Amfiteater, letn. 13, št. 2, 2025

UDK 7(4-11)
DOI 10.51937/Amfiteater-2025-2/12-44

Abstract

The starting point for this article is the significant absence of Eastern European art and artists from major international art venues and narratives, highlighting their persistent marginalisation. It also reveals a systemic neglect of this region in the post-Cold War context, arguing for the reposition of Eastern European art as a critical element in understanding diverse European art practices, which traditionally suffer from a binary perspective that contrasts the neoliberal capitalist West with the postsocialist East. In her article, the author also discusses the historical context of artistic exchanges, asserting that Western art has long been perceived as universal while Eastern art has been relegated to the periphery, aspiring for recognition yet facing continual exclusion. In the aftermath of the Cold War, interest in Eastern European art gradually diminished, further alienating it from significant platforms like international biennials and exhibitions. Despite a small number of artists who gained noteworthy prominence, the broader narrative around Eastern European art remains limited, often only transiently featuring a few artists in Western art histories. The article calls for a reassessment of Eastern European art, particularly in light of the political and cultural upheavals that occurred in post-1989 Europe, which have continued to inform artistic practices and critical discourse into the 21st century. Notable references are made to several books that were published in the meantime. These books attempted to articulate the complexities of Eastern European art amidst significant geopolitical changes, aiming to bridge the gap in global art histories and recognition, although not always succeeding in it.

Keywords: Eastern European art, Western European art, performance art, performing arts, decolonisation, deculturalisation

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The Cold War Is Over, and It Made Us Even Colder: Art and Artists Between Eastern and Western Europe from 1945 until 2025

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The idea for this paper pursued me for a long time. Precisely, I have been obsessed with the absence of Eastern European art and artists from most performing arts and film festivals, museums and galleries. For example, the 2024 Venice Art Biennale opened under the title *Foreigners Everywhere*. In the central pavilion, works by three hundred artists from around the world were exhibited, only three of whom came from Eastern Europe (Anna Zemánková, Iva Janković and Želimir Žilnik). This was not the first time that artists from Eastern Europe have been completely missing in these venues or have been neglected as "Other" on the margins of Europe's new geopolitical, economic and cultural fault lines. In the ongoing decolonisation and deculturalisation, it seems there is little space for that part of the world, once divided between the Soviet bloc and the non-aligned Yugoslav Federal Republic (SFRJ). Obviously, the region needs to be resituated as an important focal point for understanding different European art practices of the late 20th and early 21st century in ways that venture beyond the generalised divide between the neoliberal capitalist West and postsocialist East. It should be noted that certain forms of racism that have already existed in Western feudal societies, racialising Jews, Slavs and Roma, introducing colonialism and slavery in Europe itself, and not only outside of it, still persist. Western culture has a long tradition of Orientalising Eastern Europe, a tradition that has been present since the 18th century, especially with regard to Russia. Thus, although the Cold War ended, Western Europe has still kept its central role, while Eastern Europe is sometimes referred to as the former East, or as the Other to the West, or, as Marina Gržinić put it, "insufficient Europe". On the other hand, Slavoj Žižek claims that "Eastern Europe functions for the West as its Ego-Ideal (*Ich-Ideal*)": the point from which the West sees itself as a likeable, idealised country, worth dreaming of, an object of desire (Žižek 200).

From modernism on, Western art was always considered universal. In contrast, Eastern art always aspired to be accepted. However, it was, and still is, a one-way relationship.

Before the "turbulent" 1990s, especially between 1945 and 1989, the West generated a certain curiosity for the world behind the Iron Curtain; however, after the 1990s, the interest in the art of Eastern Europe has been fading. Often, this part of Europe is now excluded from international biennials, festivals and exhibitions. Additionally, although there are numerous books on performance art histories, most of these deal exclusively with Western performance art and only in passing mention a very few artists from Eastern Europe, such as Marina Abramović, Oleg Kulik, Katarzyna Kozyra, Ilya Kabakov, Sanja Iveković, etc., all of whom have prominent international profiles. This is rather curious when we know that lately many art historians and curators are trying to make a revision of the Eastern artistic paradigm. The last similar attempt was made in 2018, when the Museum of Modern Art in New York published the book *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe: A Critical Anthology*.[1] The book concentrates on the drastic political and cultural changes that took place between 1989 and 1991, which, 30 years later, continued to influence artistic practice and critical theory in Central and Eastern Europe. Comprising 75 primary and secondary sources, the book is organised thematically into seven chapters that include case studies, exhibitions, curatorial statements, critical essays and interviews with artists and curators mostly from Central and Eastern Europe.

Most authors in the book contest the "ecumenical version of Western modernity", reclaiming their own history and offering new perspectives that underscore the significance of the socialist legacy ("in particular, the ideas of collectivity and solidarity") as an intellectual and ethical force in local and global contexts. The book was thoroughly researched and lavishly illustrated with photos of artworks and performances.[2] But it seems that the interest in Central and Eastern European art stopped with it. There is still a big need for a work that explores the unfamiliar aspects of connections between the arts and politics in Eastern Europe, which, even during the Cold War, was more heterogeneous than was typically granted, comprising very different communist and socialist countries with diverse social and political regimes, institutions, religions, histories and economies.

Perhaps in writing these new performing arts histories, one should start from the significance of the fall of communism not only for Central and Eastern Europe but also for the rest of the world. Another starting point is how this event is situated within the conditions of global contemporaneity. As Susan Buck-Morss noted, the post-communist condition (she calls it "post-Soviet") affects not only Eastern Europe but it also has a much larger impact on the rest of the world (Buck-Morss 498).

1 MoMA's engagement with Central and Eastern Europe started already in 2002 with *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s*. Since then, there were several attempts for collecting primary documents and art on several occasions. Finally, in 2009, the Contemporary and Modern Art Perspectives (C-MAP), a cross-departmental, internal research programme, was established to conduct research outside of North America and Western Europe.

