentions of implementing the internship programme is to facilitate a concrete learning and training experience in which the relationship between the theoretical frameworks, frameworks and concepts are realised through the communal interdependent practical component of the traineeship. This process also facilitates a “focus on developing the experience and employability of students who will undertake non-conventional career paths” (Collis, 2010, p. 3). In addition, the process facilitates a communal learning experience in which, as in African philosophy, the host organisations form a community of practice and learning.

However, on the experiential learning front, organisations have noted learners being fixated on the course outlines instead of the concrete

practical experience, time constraints that lead to limited realisations of a more holistic learning experience. Firstly, it is critical that host organisations noted that students misconstrue the communal process of experiential learning as a “tick-box” exercise in which the process of learning in the experience is undermined by trying to accomplish module keywords and focus regardless of the activities happening in the actual workspace. Moses Rasekele (November, 2023), co-founder of Creative Industries Marketing Stokvel, expresses his observations for the need for flexibility of student’s experiences of arts management and processes within the placement organisation as well alignment with organisational processes:

...on the idea of matching and alignment. It is important because arts management is broad, and you might find that in class you are doing fundraising and marketing but where we are at as the Creative Industries Marketing Stokvel is events management and administration and it has nothing to do with fundraising, and marketing. Our organisations change and evolve according to particular clients and events, and it is important to keep alignment.

Occurrences of lack of alignment and flexibility in students within the organisations result in students being incapable of applying all aspects of the experiential learning process. Fixation on academic concepts and themes results in the abandonment of the concrete experience offered in the space where there is no full acknowledgement of the “tangible, felt qualities of the world” of the host organisation as well as immersing themselves in the concrete reality of the host organisation and the broader CCIs. Kamogelo Molobyte (November, 2023), a member of the Performance Studies international organising committee, shared his insights on an alternative approach to relating to course outlines and course content:

I think the framework on the theoretical side needs to be as flexible as possible - what we found from our side is that a lot of the time the students want to fit what they are doing pedagogically into what the institution is doing at that point. And so, the course outline is solid, it says that the students need to tick boxes. And so, it needs to be more flexible to allow them to think more creatively about how they relate concepts to what

is currently being provided so they don't feel like "now I am doing this thing in the module".

The above concern was iterated and reinforced by all the six other organisations that partook in the roundtable. Debunking and deconstructing the significance of a course outline towards making it more fluid and flexible offers insight into synthesising the learning experiences more overtly in the academic programme. In the same roundtable, recommendations were made to create an integrated learning experience in which the traineeship organisations are part of the modules throughout the year, traineeship semester presentations as well as a synthesised communal induction process at the beginning of each year to facilitate a conversation at which the entire community becomes aware of the expectations, course content as well as the student expectations.

On the other end of the spectrum, through observations of students' traineeship presentations, they constantly reflect on a missing link between what they learn in class and at their host organisations. Most of the feedback given by external examiners during the traineeship report presentations centres on the lack of theoretical grounding in the experiential observations. Students emphasise all four learning styles concerning the host organisation without drawing connections to the theoretical components. Tsebo Mphirime (November, 2023), a third-year CPM student, emphasised the need for a clear framework at the beginning of the traineeship that will make it simpler for students to establish connections between theoretical frameworks and their traineeship experience. Esihle Dandala (2023), another third-year student, attributed students' non-investment in the traineeship organisations to the misalignment of students' interest and the organisation, which in a way defies Saffari's (2016) notion of collective learning and knowledge-making. In addition, this affirms Assié-Lumumba's (2007) assertions that Higher Education institutions in Africa are still stuck in colonial structures that do not fully acknowledge students' perspectives. Wits University embraces the decolonisation of the curriculum, but it still has a long way to go. Traineeship sites are also not different from the university as they also disregard the perspective of the student, Tsebo Mphirime (2023), alluded to this when he said that he was not treated like a member of the team at his traineeship sites, he felt that he was treated like a volunteer

with very little to offer the festival which his traineeship organisation organised. Tsebo Mphirime's assertion is further supported by a fourth-year student who speaks to an unintended silencing and undermining of students' abilities and contributions when in her contribution to the panel discussion Buhle Bontle Satsha (August, 2023) said:

'here we don't want you to mess up', you know, it's like 'the kids are here'. So, you know, 'we don't want the kids to touch the important jobs' and you know, those are parts where I think that our expectation as students we would like to be allowed into some spaces.

The same sentiments are shared by many students when they reflect on their experiences in their traineeship organisations pointing to the relics of the Bantu Education system which sees students as empty vessels waiting to be filled. Another systemic structural obstacle to learning in the traineeship organisations highlighted by Bridget Van Orle (2023) is the limited time allowed by the university for students to immerse themselves in experiential learning.

In addition, amidst other concerns noted by host organisations are numerous time-specific concerns and organisations not having tasks/plans to facilitate the experiential learning process. Bridget van Oerle (November, 2023), Founder of The Buz Hive, shared specific concerns about the lack of time to thoroughly and efficiently train students, stating that "for us as an organisation, because of the hours, it was very hit and miss, spray paint, we do not even have time to train them". Lack of time resulted in a process of trial and error in host organisations where some resulted in them shifting and innovating working models and engagement models to provide an optimal experiential learning process (the ones who have been partaking as host organisations for 3-5 years), making the experience conducive to themselves and the students. A functioning experiential model is emulated and emphasised by the Programme manager of the Market Photo Workshop (a hosting organisation for five years), Khona Dlamini (August, 2023), who shared:

I think the first few years; we weren't clear - we were trying out different things so someone would come to do all sorts of things - maybe five different things because we're a big organisation that does all different types of projects and when they leave they would feel like they've not actually

learned one thing that they can point at. So, I think in the last two years, we started working that way [giving students one task to complete], and I think it has worked.

On the other hand, the host organisations have proven to have small teams and facilitating a comprehensive learning process for learners who are only there for a short period has proven to be a challenge. Sara Hallat (August, 2023), director of the Meta Foundation, had the following to share:

We're in a similar kind of position as the Fak'Ugezi team; it's myself and two other interns. On a regular day, we have 40 artists in-house and I sensibly run three businesses so I do find it very tricky when I have interns coming in and I've only got them for 30 hours to be able to give them exactly all the attention they would like. I also think that sometimes the interns have a feeling that maybe it's going to be a bit more like university and that they have this very close-knit in-depth relationship with their lecturer because it goes on for months or years and it's not nice, we don't have time for that.

Owing to organisations having small teams, with two to five members (Moving into Dance, Meta Foundation, Market Photo Workshop, Performance Studies international, Arts and Culture Trust, Assitej South Africa, Fak'uGesii Innovation Digital Festival, POP Art and more) students and learners do not having a quick turnover time once they communicate with the organisation. This is a result of organisations having their resources spread thinly and not having the capacity to orientate or integrate students into their work processes and activities. In the seasons when organisations are writing reports, planning and executing festivals or other event planning (touring) and logistics that organisations take time to respond. This echoes Patrick et al. 's note that Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) face challenges in engaging with work-integrated learning due to limited resources" (2009, p. 20).Collis (2010, p. 10-11) aptly reflects on small team organisations by stating that:

... finding the time to understand the logistics of university workplace learning placements, interviewing the student, inducting the student, and completing formal assessment forms about the student's performance at



the end of the placement meant a significant time investment on the part of the industry partner. When finding the time simply to take on a work-integrated learning student places significant demands on the costs on an SME, requiring SME industry partners to undertake work-integrated learning supervision training programs may in many cases render the placement unfeasible.

There are time pressures and additional challenges placed on organisations but these are replicated in students as well. When reflecting on the academic timetable (formative and summative assessments) and the academic commitments for their majors (shooting films, creating and performing in stage productions and writing creative work) there is a clash in timing when the organisation's schedules clear up. The time-related challenges and pressures result in much anxiety in students and sometimes an inability to fulfil the complete term of hours. As a coordinator, there are numerous instances where students have shared communications with organisations and me where there are clashes in timelines and outputs.

Lastly, host organisations highlighted the need for specific attributes in the students which refute the colonial docile body in space. These include innovative thinking, "putting your foot in the job", and inquisitiveness as integral students' attributes, which were iterated in the first-panel discussion and reinforced in the roundtable discussion. These qualities all lend themselves, in varying degrees, to Kolb's four basic learning styles - diverging, assimilating, converging and accommodating. Diverging informs a student's ability to view concrete situations from many different points of view alongside assimilating a "wide range of information and putting into concise, logical form" (Kolb et al., 2014, p. 5). In addition, attributes like innovative thinking and taking initiative are embedded specifically because people with this learning style experiment with "new ideas, simulations, laboratory assignment and technology careers" (Kolb et al., 2014, p. 6), which are all integral qualities alongside the accommodating learning style. The last style, accommodating, is highly prominent and integral for the cultural and creative sector in that these learners have a collaborative and communal impetus in their approaches to experiential learning.

However, it is critical to note that the uniqueness of this process and programme provides students with an opportunity to initiate

networks, experience prospective employment, explore their skills, and learn graduate attributes needed in the space, getting one-on-one indigenous and organic knowledge from the practical experience with self-taught mentors and innovators who have extensive experience of the CCIs as well as an emboldened presence of shifting the learning experience to spaces of subjugated and ignored knowledge which in reality is organic knowledge and not subaltern knowledge. Sara Hallat, the founder of the Meta Foundation, states that “there have been interns that have come through this programme that I cannot necessarily hire full time but I have them back to work with me consistently”. Thus, this traineeship process does initiate employment for plenty of our students. One of our third-year students, Iviwe Tom, expressed that she has already been offered a job owing to her presence in her organisation.

### **Cultural Policy and Management Curriculum Expectations, Experiences, Successes and Challenges**

Cultural Policy and Management Curriculum expectations are articulated in the two undergraduate course outlines, the traineeship guidelines, MOU, and formative and summative assessments. An example of the expectations from semester 1 3<sup>rd</sup> Year Course Outline is stated here;

Responding to contemporary challenges faced by arts and culture organisations, companies and institutions in the South African and the African context and the increasing need for sustainable growth of the cultural and creative industries (CCIs), there is great need to groom competent Cultural Leaders, Cultural Policy Experts, Arts Managers, Arts Marketing Managers and Cultural Entrepreneurs who identify, these challenges, trace their root causes and find solutions (CPM, 2023).

Responsiveness of all CPM courses to the context is in line with the purpose of the university as outlined in the Wits 2033 Strategic Framework which says; “Our purpose is to make a positive impact on society through: - creating and advancing global knowledge; and - fostering graduates to be leaders with integrity” (Wits University, 2022, p. 4). While the CPM Curriculum is part of Wits’ mission to lead from the

Global South is in line with the African philosophy of education and the higher education decolonisation agenda as articulated by Msila (2021); Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018); Nyamnjuh (2022); Ramose (2004); Sunnemark and Thörn (2023) it does not explicitly state its Africanisation and decolonisation outlook. One can interpret this to mean a non-committal position to the decolonisation project; leaving curriculum design and implementation neutral.

Another major expectation from the university side expressed in the course outline and the traineeship guide is offering courses with an optimal balance between theory and practice. The traineeship programme provides a bridge between theory and practice. Bridging theory and practice is a well-researched subject with varying but commonly shared perspectives. Ramose (2004, p. 143) says “concepts without experience are blind and experience without concepts is empty”. From a cultural management perspective, Cuyler (2013, p. 4) states that “arts Management educators aspire to balance academic rigour and professional relevance in preparing the next generation of arts leaders”. The notion of theory and practice is one of the major features of Kolb’s (2014) experiential learning model with a dialectical relationship between concrete experience and abstract conceptualisation which is acknowledged by many educationists as an effective way of learning. The programs manager at Business and Arts South Africa had the below to share about bridging the gap between theory and practice:

...my aim is now to integrate the theory with the practice, because within the university context we were given the guidelines of what the trainees need to get out of the traineeship. Now, that we are looking at the policy within the real world and implementation, I am now trying to take them from the theory and into the doing. So, a lot of the work that we’re doing is because I’m working on a program now, they do a lot of research and now into the real world. So what they learn in the classroom, because I’ve occupied that space of not being able to create the link, being in the classroom and kind of thinking through it, but now within the working space, it’s about now thinking of the traineeship as part of the doing. How do you apply what you learn in the classroom? So I do a lot of thinking around the documentation being provided to me and seeing what they can get outside of the outcomes within the classroom, but the outcomes of what we want to get within for us at BASA. Thank you. (Zanele Madiba, 2023)

Successes and challenges of the CPM Internship programme are evident in the student traineeship reports which are part of the formative and summative assessment as well as the external assessors' report. External examiners have noted with concerns the disparities between theory and practice where students struggle to apply concepts in their traineeship reports, the phenomenon could be explained by the fact that most of the literature and hence concepts are from the Global North and hence are not relatable to what students experience during their internship. The epistemic tensions are acknowledged by Gaio et al. (2023) who go even further to attribute the tensions to the internationalised and universalised university system in pursuit of 'top ranking' of universities.

As CPM academic staff we perceive moving learning from Wits University's ivory towers of knowledge to a variety of sites as synonymous to wa Thiong'o (1991)'s concept of 'moving the centre' from its location in Europe to a pluralism of centres which themselves are legitimate centres of imagination and knowledge. We are convinced that this is an effective way of teaching and learning as students get various perspectives from multiple sources within their training organisations. The idea of plural centres of knowledge is echoed by Grosfoguel's (2012) concept of shifting from 'uni-versity' which is about one epistemology which defines the rest to 'pluri-versity' which is the epistemic diversity. In the CPM Internship programme sharing of reports and experiences from the seventeen internship organisations pulls together diverse knowledge(s) which can be accentuated by a critical facilitation by the lecturer.

### **Reflections on Successes and Efficacy**

Traineeship reports which are part of both formative and summative assessments clearly demonstrated rich and diverse experiential learning opportunities which have taken the form of festivals, projects, exhibitions, PR Events, theatre shows, planning of cultural tourism programmes, market research, adjudication of film, social media marketing and day to day administrative and coordination responsibilities. Examples of such opportunities were the Performance Studies international

(PSi) Conference which was hosted by Wits School of Arts in Johannesburg from 2-5 August 2023, Online review and adjudication of films at AAA Entertainment, Social Media Marketing of theatre shows at Creative Industries Marketing Stokvel (CIMS) and the coordination of participation of Wits School of Arts at the Sibikwa Creative Industries Career Expo.

The study revealed a reciprocal relationship between CPM and internship organisations where all parties involved benefited; the internship organisation benefited from free labour to achieve some of its goals, the CPM department fulfilled its academic mandate and CPM students met their degree requirements but most importantly received induction into the South African Creative Industries landscape. CPM experiences are affirmed by Cuyler (2013, p. 5) who says:

Internships provide students with hands-on experiences that bring considerable relevance to the issues they have begun to explore in the academic setting. Internships in turn typically provide low, or no-cost, temporary staffing for the institutions, organizations, and festivals that host them.

The number of CPM graduates who are now working in some of the internship organisations such as Business and Arts South Africa (BASA), Arts and Culture Trust (ACT) and Amandla Freedom Ensemble is a testimony of the success and effectiveness of the Internship Programme. Employment and employability of university graduates is one of the core goals of higher education in South Africa (Kruss\*, 2004).

## **Concluding Remarks**

Learning outside the university is fun and exciting; hence, we call for the 'breaking down of the walls of universities and building none' to facilitate the free flow of knowledge(s) between higher education and the broader society. While the CPM's Internship or experiential learning programme has made significant strides towards efficacy, it remains ineffective because it is deeply rooted in Western and apartheid canons of teaching and learning instead of Africanised and decolonised pedagogies which guarantee holistic approaches to education. It has continued to

replicate Western epistemologies and practices. Our ongoing reflection on this component of our curriculum has begun to show great potential as it morphs to manifest the much-needed elements of what Mignolo (2009, p. 178) describes as “epistemic disobedience” i.e. “de-linking (epistemically and politically) from the web of imperial knowledge”, which interestingly is student-led. As we continue to reflect, review and revamp the curriculum, we anticipate more insightful revelations that will lead to a more immersive and malleable traineeship programme with the potential of mutating into a prolonged period of experiential learning.

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# “OUR PROBLEM, NOT OUR FAULT”: SEMI-PERIPHERAL PERSPECTIVES ON ‘GREENING’ CULTURAL POLICY AND MANAGEMENT<sup>1</sup>

VÂNIA RODRIGUES AND ANTÓNIO VENTURA

## Introduction

After the collective experience of the pandemic, the public debate about climate change and environmental degradation became louder and the sense of urgency grew unmistakably. In our field of study and work – the performing arts – artists, producers, and decision-makers are currently dealing not only with the sector’s pre-existent shortcomings but also trying to renegotiate the relationship with our planetary host (Latour, 2017). Whereas before the environmental issue “was mainly raised by innovators, its urgency certainly increased and [is triggering] deep reflections within the broader performing arts field” (Janssens & Fraioli 2022, 5). ‘Greening’ the performing arts has become, thus, an expanding area of action, debate, and research and, indeed, mainstreaming environmental sustainability criteria across the arts and culture funding and work frameworks can be said to be well under way (Vries, 2021). However, while embedding ecological issues into cultural policy may be justifiable vis-à-vis the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2023) and the undeniable planetary urgency, it is not necessarily a consensual case in the performing arts field, and

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it is especially controversial when considered from the perspective of the European peripheries.

The ambiguous geographical and cultural position of Portugal – a semi-periphery sitting between Europe and the Atlantic – makes it an interesting observation point from which to analyse the frictions and contradictions deriving from the overarching challenge of sustainability and the ways in which it intersects with cultural policy as well as with performing arts production and management practices. The questions Portuguese artists and producers are facing are as deeply rooted in national shortcomings as they are global dilemmas; they are utterly practical and indisputably political: should small-scale, not-for-profit artistic and cultural activities based in semi-peripheral countries bear responsibility for the ecological crisis? Should cultural practitioners be held accountable to a problem some of them see as originating and reaching far beyond their power? Should they refrain from intensifying international touring, even in the face of well-known asymmetries inside the EU? (Janssens & Fraioli, 2022).

This chapter explores the preliminary results of a nation-wide qualitative inquiry among performing arts practitioners based in Portugal, analysing 140 written contributions from Arts Council' regularly funded organisations. It specifically investigates discourses around the perceived distribution of ecological responsibility in the arts, representations on climate justice, and discussions around eco-ethics. It shows that, although the level of agreement on incorporating these issues into cultural policies is very high, the topic is deeply controversial, which explains the various conflicts and dilemmas that arose throughout our inquiry. Cultural agents voiced concerns over the instability of the national cultural policy framework and distrust in the suitability of sectoral approaches. They also expressed distress regarding potential social (in)justices, clearly pointing to frictions that are not only of a practical or operational nature, but mainly related to policy and ethical-political challenges.

## Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative inquiry applied to performing arts organisations in the subsidised sector in Portugal. Out of 594 organisations, 140 have submitted complete responses to an online survey with 50 questions, not all mandatory. Specifically, we will analyse and discuss the written contributions<sup>2</sup> to the questionnaire which consisted of 49 questions, 18 of which were optional, 29 open response, 33 multiple choices, 2 Likert scale, 1 ranking and 3 of numerical response. These were divided in three groups: *profile*, to collect data characterising both the organisations and the respondents; *discourses and positions*, to reflect on the interconnection between the arts and environmental sustainability; and *practices and actions*, to enquire about the practical needs and expectations in terms of their own ecological/ 'green' transition. The empirical data was subject to quantitative and qualitative analysis, through consecutive codification procedures and the construction of categories of analysis, redefined by interpretative exercises based on Maxwell's (2005) recommendations on modelling qualitative research, and confronted with cultural policy and environmental politics and ethics literature.

This sample is consistent with the distribution by artistic discipline, region, type of funding, and a balanced split between venue-based arts organisations and project-based or independent collectives. It is also representative of the Portuguese publicly supported performing arts sector in that it represents 23% of the total amount of organizations funded by the Directorate-General for the Arts (henceforth, DGARTES) - an Arts Council-like governmental body which is the most relevant cultural policy agent in the Portuguese performing arts context.

Across Europe, various Ministries of Culture and cultural policy bodies have been grappling with the green transition, attempting their participation in climate governance and in the development of sustainability-minded cultural policies (Taxopoulou, 2023). Insofar DGARTES can be considered a public agent with similarities to either the Arts

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2 As a form of anonymisation, the answers of the respondents will be identified with [R] - Response and [T] - Testimonies, followed by a number assigned to each case. In some cases, these statements have been slightly edited for clarity purposes.

Council England or the French Ministry of Culture (which have both been precursors in this field), our research allows for a reflection on the way ecological issues have been intertwining with the cultural sector, thereby indicating its potential public policy interest (Caust, 2017) and paving the way for future international comparisons.

## **Discussion: political frictions arising from the semi-peripheral condition**

As stated above, we suggest that the ambiguous position of Portugal (Ribeiro, 2009) - sitting geographically and culturally between Europe and the Atlantic and economically categorized as semi-peripheral – coupled with the country's tardy democratic turn and the late acknowledgment of its violent colonial action - makes it a remarkable observation point from which to analyse the frictions and contradictions deriving from the overarching challenge of sustainability. Some of those contradictions became noticeably evident in the first set of results that our study analysed. When asked whether they agreed with the fact that several governments were "considering including sustainability issues more expressively in cultural policies", an expressive majority (96%) responded positively. The pattern was repeated when the question more explicitly mentioned the possibility of sustainability issues being incorporated "in the criteria for public funding in the arts and culture field" – 77% expressed their agreement. These attitudes are consistent with the respondents' level of preoccupation with climate urgency: 76% reported being "very" or "extremely" distressed. An even more impressive 94% of respondents are confident that the arts and culture (even if they can be partially said to have a smaller ecological footprint than other sectors) should be included in governmentally enforced sustainability measures. Given the high topicality of the issue at stake, one should definitely consider the effect of some degree of social desirability bias (Krumpal, 2013) throughout the survey. After all, as Rodríguez put it in his now famous open letter to Jérôme Bel, who would want "to be that Donald Trump who stands against Greta Thunberg?" (Rodríguez, 2021). His metaphor strongly indicates how powerful the tendency for

one to publicly acknowledge the gravity of the current ecological situation – the term ‘planetary emergency’ having entered mainstream public discourse. A closer examination, however, reveals the issue to be far more controversial than these quantitative results might suggest. If it weren’t so, how then to account for the various conflicts that arise from a closer examination of the survey’s results – and, specifically, from the content analysis of the written responses, in which the cultural practitioners involved in this study were invited to further explain their thoughts and attitudes towards the intersection between their field of work and the larger ecological imperative?

Indeed, when confronted with the potential transformations that ‘the green transition’ can bring into the sector’s working practices, many reveal fears of (1) the instability/fragility of cultural policies, (2) distrust on the efficiency of sector-based and nation-based approaches, (3) apprehension on the financial restraints and increased difficulties in accessing funding. On a second level of representation, less expressive, the respondents consistently raise issues that are heavily context-related, namely issues related to (4) fears of instrumentalization and threats to artistic freedom (5) fairness and historical (in)justice, (6) infrastructural inequalities and (7) tokenism (Kanter, 1977).

These 7 points were identified through the content analysis based on a prior codification exercise activated by keywords related to conflict or dissent, since the respondents’ discourses repeatedly mentioned “threat”, “fear”, “distrust” and other conflict-related feelings/opinions,

The following table (Figure 1) presents a representative illustration of the type of statements that were found to be corresponding to different arguments.

These expressions of conflict/friction are indicative of the clear ambivalence on how different responsibilities should be portrayed and implemented and form an important counterpoint to the admitted concurrence with the idea that the ecological threat should be dealt with by cultural policies. The conflicts can be grouped in 3 major categories, each pertaining to a different dimension/level of conflict: political - focusing on the ethical concerns of the respondent’s discourses (instrumentalization, historical injustice, etc); policy - regarding sectoral and/or public and national approaches on identified problems; and practical - relating with the material aspect of the frictions, more in tune

Main points/arguments	Excerpts from responses
1) Instability/fragility of cultural policies	<p>[R14] “If funding in Portugal continues to operate at such a low level, one might almost consider it ridiculous that choices can be made at this stage based on environmental sustainability criteria. Only with a stabilised cultural landscape and some financial stability should funding bodies start to be required to meet such criteria.”</p> <p>[R56] “Although we all have a responsibility for change, it cannot be imposed on the sector without visible measures of accountability and commitment on the part of other sectors with a greater environmental impact.”</p>
2) distrust on the efficiency of sector-based and nation-based approaches	<p>[R37] “The question is always the mould in which these policies are implemented. If they are mere copies of international models or if they contemplate the reality of the country.”</p> <p>[R99] “as long as we are similarly applying similar rules to public funding to other sectors of activity, namely tourism”</p>
3) apprehension on the financial restraints and increased difficulties in accessing funding	<p>[R111] “there will have to be a transition period and extra financial support for cultural operators to be able to make changes.”</p>
4) fears of instrumentalization and threats to artistic freedom	<p>[R23] “I fear a lot about what consequences this could have for us artists. I feel it could harm us professionally and put us in even more precarious situations and with less artistic freedom...”</p> <p>[R100] “I do not think it is legitimate in democratic systems to use public funding to instrumentalize cultural production.”</p>

Figure 1: Illustration of main points raised by the respondents (excerpts)

<p>5) fairness and historical (in)justice</p>	<p>[T2] “it is up to us to think about the quality of life of artists who live on the margins. Artists who do not have the privilege of receiving support, nor of accessing mobility. I believe that in order to move towards the issue of environmental sustainability, it is necessary to think about reparations and confronting racial, social and cultural inequalities, as well as facing the problem of institutional and structural racism.”</p>
<p>6) infrastructural inequalities</p>	<p>[R99] “I agree only if the process is accompanied by an extraordinary effort to develop sustainable public mobility infrastructure throughout the country and at its intersection with international territory.”</p> <p>[R109] “It is not fair to encourage people to change from air to rail (especially in Portugal where rail links with the rest of Europe are practically non-existent).”</p>
<p>7) tokenism</p>	<p>[R135] “It all seems to me like trendy agendas that are going to be made only to win funding/grants.”</p>

Figure 1: (cont.)

with strictly ecological footprint issues. A simple visualisation of how the points relate to the 3 categories (Figure 2, below) exposes the fundamentally political aspect of the juncture between the arts and the ecological urgency.

Indeed, most of the respondents’ perceived conflicts seem to be of a political/ethical nature, poignantly indicating the contextual situatedness of such a clearly global problem.

[T1] “The fact that we are based in Portugal poses us several challenges, as a theatre company. Our country is a very peripheral one, at the edge of the European continent and the country’s railway network is not combined with the European railway networks.”

	<u>TYPE OF CONFLICT/FRICTION</u>		
	<u>POLITICAL</u>	<u>POLICY</u>	<u>PRATICAL</u>
1) Instability/fragility of cultural policies	●	●	
2) Distrust on the efficiency of sector-based and nation-based approaches	●	●	
3) Apprehension on the financial restraints and increased difficulties in accessing funding		●	●
4) Instrumentalization and threats to artistic freedom	●		
5) Fairness and historical (in) justice	●		
6) Infrastructural inequalities			●
7) Tokenism	●		

Figure 2: Types of conflict.

[T3] “Until 1974, Portugal was a country blocked-in on itself - a fascist and colonialist dictatorship, that described itself as “proudly alone”. The circulation of art and artists in the European space is therefore a question with a deeper and wider social and cultural scope. Will carbon savings in the circulation of arts be worth the cost of Europe becoming more vulnerable to extremist nationalisms? We have to look at the bigger picture that this whole issue implies”.

[T4] “It is necessary to recognize that the central contexts (richer and more privileged) will have a higher capacity to respond to the ecological challenge, because they already have access to mechanisms, infrastructures, and financing for this. And at the same time, one must understand that peripheral contexts (or ultra-peripheral ones like the Azores) have other constraints (economic and geographical) that do not allow them to have such an immediate or direct response.”

The practical obstacles notwithstanding, Portuguese arts practitioners appear in this study to be acutely aware of the overarching political



implications of the 'green transition', and vigilant of the contradictions that such transformations entail when associated with specific geographical and historical circumstances. The fact that there is a richness of potential conflicts/fears arising in three different levels – political, policy, and practical – may also be interpreted as an indication that, in spite of the massive discursive adherence to the sense of urgency around tackling climate change and environmental degradation, arts practitioners are very much aware that doing that presents specific challenges vis-à-vis the Portuguese and other equivalent semi-peripheral contexts.

## **Eco-ethics and Environmental Justice**

Throughout the survey, the respondents were clearly able to link the need to promote transformations towards a more eco-responsible arts sector with the challenge of overcoming various structural weaknesses that still mark the possibilities for development of the field of arts in Portugal. Most importantly, they voiced those concerns while also incorporating their distress regarding social justice and the historic reparation of global inequalities. To discuss them, we should broaden our view and adopt a more extensive understanding of the issue at stake, by becoming aware of notions of environmental ethics (or eco-ethics) and environmental justice. Regarding eco-ethics, Palmer, McShane and Sandler define it as “the study of ethical questions raised by human relationships with the nonhuman environment” (2014, 420). This concept is on the one hand related to the sense of eco-responsibility (highlighted earlier), and on the other hand, heavily implicated with overcoming weaknesses that some communities and/or countries might have that affect and impact their everyday lives.

In close quarters with environmental ethics, is environmental justice (or lack thereof). The European Environmental Bureau states that environmental justice means “that environmental benefits and burdens have to be shared fairly. Environmental injustice occurs when those with political or economic power exploit the planet’s resources to the detriment of poorer communities or the average citizen.” (European Environmental Bureau - website). It is crucial to the understanding of

environmental justice that we see here only the issue of equity highlighted but not also one of exposure and disproportionality of responsibility and impacts. Regarding that low-income and minority communities are “disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards, particularly chemical exposure and air and water pollution” (Palmer, McShane and Sandler, 2014, 424) this demands further attention. Schlosberg (2004) states that the understanding of environmental justice has various meanings, equity being just one of them. He demands a focus on “recognition, distribution, and participation” (517), considering that the three are linked and represent “overlapping circles of concern” (Ibid.).

“Distribution” might be the “most obvious” evidence of environmental injustice, the one that mirrors the inequity in social, economic and cultural status; but recognition and participation are also crucial: they refer to the need for these countries and/or communities to have “a place at the table”. This would mean “critically engaging with contributions that denounce the constructs and relations between colonial exploitation and climate change” (Chu *et al.*, 2022, 12), exposing the fundamental relationship between neoliberal capitalism, Western-centric narratives of ‘progress’, and ecological collapse. Importantly – given the political aspects that we have sought to underline – this involves that we stop “calling “ecological” what, historically, is political” (Hoff, 2022, 281). Our research tried to establish this connection exactly by underlining the political and ethical nature of the fears and frictions among cultural practitioners and relating the ecological threat with the concept of environmental justice. When asked about this concept, of the 140 respondents, 96 of them (69%) either didn’t respond, answered saying they were unaware of the concept/expression, or gave erroneous or distant interpretations of the concept. The apparent disconnection on the part of the respondents to this question may be attributed to various reasons: the fact that this question was asked more than halfway through the questionnaire, causing some understandable fatigue; misinterpretation of the question and/or lack of familiarity with the concepts at hand (which led some respondents to resort to search engines to look up the meaning) - overall pointing towards the lack of systematisation and depth of the debate itself, which is mainly being focused on the pragmatic dimension and oriented towards individual and organisational action, with less focus on political issues and global

contradictions (Rodrigues, 2024). The remaining 44 (31%) offered interpretations related to the need to geo-politically contextualise ecological issues, the need to consider the historical responsibility of the Western world, associating environmental aspects with colonialism, class, gender and race-based inequalities. Most of all, they insisted on the idea of a) inequalities and b) extractivism.

a) **Inequalities, distinct impacts and disproportionality**, i.e., the idea that the countries that have contributed the least to the problem are the ones that are being affect the most.

[R106] “The greatest damage in terms of climate change is being suffered by those who have contributed the least to it happening. The rich countries that pollute the most must compensate the poorer countries so that they can cope with climate change.”

[R56] “It is the most vulnerable who are most affected by natural disasters, pollution, water and food shortages. These are people who live in extremely polluted regions because they are the centre of production of goods for consumption in other countries; these are people who live in housing conditions that are not very resistant to natural disasters; these are countries that have to resort to massive extraction of their natural resources to feed the lifestyle of richer countries.”

[R87] “Scarcity of natural resources, imbalance of ecosystems, natural disasters and climatic phenomena do not respect geographical distributions and impact on classes, genders and races in different ways”.

[R28] “The responsibility for taking actions that promote sustainability should be proportionate to the responsibility of the countries and economic sectors that have led us to the present situation.”

b) **Dynamics of extractivism**, the cost of nature’s exploration from a nonhuman and human points of view and the need to consider the historical responsibility of the Western world:

[R82] “The exploitation of nature has costs, costs that are paid by the most fragile communities and countries in the global south. The neo-colonial extractive logic of the so-called ‘Western’ countries mediates between those who have access to natural resources and those who profit from

them. Environmental justice must necessarily take these internationalist dynamics into account."

[R103] "The 'less developed' countries are often the ones who foot the bill for the 'more developed' countries, either because they receive their waste or because their resources continue to be squandered in an unsustainable way, as well as the exploitation of cheap labour. Only by acting to eradicate these factors can environmental justice be promoted".

## **Circulation and international cooperation**

This element of environmental justice is revealed most clearly when we focus on the issues of circulation and international co-operation, which are central to the practices, processes and working models of the performing arts sector.

[T2] "It is up to us to think about the quality of life of artists who live on the margins. Artists who do not have the privilege of receiving support, nor of accessing mobility. To move towards environmental sustainability, it is necessary to think about reparations and confronting racial, social and cultural inequalities, as well as facing the problem of institutional and structural racism".

In this respect, it is important to talk about the difficulties faced by artists and companies from less developed countries and outside the centres in getting their work circulated nationally and internationally. In the recent report "The future of mobility of the Performing Arts in Ibero-America" (Iberescena, 2023), it is shown that "developed countries still continue to dominate the exchange of cultural services", being responsible for a vast majority (95%) of the total exports worldwide (UNESCO 2022, 164). In fact, the least developed countries are at a disadvantage, having a transversal difficulty: "Not being positioned in the 'centre' whether understood from geographical, geopolitical, economic, or symbolic conditions, persists as a transversal difficulty" (Iberescena, 2023, 74). This (semi)peripheral condition permeates the way environmental issues are experienced: "When I often hear people in Europe discussing the carbon footprint and how to travel less, it makes me very

uncomfortable. We in Latin America are precisely discussing how we can tour.” (Iberescena, 2023, 44).

Once again, Portugal offers a relevant vantage point, as it sits both at the periphery and/or centre, depending on the geographical scope. Portugal has the ‘advantage’ of being in Europe and being able to benefit from a range of funding mechanisms and policies – in the context of Ibero-America, for instance, it “stands out above the average as a country with the highest participation rates in mobility processes” (25). However, because it is on the periphery of Europe, it also has difficulties in developing sustainable careers and circulation: “For a contemporary dance company from Portugal, Belgium or Slovenia, it will be very hard to develop a sustainable career without engaging in cross-border touring because of limited opportunities for domestic presentation.” (Perform Europe, 35) as well as due to cross-border distribution of the performing arts not being considered as a funding priority.

In the face of such difficulties and of the added challenge of environmental sustainability, the respondents’ inputs reflect on their international and cooperation experience, in which dynamics of circulation reveal echoes of environmental (in)justice. They share their views in two vectors, a) underlining to the importance of working with diverse communities (aware of the *other*) and b) referring to their lived experience of the semi-periphery (aware of *self*).

a) *Aware of the other* highlights the respondents’ ability to refer to those outside of the self and representing individuals or groups that are from “under-represented or marginalised” backgrounds (R95). This notion is related to concepts of environmental (in)justice or unfair models of international circulation and cooperation:

[R79] “Although [Portuguese theatre company] already has some international experience, its main focus is regional/local work with communities. This is how we interpret the issue, also knowing that one of the trends fuelling environmental injustice is taking action without the consent, interest or respect of the communities concerned. What is proposed is for any model to start from sharing and constantly adapting to the realities, ‘strengths’ and interests of each community, seeking to negotiate with them the best way to reinforce them.”

[R95] “Understanding and integrating diversity in the arts can help create more balanced and fair models of international circulation and cooperation, supporting artists from diverse backgrounds, including those who may be under-represented or marginalised. We must constantly consider and evaluate the environmental, social and economic impact of each project/production and its circulation, endeavouring to reduce the production of waste and reduce carbon emissions, while seeking to support local economies and involve local communities more.”

b) *Aware of self* is more aligned with the respondents’ personal experience, including their own difficulties and specific struggles considering “the reality of those who work from Portugal” (R89):

[R89] “Taking into account the reality of those who work from Portugal, it’s important to mention that it’s a reality of those who from the outset work in the artistic field with lesser conditions or poorer financial conditions compared to other European countries, for example. So there is a kind of struggle for survival, which perhaps doesn’t allow us to think so much about the models you talk about for more sustainable circulation and co-operation.”

[R90] “The concept of justice with regard to the structures operating in Portugal is very questionable, given the relationship that artists and creative structures have with the government. From the outset, there is an economic imbalance which makes international co-operation very difficult, and which undermines all notions of fairness and justice (even more so environmentally).”

These statements emphasize a semi-periphery’s “double” handicap when it comes to both collaborating internationally and doing it in an environmentally fair way: not only do Portuguese cultural practitioners experience the fragilities of being a “southern” European country, but they also experience precariousness first-hand, which makes the effort in levelling the field towards eco-justice a very challenging endeavour.

## Final remarks

The analysis we were able to do within the scope of this text was limited to an assessment of the highly political and ethical nature of the major frictions and contradictions that arise when arts practitioners are confronted with the ecological imperative, especially in their international collaboration practices. Primarily, they help us understand the need to approach the entanglement of the arts and environmental sustainability in a way that does not avoid the inherent complexity, nor the dissent that the issues entail, even if that might mean working through challenges and contradictions of gigantic proportions. Indeed, the perspectives and experiences of Portugal-based art practitioners which we have examined throughout this text remind us that a proliferation of how-to handbooks, institutional reports, toolkits and legislation might not be enough to foster change if certain structural (social and economic) difficulties and inequalities are not confronted and overcome. Furthermore, the underlying political and ethical nature of the majority of the concerns they raise is a strong reminder that the ecological imperative will never be fully addressed through techno-fixes – it demands that we completely re-evaluate the way different axis of privilege work in the arts ecosystem – in other words, acknowledging the conflict and being more “aware of others” and “aware of self”. For that, summoning eco-ethics may prove instrumental, as it helps us to critically relate colonial/capitalist exploitation and climate change, climate collapse being a “colonial achievement” after all (Hoff, 2022). In fact, although the need to respond to the demand of ecological sustainability has been dubbed as ‘the green transition’, the changes it brings about are less a transition from one behaviour to another than a deeper transformation – one that points towards system change, especially given that the arts and culture sector has been operating on ‘survivalist mode’ (Elfving, 2020), strongly conditioned by the growth-oriented capitalist paradigm (Dragisevic Sestic, 2018) and over reliant on expansionist and productivist processes (Rodrigues, 2024).

Just how much will the sector change in the face of such a complex challenge remains to be seen. For now, we argue that it is at least crucial that we insist that the ecological debate in the arts “stays with the

trouble”, as Donna Haraway would have it (Haraway, 2016). It might be that more than rushing to incorporate environmental sustainability criteria into cultural policy-making, or ‘greening’ our performances, it is instead more urgent to envisage the “essential role of art to speak up and make space for (...) the speculative construction of just, eco-transition-ready paradigms that shrug off the logic of capitalist expansion” (Chu et al, 2022, 9). Thus, we highlight the respondents’ willingness to address the need for a thoughtful and concerted ecological transition, focused on eco-ethics and environmental justice, which is indispensable before efforts to adapt cultural policies and cooperation practices. This need arises from an awareness that the sector has of itself and its surroundings, acknowledging the potentiality of embracing ambivalence and friction as basis to discuss new ways of acting and, consequently, to challenge prevailing discourses about green transition in the arts.

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# III

**Within institutions:  
making room & working  
(with) subaltern**



# THE POLITICS OF ‘SAFER SPACES’: CONFRONTING ACADEMIA AS A SITE OF VIOLENCE

ANISHA GUPTA MÜLLER

## Introduction

This paper will consider how academia is a site of violence for many BIPOCs.<sup>1</sup> With both scholarship and personal anecdotes from a German context, I will explore how the university as an institution is not a safe space for all students, extending even into the realms of postcolonial studies and other critical classes. I also investigate the practice of ‘Safer Spaces’, which in this paper refers to political spaces for people of colour, that are often disputed in higher educational contexts. I hope to show how anti-institutional ‘Safer Spaces’ can offer a method to contest academies extractive approach to knowledge acquisition.

I close with an exercise for the other academics: what are we all actually tangibly doing to redistribute power?

‘Fuckademia’:

*‘An academic enterprise. As I see it, the exclusive structures and power relations of hierarchal, old white cis-men and women, otherwise known as higher education’.*

– Reyhan Şahin, *Yalla, Feminismus!*<sup>2</sup>

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1 Black, indigenous and/ people of colour. See the glossary for full definition.

2 Original version: Wissenschaftsbetrieb. Von mir aufgrund von hierarchischen, alten weißen, cis-männlichen und Frauen ausgrenzungsfördernden Strukturen und Machtverhältnissen der Hochschulbetriebe so genannt (Şahin, 2020, p. 10).

Reyhan's concept of Fuckademia is, put bluntly, what I am writing about. And yet it entails a bundle of contradictions. Fuckademia includes the backlash that comes with making complaints about racism at universities, but also the brilliant scholars you meet fighting along the way. Fuckademia can offer a language for our experiences, but also blur all sense of reality with academic jargon. It is the classist and racist barriers of higher education but often the path to access the theory on these very injustices. To me, Fuckademia and this paper are also an assortment of frustrating anecdotes and conflicts that have not yet settled in me.

I hope to answer some questions, and begin to ask more. What racist and colonial power structures exist in academia and the classroom? How do they in practice exclude BIPoC students and scholars? What alternatives can 'Safer Spaces' offer?

Before I begin, like others we must question the written form when critiquing white institutions (Liepsch et al., 2018).<sup>3</sup> Writing is academia's primary tool for communication, so I must also ask if a paper is the most fitting way to for me to formulate these ideas (Liepsch et al., 2018, p. 29). In my pedagogical work I try to avoid only using published academic texts, rather also include podcasts, interviews, videos, *Memes*<sup>4</sup> and work from local activists and community projects. To me this is one way to push up against the inaccessibility of 'Fuckademia', and can engage students with media that they may be more familiar with.

There are many thinkers that felt a critique of academia and education was a necessary framework and precursor for their future writing. I am thinking of bell hooks, Sara Ahmed, Reyhan Şahin, Grada Kilomba, and Gayatri Spivak to name a few. They are all writers who have critiqued white and Eurocentric academic institutions whilst creating and publishing work within them. Other spaces that have been a great source of education for me include online blogs and social media sources. This is where writers (organisers, and artists) such as Mia Mingus, Alok Vaid-Menon, Sinthujan Varatharajah make their work

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3 Definition: Institutions run by predominantly white people and that have a history of exclusivity on the basis of race (and other intersecting forms of oppression).

4 Definition: An edited image, video, text piece, etc. that is typically humorous or satirical and shared on social media.

openly accessible to a broader, often non-academic audience.<sup>5</sup> These thinkers have a variety of audiences, but many of them wish to direct their knowledge towards their own communities, including those who might not have access to university education.

I write this text for those in (and questioning) a university context or those outside academia interested in hosting 'Safer Spaces'. It is also for people straddling the two: the in-between place where this text, and I myself am situated.

To position myself in this thesis I will briefly comment on my identity as a cis, queer, abled, middle-class, light-skinned woman of Colour from the UK/ Germany (amongst other places).<sup>6</sup> I have a need for 'Safer Spaces' in my work that I often struggle to find in Berlin. I work hoping to centre Black and Brown classed and gendered voices, but at the same time, I feel I personally move through these spaces of academia relatively unpoliced. I say this for you to hear me fully, as my socialisation will of course also shape my perspective and analysis. As Grada Kilomba, the academic and author, says: 'I call for an epistemology that includes the personal and the subjective as part of academic discourse, for we all speak from a specific time and place, from a specific history and reality – there are no neutral discourses' (Kilomba, 2020, p. 30). Following these words, I hope to encourage other writers to frame their own perspective in academia and the arts, even if that means exposing privileges.

