

Online International Scientific Conference

**RIGHT TO PERFORM,
RIGHT TO RESIST
PERFORMING ARTS
SHAPING CRISIS**

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

October 20–21, 2025

Faculty of Dramatic Arts,
University of Arts in Belgrade



FACULTY OF
DRAMATIC
ARTS IN
BELGRADE

ELIA

 **ENCATC**

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INTRODUCTION

WELCOME NOTE

Dear colleagues, artists, scholars and friends,

It is our great honour and joy to welcome you to the international conference **Right to Perform, Right to Resist: Performing Arts Shaping Crisis**, organized by students of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, University of Arts in Belgrade.

This gathering was born out of a shared need - to understand how art can speak when words fail, how performance can stand its ground when the world feels unsteady. Over the past year, we have learned that a protest and a performance are not so far apart: both demand presence, courage and belief in something larger than oneself. As students and young artists, we have seen how a single gesture, a collective action or a story told out loud can inspire change and bring comfort. These moments have reminded us why we chose to study and create within the arts: because performance holds the power to make visible what is silenced, to connect what is divided and to imagine what has not yet been possible.

For us, this conference is much more than an academic event. It is a meeting place, a space to listen, to question, to connect and to imagine together. We hope it will spark conversations that cross borders and disciplines and that it will offer moments of recognition and solidarity between all who see art as a way to resist despair and nurture hope.

In times marked by uncertainty, inequality and crisis, we believe that the performing arts offer something profoundly necessary: a way to stay present, to resist indifference and to reaffirm the shared humanity that binds us all. These two days are our contribution to that belief: that art and resistance are inseparable and that both are essential for imagining a fairer, freer and more compassionate world.

We thank all participants, mentors, and supporters who have joined us in this endeavor.

With solidarity and gratitude,

The Conference Team
Faculty of Dramatic Arts, University of Arts in Belgrade

THEMATIC CONTEXT AND CORE OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE

Over the past year, Serbia has witnessed an awakening of civic consciousness led by students who have reminded society of the enduring power of collective action. Through their struggle for fundamental democratic values - human rights, the rule of law, and the right to resistance - they have brought to light the pervasive effects of systemic corruption that shape all spheres of public life, including the cultural and artistic sectors. Within this landscape, theatre and the performing arts stand at a crucial intersection: they can either reinforce mechanisms of power or become spaces of liberation, imagination and social transformation.

Throughout history, the performing arts have never remained neutral. In moments of social and political upheaval, theatre has persistently tested its own capacity for intervention - questioning how artistic practice can both reflect and reshape the crises that define its time. Today, however, it is no longer sufficient for theatre merely to represent social struggles. It must also interrogate its own structures of production, organization, and authorship. The principle of horizontality, which has enabled endurance and solidarity within the student protests, opens new perspectives for reimagining theatre-making - rooted in bottom-up processes, collective responsibility, and mutual care. Can artistic production, as such, serve as a model of resistance? Can performance generate new forms of community, solidarity and political imagination?

The conference **Right to Perform, Right to Resist: Performing Arts Shaping Crisis** seeks to engage these questions within a global framework. Aware that the current socio-political crisis in Serbia is only one manifestation of broader systemic challenges, this gathering aims to foster international dialogue among scholars, artists, cultural practitioners, and students. Together, we will examine how collaborative practices, solidarity networks, and both institutional and non-institutional initiatives in the performing arts can sustain resistance, shape crisis, and envision alternative futures.

Held online on **20–21 October 2025**, the conference will provide a platform for critical reflection on performance as political intervention, creativity under surveillance, theatre's relation to labour movements, and the reclamation of public space through performative action. Discussions will also address cultural policy, censorship, cultural diplomacy, and the possibilities of horizontal governance and participatory models in theatre-making.

Through sessions, artistic talks, and a round table discussion, participants will explore how the performing arts can move beyond representation - transforming crisis into a site of collective creation, solidarity, and hope. In doing so, the conference reaffirms a shared conviction: that the right to perform is inseparable from the right to resist, and that art, at its most vital, is an act of courage and renewal.

**PROGRAMME COMMITTEE,
PARTNERS AND CONFERENCE
TEAM**

PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

Prof. Emerita Milena Dragičević Šešić

Faculty of Dramatic Arts, University of Arts in Belgrade
Chair of the Programme Committee

Dr Jovana Karaulić

Faculty of Dramatic Arts, University of Arts in Belgrade
Department of Management and Production

Prof. Darko Lukić

Croatian theatre scholar and playwright; former Full Professor at the Academy of Dramatic Art, University of Zagreb

Assist. Prof. Ognjen Obradović

Faculty of Dramatic Arts, University of Arts in Belgrade

Assoc. Prof. Ana Letunić

Department of Production, Academy of Dramatic Art, University of Zagreb

Prof. Jasmina Husanović

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Tuzla

Prof. Aleksandar Brkić

Goldsmiths, University of London

Dr. Ksenija Marković Božović

Research Associate, Faculty of Dramatic Arts, University of Arts in Belgrade

Assoc. Prof. Janko Ljumović

Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Cetinje

Prof. Maja Ristić

Faculty of Dramatic Arts, University of Arts in Belgrade

Dr. Tatjana Nikolić

Research Associate, Faculty of Dramatic Arts, University of Arts in Belgrade

Dr. Mike Van Graan

Honorary Doctor, University of Pretoria; award-winning playwright; former Lecturer, University of Cape Town

Prof. Aleksandra Jovičević

La Sapienza University, Rome, Italy

Assoc. Prof. Silvija Jestrović

University of Warwick, United Kingdom

Assist. Prof. Jelena Knežević

Faculty of Dramatic Arts, University of Arts in Belgrade

Prof. Ivan Medenica

Faculty of Dramatic Arts, University of Arts in Belgrade

PARTNERS

ELIA – Europe’s leading multidisciplinary network in higher art education and research

ELIA is much more than a network. Powered by its members, we are a globally connected knowledge community for peer-learning, international collaboration and advocacy. With approx. 290 members in 54 countries, ELIA represents over 350,000 students across all arts disciplines. It provides a central meeting point for international educators, leaders, technical staff, administrative staff and students. Our offer delivers a host of opportunities including large-scale events and gatherings, online workshops and discussions, working groups and community hubs, European project co-ordination and matchmaking. ELIA advocates for and on behalf of higher arts education by empowering and creating new opportunities for our members and facilitating the creation and exchange of good practices. Based in Europe, ELIA’s reach is far and wide, with members and project partners around the globe.

Website: <https://elia-artschools.org/>

ENCATS - European network on cultural management and policy

ENCATC represents, advocates, and promotes cultural management and cultural policy education, professionalizes the cultural sector to make it sustainable, and creates a platform for discussion and exchange at European and international level. ENCATC represents all disciplines in the arts and culture, is an NGO holding the status of official partner of UNESCO and of observer to the Steering Committee for Culture of the Council of Europe. It’s a lively and expanding European platform encouraging serious exchange of knowledge, methodologies, experiences, comparative research and regular assessment of the sector’s training needs in the broad field of cultural management from a European point of view through a wide range of working groups, projects, activities and events. ENCATC voices the views of our members through our dialogue with international and European institutions and organisations on legislation, policies and programmes impacting on education and training in cultural management and cultural policy. ENCATC cooperates closely with our partners at UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the European Commission and the European Parliament as well as with the European Cultural Foundation. ENCATC fosters - in different forms and at different levels - close co-operation with networks worldwide concerned with the teaching of cultural policy and cultural management, in particular in Africa, the Asia-Pacific region, North America, Latin America and the Caribbean. ENCATC plays a crucial role in ensuring the sustainability and in strengthening the competitiveness of the culture and creative sectors since its members are directly responsible for the education of future managers and operators and of the future European citizens who will profit from cultural offers at European, national and local level.

Website: <https://encatc.org/en/>

CONFERENCE TEAM

- **Department of Management and Production, Class of 2021:**
 - Marko Ribić – Programme
 - Teodora Pajović – Programme
 - Danica Milanović – Programme
 - Lenka Miloradović – Partnerships and Dissemination of calls
 - Hristina Marković – Partnerships and Dissemination of calls
 - Ana Đurić – Logistics Manager
 - Aleksandar Kocić – Committee Liaison
 - Ana Konstantinović – Outreach and Local engagement
 - Milica Cvetković – Public Relations
 - Teona Milićević – Public Relations
 - Milica Ivković – Digital and Marketing
 - Lana Gitarić – Digital and Marketing
 - Anja Stanković – Editor of the Book of Abstracts
- **Mentor of the student-organized conference: Dr Jovana Karaulić,** Assistant Professor at the Department of Management and Production, Faculty of Dramatic Arts, University of Arts in Belgrade.

RIGHT TO PERFORM, RIGHT TO RESIST: PERFORMING ARTS SHAPING CRISIS

TIMELINE

20th OCTOBER 2025.