2 For further reading, see Janevski and Marcoci ("Introduction" 12–18).

> It is important to acknowledge that, after all, non-Westerners are not the only ones who have been experiencing post-1989 shocks and transition traumas. The neoliberal art system, formed within the parameters of the intellectual and political climate of the Cold War, was once a transparent concept, judging itself according to the complacent and self-satisfied premise that art was somehow equated with individual freedom, that it was an "autonomous zone" where the wounds and pleasures of alienation could be mediated into enlightened forms of modern subjectivity. As long as art was the highly desired product and exclusive property of Western culture, it could be viewed as a necessity, even if the primary function it performed was ensuring the survival of one's own system of belief. But when different notions of art started getting through Western filters, forcing a critical reexamination of the legitimacy of long-held convictions and institutionalised narratives—when the stories coming in from the tributaries started shifting the whole direction and flow of art thinking—this proved frustrating for individuals shaped by laboratory cultural experiences. (Čufer 29)

Between 1945 and 1989, Europe was neatly divided between East and West, in what has been defined as the Cold War (except for Yugoslavia and, later, Albania). This division was named cold, not from the privileged standpoint of Western Europe, but from the other, less privileged side, precisely Eastern Europe; it was a very hot war (Mastnak). Mastnak is also right when indicating that postsocialism represents the defeat of socialism by liberalism. According to him, socialism collapsed not only because of internal problems and contradictions, but also under outside pressures, which were aggravated by hostility and isolation from the West. Socialism was always under the permanent state of a hybrid war, surrounded by a hostile world; socialism actually lost the Cold War. It was considered the enemy because it stood for an alternative political, economic and social system, alternative to the liberal system of capitalism. So after the Cold War, socialism capitulated, and liberalism triumphed, with neoliberalism as its highest stage. Eastern Europe got lost in liberalisation and social disintegration. Therefore, instead of defining postsocialism by what it is not, that is, by the absence of socialism, we will define it by what it is: the liberal autocracy and its main traits.

> So not only is post-socialism not post-colonialism, but on the contrary, it has paved the way for an extremely rapid hyper-neoliberalization of the entire former Eastern Europe, so that the former Eastern Europe is no longer post-socialist, but turbo-fascist-capitalist. Although the West (or the Occident) is also racist and fascist, it is nevertheless important to understand that the forms of this type of expropriation and dispossession take a different shape. (Gržinić)

1. The Cold War Is Over! Long Live the Cold War!

If we establish performing arts in Eastern Europe as an object of study and historicisation like in the West, then we will figure out that in the East, it evolved in many directions, including body art, conceptual art, happenings, actions, dance, theatre and performance, "*in parallel and in dialogue* with practices in Western Europe and North America, despite its exclusion from the canon of that history" (Bryzgel, *Performance Art* 1). However, what is missing is a clear methodology in analysing the complex structure of various socialist countries, including the shifts of power between the Communist Party's conservative and liberal factions, as well as the increasing rivalry between Party elites and their bureaucratic bodies, which contributed to frequent changes in the political and cultural climate. What most critics and art historians forget is that, even in censoring the artists and their artworks, these countries took different approaches, from state-organised harsh censorship and surveillance to soft self-censorship. It is also important to note that after 1989, with the triumph of neoliberalism in most of these countries, the discourse of performance art, as a model for an alternative art, changed from a politically subversive one to a socially critical one. Thus, "1989 is not only considered a pivotal year in the reconfiguration of the world political order, it's often seen as a threshold for all sorts of interrelated social and cultural transformations, the 'turn of turns,' as it were" (Janevski and Marcoci, "Conversation" 343).

Consequently, several principal questions need to be answered: how and why is the history of performing arts still divided between East and West, how can we move beyond the East–West binary towards a truly global performing arts history, and how can we place the Eastern European artists from Europe's margins in its centre? Although the Berlin Wall (as Bruno Latour called it, "the wall of shame") was destroyed, many other invisible walls were constructed between East and West! Therefore, my attempt is to give an insight into both the history and contemporary state of the so-called Eastern European art and its connection to the epistemologies that derive from different practices, tracing the consequences in terms of methodologies, genealogies and epistemological shifts in the rest of Europe. It is important to mention that different artistic movements and forms have existed in Eastern Europe already at the beginning of the 20th century, almost as parallel universes to the West. One could go back in time and reconsider what happened regarding Dadá and surrealism in Yugoslavia: in the histories of these avant-garde movements they are mentioned only in passing, if ever. Throughout modernity, the East and West have been linked, not only through different artistic revolutions and historical avant-gardes but also through a largely unacknowledged and complex series of collaborations and exchanges. They influenced each other, "not always in the sense of a diagrammable dialectic, but often in terms of sublimated desire or accelerated dysfunction" (Čufer 28).

The great divide started after World War II. It should not be forgotten that for the East, communism was an experience grounded in reality; therefore, politically and even socially critical art was more often than not censored, and artists persecuted. Indeed, only after the fall of the Berlin Wall did Eastern European performance art, which almost always represented a form of resistance to the repressive regimes and took place primarily in private apartments or small galleries in student centres, become known. RoseLee Goldberg observes in her *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* that, given the constant threats, censorship and arrests, it is not surprising that much of the politically engaged work in Eastern European art was related to the body. The artist could perform anywhere, without the aid of materials or a studio, as the work apparently left no trace. According to Eda Čufer, for all the reasons that make it difficult to reconstruct the cultural policy of Eastern Europe during the Cold War, it would be necessary to make an attempt "to extract some meaning from the East's cultural amnesia and discursive neurosis with respect to its own history", starting from the rise of Stalinism in 1930 until the fall of communism in 1989 (Čufer 30).

Therefore, drawing inspiration from different disciplines such as gender, postfeminist, postcolonial and queer studies, many different methodologies could help produce a critical history of performing arts in Eastern Europe. For example, one of the most remarkable discourses of performance studies in the 21st century comes from introducing an intersectional perspective on queer and black, brown and indigenous artists and their performance tactics, tools and methods that can also be applied in the work of Eastern European artists.

Here are some of them:

2. Oral and Micro Histories: First Person Singular

Many years ago, in 1995, I participated in the project "The Dissident Muse: Critical Theatre in East and Central Europe, 1945–1989", launched by the late Dragan Klaić, then director of the Netherlands Theatre Institute in Amsterdam. From that research, I learned how deep the differences were among Eastern European countries in not only producing but also repressing the performing arts.[3] My research – and that of

3 As mentioned before, almost every Eastern European country had state-organised censorship through different restrictive laws. In Yugoslavia, for example, due to its specific position as a federal, non-aligned country, censorship was not institutionalised but transferred to self-managed cultural institutions. Many performances and exhibitions were banned by so-called Artistic committees, composed of loyal artists and local politicians. Yugoslavia was perhaps the only country in the world that recognised the so-called "verbal offence" (*verbalni delikt*) as a punishable act, implementing the notorious Article 133, section 1, of the Criminal Law of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) (*Službeni list SFRJ*), no. 40/77: "Whosoever by means of writing, leaflet, drawing, spoken word or in some other way calls for, or incites the abolition of the rule of the working class and working people, unconstitutional changes of the socialist self-management system, breakdown of brotherhood and unity and equality of nations and nationalities, abolition of self-management organs or their executive bodies, resistance against the decisions of the appropriate organs of government and self-management relations, security or defense of the country, or with the ill intention and falsely represents social and political circumstances in the country, will be sentenced to a term of imprisonment of one to ten years."