Aside from the people I have previously mentioned, the care work throughout this paper is in debt to, amongst others, the work of disability justice movement(s). I am grateful for the solace of disabled support systems particularly during my own long period of sickness, when I was attempting to write this text. It is also undeniable that the labour, the political and social activism of Black women and women of colour have shaped my thinking greatly. I have tried to include my inspiration everywhere where it has been clear to me, but I doubtless owe much more to these sources of knowledge.

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5 See Mingus (n.d.), @alokvmenon, and @varathas.

6 See the glossary for definitions.

## Power Structures in Academia

Academia is made up of a long history of accumulated knowledge taught in higher education institutions and universities. The academic 'canon' is much like a curriculum; it describes the knowledge that has been considered valuable and has been passed down over generations. As I will try to show, there are many power structures that dictate both the canon and our experiences in higher education. What is taught, how it is taught and by whom today are all a product of historically entrenched hierarchies. In this section I will focus on the ways in which academia poses as an unsafe space for BIPOC students, drawing from personal experiences and writings of academics in German universities.

"After I showed a piece of work that dealt with German colonial history, the responsible lecturer said that I should not expect a German audience to be familiar with it, since German colonial history has nothing to do with German history. It is the history of another country and you cannot expect Germans to know the history of every country in the world".

– Anonymous quote from the protest of students of the UdK Berlin, @asta\_udk\_berlin.

This statement came from a student, who joined the recent protest against racism at the arts university. In this incident, the teacher in the position of authority, placed German colonial history outside the canon as if it were irrelevant (Schwarzbach-Apithy, 2005, p. 113). Even though 'German colonial history' already states the country in its title, the professor decided to silence the students contribution. In the teachers view, German history is limited only to the borders of the country, which is both illogical as well as ahistorical (the colonies were officially German territory). The racist assumption is also made that 'all' Germans have no connection to colonial history. All the German BIPOC who carry family histories of colonisation are thus erased, reasserting the idea of Germanness as a synonym for whiteness. The implication of not needing to know this history, as Schwarzbach-Apithy says, becomes code-word for not WANTING to know (Schwarzbach-Apithy, 2005, p. 248). The teacher's apathy towards 'this' history is not coincidental nor

an anomaly; it is part of an intentional strategy to avoid confronting colonial legacies and accountability (Schwarzbach-Apithy, 2005, p. 256).

The huge historical gaps in our education system are alarming, especially the 'higher up' you go in academia. We are often taught that the more we know, the closer we will get to the most 'valid' or 'legitimate' scholarship. In universities we learn the methodology of using sources and argumentation to prove our theories. But what is 'truth' in academia? Grada Kilomba states that 'the structures of knowledge validation, which define what 'true' and 'valid' scholarship is, are controlled by *white* scholars, both male and female, who declare their perspectives universal requirements'. When academics are mostly all (and have always been) white, they become the judges and gatekeepers of the canon, much like the aforementioned teacher at the UdK (Kilomba, 2020, p. 27). Ramon Grosfoguel says, regardless where in the world you are you learn the theory written almost exclusively by white men from five western countries: England, Germany, France, Italy and the US (Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 74). Indeed, it is difficult to find in Germany curricula that does NOT place white people as the centre of human experiences (Schwarzbach-Apithy, 2005, p. 248). This emphasises the contradictory idea that the university is a universal place of learning, when the knowledge in it only relates to one small group of people.

For another example, in my bachelor degree in history of art at University College London, we studied a core course of 'The History of Art'. Looking back at the reading list (which 'stresses the importance of both historical research and critical thought') there were: 15 white men, 4 white women, 1 Black man, 0 women of colour, 0 Black women (UCL, n.d.). Claiming to be the core content of *the* history of *all* art, white men were again the default. As a student I was unaware that this narrative played a subtle yet active role in erasing my own histories and the histories of other women of colour. Writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o says in his book 'Decolonising the Mind' that erasure is a part of 'the psychological violence of the classroom' (Thiong'o, 1986/1988, p. 9). On its surface the violence does not seem so dangerous – Thiong'o calls it 'visibly gentle' – but its permanence suggest otherwise.

One of the ways we see whiteness remain present in academia, is through its alleged invisibility. In the research for my masters, I found white academics rarely position themselves personally in terms of race,



ethnicity or otherwise in their publications (whereas the majority of racialised scholars I have read, are very clear about their positionality). Schwarzbach-Apathy explains that the lack of acknowledging whiteness functions as a subtle racism, where the myth 'whiteness is invisible' continues to benefit white people. The implication is that their view is neutral and objective, that their socialisation is not relevant to their intellectual thinking (Schwarzbach-Apithy, 2005, pp. 256 – 257). This paves the way for unconscious bias, bypassing the subjectivity of their perspective. In my investigation I have found it has also laid the groundwork for many forms of intellectual and cultural appropriation.

Intellectual and cultural appropriation asserts itself across European academia. In Germany, in any social or cultural studies that relate to the so-called 'Non-west', such as studies relating to Africa, Asia, Oceania or the 'Global South'<sup>7</sup>, it is quite typical to discover white European academics in the primary teaching positions. I frame this as a form of intellectual appropriation; white western academics due to their privilege can exploit racism and the colonial division of power for their own personal career gain. It is much like Grosfoguel's discussion of 'Epistemic Extractivism,' that describes a continuity of colonial extraction from anti-colonial thinkers and resistance movements to then be shared with white scholars in the 'Global North' (Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 74). As writer Mu-qing M. Zhang aptly comments: 'It is disturbing how pervasive and accepted it is in universities for white professors to be the 'experts' on and build their entire career off of studying marginalised peoples, thereby also displacing scholars of colour who do not have the privilege or capital to enter academia'. The perverse irony is that 'they are also actively shutting out and oppressing students from the very same communities that they exploit' (Zhang, n.d.). This form of appropriation has little interest in the lived realities of exploited communities, it is rather a form of ethnography that does nothing to alleviate their struggles. In fact, perversely, structures of oppression are a necessity for white academics to continue creating their work.

Academic work that denies the existence of subjectivity, also denies the existence of power and privilege in research. Key figures in post-colonial discourse have highlighted the danger in academics not fully

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7 See footnote 9 for more.

facing our own privilege. Gayatri Spivak, for instance, expanded on her famous text 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', on who the Subaltern actually refers to (Spivak, 2020). She emphasises that people (even colonised or racialised people) with access, whether through class, caste, first world or metropolitan privilege cannot be described as the Subaltern. To her Subaltern represents a positionality with no feasible leverage to power – certainly not people who have space in academia (like me!) (Dhawan, 2007). Today, fitting a truly capitalist development, decolonial discourse in Europe has gained a certain capital in progressive academic circles. There is often an element of dishonesty in these academic contexts though; people give centrality to aspects of their identity that fit the discourse, and conveniently leave out the colonial privilege that might have got them there in the first place. In the words of Spivak: 'Many people want to claim subalternity. They are the least interesting and the most dangerous' (Dhawan, 2007). Against the appeal from E. Tuck and K.W. Yang, and in the German context Nikita Dhawan, decolonisation and the notion of the Subaltern have become symbolic: a passive analogy to be used in academia (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

To confront these contradictions, including the ones that I carry, I have often found myself asking questions amongst academics. How do you/we support the communities your work is in debt to? Where is the line between critical pedagogy and extractivism? Where are you/we giving space and power back those most impacted by the topics you/we work on? Much like Schwarzbach-Apathy, I see a necessity for academics with privilege, to position ourselves, but also to be honest about the relationship we have to our knowledge and approach (Schwarzbach-Apathy, 2005, p. 248). This is just as much the case for teachers in the classroom.

In the context of teaching, scholar Nana Adusei-Poku writes that when race is discussed in the classroom it is typically met by white silence (Adusei-Poku, 2018, p. 44). She argues this serves the white students more than any other group in the classroom. This is particularly the case when the discussion leads to a disagreement or complaint. In Sara Ahmed's book on complaints, she says: 'the path of a complaint, where a complaint goes, how far it goes, teaches us something about how institutions work' (Ahmed, 2021, p. 6). In my experience, when I have brought complaints to a university department, the response from the institution has first and foremost been to avoid conflict. This attempt at

pseudo-neutrality or 'professionalism' is a silencing tactic that inevitably leads to more complaints; the 'complaint is never completed by a single action: it often requires you do more and more work' (Ahmed, 2021, p. 5). In the end, any anti-racist work that does manage to get done ends up landing on the people of colour in the institution, and exhaustingly, 'in the form of unpaid extra time' (Adusei-Poku, 2018, p. 23). Work that goes beyond an institutionalised critique of systems of oppression is draining, violent, and precarious. It is usually unpaid and underappreciated and cannot be added to any academic CV. With this as the context for students (and teacher) of colour in higher education, Adusei-Poku asks 'so how do we shake off the trauma in the classroom and implement holistic approaches to self-care within the institution?' (Adusei-Poku, 2018, p. 47). One approach that has been offered in the short-term has been 'Safer Spaces'.

## **Politics of Safe(r) Spaces**

A 'Safe(r) Space' is a concept that aims to create a space where people who experience discrimination can come together for support, primarily without the presence of people who do not share the same discrimination. It 'is a supportive, non-threatening environment that encourages open-mindedness, respect [...] as well as physical and mental safety' (Coalition for Safer Spaces, n.d.). The origin has been pinpointed to the 70s/80s feminist and queer movements in the US, but I would argue that 'safe spaces' have always existed in BIPOC communities – particularly amongst femmes and queer people navigating predominantly white and cis male contexts (GLADT e.V.,; erklär mir mal..., 2020b).

## **Safe**

Within the idea of 'safe space' are two concepts. If we begin with 'safe', the implication is physical, emotional and psychological safety for an individual. But is it possible to make a space fully 'safe' for a whole

group? Even if the group consists of people with shared experiences, it would be wrong to assume they all have the same needs and desires. For this reason, the term 'Safer' is increasingly being used in socio-political discourse to show nuance. This essentially has the same meaning as 'safe space', but acknowledges that no one event or space will ever be perfect for ALL the participants. It merely hopes to be 'more safe' than the larger context in which it is situated (Fox, 2007, p. 506).

## Space

The idea of space in 'safer space' initially can refer to a literal place. Whether in a university, an institution or even in a virtual setting, the 'space' of 'Safer space' is undefined. But why is 'space' so important in our understanding? The word 'Space' can allow for a more complex reading; it can be a literal room, but it also can be metaphorical – we hold space for people, we can have emotional space, and we can take up space.

GLADT e.V., the Berlin based self-organization for QTIBIPoCs often uses 'Safer Spaces' and defines them similarly. They began in the 1990s as the organisation Berlin Türkgay, and consisted of a group of primarily gay Turkish men who worked on issues on the intersections of gender identity, racism and nationalism. GLADT e.V. today works to empower Black queers and queers of Colour, and they have been my cooperation partner for multiple past empowerment projects. In a text about women's spaces and their openness to Trans\* perspectives, GLADT e.V. emphasises the importance of the people in 'Safer Spaces'. They understand the concept to be defined by the people in it – the people's 'presence, their behaviour, their knowledge' as what forms the space (GLADT e.V., <https://gladt.de>; *erklär mir mal...*, 2020b). This reiterates the previous definition of Safer Spaces where 'the effects of our behaviour on others are prioritized' (Coalition for Safer Spaces, n.d.). To hold a 'Safer Space' requires a certain amount of additional emotional labour and care work; perhaps this is why they are so often rejected in institutional realms.

The existence of 'Safer Spaces' is not new to Germany, nor its higher education. For instance, during her time as a professor in Berlin, after

her lectures Audre Lorde would ask the non-Black students to depart and allocated time and space for the Black students to exchange in the class. Aretha Schwarzbach-Apithy too writes specifically about 'safe spaces' at German universities - although, she says, they are not always understood and often rejected (Schwarzbach-Apithy, 2005, p. 255). In universities, a typical argument against 'Safer Spaces' is the idea of 'freedom of speech'. In one case-in-point article, a PHD student laments 'Safe Spaces' as 'fundamentally at odds with the rigorous intellectual exchange central to the idea of the academy itself' (Whitten, 2020). The thinking here is that a closed space for people to discuss infringes on the academy's 'freedom' to discuss in the allegedly 'open' university context. What kind of freedom is it though, to discuss in a context of extremely unequal power dynamics? Who has the freedom to speak (on what) and what happens when the debate has a direct impact on a specific group of people in the room?

From Angela Davis losing her university job and the ensuing legal battle defining freedom of academic speech in the 60s (Gordon, 2023), to Sara Ahmed's statements on the misuse of 'free speech' in 2015 (Ahmed, 2015), academics of colour have long been aware of double standards of these concepts (Student Collective of FU, HU, TU, UdK, Hertie School & ASH, 2023).<sup>8</sup> I would argue the conservative defence of freedom of speech has little to do with intellectual freedom or debate at all, but far more to do with upholding the status quo. Moreover, it only holds any value for thinkers who align to the mainstream politics of the time: certainly not for radical anti-colonial, anti-capitalist thinkers. The mainstream debate I have found opposing 'Safer Spaces' all sideline racism and structural inequality in academia. Their arguments instrumentalise 'democratic debate' and 'freedom of speech' to silence marginalised voices in academia historically and still today.

I myself have been rejected from hosting a Safer Space for BIPOCs in a well-known arts institution in Berlin. It was deemed discriminatory to white people, although ironically they were happy to offer me a 'women's only' space. In my case, it was implied there could even be

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8 As a current example in Germany an open letter and petition titled 'Reclaiming Academic Freedom at the Universities of Berlin' seeks to preserve academic freedom in relation to geopolitical statements of solidarity.

legal ramifications of excluding certain (dominant) groups in Germany, which emphasises the high stakes of doing anti-racist work here. From the point of view of an institution, particularly one like academia that markets itself on 'freedom of speech', hosting 'Safer Spaces' threatens their facade of equality. To have such a space ultimately points out the current-day existence of discrimination within them. So, taking into account all these obstacles, why try to host 'Safer Spaces' in educational and artistic contexts at all?

There are multiple reasons why 'Safer Spaces' can offer some respite from academic violence. Firstly, they aim to offer spaces that are 'critical of the power structures that affect our everyday lives, and where power dynamics, backgrounds, and the effects of our behaviour on others are prioritised' (Coalition for Safer Spaces, n.d.). In other words, there is an expectation that all participants intend on anti-discriminatory behaviour and values. 'Safer Spaces' cannot, of course, ensure a lack of discrimination altogether, but by acknowledging power dynamics in the room, participants are made to be more aware of how they behave and speak in the space. To me the intentionality of a 'Safer Space' also leaves room for conflict, emotional responses and personal confrontation. This is very much in opposition to the mainstream university institutions approach. If we learn how to navigate conflict, whilst always centring the most affected, we are far more likely to be able to find solutions inside and beyond the classroom.

Secondly, I see these closed spaces as an opportunity to share knowledge outside a white gaze. If intellectual appropriation means stealing knowledge and distributing it to white audiences, then does having educational spaces for BIPoC-only offer an alternative? One of the reasons I believe white educational institutions are resistant to 'Safer Spaces', is because they are not able to benefit from the material inside the spaces themselves. They cannot have control over what is said or planned within them, and why should they? A space without the dominant group can facilitate an environment where students who are often in silence are empowered to talk. Although I have not strictly-speaking held 'Safer Spaces' in my classes, I have been told by students of colour, that my approach has allowed them for the first time to be honest in class. To me, this is exactly what 'Safer Spaces' should do.

## Conclusion

The reason I have written this paper, is simultaneously out of exhaustion as it is hope. I am tired of the structures in academia, of the cyclic conversations, of not feeling it is a safe space for me to learn or teach. And yet, it is true that the university has given me access to jobs I could not have before. It has helped me to formulate my thoughts and I have found solidarity in unexpected places.

In this paper, I have started to show how academia is entrenched in elitist power structures. To me the first step for academics would be to fully understand academia's racist, classist, sexist, ableist (and other oppressive) histories, and use this as fuel for organising against it. Audre Lorde reminds us that 'those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable woman [...] know that survival is not an academic skill' (Lorde, 2017, p. 91). The very real necessity to survive is not a way to theorise, nor is it something that is taught in academia. The idea that western university institutions are founded on intellectual freedom does not mean it actually is (or has ever been) a space for *everyone* to speak freely, nor does it mean it is inherently open-minded. In other words, academia as it is cannot function as a 'Safer Space'. And yet this does not mean that 'Safer Spaces' cannot support those struggling inside it.

I can think of many suggestions that would begin to make the context of academia 'Safer', many admittedly at the governmental, societal and even global level (education ought to be free!). In the meantime the university too has power to redistribute; I'm thinking immigration support, online classes, further language options, no fees for students in precarious circumstances, hiring BIPOCs as permanent staff, anti-racist courses, accessible campuses... the list goes on. What these all have in common, is a desire for change from those in positions of power in the university.

Until then 'Safer Spaces' can act as a temporary solution, a place that understands power dynamics. But crucially as Halberstam writes in the prologue of 'The Undercommons', 'our goal – and the "we" is always the right mode of address here – is not to end the troubles but to end the world that created those particular troubles as the ones that must be opposed' (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 9). Or in this case 'Safer

'Spaces' is not the final stop; rather we should work towards a future where we actually have no need for 'Safer Spaces' at all.

## Glossary

The language in academia and social justice realms are not always easy for everyone to access. Sometimes complex language is needed us to formulate a complex idea, or to reflect a nuanced history. Sometimes though it is weaponised as a way to gate-keep knowledge. This chapter begins with a glossary of terms; ones that I have not fully understood in the past, that are often misinterpreted (or misused) or have a history that is important to acknowledge.

**Ableism:** The systemic and historical oppression of disabled people. It functions as a way to place value on social constructs such as intelligence, being 'normal', and being productive. It is deeply rooted in anti-Blackness, colonialism and capitalism (Lewis, 2020).

**BIPoC:** abbreviation of people who are discriminated against due to racism; Black, Indigenous and/ People of Colour. It arose in the US and predominantly is used in settler colonies and/ majority white western, English-speaking contexts, and now increasingly in Germany too (erklär mir mal..., 2020a; Adomako, 2018). It is worth noting, the appropriation of BIPoC into Germany has been disputed by many political thinkers as unfit to describe racial and ethnic populations and forms of racialised oppression in mainland Europe (Varatharajah, 2022).

**Decolonial:** Is a school of thought and approach to 'thinking and doing' (Mignolo, 2011, p. 9), which is invested in our 'whole social structure being changed from the bottom up' (Fanon, 1963, p. 35). Deriving from Black, indigenous and/ people of colour many in the Global South<sup>9</sup>, it is a fight against racist and colonial power structures that are very much present

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9 I use this term with reluctance and for purposes of clarity. It is a conflicted term in that it refers to a division of power structures and world geopolitics in a homogenous and simplistic (and often paternalistic) manner. It generally includes Africa, Asia, Latin-America and some places in Oceania, but this does not take into account the white and wealthy elite in the 'Global South' nor the historically oppressed communities in the 'Global North' too.



in the world today. It aims to shift away from white western Europe and settler colonies as the centre of power and knowledge production. Instead, it works towards the structural, physical and psychological liberation of 'colonized people' (Thiong'o, 1986/1988, p. 9); this includes reparations, land back and abolishing systems of classed and racialised exploitation. Ironically, today it has become a metaphor (Tuck & Yang, 2012) constantly used in academia; by the very people and systems the work is fighting against.

**People of colour:** In the US, this term arose as a self-identifying political category. The Black Panther Party and Brown Berets used it in the 60s to unite Black and Brown people, but today it increasingly is associated with racialised people who are neither Black nor white in majority white contexts. It has been both embraced and critiqued in social justice realms, due to its generalisations; it highlights the common denominator of being 'non-white' and shared histories of colonial oppression. But it erases differences and risks ignoring the presence of anti-Black racism within People of Colour communities (Grady, 2020).

**'Safe Space':** A 'Safe Space' is a space where people who experience discrimination can come together for support, without the presence of people who do not share this experience. It is intentional in its political stance; to be actively critical of power structures and to centre those most affected by them (Coalition for Safer Spaces, n.d.). The origin has been pinpointed to the 70s/80s feminist and queer movements in the US, but I would argue that they have always existed informally in BIPoC communities – particularly amongst women and queer people (GLADT eV.; erklär mir mal..., 2020b). The term 'SafER' is used to acknowledge that no one space will ever be perfectly safe for ALL the participants. It merely hopes to be 'more safe' than the larger context in which it is situated (erklär mir mal..., 2020c).

**White:** In German the word 'white' as in 'white people', is italicised in critical race theory to show it is not referring to skin colour (erklär mir mal..., 2020a). White in this discussion is indeed not a skin colour nor is it a biological reality; it is a socio-political and historical construct of power (Auma, 2020). Globally, whiteness functions everywhere somewhat differently, it is intertwined and complicated by class, caste, ethnicity, and religion. And yet it is worth mentioning that light-skinned, European descendants and/ those read as white all experience power and privilege from this construct.

## Workshop Exercise: Discussion/ Reflection in Groups

Write down or discuss with colleagues the following questions:

Give three examples where you have supported the communities your work is in debt to?

When was the last time you gave space to those most impacted by the topics you work on?

What things will you do this week to redistribute your privilege?

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# COUNTER COLLECTING & ARCHIVING: A CURATORIAL PRACTICE

ANA KNEŽEVIĆ & EMILIA EPŠTAJN

## Some Background Information

Curators across the museum spectrum have over the course of working on collections and archiving encountered so-called counter-collections and archives.<sup>1</sup> The counter-archive phenomenon, in our opinion, refers to clusters of documentary materials such as photographs, newspaper-clippings, notes, letters, journals, and miscellaneous objects (souvenirs, badges, flags, etc.) existing in private, spontaneously organised and classified forms, outside of the institutional museum (archival) setting and these memorabilia have shown to hold certain performative potential, and may therefore be approached and worked with as *performative archives*.<sup>2</sup>

These private (or alternative) collections are composed of miscellaneous resources that refer to certain specific historical and social

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1 There are several noteworthy research projects with which we partly share terminology and concepts such as: the Counter-Archive symposium project (available on: <https://www.ici-berlin.org/events/counter-archive/>); and the Archive/Counter-Archive project and research network (available at: <https://counterarchive.ca/welcome>).

2 According to Eivind Rossaak, 'performative archives' are "collections that *do* something, not with words, but with things, ideas or images that may embody an argument, a sensation or a conception of society and history." For more on the perceived neutrality of the archive, the relation between the performative and more traditional (official) archives, as well as the reconceptualization of the archive as offering insight into power relations, the aesthetic and technology. See: Rossaak, 2016.



Segment of the exhibition “Yugoslav Testimonies of The Algerian Revolution” dedicated to Maja Plavšić’s archive.

The exhibition was curated by Mila Turajlić, Maja Medić, Emilia Epštajn and Ana Knežević and was open at The Museum of African Art in Belgrade from

18 March to 11 June 2023.

Photo: Marijana Janković.

periods. Additionally, whereas any collection (whether public or private) may share certain formal and classificatory characteristics with the performative archive, this brief essay is more focused on the curatorial approach to the private archive, which recognises the act/and action of its author (maker), and in particular, the private, alternative collection’s/ archive’s potentiality to *counter* established normativised knowledge. Therefore, this essay doubles down on the curator’s mediatory and interpretative role when dealing with private/counter archives and collections as an attempt to question re-affirming biases in knowledge production and power relations within the institution.

Our consideration specifically springs from our institutionally based standpoint from within the Museum of African Art in Belgrade which is an exponent and remnant of the Non-Aligned Movement and

the heritage of Yugoslav international relations with Africa (bearing in mind all of the complexities that Non-Aligned heritage in the contemporary world implies). The “Non-Alignment and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) comprise a phenomenon that emerged during the Cold War in Europe, however, its operation and significance are not limited to that (specific) historical epoch. Non-alignment may therefore be perceived as a doctrine of international politics that rejected the politics of force and interference in the internal affairs of nation-states, thus promoting an outlook rooted in a more equal and peaceful world, and it was also an emancipatory movement founded on the idea of liberation from political, economic, cultural and racial subordination” (Radonjić, 2021). The NAM lost its former post-Second World War significance, however, from a contemporary perspective it is important to point out that the spaces and places which deal with NAM heritage today are *subaltern* within the contemporary context.

Ultimately, working with counter or alternative private archives/collections that bear witness to the times in question, we may offer a curatorial effort that simultaneously detects, understands, interprets and communicates the residuals and remains of Non-Aligned heritage inside and outside the museum context, as well as offering *an-other* perspective and nuanced view on the relevance and meaning of this heritage today.

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It might be useful to delineate the difference between a counter collection/archive and counter collecting/archiving: the first, a noun, refers to a pre-conceived, privately formed cluster of data regarding a specific topic, the second – as a verb, is understood in terms of a specific form of curatorial activity practice.

When using the term, we want to widen the scope of its latter meaning by insisting on its form as a verb which involves the active curatorial process of dealing with private collections and archives of miscellaneous paraphernalia, recording oral histories, mapping relevant public spaces of collective non-aligned memory,<sup>3</sup> introducing these resources into the museum context (knowledge production) and ultimately also

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3 Online map of Non-Aligned heritage, a plug-in of the exhibition “Non-Aligned World”: [www.nesvrstani.rs](http://www.nesvrstani.rs).



widening collection management in terms of objects of significance for the remembrance of the cultural ties between Yugoslavia and different countries in Africa during the decolonization period and in its imminent aftermath, all within the Non-Aligned Movement's system of thought.

It is our opinion that, among other things, the “counter” aspect of a personal collection/archive (as a noun) lies in its potential to disrupt the canonized practice and knowledge production status quo by injecting the individual/personal into the wider social/collective museum context. With each micro-narrative, whether explicitly and intentionally, or merely by exposing something that was never before seen or known, the notion that only museums (and museum workers) are entitled to produce knowledge is brought into question.

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It is noteworthy to mention at this point certain initiatives and practices of the Museum of African Art in Belgrade – The Veda and Dr Zdravko Pečar Collection (hereinafter the MAU) which were conducive to this “counter” curatorial method of working with collections and archives. Firstly, during 2015-2016 film curator and independent researcher Olivier Hadouchi,<sup>4</sup> conducted research that led to the “bringing to light” and assessment of the (to that point) literally hidden<sup>5</sup> and unacknowledged but (existing and in a former time) officialized archive within the MAU: photos and documentation about the Algerian war for independence.

This was followed by the comprehensive collaborative project of the MAU reconceptualization with independent curator and theorist Ana Sladojević in 2016-2017 (Epštajn & Sladojević, 2017). The main aim of the collaboration was to re-contextualize and historicize the MAU from a critical heritage studies and postcolonial theory perspective, by casting specific light on its “non-aligned” origin. A particular segment involved the exhibition “Unpacking the Archive of Veda Zagorac and Zdravko Pečar” which primarily aimed at exposing the (to that point)

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4 Part of the “non-aligned modernisms” project by Zoran Erić. For more, see Hadouchi, 2016; and the Museum of Contemporary Art's website: [www.msub.org.rs](http://www.msub.org.rs).

5 The collection in question was found in the attic of the MAU (authors' note).



First vinyl of Independent Algeria was published with the support of Veda Zagorac. This copy from the collection of Veda Zagorac and Zdravko Pečar's personal belongings from The Museum of African Art in Belgrade is signed by Algerian revolutionary M'hamed Yazid, who pointed out Veda's role in creation of this vinyl.

Photo: Nikola Radojčić.

invisible archive, which was treated as *secondary*, and thereby claiming its value and importance as a primary resource.

These, in many ways paradigm-shifting initiatives for this museum led to the proliferation of dealing with, writing, interpreting, mapping, researching, debating, and exhibiting Yugoslav heritage and international relations between Yugoslavia and African countries – all within the Non-Aligned ideology and in relation to the role of the MAU as *lieu de mémoire* (Epštajn & Sladojević, 2017; Spaić et al., 2019; Epštajn et al., 2021; Knežević & Epštajn, 2021/2022; Sladojević, 2022; Turajlić et al., 2023).

Based on such models, we posit that redefining the understanding of value within the museum, which in its canonized form insists on formally acquiring objects (as colonial practice *par excellence*), should be shifted towards a more anthropological approach that emphasizes the significance of shared and different values and knowledge among individuals and communities with regards to specific historical topics and social matters, remembered in particular through material culture in general.

## The Curator-Mediator

The museum's institutional setting is a space for producing and confirming generally accepted histories and nurturing remembrance based on official social consensus. If we take it that museum institutions are the bearers of official discourse (politics), while private archives are *spontaneous* collecting endeavors motivated by personal inclinations and judgments about one's social role, the affective, nostalgic and romanticized interpretation, we may conclude that the active curatorial role is to mediate and facilitate the flow of knowledge from above, and from below, because both are susceptible to the same kinds of power dynamics, romanticization, tunnel-viewing, idealization, and different forms of nostalgic affirmations.

Arguments against introducing these small-scale, personal collections and archives, may also be based on the insubstantial differentiation between objective/subjective epistemologies, according to which these counter collections and archives are "subjective" histories about otherwise officially accepted "objective" truths upheld by the canonized (colonizing) museum and put into effect through its collections and archives.

Bearing in mind that the museum generally and traditionally focuses on affirming the power-motivated logics of expert versus laymen, official versus unofficial, high versus low (culture), within/without (institutional/non-institutional), etc., placing the limelight on such a bottom-up incentive (from inside the museum) is a form of focusing on "giving (a) voice to" with the ultimate aim to nuance, expand and destabilize the perceived firm boundaries that encapsulate and assert the one-story or *one-truth* narrative.<sup>6</sup>

Our fieldwork has shown that holders of private collections and archives (in our case specifically to do with the historical reality of Yugoslavia within the Non-Aligned movement structure), are oftentimes ambivalent with regards to whether to completely part with their historical testimonies. On the one hand this reluctance to separate from

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<sup>6</sup> At the same time, this is a form of empowerment to the singular and individual makers of history, who are often lost in grand historical narratives (authors' note).

their objects and documents are expressed by reasoning such as having a lack of trust in institutional care (in part this is a matter of the local context, but has also been evidenced in the wider museum context); hesitation to part with belongings considered closely linked to personal memory and personal history of a given family, family member, or loved one; the urge to preserve or “save” these collections/archives for their descendants in the hope that they would value and continue to preserve them as part of their family heirlooms and memories. There is also an awareness that potentially and with time the privately held materials will gain certain financial advantages, but, what is most important is there is also a very vivid fear of a loss of “informational control”



One page from the photo album which belonged to Maja Plavšić. The photographs recorded Yugoslav support to the Algerian Revolution and the work of the Red Cross of Yugoslavia, as well as Maja Plavšić's efforts to make her own archive of current events.

Private archive of the Plavšić-Duduković family.

*Photo: Nikola Radojčić.*

regarding the lives and work of family members that could potentially be manipulated with and/or instrumentalized in the wider social and especially digital context.

Nevertheless, all of the holders of private collections and archives that we came across were (alongside their misgivings) simultaneously and sincerely interested in releasing part of what they held and publicize the role of their ancestors in these historical events to a wider audience. So, in the long run, we were also made aware of these constituents' strong interest in taking part in the museum processes of preserving and spreading information on certain topics, supported by their active participation in museum work (preservation and exhibiting). Finally, and at the same time, there was a sense of pride that grew from the knowledge that the lives and efforts of their ancestors which were packaged in a socialist and collective-good context would finally be acknowledged.

### **Practicing Counter-Archiving: “How To”**

A sensitized approach to this institutional/private axis, or more specifically the relationship between the museum and holders of (potential) collections and archives, implies a relational and tailored approach that does not place precedence on museum staples such as acquiring, collecting, locating, “hoarding” objects within the museum, but rather opening a dialectical discursive space that actively abides by the value systems of the private as well as shared knowledge of experts for the collective or public benefit. Thus, the goal is to locate, inform, sometimes digitize, and occasionally introduce to the museum overall collections of private archives with the promise of careful handling and making sure that these counter collections and archives are made available by the museum for adequate (research and explorative) use.

From a curatorial position – the one in which the curator is conceived as mediator between the institutional/official and private/counter – we offer several, tentative suggestions on “how-to” do counter collecting and archiving:

- open eyes and open mind: developing an awareness of everyday museum interactions and face-to-face streaming of information which are a clue to potential family-based counter archives;
- sensitized tailoring of potential modes and forms of collaboration with holders of private archives: developing trust in communication regarding important matters such as preservation, disclosure of materials, and their use in the museum (for research, exhibiting, etc.)
- protection from exploitation of visual materials in the online world and context: inspired by non-aligned values and a “third-way of thinking and practicing” work in the cultural field and counter archiving in the scope of the MAU would involve an open-closed approach. The openness is reflected in making the resources available for the free use of interested third parties (researchers, artists, curators, etc.) through the museum as connecting tissue, while the *closed* nature in this respect, means specifically not allowing the free download and appropriation for all (precisely for the purpose of avoiding manipulation and abuse of digitized and private materials);
- widening the availability of (potential) collections and archives for reconsideration and knowledge production: developing an awareness among curators and different researchers about the value of extra-official collections, archives and materials, which should be taken into consideration.

## Final Thoughts

The exploration of counter collections/collecting and counter archives/archiving from the institutionally based curatorial position has led us to the conclusion that such resources are an invaluable part of sustaining and preserving heritage related to a very specific historical period in our local history which revealed specific economic, cultural and political ties developed between Yugoslavia and different African countries within the non-aligned system of thought. This re-evaluates the specific position of the MAU as a museum, delegating it a key role in



Segment from the Olja Džuverović's private archive curated by Lina Džuverović as part of the group exhibition "WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?: On the non-aligned decolonial constellation" curated by Ivana Vaseva and Bojana Piškur. The exhibition was opened from 24 November to 16 December 2022 at The National Opera and Ballet in Skopje, North Macedonia. Photo: Nataša Geleva.

heritage "conversation", especially considering there is no explicit social consensus on the above-mentioned period, making it liable to different forms of re-interpretations, relativizations, and instrumentalizations.<sup>7</sup> In its most obvious form the current social and political discourse neglects, erases, marginalizes or simply ignores the socio-historical reality of the above-mentioned relations and heritage.

In its most obvious form the current social and political discourse neglects, erases, marginalizes or simply ignores the socio-historical reality of the above-mentioned relations and heritage.

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7 This is because as a society there is no social consent or coming to terms with the causes and aftermath of the ultimate dissolution of the now non-existent Yugoslav state which was dismantled through a brutal and long war in the 1990s.

Ultimately, counter-collecting and archiving (curator) based on counter collections and archives (formed by different individuals) implies certain redefinitions of the function of museums in the contemporary world:

- An awareness of the never-achievable completeness of knowledge;
- The importance of small scale, close reading and micro-narratives;
- And, specifically, expert wakefulness, following the tendency in museum theory and practice to be more socially aware and focused on critically approaching different current ways of life and living.

In a sense, the offered model is an affirmation of the importance of the object, collecting, and archiving in and through the museum, however with the crucial difference that as a public space, it should narrow down its “world-forming” and expansionist approach to knowledge dissemination (which is always essentially colonial), by forwarding small-scale experiences and actively involving certain unacknowledged actors, i.e. opening a space for dialectical thinking about value systems of the past and present moment.

## Appendix:

### A few case studies of counter collections/archives

- **“The Olja Džuverović Archive”**; *keywords*: Namibia, South Africa, Yugoslavia, apartheid, SWAPO, Non-Aligned Movement; *type of materials*: documents, official communiqués, letters, magazines, photographs, LPs, miscellaneous objects, library, etc; *period*: 1970s-1980s.<sup>8</sup>
- **The Maja Plavšić collection/archive**; *keywords*: Red Cross of Yugoslavia, Algerian War of Independence, Tunisia, Yugoslav diplomacy,

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8 This is a rare example in which a scholar is at the same time also holder of collection/archive, and in control of the materials, well aware of their heritage potential and value. See more on Lina Džuverović’s working group “Yugoslav Non-Aligned Movement Solidarity Archive”: <https://www.dzuverovic.org/?path=/research/working-group/>. The authors of this position paper are also active members of this working research group.



Vietnam, Peru; *type of materials*: books, newspaper clippings, photo albums and photographs, souvenirs; *period*: 1950s-1980s.

- **Oral history: Dragiša Dautović**; *keywords*: Nigeria, architecture, Energoprojekt; *type of materials*: oral history, photographs, documentation; *period*: 1980s.

\*Further work: to be continued...

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# LION PEOPLE THE GASTARBEITER IN THE MUSEUM OF YUGOSLAVIA<sup>1</sup>

ALEKSANDRA MOMČILOVIĆ JOVANOVIĆ

*People think if someone has two lions at their street entrance or courtyard of their house that he is a Gastarbeiter. [...] In my opinion, a Gastarbeiter is a competent person who was a highly sought-after worker abroad in the seventies. That is what a Gastarbeiter is...*

Anton Latinović – Toni der Assi, Berlin-based hip-hop artist whose parents were Gastarbeiters in Frankfurt, Germany (conversation recorded in The Museum of Yugoslavia in 2016)

## Position 1: The Museum

From the cabinet of curiosities, through the temple of culture and knowledge, to the awakening of the awareness of a social role and the development of accessibility strategies, museums have been a discrete, expansive, and evolving, but essential component of humanity. Things that make us human beings as a species, actors in an epoch, and members of a social group, we safeguard in boxes, coffins, and buildings and exhibit over and over again to transmit and cherish stories about ourselves. A stereotypical remark, but true. At the root of the sharing

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1 Since the paper represents the work on the exhibition “*Yuga, my Yuga* – Gastarbeiter stories”, parts of the text were formulated previously and published in a similar manner in the Serbian version of the exhibition catalog.

process is identification and it is the materiality (e.g. of an ancient object) that confronts us with our own experience of impermanence and a wish of eternity. So the museum stands as a space for identifying, communicating, and sharing. As a machine for synchronizing with eternity, a museum is a place for encounters, whether of time dimensions or parallel current experiences. Furthermore, if we follow Vilem Flusser's remark that communication is a negative entropy (Flusser 2012: 221), then we might suppose that this trick is materialized diachronically within the institution of the museum where the constancy of experience and knowledge is shared from generation to generation.

Within such a civilization discourse, each institution has its own historical and cultural conditions, presumptions, and challenges. For years the Museum of Yugoslavia (MY) has been dealing with self-reflection and processes of transformation. While societies in the Balkans, particularly in the territories formerly known as Yugoslav, had been going through multiple social, cultural, and existential traumas, the Museum was established and has been perpetually questioning its identity ever since. It was defined by its name and the location it stands on.<sup>2</sup> It tried to resolve the issues of ideologically uniform and consistent collections which are diverse and ambiguous at the same time. The dominant effort always was to proactively orient towards cultivating the Yugoslav experience, its complexity and ineffability, tragedy, and widespread nostalgia, but mostly to its social and cultural potential. In addition to this, the Museum also puts its history on display in the service of observing and examining common heritage<sup>3</sup>. It constantly deals with (re) conceptualizing its mission and seeks to offer credible testimony about the subject of its research and musealisation. In this respect, in 2020

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- 2 It is not a homogeneous monolithic process, on the contrary, discussions have not subsided even twenty-five years after the founding of the Museum, both internally and with numerous individuals interested in the Yugoslav past, whether they are sympathetic to it or not. MY inherited the location and collections of The Memorial Center Josip Broz Tito and The Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations and Ethnic Minorities. Find more on: <https://www.muzej-jugoslavije.org/en/predistorija-osnova-za-razumevanje-muzeja-jugoslavije/>
  - 3 The core exhibition of the Museum of Yugoslavia, *The Museum Laboratory*, is dedicated to collaborative research of Yugoslav heritage primarily through Museum's collections and museum objects. <https://www.muzej-jugoslavije.org/en/exhibition/laboratorija-muzeja-jugoslavije/>

curators and management developed an Identity Statement formulated through numerous discussions. The statement is rooted in the curatorial experience and reflects a vision of the institution. Although at times this process seems to be a self-fulfilling goal, in doing so, indirectly and extensively, the Museum aspires to stabilize as a relevant source and a comfortable space for sharing experiences, knowledge, and sentiment about Yugoslavia.

Along with self-reflexive processes, the Museum also consolidates by constant and rational collecting and consistent mapping of (what might be) Yugoslav heritage, creating exhibitions and programs together with prominent contemporary voices that interpret topics from the complex reality of life in Yugoslavia. Following the idea of unification of south Slavic peoples and other ethnicities with which they share history, the Museum recognizes cultural relics and tackles contemporary social issues. In this manner, the Museum has produced many programs and research that imply distancing from the macro narrative and history-oriented events or historical figures, turning instead to rarely heard voices including so-called intimate narratives. This trend, as in many similar cases, responded to the general presumption about museums, especially this Museum, as a place of power. Not only because a museum is by definition a part of the (state) mechanism that chooses and represents common values, but even more so, as a place of highly biased memories of the past times of blood and glory, suffering and glamour. The very location of MY is still perceived with its authoritative aura, although almost everything it once represented has collapsed and the fact is that it has quite a different and often publicly contested legacy to deal with. The legacy it cherished once, in the epoch it was originally established, is at least questioned nowadays.

## **Towards position 2: Micronarratives**

Addressing people with an eagerness to hear them and include them in the process of creating interpretation from a place described above, with this shadow of authority, is a challenge for contemporary generations of curators. So, choosing a micro perspective is a question

not with a simple answer, and much of what was said above implies some of the main responses to this question. Because of the effect of multivocality and pluralism, micro-narratives have the potential of a stronger contribution to realizing the nuances of the Yugoslav experience. Of course, this does not relate exclusively to local issues, but rather is also the case with any recent experience or memory that has direct implications for contemporary life.<sup>4</sup> The potential of *small stories* lies in the possibility of or a capacity for identification. To clarify, museums as media share the basic logic of communication. Communication relies on recognition and identification, both cognitively and emotionally, which, in the museum context means sensing in any affective way things we can relate to our own experience. This is not an exception in contemporary museum practice. On the contrary, it already became a sort of a trope alongside the authoritative attribution.

This may sound like micro-narratives are not more than a pure museographic tool. They might be that too, but only to reach toward the social micro-sphere. Cooperation in interpreting micro-narratives, including them in a museum exposition and other museum media, makes all the difference. Mutual awareness of each position in the process—whether a connoisseur or a bearer of an authentic experience and knowledge—is crucial to always check on while cooperating. Testing those borders is only possible when we are aware of them.

In recent years, there have been many pages written and even more projects developed locally and internationally that deal with implementing participation and collaborative practices in museums. This wave of inclusion and cooperation that overwhelmed museum professionals and institutions raised the questions of ethics. Mutual respect, *justice and dignity* (Bühler 2002: 1) were problematized in many different ways. Of course, these dilemmas are much older news in anthropology, ethnology, or other research practices that include fieldwork and talking to people; ever since the next generation of anthropologists started questioning the methods and results of their predecessors. So, what and how did we work with *Gastarbeiters*?

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4 We have been witnessing transformations of ethnographic collections of the museums established in many countries that used to be colonial powers.

## Position 2: The *Gastarbeiters*

The project about guest workers, initiated in 2013, was one of the pilot projects that silently announced a new paradigm in the Museum's practice. It was rather just an attempt at a strategic potential for a different Museum of Yugoslavia. For this paper, I will underline two dominant coordinates that frame the perspective of *Gastarbeiters* as subalterns. One, already elaborated above, is considering *Gastarbeiters* through the lens of a socially fragile cultural institution that is being reconceptualized and consolidated in unstable and turbulent political surroundings. What should be stressed also in this context is that the working class is an uncommon museum audience, or at least not that regular in the Museum of Yugoslavia. This is a sort of a paradox since a large part of the Museum's identity and collections come from the former Museum of Revolution of Yugoslav nations whose mission was to historize and educate on the history of the workers. This lateral controversy is the foundation from which the Museum addresses *Gastarbeiters* as possible partners.

Another perspective that should be mentioned is the one rooted in the mental mapping of Europe.<sup>5</sup> Social and cultural concepts frame guest workers as people coming from the *poor South* who go to the *rich northern and western* countries. Especially when we speak about the Balkans, traditionally perceived as the darker side of the map of Europe; often even referred to as being something different than Europe to which it geographically belongs. Furthermore, the concept of a guest worker, as a social category, was established just after World War II. In the Yugoslav context, these were the people coming to (temporarily) live and work in the countries that had invaded the country just a few decades before and which the incoming settlers had been heroically fought against. It is common for them to refer to themselves as being those who built Western Europe.

Let's just make a short remark on internal economic affairs in postwar Yugoslavia. The causes for creating a critical amount of people to temporarily leave the country lie in the agrarian reform and market

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5 For further reading on the concept of balkanism see, for example, works of Maria Todorova (1997), or Milica Bakić Heiden (1995; 2002; 2006).

economy that had led to the massive growth of unemployment. The *lending* of the workers was a temporary solution to the problem. In the mid-sixties, and by the end of that decade, Yugoslavia signed agreements with a couple of Western and northern European countries for temporary engagement of workers (Ivanović 2012). Of course, people had left the Balkans for work before the First World War and in between the two World Wars, but these treaties were a historical precedent, the precondition for forming *Gastarbeiter* as a recognizable social group.