11:00 - 11:30

Opening session: Introduction

Milena Dragičević Šešić, Professor Emerita;
Jovana Karaulić, PhD, Assistant Professor;
Students of the Department for Management and
Production in Theatre, Radio and Culture, Class of 2021.
Faculty of Dramatic Arts ; Belgrade, Serbia

11:30 - 12:15

Keynote:

Palimpsests of Freedom:

Assemblies, Traces, and Publics in Crisis

Silvija Jestrović, PhD, Professor of Theatre and Performance at
Warwick University; Warwick, England

12:15 - 13:15

Off the rails:

performing protest, memory and resistance

Teodora Marković, M.A. student, Belgrade, Serbia / Arezzo, Italy
Areti Gionnoulis, M.A. student, Groningen, Netherlands
Mila Jovanović, M.A. student, Belgrade, Serbia

13:15 - 13:45

PAUSE

13:45 - 14:45

**Politics, Policies, and the Resilience of
Performing Arts in Crisis**

Maryam Salimi, PhD, Sooreh University; Teheran, Iran
Marijana Cvetković, M.A. ; Station Service for
contemporary dance; Belgrade, Serbia
Megan Krasteva, PhD student,
Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Sofia, Bulgaria

14:45 - 15:45

Reclaiming Public Spaces: Presence, Absence, Power

Attila Antal, M.A. ; Institute for New Theatre; Novi Sad, Serbia
Richie Lux Kramar, M.A. Janáček Academy of Music and
Performing Arts, Czech Republic
Ioanna Lioutsia, PhD, University of Peloponnese;
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki; Greece

15:45 - 16:45

**Performing Protest in the Digital Age:
Bodies, Media, and Counter-Publics**

Ana Martinoli, PhD, Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Belgrade, Serbia
Radka Kunderova, PhD, Academy of Performing Arts in
Prague, Czech Republic
Asghar Khalili, PhD, Sooreh University; Teheran, Iran

21th OCTOBER 2025.

11:00 - 12:00

Protest in (slow) motion:

From Independent stages to Occupied streets

Tatjana Nikolić, PhD, Faculty of Dramatic arts; Belgrade, Serbia
Jelena Knežević, Assistant Lecturer, Faculty of dramatic Arts;
Belgrade, Serbia
Maja Ristić, PhD, Faculty of Dramatic Arts; Belgrade, Serbia

12:00 - 13:00

Rehearsing Revolt:

Engaged theatre and the politics of visibility

Sanja Krsmanović Tasić, IDEA / CEDEUM / Hleb Teatar;
Belgrade, Serbia
Aleksandra Jelić & Nataša Milojević,
ApsArt Center for Theatre Research, Belgrade, Serbia
Maja Milatović Ovadia, Royal School of Speech and Drama;
London, UK

13:00 - 13:30

PAUSE

13:30 - 14:30

ARTIST TALK

Asli Kaplan, B.A. Maltepe University; Istanbul, Turkey
Iman Aoun, Artist, Ashtar Theatre, Palestine

14:30 - 15:45

Performative Agency:

Theatre as a Site of Resistance and Transformation

Ana Stojanoska, PhD, Faculty of Dramatic Arts - Skopje, Macedonia
Duška Radosavljević, PhD, University of London and
University of Lund, UK
Anda Florina Dragan, PhD student, Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai,
Romania, Cluj-Napoca
Despina Angelovska, PhD, Faculty of Dramatic Arts Skopje, Macedonia

15:45 - 16:00

PAUSE

16:00 - 17:00

**Protest in the Time of the Lasting Aftermath of Empire:
Rethinking Aesthetic Strategies and the Legacy of
Cultural Resistance in Post-Soviet Countries (Round Table)**

Yana Meerzon, PhD, Professor of Theatre Studies at
the University of Ottawa ; Ottawa, Canada
Julia Listengarten, PhD, Professor of Theatre and
Artistic Director at the University of Central Florida's School of
Performing Arts ; Orlando, USA
Varvara Sklez, PhD, Associate Tutor in Theatre and Performance at
the University of Warwick ; Birmingham, UK
Denis Bilunov, PhD Student, Researcher, Lecturee and
Founding member of Prague Russian Antiwar Committee ;
Prague, Czech Republic
Margarita Kompelmakher, PhD, Theatre Instructor and
Director of Community Partnerships and Engagement at
Alliance Theatre ; Atlanta, USA

FOREWORD BY THE CHAIR OF THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

Dr. Milena Dragićević Šešić

RIGHT TO PERFORM AS RIGHT TO DISSENT, TO REBEL: ARTS AS A SPACE OF FREEDOM

For all artists and audiences of the Freedom Theater in Jenin, Occupied Palestine and for all students of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade who had given the best of themselves for Social Justice and Rule of Law in Serbia 2024-25.

Many centuries passed until art gained the right to rebel against the norms imposed by the "authority" - whether it is the church (religion), political or military power, or even art authorities (academies) that define the rules and establish "measures of quality", and finally, the latest superpower - the market, which turns works of art into products for stock market speculation.

The fight for right to rebel defined romanticism as a social and artistic movement. After the rigor of academism in 18th, the 19th century brought couleur local, critical thought, a work that would not only ennoble and "put you to sleep" with its beauty, but also alarm, animate, encourage... So if Hugo, with *his Preface to Cromwell* and the tragedy *Hernani*, practically won the right for artists to have their own artistic credo, with his later works, especially the *Les Misérables*, he won for them the right to write about social injustices, about those phenomena in reality that they have never before considered worthy of artistic attention.

This is when the myth of artists as devotees is created, Hugo says – artists are "dedicated people who just want to provide the country with another space of freedom - a space of art and a space of critical reason; hard-working people who oppose the machinations of censorship and the police, and very often meet with the ingratitude of those for whom they essentially create; (...) freedom of art, freedom in society, this is the double goal that all logical and consequential spirits should strive for; it is the double flag that binds us, contemporary a small number of intelligentsia and such a strong and patient youth; then also the elite of the generation that preceded us, all those wise old men, who immediately recognized that what their children do is a consequence of what they themselves did, and that literary freedom is the daughter of political freedom" (from the *Preface to Hernani*)¹.

¹ <http://1s2lambert.free.fr/ebooks/Hugo/hernani.pdf>

Hernani thus becomes a paradigm for the art of rebellion, although in its essence it has no such significance. But it was the first time that a dedicated audience - an emerging art scene, was actively engaged in the fight against conventions... Rebellion in the theater becomes a sign of the imminence of social rebellion!

Thus, through art, and not only through political struggle, the question of the right to a different opinion was raised - not only in the Parliament or in institutions, but on the streets, on the true public stages created as independent spaces, as contemporary „Salons des Refusés, "exhibitions of rejected", marginalised, those that are questioning and criticising present policies. The freedom of creativity limited to the ivory tower of the artistic studios is essentially only another type of unfreedom, restrictions. Thus the sphere of cultural counterpublic started to widen.

A new "myth" about artists as the "conscience of society" soon arose. Zola's "I accuse" in the Dreyfus affair was a powerful voice of the need to act outside the art studio - on the public stage - even against the majority of public opinion, so easily succumbing to anti-Semitic propaganda that quickly condemned Dreyfus for high treason. On the eve of the First World War, pacifist artists like Romain Rolland also raised their voices, but they failed to prevent with their activism the growing antagonisms and nationalist euphoria (lead more by economic than political interests).

Thus, art as subversion, throughout history, had different functions in social processes, because the contexts in which it developed were different, as well as the forms of artistic expressions and methods of action. During colonialism, imperialistic wars, first phase of brutal capital accumulation during introduction of capitalism as the „democratic“ system in so-called new democracies, artists had been the first to articulate claims of losers of transition that lost both their voice, and their visibility.

Art precedes the social rebellion by articulating the essence of the social and political problem it points to, speaking "in the name" of the oppressed - people, race, class, generation... Krleža and the entire literary left before the Second World War, the "Zemlja" group, but also during the 1990s in our country, artists such as Dijana Milošević, Gorčin Stojanović, Dejan Mijač, Biljana Srbljanović, Vladimir Arsenijević, Dejan Dukovski, Ana Miljanić – to quote only a few related to performing arts both in public and in independent sector, tried to define the causes that led to the deep social anomie and to clearly express their position that opposes the ruling spirit of nationalism and militarism.

Art tries to realize in works themselves the paradigms defined by a social or political movement (like Soviet avant-garde) - entering into conflict with the dominant social and artistic canon (from Eisenstein and Dovzhenko to Malevich and Vsevolod Meyerhold).

Art might inspire revolution (like *Hernani* of Victor Hugo in Paris in), but also might be inspired by "rebellion" and tries to celebrate it (inspiration is usually "killed" if supposed to come after an order. Consequently, the art of post-revolutionary periods leads to the art of glorification, and to mere art of representation). Hence, later works "about revolution" are rarely revolutionary, Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* being an exception.

Performing arts know how to become a political mean of struggle - reacting to social injustices, fighting for the dignity of man, people, against social exploitation, nationalist abuses, totalitarianism and authoritarianism, the politics of oblivion. The culture and art of rebellion from the 1990s in the wider area of Yugoslavia, until today in the world that can not find and other mean to reclame justice for Palestinians, Soudanese people, people in Congo and all other postcolonial regions that are still today suffering of the long-lasting impact of colonialism. All these artistic activities are an obvious expression of the desire for change. From the independent groups Skart, Led Art, Dah Teatar - the art of rebellion and protest also reached institutions (Andraš Urban, Oliver Frlić, Kokan Mladenović, Boris Liješević, Zlatko Paković...) although this period ended in Serbia, started already with the (non)performance of the paradigmatic project realized by Maja Pelević and Milan Marković meant for the Yugoslav Drama Theater - then performed in the Dom omladine.

But art is an agent that might keep the "spirit" of the rebellion alive – nor Tahrir Square neither the walks in the cities of Serbia could not have been held for that long number of days, without the daily performative art actions that contributed to the excitement, attractiveness of the event, and the necessary catharsis. The performances of Sonja Vukićević and visual and theater artists in front of the militia cordon in January 1997, and the radical performances of mechanical engineering students at the end of the student protest, were the only possible form of its holding after the end of the civil protest.

Now, the situation is different – performativity of students' protest in itself is huge : long walks, bicycle rides, farmers tractors lines helping students to protect their campuses and even walks itself, by following walkers, bikers clubs volunteers.