other scholars – benefited from oral histories and individuals' private archives. It was obvious that dissimilarities among Eastern European countries required a more diversified and thick interpretation. This was way before the invention of micro histories, a methodology developed by French social historian Ivan Jablonka, who proved that being a historian does not preclude one from writing a personal history, or a history of one's own family, as long as one uses the language of the social sciences. His book, *A History of the Grandparents I Never Had* (*Histoire des grands-parents que je n'ai pas eus*. *Une enquête*, 2012), is a reflection on the fate of his family, as well as an essay on how to write a micro history. His attempt at a family biography is both a private and public reflection because he did not write about his grandparents as if their destiny was unique or remarkable, but rather as one that was shared by many and was determined by larger social and historical forces. In his writing, Jablonka introduced three methodological tools: a) use of the first person singular; b) use of scientific distance and reflection; and finally, c) a combination of personal memory and universal history.[4]

The use of the first person singular is not new. It comes from the hermeneutic tradition, introduced by historians such as Wilhelm Dilthey, Paul Ricoeur and Eric Hobsbawm, who stressed the importance of subjectivity in all stages of historiography: the choice of topic, the cross-checking of archives, ways of narration, etc. Many new histories are rooted in a personal tropism, whereas a historian is personally involved in, or touched by, his/her object of study: histories of local places, immigration, slavery, etc. For example, the most prominent scholars of black studies are revising predominantly white, western and Anglophone heritages, creating spaces for previously excluded stories of black and indigenous people. According to black studies scholar Fred Moten, "Black studies is a dehiscence at the heart of the institution and on its edge; its broken, coded documents sanction walking in another world while passing through this one, graphically disordering the administered scarcity from which black studies flows as wealth" (Moten 155). Almost all of Moten's books on the radical black tradition are written through the paradigm of performance. Moten has taken up the ideas of several black scholars, especially from Saidiya Hartman (*Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, 2008), exploring them within an open-ended discourse on performance phenomenology as well as jazz music. For Moten, blackness is something "fugitive": a continuous refusal of externally imposed standards. For him, jazz music represents the paradigm of the condition of people of African descent, as it does not resolve their past, but serves as a tool for ongoing questioning and critique, promoting

4 Jablonka's paternal grandparents were born in Poland in the early 20th century. As members of the local Communist Party, which was illegal at the time, they were sentenced to five years in prison. On their release, they migrated to France and settled in Paris in the late 1930s. A few years later, they were arrested and deported to Auschwitz where they were murdered. To summarise, we can say that they spent their entire lives in hiding: first in Poland, as communists; then in France, as illegal immigrants; and finally, under the Vichy regime, as illegal citizens, for being Jews. If their life was short and tragic, it is because they were manipulated and destroyed by different totalitarianism and historical changes. (For further reading see Jablonka.)

freedom and innovation even in the most difficult times. Moten understands jazz not only as a musical genre, but as a way to get as close as possible to the elusive essence of blackness around which his reflections developed:

> The force of this fugitivity is what we might reference as blackness, as a performative against all performances of freedom and unfreedom dependent on the historical dilemma of a lack of on the historical dilemma of a lack of meaningful distinction between freedom and slavery. The distinction here between performances of (un)freedom and a form of freedom in and as the performative of blackness is crucial. (Moten 247)

In Jablonka's work, the first person singular has at least two functions. His family is central to his study, as he reveals to the public what sociologists and anthropologists define as "field notes". He is a historian who tells the story of his grandparents and, at the same time, the story of his research that enabled him to reconstruct their lives. Jablonka has never met his grandparents; they were long dead when he was born, and that gave him a needed distance from the object of his research, since he wanted to write a micro-history of the Holocaust in which the protagonists would be real human beings, and not merely "beings-doomed-for-death". Feminist scholar and philosopher Rada Iveković, who often writes on Yugoslav wars, claims: "When your country is falling apart, especially when it is at war, you live it through personal and singular unhappiness, and you cannot keep a distance in time and space" (Iveković 23). But to talk about one's family, as *a researcher,* is to go one step further. For example, Jablonka employed what he calls the imperative of transparency, choosing to reveal everything about his work as a historian: his hypotheses, research, hesitations, doubts, etc. As a struggle against obscurity and oblivion, the story of his grandparents is inseparable from his efforts to find their traces in more than 20 archives in Poland and in France, as well as from the testimonies of many people who agreed to talk to him about their relatives, about immigration and about the war. To take the reader behind the scenes, so to speak, into the workshop of the historian, is a way of showing that the understanding of the past is not a result, but a process, a quest – if not a conquest.

French philosopher Didier Eribon published his autobiography, *Retour à Reims: Une théorie du sujet (Histoire de la Pensée)*, in 2009. His work became the central theme of the transnational theatre project *Return to Reims*, which Thomas Ostermeier has staged in several European countries, adapting the dramaturgy each time in collaboration with the local theatres and actors. In each performance, a female protagonist stood in front of a microphone, narrating Eribon's text, a blend of personal confession and sociological analysis. At the same time, a video was projected on the screen behind her, in which the philosopher registered the images of his return to his hometown, Reims, and his reunion with the family with whom he hadn't had contact for decades, ever since he began his university career in Paris. In his confrontation with the past, Eribon confronts the dark sides of contemporary French and European society: the brutal mechanisms of

exclusion from education and employment implemented by the progressive bourgeoisie, to which he now belongs, and which is indifferent to the working class of his parents. These people, forgotten and deprived of their basic rights, rejected the ideas of the left, throwing themselves into the arms of the right-wing populism of the National Front.

> I was very intrigued to explore how and why a far-right populist wing has developed so rapidly in recent years in so many European nations and throughout the world. I was deeply impressed by Eribon's analysis, which links this alarming spread to the historical failure of the traditional left. I like the idea of creating different versions of the production in different countries, languages and with different actors, whose personal experiences influence and shape it. (Ostermeier; translated by A. J.)