Perception of this social group was, and still in largely is, highly biased. People who are crossing borders mess with the system and the social structure whether politically, socially, or culturally. They are seen as destabilizing factors on many different social, cultural, and psychological levels. Evidently, these specific stories are particularly challenging for a museum to interpret. The challenge of translating *Gastarbeiter's* experiences into the language of *a temple of culture*, a fundamentally conventional cultural institution can be surveyed in the light of the observations of anthropologists Ivan Kovačević and Marija Krstić. They claim that the (non)belonging of *Gastarbeiters* to both environments derives from the fact that they “violate the norms, that is, the understanding that ‘culture’ still exists as a set of shared and specific characteristics common to all members of a community [...] by their transcultural habits [they] clearly deny that” (Kovačević, Krstić 2011: 972). The authors rely on previous observations by Aksoy about deterritorialization as one of the main features of the modern world. (Aksoy 2008: 269-270, according to Kovačević, Krstić 2011). Not having one constant setting causes multiple affiliations of transnational migrants. The way of life in both countries becomes a *transmigrant cultural response*. Perhaps that is why the goal of the exhibition could not be mere framing of *Gastarbeiter* (counter)culture, even though it has been an integral part of folklore for decades. We hope that the way we (co)worked as well as our long-term results justify the choice of community-rooted cooperation and how it could be more fruitful for each position and everyone who took part in the process.



### Position 3: Self-historicization and partnership

To start with, we went *searching for Gastarbeiters*. The research included archival research and fieldwork. It sounds standard, but fieldwork was never practiced before in the Museum of Yugoslavia. One of the first steps outside our comfort zone turned out to be of significance and have long-lasting results.<sup>6</sup> A questionnaire we made was just a frame for talking about experiences. Another important fact is that we gathered a diverse team of experts; besides anthropologists, there was a historian, a philosopher, a journalist, different kinds of activists, and cultural workers. In the field in East Serbia and the Mačva region, we spoke with more than a hundred people. The social structure of the interviewees was diverse in terms of generation, age, gender, and ethnicity. What is important was that our main aim was never out of our minds, and that was—we had to test possible ways of working together with people outside the museum to musealize *Gastarbeiter's* history.

The responses from the people in the field were diverse, but their narrations show a certain common pattern. While some interlocutors didn't have any expectations from us and didn't want to interfere with the outcome of our endeavor, giving us their trust to do what we thought we should do with it, others were amused by the idea that their lives were an interesting topic for a museum. Of course, we speak about the people who have responded, since there were a number of those who did not want to participate in any way. What is common to the stories is a narration pattern that is not exclusively related to people working abroad, but is usual when we speak about things we experience in a storytelling manner. (Antonijević 2013: 164) The listening and talking effect brought us a new dimension of understanding which is inevitably mutual since we took time to explain who we are, what we do, and why we come, as well as why we think it is of high importance for common cause to work on this together. Moreover, our mutual understanding led to a new level of respect that, to say the least, inspired the very title of this paper.

The greatest progress and material result in the Museum's practice up until then was made thanks to the introduction of the authentic,

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<sup>6</sup> For example, a few years later, some members of the exhibition team established the Museum's oral archive that leans on the field research.

independently produced exhibitions about *Gastarbeiter* lives and their history as the key element of the exhibition *Yuga, my Yuga*. Self-articulation turned out to be the real revelation, and the major achievement of the *Yuga, my Yuga* exhibition. We got to know *Gastarbeiter* who collected, archived, wrote down, and safeguarded their history. Documentation of sports clubs, societies, administrative documentation of social services, and caritative actions. We integrated into the exhibition parts of these archives or even ready-made exhibitions that some of our partners made over the years.

As Ljubomir Bratić, museum associate and the coauthor of the exhibition *Yuga, my Yuga – Gastarbeiter stories*, summed up, “our attempt with this exhibition is developing in two directions: to bring to light the hidden parts of the history of state systems and to give space to the tendencies of self-articulation. Personal stories are intertwined with the lines of development of administrative procedures, and the entire history is additionally highlighted by discursive production of the *Gastarbeiters* themselves” (Bratić 2016: 4). Apart from the fact that through cooperation we tried to avoid the passivation of *Gastarbeiters* who, from being the subject of research and interpretation, became the actors and co-creators of the exhibition, they were the main target group, too. The exhibition was also intended for and dedicated to them.

Self-articulation and self-historicization, as a subtle form of cooperation, introduced the *marginarium* of the *Gastarbeiter* history into the museum as a part of the social space. One could say that interventions went both ways. Exhibitions that workers, employed abroad for years, made themselves were imported and adapted for display at the Museum of Yugoslavia, but we curators also intervened in their projects, and by adapting them, one might talk about a process of mutual participation. Both partners bear the risks and rewards of interpretation and communication together.

In accordance with the initial idea for further developing the project to different parts of former Yugoslavia, in the newest phase of the project, cooperation with the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Hercegovina in Sarajevo was realized in 2022-23. Things were more complex operationally and it turned out we had to shrink our goals and simplify the concept of cooperation to a more conventional mode. Less time spent in the field caused changes in the exhibition concept and structure. We

kept the dialogue between macro and micro-narrative and made it more explicit. We intervened in the *history*, a timeline of official events, by private artifacts that compose a historical narrative that recognizes the complexity of the social, cultural, and political roles of guest workers. Some details were kept so that this intervention would be more visible. For example, the captions for the objects were structured by art history standards so the person's name is the largest, and comes first, as with the author of an artwork. Then comes the info about the exhibits-objects borrowed from the *Gastarbeiters* we met in field research in Bosnia and Hercegovina. This example is mentioned to remark on the complexity and to underline the adaptability of cooperative projects.

### **The interweaving of perspectives, knowledge, and emotions**

Personal experiences, private histories, and intimate narratives can more reliably communicate beyond a strictly informative and educational discourse, within a more flexible vision of a museum that is self-reflective, willing, and able to provide conditions and take part in the dialogue. The role of the museum as an agent of gathering and exchanging experiences came to the fore perhaps most directly during the discussion within the program *Conversations about Yugoslavia: An Introduction to (post)Yugoslav studies*.<sup>7</sup> The forum “*Gastarbeiter and Gastarbeiterness in a transdisciplinary perspective*” was attended by Mirjana Bobić, a sociologist, and Dragana Antonijević, an anthropologist, from the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, Jovanka Mikalački, a social worker who worked at the Counseling Center for Yugoslav Workers in Bochum, Germany in the 1970s, and Ilija Malešević, the former president of the Yugoslav club “Mladost” from Stuttgart. Regardless of the evident educational purpose of the forum, it proved to be a generator of a highly emotional wave, both among the speakers – those who empirically, or rather through personal experience, qualified for

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<sup>7</sup> The author and coordinator of the program was Tatomir Toroman, coauthor of the exhibit *Yuga, my Yuga*.

participation – and among the audience who shared a similar experience or could identify with it. At one point, Jovanka Mikalački noticed and almost resented that everyone except Ilija Malešević “ignored the emotions”, and added: “We cried a lot”.<sup>8</sup> In the museum context, the affective capital of existential topics, which deeply affect personal lives, overpowers the cognitive and educational ones and directly affects the communication potential. Empathy and identification are immanent in the dialogue, and it goes beyond the mere exchange of information, which distinguishes it from pure chatting (Tomić 2014: 275). The (trans)formative character of the dialogue has been recognized since classical philosophy. Due to the open form, the dialogue also carries the risk of distancing the perspectives, but despite its fragility and vulnerability of the positions of the interlocutors, the dialogue offers the possibility of “seeing the Other [that is] understanding the reality the way it is seen, experienced and articulated by others” (Tomić 2014: 275.). By such endeavors, the Museum takes a risk, while having the possibility of a qualitative permeation of perspectives or, in the language of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, introducing a chance for the fusion of horizons.

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# CREATING NARRATIVES – SUBALTERN KNOWLEDGE IN REMEMBRANCE

REBECCA FISCH

## Introduction

After a guided tour through the exhibition “Racial Diagnosis: Gypsy’ - The Nazi Genocide of the Sinti and Roma and the Long Struggle for Recognition”, one of the participating students asks, “So how are Roma treated today? You mentioned that they still face discrimination; is that really true?” After being given a few examples, including forced evictions and the recent shooting of a Roma boy in Greece, he remains in dismay. He was aware that his neighbours, a Roma family, were not doing very well, and he was also familiar with the stereotypes about Roma in his country. However, learning that this was the reality for Roma throughout Europe left him in disbelief.

Based on a presentation at the SHAKIN’ conference “In from the margins” in June 2023, this article introduces two projects whose aim is to promote remembrance of the National Socialist genocide of the Sinti and Roma, as well as to work against persistent antigypsyism. The projects will be taken as an example of how to combine remembrance work with anti-discrimination work, specifically in the context of marginalised groups and subaltern perspectives.

The article first provides a brief historical overview of the persecution of Sinti and Roma. The significance of including this introductory part stems from its historical neglect, underscoring the continuing relevance of shedding light on this chapter of European history. From the history of the genocide and the so-called second persecution connections

are drawn to the continuing discrimination of Sinti and Roma in the present day and forms of remembrance of the Holocaust of Sinti and Roma. The two projects will then be discussed as practical examples with some early results and lessons learnt. The paper concludes with ideas and prospects for further work in this field.

## Historical Background<sup>1</sup>

The persecution of Sinti and Roma in Europe did not begin solely with the rise of the National Socialists. Not only were stereotypes and negative preconceptions of this minority long ingrained in the society, but laws restricting the freedom and registration of Sinti and Roma had been in place throughout Europe since the Middle Ages. Schneider points out that “[w]hen Hitler came to power in 1933 there were already many, many laws against Roma in Germany and no laws against Jews” (Schneider 2013). After 1933, Sinti and Roma, like Jewish people, were declared “artfremde Rassen” (“racially foreign”) and second-class citizens under the “Nuremberg Laws”. The Nazi racial ideology became state doctrine. This was supported by “racial research”: the “Rassenhygienisches Forschungszentrum” (“Racial Hygiene Research Centre”), founded in 1936, recorded Sinti and Roma in collaboration with the SS and police, “studied” them and classified them according to their racial-biological system. While Jewish people “were blamed for many social and political evils – for creating communism, for creating capitalism”, the persecution of Sinti und Roma was based on “their alleged ‘criminality’ [that] was seen as a genetic condition” (Schneider 2013).

During the 1930s, an increasing number of municipalities began arresting Sinti and Roma, deporting them to specifically established detention camps that facilitated ghettoization and segregation. One of the first detention camps was established in Berlin-Marzahn shortly before the Olympics in Berlin. These camps were first used for forced labour and later as transit points for deportations to other camps as

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1 A detailed chronology of the genocide of the Sinti and Roma is available on the website of the Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma. Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma (2011).

the concentration camp system expanded. Systematically, Sinti and Roma were excluded from public life, employment, schools, and armed forces. Many Sinti and Roma died in camps like Dachau, Buchenwald or Ravensbrück due to the inhumane conditions. Following Himmler's decree on 16 December 1942 to deport all Sinti and Roma, from February 1943 onward, tens of thousands of Roma and Sinti were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, including deportations from children's homes. The so-called "Gypsy family camp" was established within the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp and characterised by inhumane living conditions, diseases, violence, and torture by the SS, resulting in the death of a vast majority of prisoners in this camp. From 1943 onwards, Dr Josef Mengele, the doctor overseeing the "Gypsy camp", also used Sinti and Roma prisoners for medical experiments.

On 16 May 1944, all the remaining Sinti and Roma in the "gypsy camp" were to be murdered in the gas chambers. However, they received a warning and successfully defended themselves.

In the following months, around 3,000 Sinti and Roma were deported from Auschwitz-Birkenau to other camps within the German Reich. The remaining approximately 4,300 prisoners, consisting mostly of elderly, women and children, were murdered in the gas chambers on the night of 2 August despite further attempts to resist. (Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma 2022).

Until the liberation of the camps, numerous Sinti and Roma died through the "annihilation through labour" policy in concentration camps or on the so-called "death marches". Instead of being deported to camps, many Roma, sometimes entire communities, were murdered in mass shootings, especially in (South-)Eastern Europe.

The genocide of Sinti and Roma had devastating consequences. Entire families and communities fell victim to the regime, while survivors were left with psychological and physical injuries and hoped in vain for recognition of their suffering and support. Instead, Sinti and Roma were subjected to ongoing discrimination, even in the newly founded Federal Republic of Germany. The Arolsen Archives emphasise that because the recognition of their persecution on racist grounds was denied, the imprisonment in concentration camps of many persecuted groups, including Sinti and Roma (...) was not considered a Nazi injustice and they were not compensated for this (Arolsen Archives 2021).



In stark contrast to the recognition of the Shoah, which was crucial to Germany's return into the international community after 1945, the reappraisal, compensation and public recognition of Nazi crimes did not include the persecution of the Sinti and Roma. It was only recognised as racially motivated and therefore also as genocide in the Federal Republic of Germany in 1982. Due to the persistent discrimination, the period after 1945 is often referred to as the second persecution (Steinmeier 2022: 4).

The fact that the genocide of the Sinti and Roma was recognised in the 1980s, that perpetrators were brought to justice and that the Holocaust of the Sinti and Roma was publicly addressed in society at all, primarily happened thanks to the civil rights movement initiated by Sinti in Germany, who refused to give in to the continuities of antigypsyism at all levels. Through public protests and actions, including hunger strikes at the Dachau memorial centre, they made their demands heard.

## **Continuity of antigypsyism until today**

At 10-12 million, Sinti, Roma, Kale, Travellers and other (sub-)groups form the largest minority in Europe. Many of them face discrimination on a daily basis and their human rights only exist on paper. The Alliance Against Antigypsyism defines the form of racism:

“Antigypsyism is a historically constructed, persistent complex of customary racism against social groups identified under the stigma ‘gypsy’ or other related terms, and incorporates:

1. A homogenizing and essentializing perception and description of these groups;
2. The attribution of specific characteristics to them;
3. Discriminating social structures and violent practices that emerge against that background, which have a degrading and ostracizing effect and which reproduce structural disadvantages” (Alliance against Antigypsyism 2022)

Antigypsyism reaches into all areas of life: schooling, medical care, housing, and the labour market. The Documentation and Cultural

Center of German Sinti and Roma describes how Roma “were and continue to be the target of choice for attacks or hate crimes by right-wing extremists”, even including murders, adding that “racist violence against the Roma also stems from state institutions such as the police” (Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma 2023b). Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we see cases in which Sinti and Roma are forcibly relocated or sterilised and pushed to the margins of society due to false stereotypes and preconceptions. This is even more evident in crisis situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic or in the treatment of refugees from Ukraine. In both cases, Sinti and Roma experienced discriminatory treatment solely based on their ethnic background.

## **Remembering the Holocaust of Sinti and Roma**

The ongoing discrimination against Sinti and Roma throughout Europe is also reflected in discourses and practices of remembrance of the genocide. Although official formats such as commemorative events and remembrance days have now been established in many European countries, remembrance work and policies must be further promoted.

On 15 April 2015, for example, the European Parliament adopted a resolution recognising the genocide of the Sinti and Roma during the Second World War, urging its member states to similarly acknowledge it. The resolution additionally establishes the 2 August as European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day.

The public recognition of the genocide of Sinti and Roma required decades of advocacy, primarily by survivors themselves, and is mainly the result of the civil rights movement of Sinti and Roma, which publicly demanded recognition of the crimes and appropriate compensation for the victims. A look at the origins of the existing elements of remembrance culture shows that they can be traced back to the initiatives of self-organisations by the minority, above all the survivors themselves. When the memorial for the victims of the camp in Birkenau was erected in 1967, the official memorial inscription was also translated into Romani and depicted on one of the plaques. However, even long after the opening of the memorial site, there was no memorial at the former so-called

“gypsy family camp” in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Only rarely were commemorative events held at the site, Block BIIE. It is mainly thanks to the efforts of the brothers Oskar and Vinzenz Rose that a memorial now stands at the site in memory of the imprisoned and murdered Sinti and Roma. Vinzenz himself was a prisoner in the so-called “Gypsy camp”, his wife and daughter died in Auschwitz. He continuously campaigned for the genocide to be recognised and worked towards the memorial (Gress 2018). He received no support from German authorities, and the Polish state merely tolerated the project, which is why he had to finance the memorial largely from his personal funds.

## **Holocaust in the former Yugoslavia**

On a regional level, the involvement of German occupied Serbia and the Independent State of Croatia in the genocide should be noted. From the occupied territories Roma were deported to concentration camps in Germany for forced labour, but also to camps in the region like Staro Sajmiste in Belgrade. The Ustasa deported Roma to Jasenovac camp from May 1942, “a camp infamous for the cruelty of its guards” (Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma 2023a). The Jasenovac Memorial identified “more than 16,000 murdered Roma, with children accounting for one third of the victims” (Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma 2023a).

In Yugoslavia, the memory of the Nazi crimes and the Holocaust was characterised by honouring the “narodni heroji” (“national heroes”), one of them is the Rom Steva Đorđević Novak (Đukanović 2020), and the anti-fascist struggle; the victims of the genocide were primarily remembered regardless of their ethnicity.

Roma continue to face discrimination in the countries of the Western Balkans, “a systemic change has neither been achieved nor is it in sight” (Civil Rights Defenders 2017: 5). Still, a distinction must of course be made between the countries. Considering, for example, forced evictions and the resulting refugee movements, the situation in Kosovo differs significantly from that in Montenegro. Also, for example in Serbia, Roma are still considered “the most vulnerable minority community

and target of verbal and physical harassment from ordinary citizens, police violence and societal discrimination” (European Roma Rights Centre 2014: 5).

## **“Practice based alternatives for subaltern knowledge production and sharing”**

A lack of recognition and often denial of the Holocaust against Sinti and Roma are frequent manifestations of antigypsyism and therefore fields of action in the fight against discrimination. Similarly, when dealing with the memory of the genocide of Sinti and Roma, it is important not to ignore the fact that today’s antigypsyism cannot be detached from its history, especially the chapter of National Socialism. Schneider says straight forward that “if reparations had been paid in 1945 to help them get on their feet, the terrible situation of Roma today would not be as bad as it is” (Schneider 2013). From both perspectives, it makes sense to recognise this intersection and address it in the respective activities.

The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma has long been committed to the interests of the minority not only in Germany but throughout Europe and even beyond. In countries of the Western Balkans, the two projects running from 2022 to 2024 bring together remembrance work and activities combating today’s antigypsyism, particularly at the levels of awareness raising and advocacy.

### **Project 1: Traveling Exhibition “Racial Diagnosis: Gypsy’ - The Nazi Genocide of the Sinti and Roma and the Long Struggle for Recognition”**

The key element of this project is the exhibition “Racial Diagnosis: Gypsy. The genocide of the Sinti and Roma and the long struggle for recognition”. From January to December 2023, it is on display in the countries of the Western Balkans: From Serbia (Belgrade, Nis), it travelled via North Macedonia (Bitola, Skopje), Kosovo (Pristina, Prizren) and Albania (Tirana) to Montenegro (Podgorica) and finally has its last

stops in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo, Banja Luka). Coordinated by the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, the exhibition is being facilitated by local non-governmental organisations in each country.

The exhibition is divided into three parts. The first part introduces the topic by providing a brief historical overview of the prejudices and hatred towards Sinti and Roma in Europe that were rooted long before the Nazi takeover. The exhibition also makes it clear how important it is to distinguish between external depictions, mostly negative images of the minority produced from the outside, and the reality of life for Sinti and Roma minorities in their respective home countries.

The main part of the exhibition is dedicated to the persecution of the minority during the National Socialist era. Starting with the racial ideology of the Nazi regime, which gradually led to various forms of exclusion from public life and disenfranchisement, the exhibition shows the stages leading up to the genocide. The specific circumstances in states collaborating with and occupied by Nazi Germany are also addressed. Numerous documents are used to demonstrate how the regime systematically planned and carried out crimes against Sinti and Roma. A vital part of the exhibition is to contrast the violence of the Nazis and their apparatus of persecution with images and descriptions of the everyday life of Sinti and Roma before 1933.

The final part focuses on the history of the surviving Sinti and Roma in post-war Germany and continues to tell their story up to the present day. Central to this is the civil rights movement, its activism against the persecutors' prerogative of interpretation and its many successes.

The exhibition is accompanied by several events at each location. The openings were attended by distinguished guests from politics, diplomacy, society and the media. In Pristina, for example, the opening was complemented by an artist's performance, and in Podgorica by a scenic production by a youth group. Depending on the stops, there are also panel discussions or expert talks on the topic of the exhibition. Another important element is the work with various visitor groups, especially school classes.

Through the various elements that frame the exhibition and through active outreach work by the respective partner organisation, the project works with three target groups: politicians and decision-makers,

media (and indirectly social media) and the wider civil society, and explicitly the members and self-organizations of the minority.

## **Project 2: “Remember the Holocaust – Fight Antigypsyism”**

The second project deals with the same subject matter as Project 1 and accordingly aims to promote remembrance and anti-discrimination work simultaneously. However, its focus lies exclusively on Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Serbia.

This project specifically aims to empower Roma self-organisations in Serbia and BiH through capacity-building components: Participating organisations and individuals are encouraged and equipped to take up the fight against antigypsyism, promote the remembrance of the Holocaust of Sinti and Roma, and make sure that the perspective of Roma in remembrance and in fighting antigypsyism are being heard.

The project is designed as a flagship project. The aim is to build foundations and initiate new activities in politics, research, and various areas of remembrance work. The participants are therefore actively working on networking with other actors and stakeholders in this field, seeking practice exchange (locally, nationally, and internationally) for example with Jewish organisations, universities, schools, city councils and memorial sites.

Preceded by an ex-ante report on the status quo of the remembrance of the Holocaust of the Sinti and Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, the project is divided into three parts: Training and capacity building, local research and biographies and awareness raising and advocacy activities. The trainings enable participants to conduct research and take biographies of Roma Holocaust survivors (first generation) as well as their families and communities (second and third generation). Another focus lies on making better use of social media for informing on the Holocaust of Sinti and Roma. The research carried out in two municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Gradiska, Bijeljina) and four municipalities in Serbia (Novi Sad, Beograd, Kragujevac, Nis) aims to give valuable insights into the fate of Roma on a local level during the second world war. Colleagues carrying out the interviews with survivors as well as members of survivors' families (second and

third generation) and communities (BiH: Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Prnjavor, Modrica, Vukosavlje; RS: Novi Sad, Beograd, Kragujevac, Nis, Kraljevo, Bor, Pozarevac) shared some first insights in their work during a project meeting in October 2023. The results of both the reports and the interviews still need to be analysed and published.

### **Remember the past and fight discrimination – on a project level**

All elements of the projects emerged from the assessment that there are shortcomings in this field. A travelling exhibition was necessary since there exist no exhibitions or other accessible sources of information on the topic in respective cities. Local research by historians is reasonable because there has been little knowledge production in this area. Nevertheless, the possibilities are limited by the duration of funding. A rented travelling exhibition is no substitute for a permanent exhibition. One to three months of research in local archives is an important contribution to academic research but by no means enough.

Throughout the project, media, political representatives, and civil society actors have stressed the relevance of the exhibition, especially as it was often the very first exhibition on the Holocaust against Sinti and Roma in their area. Jörn Rohde, Ambassador of Germany in Kosovo, during the opening in Prishtina, emphasised the importance of the exhibition “because on the one hand it recognizes the genocide on the Roma people in the second world war committed by Nazi Germany and on the other hand it also is a lesson that we must never forget and raise awareness against antigypsyism and racism” (Rohde 2023). In the long run, both projects have the potential to contribute towards increasing awareness of the Holocaust against Sinti and Roma, its proper recognition and remembrance as well as the ongoing fight against antigypsyism. This involves many steps that need to be pursued beyond the duration of the project: Advocacy activities, numerous discussions with political decision-makers, cooperation agreements with memorial sites, investing in a closer network of stakeholders in the field, including NGOs, especially Jewish organisations, schools, teachers, and journalists. Through advocacy activities, but also through capacity building, the projects

support Roma's self-organisations in these processes to strengthen and share narratives and use spaces for social participation.

## **A matter of democracy**

Starting with a historical overview, followed by examples of the remembrance of the Holocaust of Sinti and Roma and after introducing two projects working on the overlaps of remembrance and antidiscrimination work, how does all this relate to the question of Subaltern Knowledge and practices in ethics of international collaboration? Due to continuous antigypsyism, Sinti and Roma have been denied recognition, appropriate compensation, and protection as a vulnerable group. Randjelovic argues that Memory always takes place in the present and under the respective conditions of its material world (Randjelović 2015: 96). She further describes the power of hegemonic historiography in "Entinnerungsarbeit" ["de-memorising"], which includes tools like determining the number of victims, missing media coverage, or "banning" of witnesses in private spaces (Randjelović 2015: 96). As in many other fields, it comes down to the question of who has (access to) spaces. When we ask about spaces, we ask about resources, about being listened to, about capacities, about narratives, about public discourses. In the field of remembrance work, all of this means: who writes history?

The projects presented in this article seek practical implementations of these discourses. Because these spaces are not just a concept of cultural studies, but sometimes literally precisely that: spaces. Instead of waiting for invitations and initiatives from the big institutions, for example, the team proactively approaches them and requests exhibition spaces in the cultural and political centres, such as the Dom Kulture Studentski Grad in Belgrade, Muzeu Historik Kombëtar in Tirana or the Historijski muzej Bosne i Hercegovine in Sarajevo. Not only does this move the topic from its marginalised position right into the centre, but also helps to reduce entry barriers for visitors. In order to counteract the epistemically violent "de-memorisation", the activities work towards forms of remembrance in society as a whole. Through easily accessible instruments such as the travelling exhibition, advocacy and awareness



activities, educational offers and, above all, capacity building, actors are held jointly responsible for a lively remembrance, while at the same time spaces and allies are gained: in civil society, in research, in the media and politics. Precisely this broad variety of spaces and discourses is needed for successful civil rights work for the protection of human rights, especially minority rights, to replace externally imposed, stereotypical image, with self-portrayal, self-assertion, agency and narratives from within the minority, “in from the margins”.

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# **WORK ON THE WILD SIDE!**

## **(Re)politicizing cultural careers, supporting subaltern knowledge in cultural projects**

CAMILLE JUTANT, PIERRE BRINI, SONIA NIKITIN,  
PASCALE BONNIEL CHALIER

### **Introduction: what does it mean to “work” in cultural fields?**

Our text is a reflection on subaltern knowledge and working in culture, media and the arts. The following material is based on activities of partners and students of the Shakin project (Home - SHAKIN' shakinproject.eu).<sup>1</sup> We, the authors of the text, are university lecturers. In particular, we took part in this project with the aim of understanding how young professionals in the artistic and cultural sector in Europe work and what meaning they give to the issues of cultural cooperation. Our objective was to better understand and question what we could call the “career entry” moments (first jobs in cultural sectors) and to connect them more with professional and intellectual communities. We think that higher education systems can (and should) activate spaces where professional and research communities discuss and support each other, especially concerning the issue of professionalization and alternative methodologies away from the mainstream roads of professionalization. We also think that it is a way, for higher education systems, to propose

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several types of responses to students' preoccupation with social utility and social justice about burning issues, such as inclusivity, decoloniality, feminism, and ecology.

## **Context: a dilemma between activism and professional status**

As a starting point, we formulated the following objective in 2020: as lecturers in university courses in international cultural management, we identify a growing interest in gender studies, post-colonial studies or political ecology, cultural practices inscribed outside of all academic frameworks, as well as an awareness around power relations that invisibilize and marginalize these practices.

However, alumni struggle to articulate this interest and commitment in a professional environment that is still very hierarchical and conservative, more and more competitive, and more and more standardized. Huge contemporary transformations linked to the market and consumerism logic, the rise of populism, globalization processes, the ecological crisis, and digital technologies have direct consequences in our work environments, which are becoming more and more specialized, more and more professional in a narrow and instrumental sense, more and more competitive, more and more standardized, and more and more controlled. These situations lead to exhaustion and burnout, vocation crises, the desire to leave institutional environments; and the reinforcement of inherited hierarchies and conservative forms of legitimacy within the cultural sector, to a disconnected social authority of knowledge, in the fields of art, culture, and the academy. This process often induces losing the meaning of the activities, their collective, political and social relevance, and being insensitive to excluded, marginalized and oppressed voices and life experiences of today.

As a symptom, we face a growing disinterest of young professionals (but not only) in certain professions of the sector: administrative positions, production, booking, technical direction, and even in executive management positions of the institutions. All these professions have in common being the most bureaucratic ones, the most normative ones,

and the most linked to a new public management-producing norm. More and more young professionals are leaving the cultural institutions themselves and are looking for new, more horizontal, diverse, and self-organized cultural spaces. In fact, they are reshaping the institutions outside the institution. They are reshaping new forms of democracy close to their concerns about ecological, feminist and decolonial transitions as a reaction to cultural policies that have focused more and more, in the last decades, on economic performance and management logics and have been oriented on marketing criteria considering they have to adapt to consumerist logics.

These priorities open, for us, from universities, new ways of considering: what is professionalization? What does it mean to be a professional and a committed person, an activist? How can our professions reconnect with the social field, with democratic issues and public policies?

## **Reflexivity: Questioning our own teaching methods**

How can we – as universities and cultural organizations – support the transformation of the sector and the new generation of cultural managers that carry the aforementioned questions, issues and claims? Which knowledge and skills are needed and how has the transmission process to be framed in order to integrate the aforementioned issues, aspects and questions?

During the Shakin project, we felt a need for reconnecting theory and practice, as well as developing awareness around power relations that invisibilize and marginalize certain knowledge, which we call *sub-altern*. Moreover, we wanted to question how these issues are present in the methodologies (particularly in international collaboration) we teach and activate in our organizations. The urgency is to link these principles to concrete methodologies and cooperation models while keeping in mind that they can't be standardized or "profession-oriented" in a narrow way. Academic institutions have to update teaching methods and content in order to address new forms of democracy, including closer attention to care, education, food, hospitality, new narratives on nature and non-humans, etc. (Kisic & Tomka, 2020)

Let's take an example: As lecturers, we teach the technical frameworks for cultural cooperation projects as laid down by the public and private authorities who fund them (particularly at European level). These frameworks have a strong tendency towards standardization in international cooperation projects. The students and professionals we work with often rightly criticize this standardization. The assumption we make as teachers would therefore be to take the time necessary to unravel the project-based approach, not as a professional fact, but as a political fact revealing an era in which quantitative measurement is authoritative.

We worked to propose a critical approach to this “project-based management of the city” (Arfaoui 2019), which greatly weakens cooperative processes on the one hand, and inscribes them in measurement objectives that are often econometric and ill-suited to forward-looking approaches on the other. This critical approach makes it possible to consider the cooperative project also as a space for experimentation; a laboratory in which it is possible to inflect the narratives, works, or relations that the actors wish to co-produce together. The “project” can, then, be presented as a space for negotiation. In that, it enables certain semantic frameworks expressed in calls for projects to be interpreted, diverted and hacked.

For instance, “ecological transition”, “public participation” and “inclusion” are all polysemous terms that can be used in a variety of ways, to work on these activist commitments (the very ones identified above) if we take the time to conduct semantic and investigative work.

However, experimenting with solutions does not mean institutionalizing (or instituting) them, as research time is not the same as the democratic time needed to make public policy. This sometimes generates a form of frustration (or even anger) among young professionals, who quickly want to see the impact of their actions on issues such as social transformation or social justice, that they consider urgent to resolve.

This approach through “cooperation project methodology” has a number of pedagogical benefits:

- Considering the cooperation project as a concrete activist tool for addressing social needs and narratives hitherto little taken into account in the professional field, and thus re-politicizing our own relationship to work.

- Bringing the cooperation project approach closer to the field of research, both in its methods (hypotheses, state of the art, survey, intellectual co-production) and in the possibilities for dialogue to be established between research and the making of public policy (for instance jurisprudence in the project).
- Measuring the limits of the project approach, particularly in terms of its fundamental contradiction with the notion of cooperation (by its very nature non-finite in time) and the notion of public service (constitutionally defined as continuous).
- Exploring with students the temporalities of cultural activism.

This complexity will then enable future professionals to see the cooperative project for what it is: a space for translation (and therefore for interpreting and risking the betrayal of the word of the other) (Cassin 2016) and a space for co-production (and therefore for shared and supportive risk-taking).

## **Diversity: Promoting inquiry**

The aim of our survey was to understand what it means to work in cultural cooperation. Therefore, we set up an inquiry to gather as many testimonies as possible about the meaning of working in cultural cooperation.

We chose to begin our investigation by interviewing people we knew, with whom we share questions, either in the context of the European project (our partners) or in the context of training (our former or current students). The objective was not to collect discourse from which we could extract verbatims and semantic categories. It was to give space to people who tell us their stories and share their vision of cooperation. The objective was to fully consider the place and role of situated knowledge in our research (Harraway, 2007, Harding, 1991). We therefore chose to conduct long interviews so that the participants could take time to describe their reality and define what makes sense for them in the work of cultural cooperation. Thus, we organized three focus groups with alumni from our master's degrees, in France and



Series of portraits produced as part of a workshop with students taking part in the SHAKIN project

Serbia, and we conducted in-depth interviews with the partners of our SHAKIN project. We also decided to take advantage of the collective experience that we were having with our current students. Indeed, three groups of students from three different universities set up a co-operation project within the framework of their master's year (i.e. in 6 months, without partners and with little, if any, financial means). These projects had to question or take into consideration the place of subaltern knowledge, in other words, the way in which knowledge was produced and infused ways of working. Throughout this exercise, we analyzed their cooperation practices and at the end of their project, we asked them for a self-assessment, in which they had to tell how their project went, but above all, what skills they had implemented, what issues were most important to them, and what transformations seemed crucial for them to remember.

In each case, we were not only asking our colleagues and students to speak from their professional positions but also from their ability



to make links between their professional roles and their roles in the project. For instance, some students talked about their concrete experience in the project and explained that solidarity was key to building consensus in a group with a diversity of students facing very different academic constraints from one country to another. Some students also explained during our interviews that solidarity is a social construct, and that it manifests itself in different ways depending on the individual. They articulated that there is also a risk of confusing solidarity with demagogic posturing and that the challenge for the group is to prevent the invisibilization of conflicts under the pretext of this solidarity. This ability to translate the issues from a given professional space to a research space is invaluable to us, because in this way we see and share a reflexivity about the production of knowledge (Jurdant, 2006, Le Marec, 2011).

Then we decided to collect other voices and explore initiatives that inspired us. We chose to look at incubators and organizations that support cultural professionals in their cooperative projects (incubators, support systems, etc.), to understand how the notion of work was presented and what were the values and issues associated with professional cooperative practices, that the incubators were training or promoting. We realized a benchmark of around 16 so-called engaged platforms and incubators but also incubated projects and persons (among others Help Musicians<sup>2</sup> – State Of The Art<sup>3</sup> – On The Move<sup>4</sup>). A majority of these incubators present themselves as platforms for Entrepreneurship. But a few platforms put forward social transformation, social significance, intercultural understanding, and ethical approach. They mention commitment and political challenge and insist on complexity as part of the training issues. Three dimensions describe their work: work as a matter of place (for instance, residencies are mentioned as refuge, free zone, no conventions, retreats to preserve artists from pressures, to devote time for research); work as non-productive activity (time must not be a constraint and there are no obligations for delivery); work as cooperation (collective production is valued as well as multifocal learning processes).

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2 [www.helpmusicians.org.uk](http://www.helpmusicians.org.uk)

3 State of the Arts ([state-of-the-arts.net](http://state-of-the-arts.net))

4 [on-the-move.org](http://on-the-move.org)

Then, at the end of our inquiry trajectory, we chose three initiatives: MEWEM<sup>5</sup>, FEMIX<sup>6</sup> and La Langue des Oiseaux<sup>7</sup>. To ensure the sharing of perspectives of initiators or managers of the programs, as well as beneficiaries, we organized a roundtable and interviews in smaller groups. Two main questions arose from the presentations and discussions: on the one hand, how can we integrate different types of knowledge in the conception and management of support systems? On the other hand, which skills should and can be developed in such frameworks? How can we collectively (un)learn to observe and understand power relations?

At the same time, the Shakin' project mentored a dozen cooperation projects, over a period of 2.5 years, designed by students from 3 European universities around this notion of subaltern knowledge/groups/methodologies. The collective analysis and evaluation of these projects is also a rich source of information on the ways to better integrate subaltern knowledge in our academic institutions:

- They promote action research mechanisms.
- They propose different formats for sensitive surveys about marginalized subjects, groups or territories. These sensitive surveys have in common that they start from the situated experiences of the people involved in these situations (and therefore their ability to tell their own stories). Therefore, the collection process starts from what people are sensitive to, from what makes sense to them, and what is sentient i.e. delicate/fragile.
- The projects advocate relational, experiential, or memorial artifacts as project deliverables.
- The projects rely on bodily knowledge, oral knowledge or artifacts that enable alternative forms of storytelling to be heard; rarely is the written form relied upon.

It's interesting to note here that the notion of inquiry, though common to all these projects, is understood within very different epistemological frameworks, and brings out other types of language and

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5 MEWEM – Mentoring Programme for Women Entrepreneurs in the Music Industry, <https://www.mewem.eu>

6 Femix, <https://femix.info>

7 La langue des oiseaux – Festival Sens Interdits, <https://www.sensinterdits.org>



Graffiti production workshop - SHAKIN project students' tutored project

therefore knowledge. Accordingly, we, as lecturers, can consider a better articulation between traditional survey methodologies from social sciences and sensitive methodologies of inquiry based on other models of knowledge circulation and other epistemological traditions.

## Results from analysis

Four issues emerged clearly from our analyses:

- **Relationship(s) based on a diversity of knowledge**

Young professionals believe that it is urgent to focus on experiential, contextual and situated, embodied knowledge to form relationships that go beyond dualist conceptions of “old” versus “young”, institutions versus underground, and high versus low culture; these categories have been outdated for a long time. These relationships could be called “professional friendships” (Maud Gari and Manon Bonniel-Chalier from MEWEM): shared experiences, opinions and emotions are considered

part of professional relationships and solidarity between colleagues is made visible. Formalizing spaces in which these kinds of relationships can emerge while making room for informal interstices can help break isolation (often experienced by young professionals), create collective action and legitimize shared difficulties, concerns or “failures”. This also implies the need to pay careful attention to relations between humans and their living environment and thus to experiment with other relational modalities: safe spaces, non-humans, etc...

- **Critical analysis of existing formats**

In most educational and professional training frameworks, we are asked to precisely identify and formulate the skills the programs aim to develop. We acknowledge the need for technical skills, but also, above all, we advocate for the need to focus on ideological and politicized foundations that are closely linked to skills of critical observation and reflection. We must pay more attention to the aim of social transformation in the cultural sector and become more attentive to questions of marginalized/underrepresented knowledge.

We can stress here that this objective, however noble, requires a fundamental shift in our teaching posture on several levels:

- knowing how to implement peer-to-peer learning systems, and relying more regularly on non-formal teaching methods
- Articulating a teaching posture with a facilitator posture which secures frameworks for peer-to-peer learning.
- Drawing on sensible knowledge to enrich our academic teaching, but also to guarantee greater diversity and inclusivity in our training courses.
- Diversifying the ways knowledge circulates, using both sensible knowledge (oral, embodied, contextual) and more reflective, traditional forms of teaching.

The point here is not to advocate the disappearance of traditional teaching methods, but to experiment with a diversification of our teaching methodologies in line with the needs identified among our current and future students. Indeed, it seems unjust to advocate for reflexivity for our students without demonstrating it of ourselves.

- **Trans-sectorial cooperation**

The urge and desire to develop projects, initiatives and organizations that are more sensitive to ecological relationships, excluded or marginalized voices, or life experiences (different forms of producing, sharing, saving and displaying knowledge), has to be supported by cultural professionals in a wide sense: researchers, activists, professionals in arts institutions, as well as organizations related to food, agriculture, crafts, urbanism, etc. Democratic issues are not questions for individuals to answer but need to be shared and discussed collectively within organizations, (international) cooperation, work collectives and institutions. We believe that we can't assume any kind of responsibility for social transformation individually.

Paradoxically, this cross-sectoral approach means that we need to consider deprofessionalizing our training courses, to allow greater porosity between professional cultures and, in the same way, between academic disciplines. It is sometimes through dialogue with professionals from other sectors (social, health, educational, agricultural, sporting, etc.) that cultural professionals clearly perceive their social usefulness. By moving away from a "sector-based" approach (Florida 2005, Ambrosino & Sagot-Duvauroux, 2018), we will be able to re-politicize the cultural professions and make them more relevant for future generations.

- **Professional transitions**

Thus, we need to break the logics of more and more individualized and fragmented professional careers. In these trajectories, professional transitions are moments of great fragility for individuals and are more and more common. Supporting these transitions can't mean to rely entirely on technical skills, but must be based on a powerful theoretical and ideological background. In short, they must be politicized. It would not be possible to support professional trajectories without understanding the political and cultural contexts in which these transitions take place or without knowing the learning pathways of the participants (verbal or not, written or not and so on). De-professionalization also means greater recognition of cooperative/relational skills that can be useful in a wide range of sectors.

## Conclusion

This text presents the conclusions of an ongoing reflection that seeks to understand how young professionals in the artistic and cultural sectors in Europe work and what significance they attribute to cultural cooperation issues. We emphasized the importance for higher education systems to create spaces where professional and research communities can discuss and support each other regarding professionalization, particularly in relation to the dilemma between activism and professional status, and between committed values and hierarchical, conservative professional realities. We suggested revising our teaching methods, advocated for a more critical and reflexive approach that integrates subaltern knowledge and challenges established norms. Our aim is to continue to emphasize the need to recognize and support professional transitions, promote knowledge diversity, and foster trans-sectorial cooperation for social transformation in the cultural domain. To this end, we have tried and will continue to experiment with new ways of circulating knowledge, promoting knowledge among peers, and positioning ourselves as facilitators. This peer-to-peer sharing, which can take place as early as university training, is a prerequisite for building a vision of work as a space for solidarity rather than competition.

With that in mind, we would like to experiment with setting up a space for dialogue and sharing professional practices that could look like a support system. It would enable young professionals who are going through complex periods (transitions we mentioned above, between two jobs, shifts between one professional field and another) during which it is easy to feel alone and excluded from a system; unable to exchange, share, and activate solidarities. At the conclusion of our analysis, we did try to translate the needs identified by participants (and described in the section above) into four major themes, that could drive the design of our support system.

- Confidence.

Confidence in our own knowledge and skills that are connected to professional and personal trajectories; and the same confidence, and thus respect, for knowledge and skills of others. Confidence building is also required to be able to respond and react when facing situations of

violence, exclusion and abuse. Here, the importance of informal spaces is crucial in generating this mutual understanding and trust as the basis for unconditional cooperative relationships.

- Legitimacy.

Multiple students and young professionals express not feeling legitimate to share their knowledge, experience, and opinions in professional frameworks. They often refer to the “imposter syndrome”. How can more experienced professionals engage in opening up the symbolic barriers between professionals, and carve spaces for the new generation. In the same way, academic institutions have a responsibility to recognize, name and welcome more situated forms of knowledge, based on other epistemologies.

- Network(s).

Networking is sometimes experienced as an inauthentic, almost hypocritical practice in the sector. We feel the need for alternative practices of networking that are based on reciprocal listening, opening up professional communities and a desire and curiosity for what we don't know or experience. There is a need to affirm ways of working that include accepting our and other's fragility, confidence, legitimacy, emotions; processing them experimentally; being able to adapt and adjust, but not as an individual in a neoliberal situation – rather while being with others, in specific situations, in a reciprocal attention.

- Receptiveness.

The importance of putting social transformation first – but from the needs expressed by beneficiaries (of a project, a space, etc.). And, the importance of ensuring that our democratic institutions (political, academic, cultural) are able to accommodate other systems of representation of the world than those in which we grew up. The ability to listen, to hear, to translate from various contexts and to be aware of our own positionality seem crucial.

From these reflections, observations and discussions, we will experiment with different elements of this support system for young professionals in our university. An International mentoring program

(starting in the fall 2023): brings together students, young professionals, academics and more experienced professionals who would like to connect around questions of culture, power hierarchies and dynamics, alternative forms of knowledge production and transmission and issues of social transformation.