The 20th century made rights to civil disobedience and rights to rebel to become human rights. But even today, the political system, even when it is democratically "transparent", wants to reduce these rights only to the area of direct political struggle—acting through political parties, trying to discredit the involvement of artists as "non-art". The fear of an artwork that points to social anomalies remains an eternal constant of the authorities. From Virgil, who paid for his artistic freedom in exile, to the Russian female punk trio and numerous peace advocates, artists are sent into exile, imprisoned, killed.

The black wave in the Yugoslav film of the 1960s was a rebellion against the hypocrisy of the state in which the working class nominally rules, but is essentially closed in the social circle of the suburbs, misery, superficial entertainment. From the tragedy of the characters from Dušan Makavejev's films – *a Man sn't a bird* and *Love Case*, in which the heroes are "ordinary", but repeatedly marginalized people, to the death of Jimi Barka (*When I'm Dead and White*, Živojin Pavlović), and directly political films (Žilnik's early works, *Plastic Jesus* by Stojanović and *WR* Makavejev), these are the first voices of resistance – of the culture of dissent in the Yugoslav art scene. The black wave as an art of rebellion was quickly supressed, in film, literature, and in theatre, accused for being antisocialist for bringing on stage the heroes of the Belgrade suburbs, the marginals like Bora Drašković's play in the JDP– *When the pumpkin blossomed*,

because criticism, even given from the same ideological standpoint, in an authoritarian system was not tolerated then, as it is not tolerated now.

This Babylonian turmoil in 1992, (Dah theater) in front of the Cultural Center of Belgrade, was the first pacifist performance that would later be joined by numerous theatrical projects based on records from real life - the war in Bosnia, the genocide in Srebrenica. This first "surge" of the culture of protest and dissent was primarily related to resistance to nationalism, myths, the cult of "heroism" - the official discourse of national megalomania and xenophobia. The frozen art of Nicola Jaffa, the calendars of the FIA group, Shkart's Sorrows, which they distribute performatively on weekends at train stations, markets - all these were manifestations of the culture and art of rebellion, which gradually took shape on the counter public cultural stage: with the joint appearance of independent publishers at the Frankfurt fair in 1994, the Alter image festival in September 1996 at the Center for Cultural Decontamination, to finally its articulation as a comprehensive oppositional cultural model during the three-months of civil and student protest in 1996-7.

Artist-activists are expanding their field of activity towards the suburbs of Belgrade (Nebojša Milekić's Flux), towards cities where life is at a standstill because industry does not work: in Bor with its citizen and youth, a series of projects arise: Milena Marković's *Threepenny opera*, the films *Mining Opera* and *White, White World* by Oleg Novković and Milena Marković, Nikola Ležaić's *Tilva Roš*, dealing with topics buried in the official policy of oblivion: war, rape, genocide; economic transition that pauperized the middle class. This is how Croatian artists Andrea Kulundžić, Sanja Iveković and Igor Grubić bring the working class to the stage - pauperized, unemployed, hungry, while Žilnik's films, in addition to the capitalist transition, are also part of the wider world currents of protest culture. The films *Fortress Europe* and the *Trilogy about Kennedy* open the painful topics of the European Union, which is "fencing" itself and deporting "undesirables", in this case Roma from Kosovo to Serbia.

Today, the direct engagement of artists is realized through participatory, relational art that can take many forms: from actions performed in public space that are often ephemeral and as such touch a smaller circle of participants, to well-documented performances that last through their "archive" on the Internet, from collaborative projects of a group that is formed by chance, to author's projects performed at the most prestigious art manifestations, which also opens up an ethical question: how subversion, the art of protest, becomes a product that receives a „market price“ and becomes desirable product of elite art manifestation, seen only by those that are not losers in present-day neoliberal and neocolonial economy.

More and more, social topics are becoming the topics of artistic research. Artists are the ones who notice systemic anomalies or hidden abuses, sometimes much faster and more precisely than social science is able to do.

That our system is partocratic and not democratic was best demonstrated by the well-documented performance of Maja Pelević and Milan Marković, who, by becoming members of seven parties, exposed the mechanisms of party functioning that boil down to satisfying party (membership) interests, rather than developing programs and realizing public interest in culture.

From Palestine, through Iran and Africa to the United States and Canada, the art of subversion and resistance is today the dominant art form, which is threatened by recuperation by biennials and market forces. Decoloniality became mantra to justify existence of institutions whose strength was created in colonial times. Diverse artistic and social practices, the new "civic imagination" become the subject of theorization and gallery spectacular display – detached from social realities where they had been created. It is up to us to make them active where it is essential - in the political field, in the field where decisions are made, or in communities, and not just as part of „glamour“ and self-justification of art world.

Bio: Dr. 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 and Memory Studies. Member of the National Council for Science (2006-2010), UNESCO Expert (Balkans, Cambodia, Central Asia, Caucasus, India, etc.). University of Arts Laureate 2004, 2019; Commandeur dans l'Ordre des Palmes Academiques 2003, ENCATC Fellowship Laureate 2019, Honoris Causa doctor (University of Montpellier 2023); UCLG & Mexico City Award 2024. Guest Lecturer at numerous world universities. Published 20 books, 250 essays, translated in 20 languages.

KEYNOTE

Dr. Silvija Jestrović presenting

PALIMPSESTS OF FREEDOM: ASSEMBLIES, TRACES, AND PUBLICS IN CRISIS

Abstract: Thinking about the idea and practice of assembly or plenum in the political realm is inseparable from the invocation of freedom. At times, the very word—freedom, liberate, sloboda, azadi—is chanted, bringing assembled bodies into a shared rhythm, or inscribed on walls and placards, marking the semiotics of the public space they have claimed. Drawing on a range of past and present examples, across both local and international contexts, I examine the performativity of assembly as a cultural and political form through its triangulation with two other concepts: the public sphere and freedom. Freedom is the precondition of any assembly that acts politically, regardless of its form, agenda, or context. Yet what kind of freedom is at stake when we speak of the freedom of assembly? I engage Hannah Arendt’s conception of political freedom as action (*vita activa*) alongside Judith Butler’s reflections on the performativity of assembly to interrogate the spatiality of political freedom—not only how assemblies claim public spaces or transform private spaces into public ones, but also how they negotiate the tension between ephemerality and continuity. I further consider the traces of the *vita activa* that remain once an assembly disperses. I argue that assemblies produce a spatial citationality, a dramaturgy that accumulates across times and locations, shaping “the spaces where freedom makes its appearance” (Arendt). Ultimately, I ask: what kinds of political freedom are practiced, rehearsed, and re-imagined through the mode of assembly or plenum, particularly within the porous terrain between political and cultural public spheres?

Key words: *freedom, assembly, plenum, vita activa, public sphere*

Bio: Silvija Jestrović is Professor of Theatre and Performance at Warwick University, UK. She graduated from FDU’s Dramaturgy department in Belgrade and obtained her PhD from the Centre for Study of Drama and Performance, University of Toronto. She is the author of *Theatre of Estrangement* (UTP, 2006), *Performance, Space, Utopia: Cities of War, Cities of Exile* (Palgrave 2012), *The Author Dies Hard* (Palgrave 2020). Silvija co-edited *The Oxford Handbook of Politics and Performance* (OUP 2021) with S. Rai, M. Gluhović and M. Saward and was serving as Senior Editor of the *Theatre Research International* (2022-2025). Her latest monograph is *Theatre, Activism, Subjectivity: Searching for the Left in a Fragmented World* (MUP 2024, shortlisted for TAPRA prize) co-edited with Bishnupriya Dutt. She has been awarded the Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship for her current project *Whose Freedom? Dramaturgies of Freedom and the Aesthetic of Solidarity*.

ABSTRACTS

Teodora Marković
University of Siena, Siena, Italy
e-mail: teodoratea49@gmail.com

WE ARE UNREALISTIC BECAUSE WE ARE DEMANDING THE POSSIBLE

Abstract: In this paper I will try to show the performative dimensions of protest through a sociological analysis of the street performance / a satirical play that is critiquing the phenomenon of fake student protests in Belgrade "De ste éaci". Drawing on Judith Butler's notion of performativity and the politics of embodied assembly, I argue that De ste éaci highlights the struggle between authentic acts of resistance and their performances in public space. The paper shows how the performance operates on multiple levels: as a theatrical event in public space, as a parody of embodied protest practices, and as a sociopolitical commentary on the commodification of dissent. This raises critical sociological questions about authenticity, legitimacy, and the politics of the body. Through close reading of the performance and situating it within Belgrade's protest culture, the paper explores how De ste éaci both reflects and resists the dynamics of simulated activism. Ultimately, I suggest that the "unrealistic" demand for the possible, articulated through embodied performance, points to the radical potential of protest: to break through the spectacle and restore the body as a locus of authentic resistance.

Key words: *protest, performance, parody, authenticity, resistance*

Bio: A sociologist, currently perusing my Master's degree in Conflict Management and Humanitarian Action at the University of Sienna in Italy. Although my background is in social sciences, my heart is in dramatic arts, fine arts and journalism. I'm writing for Selfie magazine and work as a radio host for radio show Sceniranje on RadioAparat in Belgrade.