Thus, biography and/or autobiography could be a possible form that gives rise to a more general history, at the same time individual and collective, micro and global, transversal and transnational. A reconstruction of local historical narratives has remained a key concern for many leading artists in Eastern Europe. However, "in some cases, artists' approaches to 'transition' have been infused with biting irony, in others with a peculiarly entropic nostalgia – *ostalgia* – that has no clear parallel in historical discourses" (Kemp-Welch 20). This is especially important because of the constant omission of the fundamental systemic differences between Yugoslav and Soviet socialisms, which remains especially problematic in art-historical terms. Although they were both social federalist countries, they had different artistic experiences, movements and destinies. Not only that, but some existential issues regarding Eastern European arts, like poor financing, scarce resources, or not having access to expensive tools and materials, as well as brutal censorship, are omitted. Luckily, we are still on time to gather and research personal histories and archives, seminal for creating a more diversified and open history of Eastern European performing arts, to understand its present. Many people who participated in these events are still living and would be able to share their memories and documents. "The historiography of performance art in East-Central Europe is an emerging one, and one in which artist and art historians alike are participating. During the communist period, it was primarily artists and artistic organizations that preserved and contextualized the discourse on performance art" (Bryzgel, "Mapping" 34).

Furthermore, artistic documentation has always played a decisive role in the history of performance art conveying knowledge and information about past events: photographs, films, videotapes, sound recordings, notes, testimonies, drawings, etc. As a trace of past actions, they have been exhibited and collected, thus compensating for the absence of art objects themselves. They also serve as documents for artists and curators who want to reenact past performances and/or for writing performance histories. "The debate has long revolved around the ontology of performance art and the ability of documents to capture and represent its supposed ephemeral nature" (Gusman 5).

3. Intangible Documents, Embodied and Digital Archives

Even though tangible documents are missing, there is a possibility to reconstruct a historical past. For example, two feminist performance studies scholars, Diana Taylor and Rebecca Schneider, have made a big impact with their theories, emphasising how performance does not need to be documented to survive but can be transmitted from body to body and thus be reenacted. Rebecca Schneider draws attention to an epistemological shift, arguing that every performance produces remnants, in the memory and body of the spectator, and can be brought to life and actualised as performative by every living body that occasionally repeats it. Indeed, Schneider argues that performance is defined as ephemeral not because it cannot be archived, but because it does not coincide with the traditional logic of the archive as such. This statement points out to the limits of the archive seen as the sole form of documentation and preservation. According to Schneider, by privileging the archive, we are ignoring other ways of knowing, other ways of remembering, while performance endures, but in a different way. Schneider questions the universality of the cultural paradigm of the archive, considering performative practices as "a trace" of "non-documentary" transmission, a corporeal model of embodied knowledge transmitted from body to body (Schneider, "Performance" 100–108).

For Schneider, the body, memory and the uncomfortable reality of emotions still cause concern in how we narrate time, how the past is narrated, approached and understood. She emphasised recent queer historiography that has drawn on materialist, postcolonial, psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theories to support an inquiry and analysis that challenges modern Western conventions of linear temporality. Such scholars, according to Schneider, emphasise the importance of traversing disparate and multiple historical moments to explore the ways in which the past, present and future occur and reoccur backward, or even out of sequence, or in a complex cross-hatching not only of reference but of assemblage and affective investment.

In her seminal book, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor provides a new understanding of the vital role of performance (in this case, for the history of the Americas). Taylor argues that performances – from official events to grassroots protests – must be taken seriously as a means of preserving and transmitting knowledge. Taylor reveals how the repertoire of embodied memory – conveyed in gesture, spoken word, movement, dance, song and other embodied practices – offers alternative perspectives to those derived from the archive (understood as a set of written documents). Examining diverse performances in the American South and the United States, Taylor accounts for how people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge through the execution of diverse performances. Therefore, if performance could be considered a form that comes closer to the conditions through

which we understand our own experience, becoming a repertoire that "represents embodied memory", then the performance text could function as an archive. The embodied knowledge of the repertoire thus becomes the performance text, in which diverse political, social and cultural positions are preserved in a kind of archive.

In recent years, due to the invention of digital archives, their use has broadened, encompassing analogue collections. The archive(s) represent an infinite potential to draw upon and from which new meanings can always emerge. Michel Foucault's observation on the strong connection between archives and power has never been truer. On the other hand, digital archives offer more varied and up-to-date tools, for example, to enable alternative histories, as well as for the decolonisation of the archive. An archive, therefore, can no longer be hidden or static: it offers itself as a place, device and process to be valorised or, in some cases, to be disclosed. This has inspired Hal Foster to write about the "archival drive", which has exploded through the creative reuse of archival sources, a widespread artistic practice. Foster identifies artists who engage with archives because they are interested in lost or suppressed historical information and seek to make it physically present once again. To this end, they elaborate on rediscovered images and texts and often favor the format of digital installation, gravitating toward "temporal" ready-mades – in other words, visual narratives provided by various sources already familiar in popular culture – to ensure an understanding. The archives in question are raw and fragmentary materials, and their "non-discursive and non-narrative" nature requires human interpretation, not digital processing (see Foster). Thus, through pre- and post-production, an artist or a curator often organises materials according to a matrix of quotation and juxtaposition and sometimes presents them in an architecture that can be defined as archival: a complex of texts, images and objects. In this regard, one can also speak of anarchist archives, counter-archives, anti-archives, impossible archives and disobedient archives, etc.[5]

4. Deculturising Performing Arts History

To widen up Eastern European performing arts histories, perhaps we should go back in time and turn to Aby Warburg (1866–1929), who could be considered one of the first scholars who created a performance studies paradigm. However, there is very little or almost no reference to him in performance studies. If Warburg is mentioned at all, it is only in comparison to similar methodologies found in the history of theatre and performance. The concepts that Warburg introduced in the traditional discipline of art history, such as *Ausdruck* (expression), *Pathosformel* (language of gestures),

5 See for example: https://www.disobediencearchive.org/. *Disobedience Archive* was created in 2004 by Italian curator Marco Scotini as a research project on the relationship between art and politics and as "a user manual for social disobedience." This mobile and itinerant archive has been set up in various countries and was also exhibited at the Venice Art Biennale in 2024.

Nachleben der Antike (afterlife or survival of Antiquity), *Einfühlung* (empathy) and *Mnemosyne*, in a certain way, anticipated performance studies. While Georges Didi-Huberman finds Warburg's work "prophetic", or as a prediction of a "*knowledge that will come to us in the future*" (Didi-Huberman 15), Giorgio Agamben claims that Warburg created a discipline that is without a proper name (see Agamben). When Warburg did his research in Florence at the end of the 19th century, he was already changing art history, out of indignation with its ongoing "aesthetisation", abandoning Vasari's venerating artistic histories and/or Hegelian universal meaning of history and art. Foreseeing Foucault's "archeology of knowledge", Warburg immersed himself in the "unhierarchical" world of archives, in a number of private collections in Florence, finding in them a huge quantity of raw material, "both moving and unlimited", suitable for reinventing the history of Renaissance, but at the same time for profoundly changing the art history as an academic discipline.