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Parallel session: *Ontological Turn and Epistemic Injustice – A Critical Perspective on Hegemonic Knowledge*, Chair Irina Subotić; panelists Marina Simić, Igor Polsky, Ilya Dementiev, and Tania Archimovich with the audience at the Conference “In from the margins: Sharing footnotes of subaltern knowledge and practices”, Belgrade, University of Arts, Rector’s Hall, 27th June 2023.

# IV

**Sharing knowledge & shaking  
'the classroom':  
one project at a time**



Tanja Ostojić, artist talk (keynote) at the Conference “In from the margins: Sharing footnotes of subaltern knowledge and practices”, Belgrade, University of Arts, 27th June 2023.

# METHODOLOGIES OF EMPOWERING FEMINIST ARTISTIC PRACTICES AND ALTERNATIVE PEDAGOGICAL MODELS

TANJA OSTOJIĆ

I intend to share and compare some of the methodologies of empowering feminist artistic practices and alternative pedagogical formats that I developed in the framework of two of my long-term interdisciplinary and collaborative artistic projects *Mis(s)placed Women?* (2009-2022) and *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić* (2011–17). Through their collaborative and multifaceted aspects, these projects seek to raise awareness and visibility for marginalised and discriminated minorities on the local and international scale, while the artistic process brings together research, conceptuality, praxis and artistic production.

Furthermore, a recent revisiting of my Lindart archive (2001–02) made me realise that there is a connection between my early alternative teaching formats– such as the pioneering program I had the privilege to envision and conduct for Lindart, Albanian Women Artists Association members in Tirana in 2002– and my later artistic practice. Already back then, I was interlacing formats that I use in artistic practice with educational work, for instance, the *Dinner Discussion(s)* was a performative format that I used in my artistic practice at a number of festivals from 2001 onwards (Vienna, Copenhagen, Düsseldorf, Berlin) to bring people from different disciplines and perspectives, to the same table in order to discuss political aspects of migration-related topics. I also introduced it to Lindart (2002), and to Freie Klasse students (HBK-Kunst Hochschule Braunschweig in 2005) as a seminar format; a daily practice of gathering participants and invited guests around the dinner table in order to exchange ideas.

Within this text, I would like to share some of my notes, regarding the methodologies and ethics that were crucial to the processes of the project's research and realisation and I will also offer insights about steps of the workshop's realisation.

Soon after completing my studies at the University of Arts in Belgrade (1995 BA/1998 MA) I rejected the concept of art as a production of an aesthetic object, and embraced the concept of art as a social practice, art as a production of social relations, and later, community-based art and collective artistic practices. One stream of my work went into the direction of institutional critique of the local and global art world from the perspective of gender and geopolitical margins, while the second trajectory of my practice refers to the broad range of contemporary social issues, resulting from global inequalities between the global North and global South, according to class, ethnical, racial, gender, sexual or cultural identities divisions, by limited access, exclusion and vulnerabilities.

## Confrontation

In early 2002, I was engaged as a visiting artist, conducting a multifaceted block seminar, workshop and an exhibition entitled *Confrontation*, at Lindart (Centre), Albanian Women Artists Association in Tirana, and a public performance at the National Gallery in Tirana. This was an intensive, 10-day-long, 12 hours per day, initiation performance art workshop for approximately 15 women artists (and curators), predominantly painters, art students, and housewives with a background in painting—of wide generational span, who came to Tirana from different parts of Albania to attend the workshop. Most of them spoke basic English, for some, we translated to Albanian, while with one of them Lumturi Blloshmi (1944–2020) who had hearing difficulties, I communicated in French by mime and lipreading, or via translation. I developed this alternative pedagogical format specially for this group of women as a result of the invitation by Eleni Laperi. A few Albanian women artists made their first spoken elaboration about their own artistic practice and

first performative steps in the framework of this program with amazing results, which had several steps and goals:<sup>1</sup>

- To present to the participants and the wider audience in Tirana for the first time, my own art practice (via artist talk on the first evening, followed by Q&A, and an exhibition installed on one of the floors of the Linart center).
- To introduce feminist discourses to the workshop's participants, to train them in public speaking and discussion (using an alternative educational program of daily tea sessions and evening talks including moderated *Dinner Discussions* as a format, with invited guest. Topics included: sex-trafficking of women, feminism and contemporary art, and were attended by local and international experts from the field).
- Due to some 50-year-long supremacy of socialist realism in Albania, there was no history of performance art, and, to my knowledge, hardly any notion of performance art at the time. Thus, the main goal of the workshop was to inform the participants what performance art is, introducing a crash course on performance art history and the idea of its diversity and potentials, via rather informal lectures that I conducted.
- To initiate participants in trying to do some performances, body art, and installations themselves and with the help of their family members.
- To engage them with photo and video documentation processes.
- To create on one of the floors of Lindart an exhibition with works that were created during the workshop.
- To do one joint public performance, all of us together, which became our, now historical *Dinner Discussion* at the opening of the traditional exhibition *Onufri* in the grand foyer of the National Gallery in Tirana. It is important to mention that there was only one or two women artists who took part officially at the *Onufri* annual exhibition in 2002, all other participants were men. So, I approached the exhibition curator, Edi Muka, a few days prior to the

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1 The program was organised by Eleni Laperi and the Lindart team, financed by Swiss Cultural foundation ProHelvetia.

opening, and invited myself and the Lindart women artists along. By using a guerrilla strategy, we gained a platform to enter the world of national art.



*Mis(s)placed Women?* workshop, Istanbul, a collective performance in a tea house, Mis Street (2021), with the participation of: Arzu Yayıntaş, Bahar Seki, Gülhatun Yıldırım, Gizem Yılmaz, Nazlı Durak, Persefoni Myrtsou, Vanessa Ponte, Sabbi Senior, Selma Hekim and Tanja Ostojić.  
Photo: K. Kaygusuz, copyright: T. Ostojić

## **Mis(s)placed Women?**

*Mis(s)placed Women?* (2009-2022) workshops apply the principles of Art as Social Practice and explore a variety of public spaces and the possibilities for temporary interventions in them, empowering participants via a kind of master-class block seminar—a laboratory outside of

the official educational institution—while developing new collective and individual works, performances and performance scores, and in some cases, activist actions and performances.

*Mis(s)placed Women?* includes contributions by over 180 individuals from six continents that embody and enact some of everyday-life activities that thematize displacement known to migrants, refugees, and itinerant artists traveling the world to earn their living. While some of the performances deal with migration issues, others are involved with feminism, queerness, gentrification, inclusion, accessibility, power relations, and vulnerability, particularly as they relate to women and non-binary people; an aspect that has figured prominently in the past



**Tanja Ostojić: *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić*, 2012-18**

Collaborative art project *Embroidered Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić*,

Workshop, Goethe-Institut Belgrad, January 2017

Workshops facilitators: Tanja Ostojić (Berlin) and Vahida Ramujkić.

Workshops participants: Jelena Dinić, Tanja Ostojić (Banja Luka), Tanja Ostojić

(Trn), Tanja Ostojić (Udine), Tanja Ostojić-Guteša, Tanja Ostojić-Petrović, Tanja

Petar Ostojić, Tatjana Tanja Ostojić, Tatjana Ostojić Alabama, Sunčica Šido.

Photo: Marija Piroški, courtesy: T. Ostojić



three decades of my artistic practice. While investigating privilege by distinguishing between working mobility, forced or desired migration, and how arbitrary laws apply to migrants, *Mis(s)placed Women?* also explores diverse public spaces and the invisibility of certain groups within them. I have conducted numerous workshops across the world where the participants are selected by open call.

## Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić

*Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić* (2011-18) develops further the strategies of conscious ethical politics in artistic production, the creation of a community with shared authorship and ownership, and the emancipatory potentials of collective autobiographical methodologies as the basis for art-making.

Through a form of interpersonal sociological research, I created a map that documents the ways in which over 33 name-sisters—the project participants (including myself)—migrated (as refugees for reasons of war and post-war resettlement in post-Yugoslav geographies, for education, marriage, or economic reasons). One of the important threads of the project is the labor conditions of the name-sisters, including women who are proud of their work, even when they have experienced being unemployed, underpaid, and/or exploited. Division of domestic labor, domestic violence, and access to education during and after Yugoslavia were also discussed.

Ethical aspects of working with people were of essential importance to me, therefore I created an Ethical Codex.

### **Ethical Codex**

- Participants have the right to step out of the project at any time.
- Nothing will be published without their knowledge or consent.
- Participants have the right to take back certain information or censor parts that they do not wish to be accessible to the public.
- Participants can/will get all material produced in the project's frame for their own use.
- In the case of public events, participants could additionally decide whether they were willing to take part in it or not; which questions

they might be ready to answer and which not; what facts can be disclosed about them and which should stay secret; if they want to be filmed, photographed, or not, etc.

*Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić* is a participatory research project conducted within the intergenerational group of name-sisters. The trust between us developed over time, therefore the duration of the project over several years was essential for the friendships and community building that emerged. The first stage of the project involved personalized sociological research, in which I conducted interviews based on a standardized list of questions written together with the first name-sister whom I had an opportunity to meet, Tanja Ostojić, mathematics teacher based in Lörrach, Germany. We listed together all the questions we were curious to ask our name-sisters. Each time I met another name-sister and asked her to answer the initial questions, she could add an additional question to it. Some of the most interesting interviews were edited, authorized and published in the book chapter entitled *Women Talk* and also as a freeze in the exhibition accompanied by double portraits of name-sisters, coincidentally wearing matching t-shirts. The most significant points from each of the interviews later became topics of the individual embroideries. Later, those embroideries became part of the collective patchwork embroidery. The color code supported the readability of the tapestry. The information and routes of individual migration paths of each of the women were also presented as the embroidered geographical map and pie charts. Favorite recipes (that was the last question on the list) I edited as a separate book chapter entitled *Favorite Recipes of Tanjas Ostojić*.

One of the project goals was to provide artistic education to the participating women, born between 1954 and 2001, most of whom never entered any contemporary art museums, galleries or exhibition spaces in their hometowns. During our workshops we visited exhibitions, took guided tours by artists of solo exhibitions, or by curators on duty (in Zagreb, Banja Luka, Rijeka, Belgrade, Kikinda, Berlin). Some of the participants took active parts in artist talks and book launches (Belgrade, Novi Sad, Berlin). After we created our artworks and our own exhibition opened at the Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, where I gave a guided tour during the course of the exhibition opening

with the exhibition curator, some of the project participants, on their own initiative organized public guided tours of the exhibition for their friends and colleagues. They were not just passive participants of a participatory art project, they became artists themselves, coauthors and co-owners of an artwork, who were able to talk and write about the collective artistic practice they experienced as an emancipatory process.

### **What is Common to those two Projects?**

- They are long-term projects, (that means that I engage with people over an extended period of time/they are not one-off workshops).
- We practice the women circle (sitting as women/queer women at one table, facing each other, talking, coffee/tea circles/doing handwork/drawing; or sitting on the floor in a round/exchanging/exercising/performing...)
- Personal relationship with each of the project's participants.
- (Art)friendships
- Community building
- Peer learning
- Peer shaping of the program
- Support each other
- Learn about the issues and embark on the creative process together (We embark all together into creative processes, so this is not happening on a theoretical level or on paper, we are entering creative processes and are producing individual and group artworks, in some cases with shared or delegated authorship).
- Involving people outside of the institutional/academic context/ outside of the art-world or people from the margins, without excess to artistic production.
- Practice of embracing, hugging, sometimes even healing, certainly empowering

## Structure of the Workshops:

1. Get together in a safe circle in our social base. Present ourselves to each other, who we are and what is our motivation to join the workshop, and what are our expectations.
2. Gathering of topics (in the frame of the *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić* project, from the interviews conducted several years earlier) in other workshops, on the spot, via various physical and verbal exercises.
3. Looking at the city map, then going on walks, exploring, experimenting, and performing ad hoc. Or, discussing and pre-deciding which neighborhoods, spaces or locations would host certain ideas the best, which audiences or spaces we would like to address, and why.
4. Joint meals, coffee circles, creation of smaller affiliation working groups (In *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić* – ‘Zimerke’/roomies, were sharing accommodation facilities, traveling together to different workshop locations).
5. Inspiring each other; Supporting each other in the realization of their ideas, (co-perform, take care of things and objects, engage with documentation; overtake certain techniques or a part of the production/creation process that you feel confident with for the other person who struggles with that aspect).
6. Daily get-together to give each other feedback, discuss how the process has been developing. What are the feelings, plans for the day, next steps etc?
7. Self-reflection and a writing task
8. Public discussion including feedback to each other
9. Editing and publishing
10. Remaining in contact
11. Occasional annual meetings, community gatherings, joint exhibitions and similar.

SUBALTERN KNOWLEDGE IN CULTURAL PRACTICES



Experimentations and improvisations with scores on Istanbul underground line M2, between stations Şişhane-Haciosman-Şişhane, with participation of: Gaby Bila-Gunther aka Lady Gaby, Dagmara Bilon, Selma Hekim, Kathryn Fischer aka Mad Kate, Susan Merrick, Tanja Ostojić, Vanessa Ponte, Hieu Hanh Hoang Tran aka Hany Tea, Adrienne Teicher, Arzu Yayıntaş, and



Gülhatun Yıldırım among others, in the frame of *Mis(s)placed Women?*  
Community Gathering and Live Events, Depo Istanbul 2022,  
curated by: Arzu Yayıntaş and Tanja Ostojić.  
Photo: Gülbin Eris, copyright: T. Ostojić

## **Feminist Ethics of Care: With its Artistic, Activist and Pedagogical Aspects**

I, as a facilitator, practice affectionate leadership, and encourage participants to support each other within their peer groups, so that nobody is left behind, and people are opening up and contributing according to their own capacities. I need to be open-hearted and humble for all kinds of proposals and ideas to come from the participants. Sometimes I am showing, or talking about some of my own work that could somehow demonstrate that I have credibility and capacity, so to say, to work with sensitive topics and with people who are, for different reasons, marginalized. Furthermore, we create a safe space in our project base and are discussing and practicing how to extend and hold this safe space further in the public spaces where we work. We discuss beforehand the risks of certain locations and strategies of how to handle them, for instance, as we intend to make the action or performance happen and not to get arrested or pushed away, we utilize a strategy of talking out the security personnel. Sometimes I advise some of the participants not to perform at certain locations and we search for alternative solutions.

A sixty-eight-minute documentary entitled *Mis(s)placed Women? Performance Art Workshop by Tanja Ostojić, Istanbul Itinerary* engages with this type of practice of care. The film follows the process of the creation of collective and individual performances in three different neighbourhoods of Istanbul. The film is also showing the reflections of the workshop participants over four days, and showcases the final presentation and discussion at the Beykoz Kundura Cinema (September 2021). Participants were delightfully supportive of each other and highly motivated, while the response from the public was tremendous and appreciative; in spite of a police presence and oppression that made working in the public spaces of Istanbul particularly demanding. Contrary to the 2021 workshop, where we operated with the support of organizational and documentation teams and had (multiple) permissions to work in the public space, in 2022 we used guerrilla actions, one of which took place on a rainy day, on underground line M2, between stations Şiřhane-Haciosman-Şiřhane, where we experimented with many of the scores from the “Mis(s)placed Women?” project archive as well as with new ones.



*Protest Scarves Against Turkey's Retreat  
from the Istanbul Convention, 2021.*

İstiklal Street, Istanbul, September 9, 2021. A collective performance and public action with the participation of: Arzu Yayıntaş, Bahar Seki, Gülhatun Yıldırım, Gizem Yılmaz, Nazlı Durak, Persefoni Myrtsou, Vanessa Ponte, Sabbi Senior, Selma Hekim and Tanja Ostojić. In the frame of Tanja Ostojić's *Mis(s)placed Women?* workshop.

Photo: K. Kaygusuz, copyright: T. Ostojić

## **Work with Performance Scores**

Performance scores are instructions, on how to perform a piece, described in simple steps. They can also be understood as an overall frame, a starting point, or as an inspiration. Some of them are written before and some after initial performances. One score can result in numerous and diverse performances depending on the interpretation.



In my artistic practice I build, use and share an archive of performance scores as an artistic, pedagogical and activist tool. In the framework of “Mis(s)placed Women?” project workshops (as well as at other workshops, or while teaching seminars at universities) we are engaging with this archive of scores, performing archive, usually in the form of embodied performance. We are combining scores and developing them further. We are proposing and writing new scores that we share. The power of working in a group gets amplified via tools, such as exercises and scores, that are like a vocabulary for us, to examine and test, how they work in different contexts.



*JIN\* JÎYAN AZADÎ / WOMEN LIFE FREEDOM, 22.9.2022.*

Collective action, with the participation of: Gaby Bila-Gunther aka Lady Gaby, Selma Hekim, Kathryn Fischer aka Mad Kate, Susan Merrick, Tanja Ostojić, Vanessa Ponte, Hieu Hanh Hoang Tran aka Hany Tea, Adrienne Teicher, Mürüvvet Türkyılmaz, Arzu Yayıntaş, Gülhatun Yıldırım.

Organised in the frame of: Tanja Ostojić: *MIS(S)PLACED WOMEN? 2009–2022*, A Collaborative Art Project, Exhibition at Depo Istanbul (2022), *Mis(s)placed Women? Community Gathering and Live Events*, curated by: Arzu Yayıntaş and Tanja Ostojić

Photo: Gülbin Eris, copyright: T. Ostojić

## Example of JIN\* JÎYAN AZADÎ / WOMEN LIFE FREEDOM Action<sup>2</sup>

JIN\* JÎYAN AZADÎ / WOMEN LIFE FREEDOM was a collective action of the *Mis(s)placed Women?* community in remembrance of Jina Mahsa Amini, and in solidarity with the activists, especially all women, silenced and murdered in Iran. The action started at Galata Square in Istanbul on 22nd September 2022, 11 am, combining three performance scores from the *Mis(s)placed Women?* performance workshop held one year earlier, (September 2021 in Istanbul), including walking backwards and the waving of colorful scarves (Protest Scarves Against Turkey's Retreat from the Istanbul Convention) that our community performed at Istiklal Street, and *Opening of The Voice*, an action of collective screaming while walking in the busy street in Kadiköy. So, when *Mis(s)placed Women?* community from Istanbul joined forces with the *Mis(s)placed Women?* community from Berlin and London in 2022, after one day of indoor performances at Depo, on the second day of our workshop, we decided to combine the aforementioned three performance elements/ three scores to create a powerful action in solidarity with the women silenced and murdered in Iran. We walked backward carrying above our heads our colorful scarfs connected with nods to each other, along the Büyük-Hendek-Street until the square at the junction with Meşrutiyet-Street and Şişhane Metro, continuously screaming. We raised great interest, and people were standing up from their chairs in cafes across the street, taking pictures of the action.

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2 JIN\* JÎYAN AZADÎ / WOMEN LIFE FREEDOM action, with the participation of: Gaby Bila-Gunther aka Lady Gaby, Selma Hekim, Kathryn Fischer aka Mad Kate, Susan Merrick, Tanja Ostojić, Vanessa Ponte, Hieu Hanh Hoang Tran aka Hany Tea, Adrienne Teicher, Mürüvvet Türkyılmaz, Arzu Yayıntaş, Gülhatun Yıldırım. Organised in the frame of: Tanja Ostojić: MIS(S)PLACED WOMEN? 2009–2022, A Collaborative Art Project, Exhibition at Depo Istanbul (2022), *Mis(s)placed Women?* Community Gathering and Live Events, curated by: Arzu Yayıntaş and Tanja Ostojić



Luciana Damiani: *The Safe Circle*, performance at the *Misplaced Women?* workshop, Park am Nordbahnhof, Berlin, 2019.  
Photo/copyright: T. Ostojić

### Example of Score #7, The Safe Circle

In September 2019 Luciana Damiani came from Montevideo to Berlin with a travel grant from the Uruguayan Ministry of Education and Culture in order to meet with me and to collaborate on the *Mis(s)placed Women?* project. As she wrote, it was “necessary for me to try to get an opportunity to share my experiences and generate bonds with other people who have experienced similar situations” regarding misplacement. So, I organized a workshop for her in the Park am Nord Bahnhof Berlin, where she chose a place, drew a circle with yellow chalk, and performed the *Score #1: Unpacking a Bag of Your Own*, which I wrote in 2009. Then she read her Manifesto, and afterwards performed as well

the *Score #2: Holding the 'Misplaced Women?' Sign*<sup>3</sup>, in her version, the 'Misplaced Human?'. In September 2023, I wrote a *Score #7: The Save Circle* and shared it in a workshop in a public space close to the construction site for the inclusive social housing for multigenerational lesbian women. I would like to share at this point, at the end of my essay, those four short texts/instructions and would be pleased to hear back from you in case you perform any of them.

**Luciana Damiani's Manifesto**<sup>4</sup>

*I am a body and I am a statement.*

*I am a witness and I am evidence of manipulation.*

*I don't want to ask for permission to be.*

*I don't have to ask for permission to be.*

*I don't want to be defined by you, or anybody, or anywhere, or anything.*

*I don't want to be from here or there.*

*If my existence threatens you, that is because you're afraid to lose your privileges.*

*If your walls surround me, my words will be the weapon to make them fall.*

*If you hurt me, I will heal.*

*And I will repeat this all over again.*

*Because I have a pact with all of my kind.*

*Because that's my duty and my only way to resist.*

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3 Tanja Ostojić, "Score #2: Holding the 'Misplaced Women?' Sign", 2012.

4 Luciana Damiani's Manifesto, first published by T. Ostojić at the Misplaced Women? Blog, 2019.



David Caines: Illustration depicting Sophie Cero's "Unpacking a Bag of Your Own" performance in Hackney Wick in the frame of the *Misplaced Women?* workshop by Tanja Ostojić, Live Art Development Agency, London, 2016.

## Conclusion

It means to me a lot to get an opportunity to hold the space for sharing and discussion of anti-discriminatory knowledges while endorsing methodologies of transformative artistic practices. I would put in the first line those who identify as women, many of whom have not had access to art, art production, art studies, or artistic practice, or those similar to me who became marginalised due to the hegemonic processes of canonisation, or the lack of opportunity and compatibility with art market and carrier dynamics disregarding maternity engagement or peripheral geographies... So, the methodologies of empowering feminist artistic practices and alternative pedagogical formats, which I have written about in the above, have been developing over decades from a marginal position myself, and often embedded in my own artistic practice. In this way there has been a mutual learning process between the two, as well as, between the participants, and myself and others as hosts as facilitators. Those mutual learning processes and mutual empowerments have been interlaced with short and long-term friendships, and long-lasting women friendships, sisterhoods, communities of name-sisters, resulting from community-building processes. Reunions, and international community gatherings have been incredibly rewarding and productive, as women meet and reunite, often in new life cycles and in different life stages and circumstances. With time, the trust and openness to the group dynamics and the process grows...

Among the major challenges I've been facing in the numerous workshops and projects that I conducted over the years were the lacks of funds, time, space and organisational facilities; the complexity of organising work, travel, communication, documentation, archiving, and giving credit to the numerous and very diverse participants. But, it is worth investing extraordinary efforts needed to ensure that participatory artistic practices respect ethical guidances and give credit to all the contributors. That should be done even in the cases of, for instance, a 27-meter-long *Mis(s)placed Women?* project's timeline installation covering a period of 13 years, between 2009-2022, that has been on display at Depo-Istanbul, consisting of photos, videos, signs, and banners,

accompanied by over 200 names of participants, partner institutions, documentarists, locations, dates, etc. It is worth the effort of crediting, and thanking everyone...

## References

Mis(s)placed Women? project blog: <http://misplacedwomen.wordpress.com>  
Mis(s)placed Women? video channel: <https://vimeo.com/channels/1482708/videos>  
Tanja Ostojić's research at Academia.edu: <https://tanjaostojic.academia.edu/research>  
Tanja Ostojić's homepage: <https://tanjaostojic.com/>

## Appendix

These are three of the existing performances scores that I would like to further share and offer to the reader of this book: "Score #1: Unpacking a Bag of Your Own" (from 2009), "Score #2: Holding the 'Misplaced Women?' Sign" (2012), and "Score #7: The Safe Circle" (2023).

### Score#1: Unpacking a Bag of Your Own<sup>5</sup>

*More or less than an hour, with or without preparation, one or more performers, migration-specific locations*

**About:** *Misplaced Women?* is an art project that welcomes contributions from people with diverse backgrounds who embody and enact everyday life activities that touch upon forms of displacement. Participants are invited to perform and reflect upon different notions of travelling, identity, illegality, homelessness, security, and private/public space, and to share their experiences on the project blog.

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5 Tanja Ostojić, "Score #1: Unpacking a Bag of Your Own", 2009.

**Instructions:**

1. Select a migration-specific place that resonates with you (such as public transportation, central bus station, airport, border, or different areas affected by gentrification).
2. Get there and unpack a bag of your own (such as your purse or backpack, or a bag with empty plastic bags, or packaging from consumer articles).
3. Take every single item out and turn it inside out. Take everything out of your pockets. Turn your pockets inside out. Take your shoes off. Once you have unpacked everything, search to see if you have discovered something else.
4. For those more advanced and highly motivated: You can repeat the same action in various places and times, and see how it is perceived by those around you. If you choose this option, draw a map of places where you performed each of the unpacking performances.

**Note:** Reflect upon how it felt to do this in public. Did you feel exposed? How did it resonate with your life experience, and did it bring you closer to the people on the move, people on the street, etc? Be open to talking to the passers-by about what you're actually doing and why. Let this performance last for at least half an hour. If you have unpacked your things in a hectic way, after a break, try to pack items back with appreciation and care (or the other way around).

**Attention:** Places that are generally understood as public spaces might appear not to be such. That means that with your performance you might challenge the notion of public space, and see where it is (not) possible to do your action. A security guy might push you one metre away from the entrance (in a shopping mall, or what many train stations have become nowadays, right)? A policeman might ask you, "What are you doing?". I can only advise you to bring one person with you to try to talk to any security personnel you encounter, so that you can finish your performance. You may also say that you are searching for an item of your own that you really need but you are not sure if you took it with you (Whatever that might be, right?). This is to avoid being kicked out or arrested, given that performing and filming are usually not allowed in some "public" places.





David Caines: Illustration depicting Elena Marchevska “Holding the ‘Misplaced Women?’ Sign” at Heathrow Airport, London in the frame of the *Misplaced Women?* workshop by Tanja Ostojić, Live Art Development Agency, London, 2016.

## Score #2: Holding the “Misplaced Women?” Sign<sup>6</sup>

*Less than an hour, with or without preparation, one performer*

### **Instructions:**

1. Select a migration-specific place that resonates with you.
2. Make your own “MIS(S)PLACED WOMEN?” / “MISPLACED MAN?” / “MISPLACED HUMAN” sign or banner (on a cardboard, on a piece of paper, on some cloth. It can be a drawing or an embroidery or even a collage).
3. Stand there and hold it for at least half an hour.
4. Ask someone to take a photo of you standing there.
5. You can repeat the same action in various places and times, and see how it is being perceived by those around you. If you choose this option, draw on the map the places where you performed each action.

**Note:** Reflect upon how it felt to hold the sign, how it resonated with you, with your life experience, how the location you chose affected you. Be open to talking to the people that are passing by about the sign you are holding and related issues, and hear what they have to say about it.

**Crediting and Publishing:** It is important to credit everyone properly. With the *Mis(s)placed Women?* project we pay special attention to that. Please be sure to fully credit your action as: (your name) *Mis(s)placed Women?* delegated performance by Tanja Ostojić, whenever you publish it. We will do the same with your contribution. Send a photo or a drawing of yourself performing, and a description of how it went (include your name, date, time, duration, location(s) name(s) of everyone involved, photographer and notes). Please let us know if you would like your contribution to be published on the project’s blog. We would greatly appreciate your permission to do so.

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6 Tanja Ostojić, “Score #2: Holding the ‘Misplaced Women?’ Sign”, 2012.

## Score #7: The Safe Circle<sup>7</sup>

*Around 30 minutes or longer, without preparations, one or more participants*

Location: A public, semi-public, or private space where one can feel protected

**About:** This score derived from Luciana Damiani's, performance entitled *The Safe Circle*, based on my *Mis(s)placed Women? Score#1* and *Score#2*, realised in the framework of *Mis(s)placed Women? Workshop*, Park am Nordbahnhof, Berlin (2019), as well as out of my own performances *Personal Space* (1996) and *On Rape Attempts* (2021). All those performances had an empowering effect on authors, as they had on a few others who re-performed and witnessed them, so I created this score as an invitation to others who would like to reflect and to share their personal experiences in a safe circle. It is important to try out this score, to visualise and possibly even share stories, feelings and thoughts, if you feel that it will be an empowering experience for yourself and others around you, and a part of your healing process. You need to be in control of whether to share and how to share your experiences. You can choose in what circumstances and at what level of detail you feel comfortable talking about it. Ultimately, what matters most is what has value and meaning for you.

### **Instructions:**

1. Select a location in a public space where you can feel safe and protected (by architecture, greenery, and a crowd that would gather to support you).
2. Choose the colour and size of a circle, or some other shape that speaks to you, and draw it yourself with chalk on the ground.
3. Position yourself in a safe circle that you have drawn on the ground.
4. Think about situations in which you felt safe/unsafe. You may start with memories from your childhood, or by situations that affected you the most in your life.
5. You can take time to write down or draw your thoughts, and feelings for a while.
6. When you are ready you can invite your people to come around the circle or to step inside. Share with your trust group your findings (such as reading some of your notes, or explaining a drawing...).

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7 Tanja Ostojić, "Score #7: The Safe Circle", 2023

7. You may instruct one of your friends to co-perform, and try to translate your words or drawings into improvised bodily movements or another artistic medium.
8. You can choose to shake out the stress from your body.
9. Let your friends from the group give you a healing hug when you finish, if you like.

**Notes:** Reflect upon: What does safety mean to you? What do you feel you need in order to feel safe? With whom do you feel safe? Where do you feel safe? Do you feel safe here (in this neighbourhood)? What colour and what size is your *safe circle*? What considerations/reservations do you have? What other feelings do you associate with safety? We can discuss together as well, what is the difference between safety and security.

# BODY LEARNS – BODY KNOWS - BODY DOES

## Performing heritage as educational and heritage interpretation tool

MARIJA ĐORĐEVIĆ

### Introduction

Heritage is consequently understood as something that is 'done', rather than something that is possessed or 'managed'. There is, moreover, no one defining heritage action, but rather a range of activities that include remembering, commemoration, communicating and passing on knowledge and memories, asserting and expressing identity and social and cultural values and meanings. As an experience, and as a social and cultural performance, it is something with which people actively, often self-consciously, and critically engage in.

(Smith 2012: 2-3)

This paper will offer a possible methodological concept and a tool based on bodily didactics<sup>1</sup> which can be used as a teaching approach that can provide for memory sites to be viewed within dynamic spatial relations. It will briefly discuss *performing heritage* (Đorđević 2021) as a methodological concept and describe cases of performative actions that

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1 Bodily didactics encompasses all the ways in which a body is thought of the meaning of its movements. It is closely related to the non-verbal vocabulary of a community, and it is established through the repetition of the action. As an example, the accepted bodily position of expressing mourning is the kept vertical axis of the body disturbed by the slightly bent forward neck. This position is learned from participation in rituals (usually sacral ones), and if it not elaborated in the process, it is learned by observing the other members of the group).

can be seen as the root of the teaching method. Finally, it will provide several examples of the application of this method in working with students within heritage sites. In order to keep the focus on the action, no visual material will be provided for this written format, as a still image of an action is not considered sufficient to emphasize a body in movement. Rather, the method of descriptive writing will be employed to analyze the case studies, as a means for guiding the reader in comprehending a phenomenon that needs to be observed in real-time.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, it is important to note that the selected cases of performing heritage education are taking place at memorial sites dedicated to the Peoples' Liberation Struggle (NOB) built during the existence of former Yugoslavia, as a part of the official memory of WWII and the final fulfillment of the unity of Yugoslav people (Jauković 2015, Đorđević 2021).

Sites of (cultural) heritage and any other monuments of remembrance are often perceived as static, durable categories, as monuments that can withstand the passing of time. In this insistence on the materiality and longevity of man-made objects, the existence of memorials and public monuments is placed within the temporal oxymoron, of having to be eternal in a material sense, and ephemeral in that, when needed, they can emit values the community identifies with, and therefore reaffirm their sense of belonging to a community that exists outside of the confines of their homes. Commonly, heritage sites are safeguarded with a firm intent to keep the material aspects of memory-related sites, to keep their authenticity in terms of the shape, color, and chemical properties they are built with. It is assumed that the preservation of the site and/or an object is viable enough to keep the heritage in a state of relevance.

What seems to be often overlooked, however, is that one of the basic elements of making a site durable in a physical and symbolic sense is the action surrounding it, which transforms it into a space. Following the spatial notions put forward by Judith Butler (2015) in her essay *Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street*, space appears between the bodies and the action of the body. Therefore, space is an ephemeral category strongly dependent on the sensitivity of the muscles, skin, and nervous

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2 The notion of real time observation in this case refers equally to the analysis of the video documentation of the action, as it is understood that even though the observer is not physically testifying to an action occurring, the focus on video documentation serves in this context for the same purpose.

system. The body is the carrier of the potential to create, shape and understand space. “Before producing effects in the material realm (tools and objects), before producing itself by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before reproducing itself by generating other bodies, each living body is space and has space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space” (Lefebvre 1991b: 170).

By understanding the body as the carrier of this potential to make space, and as the agency in the complex notions of interaction between the physical configurations (the human body being one of them) and the sets of meanings that can be attached to the phenomenon of the made space, memory sites need to be approached through the investigation of what the body does, learns, knows, and repeats over time. The notion of ephemerality needs to be accepted as the crucial given, that allows for a site to keep its value in the contemporary moment. The recent commemoration and reinstatement of the destroyed monument in Kamenska, designed by Vojin Bakić,<sup>3</sup> serves as a potent case of how a once destroyed site can be revived. The destroyed monument was reconstructed, with the use of modern technological means. It was once again placed in its original location through digital projection, which allowed for the monument’s biography to be visible. Even though the material of the object changed, the earlier established relations between the site and the visitors’ bodies seem to be undisturbed – the action of the bodies, brought back to the site, was still dependent on previously established bodily knowledge gained through bodily didactic of past commemorations.

However, the role of the body in action as the maker of ephemeral space, that “comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech or action and therefore, predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm” (Arendt 1998: 199), is rarely the focus of attention in the analysis of heritage – of sites made, (mis)used, recycled and re-evoked by the community (or society, nation, humanity). Thus, the issues of the body are often excluded from the interpretation, safeguarding, and finally the teaching about heritage. The question is: What happens if we shift the primary viewpoint of the analysis, and

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3 “Oživljen“ Bakićev spomenik u Kamenskoj“, VIDA info, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AcKFpKuvngI&t=2s>, accessed: 12.10.2023.

focus on the actions (once) occurring and bodies performing those actions at a given site?

## **Memory sites as performative monuments and/or performing heritage**

In her book *Performative Monuments: The Rematerialization of Public Art* (2014), Mechtild Widrich coined a term that encompasses a physical site, all its separate configurations and the action taking place within it – the *performative monument*. The author emphasizes the active state of memory markers, stating that the physical site is a monument and that a memorial is always active in relation to the sites and people present. Seen in this way, a performative monument should be understood as a site-specific performance, as an action co-dependent from the physical configuration, and as an action allowed and dictated by those configurations. Quite literally, a performative monument is a commemoration.

Commemorations as site-specific performances are inseparable from the sites they are performed at, and in the case of public commemorations the sites they employ are most often predestined as important markers of the landscape used by the community, they are – “larger than life” (Assmann 2009: 38) monuments; objects of identification. Due to their importance in the social life of a community, in time, commemorations and the sites used by them eventually rise to the level of heritage, of an object of exceptional value for the community. Widrich’s approach strongly leans on the narrational aspects of such performances, placing the conveyed message as the primary aspect to be concerned with. However, commemorative site-specific performances are equally, if not more, conditioned by the knowledge of the rehearsed bodies in performance. From the perspective of heritage education and research, this relation opens room for discussion of the potential for descriptive interpretation and teaching methods that originate in a different discipline – performance studies. That can provide a means of defining practical steps for action, that can be used for understanding how knowledge is embodied, and how it can be reevoked at a different site, and within a narrational different context.



For the methods of performance studies to be employed, it is firstly necessary to recognize the body as one of the main carriers of information, and therefore, knowledge. The body needs to be understood, in Eugenio Barba's terms, as information, put "into form" (Barba 1995: 16) through education on movement, shapes and meanings a body in a performance carries. He states that the body is in-formed through the application of a codified plan of action. The body is educated through the means of the built performance score<sup>4</sup> (Schechner 1985) and through the rehearsal of the prescribed movement. The learned movement and bodily positions become a part of the total range of non-verbal vocabulary. Furthermore, in acting out the movements prescribed by the performance score, the body simultaneously is put in-form and becomes an in-formation. It can be argued that the body becomes to some extent its own reference for any future action within the same or similar context, and very often at the same site. The body becomes self-referential. In this transformation, the body expresses what it has been taught, and in its action, it understands its movements by drawing reference from the body postures and muscular strains and extensions to which a certain level of meaning has previously been attached. The self-referential body in action is simultaneously an actor and an object of observation.

In the context of public memory-based performances, such as commemorations, the performance score is prescribed based on the message to be transmitted and is usually based on the arrangement of the physical configurations of a memory site (be it a monument or a more complex structure consisting out of several segments of a different utility). The potential of a physical site to condition the movement of the body and thus to influence the understanding of the narrative being commemorated is recognized in the practices of making memory-triggering sites and activities. This is also the case with the network of memorials built to commemorate NOB (the Peoples' Liberation Struggle). In a significant

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4 In his work, Richard Schechner determines the term *performance scores* as pre-conceived sets of movements to be conducted by the body; they are the imagined performance that will be rehearsed and performed. As there can be no performances conducted in a same way within the period of its repetition, it is only possible to refer to the score as the original performance piece. Additionally, the initial performance score is built upon, and the made additions should be documented so that the transformation of the piece can be traceable.

number of cases, these principles can be found, for example in the creation of artificial elevations in the “Valley of Heroes” memorial park in Tjentište, or in the artificial bifurcation in the “Slobodište” memorial park in Kruševac (Đorđević and Krankenhagen 2024).

A very broad and multi-layered understanding of how to instate the image of the official past, as one of the three main elements of identity-building strategy, can be noted in the large-scale effort of building memorials in Yugoslavia (Jauković 2015). The vast volume of research on this topic, the official memorial, was established over a span of more than three decades and with the employment of as diverse media as possible, from monuments and events, to cinematography, literature, and youth activities (Manojlović-Pintar 2008, Videkanić 2010, Kirn i Burghardt 2011, Pavlaković 2012, Musabegović 2012, Lajbenšperger 2013, Horvatinčić 2016, Putnik-Prica 2017, Kulić 2023, etc). Given the amount of thought that went into structuring the elaborate memorial production, it is necessary to approach the maybe most well-known facet of it – the monuments dedicated to NOB – with all the aspects of the strategy in mind, especially when approaching them as heritage.

A consensus among academics, cultural professionals and numerous enthusiasts has been reached on these memorials’ artistic value, independently from the chosen aesthetical solution, as the reason for considering them as cultural heritage. However, the commemorative activities and performances are rarely taken into account when determining, preserving, and interpreting them as heritage. Both the spaces created in a community’s performances and heritage are means by which social values take on flesh and are made accessible in the moment of observation. Suppose we understand heritage as a spatial category. In that case, it can be further argued, that heritage is conditioned by the action of the bodies, the site, or a movable object, and the meaning attached to the action of valorization, to the object and the made space. Heritage in these terms is a variation of what Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008) terms as social reality (of a performance) or of what Judith Butler defines as space; it is the result of a performative action. In the case of commemorative practices, the performance of heritage-making is rather explicit. On the one hand such visibility of the process is possible because commemorations are performances in the basic definition of the term. On the other hand, as site-specific performances, they are deeply

intertwined with the sites they are performed at, i.e., they are connected to a tangible reality, making it easy to perceive what their material relic might be. Additionally, commemorations of a public nature, as a part of the formulation of the official past, are usually connected to physical sites that are from their conception envisioned to be inherited. With a somewhat straightforward heritagization process occurring in this case, the question is how to avoid aligning oneself to either pole of the tangible-intangible spectrum, and how to keep the emphasis on the main value of commemorations as practices – on their ability to create self-referential space?

One possible solution to this dilemma, at least from a theoretical point of view on heritage, would be *performing heritage*. In the case of commemorations, performing heritage can be conceptualized as heritage of the space-making action, or even more directly as heritage of the effect (of the sensation) of making the space. Of course, the definition offered here of what is to be a specific type of cultural heritage, leaves many grey areas of interpretation; it offers a definition that is non-defining, and potentially applicable only to the cases of official public commemorations.

However, even if its applicability is valid only for a specific type of practice, it is still worthy of consideration, for, as it has been argued, the practice of commemoration is one of the more prominent mechanisms employed by a community and society to put forward consensual values, to restore cohesions and distort balances, and to educate the individual bodies on the group's norms. The semi-definition of performing heritage offered here, as a heritage of space-making action (which treats all the aspects of a practice, both tangible and intangible) attempts to use the potent notion coined by Jenny Kidd and Anthony Jackson in the title of the edited volume *Performing Heritage: Research, Practice and Innovation in Museum Theatre and Live Interpretation* (2011), but in this case, performing heritage is understood as more than a performance-based tool; it is seen as a part of heritage-making, and therefore as its undividable segment that can inform the practices of its interpretation and management.

## Performing heritage as (educational) method

If one wishes/in order to approach the idea of performing heritage as more than a performance/theater-based tool it is needed to turn to the performance as a practice, to its structure, its steps and, finally, its results. As it was previously elaborated, commemorations as official, even state-instigated, site-specific performances have bodily didactics as one of their main goals. By practicing the prescribed performance score (unquestionably based in the longstanding nonverbal vocabulary of a given community), bodies in action become self-referential – they are simultaneously aware of the action of their body and of the meaning of that action.

This notion of self-referentiality can be noted in performances that are not commemorative *per se* but are strongly related to the established memory and heritage vocabulary. One such example is the performance by *PK Fiskulturnik*, held in front of the Museum of Yugoslavia in Belgrade on 12th of July 2011.<sup>5</sup> The performance was staged in front of a heritage institution as a place that has its own rather stable self-referential status. On the one hand, the performers used this heritage institution as a backdrop for their activity. On the other hand, they engaged with it as a domain of public memory and as a public space that can be utilized for a variety of collective actions, if a public consensus is reached. The conducted performance was based on the appropriated sets of self-referential actions, that have been used in the past for making spaces of a non-memorial character such as the stylized movements and body postures of labor, workers, and progress. However, in this performance, they were employed to build a space that refers to the past but is also concerned with the present states of social reality. On the one hand, this performance reinterpreted the heritage objects, including the museum building, by attaching to them the new meanings put forward by *PK Fiskulturnik*. However, this performance as a site-specific act belongs to the scope of performing heritage. While it instigated the effect of making space achieved in the past – in the space of heritage-making it placed the applied method of performance as a tool that can be used for re-actualizing heritage in the contemporary moment.

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<sup>5</sup> More information at: <https://vimeo.com/30973044>, accessed: 28.01.2023.

Fiskulturnik's performance belongs to the domain of artistic practice, socially engaged, and historically informed, but the question is whether such interventions need to remain within the realm of artistic expression, or whether other heritage-related disciplines such as memory studies or cultural studies, can employ a similar method? Can such practices be used for re-actualizing values previously attached to heritage, thus making it contemporary relevant in terms of revealing previously under-addressed values and uses? Additionally, can it be used as a way of describing heritage in a more holistic way, preserving both its material and immaterial qualities?

The tendency towards positive answers to the above-stated questions can be noted in the educational work conducted within several summer schools for MA students organized by the University of Hildesheim in Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia since 2017.

The structure of the program always entailed a lecture-based segment, providing theoretical grounding as well as the overall context of memorial politics in Yugoslavia, and the practical work finalized with a delivery that can be framed very broadly as an aesthetical practice or a *presentational form* (Haseman 2016, in Đorđević and Krankenhagen 2024). The provided method was based on performing heritage defined above, as a heritage of the effect (the sensation) of making space, with the clear intention of not imposing the previously conducted performances on the students as the new bodies in action. The self-referentiality of the sites that were used was seen as a sufficient limitation, that would impose itself when entering the necessary investigation. Through the delivered material in all three cases, it became clear that the once-established self-referentiality of heritage sites (memorials dedicated to NOB) impacts the way new actions are performed on and with them – from the descriptive method imposing specific bodily movement to framing the possibility of the body, to narrative aspects of monuments as the main character.

