

The paper deals with a performance with the meaningful title *Drama Observatory Kapital*. It premièred in 1991, in the year of Slovenian independence. Directed by Dragan Živadinov, it was made in the context of the politically subversive art collective NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst). I am analysing the performance by taking a different approach, which enables highlighting the political context and public responses to the performance with an analysis of its introductory rituals (E. Čufer, S. Kardum). In the case of *Kapital*, those took the form of theatralised conferences, consequential media reports and readers' responses, as well as Dragan Živadinov's hunger strike before the performance. These accompanying events to the performances - popular exactly at the turn of the Republic of Slovenia from Yugoslav socialism to parliamentary democracy - enabled the artists, Živadinov in particular, to publicly provoke a discussion about the socio-political role of art and the national cultural policy in the newly established democratic state, thus testing the level of its democratisation. By analysing these introductory rituals to *Kapital*, I am therefore employing a discussion on the wider subject of "today's culture in democracy" (van Maanen) and its specifics in the Slovenian transition, which touches upon crucial issues about understanding democracy, democratisation and politicality in relation to art, especially to its socio-political function. In the end, I emphasise the change in public discourse on art by framing the polemics in the question of today's socio-political role of art, thus offering a broader viewpoint on the current happenings.

Keywords: Dragan Živadinov, performing arts, Republic of Slovenia, *Drama Observatory Kapital*, NSK, the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre, socialism, democracy, politicality

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The Socio-Political Function of Performing Arts and the Democratisation of the Republic of Slovenia

The Example of *Drama Observatory Kapital* (1991)

1. Introduction to the socio-political context

When I was completing the current article in 2019, the discourse in the field of performing arts in Slovenia was predominantly subordinated to the influence of the economically-rationalistic logic which had reduced the effect of the arts to measures in profitability and usefulness and in Slovenia has been the ruling general perception of art for some time. In times of neoliberal governmentality (see Foucault) and the rule of competitive relations on the market (see also Berardi – Bifo), the transformation of the socio-political role of art was symbolically marked by the (temporary) abolishment of an independent Ministry of Culture (in 2012), it continued with the reduction of funding in cultural field and the consequential worsening of conditions for professional work, which persisted even after the visible effects of the global economic crisis (2008) were over and after the beginning of the period of real GDP growth rate in Slovenia (after 2014) (Statistical Office RS). Spreading the negative attitude, even hate speech towards the arts could be observed in the public sphere, for example, among web commentaries in published online media articles about art, and is being reproduced with the silent consent of the regulatory procedures of web administrators. As early as 2003, a public debate about subsidies in Slovenian culture was triggered, because of which even the “Ministry of Culture ordered a study about the effects of public investments into culture” (Ručna 2). Consequentially, the problematisation of the (precarious) conditions for production is becoming a regular part of artistic works and their content. Even in the theoretical treatment of art practices, the political contextualisation, referring exactly to these problems, has overshadowed other approaches (Milohnič *Umetnost, Kunst Artist*).

Completely the opposite, in times of socialism in former Yugoslavia, “art and culture represented a privileged part of the social universe”. Erjavec reasons that in the socialist society, the role of art was important because “the positions and opinions which in a different political system would have been expressed in the form of public political discourse were here presented in disguised art form, because the political

discourse was reserved for official ideology and politically sanctioned speakers and writers” (Erjavec 93). Apart from such use of art as public forum, (socio-critical) art played an important role in the “repluralisation of the Slovenian political space”, which enabled a “painless transition to democracy and the beginning of the Slovenian state” (Troha 130). The history of Slovenia also recognises that intellectuals and creators in culture importantly contributed to the process of the transition period (Vodopivec 463).

To trace this shift in attitude towards art and the public perception of its role in society till today, I return the discussion to the moment when Slovenia entered the political system of democracy and the free market in capitalism began to dictate art’s fight for survival. I am using the example of *Drama Observatory Kapital* (1991), produced in the independent scene in the year of Slovenian independence, it was directed by Dragan Živadinov, the nowadays internationally acclaimed theatre director known mostly for his project of culturalisation of space (see Anđelković). In the 1990s, he was one of the foremost users of introductory rituals and also their promotor, as well as a promotor of avant-garde motifs (their re-appropriation in the principle called retro-garde), a promotor of (performative) rituals and grand manifest gestures, all of which remain his recognisable aesthetic to this day.

With his introductory rituals to *Drama Observatory Kapital*, Živadinov provoked the discussion about the national interest in cultural policy of the new democratic country. Analysing these introductory rituals, that is, the accompanying events such as the hunger strike, the theatricalised press conference and responses of the newspaper readers, enables us to contextualise the concurrent socio-political situation. Initially used for provoking the bourgeois audience (for example, in Italian Futurism), introductory rituals, as “various accompanying (post)avant-garde acts” to performances (quot. in Kardum, “Uvodni rituali” 116)¹, did, in the times of decline of socialism and the birth of democracy, provoke the discussion about the re-forming of theatre, its social function, politicality and relation to democratisation, also in terms of its relation to institutions. To further explain the difference in this perception of the role of art between the two political systems, I am using the two-fold model of cultural policy: first, the “democratizing of culture” (Evrard 167), which leans toward elitism (Jung 7), and which, on the example of Slovenia, I am placing under the ideological patronage of socialism, and the other, the “cultural democracy”, which I am placing in the populist “reign of the consumer” (Kershaw 166) and the current time of capitalist consumerism.