Areti Giannouli
University of Groningen, Groningen, Netherlands
e-mail: a.giannouli@student.rug.nl

FROM TRAGEDY TO COLLECTIVE MEMORY: CULTURAL RESPONSES TO THE TEMPI TRAIN CRASH IN GREECE

Abstract: One of the most catastrophic incidents in Greece's recent history occurred on February 28, 2023, when the Tempi train crashed, killing 57 people. Evidence suggests systematic shortcomings in government control and railway maintenance, even though the precise causes are yet unknown. Grief swiftly transformed into public resentment as a result, with people calling for accountability and a trial to address official responsibility. In this context, the cultural sector emerged as a vital arena for both mourning and political expression. Large concerts, such as the one held at the Panathenaic Stadium in Athens, brought together thousands in acts of remembrance and protest. Visual artists created symbolic works that transformed pain into collective solidarity, while films and documentaries—including Netflix's *Mama, I'm Coming Home*—began shaping narratives of memory and justice. These responses illustrate how cultural production can preserve the voices of victims while amplifying popular demands for change. Based on Jansma's (2020) theoretical analysis of culture and populism, this paper demonstrates how cultural practices can mobilize "the people" against institutions, transforming sorrow into a populist plea for justice. It also aligns with Eyerman's (2019) research on cultural trauma, which emphasizes how collective identity is recreated following shared pain, and Assmann's (2011) idea of cultural memory, which holds that identity is sustained across time through art and ritual. This study makes the case that culture serves as more than just symbolic expression during times of crisis by examining artistic interventions, performances, and digital monuments following Tempi. It turns sorrow into collective memory and memory into a demand for accountability, thereby serving as a vehicle for democratic engagement. By doing thus, the Greek cultural sector exemplifies its vital role in bridging social transformation, justice, and grief.

Key words: *cultural memory, collective trauma, mourning, protest, accountability*

Bio: Areti Giannouli is a Master's student in Arts, Policy, and Cultural Entrepreneurship at the University of Groningen, with a background in History and Archaeology from the University of Athens. She has experience in both the cultural and tourism sectors, ranging from internships at the Numismatic Museum of Athens and the Benaki Toy Museum to working in her family's tourism business in Zakynthos. Her academic work explores themes such as cultural policy, arts and wellbeing, and post-COVID transformations in Greek cultural life. Passionate about connecting culture with social impact, she has developed projects in arts for seniors, cultural internationalization, and heritage preservation. She is fluent in Greek, English, and Italian, and combines practical skills in content creation, project management, and academic research with strong intercultural communication abilities.

Mila Jovanović
Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Belgrade, Serbia
e-mail: milajovanovic98@gmail.com

PERFORMING RESISTANCE: INSTITUTIONAL THEATRES AS ACTORS OF COLLECTIVE UPRISING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CRISIS IN SERBIA 2024/2025

Abstract: The subject of the presentation refers to the forms of resistance and solidarity articulated by institutional theatres in Serbia during the 2024/25 socio-political crisis. Throughout the months-long anti-corruption protests that began after the collapse of the canopy at the Railway Station in Novi Sad in November 2024, theatres demonstrated a high level of engagement in expressing civic resistance and solidarity with the student movement, which became the driving force of the broader social uprising. Theatre employees emerged among the most visible and persistent actors within the social front, expressing solidarity through various artistic and civic actions, ranging from strikes to symbolic gestures within the performative context. The presentation offers a systematic overview of how theatres in Serbia responded to the socio-political crisis. The research applies a qualitative empirical method of media content analysis (including online portals, television reports, and social media) covering the period from November 2024 to July 2025 and encompassing more than 250 media items. Guided by an inductive approach, the study proceeds from collected data toward identifying patterns and general conclusions. Seven dimensions of theatre engagement were identified and analyzed: performance cancellations; symbolic acts of solidarity within performative contexts; union organizing; participation in protests; performative actions in public spaces; performances outside institutional venues; and resistance through programming policies and repertoires. The findings affirm contemporary theoretical perspectives that position theatre not as a neutral artistic space but as an active agent of social reality — capable of political articulation and collective mobilization. This presentation represents the initial phase of broader research that will further expand the methodological framework through interviews with participants and key stakeholders and will explore the possibilities of positioning theatre as a platform for collective action and social mobilization.

Key words: *institutional theatre, socio-political crisis, solidarity, resistance, policies*

Bio: Mila Jovanović is a cultural manager and communications professional from Belgrade, active in theatre, media, and independent culture. She works as Marketing and Communications Manager at Bitef Festival and Theatre and collaborates with N1 Television. A graduate and current master's student at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, she has been involved in teaching and cultural project coordination. Her experience includes collaborations with Centre E8, Bašta Fest, Green Art Incubator, and Hoću u pozorište. Her professional interests focus on theatre and community, audience development, and the use of digital tools in cultural participation. Her current work explores theatre in times of socio-political crisis.

Dr. Maryam Salimi
Sooreh International University, Tehran, Iran
e-mail: itiidineu@gmail.com

THEATRE ON THE RAZOR'S EDGE: PERFORMING ARTS AND POLITICAL-SOCIAL CRISIS

Abstract: Theatre has historically occupied a precarious position in moments of political and social upheaval, navigating a delicate balance between neutrality and resistance. This article conceptualizes theatre as existing “on the razor’s edge,” where its public discourse must often appear impartial, yet its subtext may align with the struggle for justice and truth. The metaphor of the razor’s edge underscores the dual function of theatre: while it risks censorship or suppression if overtly political, it simultaneously carries the potential to nurture critical reflection, solidarity, and collective resistance. The study argues that theatre policy plays a decisive role in shaping this position. Policies that enforce conformity and silence transform theatre into an instrument of power, while policies that protect artistic autonomy enable it to serve as a space for critique and liberation. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from political theatre, cultural policy, and performance studies, the article examines how theatre can both mirror crisis and reconfigure it by generating new forms of communal imagination. Case references from contexts such as Serbia, Iran, and Latin America illustrate how performing arts have resisted authoritarian narratives while operating within constrained political environments. Ultimately, this article suggests that effective theatre policy should embrace the paradox of the razor’s edge: allowing theatre to perform its civic duty subtly yet powerfully. In doing so, theatre does not merely represent crisis but intervenes in it, shaping political imagination and contributing to the broader struggle between justice and oppression.

Key words: *theatre policy, censorship, resistance, communal imagination, critical reflection*

Bio: Maryam Salimi holds a Ph.D. in Cultural Management and Planning, an M.A. in Theatre, and a B.A. in Theatre. She lectures at universities of cinema, theatre, and culture and art. As a playwright and director, she has created several notable theatre works and short films. She is the author of Cultural Project Management and an active researcher in theatre and cultural studies, with a special focus on managing cultural and artistic projects. Salimi is also the founder, CEO, and chairwoman of the New Experience Theatre Group, which hosts professional stage and street theatre groups and research teams in theatre and cinema.

Marijana Cvetković
Station Service for Contemporary dance, Belgrade, Serbia
e-mail: marijana.cvetkovic@gmail.com

DANCE OF RESISTANCE: SELF-ORGANIZATION, SELF-ARTICULATION AND THE (IM)POSSIBILITY TO RESIST

Abstract: This paper examines the two decades of practice of a self-organized contemporary dance community in Belgrade, gathered around Station Service for Contemporary Dance, which has sought to inspire and embody different forms of resistance to the neoliberalisation of the arts in the post-Yugoslav social and political context. In the short-lived moment of enthusiasm following the political changes of the early 2000s, this community aspired to create bottom-up, specific, and organic cultural policies for the field of dance, which at that time was still an emerging artistic field in Serbia. The ambition was to develop policies, institutions, educational programs, and instruments that would reflect the very practice of dance: community-based, grounded in common work, care, sharing of resources, mutual support (rather than competition), horizontal structures, collective decision-making, and openness to experimentation, new formats, alternative production models, and inclusivity. However, confronted with intensified neoliberalisation, partocratic control, economic degradation of culture, and the imposition of cultural industries, the dance scene was forced to practice resistance which often had a performative character. This transformed collective experience into practices of survival, but also, at times, into forms of escapism. Over the past twenty years, this struggle has encompassed artistic, performative, organizational, advocacy, and legal modes of refusal to comply with the aggressive neoliberal logic that demanded each actor either to collaborate or to disappear. The paper will highlight several examples of these collectively developed forms of resistance as gestures of imagining and enacting alternatives. Through them, the Belgrade contemporary dance community has sought to sustain critical action, self-articulation, and the possibility—however fragile or temporary—of resisting.

Key words: *contemporary dance, self-organization, neoliberalism, resistance, cultural policy*

Bio: Producer, curator, cultural activist and lecturer with a background in art history, cultural policy, and cultural management. She's involved in various programs and projects related to cultural policy, international cultural cooperation, contemporary dance, visual arts, and museums. She is a co-founder of Station Service for Contemporary Dance and Nomad Dance Academy, platforms dedicated to the development of contemporary dance and performing arts in the Balkans. Additionally, she serves as a cultural activist within the independent cultural scenes of Belgrade and Serbia, where she co-founded platforms such as druga scena, Cultural Centre Magacin, Association NKSS, and Platform for the Commons "Zajedničko".

Megan Krasteva
Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Sofia, Bulgaria
e-mail: krastevamegan@gmail.com

RECONFIGURING ARTISTIC LABOUR: INDEPENDENT PERFORMING ARTS AS COLLECTIVE ACTOR IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Abstract: In times of political and social instability, theatre and the performing arts cannot remain neutral. Artists are inevitably in dialogue with the world, and their work reflects a dialectical relation between art and society. In moments of crisis, the performing arts not only mirror social tensions but also open spaces for resistance, imagination, and collective action. In Bulgaria, the performing arts stand at the front line of systemic neglect, chronic underfunding, and the political capture of cultural institutions. The combined effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, the rise of right-wing radicalism, ongoing political instability, and the commodification of culture have further marginalized artists, revealing structural vulnerabilities within neoliberal democracies that individualize and isolate creative labour. Yet, this fragility also gives rise to emerging forms of organization and resistance. The independent performing arts field - non-commercial and distanced from official agendas - carries the strongest potential to resist fragmentation. While marked by competition, individualization, and difficulties in self-organization, it is experimenting with horizontal governance, shared infrastructures, and mutual responsibility. Collective structures such as the Association for Independent Theatre (ACT) and the Centre for Contemporary Arts “Toplocentrala” (CCA), Sofia exemplify attempts to counter precarity through resource pooling and public engagement. Recent developments, such as initiatives toward independent collective representation and the formation of working groups addressing structural problems in the independent cultural field, signal the potential reconfiguration of artistic labour into a collective political actor. The Bulgarian case contributes to broader discussions on theatre’s role in contemporary labour movements, highlighting how cultural workers negotiate autonomy, insecurity, and the right to perform under conditions of dignity and equality.