For example, for the final delivery of their study visit to Montenegro, students utilized the physical configuration of the “Partizan the Fighter” monument in Podgorica as the site, and as a backdrop, of their site-specific performances. As it can be seen from the two documented site-specific performances, practitioners' movements and consequently

the manifested space at the monument's grounds were influenced by the self-referential site in a different way.

In the case of “ASMR – Monument Edition” made by Carolin Kister, Annekatrin Utke and Marie Simons, the physical movement of the bodies in performance was strongly influenced by the physical configuration of the site, which was purposely built to evoke the self-referential body of the visitor regardless of the altered pace of the performance's movement and the clear non-ceremonial nature of their action; their bodies needed to interact with the physical site by employing some of the main elements of the once-established bodily didactics. The strain on the body was determined from the movement conditioned by the actual physical layout of the site, regardless of the intentionally dismissed limitations the monument, when visible in the frame, imposed on the overall performance ornament. Therefore, the intention of breaking down the site into its most particular segments did not fully disinherit the new space from the past ones. Rather, it maintained the effect of making the space the primary impression, i.e., it used the space as performing heritage. In doing so, the once-made spaces were used as a source and nested within the new action and the new sets of movements.

A somewhat different situation can be observed in the presentational forms created within the site of/in the area of the central monument of the Memorial Park “Valley of Heroes” in Tjentište. Since this site has suffered a significant loss of the original site that once physically shaped the memorial, it was possible to insert a new action and to create a non-related space. The video work “Performing Heritage” by Linda Ludwig demonstrates a different result of performing yoga in the Yugo context. The author decided to explore the site of the “Battle of Sutjeska” monument through a selected set of yoga positions, that visually seemed to be most complementing to the site. The two dramatic slopes of the monument served as a somewhat dominating backdrop for the performance. In this sense, the performance score used the encountered site as a trait to be expanded on. In doing so, a new spatial relation was created, transforming the site into a space of a different nature. The given site did not necessarily serve as a heritage site to the untrained or unaware eye, pointing to the limitations of dealing with this site as a tangible heritage.

A similar approach of deconstructing the site by focusing on its specific traits applied in the first case of presentational form produced by the students is noted in the group work conducted within the summer school *Towards a performative turn in heritage studies: the case of WWII Monuments and Memorials in Western Balkans* held in Serbia in September of 2021. On this occasion, students produced a first-voice text presenting the monument as a sensual being, as an agency that feels its configuration and the movement around it. Monument “V3”, as a part of the larger memorial complex “21<sup>st</sup> of October” in Šumarice (Kragujevac), was given the position of a subject reflecting on other bodies interacting with it, either by breaching the line of intimacy in touching its surface and reading its label, or in performing almost a gift-giving action of commemoration. The phrase “This is what it looks like”, used extensively in the making of the *ASMR-Monument edition* case, was now replaced by continuous pronunciation of “I”. The produced video implied a movement that made/created the space within which the immobile object made of concrete was granted the possibility of conducting action that would produce spatial relations and re-produce the sense of heritage making.

## **Learning from the site and space – potential conclusion**

From the research conducted on the subject of performing heritage, as well as from practicing it in an educational setting, the concept of performing heritage proved itself a potent descriptive and interpretative method, that can approach heritage objects holistically – by placing an equal emphasis on their tangible and intangible qualities. It provided a possibility of interpreting heritage beyond artistic practice, while keeping the artistic method as a means for selecting the contemporary significant values of the earlier valorized objects and practices. By employing the principles of structuring artistic performance practice within the sites of memory, the recreation of the space puts forward the needs and consensuses of the new “public”. Furthermore, the awareness of memorial sites being site-specific performance venues provides the

means of clearly seeing the changes in narratives that can be made and (mis)used for creating new relevance.

Additionally, the attempt of implementing performing heritage as a teaching method provided a fruitful ground for observing the possibilities and limitations of importing and exporting practices to the sites that have, over time and through continues practice, became self-referential; heritage objects with seemingly “stable” meanings. The same is valid for the sites that were not surrounded by action for a significant amount of time. Applying performing heritage as a learning tool or as a teaching method is based on the notion that the bodily didactics imposed by sites on site-specific performances, defines how and why to act in a certain way, regardless from who is set as the performing body. Furthermore, the possibility of deconstructing the bodily action, the site and finally the space, allows for rearranging the narrative- and value- based aspects of the space-making action, bringing contemporary relevance to the established spatial relations. Performing heritage as a teaching tool, places the importance on presentational form which as a concept is performative, i.e., it needs to be observed in order to appear. Thus, the presentational form can be approached as a spatial category as well, and in the context of heritage-related disciplines, it comes with the potential to evoke the effect (the sensation) of making space.

Finally, performing heritage as an educational tool allows for the values imbedded in heritage to be understood in a broader way. In the specific case of memorials dedicated to the NOB, the attached values cannot be observed solely through their dedication. Rather, these values should be interpreted from the point of the era in which these sites were constructed. Today, the monuments dedicated to the NOB do not necessarily have to serve as the apotheosis of the antifascist liberation struggle, but they can be the carriers of the values of the class struggle of the then-instated socialist revolution. They can serve as the sites of performance. As spaces that can emphasize values being lost today – values such as equity, social rights, the right to education, or to address the prevalent issues such are marginalization, discrimination, and re-colonization. Notions that were at least, if not resolved, proclaimed as counter-revolutionary by the system that once built these complex memorial spaces and educated the bodies to sense them when they



encountered them. They can serve as sites for performances made “prema JUS-u”.<sup>6</sup>

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6 Phrase “prema JUS-u” is colloquially used to refer to the Yugoslav standardization of industrial production, that was introduced as the measurable category of quality of products.

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## THE WAY A CITY REMEMBERS

### The importance of site-specific projects for the process of art education

JELENA TODOROVIC AND SVETLANA VOLIC

How can site-specific research be incorporated into the teaching process? How much can the students learn from this intertwining of artistic and scholarly approaches? In which ways does learning about the memory of the particular place, of *genius loci* help in the development of their artistic practices? This paper will try to answer all these questions based on the example of a series of site-specific workshops held at the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of the Arts both at MA and BA level (2014-2019). The subject of them all was the urban space and the process of remembrance and forgetting (both willing and unwilling) that is ingrained into the fabric of the city. The city as a particular form of palimpsest, was presented in these workshops, respectively by artists, scholars, archaeologists, etc. Thus, this polyphony of memories and meanings became a departure point for further artistic investigations that were so eloquently manifested through a series of exhibitions.

There is no empty space. Every space reflects our intimate and collective desires, interests, and needs. At the same time it is a particular mirror reflecting the society and the political distribution of power within it. The participant of the site-specific workshop is first of all a researcher who moves through multiple spatial layers, as well as non-linearly through time. They move through the past, present, and future of a certain space, and are placed in a situation to think, feel, create, and draw certain conclusions. Space is presented here as a depository of different histories, memories and experiences, and most importantly, as an equal partner in the creative process.

Through such polyphonic research of the space, it is possible to define its physical framework, to better understand its appearance, architecture, and purpose... It is also possible to study its history (respectively its official and oral history that lives through the traditions and memories of residents and witnesses), to research the material and immaterial cultural heritage of that space, to place it in a certain social-political context, to detect problems, to think about the protection of objects or their future use, etc. For these purposes, one could use different historical sources, whether primary or secondary sources (archival, scholarly, or literary material), or direct recordings of interviews with residents of local and city authorities. This form of research could be obtained through collaboration with institutes for the protection of monuments, through discussions with museum curators, local activists, and non-governmental organizations, sociologists, archaeologists, anthropologists, architects, urban planners, cultural workers, etc.

This method of artistic research changes our experience and everyday relationship with space, which ceases to be banal and monotonous. It enables the participation, communication, and creative interpretation of the specific loci, which become places for new cultural and social exchanges.

## Reading, Visualising and Performing the City

One of the fitting educational formats for the site-specific workshops is the *Summer School of the University of Arts in Belgrade*, which is organised each year in a different city. Authors of this paper collaborated on several occasions as supervisors of international site-specific workshops held during the University Summer Schools: *The Mount for Contemplation - discovering the hidden past of the City* (2016, Belgrade - Serbia, mentors: Jelena Todorović and Svetlana Volic); *New past - genius loci Vučje* (2018, Leskovac - Serbia, mentor: Svetlana Volic); *Desire, Square - reading, visualizing and performing the town* (2019, Kotor - Montenegro, mentor: Svetlana Volic).

Each of these workshops revolved around several stages:

## **1. Introductory lectures**

Each workshop began with introductory lectures by the supervisors and guest lecturers. Those lectures introduced the students to the history, architecture, and cultural heritage of the chosen cities, as well as to the processes of site-specific research and methods. Selected examples of site-specific projects from contemporary artistic practice were also presented.

## **2. Individual and group field research**

The most important phase of any site-specific workshop is the research part of the process. In order to get to know and empathize with the complex city history and its cultural heritage, many guided tours as well as meetings with different representatives of local communities were planned and organized. Equally important in this phase of the workshop were psychogeography research walks. Following the flow of their physical and mental movements, students entered into a specific dialogue with the space. Through the field research, they connected the discovered premises, drew branching conclusions, and created their own narratives. The goal of those “city wanderings”, of these outer and inner ambulations, was to listen to the space, to carefully observe it, to touch it and feel it. The aim was to experience not only what is visible, but also to comprehend the invisible – to contemplate and imagine the city. During these exploratory walks, students kept detailed diaries that intertwined the text, drawings, photographs, audio and video recordings; they also collected material samples, found objects, printed frotages, etc. In this process, students communicated with local residents through a series of interviews and interactive actions. Numerous performances and ambient installations were also realized in public spaces. Through their artistic research each student established his intimate connection with the city. Some were fascinated by the natural environment and materials, others by the rich layers of cultural heritage in the city’s history (city architecture, monuments, artifacts, records, symbols, preserved documents, objects, photographs), while others critically reflected on its present state, the effects of economical/political transition,

globalization or the influence of the profit interests on the appearance and life of the city.

### **3. Creative reactions and production of artworks**

Through daily consultations with their supervisor, students were guided individually toward the formulation and realization of the final artworks. Each site-specific workshop is a kind of experiment, with an uncertain outcome. It is important to tolerate free play and uncertainty within the process as a prerequisite for the realization of new creative potentials of students. Students were encouraged to try new approaches, methods, media, and techniques, which they may not have had the opportunity to implement in regular classes at their faculties. The emphasis was on the process itself, not on the end result; which gave the students freedom to experiment. This experience proved to be significant for their further work at the university and the development of their independent practice after graduation.

### **4. Public Presentation**

Results of the workshops were presented in exhibitions at the Rectorate of the University of Arts in Belgrade, in the *Cultural Center* in Leskovac and in the *Solidarity Gallery* in Kotor. Exhibitions from Kotor and Leskovac were also presented in the *Gallery of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade*. The special quality of each exhibition was that artworks were performed in various media: paintings, drawings, photographs, prints, collages, assemblies, installations, objects, video works, animations, performances, or as video/ photo documentation of performances and ambient installations previously performed in specific public spaces. Exhibited artworks produced live interactions, and engendered new understandings and experiences respectively for the participants and their audience.

## Exploring Visible and Invisible Cities

Besides the Summer school UAB projects, over the period of several years, four distinctive workshops also took place at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade. Each of them focused on a different concept vital for the understanding of the city as a phenomenon: *The Way a City Remembers* (2014), *Appearance and Disappearance of the City* (2015), *the City and the Confine* (2016), and *the City as Microcosm* (2017). All of them were supervised by authors of this paper and they, in greater part grew out of our experiences gathered from the international Summer School UAB workshops.

Although the general focus slightly shifted from one project to another, two topics remained central for them all – the concept of *memory* and the concept of *metamorphoses*. Like an invisible thread they weaved through all the lectures, they trailed behind us on our walks and constantly emerged in artworks, both past and present. Without them both, it would have been impossible to truly comprehend the complex fabric that is the urban space, and to grasp the *genius loci* of any metropolis. Moreover, they both implied particular forms of movements, of invisible inner journeys, that one has to embark upon. They invoked unique voyages, those undertaken backward, through time, through history and memory in order to unravel the real image of the past. Others seemed more irregular, meandering, oblique trajectories that marked the paths of urban transformations.

Thus, the first of the projects was devoted to the concept of the memory of the city; that perpetual process of writing and rewriting of both physical and symbolic space that occurs throughout history. Belgrade was particularly well suited for this type of site-specific exploration: a unique locus that has been endlessly built and rebuilt, besieged and liberated, erased and erected. It was both the ultimate city on the confine, and the ultimate liminal place, a city of intersections, of translations and transactions, of endless memories and oblivions.

Recognizing the importance of the interdisciplinary approach in art education, of intertwining artistic and scholarly approaches in teaching, from 2014 at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade we introduced the practice of site-specific art projects into the regular MA program. Thus,

these projects were aimed at entire generations of graduate students and were organized as a part of the art history/theory course. This proved to be a considerable endeavour as the groups of students often numbered more than 50 participants, but also opened a wealth of possibilities for experimentation and a combination of different media, since they came from all four art departments: Painting, Sculpture, Graphic Arts and the New Media. For the purpose of the site-specific research, they were often divided into groups, each responsible for a particular street or quarter of Belgrade. Occasionally, in order to achieve a more profound understanding of the chosen loci, students coming from different places outside Belgrade were assigned spaces of their hometown as their research topic. Thus, some of the most intriguing artworks were created to present not the genius loci of Belgrade, but the ever-shifting vistas of Požega, Kraljevo, Samoš, Pančevo or Iževsk and Moscow (Russia)...

In each of these four projects not only artists, but also experts from different disciplines of the humanities took part. The first phase of each project – *exploration* was created as a combination of lectures and in situ explorations of the city through diverse thematic walks. The second phase – *metamorphosis* – was devoted to the process of creation of artworks under the interdisciplinary supervision of both Prof. Volic and Jelena Todorović. The lectures given in the first phase of the projects encompassed a vast range of urban studies. From the philosophical point of view (Prof. Misko Suvakovic), archaeological (Milena Vasiljevic and dr Vesna Mikić), to historical (Prof. Djordje Kostić), site-specific explorations (Prof. Svetlana Volic) and art historical (Prof. Jelena Todorović). Of particular importance were the contributions of two notable artists, respective professors of the FFA: Prof. Čedomir Vasić and Prof. Mileta Prodanović. Prof. Vasic outlined the concept of diss/appearance of the very fabric of the city, a topic also central to his own oeuvre, while Prof. Prodanovic, an acclaimed painter and writer, centered his lectures around the metamorphic quality of the city, that specific fabric which exists through perpetual transformation and mutations. Often theoretical and historical presentations took part in the space of the city itself, with lectures devoted to the *genius loci* of particular neighbourhoods like *Dorcol* or *Vidin Kapija* (situated around the Rectorate of the University of the Arts, the site rich in historical artifacts from Roman to Baroque times).



After the thorough scholarly and artistic explorations, students had to choose those particular places where the process of remembering and metamorphoses, of the writing and rewriting of history, was at its most poignant, and make them the focal points of their artworks. Construed as interdisciplinary site-specific explorations, these projects were seen as possibilities for research and experimentation. Thus the students were endlessly encouraged to try new media and new languages to express their concepts, to depart from their usual practices, and primarily to use the urban space as both their departure point and the most important medium in their works.

The artworks created (whether by groups of students or sometimes individual participants) were presented annually, at the exhibitions in the Gallery of Faculty of Fine Arts. These shows, with each passing project, testify to the richness of students' artistic expressions but also to some re-occurring themes in their works: the city as a palimpsest, the instability of the city as the instability of memory spaces, the memory of the city as an artifact – the city as the grand Wunderkammer, the fragility of the very fabric of the city and the fragility of the fabric of memory...

Through examples of our joint endeavours, we wanted to present the importance of site-specific workshops for all levels of art education and to show how easily site-specific research, as well as other forms of project teaching in the field of visual arts, could be easily incorporated into the curriculums of art colleges/academia. Such workshops are of pivotal importance as they allow students to get familiar with the processes of working with *genius loci* of a particular place and enable them to comprehend the potential that such encounters have for the development of their own artistic expressions. Interdisciplinary exploration of space plays a decisive role in students' progress, as it encourages the awakening of their inner spaces – intimate needs, memories, desires and reactions. It equally enhances students' engagement with the subject of their research, furthers their interaction with society and increases the development of their critical and ethical thinking.

# AD-HOC EDUCATION & RESEARCH APPROACH FOR 'GARDENING' LEARNING ECOSYSTEMS

SERGEY DMITRIEV

## Introduction

New areas of knowledge and corresponding skills appear more and more often and at increasing speed. Quite often 'hot topic' education programs and training represent and recreate inequality because of their costs and/or expensive locations to travel and stay. While subalert knowledge is hard to discover and to transfer in the modern context. Thus there is a need for frameworks and environments that could provide appropriate education related to both challenges. At the same time school and university students are mostly still taught in the top-down model. Personal learning trajectories are also hard to implement within well-established approaches.

In this article, the author presents the method and tools submitted to the SHAKIN' project 'Shakin' The Classroom' with the title 'Ad-hoc Education and Research' that was designed to address the mentioned drawbacks of the traditional approaches to education. The author started to work on it in 2005 with hobby-style research on flexible, meaningful and up-to-date education formats and cases and writing a blog about it (Dmitriev 2012).

In the first part, a generalized approach is presented. In the second – there is a 'Game|Changers Program' case description and story that was a main testbed to work within the Ad-hoc Education & Research



Figure 1: Challenges of multi-crisis mapped onto space of impact and demand for collective decision-making (Luksha 2023).

method and tools as it has been delivered as a talk ‘Gardening Learning Ecosystems in Between Steady University and Industry Structures’ (Dragičević Šešić M. 2023 p. 50) at the conference ‘In from the margins – Sharing footnotes of subaltern knowledge and practices: Questioning North-South relations and ethics of international collaboration’. In the third part, the author suggests further considerations of how the above-mentioned experience could be applied and expanded to deal with multicrisis (Fig. 1) creating long-term cooperation between universities, ecovillages and other grass-roots ecological and regenerative initiatives, nature reserves, and indigenous people groups.

## Ad-hoc Education&Research Methods and Tools

Ad-hoc Education&Research environments by design provide students with practices where they are acting as educators and researchers in new fields where there are still no courses and programs, or in which they just can't afford to enrol. Students learn how to organise courses, particularly for themselves and for groups they are in, nurturing personal learning paths and synchronising them with collective learning and researching. The author uses this notion of 'Education&Research' as he suggests that the division of the originally holistic process with activities that are known nowadays as research, art, education, and media is temporary, and sooner or later they will be considered as a whole again. In his experiments and practices author tries to use a perspective where at least two components (research and education) out of four are almost undistinguished from each other and are just facets of a single process (Dmitriev 2012).

The Ad-hoc Education&Research method is based on the following set of approaches:

### *Co-creation and high flexibility*

- for any new run of the course/program the curriculum is re-created each time (based on students, available experts, and recent updates from science/industry)
- all the students (participants) actively involved in this re-creation process as well as in all the (administrative) processes related to the program, even partly to an admission campaign.
- the exact schedule and timeframes are also based on the participant availability, it's not given in advance.
- the only key requirement for graduate project topics is that the result has to be needed in the real world and useful for at least 2-3 particular persons.
- context awareness and contribution. If there are related conferences, lectures, and workshops happening in the city they are integrated within the program schedule, if some of the program's event during its preparation starts to look useful for a broader audience it becomes open or semi-open.

- it's possible to create and run a course/program even without a dedicated budget as there could be no significant difference between the course organizer and students while invited experts are requested relatively little amount of their time.

### *Easy Start*

The course organizers (curators) describe in a brief note which topics they want to explore and learn. These descriptions are used to attract other students (participants) and experts (advanced participants). For the participants the course could be free of charge, while advanced participants are not paid – they have to see other than money benefits of participation.

### *Expert and 'Frontier'/Niche Knowledge*

Curators and participants identify topics and find experts who can provide the most actual and deep insights. If an expert is not professional in sharing his/her knowledge they also learn how to prepare and ask questions, to have the knowledge presented without bothering an expert to dedicate additional time to prepare a lecture or workshop. Practice during the 'Game|Changers' Program shows that even if there are top experts in a particular field, they are easily reachable and open to sharing (pro bono) when the whole approach of the 'Ad-hoc Education and Research' method and tools become clear to them. As the method is mostly for fields where there are still no well-developed courses and training (most often it's technology and/or scientific 'frontiers' or visa versa - marginal, unpopular, niche topics), experts also can benefit by structuring their knowledge during the process.

### *Informality and Subaltern Knowledge*

As no formal institutions are required to start Ad-hoc Education&Research programs the method and tools fit well for subaltern knowledge. The Method provides flexibility in experiments to embrace the types of knowledge that used to be marginal and unnoticed. Since such programs are started it's much easier to approach well-established

formal organisations such as universities, NGOs, foundations, etc. as particular results and participants can be shown to these organizations' decision-makers, which further helps create partnerships with them.

## The 'Game|Changers' Program Case. A Learning Ecosystem in Between Steady University/Industry Structures.

### *Background*

The 'Ad-hoc Education&Research' environment we (the team and the author) applied - tested and proved to create and run for 4 years the

**Game|Changers**  
Ad-hoc Education and Research Program 2012/2014

announces the admission for the 3rd season of the free two-years program devoted to IT industry mechanics. The program's aimed on the highly-motivated students who desire to investigate the IT industry and contribute with the best they can

Program starts on **September, 17** and lasts for two years. 1st year is devoted to education process. During I and II semesters there will be master classes and lectures (4 hours per week) and 8-12 hours per week for home research. 2nd year is about graduate projects and collaboration with companies.

Program is aimed on students and recent graduates of both technical and non-technical universities. There are only 20 places available. In order to apply to the program, please, visit our web-site and fill the application form before 6th of September.

For more information visit  
[GameChangers.ru](http://GameChangers.ru)

Or feel free to contact Ekaterina Chaykina  
+7 981 861 8251 [chaykina@gamechangers.ru](mailto:chaykina@gamechangers.ru)

RVC  
Deloitte  
INGRIA  
EMC  
BRAINS  
INTEGRATED

Figure 2: A flyer design used to advertise the Game|Changers program admission campaign in 2012

program 'Game|Changers'. It was aimed at highly motivated students and recent graduates of technical and non-technical faculties who desired to investigate the IT industry and find their role and place in it to contribute to the best they can.

For us, it was an adventure of social entrepreneurship that we took in 2010-2013 to grow a learning ecosystem (Spencer-Keyse 2020) for students from St. Petersburg universities to allow them to have the same involvement in the program's co-creation as the program's curators and invited industry and science professionals.

### *The Program's Overview*

The program's core is the cross-university course 'An Introduction to the IT Industry' (with optional tracks on 'Transforming Education', 'Social Entrepreneurship', BioTech, and FinTech) to help students get:

- the broad context;
- interdisciplinary network in academia, the non-profit sector, and business;
- hands-on experience in authoring (personal) educational paths and (group) programs;
- experience in applying their interest to initiate real-world projects.

The program consisted of:

- classes with experts from the IT industry, universities, marketing and management fields;
- project-based work, field trips, and intensive networking;
- internships in IT companies, business incubators and venture funds.

Emphasis was on learning through discussions, case studies and individual and group research projects as well as reading. The whole written communication of the program was in English, while oral communication was in Russian.

The program was located in St. Petersburg (Russia) with a few field trips to Moscow and Helsinki (Finland). Semester I was a theoretical one and consisted of weekly classes, homework and research tasks. Semester II was devoted to special tracks. Semesters III and IV were allocated for graduate projects. Participation for students required about 4–8 study hours ‘onsite’ and 8–16 homework hours weekly. The last year of the program was dedicated to expanding the ecosystem to Northern Europe with the international unconference in Helsinki in 2013 with a local partner PixelAche (a transdisciplinary platform for emerging art, design, research, and activism). Participation was free, but as the number of participants was limited there was an admission process to select the most motivated, self-driven, and capable.

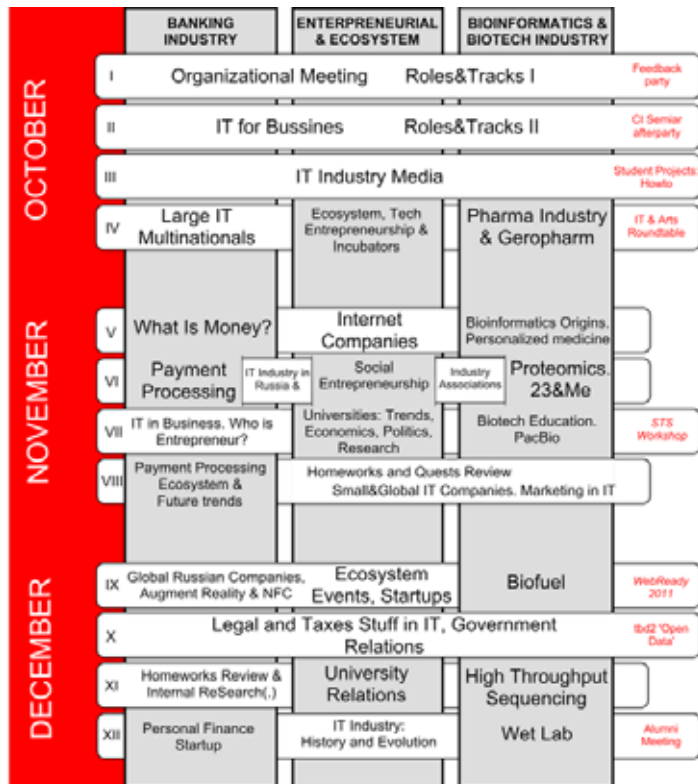


Figure 3: Game|Changers Program's schedule for the first semester in 2011



### *Admission Campaign*

The admission campaign has been the most intensive period of the program. Because of being small in resources and having freedom from institutional path dependence, we made even admission as a part of the learning ecosystem. It was implemented in two stages – an online admission form in English, to answer its questions you already need to google and learn new things. For the second stage, we came up with this 1.5 hours off-line interview scheme:

- 30 minutes - 3 written questions
- A 30-minute chat with curators (more as career path consulting) - as we already had applications and studied candidates' profiles on social networks such a limited time proved to be long enough.
- A 30-minute peer interview (two candidates chat with each other) with recommended questions to write and send a report to curators: If there are things in common (interests, friends)? Would you make a joint project within the program or wherever? Would you recommend accepting your counterpart in the program or not and why?

This off-line part we did in corporate offices, thus students can feel the atmosphere. Beyond the core curators team occasionally we invited industry experts and alumni to interview candidates.

We also invented an informal 'admission feedback party' with all those who were not accepted to the program in one of the oldest creative spaces in the city, in its cosy cafe. We invited all those who submitted applications to get to know each other, chat on how to upgrade to be stronger candidates next year and advise on educational and career paths. One of the reasons was also to check if we missed someone we need even on submission form filtering and to have a face-to-face connection in case a person will apply in the next years) In the first year, we had 9 applications per place, in the next years, it was about 5-6 per place.

Admitted participants wrote brief self-introductions. These students' profiles proved to be a powerful tool for opening any corporate door via HR or executives. After the first season of the program, such a door-opener became also a list of real-world graduate projects.

### *Involving Experts and Partnering Organizations*

We provided an expert with the basic idea for the topic that we supposed that he or she would cover (quite often we invite up to four experts to allow polyphony) and as curators, we orchestrated a kind of jam session with a topic overview, expert voices, and Q&A. All the communication processes with companies were also to identify possible topics and areas for research or event-based projects as well as internships.

### **Co-located Events**

The most advanced co-located event we did was in the program's 4th year in Helsinki, Finland - the Unconference 'Education Engineering Days' in 2013 (Yarmanova, 2013). We've gathered similar flexible independent up-to-date programs from Denmark (Kaos Pilots), Finland (Aalto Design Factory, Otava Opisto Coop), Germany (Public School Berlin), France (CRI - Center for Research and Interdisciplinarity), Netherlands (THNK, Fablab Amersfoort), Sweden (HyperIsland, YIP), Estonia (Garage48), US (the Green Program), UK (BarnCamp), Strelka Insitute and the European University in St. Petersburg Science and Technology Studies Center (Russia), Spain Basque Country (ikasHUB) with the hosting partner of Pixelache Helsinki - a Finnish transdisciplinary platform for art, design, research and activism, which had an annual festival since 2002 promoting electronic arts & subcultures, open-source culture and software, circuit-bending & hacker aesthetics. Pixelache Festival, and its informal education programme 'Pixelversity' from 2010 onwards, was discovered by students 'unguided' field trip to Finland in the program second's year. The UnConference, co-produced with Pixelversity coordinator Andrew Gryf Paterson, was co-sponsored by a NORDEN's grant. (Paterson 2012, 2016). Key event team members Lena Yarmanova and Alyona Markovich 2 years later founded a national program 'Teach for Russia' to place top young graduates in rural schools as teachers for 2 years of local work.

*Home-free / Flying Program. Living in a Schedule.*

As the program was a cross-university one and visiting the spots that we researched was an organic part of the approach we didn't have any permanent base, except online with Google documents and mailing list. As a backup for the locations, we have booked rooms in two universities and one corporation (as meetings started at about 6 pm it was not a problem) with all the other meetings hosted by organizations we research and have experts. We also use city business incubator facilities, creative spaces, and even experts' homes. We deal with a 3-4 weeks meeting planning horizon with backup topics and meetings that curators can cover by themselves.

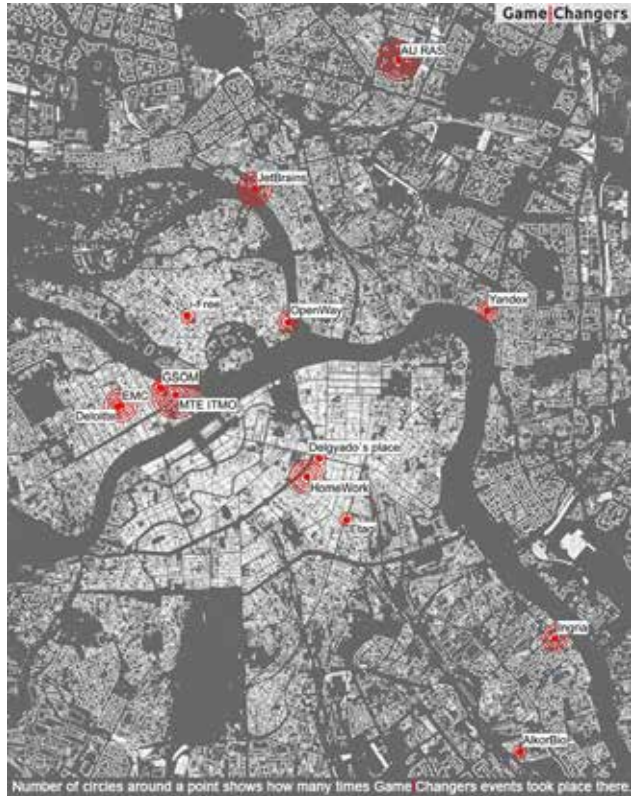


Figure 4: Locations that hosted GameChangers Program's events in 2011-2012 in St. Petersburg, Russia.

## *Graduate Projects*

Most of the projects were student educational programs/courses/clubs/events - as it was a lot of their curiosity and courage to try ad-hoc education and research approaches completely by themselves. One of the first year's graduate projects (city-wide students the 'Iron Entrepreneur Game' league) helped to fundraise the first donation for the next year's run.. Another student inspired by our ad-hoc approach created a STEM club for school kids, together they made and launched a probe into the stratosphere. Two years later this student curated the Fab lab track and co-located conference and a workshop with on-side part.

The 'Data Mining Track' was created by two students cooperation who hadn't worked with big data before. In the end, they get into this field within their professional paths and for the second run of the track they've got corporate funding for it.

The 'Design Track' course was also organized twice by a student who joined the Game|Changers program in the same year as he started the university's IT-management bachelor program. As a result of organizing his own course and meanwhile being its student he acquired the knowledge and skills he wanted to get lead designer positions, thus he has quit his bachelor's studies next year.

Research-based graduate projects can be illustrated with research work upon DELL/EMC request to identify EMC's systems for the data centre's potential for the fast-growing bioinformatics-related data.

## *Key Numbers and Metrics*

In the first year of 'beta-version', we limited the number of students to 8. For the next runs, we admitted 20 students per season at the main track and during the key 8 months we had 40 classes/workshops with 128 hours in total with 45 experts in total and 10 open (co-located) events with 400 participants in a total of 19 locations.

The annual budget of the whole program was about 65k euros. Participation is free for students. No renting and facilities costs (premises provided by companies and universities). No payments to experts, operated by students with temporary contracts and bonuses for the most boring jobs (reports writing, grading system administration). Funding

from international IT companies (as donations) and grants from development organizations (Russia, US, Scandic).

### *Curator Team*

The team used to be: two co-curators (academia and industry) both part-time, back office done by a mother of many children, and two assistants for admission campaigns. With only one position of the main curator as a full-time contributor total headcount was about 2.5. After the two successful years of the program the team, alumni and participants started to do research consulting services because of the growing network and reputation in the industry. These projects were related to FabLabs, organizational design, geoinformatics, and intern sourcing.

### *What Continues Nowadays*

The first Nêrdcamp – a weekend-long mix of conferences, sports and parties was organized in 2011 as a Game|Changers graduate project to connect students with experts - 40 participants in total. This informal and cosy in-the-woods format inspired our experts and friends from Moscow to make their informal camps with similar values and interdisciplinary topics. Since 2022 these camps' locations moved to Montenegro with a new name Amp.camp.

One of the second-year graduate projects was the starting up of an international conference on Artificial Intelligence and Natural Language Processing - AINL in 2012 (before it became mainstream). It was a corporate partner request with a dedicated budget. In 2023 AINL was done in hybrid with the offline part in Armenia.

Ivan But – a 2011 alumni and the head curator of the 2012-2013 season made a podcast series with 10 Game|Changers participants in 2023. It helped to update the alumni community that spread across Europe and the US.

### *From Engineering Perspective and Fractal Organization to Nature Metaphors*

After the first three years of running the program, we came up with a metaphor that education and research processes have to be not only designed, but it's also an area of engineering - the same story as with the invention of computers – the discipline of Software Engineering appeared. Nowadays, as educational experiences and research processes need to become more advanced in their processes and structures, and making it up and running as well as maintaining, monitoring, and fixing - thus Education Engineering could be not just a metaphor but actually a discipline. That is why the gathering in Helsinki was titled - 'Education Engineering Days'.

A couple of years later the author while working as a researcher-in-residence on organizational design realized that the way Game|Changers's participants implemented their own ad-hoc education&research programs indicates that the method and tools allow creating and running a 'fractal organization' (Bhattacharya, 2022), (Bockelbrink, n.d.). New research&education projects initiated by students replicated (in more or less detail) the framework they were immersed in but with autonomy and access to the main informal network of contacts and city-wide reputation.

With this understanding, later experiences in forest environments, and discovering the perspective of learning ecosystems (Spencer-Keyse, 2020) the author came to the conclusion that the processes within Ad-hoc Education&Research instances are complex, vital, flexible, and more human-and-context-oriented than pre-defined schemes, so it's more precise to see the method and tools through nature-based metaphors. Instead of engineering the environments for an agile and flexible research, education, and projects incubation the community that was growing itself was growing or, actually, gardening the city-wide learning ecosystem.

### *From Steady Structures to 'Gardening' Ad-hoc in Between*

Four years of the Game|Changers Program's run we have 'gardened' a network of personal and institutional connections which

started to act as a learning ecosystem. From the well-organized worlds of high-tech business and academia, we weaved the program utilizing their facilities and involving their candidate base (students), experts and brands, synchronizing the program's graduate projects with university graduate theses. In the meantime, we created our own dynamic flexible programs using field trips, ad-hoc negotiable homework, quests, and graduate projects,

We provided no diploma, but the network; asked for no participation fee, but shared administrative work, involved alumni, and provoked informal events. The focus was on:

- not teaching, but creating environments that allow self, group, and institutional learning
- not to change, but to create in-between
- filling the gaps where academia and business are not flexible enough

### **Further 'Ad-hoc Aducation&Research' appliances: Ecology/Multicrisis, post-disciplinary and online appliance**

Multicrisis itself provides a lot of inputs for Challenge Based Learning including its ecological and climate dimensions (Portuguez Castro 2020). Meantime, the mainstream agenda in research and even more in education is still focused on sustainability from the business as usual, consumeristic lifestyles, techno-optimism, and anthropocentric perspectives. Alternatives that have their roots in indigenous people's knowledge, grassroots ecological intentional communities like ecovillages, and post-anthropocentric perspectives are most often still marginal and out of public attention, budgets, and political support.

In such a context, Ad-hoc Education&Research formats and appropriate learning environments are needed more than ever. They have the potential to stimulate the incubation of knowledge from subaltern and marginalized domains by easy-to-start low-budget research and

education, and as some partial outputs, results are created to grow and to garden them in between well-established institutions. E.g. knowledge gathered for decades in the Global Ecovillage Network has been delivered via Gaia Education since 2005 in 55 countries but still has very little cooperation with schools and universities.

After independent (or interdependent) research for alternatives to the mainstream anthropocentric agenda and consumeristic lifestyle, the author came up with **the Symbiocenic Environments Framework** (Dmitriev 2023) - which outlines the next generation of nature reserves and requires long-term cooperation between universities, ecovillages and similar grass-roots ecological and regenerative initiatives, nature protected areas like biosphere reserves, and indigenous people groups. Such eco-socio-research learning ecosystems could eventually support the resilience (including climate change adaptation) and regeneration of the bioregions where they were established and become laboratories to research alternative social models and lifestyles, in some cases, they could serve as art and science residencies and safe spaces for rehabs.

In indigenous people's places that are in the scope of Symbiocenic environments local subaltern knowledge could be accessed directly not only by scientists but all the variety of people involved, which leads both to open and citizen science. Another benefit is that as described in (Luiselli 2023) e.g. African knowledge and traditions could pave the way for defining new problem-solving scenarios as well as pointing out scientific theories that are new and not well accepted e.g. the Biotic Pump (Makarieva 2007).

At the SHAKIN's conference Eva Milovanović (one of the founders of the Serbian ecological NGO "Zelena doba"), Igor Polsky (founder of 'School-Garden' in Montenegro), and the author guided a 'walkshop' 'Ecovillages as Living Labs for Academia and Artists to Pave the Road to Symbiocenic Collaborations' (Dragičević Šešić M. 2023 p. 51) which was inspired by 'Towards Symbiocene'/'Ka Simbiocenu' series made in Serbia by Cultural Center of Belgrade, platform 'Plavo i Zeleno', and the Forest University, Fruška Gora (Vuković 2023).

Symbiocene as a concept was developed by eco-philosopher Glenn A. Albrecht (Albrecht 2016). He proposes a "complete change of the biophysical and emotional foundations of society from the ecocide to the symbiotic, from the destructive to the nurturing". In "Generation



Symbioscene” (Albrecht 2019) particular places as “unique sites of bio-cultural energy and creativity” are mentioned, while on the social layer “the diversity of human culture in the Symbiocene will be a new form of tribalism. The new tribalism will not exemplify xenophobia, but an emergent hybrid humanity that celebrates and respects diversity and has new intellectual and emotional attributes.”

To start ‘preparing the soil’ for the Symbiocenic environments framework the author initiated a series of online workshops with individual and group work between them dedicated to ‘University Relations Strategies and Tactics for Grass Roots Ecological Initiatives in the Balkan Region’. This series is planned for the end of 2023 and the beginning of 2024 based on Ad-hoc Education&Research tools with the goal of stimulating an appropriate learning ecosystem in the region. As COVID-19 times made online gatherings of any form a norm, the author supposes that most of the previous ‘GameChangers’ program offline experience with some adaptations could be applied in blended/hybrid settings.

Another outcome that the Game|Changers team get from running the program is that to create more flexible, agile, challenge-based and, post-disciplinary learning environments there is a need for a more people-based and oriented approach than universities can provide. Thus in the article ‘Tutors and Colliders: New Ontology for Education’ (Dmitriev 2013) it was coined the concept of a **‘tutority’** as a post-disciplinary alternative to university where young curious talents have direct connections with those practitioners whose work/life balance includes mashups of science, art, engineering, entrepreneurship, activism, and politics who work on the intersections of a variety of disciplines and contexts. However, the author stresses that Ad-hoc Education&Research is not to replace but to be a complementary part between existing institutions and cooperation with universities, especially when they reimagine themselves and update their principles and organisational design for the fast-changing context of the XXI-century (Schramer 2019).

## Conclusion

After a decade, alumni's professional paths prove the value of the Game|Changers program, the Ad-hoc Education and Research approach and a part of the created learning ecosystem continues its evolution internationally and particularly in the Balkan region. The author claims that approaches developed for this ecosystem within a high-tech business environment could be applied to decolonizing other areas where knowledge and skills are created and need to be transferred and constantly updated (art, architecture, ecology, healthcare, food production, tourism, etc) while using universities and other formal institutions as bases for new learning environments, communities and organizations to grow up on. Especially these approaches are needed to address challenges connected to multicrisis and the author has initiated a learning ecosystem towards a symbiocenic framework that could help to find out which theories and actions could make sense within the local and global contexts and to apply it in practice.

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as by participating in it the author made step-by-step contributions that in the end resulted in this text.

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# V

**Beyond Western rationality:  
altering & widening  
knowledge**



# CORPOREAL KNOWLEDGE IN OR AGAINST WESTERN BODY-MIND DUALISMS

SONIA NIKITIN

This chapter reflects on processes that challenge dualist ontology based on a separation of body/mind and individual/collective, as well as the dominant Western ontology of the body. These processes are particularly salient in shared creation practices in contemporary dance<sup>1</sup>. These practices involve differently skilled and bodied dancers, so-called amateurs and professional dancers, who create choreographic work collectively with specific attention to participation in decision-making and knowledge-sharing. In this environment, I investigate the possibility of dance methods that rely on kinesthetic awareness and empathy to develop and promote experiential, corporeal knowledge, often invisibilized or suppressed in standard, dominant Western pedagogical or collaborative frameworks.

The findings presented in this chapter draw from conceptual and empirical research in my doctoral work and prior experiences in contemporary dance environments, mainly in France, Germany and Canada. Being trained as a professional dancer and cultural manager, I rely on personal and professional relationships for field research, my own bodily experiences and connection to specific spaces and location. Therefore, action-research and research-creation methods such as participatory observation or observative participation, (informal and formal) interviews and bodily experimentation are part of the empirical research that leads to the following observations.

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1 I refer to contemporary dance as a structured aesthetic discipline rather than the dance forms of today, which could include other aesthetics.



I invite the reader to explore practices that, however short or small, bring attention to a “certain kind of knowledge based on corporeality, which includes experiences, sensations, feelings, and knowledge of and from the body.” (Bergonzoni 2022: 27) They allow for a reflection on the hierarchies established between body-mind and individual-collective through a bodily experience of the relationality and complementarity between the two parts of each binary. Therefore, it is also an attempt to look for “the nondominant West that exist within the West” (Escobar 2020: 114), in this case in contemporary dance environments that are based on complex forms of proximity with and resistance to so-called modernity.

### **Acquiring knowledge about one’s “lived body”**

In Western science (especially biology, medicine, and so-called natural sciences), as well as bodily practices, the body is most commonly defined as an instrument, object or property with a universal substance or reality: Think about the male skeleton used as a universal example in biology class, the BMI as a scale for a healthy body, the standardized movements taught to achieve “better” results in sports, etc.

Edmund Husserl, an Austrian philosopher, made a distinction between the “material body” and the “lived or felt body”. In German, these are defined by two different words: *Körper*, the material body as a biologically constructed object that possesses sensation and kinesthetic abilities and *Leib*, the body as it is sensed and lived by the subject (Husserl 1989). When connecting this reflection to dance, Sondra Horton Fraleigh, dance researcher, holds that

“lived-body theory provides a means toward overcoming dualistic concepts of dance, which regard the body as an instrument, movement as the medium, and mind or soul as the mover or motivational source for dance. Lived-body concepts hold that the body is lived as a body-of-action. Movement cannot be considered as medium apart from an understanding that movement is a body, not just something that the body accomplishes instrumentally as it is moved by some distinct, inner, and separable agency.” (Horton Fraleigh 1987:13)

Contemporary dance practice is based on a particular attention to this lived body. It has developed out of a vision that puts the body in movement as the subject, object and tool of its own knowledge, which would allow for a “new” perception and attention to the world, and therefore a “new” way to sense and create, through bringing out the body’s “imaginary world” and make it legible (Louppe 1997: 13). Different exercises and practices emerged out of this vision and were first developed in the professional field.