1 Performative strategies in introductory rituals were influenced by the historical avant-gardes of the 20th century (Dadaism, Futurism, Surrealism and the conceptualism of Michel Duchamp).

2. *Drama Observatory Kapital*

It was the year of Slovenian independence and the turn from Yugoslav socialism toward democratic parliamentary republic. In January 1991, eight months before the première of his performance *Drama Observatory Kapital*, theatre director Dragan Živadinov went on a hunger strike for eighteen days by shutting himself in the secretariat of the Ministry of Culture (Štefančič 137; Čater 36; Kardum 123). Post festum theoretical analyses reasoned this happened “because the Minister of Culture at the time, Dr Andrej Capuder, was not attentive to the financial needs of this project [namely *Kapital*’s] post-production” (Milohnič, “Politično” 131). Similar reasons can also be read in concurrent reviews of the performance *Kapital* (Fridl 10). Živadinov was removed from the ministry building with the help of the police and continued his strike in a gallery on Gornji trg.

The first public impressions of the hunger strike alongside the birth of the new democratic state in 1991 reveal a surprising focus on democracy in understanding and contextualising the event. The direct public response to Živadinov’s protest as written by the readers of the leading national daily newspaper *Delo* was the following: “Dragan Živadinov’s hunger strike is a form of democratic performance in a democratic society” (Jurinčič 3). Whereas years later, in the more academic sphere, art historians and theorists stated that the event could also be perceived, primarily, as a part of a “multi-layered political and social events, which had for its goal general democratisation of the society”. Or, even more precisely: “[I]nsisting on the right to create conceptual art” along with introductory rituals was, in the existing socio-political circumstances, an aesthetic as well as a “political gesture” (Milohnič, “Politično” 136).

Thus, with his hunger strike, Živadinov opened a vivid debate in cultural circles, in which people were highly aware of the crucial importance of cultural policy (and the relation of the state to the culture) in the times of Slovenian independence in order to secure the existence of (non-commercial) culture in capitalism. In the readers’ responses to Živadinov’s hunger strike before *Kapital* in *Delo* from 11 February, Jožef Školč² made an important establishment and prediction: “That is why the crucial and real question is not, whether this or that stream in culture will prevail, but for what kind of state will we decide, what should the state be like, what the state must be like, so we could normally live in it as citizens and so we could speak about culture at all.” With this, Školc marked an important connection between the level of democracy in society and (the role of) culture, even or also after the ending of democratisation process. From Živadinov’s act to its responses denoting the necessity to define a national interest in the cultural policy of the newborn state.

² Školc was president (1990–1992) of the political party Liberal Democratic Party (LDS), which had been formed in 1990 from the League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia (ZSMS). In 1994, the LDS transformed to Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS).

Živadinov's fight for abstract theatre in the new democratic state – especially in the form of the hunger strike as an introductory ritual to *Kapital* – can be perceived as a fight with(in) cultural policy. That can be seen also solely from the titles of readers' responses regarding the event: "Not just about cultural policy, it's about the policy of the state" (Jožef Školč), "Tense cultural policy" (Edelman Jurinčič, Primorska Writers' Association). Jurinčič also prognostically established that: "With the transition to capitalistic relations, culture itself will cope with very painful market and interpersonal relations." Consequentially, by analysing Živadinov's performance *Kapital* and its context, I am employing a discussion on a wider subject that touches mostly upon the affairs in "today's culture of democracy", a phrase that since the 1970s in European countries has so often been juxtaposed to the 'democratization of culture'" (van Maanen 169). A debate that in the special conditions of the Slovenian transition gets a peculiar political connotation.

3. Democratization of culture versus cultural democracy

To demonstrate more clearly the core of the dilemma and the distinction between the role of art in socialism versus democracy, let's return to the two-fold theory as used by Yves Evrard. When using binary "policy theories" that are "used to discuss cultural policy development, analysis, and change", Jung ("Threading and Mapping" 7), who provided a detailed overview of the theories in arts administration published in the *Journal of Arts Management, Law & Society*, apart from Evrard (1997), mentions also Girard (1972), Langsted (1990) and Mulcahy (2006) (for Mulcahy see also Praznik 34).³ The reason why I am framing this vivid debate between the two paradigms, the "democratization of culture" and "cultural democracy", in a political way is to re-think the role of cultural policy in the democratic state, as opposed to socialism, and to re-define the role and function of culture in democracy today.

The democratization of culture deals with the aim of cultural policy "to disseminate major cultural works to an audience that does not have ready access to them, for lack of financial means or knowledge derived from education" (Evrard 167). "Democratization of culture views culture as something that is uniform and 'good for you' and as administered by the government (Langsted 1990; Mulcahy 2006)" (qtd. in Jung 7). Or even differently: "A cultural policy based on democratization of culture is top-down and promotes the elitist idea of arts and culture (Mulcahy 2006)" (Ibid.).