Already between 1900 and 1906, having accumulated an astonishing number of books, manuscripts, notes and documents, Warburg started to construct his own library, as *Denkraum* (a space for thinking). The library is organised in a rhizomatic way, in which certain improbable and unknown concepts for the history of art were inserted, but without a pretension for a definitive synthesis, or absolute knowledge. His library ended up being a kind of uncommon archive rather than a specialised library, in which he multiplied and confronted different sources, creating "a real *archeology of the fields of knowledge* that are linked to what today are called 'human sciences'—a theoretical archeology centered, from the start, on the twofold question of forms and symbols" (Didi-Huberman 21). It was with this library that Warburg placed a foundation for the so-called "science of art" (*Kunstwissenschaft*) or even for the cultural field in general (*Kulturwissenschaft*) that opened a path for the interdisciplinary studies. If Warburg made art history a critical discipline *par excellence*, then he also unlocked a door to performance studies, bravely leaving the space for the unknown (*Unbekanntes*) and for strangeness (*Fremdes*).

In 2017, American scholar Amy Bryzgel generated a website in the form of a database of artists who have created or are currently creating performances (action art, live art, happenings and socially engaged art) in Eastern Europe. In the period from 2013–2016, she travelled throughout Eastern Europe, conducting research for her book *Performance Art in Eastern Europe since 1960*, and this website serves as a documentation of her travels to the region, where she met and interviewed artists, curators, art historians and critics. She is also in the process of expanding the site, adding more artists, and eventually voice and video files of interviews, as well as images. Starting with her research, she got the idea to include an entry about each artist that she met, to create an impromptu database of artists who do or have done performance or performative works in the region.[6]

6 See https://amybryzgel.wordpress.com/.

5. Decolonising the Past

Decolonisation is an ongoing process, which in recent years has taken on new forms in various intersectional epistemologies, especially in queer and feminist ones, such as those proposed by Christine Delphy (*Classer, domineer. Qui sont les "autres"?*, 2008), José Esteban Muñoz (*Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, 2013), Rachele Borghi (*Decolonialità e privilegio*, 2020) and Françoise Vergès (*Un féminism decolonial*, 2019; *Programme de désordre absolu. Decoloniser le musée*, 2023). Borghi, for example, proposes "re-semanticising" the term "decolonisation", replacing it with "decoloniality", to highlight the perpetuation of epistemic violence, especially in academia. Vergès, on the other hand, believes that this evolution requires a theoretical and discursive shift, the abandonment of anachronistic language, recognition of criticism, and a certain tolerance for positions considered radical. According to Vergès, since we cannot change the past, let us look at the future. Therefore, new decolonial tactics must ignite our imaginations and make us think about the institutions dedicated to the questions posed by decolonisation. "Decolonial tactics advocate an anti-racism based on memory, unlike neoliberal anti-racism, which prescribes going beyond and settling for official commemorations" (Vergès 273; translated by A. J.). Working on the imagination requires the effort to reintroduce new meanings to terms created by racial capitalism – freedom, care, old age, youth, memory, history, geography – to restore centrality of the self-representation of colonised peoples, which has so far been denied. From this perspective, performing arts assume a crucial role, as they bring the embodiment of political thought and action back to the centre.

For Edward Said, this is the essential idea of contemporary revolutionary reality, in which the performances of recent generations are imbued with the conflicts of the secular world. Gone are the days of linear historical conceptions or Hegelian transcendence that place the patriarchal West at the centre and the non-West at the "deficient" or "dissident" periphery. From this perspective, the "journey within" becomes a form of cultural miscegenation, a sign of antagonistic internationalisation in an era of enduring imperial domination. History no longer proceeds unilaterally, from East to West or from South to North, but the tools of criticism are shared by all, generating new and surprising configurations.

Françoise Vergès suggests that persistence of colonialism could be described as a "feedback effect": structural colonial racism inevitably creeps back into European law, literature, the arts, politics and mentalities. According to her, white innocence does not exist: the well-being of life in Europe was built on the extraction and exploitation of the global South (but also racialised Eastern Europe), and even the working classes

ended up benefiting from it. But everything becomes much more complicated with the "zones of non-being", as defined by Franz Fanon, places created by war and violence, where people are dehumanised, considered non-human/subhuman. A proliferation of these zones in the European Union is a symbol of structural racism and the politics of hatred against refugees fleeing the conditions created by capitalism and imperialism. Thus, the zone of non-being no longer exists only outside Europe but also within – in its cities, along its borders, in its forests. Thousands of refugees are revealing the foundations of bourgeois life and the racist structure of European well-being. Indeed, the well-being of the Euro-American bourgeoisie continues to be based on the endless exhaustion of the bodies and minds of migrants from Eastern Europe and non-white people, while the identity of the Western world has been built on weapons, conquest, colonisation and the accumulation of objects.

Reflecting on the decolonisation of Western museums, Françoise Vergès proposes the creation of a post-museum as a space where narratives, objects, sounds, images, memories and histories can be preserved, reaffirming that "Black, Palestinian, Indigenous and racialized lives matter," transmitting dreams and struggles, protecting archives, objects and documents from erasure, destruction and theft.

> This museum will not adhere to the norms of the Western museum, which seeks other forms of exhibition and operation, while also learning the norms of conservation that the West has developed, thanks to its wealth. This need for transgenerational transmission and preservation is neither nostalgic nor melancholic. It resists abstract universalist discourse by seeking to inscribe objects, sounds, images, and memories in their living environment, avoiding transforming them into "art" inevitably destined for the market. (Vergès 51; translated by A. J.)

Decolonisation, therefore, is not only about the historical moment in which former colonies gained their independence, but also means "the abolition of an unjust order, marked by systemic violence, a permanent state of war, and colonial and military occupations" (31; translated by A. J.). Indeed, as Vergès notes, never before have there been so many biennials, festivals, exhibitions and works by artists questioning Eurocentrism, celebrating artists of colour and indigenous people and proposing new narratives. The movement is spreading to art schools, where collectives and student groups are challenging structural racism and sexism. New histories of art are the subject of documentaries, books and debates. But none of these gestures are decolonial in the true sense of the term, according to Vergès, because decolonising means creating the conditions for the necessary abolition of this world. The historical tradition of emancipatory utopias in all fields – education, care, culture, social and political organisation – is an invaluable resource. The current forms pioneered by feminist, anti-racist and anti-

imperialist collectives and movements in the Americas, Asia, the Caribbean, Africa and Europe offering models and other ways of building family and community, of teaching, of caring, of cultivating, of creating and of establishing institutions. According to Vergès, it is a matter of deconstructing the dominant structure as a whole through teaching, training, and in turning over art history, hierarchies, references, blindness and indifference to the racial question and the current experiences of colonial violence. It is a matter of moving beyond the critique of existing institutions to work on what will become decolonial, feminist, anti-racist, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist institutions.