In my field research, I observe that shared creation projects are spaces in which leading artists, who hold knowledge about these exercises and practices, focus on the development of a kinesthetic mode of attention (Ehrenberg 2015:44) or kinesthetic awareness, instead of teaching certain movement forms to so-called amateur dancers. Through different exercises, leading artists invite participants to explore their body and movement, with a particular focus on the perception and sensation of their own bodies. They often use particular images of the “material” body to lead these exercises and initiate the development of kinesthetic awareness, using wording like for example:

“Feel your skin on or from the inside and your breath that passes behind your heart.”

“Try to make it conscious when and what [bones and muscle] you are bending.”

“Focus on the spine, or visualize it. Get an awareness of it.”

“Concentrate on the parts of your body that touch the floor.”

Consciousness is then marked as an activity, through a perceptual attention to felt body movement based on a supposed common knowledge of the “material body” structure. Even though the development of this heightened sense of kinesthesia is based on certain epistemologies of the “material” body, the focus is not on learning or teaching a specific normative bodily structure or posture. For Richard Schustermann, professor of philosophy, the practice of “soma-aesthetic attention” helps to improve proprioceptive awareness, in order to clarify and complete the image of the shape, volume, density and alignment of our own body (my translation, Schustermann 2007: 79). Knowledge on the lived body is developed through a regular practice of shifting attention to bodily

perception and movement. In the projects I observed, different classes or workshops I attended and discussions I had with artists, contemporary dance is rejecting the idea of one universal body structure and thus a universal way of feeling, sensing, and perceiving the body. For Isabelle Ginot, a researcher in dance and somatic practices, “somatics doxa does not pretend to restore a so-called natural or original body but rather [contributes] to the reorganization of the multiplicity and heterogeneity of that which we call the body.” (Ginot 2010: 25) Clearly, it stands in contrast to the idea of the universal material body I introduced at the beginning of this chapter.

Also, cognitive processes that would refer to the mind, are directly connected to lived, immediate experience of bodily sensations. Kinesesthetic awareness is not considered as either “on” or “off”; it is marked as a threshold phenomenon, as it occurs where the endless stream of imperceptible perceptions turns into conscious apperception. There is no objective of controlling bodily sensation or movement through cognitive awareness, but rather to develop ways of attending to the plural and diverse possibilities of experiencing these sensations.

In contemporary dance practices, this is then expanded to experience different layers of surrounding space, through what is called focal gaze and peripheral view. It is the ability to shift between narrow and wide views, from an up-close sensation to perceptions of the wider world, in order to be able to pay attention to details of the environment or a global perception of what happens around us. Different exercises are used to develop this ability in dance groups: focusing on one very specific point of the room and approaching it moving through space; imagining to follow a bird flock through space; trying to see what is happening on both sides while looking in front; etc.

*You can try the following short experience at home to sense the idea of kinesthetic awareness:*

*Close your eyes and try to focus on your sitting bones – how are they touching the chair? Can you feel the weight they carry? How do you give this weight to the chair? How is the chair touching you?*

*Moving away from your own body, can you now, without opening your eyes, imagine or feel what is below you? What is on your right or your left? Above you?*

*As a last experiment, put both of your hands closely in front of your face. Open your eyes inside of your hands and look at them (normally everything should be almost dark). Now start to move your hands slowly away from your face, but always in front of your eyes. Focusing on your hands, feel how the environment is coming back, what you can see, what is blurry. When do you feel the need to shift your view/gaze away from the focus on your hands?*<sup>2</sup>

This awareness of the environment, of space, of other humans and non-humans, is often referred to as “listening” in contemporary dance practice. This act of “listening” is not just limited to acoustics: as Gabriele Brandstetter, German dance and theatre researcher, explains, “it is a syn-aesthetic network of experiences of the body, of its internal and external states at rest and in movement.” (Brandstetter 2013: 164) It is an action and an event at the same time (hearing and listening, in German: *zuhören, hören auf, horchen und lauschen*, in French: *écouter, entendre*), “thus implying the reference to the self as well as the reference to the other and to the space.” (Brandstetter 2013: 165)

These processes of awareness shifting and listening are central in (mostly professional and shared creation) dance practices and facilitate developing knowledge out of an embodied and situated listening to what is presently there, always in relation and movement, to different layers of perception and thus to our own habits in experiencing our own body and our environment. I would argue that this is at the opposite of dominant knowledge production in the West, which is based on objectivity, universality and transferability.

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2 These questions are developed out of repeated experiences I had in contemporary dance workshops: focusing on specific body parts, grounding our body into the support that is the floor, and opening our attention to our environment are often laid out as a base for engaging in the practice.

The experience was proposed to participants of the conference “In from the margins” at the University of Arts in Belgrade in June 2023. You can access the video recording on Youtube (In from the margins conference, June 27<sup>th</sup>, 06:10:00), but I recommend only relying on these images to clarify instructions; experiencing it in the body is the only way to grasp what is outlined in this chapter.

## Feeling-knowing the other(s)

As a next step, practices of kinesthetic awareness and listening are interesting to observe in collective frameworks, here collective, improvised dance practices: how can one be aware and listen to the others while also being conscious of their own movement, body sensation and position in space?

In my field research, it appears that these processes of collective listening are difficult to articulate by leading artists and/or dancers. Primarily used to create choreographic parts in absolute unison, verbal illustrations such as: “so that you get a feeling for each other” / “until you feel each other” / “being together means feeling each other” often do not lead to the desired result. Bodily exercises are then proposed to develop this collective “feeling-of-each-other”. One example is walking in one horizontal line in the same rhythm, stopping and starting again, without deciding beforehand or communicating verbally. Another exercise that I have observed and experienced several times is walking throughout a room in different directions, with different trajectories and trying to stop all together, then start again with the same speed. In this specific example, judgement can happen easily: do I walk too fast/too slow? How can I connect to the others? Should I look at them, trying to develop some kind of strategy or signal to accomplish the task? Rather than evaluating which groups succeed to stop and start together exactly at the same time, it seems more interesting to me to observe how the attention of the whole group expands, developing a kind of hypersensibility to the others’ way of walking and moving. From there, a bodily negotiation develops. In my own body, I observe a widening of my gaze, straightening of my back and accentuating the rhythm of my walk; I also try to see and feel all others in the room with me instead of being focused primarily on my own trajectory in space. In some groups, it can happen that all dancers collectively produce and thus implicitly agree on a specific rhythm or time of walking and holding; in some workshops or projects, the leading artist then asks to avoid creating a pattern to continuously sustain the need for immediate attention.

*To experience this kind of process, you can try the following exercise in a group<sup>3</sup>: Sit at a certain distance from each other, e.g. on chairs around a table, and close your eyes. Then, without any kind of audible signal, try to stand up together at the same time, at the same speed. Try to decide it together. Once you are standing, try to sit down again all together.*

*You can do the same thing with your eyes open and ask the following questions: What can you observe? Was it easier with open eyes, because you could “follow” the ones in front? Is it then still a collective decision in an act of active kinesthetic awareness and listening?*

These basic practices of “listening” are then supposed to be activated in more complex movement and space shapes and structures. Especially in shared creation projects that are not organized around one choreographer who would decide on the choreography alone, but around collective production, sharing and structuring of movement, the relation between dancers is essential. To this end, most projects work with individual and collective improvisation.

In one group I observed<sup>4</sup>, the leading artists proposed for example to experiment with the feeling of getting pricked on different parts of the body. This exploration was first conducted in pairs, one person pricking the other with one finger, the other one reacting to this through movement. In a second step, one person created an improvised dance based on the memory of the sensations of the first exploration and the group formed a big circle around her/him. They were then asked to collectively react to the solo dancer in the centre. Very diverse situations occurred, from the people in the circle being almost still or engaging in very small movement or stepping into the space of the person in the centre with movements oriented towards him/her. In these processes, how do dancers sense, perceive, respond to the movements of the group?

Kinesthetic empathy, as a permanent active process linked to kinesthetic stimulation, enables one person to feel or experience the

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3 This exercise has also been experienced in the “In from the margins” conference. You can find the video recording on YouTube (In from the margins conference, June 27<sup>th</sup>, 06:14:45), but I would recommend trying it rather than only watching the recording.

4 « Ateliers Sorcières » led by the Compagnie ACTE in Lyon (FR) from March 2022 to July 2024

movement of another. Based on the German term “Einfühlung” (which Robert Vischer first used in 1873), this process relies on the motor (or perceptive) memory of past experiences and imagination to perceive the motor intention of others and to experience it kinaesthetically (Leroy 2021: 28-29, my translation). This projection would be a way of overcoming the essential alterity of the world that gives us a sense of familiarity with what surrounds us, acting as a mode of knowing.

How could this concept be enlarged to collective processes? Can this process only happen between two subjects, with one who feels and the other who feels for them? Through observation and experience of collective improvisation, I think that this concept should and could be developed towards a collective kinesthetic empathy marked by continuous solidary incorporation and intra-action. This means that in observed practices of collective improvisation, including the beforementioned exercises for collective “listening”, individuals cannot be analyzed as preexisting their interactions. They “emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating” (Barad 2007: preface). In this regard, it is interesting to observe how all the felt bodies involved become one “higher-level entity” (Landweer 2013: 142) through joint engagement in a task or theme. According to Landweer (who bases her argument on Schmitz’s research on this concept), this process of solidary incorporation would lack dominance and subjection in this joint concentration and is only possible through the experience of corporeal interaction between co-present individuals. This could mean that the collective bodily practices that aim at developing listening in shared creation practices could be a non-hierarchical way of co-producing knowledge about the own lived body, the other present bodies and the environment.

## Conclusion

How can we describe ways of knowing-doing-being, with no separation among these, that enable us to go beyond the traditional Western conception of ourselves as an isolated and acosmic thinking instance?

In the proposed experiences (in *italic*), we cannot completely define who or what made us stand up/sit down, how our bodies engage with

each other, with the space around us, the gravity and material below our feet and so on. Linked to examples of field research, it becomes clear that the kind of perceiving developed through those somatic and bodily practices and thus acquiring knowledge about the self, the other, the situation, the environment, and the real can't be easily explained and/or defined by dualist categories such as active-passive, body-mind, sensing-thinking, me-them, knowledge-practice. As Mia Perry, Professor of Arts and Literacies in Education, points out: "a body/mind, Cartesian dualism still reigns [in educational models], not always because of a concerted belief in the distinctions between mind and body, but rather because of the limitations of our literacies to move and act beyond this." (Perry 2023: 118). Kinesthetic awareness, "listening" and collective kinesthetic empathy could and should be a basis of those body literacies to enable opening up to non-dualist, or at least non-hierarchical, conceptions in knowledge production and transmission environments.

I propose that the mentioned practices challenge dominant ideas (especially in Western education) of what knowledge is, how knowledge is developed and which kind of knowledge is important (because it would be productive, objective, transferable). By disrupting the rigid and hierarchical dualisms of body-mind and individual-collective, they encourage situated and experiential ways of knowing, inextricably linked to immediate, ever-changing experiences of the "real". As Arturo Escobar explains, "we base our conventional notions of what is real on a belief that we interact with the world as individuals separate from the world; the world seems external, outside of us, a predictable context with we move about freely" in Western societies (Escobar 2020: 2). Through the engagement in regular practices that focus on plural ways of perceiving ourselves and our environment in continuous relation, we might come closer to "conceptualiz[ing] reality as composed of networks, assemblages, and meshworked socionatural complexes in which the human and the nonhuman are implicated with each other in complicated and ever-changing ways, instead of well-defined and more or less permanent structures" (Escobar 2020: 24).



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# TACIT KNOWLEDGE AND THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF ARTISTIC DOCTORAL PROJECTS

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## Introduction

*In an economy where the only certainty is uncertainty,  
the one sure source of lasting competitive advantage is knowledge.*

Ikujiro Nonaka

The concept of tacit (silent, implicit) knowledge, first introduced by the philosopher Michael Polanyi in the middle of the 20th century, and later refined by scientists like Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi, is primarily associated with organisational sciences. Tacit knowledge is unspoken, experiential and deep-rooted knowledge that often escapes formal documentation, even though it is often a key driver of innovation and success in organisations. For fine art, tacit knowledge is essential. The world of fine arts has always been a storehouse of tacit knowledge that was traditionally passed down through apprenticeship and studio interaction. This review article explores the latent potential for synergy between the organisational sciences, cultural management and art education. The central goal of this paper is to examine the feasibility of transferring selected models of “harvesting” tacit knowledge from the domain of organisational sciences to the field of higher art education. This could have the potential to enrich knowledge transfer processes and encourage innovation. As we navigate this interdisciplinary terrain, we delve into the theoretical foundations of tacit knowledge and its role both in the organisational context and in the creative realm of fine

art. We examine the principles of knowledge management, collaborative learning, and innovation that underpin the field of organisational science. We consider how they can be adapted to education in the field of fine arts. Although it exists in the official academic framework, it is not given importance, even though it is fundamental to the artistic processes.

In this article, we will attempt to identify the intersection point between visual arts, cultural management, and organisational sciences where the concept of tacit knowledge first emerged. Within the academic world, tacit knowledge is considered as subaltern knowledge. Even though it exists within the official academic framework, it is not given importance, despite being fundamental to artistic processes.

When referring to subaltern knowledge, this concept primarily pertains to the reservoir of epistemological and cultural insights stemming from disenfranchised and subordinate groups within society, which are suppressed, devalued, or neglected by dominant discourses (Chakravorty Spivak, 2010). It represents a counter-narrative to hegemonic forms of knowledge and offers an alternative perspective on history, identity, and socio-political dynamics, primarily in postcolonial and other marginalised contexts. The term “subaltern” is derived from the Marxist theory of Antonio Gramsci and has been reappropriated in postcolonial studies to emphasise the activities and perspectives of historically subjugated groups (Gramsci, 1976-78).

Regarding the transfer of knowledge within societies, knowledge transfer is systematically organised from higher social strata (those in power—who consequently codify social norms and knowledge) to lower ones—who produce knowledge but exclusively use it within their own communities (such as Roma communities, LGBT communities, Vlach ethnic groups, rural populations at a local level, etc.). There is neither opportunity nor possibility for this knowledge to be “exchanged” because the knowledge of the “excluded” and subaltern is not even considered knowledge.

The primary goal of this work is to highlight the existence and immense potential of tacit knowledge in the field of visual arts and then propose ways for its articulation and codification. Art is inherently not considered subaltern in relation to science, but the perception of hierarchy between art and science is shaped by historical, cultural, and

social factors. This perceived hierarchy can lead to the idea that art is subaltern in relation to science in some contexts.

In that sense, fine art academies often generate knowledge, but they themselves are not aware of it—because that knowledge gets codified in the scientific university, at the Faculty of Philosophy. In Serbia, there isn't even an independent research institute specifically dedicated to this (The Institute for Literature and Art primarily focuses on literature). One of the aims of this work is to highlight the necessity of codifying tacit knowledge because until that happens, even those who possess it will not adequately appreciate it.

The next step involves familiarising ourselves with basic models of “distillation,” conversion, transfer, and knowledge creation in the field of organisational sciences (Nonaka and Takeuchi), which could be applied in the field of visual arts.

We investigate how visual artists write about their artistic methods in their artistic doctoral theses and to what extent they directly or indirectly speak about their own tacit knowledge. Primarily, we use a desk research method and an electronic repository of doctoral theses from the University of Arts in Belgrade. For the purposes of this paper, our focus is on artistic doctoral projects from the Faculty of Fine Arts (from 2014 to the present). The hypothesis is that, in addition to the theme addressed by each artistic doctoral project, in each of them, particularly in the methodology segment, there are parts of the text that speak about a personal method, a very specific and unique approach that each artist has when creating an artwork.

We aim to initially map the current state and answer the question of whether artistic doctorates have epistemological potential insofar as they can serve as valuable material for a more detailed study of tacit knowledge in visual arts. As we delve deeper into this research, we will navigate a dynamic terrain where artistic creativity meets the structured domain of management and organisational theory while maintaining a strong focus on the transformative power of knowledge in this specific domain.

Moreover, we will explore real-world examples and case studies where aspects of organisational scientific models have already been successfully integrated into the pedagogy of fine arts or artistic practice. We examine how principles, models, and practices derived from

organisational sciences could potentially enrich the field of knowledge transfer in the realm of visual arts.

## **Epistemological theories and the notion of tacit knowledge**

Epistemological theories on knowledge transfer investigate the processes and mechanisms through which knowledge is transmitted, shared, and acquired. Several prominent theories and models delve into this subject, each offering a different perspective on how knowledge is passed on.

The Transfer Model (Heintz, 2018) represents the simplest model of knowledge transfer, viewing knowledge as an object that can be transmitted from sender to receiver. It presupposes a one-way flow of information from the knower to the learner.

Social constructivism (Turner, 1991), influenced by theorists like Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, emphasises the social and interactive nature of knowledge transfer (De Vries, 1997) and suggests that individuals actively construct knowledge through interaction with others and their environment (Yilmaz, 2008).

“Cognitive Apprenticeship” (Wilson, 1997), developed by Allan Collins and John Seely Brown, assumes that knowledge transfer is best achieved through mentorship and apprenticeship-like relationships (Schiff, 2010), involving the transmission not only of explicit knowledge but also of tacit and experiential aspects of expertise (Brown, 1989).

In organisational theory, various models and frameworks for knowledge transfer within enterprises exist (Schmidt, 2017). They often involve creating knowledge repositories, mentorship programmes, and so-called “communities of practice” (CoP) to facilitate the exchange of expertise among employees. The theory of Communities of Practice (CoP) from organisational sciences can be effectively applied in university-level art education to enhance knowledge performance and cultivate a collaborative and supportive learning environment.

Aristotle’s concept of practical judgement or wisdom (phronesis) is considered by some authors (McKeon, 2001) as the precursor to the

concept of tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is defined as knowledge that manifests in successful individual or organisational practice but cannot be fully or adequately articulated (verbalised, objectified, formalised, projected) either by the possessor or by the observer analysing it.

Tacit knowledge is knowledge the actor knows they possess (how to catch a ball, tie a knot, mark a line), but which cannot be described in terms other than through their own (skillful) execution. It is mainly acquired through experience, practice, and observation. It is difficult to articulate or convey to others because it is deeply rooted in individual experience, intuition, and personal understanding. Such knowledge is intrinsic to the arts. In the academic world, tacit knowledge is considered subaltern knowledge. It exists within the official academic framework, but it is not particularly emphasised, although it is fundamental to artistic processes.

Tacit knowledge consists partly of technical skills – a type of informal expertise encompassed by the term “know-how.” Simultaneously, tacit knowledge has an essential cognitive dimension, comprising mental models, beliefs, and perspectives so deeply ingrained that they are taken for granted and therefore not easily articulated. Tacit knowledge is highly personal, difficult to formalise, and consequently challenging to transfer to others. It is deeply rooted in an individual’s actions and commitment to specific contexts—craft or profession, specific technology or product market, or the activities of a workgroup or team. The result of the interaction between explicit and tacit knowledge is - new knowledge.

Tacit knowledge in the artistic creative process (Zembylas et al, 2017) has been studied by art sociologists and epistemologists Tasos Zembylas and Martin Niederauer, primarily focusing on the field of musical arts (Zembylas et al, 2017), which will be discussed in more detail in a separate chapter. Numerous scientists have explored the concept of tacit knowledge.

Michael Polanyi (1891-1976) may be the most influential scientist concerning the concept of tacit knowledge. His book “The Tacit Dimension” (Polanyi, 1966) is considered a seminal work in this field. According to his perspective, tacit knowledge is challenging to explicitly articulate because it is deeply rooted in personal experience and expertise.

Dorothy Leonard and Walter Swap define tacit knowledge as “personal knowledge and intuitive understanding possessed by individuals”

(Leonard et al, 2004). They emphasise its development through experience, often residing in an individual's mind, and being challenging to convey through formal documentation.

John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid highlight the social and situated nature of tacit knowledge. They describe it as “a type of knowledge that is difficult to transfer to another person by writing or verbalising.” They argue that it is closely tied to the context in which it is acquired.

Georg von Krogh and Johan Roos describe tacit knowledge as “know-how” (Nonaka et al, 2009). They emphasise it as a type of knowledge deeply embedded in an individual's actions and skills (von Krogh et al, 1994). A significant figure in the field of architecture and education, Donald Schön, wrote about “reflection-in-action” and the role of tacit knowledge in professional expertise (Schön, 1984). His work, including “The Reflective Practitioner” (1983), explores how professionals make decisions and solve problems based on their tacit knowledge.

Philosopher Gilbert Ryle introduced the distinction between “knowing how” and “knowing what” in his book “The Concept of Mind” (Ryle, 1949). This difference is closely associated with the concept of tacit knowledge and has influenced subsequent discussions on this topic (Scott, 1971).

Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi introduced the concept of tacit knowledge into the context of creating organisational knowledge, making a significant contribution to the field of knowledge management (Nonaka et al, 2009). They describe it as personal, contextually specific knowledge that is difficult to formalise or transfer, often involving personal insights, intuition, and practical skills. In their book “The Knowledge-Creating Company” (Nonaka et al, 1995), they introduced the concept of “conversion of tacit knowledge,” which had a significant impact on the field of knowledge management.

## **The SECI model of knowledge conversion and the possibility of application in fine arts**

Tacit knowledge partly consists of technical skills—a type of informal knowledge that is challenging to define and encompassed by

the term “know-how.” Craftsmen develop a wealth of expertise in their fingers after years of experience. However, they are often unable to articulate the scientific or technical principles behind what they know. For this reason, Nonaka and Takeuchi developed a model known as the SECI model (Socialization, Externalization, Combination, Internalization) to explain the processes of converting tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge and vice versa (Leonardi et al, 2008). Some models from the organisational sciences field offer valuable insights that could be implemented in the field of visual arts to facilitate the transfer of tacit knowledge (Ray, 2009).

The SECI model suggests that knowledge creation is a dynamic and iterative process involving a continuous flow between tacit and explicit knowledge. It emphasises the importance of social interactions, reflective thinking, and structured knowledge management in facilitating this process within organisations.

The “Nonaka-Takeuchi knowledge spiral” is a conceptual framework particularly associated with their work on knowledge management and the conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. The knowledge spiral consists of four ways of knowledge conversion, presented as a continuous, cyclical process.

- **Socialization** - Conversion of tacit knowledge into tacit knowledge
- **Externalization** - Conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge
- **Combination**: In the combination phase, new explicit knowledge is created by organising and synthesising existing explicit knowledge. This includes taking parts of documented information and recombining them to create new knowledge.
- **Internalisation**: In the final phase, individuals internalise explicit knowledge to make it tacit again.

Education in the field of visual arts has long been characterised by reliance on the transmission of tacit knowledge from experienced artists and mentors to students through apprenticeships, studio practices, and critiques. However, in an increasingly digital and interconnected world, there is a growing need to bridge the gap between traditional pedagogical approaches and contemporary means of knowledge exchange.



Based on the assumption that artistic knowledge is inherently experiential and tacit in nature, identifying potential new models to enhance pedagogical practice and knowledge creation in higher education institutions could make a significant contribution to the field of visual arts. Using the SECI model, a new framework for this purpose could emerge.

Here is how the SECI model might be viewed from the field of fine arts:

- **Socialisation:** Emphasis is placed on fostering a dynamic and collaborative learning environment where students engage in meaningful dialogues, mutual exchanges, and mentor relationships. This phase promotes the exchange of tacit knowledge, encouraging students to observe, mimic, and learn from their peers and professors.
- **Externalization:** Students are encouraged to externalise their artistic experiences and insights through reflective practices, keeping work journals, and critiques. This approach is practised in the New Media Department of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade in the form of so-called “artwork defences” where students present and argue their conceptualised artistic works with professors and among themselves before their execution.
- **Combination:** The organisation of explicit knowledge, including the historical and theoretical aspects of fine arts, is integrated into the curriculum. Articulated knowledge is structured and categorised, serving as a resource from which students draw and build upon.
- **Internalisation:** Explicit knowledge, now available to students, is actively internalised through experimentation and creative practice. Integrating externalised knowledge into students’ personal artistic processes enhances their skills and expertise.

This approach of “distilling” new knowledge could contribute to the ongoing discourse in higher education within the realm of fine arts by proposing a structured approach that combines traditional art pedagogy with contemporary knowledge management principles. Through the implementation of the SECI model, art universities can create an environment that fosters knowledge creation, innovation, and the development of artists equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern art world.

When tacit and explicit knowledge interact, new knowledge emerges, described as the so-called “knowledge spiral.” Articulation (transforming tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge) and internalisation (using that explicit knowledge to expand one’s base of tacit knowledge) are critical steps in the so-called knowledge spiral. The reason is that both require one’s active involvement – that is, personal commitment. Because tacit knowledge involves mental models and beliefs alongside knowledge, the shift from tacit to explicit is actually a process of articulating one’s worldview—what it is and what it should be.

Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi wrote about how turning tacit knowledge into explicit means finding a way to express the inexpressible (Nonaka et al, 1995). Nonaka and Takeuchi emphasise the role of figurative language in transforming tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. This process helps in the transfer and creation of knowledge within organisations, making tacit knowledge more accessible and efficient.

### **Tacit knowledge in the artistic creative process - a study of the composing process as a possible model applicable to fine arts**

Tacit knowledge in the artistic creative process (Zembylas et al, 2017) was studied by art sociologists and epistemologists Tasos Zembylas and Martin Niederauer, primarily exploring the field of music (Niederauer, 2022). Their comprehensive study, “Compositional Processes and Artistic Action: Tacit Knowledge in Composition,” emerged in the pursuit of an answer to the question - what do composers actually do when they create (Zembylas et al, 2016). Their study encompassed a contextually broad analysis of music composition processes, from initial ideas to the performance of selected compositions in the field of contemporary music. The authors examined the intricate composition process as a series of open and dynamic operations.

Their monograph includes a profound investigation of compositional processes, shedding new light on the components and conditions that constitute artistic action. The specific research goal of the project

undertaken by Zembylas and Niederauer was to analyse the creative process of composition to reveal the synergistic interaction of various components of knowledge. The idea was to develop an empirically grounded model of how practical artistic knowledge is generated and becomes effective in the processes of artistic creation. Building on the concept of tacit knowledge the authors sought to document and analyse specific activities intrinsic to the composition process, gaining insight into how experienced composers deal with various artistic, technical, organisational, and emotional challenges.

This interdisciplinary study involved experts from various disciplines to understand artistic agency and tacit knowledge in artistic practice from sociological, epistemological, and musicological perspectives. It has epistemological potential that could be applied to other artistic fields, primarily visual arts, where tacit knowledge and artistic agency remain unexplored.

## **The epistemological potential of art doctoral projects - concept and examples from practice**

Subaltern voices, those on the margins, are frequently overlooked in mainstream narratives, including within academia, where they extend beyond social identities to include marginalised forms of knowledge production, such as artistic research. The historical distinction between artistic and scientific knowledge traces back to the Enlightenment era when an emphasis on reason and empirical study elevated scientific fields over the arts. This distinction still shapes academia today, influencing how resources are allocated, which institutions receive recognition, and how society views the value of different types of knowledge. Scientific research often takes precedence due to its perceived objectivity, ability to be replicated, and practical applications, while artistic research is often sidelined due to its perceived subjectivity. Despite efforts to acknowledge the importance of artistic research, it continues to be undervalued compared to scientific inquiry in academic circles.

The Doctor of Fine Arts (DFA) degree is a final academic degree typically awarded in recognition of a significant contribution to the field

of fine arts, often in the form of an art piece or a significant portfolio. This degree is less common than a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) and typically focuses on artistic practice and creative contribution rather than traditional research or a scholarly dissertation.

Doctoral programmes in fine arts usually combine research and artistic practice. Students are expected to produce original creative works such as artworks, exhibitions, performances, or design projects while conducting scholarly research related to their artistic practice. The research component often involves critical analysis, contextualization, and theoretical exploration of the created art.

The best global practices of fine arts doctoral programmes encourage an interdisciplinary approach, enabling students to explore connections between their art and other fields such as history, philosophy, sociology, or technology. This interdisciplinary perspective can lead to innovative art that demands thought. The publication *Creator Doctus* ([creatordoctus.eu](http://creatordoctus.eu)) offers examples of best practices and new perspectives on doctoral art projects.

At the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade, the aim of the doctoral study programme is the development, realisation, active defence, presentation, and promotion of a complex research artistic work/project conceptually, theoretically-methodologically grounded and carried out under the supervision of a mentor concerning the relevance of contemporary art and art theory and media, as well as in relation to the opportunities provided by the global art system and the field of culture.

Artistic research, despite its interdisciplinary nature and potential for innovation, faces numerous hurdles within academia. Traditional academic recognition, often based on peer-reviewed publications, tends to favour written forms of knowledge dissemination, leaving artistic outputs like exhibitions, performances, and installations at a disadvantage. Additionally, the evaluation criteria for doctoral research tend to prioritise quantifiable measures of impact, which can disadvantage the qualitative and experiential approaches inherent in artistic practices. To address these challenges, it is crucial to reconsider how academic discourse is framed, reexamine curricula through a decolonial lens and broaden the criteria for assessing knowledge production.

## Conclusion

The potential integration of models from organisational sciences, especially those related to tacit knowledge, in the field of visual arts to enhance knowledge transfer could be potentially very successful, yet it's also a complex undertaking. While traditional methods of knowledge transmission in art education have deep historical roots (the master-apprentice relationship), contemporary circumstances demand a re-evaluation of how knowledge is shared, preserved and disseminated. The aforementioned models, including the SECI model, Communities of Practice, and Network Theory, offer valuable insights to facilitate knowledge transfer in the domain of visual arts. They represent pathways for structured learning environments, interactions, and effective exchange of tacit knowledge among artists, educators, and students.

However, adapting organisational science models to the field of visual arts requires careful consideration of its characteristic epistemological features. Visual arts, by its nature, is characterised by subjectivity, creativity, and individual expression. Therefore, any integration of these models should be approached with sensitivity to the various and often unconventional ways in which artistic knowledge is acquired, created, and passed on.

Incorporating organisational scientific models should complement, not replace, traditional pedagogical approaches in visual arts education. The dynamic interaction between established artistic practices and innovative frameworks for knowledge transmission has the potential to empower artists, educators, and students to navigate through the artistic landscape.

By aligning the heritage of high visual arts education with contemporary knowledge management practices, we can envision a future in which timeless artistic expression traditions harmoniously coexist with the most cutting-edge knowledge transfer methods, ensuring the enduring vitality and relevance of visual arts in the future.

The development of cultural management and policies can also benefit from applying theories of (tacit) knowledge transfer from organisational sciences to the sphere of visual arts. Tacit knowledge transfer in visual arts often involves mentoring and apprenticeship, where

experienced artists pass on their skills and insights to the next generation. Organisational science theories, such as the concept of Communities of Practice, can aid in structuring and formalising these relationships. By creating structured mentoring programmes within artistic organisations, cultural institutions can ensure the smooth transfer of tacit knowledge from established artists to new talents.

Tacit knowledge in art is not easy to document. By applying knowledge documentation methods from organisational sciences to the creative process, a reliable and valuable resource can be created for artists, researchers, and cultural policymakers, contributing to the development of the cultural sector.

The application of theories of tacit knowledge transfer can influence the development of cultural policy, provide support to artistic communities, and ensure the continuity of artistic traditions. Cultural policymakers can use these theories to encourage investment in education, mentorship programmes, and initiatives that facilitate the inter-generational transfer of artistic knowledge.

Organisational sciences offer tools to assess the effectiveness of knowledge transfer, which arts organisations can adopt to gain a precise performance metric and evaluation frameworks. This data can contribute to informed decisions on resource allocation, programme improvement, and the development of cultural policy.

By incorporating insights from organisational sciences into arts management and cultural policy instruments, a more structured and efficient approach to understanding, preserving, and promoting the transfer of tacit knowledge within artistic education communities can be achieved. This leads to more informed decision-making and more effective cultural policies that support the sustainability and growth of the artistic education sector.

In further exploring the materials provided by the repository of doctoral art projects at the University of Arts in Belgrade, we will engage in a detailed analysis of the autoethnographic process that artists apply to analyse their own artistic methods. Additionally, we'll attempt to systematise knowledge so that it can be categorised within the four categories of the SECI model. The next step will involve interviews with selected art doctors who are actively engaged in higher artistic

education to learn about their verbal thoughts on transferring their artistic methods to students. Discussions with experts in the fields of cultural management and organisational sciences will also be conducted. Following that, an interdisciplinary workshop on the transfer of tacit knowledge in the visual arts will be organised with the participation of practice experts. All these steps will serve to prepare material for the next phase of research, which is expected to result in specific policy recommendations in the field of artistic education.

The exploration of the epistemological potential of artistic doctoral theses sheds light on the invaluable role of tacit knowledge in artistic practice and its contribution to generating new knowledge within academia. Through investigating artists' accounts of their methods and tapping into the tacit knowledge inherent to their practice, we reveal a rich reservoir of experiential understanding and intuitive insights that are often overlooked within traditional academic research frameworks. By more proactively embracing artistic doctoral theses as sites for knowledge production, we have the opportunity to expand our epistemological horizons and enrich scholarly discourse.

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# RESPONSE\*ABLE DRAWING AS TOOL TO CONFRONT EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE

SARAH HEGENBART AND KAJ OSTEROTH

‘Subaltern knowledge’ is often conveyed through performative practices, oral exchanges and cultural rituals. As the Euro-American academic tradition is based on textual sources, until very recently these subaltern epistemic sources have been dismissed in scholarly discourses in the Global North. To confront this ‘epistemic injustice’ (Fricker, 2007, p. 1), we have developed the approach of response\*able drawing as aesthetic strategy to foster participation and representation in an era in which global challenges, such as climate change and the increasing suspicion towards democracy as form of political organisation, highlight the necessity to take subaltern epistemic traditions seriously. As part of the ‘In from the margins: Sharing footnotes of subaltern knowledge and practices’ conference in Belgrade, we conducted a response\*able drawing session with the conference participants on 29 June 2023 in order to discuss ways art can redress epistemic injustice. In what follows, we will introduce the methodology of response\*able drawing as a tool to initiate polylogues between individuals and communities. We will then give an overview of the strategies used and the processes implemented in Belgrade. Finally, we will provide an outlook on how response\*able drawing might serve to broaden epistemic structures and to redress epistemic injustice. We ask how response\*able drawings challenge conventional approaches to artistic and curatorial practice. We also hint towards potential challenges arising from using response\*able drawings as a workshop format.

## Response\*able drawing: The methodology

The idea of respons\*able drawing emerged as aesthetic strategy to foster participation and representation in an era in which the functioning of contemporary democracy is constantly challenged.<sup>1</sup> We conceive of response\*able drawing as a dialogical concept using one of the main tools of visual communication, the drawing. The main focus lies on the audience response, allowing them some time to reflect and react to a given matter on paper. We use copying to comprehend and interpretation to find an individual or personal access point for an intervention in order to make the dialogue a more complex and broader one. Considering the fact that images reflect individual knowledge and experiences, jumping into the medium of drawing will add yet another layer of productive (mis-)understanding. If drawing does not aim for best practice or perfect imitation but for 'as good as', 'best possible' and 'trial and error', it might open up a space for an ongoing, attentive communicative process.

The concept of response\*able drawing is inspired by Kaj Osteroth's previous practice of *dialogical painting*, which she developed as a long-term project in collaboration with Lydia Hamann, as well as the notion of the dialogical image Sarah Hegenbart introduced in her research. Hegenbart's *dialogical image* references an interface where multiple-external and internal-perspectives meet (Hegenbart, 2022, p. 30). The notion of the dialogical image aligns with Walter Benjamin's account of the 'dialectical image', Martin Buber's dialogical principle, Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism, conceiving of the self as an interface that spatially comprises multiple (often temporally unrelated) perspectives, dialogical self-theory, and the 'dialectical concept', which postcolonial scholar Robert Young describes as inherent in postcolonial theory (Young, 2001, p. 57; Bakhtin, 1984, p. 28; Buber, 1947, p. 4; Hermans, 2011, p. 655). Rather, though, than borrowing Benjamin's notion of the 'dialectical image' as

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1 We are very grateful that the international Horizon 2020 ARTIS (Art and Research on Transformations of Individuals and Societies) provided the financial resources and productive research environment for implementing respons\*able drawing workshops and developing the methodology further. Documentation of workshops and related material can be found on our website <https://response-able-drawing.com/>. We thank the whole ARTIS team for the productive collaboration, generous feedback and insightful comments on our project.

such, Hegenbart introduced the notion 'dialogical image', to avoid the implication that she is proposing a systematic or synthetic resolution of dialectical opposites.<sup>2</sup> Her concept of the dialogical image expands on Kobena Mercer's aesthetics of the diaspora, which he maps out in his book *Travel & See. Black Diaspora Art Practices since the 1980s* (2016). Mercer there describes the 'back-and-forth dialectic set in motion when artworks talk to one another' (Mercer, 2016, pp. 237–238). In its dialogical nature, the image engages the spectator-participant in the dialogue. It is open-ended and does not possess a clearly fixed meaning, since new voices may at any time enter the dialogue elicited by the image.

It is precisely this open-ended dialogue in which Kaj Osteroth engaged with Lydia Hamann in the process of dialogical painting. Dialogical painting emerged partly conceptually, but mainly experimentally. This process involved the sometimes painful yet equally beautiful experience that working together on a mutual image requires visual translation and strategic visualisation in order to not drift off in different visual realms. As the artist duo scribbled, added and copy pasted while developing a final draft, much of the outcome of the painting depended on coincidence, as each of them often came up with unique features, impressions or figurations offering a surprise to themselves and the other. These beautiful coincidences and surprises within visualisation techniques should become the source for this project's communication on paper as the idea of response\*able drawing expands on dialogical painting. In doing so, response\*able drawing thrives on the immediacy of drawing, which allows for prompt responses and expressions of positionality.

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2 Adorno attacked Benjamin's 'dialectical image' and *The Arcades Project* more broadly for its omission of theory. He asked for 'more dialectics' (Adorno, 1973, p. 65).

## The response\*able drawing and democratic engagement

For democracy to become experienceable in everyday actions and exchanges (again), it is necessary, we contend that democracy operates dialogically.<sup>3</sup> Adopting Juliane Rebentisch's idea of the 'unstable democrat', the democratic way of life requires a continuous engagement with novel facts, insights and influences and therefore cannot be thought other as a life celebrating difference (Rebentisch, 2016, p. 23). The contrary, however, appears to be the case. Contemporary democracy is often conceived of as static, happening in institutions and lacking the dialogue and input of citizens. This might be due to the complex nature of democratic processes, the increasing global entanglement of global democracies and their dependence on industries in the capitalist societies of the Global North. Another reason, however, may be that representative democracy has never guaranteed equal representation. Racism and classism have contributed to the failure to provide equal access to democratic institutions to numerous people. In addition, the concept of democracy is deeply imbricated in theoretical foundations which cannot be disentangled from colonial and white supremacy thinking. In order to remain dynamic and by extension dialogical, democracy has to undertake an endeavour to decolonise, deconstruct and critically interrogate its own foundations. This involves examining forms of political organisation in under-researched geographical regions, which might function much better in these specific regions, where democracy could easily be viewed as Western imposition. In order to be 'democratic', one ought to consider Indigenous research, too.

Contemporary theories of democracy have been strongly influenced by the Enlightenment, an era in which reason was cast as superior to emotions and desires. Such a focus ignores the fact that even historical accounts in antiquity highlighted the relevance of human emotions

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3 This ties in with approaches, such as Felix Heidenreich's 'democracy as imposition'. Heidenreich highlights that democracy requires a relationship of resonance between citizens and political decision makers. This relation ought to be thought of as a 'dialogue'; see Heidenreich, 2022, p. 21f.

and desires. As Rebutisch argues refusing a one-sided interpretation of Plato as rationalist:

Plato thus characterizes the democrat as representing the indifferent principle of equality, and his own soul characterizes the principle of democracy. Decisions based on reason carry no more weight than those based on desire, which implies that reason and passion cannot be strictly distinguished and set in abstract opposition to each other. (...) At any rate, the democrat occasionally allows the situational reasons of desire to triumph over more comprehensive, rational reasons (Rebutisch, 2016, p. 24).

This is where response\*able drawing comes in, as we believe that the immediacy of drawing facilitates a dialogical exchange, which merges rational arguments with emotive and desiderative aspects. Through the process of response\*able drawing, we endeavour to understand why democracy has yet failed to enter into dialogical relations with many communities. Our hope is that response\*able drawing will also bring out ways in which democracy can be implemented in more dialogical ways. Response\*able drawing engages with questions, such as:

- What does art have to do with democracy?
- Can art potentially even transform democracies?
- What actually is democracy?
- Which role does democracy play in my everyday life?

We have developed the methodology of response\*able drawing to investigate into these and related questions. Response\*able drawings are exercised in workshop-based formats. We are particularly keen on addressing communities who feel alienated by or question concepts within contemporary democracies.

## **Response\*able drawing workshops**

Our workshop formats are designed to last at least two hours, but can also be conceptualised as longer formats. Response\*able drawings

from previous workshops can be found on our website <https://response-able-drawing.com/>. The aim of the workshops is to initiate a dialogue, envisioned as leading up to a long-term exchange on a visual level. As sustainability is pivotal to the response\*able drawing method, our workshops aim at a long-lasting exchange with the communities we are working with. We usually begin the workshop with a so-called ‘positionality drawing’. This allows participants to arrive in the room and to position themselves with regard to the topic, e.g. how democracy impacts on them. The positionality drawing also involves an awareness for one’s own (privileged) position within a society. It also allows participants to overcome and address their drawing anxieties as many participants are initially worried that they ‘cannot draw’ or that their drawings do not correspond with a certain norm. These aspects are then discussed in a round of introduction, during which the participants share their drawings with each other and introduce themselves. In this way, it becomes clear that response\*able drawing is not about the result but the process of engaging in dialogue through drawings.

If we work with participants with whom we have already exchanged drawings through social media or a messaging service, or who share related interests, e.g. conference participants, we often start only a brief introduction of the methodology of response\*able drawing. The fact that this is often experienced as a bit overwhelming by the participants is intended and part of our working process, as we wish to surface unconscious associations rather than receiving fully fleshed out rational answers. This happened in Belgrade, for example, when we invited participants to respond to the following quote from Miranda Fricker’s *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, which we projected onto the wall:

‘The reason for our particular interest in identity power is that we shall be concerned with how it is involved in the sort of discursive exchange in which knowledge can be imparted from speaker to hearer—in the broadest sense, testimonial exchange. I shall argue that identity power is an integral part of the mechanism of testimonial exchange, because of the need for hearers to use social stereotypes as heuristics in their spontaneous assessments of their interlocutor’s credibility’ (Fricker, 2007, p. 17f.).



Kaj Osteroth's response to this quote, which she completed before the workshop, opened up the dialogue.



Image 1: Sketch by Kaj Osteroth as introduction to the practical part of the workshop in Belgrade in response to a quote from Miranda Fricker in *Epistemic injustice*.

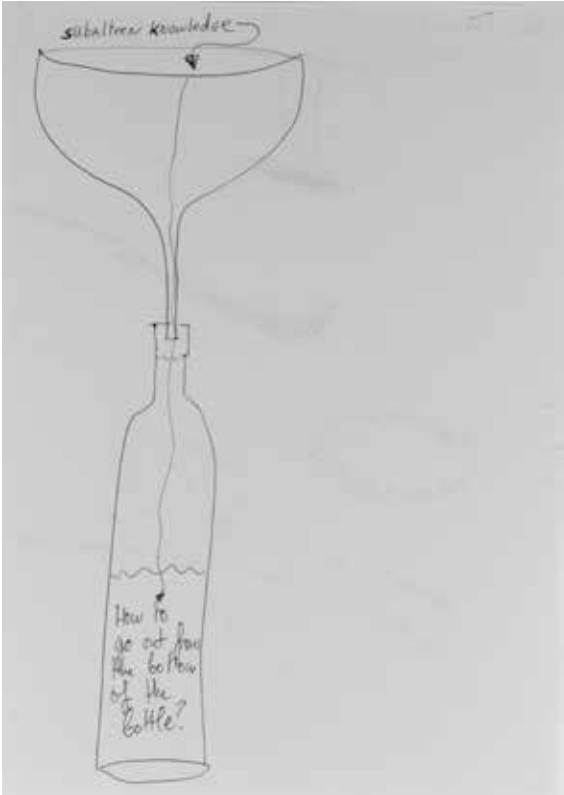
p. 17 The reason for our particular interest in identity power is that we shall be concerned with how it is involved in the sort of discursive exchange in which knowledge can be imparted from speaker to hearer—in the broadest sense, testimonial exchange. I shall argue that identity power is an integral part of the mechanism of testimonial exchange, because of the need for hearers to use social stereotypes as heuristics in their spontaneous assessments of their interlocutor's credibility. This use of stereotypes may be entirely proper, or it may be misleading, depending on the stereotype. Notably, if the stereotype embodies a prejudice that works against the speaker, then two things follow: there is an epistemic dysfunction in the exchange—the hearer makes an unduly deflated judgement of the speaker's credibility, perhaps missing out on knowledge as a result; and the hearer does something ethically bad—the speaker is wrongfully undermined in her capacity as a knower. I now turn to the exploration of this dual epistemic and ethical dysfunction. The task is to home in on what is perhaps the most ethically and socially significant moment of identity power's impact on our discursive and epistemic relations, and to paint a portrait of the distinctive injustice that it entails: *testimonial injustice*.