Key words: *artistic labour, independent theatre, collective action, precarity, cultural policy*

Bio: Megan Krasteva holds a BA in Cultural Studies and an MA in Cultural Anthropology and Cultural Heritage from Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski,” where she is currently pursuing a PhD at the Department of History and Theory of Culture. Her doctoral research, *Autonomy and Insecurity: The Working Conditions of Independent Performing Artists*, examines precarity and self-organization in the field of artistic labor. She is also part of the Estorium Foundation team—an anthropological storytelling archive that collects and preserves personal life narratives.

PUBLIC SPACES COMING ALIVE

Abstract: The butterfly has spread its wings and the fluttering turns into a hurricane... I firmly believe in the ability of art to shift perspectives and to potentially lead to crucial societal changes - even if those changes seem unrelated and may come years later. The everlasting political turmoil that has been a steady undercurrent in our society finally surfaced in the various actions and protest in the streets and public spaces in the majority of our cities for the last ten months. Public spaces became the public forum for the socio-political changes we desperately need. In this paper I will showcase a recent project I was partaking in, which essentially correlates to the current happenings in our country. Public Spaces ReClaimed was a two-year creative endeavour, which aimed at the artistic reinterpretation and revival of public spaces in Novi Sad, Skopje and Tirana, through immersive, multimedia performances. In the project, our main aim was to pierce through the grim reality of our uncontrollably developing cities with artistic interventions that would take our fellow citizens on a journey of rediscovering their unknown, hidden and forgotten potentials. In this journey, a certain shift from a conventional understanding of physical structures takes place: the permanent, passive and static envelopes for human lives become active, temporary, fluctuating entities in time. Spaces become active protagonists of stories, capable of producing meanings in a constant dialogue with the bodies and events they enclose: the city co-performs. By combining the factual and the fictional into new narratives, and visualising the places that we know oh-so-well, in a unique and unusual context, we can engage the audience not only in an entertaining performative content, but also open public spaces to new dimensions of interpretation and purpose. In this sense, an artistic intervention can be a step towards reclaiming our cities and our social environment, too.

Key words: *immersive performance, public space, intervention, urbanism, imagination*

Bio: Attila Antal is a theatre and film director, composer, teatrologist and performer. He's a doctoral candidate at the Mozarteum University in Salzburg. In his work he expands the theatre experience outside the confines of the black-box theatre by creating immersive audiovisual experiences, interactive multimedia performances and exhibitions, using the tools from a diverse background of theatre practices (from site-specific performances to contemporary dance). He has worked on more than 40 theatre projects throughout Europe. He founded the Institute for New Theatre, which is an NGO focusing on research and production in performing arts and related artistic disciplines (architecture, film, music...)

Dr. Ioanna Lioutsia
University of Peloponnese, Athens, Greece
e-mail: johannali284@gmail.com

PERFORMING CRISIS: A DECADE OF PUBLIC ART INTERVENTIONS IN GREECE (2013-2023)

Abstract: Drawing on both performance and theatre studies foundations, as well as my practical engagement with these art forms, this presentation examines the interaction between my performance artworks conducted in various public spaces across Greece (2013-2023) and the country's sociopolitical landscape. The series begins with "Hypo-Logo/Crisi(a)," which directly addresses the economic crisis that Greek citizens had been experiencing, specifically examining issues of censorship and political hypocrisy during the memorandum era and austerity measures. In 2015, amid the refugee crisis, I participated in the 50th Dimitria Festival in Thessaloniki with "Traffic Office," as part of Leibniz Live Art Company's collective performance "The Book of Blood: The Human Writes." This work invited audience members to undergo an interview process similar to - though deliberately less traumatic than - that experienced by asylum seekers. Since 2021, I have been presenting "Every Day is Woman's Day" across Greece and internationally, a performance that explores contemporary female identity and the conflicting expectations women face. The artwork has evolved to address femicide and the fundamental need for safe space. The most recent performance, "Fed Up," was staged in front of the Greek Parliament in Syntagma Square, responding to the 2023 Messenia migrant boat tragedy and the fatal train collision disaster in Tempi. This presentation will examine the methodological approaches and tools employed to communicate with audiences—often consisting of passersby—and analyze their reactions and reception to these interventions. The theoretical framework draws upon Claire Bishop's perspectives on participatory art, Oliver Marchart's analysis of the political dimension in artistic practice, and Jacques Rancière's theories on the relationship between aesthetics and politics in public space. Through these works, created during a decade marked by various crises and social upheaval in Greece, I aim to conduct a dialectical investigation of our (resi)stance toward ourselves and the world.

Key words: *performance art, participatory art, political art, crisis, feminism*

Bio: Ioanna Lioutsia holds a PhD in Theatre Studies from the University of Peloponnese. She is a graduate of the Department of History and Archaeology at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, specializing in Archaeology and Art History; the Department of Theatre at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, specializing in Directing; and the Higher Drama School "Contemporary Theatre Vassilis Diamantopoulos." Since 2012, she has been a frequent contributor to print and digital media on theatre and literature. She works in theatre as an actress, director, playwright, and theatre educator. Since 2013 she conducts her own performance pieces in public spaces.

Dr. Radka Kunderová
Academy of Performing Arts, Prague, Czech Republic
e-mail: radka.kunderova@damu.cz

POWER STRUCTURES HIT BACK: ANALYSING ANTI-RESISTANCE STRATEGIES

Abstract: Subversive potential of a political performance is often oppressed by the power structures it challenges. Defensive rituals of the ruling power usually include censorship or press counter-campaigning. In the latter case, what ideological practices might be used to neutralize a subversive message? In my paper, I am identifying some of the de-legitimizing strategies used by the Communist press in the 1980s Czechoslovakia, i.e. in the period preceding the social change that took place in 1989. As a case study, I am using a socially engaged production *Společný projekt Cesty: křižovatky – jízdní řády - setkání* (The Joint Project Journeys: Crossroads – Timetables – Encounters, 1984). Within the analysis, a special emphasis is placed on the strategy of constructing a misleading identity and manipulating the notion of youth, which was one of the key emblems of the Communist mythology. The critical framework includes the British sociologist J. B. Thompson and his theory of ideology, and the writings of Vladimír Macura, a distinguished Czech literary semiotician, who famously analysed the iconography of Communist culture.

Key words: *political performance, censorship, ideology, youth, media manipulation*

Bio: Radka Kunderová is a theatre academic, the main focus of her research and teaching is the relationship between theatre and the political. Currently, she works as an Assistant Professor at the AMU Theatre Faculty in Prague. She was a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research Fellow at the Freie Universität Berlin, where she ran the project “Redefining the Agency: Post-1989 Crisis of the Czech and Former East German Theatre”. She published numerous studies on the socio-political dimension in Czech theatre of the 20th century. In the past, she worked as the Head of the Institute for Theatre Research at the JAMU Theatre Faculty.

Dr. Asghar Khalili

Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Sooreh International University, Tehran, Iran

e-mail: itinew64@gmail.com

EMBODIED PROTEST: THEATRE, MEDIA REPRESENTATION, AND THE LIMITS OF CENSORSHIP

Abstract: Throughout history, the body has remained the central site of both performance and political resistance. In times of crisis, the body on stage and the body on the street intersect, creating a powerful performative act that is simultaneously artistic, political, and communicative. This paper investigates how resistance is staged and subsequently represented in the media, while questioning the transformative role of theatre and performance in shaping socio-political realities. Drawing on case studies from student protests in Serbia and comparative examples from Iranian theatre and street performances, the research analyzes how performative gestures of resistance—sit-ins, collective silence, symbolic costumes, or choreographed movements—are designed not only for immediate audiences but also with an acute awareness of their potential mediation through cameras, news outlets, and digital platforms. The protesting body becomes a dual actor: present in physical space and reproduced as an image, often reframed and reinterpreted according to political agendas. Yet, the question of media representation cannot be separated from the issue of censorship. While media are entrusted with the responsibility of reflecting reality and transmitting the voices of resistance, in many contexts—particularly in Iran—systematic censorship intervenes to silence, distort, or criminalize those very voices. Independent and digital media, on the other hand, create alternative channels of visibility that sustain and amplify acts of resistance, challenging the dominance of official narratives. This tension between visibility and erasure highlights the inherently performative nature of protest, where staging, spectatorship, and mediation are inseparably intertwined. Ultimately, the paper argues that theatre and the performing arts can not only reflect crises but also radically reshape them, by reimagining the body as a locus of political imagination. By linking horizontal forms of organization in student protests with collaborative artistic practices, the paper envisions new possibilities for solidarity, resistance, and collective creation across both local and global contexts.

Key words: *embodied protest, media representation, censorship, student movements, resistance*

Bio: Asghar Khalili is a theatre director, scholar, and one of the leading practitioners of political theatre in Iran. Since 1998, he has focused on productions that critically engage with socio-political issues, exploring the intersections of power, society, and civic responsibility. His work often combines historical and contemporary narratives to interrogate governance, social justice, and the role of art in public discourse. Notable productions include *Mossadegh*, staged in the presence of former President Mohammad Khatami and prominent reformist leaders, and *The Weak Government*, both reflecting critical perspectives on political authority in Iran. He has also directed several performances exploring women's roles in society, highlighting their agency and social impact within structured frameworks. In all of his work, Khalili emphasizes the role of media as a central actor in contemporary society, making media analysis and representation a key focus alongside issues of politics and gender. Beyond directing, he actively contributes to academic discourse on political and activist theatre, advocating for the transformative potential of performance as a space for reflection, resistance, and civic engagement.