When placing this distinction between the different aims of cultural policy in the timeline from socialism to democracy, one can easily ascribe the type of democratization

³ Kevin Mulcahy talks about two kinds of cultural policy. First is "democratization of culture", which privileges only certain types of culture as public good and is focused at acquiring cultural capital, while "cultural democracy" refers to equal accessibility of culture (qtd. in Praznik 34).

of culture to socialism. Which universal values were to be supported, distributed and subsidised by the socialist state in the paradigm of cultural democratisation were clearly the ones supporting the socialist ideology, which should, consequentially, be distributed to everybody. As Peter Vodopivec in his integral contemporary history of Slovenians sums to the point, in socialism, “the builders of the Yugoslav post-war cultural policy were [...] striving towards three goals: raising the general educational and cultural level of the population, promoting creativity approachable to ‘crowds’ and enabling their lively integration into various cultural activities and cultural fruitfulness, in order to strengthen the socialist ‘consciousness’ and belonging to the new social and political order” (422).

On the other pole of cultural policy: “Cultural democracy is concerned with providing equal opportunities for all to be culturally active in their own terms and interprets arts and culture more broadly, valuing pluralism. When this ‘populist’ approach is applied to cultural policy, the emphasis is shifted from providing one collective cultural experience to pluralistic and participatory experiences” (Jung 7). The polemics between the two viewpoints, the democratisation of culture and cultural democracy can in the most radical derivation be cut down to polemics between elitism in culture on one side, with a policy of dictating the contents and values in art, and, on the other side, populism or, in the language of today’s capitalism, “the tyranny’ of audience ratings” (Evrard 173).

With the entrance to democracy, the Slovenian state’s cultural policy lost its ideological compass. The younger generation of artists at the time, Živadinov in particular, saw this as the right moment to instigate a wider debate on questions of cultural policy, just in time before the neoliberal measurement of profitability and usefulness stepped in the foreground as the only measure. Their striving for professional working conditions in cultural policy was not founded (and interpreted) as much in measures of the equality of conditions, but rather in the democratic opening to freedom of speech, which enabled greater public visibility to the before ideologically restricted and marginalised contents.

As shown by empirical studies, despite the rising social inequalities in Yugoslavia in the beginning of the 1990s as well as in the beginning of the 1980s, their consequential result was not the general attitude of egalitarianism as would be the expected or “dominant reaction” to such social inequalities. In opposition to all the expectations, the empirical studies instead show that, “during the first stages of democratic transition, Slovenes did not expect that democracy would bring social equalities. However, they did expect political freedom” (qtd. in Hafner-Fink, “Values” 138). Thus, cultural democracy and open access to cultural production may be connected to making the ability for everybody to create culture as a basic

democratic right to the freedom of speech and (cultural) articulation as well as the representation of (de)privileged voices in society.

Being aware that the Slovenian market with an estimated total population of 2,076,595 (Statistic office RS, March 2019) in itself is not large enough to enable the survival of (non-commercial) culture, the (younger generation of) artists in the 1990s had to (and still has) to assure its survival in cultural democracy. In his 12 September 1991 article "Our theatres dependent on state's fondness", Slavko Pezdir establishes on the basis of the analyses in the theatre annuals in Yugoslavia and Slovenia: "Because of the relatively small number of spectators, our theatres will long be dependent on the life on momentary fondness of our state or dominant cultural policy" ("Naša" 6). The reason was smallness of the market, which required a higher number of premières per year in Slovenia (46% of all performances), as in, for example, when talking about the entire territory of Yugoslavia (33%). Meaning also, the arts could not sustain themselves on the market (or from ticket sales), because of its apparent troubles with post-production in relation to production.

The topic of democratisation in culture is not exclusive for Slovenia, and has been present in the European sphere since the 1970s on, when, on the one hand, new forms of popular culture came into the foreground and the cultural industries for the masses prevailed, while the so called elite, classical and traditional forms of non-commercial culture suddenly felt threatened by populism, and needed to (re)assure its existence in the free (art) market via a democratic strategy of cultural policy (and subsidies from the state) (van Maanen 169). Van Maanen then critically refers mostly to Richard Shusterman's pejorative treatment on "several forms of popular culture" that have in "contemporary cultural democracy", "apparently attained a position alongside the 'highbrow' culture that was traditionally enjoyed by a well turned-out elite" (Ibid.). Van Maanen is sceptical about the presumed hierarchical distinction between popular and "traditional" culture and positioning them in the relation of low towards high/ elite culture.

While van Maanen treats the topic in the chapter "On values and function of the arts", he poses the question whether the level of democratisation of culture depends on the state's support of "stimulating the perceptual schemata of participants", meaning, is it dependent on "provocative" rather than on "comfortable" forms of art, told in the vocabulary of Sciotoovsky (qtd. in van Maanen 169). He then further states a rather interesting provocation regarding if a culture can be considered democratic: it is not whether the culture enables in equal measurement representation of popular and non-popular forms of art and attributes them the same value, but rather if the culture "regards as equal and encourages all those forms of communication within the various aesthetic disciplines that challenge the perceptual schemata of the

participants, then it can rightfully be called democratic” (170).