Thus, perhaps the same method of art decolonisation could be applied to Eastern European art histories, museums and archives, but unfortunately:

> The persisting cultural amnesia of the East with the regard to the period of communism points both to the powerlessness of post-communist countries to democratize themselves through their own historical, intellectual and creative resources, as well as to the exclusive and ideological character of the historical narrative and discourses of the Western conception of modernism and avant-garde movements—discourses that evolved for the most part in the second part of the twentieth century, parallel with the formation of the neoliberal art system. (Čufer 30–31)

6. Horizontal Art History

If the visual arts, theatre and cinema in Eastern Europe before the fall of the Berlin Wall were characterised by heavy political censorship, often implemented by law, then this kind of censorship was certainly unavoidable regarding performance art. Whereas most critics and scholars who write about recent performance art tend to privilege its historical precedents in Western Europe and the United States, a more inclusive and balanced account of performance and experimental art in former Eastern Europe is needed, to contextualise it in relation to other artistic movements in Western Europe. The main questions, such as whether performance art was really subversive or not, important or not, and what its legacy might be, are only tackled partially by a few books written by Western art historians like Hans Belting, Amy Bryzgel, Sascha Bru, and/or two British authors, Maja and Reuben Fowkes who founded the Postsocialist Art Centre (PACT) in London.[7]

7 The PACT is dedicated to the study of the art and visual culture of socialism and postsocialism from a global perspective. It leads research into the distinctive art practices, movements, circuits, systems and structures that flourished in socialist states for much of the 20th century in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as across Asia, Africa and Latin America. Through research projects, international networks, curatorial activities, artistic collaborations, teaching and supervision, public lectures and events, as well as podcasts and blogs, the Centre attempts to give an insight into the arts and visual culture of socialism and postsocialism from a diversity of disciplines, such as historical, contemporary, comparative, global, horizontal and environmental perspectives.

In his book, *Art History and Modernism* (2003), Hans Belting writes about two voices of art history, the Western and the Eastern. For him, one of the main tasks facing art history today is to ensure the coexistence of two very different and sometimes contradictory narratives. He believes that art produced in Eastern Europe differs fundamentally from art produced in Western Europe. According to Belting, Eastern Europeans believed in the power of art that vanished long ago in the West, citing the example of Ilya Kabakov, who once claimed that the art in Eastern Europe was a necessity of life, not a professional activity.

Whereas most critics and scholars who write about recent performance art tend to privilege its historical precedents in Western Europe and the United States, Amy Bryzgel offers a more inclusive and balanced account of performance and experimental art in former Eastern Europe, contextualising it in relation to other artistic movements in Western Europe. The book *Performance Art in Eastern Europe since 1960* (2017) diffuses the boundaries between dissident art in the former East and critical art in the former West. The book is thoroughly researched, carefully documented and covers the work of 250 performance artists and art historians. Bryzgel is passionately engaged in a detailed explanation of her subject to make her material accessible to readers unfamiliar with this part of the world. This is the book's main quality, but at the same time, its major weakness: there are too many examples and too many names that suffocate any profound reflection on what it meant to create and produce performance art in Eastern Europe before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The book is missing a more in-depth introduction and conclusion on the main cultural, political, social and economic currents that flowed into the making of performance art in these countries, as well as an account of what performance art meant on a larger cultural and social level. At times, the historical and political context is missing or gets blurred. For example, the civil wars in former Yugoslavia (1991–1995 and 1998–1999) are mentioned only in passing. Yet, they had a decisive impact on performance art in Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, Serbia and Slovenia. Bryzgel also depends heavily on what the artists themselves have to tell her about their work and less on the critical literature on these performances because most of the relevant theoretical and historical texts have not been translated into English. To a large extent, Bryzgel has undertaken an impossible task in attempting to cover what went on for 50 years in 21 countries. The book, moreover, lacks a clear methodology for the research of the complex structure of various socialist countries.[8]

8 Although it deals with a different period in history, Sascha Bru's book, *The European Avant-Gardes, 1905–1935: A Portable Guide* (2018), in contrast to Bryzgel, does not deal with any specific national avant-garde, due to their mobility in the early 20th century. Instead, Bru gives an insight into the avant-gardes throughout Europe. The book's intention is to show that because of artists' mobility, the avant-gardes were in part able to cross many linguistic and cultural obstacles, illustrating "just how complex and rich that patchwork of languages and cultures made the European avant-gardes" (31). Bru claims that, between 1909 and 1935, there were more than 60 avant-garde movements in the world. For example, in the second part of the book entitled, "Spaces and Places", Bru widens his scope and looks at the cultural and political contexts in which the avant-gardes emerged and how they related to these contexts. This part is most interesting because it introduces the issue of cultural geography, including different cities both in Western and Eastern Europe, such as Budapest, Belgrade, Zagreb and Prague.

Finally, in their book, *Central and Eastern European Art Since 1950* (2020), Maja and Reuben Fowkes did not go into a detailed examination of particular art in local settings. Instead, they opted for a chronological method, with each chapter devoted to one decade, outlining the appearance of particular art practices, contextualising them within wider movements and styles, comparing them also with other art scenes of the region if applicable, or alternatively, considering them as local phenomena. The authors also tried to describe the political climate, institutional landscapes, as well as cultural, social and technological developments, in order to contextualise specific practices. The result is a very general picture of the art scene in Eastern and Central Europe of the last seven decades, reflecting both the hybridity of contemporary practices and the fact that reliable national accounts are still in the making. Writing an introductory overview of Central and Eastern European art history proved to be almost an impossible task due to the large number of artistic practices the book tries to encompass, inevitably encountering numerous discrepancies, antagonisms and irresolvable dilemmas.

Moreover, in all the above-mentioned books, Central and Eastern European art was presented in a reductive binary opposition to Western art. Consequently, Eastern Europe must stop being presented as the Other to the West, and look at itself, define its own position and location from within, regaining its own voice. On the other hand, a significant number of Eastern European art historians, artists and curators have always aspired to be accepted and be part of Western culture. Some have even gone so far as to willfully forget the historical sources of their culture, attempting to position themselves on a global and universal plane rather than within a regional frame of reference. Thus, there are only a few serious attempts at writing a performance art history from the side of the East. Piotr Piotrowski cites a book by Maria Oriškova, published in Slovakia in 2002, *Two Voices of Art History*, in which she noted that the history of Eastern European art has been purposely omitted from Western art history books after 1945. She analysed a complex network of factors that led to this state of affairs. In her opinion, both sides are guilty in this: Eastern European art critics have provided their Western counterparts with a simplified view of the local art scene, based on the so-called "dissident paradigm" of art making, which valorised resistance, while the Westerners have accepted this and given it a marginal status.