Dr Tatjana Nikolić
Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Belgrade, Serbia
e-mail: tatjana.nikolic@fdu.bg.ac.rs

INSTANCES OF RESISTANCE AND SUPPORT: HOW HAS SERBIA'S CULTURAL SCENE ENGAGED WITH THE CURRENT PROTEST MOVEMENT

Abstract: The presentation focuses on the involvement of institutional and non-institutional actors of the artistic and cultural scene of Serbia in the current protest events. The research aims to provide an overview of instances of support among individuals, organizations, and institutions within the cultural sector to the students movement, and their diverse resistance activities during this period. The primary methods employed include participant observation and media content analysis. The material analyzed consists of over 400 media items, including photo, video, and textual content published on social media, collected mostly between February and September 2025. These materials document the participation of cultural and artistic workers in solidarity actions with student movements, as well as, to a lesser extent, the consequences they faced as a result of such engagement. Additionally, the researcher has been able to reflect on the topic through her participation and observation at different relevant events such as the given protests, performances and concerts by the artists engaged in solidarity, as well as public discussions or professional community meetings. The overview represents an initial phase of a broader research project. The next stage is expected to involve conducting interviews with direct participants in the relevant events, including members of mobilized collectives. The goal of the continued research is to analyze the forms and formats of resistance and protest organization, as well as the concepts of solidarity among the actors involved, and how these are enacted in practice.

Key words: *cultural scene, protest, solidarity, resistance, students*

Bio: Dr Tatjana Nikolić is Research Associate at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, University of Arts in Belgrade with educational background and research focus on cultural management and cultural policy. She has published several papers and chapters in local and international books and journals, (co-)authored two monographies and co-edited a thematic collection. Previously she participated in research projects focusing on cultural participation, gender equality and mentorship in cultural management, while her doctoral dissertation also encompassed analysis of participation of young people in the cultural policy of Serbia.

Jelena Knežević
Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Belgrade, Serbia
e-mail: jelena.knezevic@yahoo.com

GOVERNING BELGRADE'S CULTURAL FESTIVALS THROUGH THE LENS OF FESTIVAL BOARDS: A CASE STUDY OF BITEF AND FEST

Abstract: Amid the growing social crisis in Serbia during 2025 — marked by student blockades, civic protests, and resistance to authoritarian tendencies within the cultural sector — the City Government of Belgrade amended the legal framework regulating the work of permanent cultural manifestations of significance to the city. These changes were introduced without planning, public consultation, or dialogue with professionals and stakeholders directly affected by them. Under the new regulation, festival boards have been granted expanded authority: the position of artistic director has been abolished, while the boards have assumed not only artistic leadership but also executive production responsibilities, resulting in a transformation of the previous governance model. This paper analyzes the consequences of these changes through a case study of two of Belgrade's most prominent festivals — BITEF and FEST — highlighting how festival boards have been positioned as mechanisms of control over manifestations perceived as potentially “risky” due to their history of artistic integrity, social engagement, and critically minded audiences. The central argument is that, faced with internal resistance within cultural institutions, the city authorities have established parallel decision-making structures to regain control over the festivals. In doing so, they have radically distorted the original purpose of boards as democratic instruments of cultural governance. The model which, in cultural policy theory, serves as a safeguard against political interference (the *arm's length principle*), has here become a tool of its instrumentalization. This shift in governance also explains the passivity of BITEF and FEST during 2025: the festivals not only failed to respond to ongoing social events but were not even held within their planned timeframes. These developments raise key questions: Within the existing hegemonic system, is it possible to sustain a socially engaged and relevant festival founded by the state? And can alternative models of work — based on responsibility and the public interest — be developed from within?

Key words: *festival governance, BITEF, FEST, cultural boards, arm's length principle*

Bio: Jelena Knežević holds a MA from the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade, Department of Theatre and Radio Production, and is currently a PhD candidate in Cultural and Media Management at the same faculty. She works as a teaching assistant at FDA, where she teaches Basics of Theatre Production and Festival Management, as well as Cultural Marketing within the UNESCO MA in Cultural Policy and Management. Since 2004, she has worked across both institutional and independent cultural sectors, including as Executive Director of BITEF (2008–2023), and as a long-term collaborator with the platform TkH (Walking Theory). She is a board member of the National Theatre in Pristina and has participated in numerous mentorship and advisory programs.

Dr. Maja Ristić
Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Belgrade, Serbia
e-mail: majaristicroma@gmail.com

STREET PERFORMANCE AS A SPACE FOR SOCIAL CHANGES

Abstract: In the last ten months, Serbia has been shaken by a major social crisis. After the collapse of a canopy at a bus station in Novi Sad, students of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts entered a blockade, and then other faculties of the University of Belgrade, and University of Arts followed suit. Serbian citizens express their civil disobedience on the streets as a space of resistance. If we view protests as part of artistic resistance, we can analyze them as performances that call for changes in society. The role of performance involves gathering a spontaneous audience, an "invisible audience". Considering the overall situation in our society, the main goal of the paper is to explore the role of performance in the democratization of society and the development of critical thinking among citizens. To what extent do street performances imitate the artistic rebellion of the 1990s, when artists conceived performances in front of police cordons, and to what extent are they original and different in ideas and concepts, are some of the questions we want to address in this paper. The paper will use an interdisciplinary research approach using performance theory, assembly theory, and applied theater theory. The paper will analyze the performance "Istopia" by Aleksandra Jelić - Apsa Art as a case study.

Key words: *street performance, protest, social change, democratization, critical thinking, applied theatre*

Bio: Maja Ristić, Phd is a full professor at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade, at the Department of Management and Production of Theatre, Radio and Culture, where she teaches courses in the field of Theatre Production as well as Human Resources Management. She has published two books: *The Audience of Musicals and Theatre Management - Human Resources in Shaping a Theatre Performance*. She has published over thirty texts in domestic scientific journals, the *Proceedings of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts*, the *Kultura* magazine, the *Proceedings of the Matica Srpska for Stage Activities* and the *Matica Srpska for Social Activities*, and many others. She has edited two collections: *Sixty Years of the Department of Management and Production of Theatre, Radio and Culture: Past, Present and Future and Creativity and Innovations in Theatre, Media and Culture*". She has participated in numerous international conferences. She is an associate of the independent theater Dah Teatar. She writes for the Cultural Supplement of the newspaper Politika.

Sanja Krsmanović Tasić
Hleb Teatar, Belgrade, Serbia
e-mail: sanja.k.tasic@gmail.com

THE SCREAM FOR JUSTICE OF MARIJA RUČARA of Hleb Teatar

Abstract: The performance “Marija Ručara” stages a powerful and unsettling encounter with injustice that transcends centuries, positioning the figure of Marija Ručara as both an individual and a symbolic voice. A voice that confronts injustice, social inequality and harsh conditions of workers, in the thirties of 20th century Belgrade, to conditions of workers “enslaved” in the Serbian factories working for foreign investors today. Rooted in a real event and inspiring two surrealist poets Aleksandar Vučo and Dušan Matić to write a poem intended for staging. The published book of the poem was censored, to reach Hleb teatar in 2021. Funding for the project by official funders in Serbia were denied, but thanks to the Women’s Reconstruction Fund (RŽF) the performance came to light at the end of 2021. The reason for censorship was that the poem ends with a powerful march of the workers into the streets, as to demand basic rights as human beings. It was a call for revolution, a call for protests, change, similar what is happening today in the streets of Belgrade. The key and link to today’s situation came through the projection of the texts about the situation of workers today (the case of APTIV factory from Leskovac), that audiences are asked to read aloud. Through a synthesis of documentary theatre, physical performance, and participatory elements, Marija Ručara reanimates a forgotten history, compelling audiences to confront uncomfortable continuities between past and present. This paper argues that Hleb Teatar’s work achieves two critical interventions: first, it restores voice and presence to any anonymous worker, as a silenced subject, reclaiming their stories from oblivion; second, it activates a dialogical space where audiences are implicated to be co-performers and the voice of “now” in the unfinished struggle for justice.

Key words: *injustice, workers, censorship, documentary theatre, participation, protest*

Bio: Theatre director, actress, choreographer, drama/theatre education expert creating, producing and curating programs in performance art and art education. Recognized for creating work that intersects activism and art, addressing critical political and social issues. A strong advocate for using art and art education as a tool for transformation and healing. Artistic director and founder of Hleb Teatar from Belgrade, and Association Artistic Utopia. President of the International Drama/Theatre and Education Association-IDEA, member of the Executive Forum of the World Alliance for Arts Education. President of Centre for Drama in Education and Art-CEDEUM. Keynote speaker and presenter. Author of essays, dance and theatre reviews and articles on performing arts, and drama/theatre education.