Applying van Maanen’s question to the example of Slovenia would therefore be, what kind of art would be considered “provocative” or “stimulating the perceptual schemata of participants”, first, in socialism, and then, in democracy. While the level of democracy or democratisation of society measured would be the inclination of cultural policy to support the non-comfortable forms of art and its variability. However, it is worth noticing that van Maanen is here mostly preoccupied with the aesthetic, moral and even epistemological questions and values of art (later also sociological), while discussing the questions of democratisation and cultural policy in terms of supporting “provocative” rather than “comfortable” forms of art. The interesting part here is that the debate on cultural policy supporting them that became alive in Slovenia with the entrance into democracy, was mostly ideological. In the bottom line it addressed the question of cultural policy and state subsidies from the point of view of politically challenging ideas. It also strived for incorporating the independent performing arts scene into financial institutions. That also means that in this case, the debate about subsidising alternative, marginal or, in fact, non-mass oriented and, most importantly, ideologically provocative performances was publicly opened with the transition from socialist self-management to the capital market economy and in the processes of Slovenian democratisation and independence from the socialist system of Yugoslavia. Even though elite culture does not appear to be quite the same as marginalised culture, they both tend to be non-mass, non-commercially oriented and financially non-autonomous on the market.

Živadinov is hardly a good example for the equal dissemination of culture in accustomed measurements. The production *Kapital* only had a capacity for 18 spectators per performance. As the media reported, initially there were 20 performances planned, which would mean 360 spectators in total (see “Z Živadinovom” in “Zapeljevanje non-stop”). There is no official data about the total number of performances actually performed, but the number (deliberately) remained highly controlled and severely modest. However, when it comes to provoking questions about cultural democracy, with the hunger strike and its reception in the newspaper, the number of the target audience for *Kapital* became much higher, reaching even several thousand.⁴

With the carrying out of introductory rituals, the (elite or marginalised) performance could more easily target the public sphere and trigger the necessary discourses in public. Official reservations towards (political) polemicisations and the seeming absence of strategical national cultural policy,⁵ which is hidden behind the mass global

4 For comparison: the circulation of the largest newspaper, *Delo*, for example, in July 2004 was 89,656 per day for the printed edition (RPN/Revidiranje prodanih naklad). And this is only for the printed editions. The official number for the year 1991 remains undisclosed. Hence, with the introductory rituals such as the hunger strike and its reports, the possibility to reach a larger audience – which is even not exclusively of cultural provenience (!) – is far greater.

5 The first Exercising of the Public Interest in Culture Act / Zakon o uresničevanju javnega interesa na področju kulture (ZUJIPK,

phenomena of the silent “commodification of cultural consumption” (Kershaw 166) and tendencies to let the (independent) art to survive on the market, gets sharper political connotation in the context of Slovenian transition from Yugoslav socialism than, for example, in the West. By that, it highlights the question of the social role of art and reveals our perception of democracy.

Hence, introductory rituals, such as the hunger strike, which were the main ones used, became a means to deliberately direct the focus of the public interest and the audience onto the working conditions of the non-institutional theatre production (the so-called independent theatre production). In the case of the hunger strike, the audience was mostly the readers of the “press” introductory rituals to the performance. With the use of the form of introductory rituals to the performance, *Kapital* opened a vivid debate in cultural circles about the question of cultural policy, the functions of art in new socio-political conditions, as well as redefining the politicality of arts. The public responses at this stage of history of Slovenia prove to be on the side of (alternative) art in defence of democracy and freedom of speech, understanding it as its integral part.

4. Introductory rituals to *Kapital*

The introductory rituals – in Slovenian performing arts firstly mentioned by Eda Čufer – are, tautologically, “rituals of introducing the spectators into performance” (qtd. in Kardum, “Uvodni rituali” 116). *Kapital* was made in the year of independence, on the non-institutional theatre scene, and with the help of introductory rituals producing an autonomous aesthetic sphere. As it is often the case with the theatre of Dragan Živadinov, there were more introductory rituals preceding the actual event, all of which crucially determine its understanding and its context. As already mentioned, half a year before the première of *Kapital*, Živadinov conducted a hunger strike (introductory ritual no. 1). Later, directly before the première, a highly theatricalised press conference was organised (no. 2). Both actions were also mentioned in the reviews of the performance *Kapital* as a means of its interpretation (Kardum, “Kaj” 5; Fridl 10). Additionally, Živadinov’s *Kapital* was not a solo project. At the time Živadinov was part of the SNST,⁶ the theatre section inside NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst) (intro. ritual no. 3). NSK collective mostly became internationally known for their politically subversive art against Yugoslav socialistic regime (for further reading see I. Arns, S. Sasse, A. Monroe, etc.). *Kapital* demanded from NSK to re-define their politicality in art, because it was done at the shift in socio-political system from

later ZUJIK) was released in 1994.

⁶ Dragan Živadinov was mostly involved with NSK between the years 1983–86 in the times of the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre (SNST).

socialism to democracy and capitalism. But as the exhibition guide *From Kapital* suggests, mostly to invest their symbolic capital, and this was precisely this particular moment in history (Z. B. 26).