Image 2: Reference by Miranda Fricker in *Epistemic injustice*, 2016, p. 17.

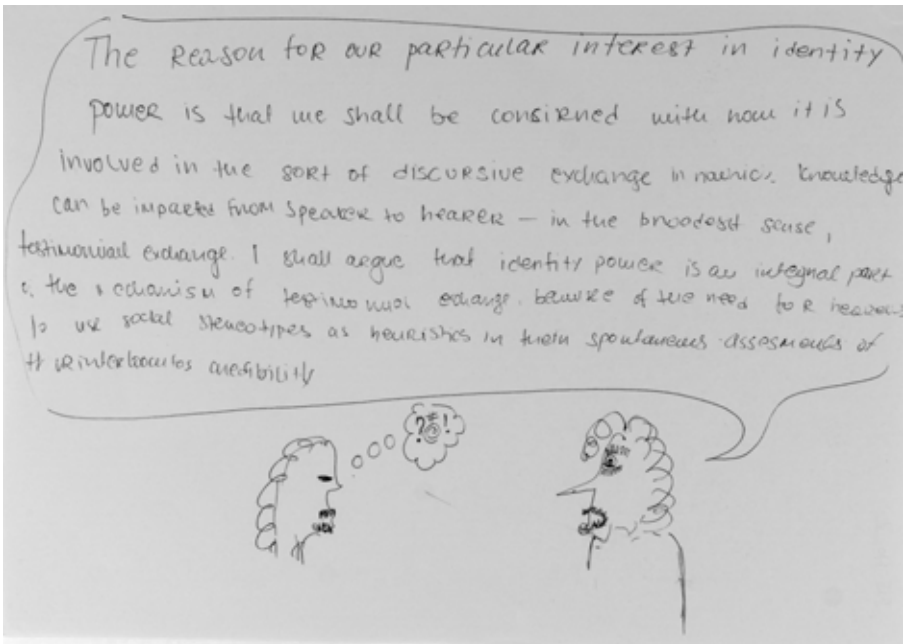
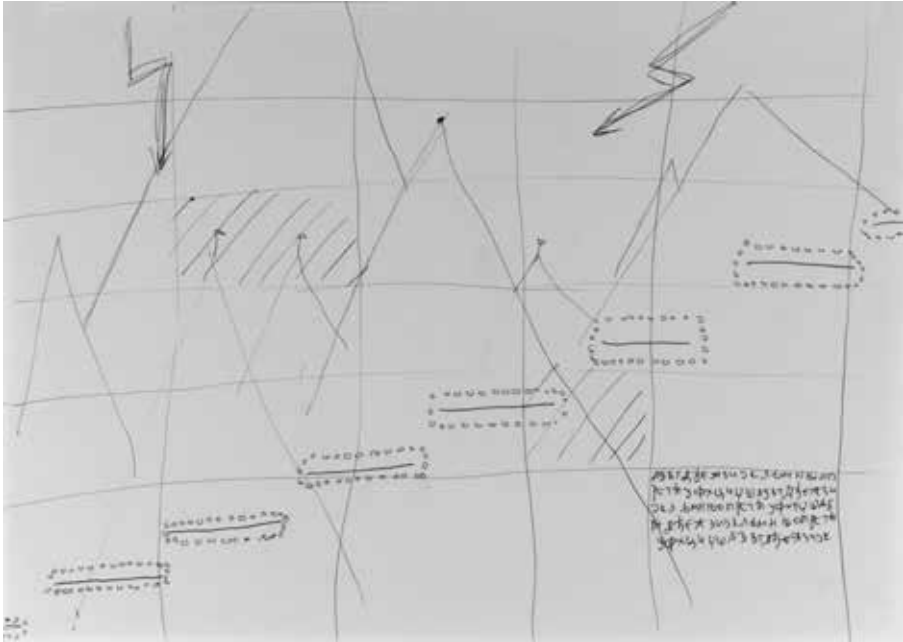
After they executed individual drawings, they were discussed in small groups.



SUBALTERN KNOWLEDGE IN CULTURAL PRACTICES



RESPONSE\*ABLE DRAWING AS TOOL TO CONFRONT EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE

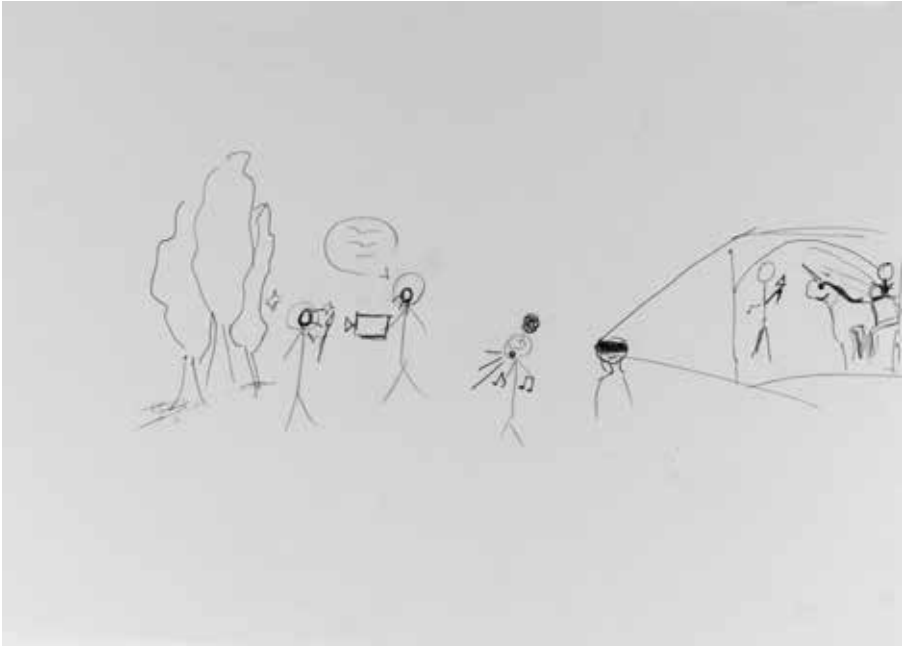




*Images 3-8: response\*able drawings engaging with the above-mentioned quote from Fricker*

Each group then executed a joint drawing, assembling a variety of associations. These 'small group drawings' later informed our group discussion in the entire group. After our exchange on Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice, we asked participants how this theoretical concept resonates in their everyday life experiences with democracy. We invited them to share their associations in the format of 'silent post' drawings. This meant that everyone did a speed drawing within two minutes and passed it on to their neighbours who would continue it as a form of dialogical engagement. What matters as part of the dialogical engagement is not the artistic skill when executing a drawing but rather the differences in depicting events, attitudes, convictions etc., the discrepancies and frictions this provokes, the humour, the failed attempts and the reference to stereotypes in the depiction of a certain aspect.

RESPONSE\*ABLE DRAWING AS TOOL TO CONFRONT EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE





*Images 9-11: A selection of 'silent post drawings' from the workshop in Belgrade*

## **Insights from our workshop in Belgrade**

The Belgrade workshop proved exceptionally helpful for refining our methodological approach and our workshop format when working towards an exhibition of response\*able drawings, for which we plan to share the curatorial authorship with selected communities. We also would like to develop these thoughts about our methodological approach after a critical discussion with current workshop participants:

- We will invite critical friends to provide feedback on our workshop formats in order to refine our methodology.
- We will highlight the necessity for institutional critique and the expectations behind the workshop format. While artists are often invited by public institutions to facilitate complex conversations

about democracy through the visual, they are rarely acknowledged as important participants in this discourse themselves.

- We will develop two workshop formats further: (1) a long-lasting discourse through the visual, which goes beyond the workshop space, and continues (e.g. through social media); (2) brief intuitive drawing workshops to surface associations, beliefs, stereotypes (especially with regard to one's positionality)
- We will deepen the interpretative format and record original statements by participants that emerged in the group discussions.

Following the feedback we received in Belgrade, we have already approached scholars, socially engaged artists and activists to advise on our process of response\*able drawings as so-called 'critical friends'. In particular, we pursue ethical questions further, e.g. how to allow community members to not only raise their concerns about failures of being not represented in democratic systems but to relay this to political decision makers. Also, we wonder to what extent we as a team of two white, relatively privileged women, can contribute to forms of political empowerment if we do not share the participants' experiential



Image 12: Reading & Drawing. Original sketches up for discussion at Kaj Osteroth's solo exhibition *Wo tuť s denn weh?* (Where does it hurt), 2023 at HilbertRaum Berlin.



background. Another consideration concerns the question of how to develop sustainable relations with communities, which differ from communities we are part of. And how can we guarantee that the relationship with them develops in a genuinely dialogical way? This involves addressing the questions of what we take away from the workshop and what community members take away. In between the workshops, Kaj Osteroth continues to engage with audiences through response\*able drawings disseminated through social media, executed in response to Isabell Lorey's *Demokratie in Präsens* (2020).

Finally, we will look further into art's democratic responsibilities. Why is art supposed to transform democratic processes in a society in which appreciation for artistic practice is limited and the arts are to a certain extent even marginalised? Currently, we are also working on a comic illustrating challenges to the response\*able drawing process, e.g. lack of childcare during the preparation and implementation of workshops.



Image 13: Kaj Osteroth's response\*able drawing referencing everyday challenges in the process of implementing and planning the workshops

## Conclusion

Response\*able drawings are ephemeral drawings facilitating forms of dialogues, which not only consist of verbal arguments but allow emotional and unconscious content to surface, too. As response\*able drawings are not language-based, they enable forms of dialogue between communities who do not share the same language. This not only refers to specific languages, but also to different styles of speaking, discourses and dialects within the same language, which are shaped by one's distinctive social and educational backgrounds. The artistic quality of the drawings is not founded in their visual content but in the process which opens up dialogues and negotiations about questions of democratic processes and representations within societies. Needless to say, these dialogues might not end in agreement and fixed solutions. Rather it is the potential for ambiguity they open up that makes them so valuable. Therefore, our hope is that response\*able drawing can contribute to redressing 'epistemic injustices', such as those committed when ignoring subaltern knowledge culture. In doing so, response\*able drawing leads to widening forms of representation not only in academic and epistemic discourses but also within processes of democracy.

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# VI

**Non-conclusion: being  
together, atmospheres**



Camille Jutant and Milena Dragičević Šešić from the SHAKIN' team, and Goran Milašinović, president of the Commission of the Republic of Serbia for Cooperation with UNESCO, at the final concluding session of the conference "In from the margins: Sharing footnotes of subaltern knowledge and practices", Belgrade, University of Arts, 28 June 2023.

# REPAIRING (AS) PRACTICE: A CONVERSATION FOLLOWING ‘TOWARDS FIELDS OF WHERE’

UKHONA NTSALI MLANDU, VIŠNJA KISIĆ,  
MARTEINN SINDRI JÓNSSON, SOPHIE MAK-SCHRAM,  
JULIUS THINNES

## Introduction, by Julius Thinnes

In March 2023, Sophie Mak-Schram, Marteinn Sindri Jónsson and I, Julius Thinnes, organised a convening of cultural practitioners. This took place partly at Zeppelin University, and partly at a cultural and living project of which I am a member, Die Blaue Blume e.V. in Friedrichshafen, in the south of Germany. The three-day gathering was entitled ‘A Field of Where, What, When’ and we framed it as “a conference about place-(un)making and community-building”.<sup>1</sup> The invited cultural practitioners were: members of the Blaue Blume e.V., Andan Mirwan and Iswanto Hartono (ruangrupa), Ernesto Oroza (Azimuts, École Supérieure d’Art et de Design de Saint-Étienne), Jakob Wirth (Make Up

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1 ‘A Field of Where, What, When’ took place at Zeppelin University between 8 and 10 March 2023, funded by FEINART and Zeppelin Universität Gesellschaft (ZUG), as well as by the Association of Icelandic Visual Artists SÍM. We were warmly advised and supported by Prof Dr. Karen van den Berg, of the Chair of Art Theory and Curating at Zeppelin University, Professor Björn Þorsteinsson of the University of Iceland, Junior Professor Meike Lettau of the chair of Cultural and Media Policy Studies at Zeppelin University, Rahel Spöhrer, Curatorial Head of the Artsprogram at Zeppelin University and Marie-Sophie Usadel of Zeppelin University. For more information about the event and the participants see <https://www.zu.de/veranstaltungen/2023/2023-03-09-a-field-of-where-what-when.php> and <https://feinart.org/2023/04/05/esr-8-blog-january-february-2023-marteinn-sindri-jonsson/>.

e.V., Operation Himmelblick), Louise Hobson (SWAY) and Unnar Örn Auðarson (South Iceland Biennale). Each practitioner led a workshop or gave an input about their practices. Beyond the central themes of place-(un)making and the usage and facilitation of space, many of the contributed workshops also related to practices of repairing, care and grounding. Ernesto Oroza discussed the role of repair as a practice of survival in the Cuban context, such as the widespread practice of modifying the ubiquitous Monobloc plastic chairs, which are known to break due to their poor quality, and Die Blaue Blume introduced their way of repairing them as a communal activity.

Repairing is a fundamental part of the practice of Die Blaue Blume. It is not only essential to keep the living infrastructure of the caravans, pathways, stage and other temporary buildings intact, but repairing together is also a method to share knowledge and build community. The input of Die Blaue Blume for 'A Field' took place in an old bus which is used by the collective to host concerts and raves but also organisational meetings, workshops, and film screenings. There, a huge piece of sealing foil discarded by a local construction project because it had



Workshop about collective repairing in the “Wedding Bus” at Die Blaue Blume e.V., during ‘A Field of Where, What, When’, March 2023. Photograph by Iswanto Hartono.



Die Blaue Blume during Seekult festival (summer 2021)

hundreds of tiny holes, was unfurled on the ground. The goal of the workshop was to collectively repair the foil by covering the holes with waterproof tape. Once repaired, we could reuse the foil and insulate one of the caravan roofs for one of our community members to live in. Later, upon reflection with Marteinn and Sophie and through conversations with the participants of 'A Field' we discussed how questions of repair and care are closely connected with using, creating and experiencing space or land. It was this experience, and the subsequent reflections on it, that led us to propose for the SHAKIN conference in Belgrade an artistic workshop expanding on questions of repair in relation to ways of knowing. To this end, Sophie and I prepared a workshop that drew on the practice of Die Blaue Blume and our notion of needs and repair, in relation to decolonial and artistic practices of knowledge production and dissemination.

Our workshop at the SHAKIN Conference, 'Towards Fields of Where', took place in the Rector's Hall of the University of Arts in Belgrade, a location that presented us with some difficulties. For the workshop we wanted to create an intimate, informal, non-hierarchical and temporary (un)ground where participants could speak freely without





One of the living spaces at Die Blaue Blume e.V.

enacting their academic roles. The Rector's Hall, however, is a very formal conference hall. There are large portraits of academic officials on the walls, national flags in every corner of the room and microphones on the tables. All in all, the Rector's Hall looks like a space where important and serious conferences take place. This required us to think carefully about how the forms of our input would pre-structure ways in which participants would be willing to engage: i.e. how could we model a form of exchanging knowledge that didn't align with – or indeed refused – the

didactic format implied by the formal round meeting table and portraits? After a brief introduction by the moderator of the conference, Nikola Šuica, we started our workshop with a ten-minute audio reflection about 'A Field' by Marteinn, who was sadly unable to join us in Belgrade. This audio was in part a way to bring Marteinn into the room and was in keeping with his background in radio production as much as our shared interest in audio as a form of (un)grounding. After this audio, I gave a short introduction about *Die Blaue Blume* and our collective practices.

The main part of the workshop was a pair of recording sessions, designed by Sophie in collaboration with Marteinn and myself. This drew, in part, on Sophie's ongoing interest in audio as a possible site of learning and coming to know. Sophie and I invited the workshop participants to pair up and in the first round we asked questions about grounding: Where, who or when are you grounded? What does that ground feel like, smell like, hold like? What unsettles your ground? And what sustains or repairs your ground? We then asked the participants to discuss



Sophie Mak-Schram and Julius Thinnes  
in the Rector's Hall at the University of Arts in Belgrade

these questions for a few minutes and audio-record their conversations. Next, they posted the audio files in a Viber chat group that we had set up. In the second round, we invited the participants to listen to one of the audios from the first round and reflect on what they heard, before answering questions about sustaining and repairing in their original pairs. These questions were: What knowledges do you sustain? What are you sustaining them against or in the face of? How do you know what to sustain? What knowledges do you repair? What are you repairing about them and at what cost? And finally: How do you know what to repair? For the third and last session, everyone sat together again, so each could share their experience of recording and sharing their own audio and receiving a recording made by someone else.

When it came to submitting a contribution to the SHAKIN reader, Sophie, Marteinn and I agreed that it would be most interesting to draw in some way on the experiences prompted by the workshop. We decided to reach out to two participants of our workshop, Ukhona Nt-sali Mlandu and Višnja Kisić, and invite them to join us in a reflection on repair, cultural production and the notion of epistemic space. I was unfortunately unable to join the conversation but Ukhona, Višnja, Marteinn and Sophie met online on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October 2023 to record their exchange. They talked about how it is to be constantly on the move and how to bring different worlds together, how to collaborate internationally, how space is formed by who is there and how we as bodies and our interpersonal relations are formed by spatial conditions. Materially, all that remains from our shared time in the Rector's Hall in Belgrade in June is a pair of sunglasses, floating around time and space, far away from their owner, but still connected. Yet, the audios recorded at our workshop and their ongoing threads of connection, care and possible repairs continue to echo – and we were grateful for the conversations during SHAKIN as much as the conversation below, which expands and reflects on that time. I will now –metaphorically – hand over to Marteinn, who begins the conversation between him, Ukhona, Višnja and Sophie by briefly expanding on the context I've outlined above, before asking the first question.

\* \* \*

**MSJ:** Earlier this year, Julius, Sophie and I initiated a programme called 'A Field of Where, What, When', which was an invitation to cultural practitioners from Indonesia, France, Iceland, Germany, and Wales to come to our university in Friedrichshafen and have a discussion about place (un)making.

I think this (un)making is very important and comes from conversations about decoloniality in the context of socially engaged practice and placemaking that Sophie and I had been sharing for some time about what it means to make space or make a place and what it means to work site-specifically. The broader context of this conversation was our respective PhD research projects that are both related to socially engaged art and cultural practices in Europe and conducted within a research network called FEINART.<sup>2</sup>

It was the programme 'A Field' and the conversations held within that frame that prompted Sophie and Julius to go to Belgrade. My participation in this was auditory – I wrote and recorded a brief thought around 'A Field' where I was musing on the auditory as a ground or as an unground.<sup>3</sup>

And I know that Julius subsequently talked about what Die Blaue Blume did during 'A Field'. This was a very memorable moment of repairing a tarpaulin that's used for the roofs of the caravans in which he and other members of Die Blaue Blume's community live.

Now, I'm interested to know how you related to these original propositions in the workshop and what you took away from it, and where your conversation, Višnja and Ukhona, was located in relation to these coordinates that I'm aware of.

**UM:** When I joined your workshop in Belgrade, I had been in Europe for a month. I think this workshop and this work found me at a time when it was needed – to culminate a time and a process around a long-term research project. This project included a piece of writing that

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2 FEINART is short for The Future of European Independent Art Spaces in a Period of Socially Engaged Art and is a training network supported by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions of Horizon 2020, committed to providing high quality training for 11 Early Stage Researchers to complete PhDs in the area of art and social engagement. For further information see <https://feinart.org/>.

3 Marteinn Sindri Jónsson, *The Audible as Unground*, unpublished.

I have just finished and it will be published in a month's time. Part of that work entailed visiting a few European countries and having some preliminary conversations with people about cultural mobility and environmental justice. This research was preceded by a commission for *On The Move* for their *Year Book* on cultural mobility and environmental sustainability.<sup>4</sup>

But also, I think by consequence, intended or unintended, was the fact that in my movements in Europe I was also kind of using my body to experiment with the idea of cultural mobility as an embodied practice of negotiating borders, visas, and all of that jazz.

And while I was very well supported in this endeavour and witnessed incredible articulations of solidarity as a tool for mobility justice this didn't take away from the fact that, you know, moving through Europe with this body and this passport is a particular kind of experience. Being African, black, and a woman is a particular lived experience. I say this very aware that a South African passport is very much privileged compared to other African countries' passports.

And so, when I eventually got to Belgrade, to this conference. I mean, I struggled with the title, something about the margins and the subaltern, which is something I don't know how to identify with, and I problematized this in my presentation there<sup>5</sup>. There is nothing about my centre that is subaltern or peripheral because that would imply that I subscribe to the idea of a centre that is outside of the self and locatedness.

But also, what was striking and most violent for me was the ways in which even when posturing to speak and think with knowledge from the margin, and wanting that posture to be talking about decoloniality,

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4 Cf. Ukhona Ntsali Mlandu. "Cultural Mobility and Environmental Sustainability: A Decolonial and Intersectional View on Solidarity with African Artists and Creatives Towards Achieving Environmental Justice." In: *Cultural Mobility Yearbook 2023*, 43–49. Available online at [https://on-the-move.org/sites/default/files/library/2023-03/OTM\\_yearbook-2023.pdf](https://on-the-move.org/sites/default/files/library/2023-03/OTM_yearbook-2023.pdf).

5 Ukhona Ntsali Mlandu: Africans say "Karibu" – you're welcome, ANYTIME. Europeans say "call us to beg to come first and even then we may choose to not answer the door": A synopsis of the mobility dynamic presented at "In from the margins - Sharing footnotes of subaltern knowledge and practices: Questioning North-South relations and ethics of international collaboration", international conference, University of Arts in Belgrade, 26-28<sup>th</sup> June 2023.

the ways in which scholarship from elsewhere was omitted from the conversation was quite glaring. How do you talk about decoloniality without acknowledging and referencing the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movement of South Africa where discourse around free, decolonial intersectional education gained traction and articulation for example?

And all of that made for quite an exhausting experience. The erasure. The omissions. And so responding to the invite to come to your intervention, which had a different format to the tone of the more academic and formal presentation, was a very important moment for me to gather myself and find some form of articulation of the kind of work that I imagine myself doing in my exploration of a healing justice framework and restorative and regenerative justice.

And I don't think I will be able to exactly tell you specific aspects of what I enjoyed about the intervention ['Towards Fields of Where'], but I know how it left me feeling. And I think that's a good sign because it wasn't an intellectual exercise.

It was an embodied exercise, consolidating a month that I'd spent being an other while interrogating notions of mobility and self-actualization. Not only that, but calling out and naming the harm of all of that which is mentioned above (and more) takes on a combative stance whether you like it or not. So, I most definitely needed space to just feel something else.

And our conversation, yeah, it was incredible. It was beautiful.

**VK:** For me, there's a lot of resonance with what Ukhona is saying about passports and negotiating borders, being in and out simultaneously, coming from former Yugoslavia and spending the 90s and early 2000s waiting in queues for visas that you don't get and stuff like that. That sort of memory is not that far away from us in this region. Every now and then, our easy mobility is threatened by the EU. So that awareness and unease remains.

But, going back to 'Towards Fields of Where': there was a feeling that I felt back there in the workshop – of being myself. In a place that is the Rector's Hall at the Rectorate of the University of Arts in Belgrade, a building in which I spent some time during the year and a place which requires one particular part of myself, a part that I'm kind of trained

to deliver. I'm constantly trying to expand that and shake that up and change the places where I teach and where I take students, so as not to be necessarily in that building. But this building is representative of all the kinds of conferences and university frameworks and teachings that are dominant and that I feel colonise everyone.

So yeah, that workshop was a moment of, on one hand, calmness and slowness. And, on the other, it brought questions that were at the same time so vague, but also very important to me. That was a place where I could really meet another person as a person. And I think that is what happened, unlike all the other kinds of encounters during the conference.

Also, there was something particular about this question of space and repair that resonated a lot with me. I've been dealing with memory and heritage and repair as part of those issues. How do we care for things? Which worlds do we choose to repair? Which places do we choose to repair? How we forget some things because of this kind of epistemic universalism that tries to say: "okay, we should be looking just at this aspect of reality or the past". Or: "this is what's worth preserving and caring for". And for me, throughout the years, things that are on some kind of margin or forgotten or under the carpet or suppressed, have been of interest and import. So how do we unearth those, uncover or shine a light on them?

These questions of repair and mutual aid and care have become even more important for me, bearing in mind where I live now, which is on the edge of the forest, bordering the outskirts of a city. This is where I feel I can be in a community of not only humans, but many non-humans that I feel very close to. So, I easily connected in conversation with Ukhona, who shares these concerns of: "place is important and repair is important". And this territorial knowledge and encounters and existences are important.

I feel I'm actually shaped by several places; deeply shaped by several places. Much more shaped by them, more strikingly and whole-bodily than I have been shaped through encounters with people or with books or other usual suspects of influence.

These places are somehow in my heart and body. Those places made me feel the way I want to feel in my life, and they were teachers in some way. So, in that sense, for me, place is not so much about

place-making, but about an encounter, or mutual conversation, that happens between all of those who show up in the space.

**SMS:** Thank you both. Particularly when you end with this thought on how places are constituted by those that are in them, or choose or are able to be in them, I think about Sara Ahmed, who I'm reading a lot of at the moment. She, of course, talks about the body and space, and how the body is oriented through as much as in space. Places – their forms, their histories, their default uses – reciprocally shape how and what we can reach or do or move in them.<sup>6</sup>

And I'm thinking about this as I listen to both of your reflections, which seem to be operating at proximate but different scales. Ukhona, when I'm listening to you, I'm thinking about how to respond and what it means to be in the kind of violence of positioning or the violence of abstraction that happens in the context of a conference. I'm curious to hear more about how the healing justice framework work that you were talking about has evolved since, possibly also in reflective contrast to the experiences of conferences like SHAKIN.

And then at the same time, Višnja, I loved your question about which worlds do we choose to repair. I recently read yours and Goran's text, "Tickling the Sensible"<sup>7</sup>, in which you quote the Zapatistas. How can you create a world of many worlds is a question I often return to and seek to relate to concerns within the communities I work and think with. How can you create space for multiple worlds that are each given their needed space in that moment, even if only briefly and only through kind of protecting the space as an artistic intervention rather than proclaiming it academic and therefore opening it up to academic critique? We were able to world differently even though we were very much still within that building, within the architecture and also ironically within the time frame of the conference with the pressures that that gave, because of the almost surreptitious framing of 'Towards Fields of Where' as an artistic intervention. I wonder, in relation to this, how

6 See Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Objects, Orientations, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

7 Cf. Višnja Kisić and Goran Tomka. "Tickling The Sensible: Art, Politics, and Worlding at the Global Margin". In: *Forces of Art: Perspectives from a Changing World*, pp.29-51. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2020.



some repairs are conducted through loopholes.<sup>8</sup> So, not only what worlds do we choose to repair but what worlds are given enough room that we can use them as temporary (un)grounds to world anew through or in.<sup>9</sup>

At the beginning of the workshop, there was this whole negotiation between us and the moderator of the workshop because there were two artistic interventions scheduled for the same room at the same time. So, we had to negotiate whether they could happen at the same time and whether there would be enough time or space or participants to separate them, and there was this whole discussion about how to distribute these resources that I doubt would have been considered appropriate if we were part of a panel discussion. In the end it was resolved because the other artist wanted to take the group outside and the participants were willing to split up rather than do half of each workshop, but it set the tone of us needing to hold or carve out the space in which to encounter each other differently.

**UM:** It's an important note that you made about the fact that the two interventions were programmed at the same time, and one felt one had to make "a choice" between the workshops.

It also speaks to something that I struggled with; with some work I was meant to do shortly after the conference. I was supposed to go to Cambridge and do a site-specific intervention as part of the Global Atlantic Fellowship's annual convening. This fellowship is rooted in and funded by the Cecil John Rhodes legacy that means particular things in terms of colonialism and colonial legacy. It was my contribution to acknowledge the problematics of the Rhodes legacy and the situatedness of the Atlantic Fellowships whose network I particularly entered through the Atlantic Fellowship for Racial Equity.

So, we convene every year at Cambridge as the broader cohort of Global Atlantic Fellows at Cambridge University. But increasingly, there's been talks about the space in and of itself, and how bringing in people

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8 Maria Hlavajova and BAK think extensively on loopholing, and I use the term here in their spirit of it.

9 A 'temporary unground' draws both from Martein's proposition of the term, and from the work of a colleague in the FEINART network, Claude Nassar, whose sonic work and methodologies explores 'no ground' in relation to migratory positions and conceptions in digital spaces.

who come from a colonial context, which for me is a British colonial context, changes that space and how we experience that space. And what it means to begin to address that by naming the harm, talking it through and deliberately creating space for repair. What I had been proposing was some kind of an intervention (a site-specific live installation) that seeks to address the harm, but also wanting to shift the conversation from an intellectual to a more embodied expression and understanding. They were happy to have me intervene in that way. There was support, but it was interesting that there was however a debate about whether this work needed to be a stand-alone intervention with its own discussion or whether it could be understood as part of the broader conversation. This brought up very interesting conversations about what we actually mean when we make claims about disrupting centres of knowledge production and making room for multiple knowledges, and where artistic expression is placed in these discourses and postures.

In the end, I did not go to Cambridge. I simply didn't manage, given the time frames and the emotional bandwidth it takes to go through the visa process. I chose to stay at home and repair and recover and lean into a slowness rather than pursue the next trip. I needed to heal and repair from previous trips that were also life-giving adventures. More than one thing can be true. Something can be an adventure that feeds something in you while it stains you in other ways. And so I decided, I actually don't need to go to the UK. I'm already in my favourite place in the world. But it was interesting; the discussion around where to position my intervention within the broader programme alongside more formally explicit intellectual conversations.

Again, back to this question of where do we position care? Is it an event that we attend to that postures towards care or do we operate from a healing justice framework, which then forms a part of how we interrogate and navigate everything, or do we position it as a performative act? I think that's one of the key things that we have to grapple with in our pursuit to better understand and utilise care as a regenerative form of alternative world-building.

I think we need to be mindful when we have conversations around care and world-building... Because it can be a very performative thing that does not have the ability to sustain itself, or replicate itself outside of the spaces that have been declared as such.

In my forthcoming paper, the one on mobility that is to be published now in November, I talk about the ethics of mobility justice and how collective care needs to be at the centre of how we interpret what we mean by mobility justice. We must contend with the fact that we are dealing with human beings, that people's bodies and emotional selves are on the line here. I am deliberate in offering criticism around the technical elements of the process that are treated as if they are ordained despite their architectures of harm and exclusion. A process that is not a process if you consider how random it can be. Excuse me, it's the fact that the actual human beings are having to go through a motion of a process that renders them undesirable, and ineligible. A myth of meritocracy is assigned to movement which determines the extent of self-actualisation.

If you look closely enough, you actually realise there is no method to the matter except to police, to apply vigilance as a form of discrimination, to exclude, to control, to keep out. Now how do we imagine repair in this scenario? How does collective care manifest itself? How do we co-create? How do we end the harm and imagine something else? Radical imagination is key! Bringing in the voices of the marginalised is key! Solidarity is key! Understanding cultural mobility justice through a healing justice framework is key. Being deliberate about understanding that in alternative world-building nothing is formulaic and cast in stone and that being iterative and generative is the attitude to adopt. There are many ways in which I am thinking through repair, and mobility is top of mind because that is the body of work I have been engaging with the most during the last year, along with rest and repair for black women and marginalised identities. Designing spaces for gathering and convening and collective witnessing that centre repair. My own conversations on gender justice, heritage, memory and archive within a healing justice framework. Healing as confrontation.

**SMS:** Ukhona, you're frozen. Oh, now it sounds like you've dropped out. The rest of you can hear me, right? Let's wait for a moment.

We come to the kind of frictions that are subsumed in these ideals of the subaltern as a kind of swath of connections that can be rebuilt purely through re-articulation or visibility alone. It reminds me of when somewhere during the pandemic I worked with an organization trying

to bring high school education to a lot of remote areas in Argentina.<sup>10</sup> One of the biggest things they were saying is we can't act like people who are going to use the internet there. So we need to think of a totally different, radical approach. Zoom or Teams or simply "connecting" is not the solution here.

I say it like this because radical is a relative word. They had to take a completely different approach compared with the glibness of "let's have a decolonial conversation, we can all get on Teams" that I see proliferating in academic and artistic conversations of recent years, and that we're echoing here in part.

**VK:** For me, it's striking every time I have a meeting or a conversation with students or someone from the African continent or South America. It's worth remembering that all those cables come first, via Europe. Only very weak connections are built or allowed there.

**SMS:** I would love to read or talk more about the very material infrastructures that shape the worlds we think in and on. I remember once seeing a map of knowledge production proportionately across the world and where most academic papers are published. It's exactly what you would expect, where things are coming from, where things are being disseminated.

**VK:** And there is a similar image of internet cables, like optic cables going through Europe and the USA. I think Ukhona is frozen now. I wonder whether we continue?

**SMS:** Let's give it a few more minutes. Also, maybe it isn't the best to do it over Teams purely because I realized that it's entered me into an academic framing for something that doesn't need to be that – there are pre-set modes of talking that are more invited here, more practiced here, similar to how the Rector's Hall made some forms of meeting or convening easier to enact than others.

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<sup>10</sup> This organisation was Eidos Global.

And when I think about Teams entering me into an academic and abstracted mode, I'm reminded of a conversation that Marteinn and I have had in different ways across the years, when you're choosing to operate differently, how much do you then have to reveal or what's the violence of then talking from a very personal positioning in settings that don't have room or care for this, and then still choosing to do so, is it a form of resistance or is it a form of re-vulnerabilizing oneself only to be re-coopted into glib decolonial conversations, for instance?

**VK:** Yeah, yeah, that resonates quite a lot with me.

And I feel there's no way to do such a scale or quantity of things once you try to do things with integrity, if "with integrity" means that all of you is showing up, is participating. Which always implies vulnerability. But if we degrow our activities and appearances, then it might be possible to, when we show up, be there with full presence and honesty.

Maybe one answer is reducing speed. I think speed was brought up earlier as well.

**SMS:** It just reminds me of a poem. I'll send it to all of you afterward. Sorry, Marteinn. You were going to say something.

"Whatever you have to say, leave  
The roots on, let them  
Dangle

And the dirt

Just to make clear  
Where they come from."

— Charles Olson

**MSJ:** Now, I am also reminded in a way of our first conversation – I don't know if you were there Sophie – the first conversation that I had with you, Višnja, because mobility was the first thing we talked about.

You were telling me about your life across different institutions in Europe in the past years, and what we've been discussing in the

past ten minutes really brings that to mind. In a very different way, and respectively different, me and Sophie have also been torn across times and places between meeting on this very strange territory of international mobility. I was just reflecting when you mentioned our collaboration and correspondence through the years, Sophie. I mean, on digital platforms and with the other's family and friends even if one of us is not there, you know?

I once had this experience of meeting up with Sophie's friend from Wales at a train station in London to exchange keys for an apartment in a different city in Europe, and we met for five minutes. And I wonder if such an encounter does not map onto the kind of territory that many in this realm of production are navigating, at least to some extent.

**VK:** I don't know... This is why I feel these place-based existences have been really important for me recently. I grew up with this idea that it's good to be mobile, and it's great that we are living in this global world in which, you know, nationalism, which was especially ravaging the former Yugoslavia and the western Balkans, can and should disappear. For me, the way to get out of that ethnonational register was to internationalise and live in a cosmopolitan world in which people meet and cultures melt and so on.

But another side of that coin is that in this extractivist global order it is good if we are deterritorialised so that we can be dragged to perform at so many places as this kind of very "narrow" us. 'Us' on a small scale, 'Us' carrying the topics that others want to hear. I felt that especially when I was being asked to talk about heritage dissonance and wars and reconciliation in the Balkans, over and over again. For me, that topic has been a deeply personal way to go through the experiences of the 90s and bring something up in the heritage field.

But being asked to bring up the topic somewhere because someone wants to hear someone from the Western Balkans talking about the war and identity politics – as if these issues are reserved for the Balkans... It destabilises how much you feel for the topic and makes you both vulnerable, but also careful of how you stand up for the topic without compromising it through particular contexts and appearances. And after a while, all of those short performance arrangements just didn't make sense anymore - emotionally, ecologically, structurally.

Being so all over the place often means that you cannot be deeply connected.

**MSJ:** I need to step out just briefly for a few minutes. I'll be back in four. Hopefully, Ukhona will make her way back to us by this time.

**SMS:** Yeah, it's hard, these questions of... what happens when the territorialisation one inhabits is primarily the international as a sphere in itself, and these representational qualities or identities that you have to take on. I guess you're thinking more in the realm of cultural heritage, and I'm thinking a lot about cultural production in the arts, and they're very proximate in terms of their modes of functioning.

One slight distinction however is the element of production – i.e. the making of new things, and their circulation and display, particularly in contemporary arts where it's been interesting and difficult to see what the renewed ethical and ecological shifts away from the international and global mean, especially in the wake of [insert non-Western European country here] modernities as a pre-cursor attempt to that and how those approaches have been critiqued since. I guess I'm thinking about cycles of discursive concerns in the realm of contemporary art and art history in relation to locality, situatedness and the notion of the local when exhibited, produced or discussed in uprooted, white-cube settings. And this is all something that I have to think about because I'm extremely mobile by virtue of the PhD programme and by virtue of my passports and also, I think, because of my relative racial ambiguity which allows me to enter different spaces but also requires a different kind of... I get asked to perform different roles and have to consider how past roles I have had need to change in relation to my changing positionality. Like, who and what can I speak with, from, rooted in? And all the while, I'm often in spaces where people can use me to say “ah, so we're diverse, right?” I'm sure you get that too.

**VK:** Yes, I do. To some extent there are multiple existences or appearances that we all are, but some of them feel more in tune than others at certain points. I feel there's a lot that tends to be forgotten and unseen when we internationalise, when we abstract relations and places, moving from classroom to classroom, gallery to gallery,

conference to conference. This way of being mobile and internationalising limits what we get exposed to, how we see interconnections, especially very localised, proximal, intimate connections within the web of life. Much of arts and cultural production tries to do this abstracted place-making, instead of encounters with all who exist and show up in a place.

So, I am inspired by arts and cultural work that tries to exist differently, create differently, relate differently within particular places and the whole web of life within them. Ones that try to be more convivial, rooted, relational. This whole WOOFing culture<sup>11</sup>, WorkAway culture<sup>12</sup>, gatherings in festivals that last for a month, cycling culture - this is internationalisation which is happening on the ground, in a slower way, in a more relational and embedded way.

It's not just a 15-minute presence at a conference, or one-off lecture, one-off performance... The slowness, being able to actually spend some time and live in a place with someone, or welcome people in and out, allows for different kinds of creating and relating. These cultures are more challenging to the Art World and to the international capitalist colonial system than any great artwork in a gallery or any conference.

**SMS:** Yeah, I agree with you. The challenge I see is around when to strategically go public or to which parts to make transmittable given the risk of being instrumentalised or used to prop up realms that do not in practice support these forms of being. In this sense, I think there are so many important and beautiful practices of living otherwise than existing systems of circulation and consumption and relation -

[Marteinn returns to the conversation]

And for me the question is just always which parts of these could be shared, can be shared, can remind people that there are ways beyond this kind of turning up, sitting in a classroom, reading a text as if it's been amputated from reality and then sort of severing yourself from reality to continue to engage with it.

11 Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF): <https://wwof.net/>

12 Community of global travellers who want to see the world whilst giving back to the places they visit: <https://www.workaway.info/>



I'm thinking about this also in relation to, for me the biggest thing on my mind right now, and that is how to navigate the spiralling conversations around Palestine that are happening across many of the communities I'm in at very different scales. How to do that without over-centering on that as a single issue? How to find a way to attend to things that take time, whilst at the same time, responding with the urgency that things need? What kind of transmissions or elements need to be shared or can abuse or sneak back through these systems of circulation to change their fundamental forms of functioning?

And in that sense maybe we come back to you and Ukhona for instance having a moment of time to meet during 'Towards Fields of Where' within the frame of the SHAKIN conference, or us having time to meet you back in Friedrichshafen in March within the frame of another conference.<sup>13</sup> Both encounters happened through partially adhering to some elements of these structures of colonial violence within/of academia.

**VK:** I don't know, I guess mushrooms are quite inspiring. And I think they find ways to sneak into and go through the tunnels and borders and break through these kinds of structures that we see much more clearly and solidly. A lot of the practices that we are mentioning are in some way trying to do that. Or we have been doing that in some way. I feel it's almost our responsibility to find those moments in those rigid, structured spaces because they mean a lot when they happen in those spaces as well.

If it hadn't been for such a structured academic conference experience of two days, this meeting with Ukhona maybe wouldn't have been that extraordinary. It was so extraordinary exactly because it happened as a kind of counteraction to what was happening elsewhere, in other rooms.

I think a lot of these truly counter-hegemonic practices can be so boringly simple. They are actually super simple, much simpler than what we are usually asked to do and expected to do. Counter-hegemonic ways are not super exciting if you live them every day...

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13 This was the conference 'New Approaches in Cultural practices, Institutions and Policies for an Equality-Conscious Diversity Framework' 4–8 March 2023, Zepelin University, Germany

**SMS:** No, it's true. Towards the banal in a way, or towards a lived practice that... And then a question of... Yeah, I was thinking a little bit of the framing of elbow room, which comes from a different collective I worked with in Poland.<sup>14</sup>

And that in some spaces you need to take the elbow room, whereas if structures overall were not so intrinsic, maybe we wouldn't need it. But Ukhona, can you hear us? Are you back?

**MSJ:** We're very much talking about repairing across different levels.

And I also think you've touched very repeatedly and in very interesting ways on the overarching question of the conference – the ethics of international collaboration. I think these are fundamental ethical questions, not least because they circle so much around embodied experience.

**SMS:** Welcome back, Ukhona.

**UM:** Thank you. I hope I didn't miss much. I'm sure I missed much because you stay, dropping gems- all of you.

**SMS:** How are you? I'm sorry that you lost connection. We can try and reflect on the ground we covered without you:

I apologised for slightly formally framing the conversation and that the format of Teams was doing that to me, that I came in with a theoretical rather than interpersonal framing that perhaps a priori displaced us into an unground of our own presences. And then we began to talk about the connection, internet connections around the world. And then into a question of what it means to be internationalising, which is

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14 ZAKOLE, in conversation with Sophie, discussed elbow room back in June 2023. ZAKOLE is a project rooted in a wetland near Warsaw, who map and tell stories of this wetland in varying ways. This conversation reflected on how they collaborated with divergent stakeholders through thinking about elbow room, and was part of a process of co-design for a tool that was part of Sophie's Vest of Tools, an artwork/pedagogical object involving 4 tools for working together co-designed by collectives who were in Warsaw, Poland, in the summer of 2023. This work was part of Biennale Warszawa and funded by FEINART.

coming from Martein, my and Višnja's various experiences of parading around academic spaces. I suppose parading is my word. So maybe I'll pause. What else did we talk about?

**MSJ:** I don't want to paraphrase you, Višnja, because I think your contribution was quite substantial. You were sharing a lot of your own experiences, and I was drawing a little bit on those too. These are, similarly to the experiences that you also mentioned, Ukhona, different conditions of navigating the territory of international mobility.

And then, in the end, I was also remarking how these... well, Sophie pointed out the poignancy of repair in this context, and I was talking about how these also relate to this question of ethics in international collaboration, how these theoretical questions, how embodied beings are being spun around in different ways often.

And I think that's where our discussion that you missed was also interesting, as we were thinking about material infrastructures, whether it's the internet cables or, I mean, you yourself also mentioned borders, for instance, you know, how these very material structures dictate in very, very different ways what we as embodied beings experience.

**VK:** Maybe to reflect on some more invisible structures too: for instance, we had an interesting encounter with a Scottish art organizer and curator who has lived in Finland for quite some years. And he's now on a mobility grant through the Balkans, and wanted to meet us, a friend told him about Forest University. It was really interesting how it is as if we are almost trained to put into the conversation potential funding opportunities, collaborations and projects, which is what he was doing with good intentions, of course. In terms of who can be our partner, where, and through which funding.