Finally, the most influential book to date is *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe* by Piotr Piotrowski (2012). Although depending heavily on what went on in Poland (like Bryzgel, who learned Polish for her research), Piotrowski made an effort to create a new epistemology and methodology for the study of this part of the world. His examples are thorough and paradigmatic. Piotrowski cites several attempts that were made between the 1990s and early 2000s to confront two art worlds and to more seriously introduce Eastern European art into the West. One of the most

significant attempts was the exhibition *Interpol* at Färgfabriken, staged in Stockholm in 1996 as a dialogue between East and West. It was realised as part of a long-term project conceptualised by curators Victor Misiano and Jan Åman. According to the initial concept, the project was envisioned as a collaboration between a Western and an Eastern artist, intended to initiate a dialogue between the two worlds and to generate something immanent beyond the project itself, with the curators acting as mediators who encouraged the artists "to open their ideas to each other, making them more interactive and interwoven".

The exhibition ended in a scandal and transformed into a widely debated case study, where not only the possible challenges and failures of the curatorial practice became an extremely important case of further examination but also the individual and cultural-political differences in the context of the "West" and the "Rest". Everything failed after scandals created by two Russian artists, Oleg Kulik and Alexander Brenner. Brenner destroyed the artwork of Chinese artist Wenda Gu, and Kulik, who played a dog (a performance he did before), bit some visitors. The audience found aesthetic pleasure in observing him as a dog, only because he did not behave like one. But when he started to behave like one, his performance was described as a direct attack against art, democracy and freedom of expression, or a classical model of imperialistic behaviour. Indeed, Kulik was perceived as a *Russian* dog and as such a big threat, an enemy, who had refused to play by the rules of the "Master", i.e., the West. If this common exhibition was a failure, it was also because the division between the two worlds was fresh, but after which, there were not too many attempts to repeat similar ventures.

Perhaps in these situations, what could be applied is a "contrapunctual analysis". This is one of the key terms coined by Edward Said, which he derived from his "contrapunctual reading" taken from the methods of comparative literature and other theories. Said argues that the issue of interculturalism occupies a central place in contemporary theory, yet it is rarely placed in its overall political context, which continues to be imperial and colonial. Above all, in the Western context, the double meaning of intercultural communication remains ambivalent as long as the forms of cultural exchange are determined by the relationship between the dominant culture, on the one hand, and the subjugated culture, on the other. This is precisely because between cultures there is not a simple "communication" and exchange but rather a kind of political power structure. That is, interculturalism is organised into a kind of hierarchy, in which Euro-American culture occupies a central and more important place. According to Said, it has never been possible to avoid the dichotomy between dominant and subjugated cultures, between majority and minority, between ethnocentric and decentralised cultures. From this, it is easy to conclude that interculturalism is an ethnocentric Western strategy, which seeks to conquer and appropriate the symbolic assets of others, recodifying

them according to its own dominant paradigm. On the one hand, there is an isolated cultural sphere that perceives itself as completely free and unconditionally available for abstract speculation and research, while on the other, there exists the political sphere in which conflicting interests clash. Although the separation between these two spheres is taken lightly, they are closely connected; or, as Said states, they are one and the same. Therefore, as he argues, paradoxically, we have never before been more aware of how unpredictably hybrid historical and cultural experiences are, and that they participate in many contradictory experiences and fields, transcending national borders and challenging "the *police* action of simplistic dogma and loud patriotism" (Said 15). To avoid this, Said proposes a de-hierarchisation – a kind of cultural "polyphony" – that is, a new analysis of the "global context" as a context of overlapping and interconnected territories, which will allow us to see all cultures in a new and dynamic way.

Similarly, Piotrowski proposes a revolutionary turn: a paradigm of horizontal art history as an alternative to the vertical one. Of course, a point of departure in constructing such a paradigm should be a deconstruction of vertical or Western art history, which is not an easy task. One of its consequences would be a rejection of the traditional relationship between Western art history and art history of Others, in this case Eastern Europe. Although the influence of Western art is undeniable, it could also be useful to study the influence of non-Western art on Western art.

> When, after such a horizontal methodological venture, enriched by the experience of the margins and simultaneously of the world, we return to the analysis of the art produced in the centre, we realize that conceptual art in the West, and therefore in the centre, was not as nearly orthodox and homogenous as some of those who have written about it suggest. […] What I am claiming is that we have an opportunity to revise both the history of art produced within the centre and the world history of modern art written from that perspective by drawing on the studies of the art margins by construction of horizontal art histories. (Piotrowski 35)

Piotrowski suggests the concept of transnationalism that could be employed in the creation of horizontal art history, as "polyphonic, multidimensional, devoid of geographic hierarchies". This "open model of world art history" could also rely on the concepts from other fields, other than critical geography, "namely based on gendered, ethnic or subcultural perspectives" (Piotrowski 39). Although sometimes it was difficult for Eastern European artists to maintain contacts with the Western art scene, the art produced in Eastern Europe *was and is* European. Therefore, it is clear that in order to produce a historical account of the regional art, one also has to pay close attention to the political and social context of the reception of particular Western trends. This is a very complex task because the context always changed in a dramatic way. Paradoxically, Western art models were often used in the local Eastern context as an instrument of resistance against the cultural appropriation, colonialism

and imperial dominance of the West. Therefore, art in Eastern Europe may have had a different meaning than art produced in Western Europe, but it was produced within the sphere of Western influence. It also served as a resistance to the official cultural policies of socialist states (for example, the performance artists around the Student Cultural Center in Belgrade, the OHO group in Slovenia, and Gorgona in Croatia).

7. Instead of a Conclusion: Some Useful Examples

One of the most recent major exhibitions on Eastern European art was *Bigger Than Myself: Heroic Voices from Ex-Yugoslavia*, held at MAXXI in Rome in 2021 and curated by Zdenka Badovinac and Giulia Ferracci. The exhibition was presented as a composite and complex mosaic of almost 100 works by 60 different artists, ranging from video, conceptual and performance art, concentrating both on the traumatic past (the wars and conflicts, from World War II to the Yugoslav wars) as well as on a country that remained only as a memory of a failed project, or dystopia. The exhibition represented exactly what Jablonka attempted with his book: through the personal lenses of visual and performance artists, the heroic struggles of Yugoslav peoples, who sacrificed themselves in the name of higher ideals.