4.1. Introductory ritual to *Kapital*: Hunger Strike

Perhaps the most important introductory ritual to *Kapital* was the already mentioned hunger strike. By that, Živadinov was not only highlighting the impossible conditions for working in the independent art scene, but was also providing a provisional cultural policy strategy. At the beginning of the strike, Živadinov articulated his programme and wrote it on the desk of the Minister of Culture in three demands (Čater, *Ibid.*).⁷ From this, we can observe that the tendencies were not limited to *Kapital* only; he strove for the transnationalisation and democratisation of the Slovenian culture, demanding from the state to articulate its national and public interest in culture and improve the conditions for artistic production – especially non-institutional production. In short, the message of the strike was that the state’s (inter)national interest in the field of culture ought to be reflected in the strategies of its cultural policy by the means of a democratic state.

While it was taking place, the strike had received collective support⁸ from the cultural field in the form of collective performative actions, such as the “running in place” that was happening at the same time-place as the press conference of the hunger striking artist, only a few floors higher in the building of Cankarjev dom. As reported in the media, this “protesting-celebrating action” (Puhar “Crescendo”, 5), as the “runners” claimed, was simultaneously celebrating the fifth anniversary of Živadinov’s avant-garde performance *Baptism under Triglav* (1986) (*Ibid.*). Hence, it was the “generational” support of certain aesthetics, politicality, autonomy, artistic freedom in the fight for establishing the conditions for the continuity of work.

4.2. Introductory ritual to *Kapital*: Press Conference (11 Detonations)

The second introductory ritual to Živadinov’s *Kapital* takes the form of a press conference. The reviews after the première (Milohnič, Čufer, Kardum, Fridl) report that the form of the press conference for *Kapital* was far from usual. This particular

⁷ The exact demands in his hunger strike were the following:

1. That the National Cultural Programme be finally publicly published.
2. That the ratio between institutional and non-institutional production changes from 100:1 to 100:20.
3. That Ljubljana apply for the project European Capital of Culture.

⁸ Živadinov also received support in media from individuals, theatre authorities, Jovan Čirilov from Belgrade, and Dušan Jovanovič, theatre director and playwright, as well as other visible personas.

event/press conference lasted around five hours and was itself an (autonomous) performance. It took place on Thursday, 5 September 1991, beginning at 6:30 p.m. at the Slovenian Theatre and Film Museum⁹ in a form called 11 Detonations. In Detonation No. 3, Živadinov announced the première of *Kapital* 13 days later.

However, the other points of detonation represented the continuation of debate about cultural democracy as started in the hunger strike, only this time the programme was far more thought through, systematised and elaborated. The “detonations” included demands for the financial continuity of work of the younger generation of directors with the help of funds to ensure the proper historicalisation/archivation of theatre, that Ljubljana be the “European Capital of Culture”, to unite three academies (music, fine arts/design and theatre), changes in the spatial conditions in the construction of the stage, to form a postmodern school of dance, the honouring of H. P. Noordung, and last but not least, the point of detonation presented the 50-year-long project *Noordung* (Kardum, “Kaj”).

In short, with his detonations, Živadinov was addressing the issue of improving the production conditions (infrastructure, organisation, education, financing ...) of art with the attempt of directing and systematising the national cultural policy or, in the vocabulary of the two-fold cultural policy, he was setting the basis for a cultural democracy that would also ensure the existence of independent art practices.

4.3. Introductory ritual to *Kapital*: NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst)

The third introductory ritual is connected to the ideological highlighting of the process of transition in the socio-political context and the entrance to capitalism with a joint project of NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst). In 1991, the year of Slovenian independence from socialist Yugoslavia, all three main sections of NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst), namely, the multimedial (musical/performative/video) section with the band Laibach, the visual section with the art collective IRWIN and the theatre section SNST with Dragan Živadinov¹⁰ – each carried out a project under the title *Kapital*.¹¹

Despite the expectations and telling political titles connected to Živadinov’s *Kapital*, the release of the notorious band Laibach’s “*Kapital*” album in 1992 was [...] a great

9 For more data see Kardum, “Uvodni” 121. Because of the limited reports and reviews about Živadinov’s performances and their introductory rituals in general, some data gathering can be limited and difficult, for example, some critics report that the hunger strike was conducted in winter (Fridl), other claim it was in spring (Kardum, “Dragan”). When following the subsequent reports in newspapers, the hunger strike finishes on 12 February after 18 days (J. H. 6).

10 At this point, no longer neither the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre (1983–87), nor Red Pilot, but now Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung (1990–).

11 Laibach, for example, released the album with telling song titles in 1992. Telling also in relation to Živadinov’s *Kapital*: *Wirtschaft ist tot* (*Economy is dead*) and *Kinderreich*, but also *Decade Null*, *Hymn to the Sun*, *Regime of Coincidence*, *State of Gravity*. The album was produced on three different formats (CD, LP, cassette) and each contained different version of the songs or even different songs. IRWIN starts its series of paintings entitled *Kapital* in 1990 (in 1991 it was exhibited in the USA).

surprise for its withdrawal from bombastic ideological and political content" (*From Kapital* 24). It is IRWIN's part that is more interesting. They found a strategy for coping with the new economic and political system: "On the brink of the collapse of socialism and Yugoslavia, IRWIN was aware that its symbolic capital was precisely this very same historic moment" (Z. B., *NSK: From Kapital* 26).