Aleksandra Jelić, Nataša Milojević
ApsArt Center for Theatre Research, Belgrade, Serbia
e-mail: apsart1@gmail.com

I _ S _ T _ O _ P _ I _ J _ A
A PRACTICUM FOR THE CONSUMPTION OF REVOLUTION IN THREE
ACTIONS, PROGRESSIVELY

Abstract: The performance trilogy I _ S _ T _ O _ P _ I _ J _ A examines the paradox of resistance within the corrupted Serbian reality—one that oscillates between apathy and bursts of student-led rebellion. Conceived as a practicum for consuming revolution, it unfolds through three public actions that question the boundaries between engagement and spectacle, intimacy and exposure, voice and silence. The first action, DIŽI REVOLUCIJU U SVOJA 4 ZIDA (*Raise Your Revolution Within Your Four Walls*), stages the irony of activism confined to the private sphere, inviting participants to vocalize personal emotions in public space. The act exposes the fragile threshold between genuine expression and performative participation. The second, LILIHIPOKRATIJA (*lilhipocracy*), turns rebellion into candy—literally and metaphorically—revealing how political impulse melts into sweet, harmless consumption. The slogan “children eat their revolution” replaces the exhausted trope of “revolution devouring its children,” addressing the infantilization and hedonism of contemporary protest culture. The third, PARA - LIZA, contemplates paralysis as the final stage of activism: when protest becomes routine, inaction might appear as the last radical gesture. By engaging the audience through playful yet subversive participation, I _ S _ T _ O _ P _ I _ J _ A performs resistance that is self-aware of its own decay. It raises questions about who grants the voice and who censors it, about the illusion of institutional support, and about the exhaustion of political desire in the economy of attention. Unpaid artists, illusory institutions, and the lollipop as the only certainty—I _ S _ T _ O _ P _ I _ J _ A becomes a metaphorical sauna where revolt evaporates, leaving behind the bittersweet taste of freedom deferred.

Key words: *revolution, performance, activism, irony, censorship*

Bio: Aleksandra Jelić is a theatre and film director, drama educator, and founder of ApsArt – Center for Theatre Research. With over 20 years of experience in social activism and ARTivism, she pioneers applied and participatory theatre in Serbia. Her work empowers marginalized groups—including prisoners, youth, and survivors of violence—using art as a tool for education, rehabilitation, and social change. She has conceptualized and led numerous international and local projects advocating for human rights and social inclusion. Awarded internationally, she remains a strong advocate for lifelong learning and the right to art for all.

Nataša Milojević is a performer, dancer, choreographer and dance and theater pedagogue from Belgrade, Serbia. She graduated from a ballet school, a biology faculty, academic specialist studies in art - theater pedagogy and an academy for physical and expressive theater. She is a member of the Association of Ballet Artists of Serbia, BAZAART (representative association for educational and scientific research activities in culture), Nektan art and STATION - service for contemporary dance. She realized her artistic work all over Europe, mainly through physical theater shows and performance art.

STAGING COMPLEX NARRATIVES: DEVISED COMEDY AS POLITICAL INTERVENTION IN POST-CONFLICT RECONCILIATION PROCESS

Abstract: Terms comedy and reconciliation are rarely paired together, and their juxtaposition may initially appear unusual as they often operate in distinct emotional and thematic realms. Nevertheless, this paper examines the potential of devised comedy to support peacebuilding efforts by facilitating conversation about clashing narratives. It will explore how devised comedy can serve as a transformative methodology for engaging divided communities in complex discussions about identity, trauma, and post-conflict reconciliation. One of the crucial elements of the peacebuilding process is the creation of a common narrative shared by opposing sides. However, establishing a new, shared and recognised narrative about past events is a complex issue, as opposite sides have different understandings and experiences of the conflict and demands a critical examination of collective memories. Therefore, for this process to happen successfully, discursive space needs to be created, the existence of 'multiple narratives' needs to be acknowledged (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004), and the importance of a dialogue where all conflicted sides will tell their stories will need to be emphasised since 'collective memories are rarely directly malleable and simply telling people they are wrong is rarely productive' (Ross 2013:98). Situated at the intersection of peacebuilding, theatre and comedy studies, this paper will explore ethical, artistic and political implications of using comedy and collaborative theatre making strategies to challenge hostilities between opposing groups, renegotiating social authorities and envisaging different society. Drawing on my ten years of experience as a theatre director and facilitator working with young people from segregated communities in Northern Bosnia, this paper will summarise the key principles that guide this work, outline the challenges this approach presents, and consider comedies' potential to support peacebuilding efforts by fostering togetherness while providing a useful lens for critical examination of society and self-reflection.

Key words: *devised comedy, political intervention, reconciliation, collective memory, peacebuilding*

Bio: Maja Milatović-Ovadia is a theatre director, facilitator and lecturer, working in a wide range of contexts, including classical and contemporary text-based theatre, devised work, music theatre, experimental opera, and multimedia performances. Her socially engaged art projects focus on the use of comedy and humour within collaborative theatre practice. She has created theatre with migrants and refugees in London, ethnically segregated communities in post-war Bosnia and survivors of the Rwandan genocide. Her articles on theatre-making have been published in several book editions and journals.

ARTISTIC TALK

*The **Artistic Talk** is a space for honest, open conversation - where artists step out of the frame of their performances to share the stories, emotions and questions that shaped their work. It's a moment to speak person to person, to reflect on why and how we create in times of uncertainty and to recognize the courage it takes to turn experience into art. Here, theory meets lived reality and artistic voices come together to remind us that creativity is, at its heart, a form of connection - and sometimes, a form of resistance.*

Featuring Aslı Kaplan & Iman Aoun

Participants:

- **Aslı Kaplan** is an actress, writer, and director from Istanbul. She graduated from Maltepe University, Department of Performing Arts – Acting. She has received training in acting techniques such as mask theatre, the Spolin method, and the Michael Chekhov method from actors of Bulgarian, Turkish, and German backgrounds. In Istanbul, she worked with several independent theatre companies as a playwright, assistant director, and associate director. She also completed an internship at Familie Flöz in Berlin. She is the author of a published novel in Turkish and continues to actively write plays and novels.
- **Iman Aoun** is the Executive Director of ASHTAR Theatre. She is an award-winning actress who works in theatre, TV series, and films. She received various notifications for her work from different countries and international organizations and festivals. Ms. Aoun holds a Bachelor Degree in Social Studies and a Diploma in Psychodrama. Started her acting career with El-Hakawati Theatre Company in 1984 and later co-founded ASHTAR Theatre in 1991. Wrote and published several articles on the subject of theatre in Palestine and the Arab World, co-written two books on theatre training and preludes for few others. Panelist in a number of international conferences and World Summits. An internationally known theatre trainer specialized in Theatre of the Oppressed. Initiator of various international projects, most notable: “The Gaza Monologues” in 2010 and “The Syrian Monologues” in 2015.

Dr. Ana Stojanoska
Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Skopje, Macedonia
e-mail: ana.stojanoska@fdu.ukim.edu.mk

THEATRE AS A FORM OF RESISTANCE: ON PERFORMATIVITY AS POLITICAL AGENCY

Abstract: From its very beginnings, theatre has evolved along two parallel trajectories: one shaped and sustained by political structures that organize and/or finance it, and another formed in response, often situated in street, alternative, and avant-garde practices. This paper explores theatrical productions and performances in Macedonia that have functioned as acts of resistance, specifically those that directly opposed political systems across different historical periods. The study draws on historical research into performances created with the explicit intention of challenging the system, productions that were censored or banned, and works that emerged as central voices of protest within particular socio-political contexts. Tracing this genealogy of resistance, the paper considers Vojdan Černodrinski's notion of theatre as part of the Macedonian people's struggle against Ottoman rule, the role of partisan theatre during World War II, the manifestations of theatrical dissent in the post-war period, and the most recent forms of resistance theatre in the opening decades of the twenty-first century. By mapping these practices, the paper argues that Macedonian theatre can be read not only as an artistic medium but also as a sustained site of resistance, continuously negotiating its relationship to power, authority, and political order.

Key words: *Macedonian theatre, political resistance, censorship, protest, performance*

Bio: Ana Stojanoska is a teatrologist, writer, and Full Professor at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. She is also the Director of the "Vojdan Černodrinski" Theatre Festival in Prilep. Her research focuses on drama, theatre, and performative practices, with a specialization in theatre museology. She is the author of numerous monographs, textbooks, and works of fiction, including *Macedonian Drama and Theatre: Contemporary Reflections* (2023), the novel *We* (2022), *Swan* (2021), and *Theatre – A Challenge: Studies and Essays* (2018). Her literary work encompasses novels, drama, and poetry, awarded with major national prizes such as the "Racinovo priznanie" (2017) and "Antevo Pero" (2020). Stojanoska has published over a hundred studies and essays in domestic and international journals, and her creative work has been translated and published in several languages.

Dr. Duška Radosavljević
University of Lund, Lund, Sweden
e-mail: duska.radosavljevic@cssd.ac.uk

DRAMATURGY AND DEMOCRACY

Abstract: This presentation explores changing relations between the notions of authorship, authority, dramaturgy, hierarchy and heterarchy in contemporary theatre-making processes. It draws on practical examples of innovation through collaborative theatre-making in the UK (Tim Crouch, Andy Smith, Improbable), Belgium (Ontroerend Goed) and Scandinavia (Fix and Foxy, Emma Bexell), focusing specifically on models of devolved, shared, and relinquished authority, which I have previously explored under the title of 'heterarchical' authorship (Radosavljevic 2020). What these examples reveal are more democratic working processes and also new modalities of dramaturgy, often dependent on audience participation and co-creation. Though it has sometimes been dismissed as exploitative or less artistically valuable than "professional" theatre practice, it is my contention that social engagement in these artists work has in fact been forward looking and paradigm shifting. At the core of this presentation, which is part of a bigger enquiry, is an interest in bottom up processes as factors for change both in society and in creative practice.

Key words: *dramaturgy, democratic theatre, collaborative authorship, heterarchy, audience participation*

Bio: Dr Duška Radosavljević is a writer, dramaturg, academic and teacher. She is Professorial Research Fellow at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London and currently teaches at the University of Lund, Sweden. She has also taught at the Universities of Kent, Bristol, Warwick and Newcastle and has worked as the Dramaturg at Northern Stage Newcastle and in the education department of the Royal Shakespeare Company. Her books include *Aural/Oral Dramaturgies: Theatre in the Digital Age* (2023), *Theatre Criticism: Changing Landscapes* (2016), *The Mums and Babies Ensemble: A Manual* (2015), *The Contemporary Ensemble* (2013), and *Theatre-Making: Interplay Between Text and Performance in the 21st Century* (2013). In 2020-21 she held an AHRC Leadership Fellowship during which she led a team of collaborators in creating the award-winning online repository www.auralia.space.