Zdenka Badovinac also initiated one of the most radical responses to this new methodological approach: the exhibition *+Art East Collection*, held at Moderna galerija/Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana in 2000. Through this exhibition, the museum articulated its intention to collect Eastern European postwar avant-garde works from the early 1960s onward and to position them in dialogue with Western art. The international Art East 2000+ collection is based on a dialogue between key Western and Eastern artists and presents a range of important, but long unknown or overlooked, artists from Eastern Europe. A year later, in 2001, the Slovenian art collective IRWIN began a project to create a map of Eastern European art but somehow stopped in 2006. IRWIN actually tried to create a cartography of Eastern European art; the map included not only specific works and artists but also their links and artistic relationships.

The importance of practice-based research in recovering lost histories and destabilisation of canonical readings is also done by the Institute for Duration, Location and Variables (DeLVe) in Zagreb, founded in 2009 by Ivana Bago and Antonia Majača. DeLVe engages in discursive, exhibition and publishing projects that develop at the intersection of academic research, political and cultural theory, politics and the sphere of art production. *Where Everything is Yet to Happen* is a long-term and collaborative project centred around the non-essentialist notion of community. It resulted in two

large-scale exhibitions: *Can You Speak of This – Yes, I Can* (2009) and the exhibition *Exposures* (2010) developed as a series of new productions with artists from the post-Yugoslav space and beyond, focusing on the political, social and economic trauma of the break-up of Yugoslavia. Another project, *Removed from the Crowd*, involves research, self-organised education, exhibitions and publications, taking as its point of departure the legacies of the politicised artistic and intellectual practices of Socialist Yugoslavia, Eastern Europe and the Global South. DeLVe also initiated a series of self-organised education projects: *Removed Pedagogies,* conceived as critical interventions into the institutionalised art historical narratives and methodology.

A similar attempt was made by the Prelom Kolektiv, an independent arts organisation in Belgrade, between 2005 and 2010. Prelom's study of the Student Cultural Center in the 1970s also contributed to the revised genealogy of contemporary art, with an emphasis on the continuity of self-critical and collective practices. The intention of these exhibition research projects by DeLVe and Prelom has been to undercut any sense of an institutionalised, comprehensive history by bringing together a patchwork of different voices and perspectives that illuminate the chaotic functioning of the Yugoslav art scene. Their work is still the tip of the iceberg because of numerous obstacles pervading the complex net of relationships between the institution, state, community and individuals at particular historical moments. Thus, we are still very far from any kind of comprehensible and inclusive histories and epistemologies.

As the cultural and political context of former Eastern Europe cannot be separated from the wider European political sphere (the growth of illiberalism, the spread of populism) and cultural sphere (festivals, touring and guest director projects), official culture in most Central and Eastern European countries is now shaped by ruling partocracies that regard parties' interests as public interests. This is especially the case with populist right-wing parties, which promote culture as an instrument of national identity-building or with neoliberal parties that promote culture as an economic value (thus prioritising "popular" performances). The church also exercises significant influence, often under the guise of moral leadership and frequently interferes with different requests for censorship of performances or exhibitions. Most of these political and religious demands result in some form of indirect censorship (pressures on artists by the right-wing groups) that damages the public realm (mostly via institutional self-censorship that pushes artists to resign or even to "exile"), and sometimes encroaches on the counter public realm (through "financial censorship" and the withdrawal of private support for independent projects). Recent empirical research in the postsocialist "democracies", but also in some Western European countries, shows a discrepancy between policy statements on the one hand, and the reality of different forms of censorship in the performing arts, on the other. There are many examples that range from direct verbal and physical

threats, cancellations, protests, legal actions, governmental interference in artistic institutions and even exile and imprisonment, to the subtle pressures of the market, targeted budget cuts and self-censorship.

Since the 1990s, in most Eastern European countries, political oppression has been replaced by economic oppression. We can see how the uncontrolled and unrestrained economic power, pursued and exercised for private gain, was and is still destructive for different societies, especially in Serbia, Croatia, Russia …. For example, feminist scholars such as Bojana Kunst and Ana Vujanović are the first to grapple with the new situation of what it means to be a precarious artist in today's world. They point out that, in the last thirty years, a series of profound shifts has redefined the position of artists across Europe and, indeed, throughout the capitalist world. These shifts have now framed artists simultaneously as a creative class and as a group that could easily slip into a new precarious class continuously on the edge of unemployment, homelessness or proletarianisation, etc. Thus, artists in Europe today could be described as *precarious members of the creative class*. The modes of operation of the artist comprehended this way include multitasking, freelancing, flexible personality, a non-stop performance of the self, lifelong learning, blurring of the borders between work and private life, intermittent working conditions, including projects and artistic residencies, etc. However, what we encounter here are not the "cultures" at all, but concrete artists, forms and artistic works. Consequently, the impression is that many artists maintain the same dissident, discordant and marginal attitude toward both their own and other cultures, whether from Eastern Europe or Western Europe.

Therefore, all artists everywhere in contemporary Europe share the same destiny, no matter where they come from. Consequently, it is unclear why, in international exhibitions and festivals, the art of other geographical areas is presented as a fragment of the global Western universal art history. This is the instance of the "vertical historical narration" that is characterised by a hierarchical approach. From this standpoint, the art canons, hierarchies of value and stylistic norms are all created in the centre, while in the peripheries they need to be received and assimilated. If it happens that significant artists appear in peripheries, then their recognition and consecration must happen within the centre through either exhibitions, productions and publications, otherwise they do not exist. It is enough to mention a few such cases, like Ilya Kabakov, Milica Tomić, Oliver Frljić, Selma Selman, Piotr Pavlenskij, etc.

Controversies surrounding neoliberal capitalism and its art system are still in the process of change. The existing critical methodologies are no longer sufficient to address, or capable of articulating, the complexities of emerging relations within the new cultural realms and political stratifications – between the dissolving, restructuring centre and the growing number of active, expansive peripheries. On the

other hand, there is no single, universal or right method to be applied in critical and historical studies of performance art and performing arts – it should be an artwork that determines the methodology. According to Piotrowski, "The debate surrounding the post-communist condition has become multifaceted and extremely abundant. Any effort to do it justice would require a substantial monograph" (41). "Each new method provides an opportunity for a new approach to the subject, for finding answers for to questions that have not yet been asked, for revealing unexplored dimensions of reality" (Piotrowski 49).

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