IRWIN worked on *Kapital* between 1990 and 1992 and based the project on five large paintings from the *Was ist Kunst* series, in *Kapital* these were completed with the nameplates of political organisations. IRWIN incorporated nameplates such as the League of Communists, that were in 1991 being removed from town buildings into the artwork and wrote *Kapital* on them (see Exhibition guide *From Kapital* 36). "Instantly given a new life, the plates stand for the experience of socialism as IRWIN's capital" (Ibid.). It was exactly the change of political context that was emphasised with the project and the new functioning of art as well as its politicality within it.

"Once IRWIN started displaying these paintings together with mounted hunting trophies, the concept of capital became even more multifaceted: now it also referred to the fact that art is always a trophy, no matter what the system, serving both ideology and capital equally well" (Ibid.). This interpretation of IRWIN's *Kapital*, can be understood also as NSK's re-orientation of political subversion in times of socio-political transition from socialism to neoliberal logic. The collective project *Kapital* was precisely "referencing that which NSK had loudly proclaimed in the early 1980s: the collapse of socialism and the dawn of total capitalism," is written in the exhibition guide of the only grand NSK retrospective in Slovenia made in Moderna galerija (2015), symptomatically entitled *From Kapital to Capital*.

Known for political subversions and having learned the painful lesson from art history of art being instrumentalised by the governing structures (in socialism) and thus employing their own auto-immune tactic with the tactic of over-identification or subversive affirmation,¹² the actual switch between socialism and democracy demanded from the NSK to articulate the switch in the politicality of (performing) arts. The NSK continued to make their own distancing from the governing system, even in capitalism. Proving the ideological fight against instrumentalisation by the governing system seems in turn from de-politisation of socialism to "demonetarisatation" of capitalism even harder and the questions of cultural policy and (ideological) financial support for artists unavoidable. How to be more "total than totalitarianism" of capital (see Arns *Avantgarda* 165), proved to be more difficult than to be more "total than totalitarianism" in socialism. In the totality of capital(ism),

12 "Subversive affirmation is an artistic/political tactic that allows artists/activists to take part in certain social, political, or economic discourses and to affirm, appropriate, or consume them while simultaneously undermining them [...] there is always a surplus which destabilises affirmation and turns it into its opposite." (Arns, Sasse, "Subversive")

they resorted to highlighting the processes of privatisation of art by capital (art as a trophy of capitalism). This was the one thing Živadinov was in performing arts, as an immaterial form of art, attempting to avoid by imploring the public discussion on cultural democracy and introductory rituals.

In relation to IRWIN, whose members are fighting for the autonomous marketing of their own socio-political history, the politicality of Živadinov's theatre is to create (a)political autonomy. If we follow Aldo Milohnič's interpretation, this theatre was not exactly apolitical, namely this generation "effected a radical turn in the political optics where the subversive nature of artistic practice [...] originates [...] from uncompromising persistence with the concept of experimental theatre and from the demand for the construction of the new historical and political context on the stage" (Milohnič, "Politično" 135). Hence, in this turn to conceptualism, we could speak more in the sense of politics of form.

When entering his theatre, two things or two statements at least should be considered. Živadinov's statement in "The First Sisters letter" that is found in the founding act of the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre (SNST) in 1984, as the initiation and manifesto of the theatrical section of NSK. The first statement: "Theatre is a State," (*From Kapital* 475) and second: "The Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre is apolitical" (Ibid.), thus, as a state within a state, creating a much needed alternative (u-topian) imaginary and autonomous space of artistic freedom inside the totalitarian (and later democratic) regime.¹³ This was done with the rest of introductory rituals.

4.4. At last, *Drama Observatory Kapital*: the performance itself

Even the performance itself started as an introductory ritual. *Drama Observatory Kapital*¹⁴ premiered outside theatre institutions in the public warehouses in Ljubljana, Hall 13 (nowadays the shopping mall BTC City) on 18 September 1991, supported by the non-institutional theatre production Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung (from here on, CC Noordung).

Spectators were taken inside the performance one by one. Each of the spectators was carrying in his hands a "sacral" object that is a module of a satellite of Herman Potočnik Noordung (see Kardum "Dragan Živadinov"). H. P. Noordung, the Slovenian rocket engineer, popularised by Živadinov in the artistic sphere, is known for his pioneer work on space travel *The Problem of Space Travel* (1929) and the idea of long-term

¹³ This act was actually finalised when founding the impossible state, NSK State in Time, a state with no territory and no borders in 1992. But Dragan Živadinov was forced to find his space literally in space (see Postgravity Art).

¹⁴ Also found in different publications under the name *Dramatic Observatory Kapital*.

human inhabitation of space. The spectators were carrying this homage to Noordung inside the performance with their eyes blindfolded, and personally accompanied by Živadinov through this initiation.

“This individualisation [of spectators by blindfolding their eyes at the entrance into performance] was performed as a violent tearing of the spectator out of his former civil context,” (“Gledališče ... I”, 20) explains Eda Čufer for the introductory ritual to *Kapital*. In this sense it was true that the spectators were, with the help of introductory rituals, individualised from a uniform collective subject defined as the audience, as well as from the ideology of the collective political body, but this was done with the sole purpose of de-politisation by purifying and aestheticising the political and historical context (of the previous socialist state) from which spectators were coming with the act of introductory rituals. Thus, creating an autonomous artistic space.