And there was just this feeling – I need a break from those structures, but I want to meet some of those people. And how do you do that? How do we find the means or someplace in between or some moment to actually talk to one another and learn from one another without necessarily being productivist about it?

These structures of funding, mobility, and knowledge circulation, are also very much shaping international ethics of collaboration. We don't necessarily desire this kind of collaboration. I desire much smaller

scales, smaller funding, much more relaxed collaboration. But actually, what is being put to the scene, what is deemed worthy and what is bringing resources to some people who do need them, is usually some bigger funding, rich universities, foundations or rich states.

These dominant structures of collaborating or sharing knowledge make you have to cheat if you are not from a European or US university. You have to become a pirate or a hermit. Both Goran and I have made our academic careers thanks to Sci-Hub and LibGen, and these kinds of platforms providing free access to much of the academic writing. All these structures are invisibly framing, who's there, what's enabled and who we can share and collaborate with.

**UM:** Ah, yes –

**SMS:** Yes and –

**UM:** Actually, maybe if you could go on, because whatever I'm trying to say is not formulated in my head. So, I would just literally form a bunch of random things. But I'd rather hear what you have to say so that I can maybe have a little bit more time to think.

**SMS:** I'll keep it brief though, because it was more just a thought about these invisible structures that are rooted in very material histories and sustained also by very material presence and politics. I'm thinking about how Sci-hub is a nice example, or all of these kinds of resources that in a way are bringing us into other forms of contact, like who's tugging on which side of the...

Like, even if you're not seeding, you can help spread those kinds of texts in these paralegal ways and so you're in contact, brought into contact. I'm thinking about these alternative sites of encounter and that brings me back to the shelters that we can create for each other or the moments that we can be visible.

Because one thing, Ukhona, that I was asking Višnja about when you were gone was around when we might want to strategically use the international or when we might want to strategically use some of these sites in order to access a different kind of public or access different people or different sites or places.

But I don't know if that helps you to distill or whether that distracts where your mind was going now.

**UM:** I think it actually helps, because I think what I was trying to make a point of is this idea of attempting to engage with care and the solution and alternative world-building from the premise that whatever exists now is not sufficient for our needs and that it's failing in a lot of ways and that there are absolutely aspects of what works about it that must be carried forward.

There's a need for us to pay attention to the moment and being present and then the need for the space where radical imagination is needed. I speak of radical imagination, understanding that imagination is very political, so it becomes very difficult to imagine. You imagine differently from a place of repression and scarcity than when you do it from a place of justice and safety, comfort, provision, and joy. But back to this idea that there's an alternative world that is inching in through the rupture of the imagination. Part of coming to this knowledge must go hand in hand with the humility of the perspective that allows us to have a healthy relationship with iterative processes and fluidity and mobility. It is not the moment to be attached to binaries, it's a moment to engage with the humility that is required when you're understanding that things must be co-created. I think maybe if we look at it from that perspective, maybe we're able to come up with a spectrum of responses that are ours and have a regenerative concept of power rather than a subjugating and dominant notion of power.

**SMS:** We lost you for parts of it. So you came back into audibility when you started to talk about regeneration, which was impressive timing-wise.

But it was very beautiful that you came back with talking about regenerative practices. There was a kind of strange synchronicity, but I'm sorry that we didn't catch everything.

**MSJ:** Yes absolutely. On a different note, I might add how grateful I am for seeing you again, Višnja, and meeting you, Ukhona! It really gives me a lot as I wasn't able to be present at the conference in June, apart from joining via audio recording. Therefore, it is important to me

to get a stronger sense of what kinds of thoughts and conversations our workshop prompted, and for me to be able to return in this way to the place that the three of you shared with Julius. So that's very meaningful to me. I'm really glad and I'm really grateful for your time because I know it always needs carving out.

**VK:** Thank you for connecting us. I'm really glad it happened. In that sense, in what was really back there at the workshop, I feel we met as persons, but I also feel we shared the places we are really connected to. And we reflected upon these places as alternatives to where we were or where we are dominantly working.

And yeah, in those places we recalled, repair and care and regeneration do happen, which was very hopeful.

**UM:** Um, yeah, it's much more, it's equally a pleasure to have met you. Also, thank you for convening this space and I'm excited, I like the format very, very much. I thought about contributing to the publication, but I just knew that I didn't have the time to take on another writing task as much as I would have loved to critique and reflect back on Belgrade.

And so, I like and appreciate that I'm going to get to have a voice and it's going to be done in a way that is interesting in this way. And maybe the commitment is to just, you know, at that stage, even to keep doors open, with an opportunity and a request to me like this. And this is not the end of the road.

**SMS:** I'm glad, because I actually still have your sunglasses, which I need to return!



The SHAKIÑ team at the conference “In from the margins: Sharing footnotes of subaltern knowledge and practices”, Belgrade, University of Arts, 28th June 2023.

Standing: Samuel Döring, Dunja Babović, Eva Krivanec, Agca Saglam, Anna Tascha Larsson, Milena Dragičević Šešić, Sandra Ahman, Sonia Nikitin, Sarah Cordonnier, Višnja Kisić; crouching: Simisola Aremo and Camille Jutant.

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**Milena Dragičević Šešić** prof. emerita, former President of University of Arts, Belgrade, founder of UNESCO Chair in Interculturalism, Art Management and Mediation, professor of Cultural Policy & Cultural Studies. Member of the National Council for Science (2006-2010). Head of Cultural Policy Research Award (ECF, Amsterdam); University of Arts Laureate 2004, 2019; Commandeur dans l'Ordre des Palmes Academiques 2003; ENCATC Fellowship Laureate 2019; Doctor Honoris Causa University of Montpellier 2023. Guest Lecturer at numerous world universities. Published 20 books, 200 essays, translated in 18 languages. Works as the UNESCO Expert in cultural policy (Balkans, Cambodia, Central Asia, Caucasus, India, etc.). E-mail: msesic@gmail.com

**Basma El Hussein** is a cultural manager, an activist for social change, and a cultural rights defender. For the past 30 years, she has been involved in supporting independent cultural projects and organizations in the Arab region and Sub-Saharan Africa, bringing together her passion for civil society and community welfare with her expertise. The two main organizations that she founded and led, Al Mawred Al Thaqafy (Culture Resource) and Action for Hope, are proof of her commitment to culture and artistic creation as tools that enable people's empowerment and socio-economic improvement and allow a social change in the medium and long term. The first non-governmental regional cultural organization in the Arab region, Al Mawred Al Thaqafy, pioneered remarkable projects (e.g., the first cultural management training program in Arabic, and the first cultural policy research and development program in the Arab region), while the Action for Hope, that Basma currently leads, protects and promotes the cultural rights of marginalized communities

and the countries undergoing or emerging from conflict. Action for Hope pioneered cultural relief programs, new alternative models in arts education and production for refugee and marginalized communities, and is leading the Landscapes of Hope global civil society network promoting the role of arts and culture in social change. In 2018, Basma won the UCLG Agenda21 for Culture International Award for her contribution to the relationship between culture and sustainable development. E-mail: [b.elhusseiny@act4hope.org](mailto:b.elhusseiny@act4hope.org)

**Emilia Epštajn** earned her BA in Ethnology and Anthropology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, and a Master of Arts degree in Cultural and Gender Studies at the Faculty of Political Sciences. She works at the Museum of African Art in Belgrade, traversing the field of museum work through collaborative and interdisciplinary curatorial projects. Recent exhibitions include: “Reflect #2 – Fragments, Fragilities, Memories: Contemporary Art from Angola” (2022), “Non-Aligned World” (2021), “‘This is Not a War’ – Liberation of Mind and Land, in Ink and in Action” (2021), and “Everyday Poetics – Instagramming Life in East Africa” (2019). She was co-curator of the exhibition “Yugoslav Testimonies About the Algerian Revolution: Archival Omnibus”, 2023. E-mail: [e.epstajn@mau.rs](mailto:e.epstajn@mau.rs)

**Rebecca Fisch** studied cultural diplomacy, literature and theatre in Hildesheim and Belgrade. She graduated with a dissertation on the role of survivors’ artworks in the remembrance of the National Socialist genocide of Sinti and Roma. Since January 2023, she has been working for the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma as a project manager in the field of remembrance work in the Western Balkans. She is also involved in the Roma Holocaust Remembrance Network “Dikh He Na Bister” (Look and don’t forget). E-mail: [rebecca.fisch@sintiundroma.de](mailto:rebecca.fisch@sintiundroma.de)

**Jelena Marta Glišić Matović** (1980, Belgrade) is a visual artist and a researcher. Main interests: fine arts, cultural management, cultural policy, tacit knowledge, epistemology of artistic creative practices, knowledge management, fine arts education, international cultural relations practices, intercultural competence, intercultural intelligence, cultural institutions studies, sociology of the arts. E-mail: [jelena.marta.glisic@gmail.com](mailto:jelena.marta.glisic@gmail.com)

**Anisha Gupta Müller** is a pedagogical facilitator, who specialises in feminist body practices. She leads empowerment workshops and founded the dance fitness class FemmeFitness. Anisha’s projects question body politics and power

dynamics in arts education, with focus on creating safer spaces. More recently she has been teaching interdisciplinary seminars on anti-discrimination at weißensee kunsthochschule; with topics from the politics of representation, the art historical division of art/ artist, to the limits and possibilities of ‘transformative art’. She has lectured at institutions such as the Staatliche Akademie der Bildende Künste Stuttgart, Kunsthalle Wien, Sophiensaelen and Haus der Kulturen der Welt. E-mail: mulleranisha@gmail.com

**Sarah Hegenbart** PhD is currently a research fellow at the University of Oxford where she acts as a member of the consortium of the EU-funded project Horizon 2020 *Art and Research on Transformations of Individuals and Societies*. She has been selected as a member of the Junge Akademie Mainz. Among her recent publications are the monograph *From Bayreuth to Burkina Faso: Christoph Schlingensiefel’s Opera Village Africa as Postcolonial Gesamtkunstwerk?* (Leuven University Press, 2022) and *Dada Data. Contemporary art practice in the era of post-truth politics* (co-edited with Mara-Johanna Kölmel, Bloomsbury, 2023). E-mail: sarah.hegenbart@tum.de

**Estefanía Henríquez Cubillos** is a professional photographer, visual artist with M.A of Development of international artistic and cultural projects at the Université Lumière Lyon II in France. E-mail: estefaniah.cubillos@gmail.com

**Sonja Jankov** holds PhD in Art and Media Theory. She is currently conducting research “Design as inter-medial quote in art – contemporary artists about ideologies of automobile design: the case of Volkswagen beetle and Yugo” at the Academy of Arts, Novi Sad. Her fields of research include methodologies of practice-based research, art history/visual studies, museum studies and art theory. She is also active as a curator. E-mail: jankovsonja@gmail.com

**Camille Jutant** is an Associate Professor at the Université Lumière Lyon 2 and holds a PhD in communication science. Her research interests are focused on audience participation, heritage mediation, and digital literacies. Since 2014, she is overseeing the MA Development of International Cultural Projects. She teaches critical audience approaches, management of museums, and professional issues of digital mediations. Since 2006, she has been conducting audience surveys for public institutions such as Louvre museum, Musée des beaux-arts de Québec, Villeurbanne street arts festival, Réunion des musées nationaux, etc. E-mail: camille.jutant@univ-lyon2.fr

**Višnja Kisić**, PhD, is an educator, scholar and activist who explores entanglements between heritage, politics and ecological relations. Apart from her work as educator at several universities, organisations, and informal groups, she feeds on practices of DIT gardening, carpentry, earth-building and improvised music making. She's an inhabitant and a caretaker at the Forest University, Fruška Gora, a place for counter-hegemonic ways of learning and living, dedicated to questioning the boundaries of culture, society and nature, in order to steer new ecological and socio-political imaginations. What deeply inspires her are tricky questions, fungal intelligence and those who dare to live utopias. In this wondrous and wounded world, she often dwells at the shaky grounds between critique and care. E-mail: vikac986@gmail.com

**Ana Knežević** is an art historian and a PhD candidate at the Museology and Heritology department of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade. She is working at the Museum of African Art since 2016 and has co-curated the following exhibitions: "Unprotected Witness no.1: Afrodisiac" (2019), "Reflect – Namibia after 30 years of independence", "Unprotected Witness no. 2: MMM" (2020), "Non-Aligned World", "This is Not a War – The Liberation of Mind and Land, in Ink and In Action" (2021), "Reflect #2 – Fragments, Fragilities, Memories" (2022). She launched an online heritage map nesvrstani.rs and is co-curator of the exhibition "Yugoslav Testimonies About the Algerian Revolution: Archival Omnibus", 2023. E-mail: a.knezevic@mau.rs

**Tane Laketić** is a visual artist with M.A. of Interdisciplinary Master Studies at the UNESCO Chair in Cultural Policy and Management at the University of Arts in Belgrade. So far, they organized three solo exhibitions and participated in over 10 collective ones. Primarily works in textiles, but has interests in drawing, text, sound and performance. In addition, Tane aspires to contribute to the wider field of culture, including various disciplines such as management, communication, art history, cultural heritage, politics, human rights with an emphasis on LGBTQI+ rights. E-mail: tanelaketic@gmail.com

**Sophie Mak-Schram** is an art historian, producer, educator and occasional practitioner. She likes to think-work-make-be about how we (come to) know and what forms that knowledge takes. She mainly works with others, both as method and as form. At the moment, this work includes artist development programming, decolonial and DEI practices, programmes for young people and audio pieces. Her current research (in part held through the academic frame of the EU: Horizon 2020-funded FEINART project, where she is completing

a PhD at Zeppelin University in Germany) thinks alongside contemporary alternative educational projects about how artistic practices and methods can convene communities around learning. At the moment, she's particularly interested in radical pedagogies, sociality, embodied knowledge and the 'and' between art and education. E-mail: [sophie.mak-schram@zu.de](mailto:sophie.mak-schram@zu.de)

**Monika Mokre** PhD is a political scientist and senior researcher at the Institute of Culture Studies and Theatre History of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. She is a political activist in the fields of asylum, migration, and prison work. Her research fields are asylum, migration, prison research, cultural policies, theories of democracy, and gender studies. E-mail: [monika.mokre@oeaw.ac.at](mailto:monika.mokre@oeaw.ac.at)

**Aleksandra Momčilović Jovanović**, ethnologist-anthropologist, senior curator in the Museum of Yugoslavia, earned her higher professional degree by working on the exhibition "*Yuga, my Yuga – Gastarbeiter stories*", which she co-authored. She has been curating Museum's core exhibit "Museum laboratory". She handles ethnological collections. In recent years, she has been engaged in defining the development policy and its implementation, as well as the standardization and development of the oral archive of the Museum. She is continuously interested in issues of the axiological profile of museum objects, especially the affective value in the context of the Yugoslav experience and heritological hermeneutics. E-mail: [aleksandra.momcilovic@mij.rs](mailto:aleksandra.momcilovic@mij.rs)

**Smangaliso Ngwenya** is a multi-disciplinary artist, researcher, and founder of Isifiso SakaGogo Performance Theatre. The essence of all his offerings, research, and writing, is rooted in dance and movement initiated in the embodied, moving, dancing black body. This is towards investigating epistemologies and pedagogies in the black African experience and documentation of African dance. He holds a Bachelor of Journalism and Media Studies from Rhodes University (2016) and a Master of Arts in the field of Cultural Policy and Management (2020) from the University of the Witwatersrand. He is currently a PhD candidate researching embodied, practice-led research rooted in Afrocentrism at the University of the Witwatersrand. E-mail: [smangaliso.ngwenya@wits.ac.za](mailto:smangaliso.ngwenya@wits.ac.za)

**Sonia Nikitin**, PhD student in communication studies and applied theatre studies at University Lyon 2, Lyon (FR) and Justus-Liebig University Gießen (DE). Sonia Nikitin holds a bi-national BA in European Media Culture

(Bauhaus-University Weimar and University Lyon 2) and a MA in International Cultural Management (University Lyon 2). She worked in environments focusing on questions of cultural democracy, diversity of knowledge and international cooperation, while continuously developing her practice as a dancer. As a PhD candidate in communication studies at University Lyon 2 and applied theatre studies at Justus-Liebig University Gießen, supervised by Sarah Cordonnier and Gerko Egert, she currently develops an action-research project investigating the circulation of knowledge in shared creation practices in contemporary dance through the prism of pluriversality. E-mail: s.nikitin@univ-lyon2.fr

**Ukhona Ntsali Mlandu** is the Director of Greatmore Studios, Cape Town, South Africa, as well as the founder and curator of makwande.republic in Goshen Village, Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Mlandu is a Senior Atlantic Fellow for Racial Equity. She is also a practicing artist, writer, and healing practitioner with a focus on restorative justice. She has a special interest in mobility justice, gender justice, spatial justice, embodied wellness, artists who are parents, and black liberatory futures. E-mail: ukhona@gmail.com

**Kaj Osteroth's** solo and collaborative art projects use drawing and painting as dialogical tools in order to question stereotypes, knowledge production and (art) history writing. She graduated in 2006 with an MFA from Universität der Künste, Berlin, where she studied under Stan Douglas. She also completed a Magister in Anthropology and History of Art at the Freie Universität Berlin. Since 2007, Kaj Osteroth has been working with Lydia Hamann as the painter duo *hamann&osteroth*. Their collaborative works—conceptual, feminist, immersed in dialogue, and rife with an external reference, inspired by queer theory and visual studies—have been shown internationally to great acclaim, e.g., at the 10<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art in 2018, and at the Histórias Feministas at Museu de Arte de São Paulo in 2019. E-mail: studio@kaj-osteroth.com

**Tanja Ostojić** (\*1972 Yugoslavia) is Berlin based, visual-, performance-, and interdisciplinary artist, researcher and educator. She is internationally renowned as a pioneer of institutional gender critique, socially and politically engaged feminist art, and art in public space, especially related to migration and gender issues. Her artworks have a high level of theoretical reference and have been analysed and included in numerous books, journals and anthologies. She studied at the University of Arts Belgrade, at ÉRBAN Nantes, and was a

fellow of the Graduate School at the University of Arts, Berlin. She received various grants and awards; her performances and exhibition art works have taken her since 1994 to numerous important art venues and festivals worldwide, such as the 49th and 54th Venice Biennale, Brooklyn Museum in New York, Busan Biennale in South Korea, among others. Ostojić has published a number of books and essays and has given seminars, workshops, talks, and lectures at academic conferences and at art universities around Europe and in the Americas. E-mail: TanjaOstojicArt@Gmail.com

**Lena Paffrath** is an MA student of Film and Cultural Studies at the *Bauhaus University* in Weimar. Following the Shakin Project Lena aspires to continue working in the cultural field with a focus on curation. E-mail: lena.paffrath@web.de

**Vânia Rodrigues**, Coordinator of the Post-Graduate Programme in Arts Management and Sustainability at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and Principal Investigator at Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies (CEIS20) – University of Coimbra. Vânia Rodrigues worked as an arts manager and consultant for several cultural organizations before transitioning to a research career. With a PhD in Artistic Studies from the University of Coimbra and an MA in Cultural Policy and Management from the City University of London, she currently coordinates the Post-Graduate Diploma in Arts Management and Sustainability at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Coimbra and is a Principal Investigator of the R&D project GREENARTS in the framework of Modes of Production – Performing Arts in Transition at CEIS20 – Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies. E-mail: vania.rodrigues@uc.pt

**Marina Simić** is a Professor at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Belgrade. She received her MA and PhD in Social Anthropology from the University of Manchester. Professor Simić writes on cultural and anthropological theory and postsocialist transformation in Europe. Her book *Cosmopolitan longing: ethnography of Serbian postsocialism* has been awarded by the Ethnographic Institute of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences as the best anthropological book in the Serbian language for 2013 and 2014. She is also a poet and a libretto writer. The opera *Higher* for which she wrote a libretto was played in Serbia, Belgium and Indonesia. E-mail: marina.simic@fpm.bg.ac.rs

**Marteinn Sindri Jónsson** (1989), seasoned in the production, performance, and composition of music, studied philosophy (BA/MA) and works



across artistic and cultural fields in and beyond his home in Iceland through practice, collaborations, publishing, and research. He has produced extensively for the Iceland National Radio, co-curated art festivals in East Iceland and lectured and collaborated in workshops with students and practitioners at the departments of design, architecture, and fine art at the Iceland University of the Arts. He currently holds a Marie Skłodowska-Curie PhD scholarship at Zeppelin University within the FEINART research network, focusing in his dissertation on socially engaged and place-based curatorial practices. E-mail: mattisindri@gmail.com / marteinn.jonsson@zu.de

**Julius Thinnes** (he/him) studies cultural management at Zeppelin University in Friedrichshafen. He is a member of the cultural and housing project Die Blaue Blume e.V. in Friedrichshafen. The collective aims to create an open space for creativity and encounters, support the local independent cultural scene, and to intervene in the conservative city of Friedrichshafen by reflecting on contemporary and local socio-political issues like housing shortage and climate change. His interests focus on socially engaged art, community-based cultural organisation, the practice of repairing and land-use or place-(un) making. E-mail: j.thinnes@zeppelin-university.net

**Jelena Todorović** received her BA in the History of Art at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, and MA (1998) and PhD (2004) at University College London. Since 2005 she has been teaching early modern art history at the *University of the Arts in Belgrade* where she presently works as a Full Professor. For the past 16 years (since 2006) she leads the project of curating and protecting the *State Art Collection in Belgrade* for which she received European Union Award for cultural heritage in 2018 (Europa Nostra). She published extensively on the subjects of early modern festival culture, concepts of space and time in the Baroque age, as well as the history of collecting and the history of Trieste in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. E-mail: jelena.a.todorovic@gmail.com

**António Ventura** is a Post-Doctoral Researcher at the R&D project GREENARTS in the framework of Modes of Production – Performing Arts in Transition at CEIS20 – Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Coimbra. E-mail: venturamartins@uc.pt

**Svetlana Volic** is visual artist and Associate Professor at the Painting Department of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade as well as the Vice Dean for International Cooperation. She received her BA (1999), MA (2002) and DA

- doctorate of arts (2018) at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade. She had 18 solo exhibitions and took part in a great variety of group exhibitions, symposiums, site-specific projects, festivals and workshops in Serbia and abroad (Germany, Italy, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, USA, Hungary, Latvia, Greece, Poland...). She has participated in the production of many theatre performances, contributing videos and video installations. In 2013, she won the CEC ArtsLink Fellowship in Performing Arts and Literature (New York). Her works are in museums, public and private collections in both home and abroad. E-mail: volicsvetlana@gmail.com

**26<sup>th</sup> of June 2023**

**Conference “In from the margins – Sharing footnotes of subaltern knowledge and**

	9:30 - 10:00	10:00 - 11:00	11:00 - 11:30	11:30 - 13:00	13:00 - 14:00
Congress hall	<p><b>Opening</b></p> <p>Co-presidents of the Conference Program Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sarah Cordonnier</b>, University Lyon 2</li> <li>• <b>Milena Dragičević Šešić</b>, University of Arts in Belgrade</li> <li>• <b>Mirjana Nikolić</b>, Rector of the University of Arts in Belgrade</li> <li>• <b>Jelena Begović</b>, Minister of Science, Technological Development and Innovation</li> </ul>	<p>Keynote:</p> <p><b>White privilege is not a question of color</b></p> <p><b>Gerty Dambury</b>, writer and activist, Guadeloupe/France            Chair: <b>Ivan Medenica</b>, University of Arts, Faculty of Dramatic Arts</p>		<p><b>Sharing subaltern knowledge through international cultural collaborations (SHAKIN')</b>            panel debate</p> <p>Chair: <b>Sarah Cordonnier</b>, University Lyon 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Eva Krivanec</b>, Bauhaus-University Weimar</li> <li>• <b>Goran Tomka</b>, UNESCO Chair, University of Arts in Belgrade</li> <li>• <b>Pascale Bonniel Challer</b>, University Lyon 2</li> <li>• <b>Camille Jutant</b>, University Lyon 2</li> <li>• <b>Nina Mihaljinac</b>, UNESCO Chair, University of Arts in Belgrade</li> </ul>	
Rectors hall - 46			Coffee break		Lunch break
Classroom 35					

# University of Arts in Belgrade

## practices: Questioning North-South relations and ethics of international collaboration”

14:00 - 15:30	15:30 - 16:00	16:00 - 18:00	18:00 - 19:30
<p><b>Monitoring Cultural Policies Around the World: Potential and Challenges Compendium as a 'Good Practice' beyond Europe for "Bringing in from the Margins"</b></p> <p>Chair: <b>Avril Joffe</b>, University of Witwatersrand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ulrike Blumenreich / Oliver Göbel</b>, Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends</li> <li>• <b>Oleksandr Butsenko</b>, Institute of Cultural Research of the National Academy of Arts of Ukraine</li> <li>• <b>Nataša Kraljević</b>, Member of the Compendium, Montenegro, Lecturer at the Faculty of Visual Arts, University "Mediterranean" Podgorica</li> <li>• <b>Anupama Sekhar</b>, former Coordinator of Compendium goes beyond Europe; UNESCO expert facility member (2015-2022), director of the Culture Department at the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)</li> <li>• <b>Hiroko Tsuboi-Friedman</b>, former Deputy Director for International Affairs, Science Council of Japan Secretariat, Cabinet</li> </ul>	Coffee break	<p><b>Epistemic injustice – a critical perspective of hegemonic knowledge</b></p> <p>Chair: <b>Milena Stefanović</b>, Independent researcher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Monika Mokre</b>: Can the Subaltern be a Scientist?</li> <li>• <b>Ulf Aminde &amp; Christien Goutré</b>: Critical Spaces at White Art Academies or Art Academies for Everyone?</li> <li>• <b>Krishan Rajapaksh</b>: Re-inventing Politic and Aesthetics in a White Art Academy</li> <li>• <b>Anisha Gupta Müller</b>: The politics and Possibilities of 'Safer Spaces' - Confronting Academia as a Site of Violence</li> </ul>	
<p><b>SHAKIN' Project Transnational meeting</b></p> <p><b>Perspectives from the South</b></p> <p>Chair: <b>Ana Sladojević</b>, Independent curator and theorist</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ukhona Ntsali Mandu</b>: Alternative World-Building from an African Feminist Perspective that Rejects Linearity and Hierarchies of Knowledge Production, Consumption and Application</li> <li>• <b>Doris Augusta Tarawalie</b>, Embracing Diversity in a Learning Community: Lessons from "World in Serbia" scholarly community</li> <li>• <b>Gautam Chakrabarti</b> "'Voyages of Peace': Tito's Attempts at Afro-Eurasian Solidarity and Cultural Diplomacy on Board the Galeb"; Internationalist Solidarity Between the Global East and South.</li> <li>• <b>Ana Sladojević</b>: An Anticolonial Museum Manifesto</li> </ul>		<p><b>SHAKIN' Project Transnational meeting</b></p> <p><b>Situatedness in knowledge production: peripheral perspectives</b></p> <p>Chair: <b>Slobodan Cvejić</b>, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ksenija Marković, Jovana Karaulić</b>: The Building Capacities of "Peripheral" Performing Arts in a Transnational Context</li> <li>• <b>Ljiljana Rogač Mijatović</b>: Ways of Knowing and "Sciences from below": Insights for Cultural Policy Studies in a Controversial World</li> <li>• <b>Nebojša Milikić, Violeta Stojmenović</b>: What is to be Done in the Crawl Space of Fathers and Children (Historical "We" of the Peripheral Middle Classes)</li> <li>• <b>Marija Đorđević</b>: Body Knows – Body Does, Corporal Knowledge and Heritage Interpretation</li> <li>• <b>Vania Rodrigues</b>: "Our Problem, Not Our Fault": Semi-Peripheral Perspectives on 'Greening' Cultural Policy and Management</li> </ul>	<p><b>Digital world: is subaltern excluded from techno utopias, doctoral seminar</b></p> <p>Chair: <b>Maja Vukadinović</b>, Faculty of Contemporary Arts</p> <p>referees: <b>Milan Gnjatović</b>, University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies; <b>Aleksandra Milovanović</b>, University of Arts in Belgrade, Faculty of Dramatic Arts; <b>Milena Stefanović</b>, Independent researcher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Olivia Sino</b>: Podcasts and Critical Public Pedagogies - A Deconstruction of "Canadian" Hegemony Through Commons</li> <li>• <b>Dragana Zarić</b>: Silence as Subaltern: Can the Slow Media Shake the Tyranny of the Speed?</li> <li>• <b>Jelena Mila</b>: Nordic Film Engagement in Collective Noir Imaginaries</li> <li>• <b>Sara Trdšić</b>: The Impact of Digital Technology on Education: Examining the Role of AI Tools and the Marginalization of Underprivileged Nations and Individuals</li> </ul>

27<sup>th</sup> of June 2023

Conference “In from the margins – Sharing footnotes of subaltern knowledge and

	9:30 - 10:30	10:30 - 11:00	11:00 - 13:00	13:00 - 14:00
Congress hall	<p><b>Artist talk</b></p> <p><b>Tanja Ostojčić:</b> Methodologies of Empowering Feminist Artistic Practices and Alternative Pedagogical Formats Developed in the Framework of “Mis(s)placed Women?” (2009-2022), Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojčić, international (performance) art workshops (2011–17)</p> <p>Chair: <b>Jasmina Čubrilo</b>, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy</p>		<p><b>Fairness in international cultural cooperation: questioning North-South relations</b></p> <p>chair: <b>Ivana Spasić</b>, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Avril Joffe, Matina Magkou:</b> On Fairness in EU-Africa cultural relations, an auto-ethnographic approach</li> <li>• <b>Srufi Bala:</b> Can Translation Do Justice?</li> <li>• <b>Greg de Cuir:</b> Assembling a Subversive Canon in Black film, from 1968 to Today</li> <li>• <b>Dóra Mérai, Loes Veldpaus:</b> Why to / how not to – North-South and East-West collaborations and epistemologies in EU projects</li> </ul>	
Rectors hall - 46		Coffee break	<p><b>Ontological turn and epistemic injustice – a critical perspective on hegemonic knowledge</b></p> <p>Chair: <b>Irina Subotić</b>, UNESCO Chair, University of Arts in Belgrade</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Marina Simić:</b> “Taking Others Seriously”: Ontological Turn and the Knowledge from the Marginal Margins</li> <li>• <b>Igor Polskiy:</b> Radical Critics of Civilization</li> <li>• <b>Ilya Dementiev:</b> Writing the History of the Kronprinz Quarter in Kaliningrad: the Search for a Common Narrative</li> <li>• <b>Tania Archimovich:</b> A Claim for Avant-Gardes in Belarus. The Potential of Artistic Practices for Deterritorialization of Knowledge Production</li> </ul>	Lunch break
Classroom 35			<p><b>Towards Politics of Care and Caring Cultural Policies</b></p> <p>Chair: <b>Dimitrije Tadić</b>, Independent researcher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Giuliana Ciancio:</b> Political emotions for pluralist cultural policies</li> <li>• <b>Marthe Nehl, Friederike Landau-Donnelly:</b> Infrastructuring Togetherness: Unpacking policy, advocacy, and constructions of community in Europe’s network of independent cultural centres</li> <li>• <b>Özlem Canyürek, Friederike Landau-Donnelly, Meike Lettau:</b> Caring Cultural Policies</li> <li>• <b>Adil Serhan Şahin, Dunja Karanović:</b> Ethics of Care in Cultural Policy and Practice - Case Study: Documenta15</li> </ul>	

# University of Arts in Belgrade

## practices: Questioning North-South relations and ethics of international collaboration”

14:00 - 16:00	16:00 - 16:30	16:30 - 18:00	18:00 - 20:00	
<p><b>Subaltern perspectives in teaching arts and heritage: imagination and tacit, experiential knowledge</b></p> <p>chair: <b>Milena Jokanović</b>, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Loes Veldpaus</b>: Teaching heritage with care: reclaiming the master's tools</li> <li>• <b>Hanne Maria De Bruin</b>: Kattaikkuttu's tacit, experiential knowledge</li> <li>• <b>Kim-Marie Spence</b>: Decolonising arts management curricula</li> <li>• <b>Nikola Koruga</b>: Everyday life and (im)possibility for critical thinking improvement by critical utopian imagination</li> <li>• <b>Sonia Nikilin</b>: Dancing the Pluriverse. An Approach to the Circulation of Knowledge in Contemporary Dance Through Shared Creation Practices</li> </ul>	<p>Coffee break</p>	<p><b>"Empowering Participation in Culture and Architecture: Activating Public Resources for and with Community (EPICA): new theoretical framework for participatory urban and cultural policies panel debate</b></p> <p>Chair: <b>Nina Mihaljinac</b>, University of Arts in Belgrade, Faculty of Dramatic Arts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Bojana Matejić</b>, University of Arts in Belgrade, Faculty of Fine Arts</li> <li>• <b>Danijela Milovanović Rodić</b>, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Architecture</li> <li>• <b>Irena Ristić</b>, University of Arts in Belgrade, Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade</li> <li>• <b>Višnja Kisić</b>, University of Arts in Belgrade</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Innovative, site-specific and practice-based teaching and learning</b></p> <p>Chair: Ivana Vujčić, University of Arts, Faculty of Dramatic Arts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Munyaradzi Chatikobo</b>: Efficacy of Internships in Higher Education - a Pedagogic Reflection on Cultural Policy and Management (CPM) Traineeship Programme in Four Undergraduate Courses at Wits University Research Theme: Methods and Modes of Subaltern Teaching and Learning</li> <li>• <b>Jelena Todorović, Svetlana Volic</b>: The Way a City Remembers. The importance of Site-Specific Projects for the Process of Art Education</li> <li>• <b>Tamara Nikolić</b>: Performative Learning - Overcoming the Knowing Paradigm</li> <li>• <b>Jelena Marta Glišić</b>: Tacit Knowledge in Fine Arts. Epistemological Potential of Art Doctorates at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade</li> </ul>		<p><b>Creative learning: urban spaces, heritage sites and museums in virtual and real communities</b></p> <p>Chair: <b>Miloš Milošević</b>, Singidunum University</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sergej Dmitriev</b>: Gardening Learning Ecosystems in Between Steady University and Industry Structures The Game   Changers Case</li> <li>• <b>Merit Kofoğlu</b>: Investigation of Social Media Usage in Museology Through Museums of Turkey and the World</li> <li>• <b>Meltem Ezer</b>: Industrial Heritage Sites as Urban Memory Spaces: Beykoz Kundura and the Neighboring Communities</li> <li>• <b>Juan Pablo Aschner</b>: Faculty of Creative Studies: An Innovative Proposal for Training in Creative Areas in Latin America</li> </ul>		<p><b>External event:</b>  <b>Samuel Döring</b>: Audio Walk - How could a Non-Sexist City Sound Like? (gathering in front of University of Arts, Belgrade)</p>
<p><b>Minority perspectives, subaltern stories, situating feminism</b></p> <p>Chair: Nada Bobičić, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Political Sciences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Vlatko Ilić, Vojislav Klačar</b>: Radical Intimacy</li> <li>• <b>Felicitas Zeeden</b>: Learning from the Margins. Decolonial Perspectives for Cultural institutions and the Practice of Outreach Curation</li> <li>• <b>Anna Tascha Larsson</b>: Reimagining museums: Unveiling women's history through collaboration</li> <li>• <b>Tane Laketić, Sasha Krasinskaya</b> (University of Arts, Belgrade, Serbia), <b>Lena Paffrath</b> (Bauhaus University, Weimar, Germany), <b>Lola Lambert, Jhonny Ning, Estefanía Henríquez Cubillos</b> (University Lumière Lyon II, France): Perreo Periferia: A Feminist Exploration of Reggaeton</li> <li>• <b>Svetlana Hristova</b>: The Decolonization of the Self : The Never-Ending Story</li> </ul>			<p><b>Sophie Mak-Schram: Expand the And (Workshop)</b></p> <p>Chair: <b>Maida Gruden</b>, Head of Visual Arts Department and curator, Students' City Cultural Center, New Belgrade</p>	

28<sup>th</sup> of June 2023

Conference “In from the margins – Sharing footnotes of subaltern knowledge and

8:00		9:30 - 10:30	10:30 - 11:00	11:00 - 13:00	13:00 - 14:00
<p><b>External event:</b> <b>Sergey Dmitriev:</b> Ecovillages as Living Labs for Academia and Artists to Pave the Road to Symbyocenic Collaborations - Early morning walk &amp; talk unstructured discussion (meeting point in front of the University of Arts, Belgrade)</p>	<p>Congress hall</p>	<p>Keynote: <b>Human Rights Based Approach through Artistic and Cultural Practises</b>  <b>Basma el Husseiny</b>, Action for Hope (Beirut) Chair: <b>Bijana Đorđević</b>, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Political Sciences</p>	<p>Coffee break</p>	<p><b>Subalternity and remembrance work Practice-based alternatives for subaltern knowledge production and sharing</b>  chair: <b>Vera Mevorah</b>, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory • <b>Jelena Savić</b>: The Darker Side of East European Coloniality - The Case of the Balkan Roma • <b>Rebecca Fisch</b>: Creating Narratives – Subaltern Knowledge in Remembrance Work • <b>Isidora Savić</b>: Visual Representations of the Romani Women in the 19th and Early 20th century Serbian Art: from Oriental and Erotic to Ethnographic Subject Matter</p>	<p>Lunch break</p>
	<p>Rectors hall - 46</p>			<p><b>Artist talks</b>  Chair: <b>Nikola Šuica</b>, University of Arts in Belgrade, Faculty of Fine Arts • <b>Sophie Mak-Schram, Marteinn Jonsson, Julius Thinnis</b>: Towards Fields of Where (plus workshop TBC) • <b>Andreas Liebmann</b>: Marginal Voices in the Center (plus workshop outside the Rectorate building)</p>	
	<p>Classroom 35</p>			<p><b>Culture of memory, artistic engagement and collective imaginaries</b>  Chair: <b>Sanja Iguman</b>, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory • <b>Andela Jovanović, Kajmak Boris</b>: Destroying Monuments as Decolonizing Method: the Case Study of Yugoslav WWII monuments • <b>Falma Fshazi</b>: Space and Heritage in Contemporary Balkans. A Research and Teaching Perspective • <b>Sonja Jankov</b>: Is Experience of Yugoslavia Subaltern Knowledge? Contemporary Art and Memory of Yugoslav car industry</p>	

# University of Arts in Belgrade

## practices: Questioning North-South relations and ethics of international collaboration”

14:00 - 16:00	16:00 - 16:30	16:30 - 17:45	17:45 - 18:00
<p><b>Archiving and musealising subaltern experiences</b></p> <p>Chair: <b>Milan Popadić</b>, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Nebojša Dorđević</b>: Life Histories as Decolonized Non-Aligned Memories</li> <li>• <b>Emilia Epštajn, Ana Knežević</b>: Counter-Archiving: From Artefacts as Objects, to People as Subjects of History</li> <li>• <b>Aleksandra Momčilović Jovanović</b>: Lion People – Gastarbeiter in The Museum of Yugoslavia</li> <li>• <b>Jasmina Gavrankapetanović-Redžić</b>: Cultural Heritage and Identity Politics - the Case of Shuri Castle and its Dragon Pillars</li> </ul>		<p><b>Decolonising cultural policies and cultural management teaching – reconsidering North – South relations – panel debate)</b></p> <p>Chair: <b>Jasna Zrnović</b>, secretary general, UNESCO National Commission of Serbia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Yeo Lacina</b>, Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny Abidjan-Cocody</li> <li>• <b>Munyaradzi Chatikobo</b>, Wits School of Arts, Johannesburg</li> <li>• <b>Shumirai Nyota</b>, Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe</li> <li>• <b>Kouassi N Guessan Fulgence</b>, Côte d'Ivoire</li> <li>• <b>Helena Nassif</b>, Al Mawred al Thaqafi, Beirut</li> <li>• <b>Nina Mihaljinac</b>, UNESCO Chair, University of Arts, Belgrade</li> </ul>	<p><b>Closing of the Conference</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Goran Milošinić</b>, president of the UNESCO National Commission of Serbia</li> <li>• <b>Camille Jutant</b>, University of Lyon 2</li> <li>• <b>Milena Dragičević Šešić</b>, University of Arts in Belgrade</li> </ul>
<p><b>Artist talks</b></p> <p>Chair: <b>Sunčica Milosavljević</b>, independent researcher, Baza Art NGO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sarah Hegenbart, Kaj Osteroth</b>: Respons*able drawing as tool to confront epistemic injustice (workshop)</li> <li>• <b>Ana Pinter, Ana Konstantinović</b>: Lecture-performance "In Our Cave" by Young Theatre Experts</li> </ul>	Coffee break	<p>Video screening: Mis(s)placed Women? (69 min)</p> <p>Performance Art Workshop by <b>Tanja Ostojić</b></p> <p>Istanbul Itinerary Directed by Tanja Ostojić Mis(s)placed Women?</p> <p>Production in Colaboration with Cultural Academy Tarabya and Performistanbul, 2021/2022 english/turkish</p>	
<p><b>Subaltern cultural practices in public and counter-public realms: new models, self-organisation, anti-institutional practices</b></p> <p>chair: <b>Mina Petrović</b>, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Oleksandr Butsenko</b>: Comprehension of Social Space: Ukrainian Reality</li> <li>• <b>Marijana Cvetković</b>: Where is Democracy Here? Subalternity, Self-Organized Practices, Arts and Hopeful Societies</li> <li>• <b>Isidora Popović</b>: An Ethnographic Account of Practices of Commoning at The Cultural Centre Magacin in Belgrade: A Cultural-Historical Activity Theory Perspective</li> <li>• <b>Voica Puscasiu</b>: Illegal Artistic Interventions on Eastern-European Public Monuments</li> </ul>		<p><b>Cultural remembrance and community based project</b></p> <p>Chair: <b>Ildiko Erdei</b>, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Zeynep Okyay</b>: "Taşlica Table" - a Research-Based Art Project for Knowledge Production in an Inclusive Approach Between Archaeologists, Local People, and Artists in Taşlica, Marmaris (TR)</li> <li>• <b>Daniel Palacios González</b>: Cultures of Memory from Below: Mapping Subaltern Remembrance in Spain</li> <li>• <b>Ana Matićević, Paula Sawatzki, Vedran Pean, Maia Paounov, Theresa Piening, Yichen Guo, Ivana Erdevički</b>: WHAT DO WE KEEP? An Exploration of Personal Archive and Non-Academic Research</li> </ul>	



SUBALTERN KNOWLEDGE IN CULTURAL PRACTICES:  
FOSTERING FAIRNESS, COOPERATION AND CARE

*edited by*

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In a world saturated by the ever-present buzz of the dominant, *Subaltern Knowledge in Cultural Practices* offers a vital platform for perspectives from below and beyond. Edited by Milena Dragičević Šešić and Sarah Cordonnier, this conference proceedings brings together scholars, artists, and cultural practitioners who challenge the status quo through their work on and from the margins of society.

Readers will encounter a diverse range of topics, from ontological shifts and post-colonial critiques to feminist explorations of reggaeton and counter-archiving practices, the transformation of the Yugoslav working class, the complexities of 'greening' cultural policy, and the role of site-specific projects in art education. The final section offers a non-conclusive conversation on the practice of repairing, reflecting the ongoing and evolving nature of subaltern studies.

*Subaltern Knowledge in Cultural Practices* is an invitation to rethink and broaden our understanding of knowledge, culture, and everyday practice. It is essential reading for those interested in cultural studies, post-colonial theory, and the politics of knowledge sharing and production.

**Goran Tomka, UNESCO Chair in Interculturalism,  
Art Management and Mediation, University of Arts Belgrade**

*Subaltern Knowledge in Cultural Practices* grew out of our project "Sharing subaltern knowledge through international cultural cooperation" (SHAKIN'). Over three years (2020–2023), and with the support of the Erasmus+ program, this partnership addressed issues of exclusion, depoliticization, and relevance in cultural collaborations. Our international team of researchers, students, activists, cultural professionals, produced several tools and resources aimed at implementing support systems for students, young professionals, and all those wanting to sustain subaltern knowledge through cultural practices.

We endeavored to find common, respectful and joyful ways of experimenting, working, observing, comparing, collecting, unlearning, testing, questioning, sharing, framing... and, of course, letting ourselves be shaken! We do believe that this book reflects our ways of working and thinking. And as it gathers so many inspiring and much needed contributions, it also goes beyond the SHAKIN' project: It will hopefully nurture other meaningful enterprises.

**Nina Mihaljinac, UNESCO Chair in Interculturalism,  
Art Management and Mediation, University of Arts Belgrade**

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