Anda-Florina Drăgan
Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
e-mail: anda.dragan@ubbcluj.ro

THE FACES OF WAR – THE MANIFESTATION OF WARS IN CONTEMPORARY PLAYWRITING

Abstract: This paper explores the multifaceted representations of war in contemporary playwriting, focusing on the ways in which armed conflict shapes theatrical discourse, narrative structures, and performative strategies. Contemporary dramaturgy reflects wars not only as geopolitical events, but also as deeply personal and collective experiences that redefine identity, memory, and social relations. By analyzing plays that address both historical and ongoing conflicts, the research highlights how theater becomes a space of resistance, testimony, and healing. The study argues that contemporary playwriting not only documents wars, but also challenges dominant narratives, offering alternative perspectives on violence, resilience, and human solidarity. The “faces of war” in today’s dramaturgy are thus plural, hybrid, and deeply engaged with the social and political realities of our time.

Key words: *war representation, contemporary playwriting, dramaturgy, memory, resistance, solidarity*

Bio: Anda Drăgan is a theater director from Romania, a graduate of the Faculty of Theater and Film in Cluj-Napoca, level bachelor's and master's. She is currently a PhD student at the same faculty with research in the field of theater. She directs performances both in the independent and in the state environment. Collaborated with the independent sector and artistic creation residencies. She is actively involved in cultural interventions and focuses her interest on social themes, performative installations and interactive performances.

Prof. Despina Angelovska
Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Skopje, Macedonia
e-mail: despina.angelovska@fdu.ukim.edu.mk

A THEATER THAT STRIVES TO CHANGE THE WORLD

Abstract: This article explores current debates on (theatrical) art and activism, reflecting on theater's ambition to serve as a platform for political protest and social transformation. It examines the evolution of 21st-century activist theater and its differences from 20th-century critical and engaged theater. Theater activists today aim to change not only the way theater is made, but also the world itself, which has become globalized. Faced with urgent challenges, they wish to act not only within the art system, but also outside it, in reality. While striving to make art useful and to have a real impact on the world and individuals, 21st-century theater activists do not want to stop being artists. Theater combining art with social and political action is discussed in this article through the examples of the engaged collective artistic projects of Caroline Guiela Nguyen and Milo Rau. We first examine the societal transformative power of Nguyen's theater through the example of her production SAIGON, generating new forms of solidarity and political imagination. We then turn to the Ancient Myths Trilogy project, where Rau proposes to make theater a "micro-ecology," that is, to develop alternative networks in cooperation with civil society in order to create something larger and more sustainable than artistic production itself. As stipulated in the Ghent Manifesto by Rau himself: "It's not just about portraying the world anymore. It's about changing it".

Key words: *activist theatre, collective creation, Caroline Guiela Nguyen, SAIGON, Milo Rau, Ancient Myths Trilogy*

Bio: Despina Angelovska is a theater and drama theorist and professor at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Skopje. After obtaining her bachelor's and master's degrees from the Institute of Theater Studies at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris, she consecrated her doctoral thesis to contemporary French dramaturgy and the work of Bernard-Marie Koltès. Having lived and conducted research for many years at the crossroads of cultures, between Paris and Skopje, she has a thorough knowledge of current trends in French and world theater. She was also a professor of gender studies at the Research Center for Gender Studies in Skopje.

ROUND TABLE

PROTEST IN THE TIME OF THE LASTING AFTERMATH OF EMPIRE: RETHINKING AESTHETIC STRATEGIES AND THE LEGACY OF CULTURAL RESISTANCE IN POST-SOVIET COUNTRIES

This round table grows out of the collaborative research undertaken for the forthcoming volume *Performances of Protest and Resistance: Contesting Russia's Nationalism* (Methuen Drama, Agitations Series, 2026). The book examines the evolution of protest theatre and resistance culture in Russia under Vladimir Putin and other countries in the presumed area of Russia's geopolitical interest, situating performance as an act of defiance, a mode of witnessing, and a means of archiving dissenting voices. While authoritarian resurgence and war propaganda have sought to silence opposition in Russia, but also affect the internal affairs of other states in the region, this project insists on preserving and analyzing cultural practices of resistance as crucial counter-histories and as resources for imagining alternative futures. Building on a rich body of scholarship on Russian protest and performance—including *Varieties of Russian Activism* (Morris, Semenov, and Smith, 2023), *Performing Violence* (Beumers and Lipovetsky, 2009), and *Cultural Forms of Protest in Russia* (Beumers, Etkind, Gurova, and Turoma, 2018)—the contributors critically re-examine the role of culture in conditions of crisis. If, as Etkind argued, culture “protests against the foretold” and anticipates the future, what does that claim mean today, amid Russia's imperial war in Ukraine and its tightening grip on dissent at home? This round table engages these questions by tracing the aesthetics and strategies of protest across theatre, performance art, and film, while also placing Russian resistance in dialogue with movements across Belarus, Ukraine, and the wider post-Soviet and Eastern European landscape.

The session will feature four short presentations highlighting distinct strands of the book, followed by an open discussion:

- Denis Bilunov & Yana Meerzon – *Rise and Fall of Anti-Putin Protests in Russia: The Changing Resistance* Examining the transformation of Russian political activism into performative politics in the 2010s, this presentation analyzes opposition leaders' use of digital media as a stage for performance and populism, framed through performance studies and the “performance contract.”
- Varvara Sklez – *Rehearsing Political Collectivity in Times of Hopelessness* Focusing on *That's Not What You're on Trial For* (2018), Sklez explores how reenactments of past dissent gesture toward new forms of collective resilience, framed through Butler's and Schneider's theories of embodied protest and reenactment.
- Julia Listengarten – *Speaking Truth to Power: Expressions of Holy Foolishness as a Form of Resistance* Tracing the resurgence of *yurodstvo* (holy foolishness) in Russian culture, this talk examines its manifestations in film, theatre, and feminist protest art as modes of defiance against authoritarianism and multigenerational trauma.
- Margarita Kompelmakher – *Inclusive Actionism: Radical Care as Protest in the Belarus Free Theatre's Ability for Disability* Introducing the concept of “inclusive actionism,” Kompelmakher demonstrates how disability performance in Belarus reframed public protest through radical care and collective action, foreshadowing later democratic movements.

Together, these contributions invite reflection on the dramaturgies of resistance in times of authoritarian crisis and war. How do different forms of protest—artistic, digital, embodied—intersect, sustain, or fail under repression? What role does cultural memory play in sustaining practices of dissent? And how might protest performance reconfigure notions of solidarity and political imagination across post-Soviet and global contexts? This round table aims to foster a dialogue on the possibilities and limits of cultural resistance in the lasting aftermath of empire, foregrounding the urgency of archiving, theorizing, and rethinking protest when its efficacy is most in question.

Participants:

1. **Denis Bilunov** is a PhD student/ Researcher/ Lecturer, Founding member of Prague Russian Antiwar committee, and Organizer of anti-Putin networking in Russian diaspora. His research topics are Anti-Putin Russia, history of resistance: ups and downs, relevance and prospectives, Russian diaspora: genesis, structure and political potential, and Alternative media and political communication in Putin's Russia.

2. **Margarita Kompelmakher** is a scholar, theater instructor, and Director of Community Partnerships and Engagement at the Tony Award-winning Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia. She holds a PhD in Theater Historiography from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, where she wrote her dissertation on human rights theater based on a critical case study of the Belarus Free Theatre. Her writing appears in *Modern Drama*, the anthologies *Captured by the City: New Perspectives in Urban Culture* (2013) and *Staging Post-Communism* (2020), and the forthcoming *The Palgrave Handbook on Theatre and Migration* (2023).

3. **Julia Listengarten** is Professor of Theatre and Artistic Director at the University of Central Florida's School of Performing Arts. She is a theatre artist and scholar, and her research interests range from avant-garde and contemporary theatre to socially engaged performance practice. Her recent books include *Modern American Drama: Playwriting, 2000-2009* (2018), *The Cambridge Companion to American Theatre Since 1945* (2021), *Performing Arousal: Precarious Bodies and Frames of Representation* (2022), and *Visual and Performing Arts Collaboration in Higher Education: Transdisciplinary Practices* (2023). She has contributed to many theatre publications, recently co-edited the 8-volume series *Decades of Modern American Playwriting: 1930-2009* and was the editor (2013-2020) of *Stanislavski Studies: Practice, Legacy and Contemporary Theater*.

4. **Yana Meerzon** is Professor of Theatre Studies at the University of Ottawa. She is the author of three books, most recently *Performance, Subjectivity, Cosmopolitanism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). She co-edited nine collections of articles, including *Handbook on Theatre and Migration* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023; with Steve Wilmer). Her current research project is entitled 'Between Migration and Neo-Nationalism(s): Performing the European Nation — Playing a Foreigner,' which has been funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

5. **Varvara Sklez** is an Associate Tutor in Theatre and Performance at the University of Warwick (UK). She holds a PhD in Theater Studies from Warwick, titled 'Aesthetics of Effort: Performing Difficult Past in Contemporary Russian Theatre.' Her thesis examines how contemporary Russian theatre engaged with memory and resistance till 2022. The study explores how theatre artists address controversial aspects of Soviet history, contributing to discussions on power, responsibility, and agency while proposing new forms of resistance in an era where traditional political participation is increasingly restricted by the state.

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