4.5. Introductory ritual to *Kapital*: Initiation at the gates of performance

There is an additional meaning in the text adapted from the libretto by Jole Randelović, which, in the performance, was played out almost as a radio play, released from the sound speakers. *Kapital* was “based on the libretto for the opera *Victory over the Sun*” (*NSK: From Kapital to Capital*, 528). The opera follows the spirit of avant-gardes and is the first Russian Futurist opera.¹⁵ Its world première was in December 1913 in Saint Petersburg (Arns, *Avantgarda* 215). The idea behind the futuristic opera was the idea of the state beyond the state, according to Myroslava M. Mudrak (in Arns). This utopic world or kingdom of Real was called “the Tenth Land”. The first act pictures the end of world, limited by materiality, while the second act introduces land of different dimensions. There is “the cataclysmic downfall of the old cultural order – and announces new organisation of art (and life)” (quot. in Anđelković 53).

I claim that with the help of his performative introduction ritual, Živadinov was actually trying to enact the autonomous aesthetic state. It can be compared to what one year later was realised as the NSK State, a state in time, that is, a state without borders or physical territories. A state that is more a mental state or a state of being and takes place in(side) all of its citizens. This autonomous aesthetic state can be also seen from the second statement of its founding act, which is connected to the previous one: “The Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre is apolitical” (Ibid.).

“The cultural and political function of the myth about Noordung, celebrating the work

¹⁵ *Victory over the Sun* (*NSK: From Kapital to Capital*, 528) is the first Russian Futurist opera (1913), written by Aleksei Kruchonykh (libretto), Mikhail Matyushin (music), Velimir Khlebnikov (prologue), Kazimir Malevich (stage design). Živadinov’s performance also used a reconstruction, or more accurately, a deconstruction of Malevich’s stage design.

of the Slovenian scientist and inventor of the geostationary satellite Herman Potočnik (who assumed the pseudonym Noordung) was – as Živadinov explained at the press conference before the première of the *Drama Observatory Kapital*, at which he laid out his plan of work through 2045 – to open up the mythological space of a future not shaped by poetry and national identification, but by universal postulates of science and technology” (E. Č., *From Kapital* 71).

The function of the introductory ritual at the entrance to *Kapital* was connected to the initiation of the spectators into a (politically) autonomous, artistic, (post/)utopian sphere of performance. But what can be seen at the birth of democracy with this performing of an autonomous political space and with the tactics of introductory rituals used, is that in the transition from socialism, the fight for the democratisation of the cultural and public sphere – that is, the fight for the autonomy of the independent theatre – has shifted from the ideological questions of artistic content into the field of cultural democracy, that is, cultural policy. Meaning also that in the transition from socialist self-management to the economy of the capitalist free market, aesthetic questions in the public sphere became secondary to those of the financial and productional conditions for making art. The fact that the actual performance *Kapital* itself was introducing into theatre a film-like perception and revolutionary form, where spectators were revolting around the scenery, was not as present in the public discourse as the questions of cultural policy/democracy. See also the passage in which I compare the number of spectators at *Kapital* to the number of possible recipients to its introductory rituals (hunger strike, press conferences ...). Which may altogether lead to the presumption that far more people are concerned with the state’s cultural policy than they are with actual art.

Symptomatic in this case of transition from content/wise questions to a logistic, organisational and bureaucratic logic is that Simon Kardum, theatre theorist and critic as well as the author of the article about introductory rituals, was employed from 1997 at the Ministry of Culture and dealt with bureaucratic and financial regulation and systematisation of the non-governmental, independent (non-commercial) theatre scene (the status of independent cultural workers, regulating funding for non-governmental public institutes ...). In the debates about cultural policy, the aforementioned Jožef Školč became Minister of Culture, etc. The “scene” was more and more preoccupied with questions of cultural policy than with anything else. “Notably, it is not about the need to distinguish between artistic and organisational work, but especially about the production of subjectivity, which is at the core of this model” (Kunst, *Artist* 159, see also *Umetnik* 129). Bojana Kunst in her book *Artist at Work* speaks about the proximity of discourses on art to production processes of capitalism, which she mostly emphasises as a result of the “different forms of temporality and perception”, such as, “projective temporality” and “acceleration of production subjects”, that are at work

here. Both are also mostly the reasons, she says, why we can simultaneously observe the “disappearance of a constitutive place for position of art in society”. As an example, she names “the development of the cultural-political model of independent artists or administrators/managers, which can also be viewed as a result of the political struggle for the support for non-institutional culture.” A transitional result, she adds in the Slovenian edition of the book, using the development of the Slovenian independent production of the last decade as an example. The situation about the neoliberal switch in the perception of arts or the measurement of arts’ value is in fact becoming more and more strained. As also proved, for example, by research done in 2003–2004 at the Peace Institute called “Economics of Culture” and its problematisation of prevailing logic of economists for culture to prove itself on tests of “economic rationality and usefulness of society in general” (Milohnič, “Kultura v primežu” 7). When Katja Praznik in *From Kapital* analyses the hierarchical ratio between institutions and non-institutions and cultural policy, she writes “viewed from the perspective of three decades later” [...] “the conditions of production for the new art forms, have not only remained unchanged, but have also in fact worsened” (365), thus, ironically rounding off the discussion about the effect of democracy on Slovenian culture with the entrance to the independent democratic state.

5. Towards conclusion: Comparison to more current happenings in cultural democracy

Živadinov’s hunger strike thus temporarily meant a victory “for abstract theatre” (Kardum, “Dragan” 7). This “temporality” represents only one chapter in Slovenian performing arts history, since the ongoing fight in the affairs of cultural democracy in cultural policy is still very much vivid and alive to this day.

In 2015, Miha Turšič, acting director and, together with Dragan Živadinov and Dunja Zupančič, co-founder of KSEVT (Cultural Centre of European Space Technologies), went on a seventeen-day hunger strike against the “relentless stance” of the Ministry of Culture.¹⁶ In comparison to Živadinov: the strike lasted seventeen days (not eighteen): from 30 September 2015 to 16 October 2015. The place where the strike took place was again a gallery: this time Museum of Modern Art Ljubljana. The demands posed to the Ministry of Culture were again three.¹⁷ This time they were more concrete, pointed toward concrete people and not representative (bureaucratical) functions

¹⁶ Whereas in 2018 several non-governmental organisations from the field of performing arts filed a lawsuit against the Ministry of Culture and their (unprofessional) tender procedures, because of their financial reductions in the period of 2018–2021. One of the organisations in the lawsuit against the state was also Živadinov’s production house.

¹⁷ “There are three sets of demands: resignation of Biserka Močnik, head of the creativity directorate at the culture ministry, who Turšič believes ruined KSEVT, the Cultural Centre of European Space Technologies, and her removal from all work positions that require an understanding of art; change of KSEVT’s legal status from a municipal to a public instruction [sic]; and increasing the funding of culture from the state budget by two per cent.” (A. J., M. K., “KSEVT co-founder still on hunger strike”).

of the Ministry of Culture in general, the goal was to benefit a concrete cultural institution (KSEVT), but not the least: to increase the funding for culture. Ironically, at least in comparison to the strike in 1991, the strike tended toward the legal, financial, bureaucratic and transparent regulation of Slovenian cultural institution(s) and for improving the working conditions for the entire cultural sector. In 2015, the entire budget for culture in relation to the state's budget was hardly higher than 1.5%, whereas at the birth of new democratic state was 2.5%, reports *Dnevnik*¹⁸ (Pišek, "Proračun").

Turšič had received support from visible intellectuals, artists and cultural workers and organisations in the cultural field. All the demands of the strike, letters of public support were well documented in Turšič's blog: "J'accuse ...!" In comparison to readers' responses in 1991, prominent Slovenian philosopher Dr Mladen Dolar wrote in his letter: "The lack of an ear and understanding in the case of KSEVT is inscribed in a wider pattern, in which the Ministry cannot offer anything else but to continue with reduction and cutting, which are regular features of cultural policy in Slovenia in the last twenty years and to which the left and right governments have collectively contributed. It seems there is nothing as dangerous and harmful to our culture as are our ministries of culture." Published also in the weekly *Mladina* (qtd. in Košir, "Mladen Dolar"). While in web articles about the hunger strike, the anonymous users' comments offered a different picture of the reception of the event. A user with the nickname Morpheus1 on 1 October wrote the generic comment, one of many similar: "If there is something you don't like, go to the labour market and let us see how much you are worth!!" For which he received 75 likes (see K. M. "Miha Turšič"). In readers' responses in *Mladina*, the press representative of the Ministry of Culture published – after the strike was already over – a letter with an official explanation to the public, referring to inconsistencies in the past articles regarding the strike published in *Mladina* by different authors. The letter provides detailed data about the past financing and legal status of KSEVT, claims the transparency and correctness of procedures by referring to the Ministry of Finance, denies the lack of dialogue with the Ministry of Culture and greets the end of the strike. The letter also tells how the Ministry of Culture is also looking forward to the resolved financing problem of KSEVT, now settled under the patronage of three Ministries (Glaner, "Intervju").

Two months after the end of the hunger strike, Turšič resigned from his position of director, since despite the promises made by the authorities, the demands were not realised. KSEVT came under the operation of the state in 2017, the position of acting director was awarded to Nena Dokuzov. On 14 October 2017, two years after the strike, the daily *Dnevnik* published correspondence between Turšič and Dokuzov entitled

¹⁸ The weekly *Mladina* later similarly reported that in 2018 the percentage of the cultural budget in relation to the state's entire budget is 1.6 %, in 2009 it was 2.2% and the highest was in the first decade of the independent state 2.5% (see Pauković, "Čas je"). Turšič demanded that the budget for culture be brought back to the level of at least 2%.

“Primitivism of the new director”, that, so *Dnevnik*, “demonstrates, it is not only about discrepancies on content, but also about fundamental differences in understanding, what is cultural and democratic dialogue.”

Last but not least, the research on the matter of democracy in culture has brought us to the conclusion that the problem is not only about the global neoliberal logic influencing the strategy of cultural policy (so called cultural democracy) but also about the lack of dialogue, communication, which resides in the different languages that both the cultural and economical sector use, as well as their apparent untranslatability.

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