

SHORT NOTICE ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PARL IN SLOVENIAN PERFORMING ARTS SCENE

Written by Andreja Kopač, October 2018

I.

Slovenian cultural space of the 20th century is marked by diversified cultural production, including classical and traditional cultural genres as well as experimental and contemporary artistic practises. Nevertheless, contemporary artistic practises have never attained the interdisciplinary breadth and international recognition as over the last twenty years. Art history of the 20th century in Slovenia subsists of influential generations of individual authors who brought new currents into Slovenian cultural space, like for example, the avantgarde movement of the thirties (found in the field of literature, painting, theatre as well as in dance). In the sixties and in the seventies of the 20th century a surprising development of interdisciplinary experimental forms can be traced mainly in the theatre, literature and visual arts, though these forms never truly became institutionalized in Slovenian contemporary art.

II.

Contemporary and interdisciplinary artistic forms experienced a strong development in the eighties when political and social changes in Slovenia provoked a reflection on different possibilities of aesthetic and production formats of contemporary art. This situation was further sustained with the development of alternative culture and cultural practises (punk, new social movements, development of alternative club scene), which profoundly influenced the development of contemporary artistic practises with their emancipatory relationship toward contemporary reality. Art movements of this decade (NSK, ŠKUC, video production, the formation of Dance Theatre Ljubljana – PTL, increase of experimental and independent theatre groups) have not only marked Slovenian art space with novel aesthetic forms but also opened up new production and interdisciplinary approaches to the creation and production of art. These went through an even more rapid development in the nineties of the 20th century when a group of the so called independent authors and groups appeared in Slovenia, who worked mostly in the fields of theatre and contemporary dance as well as contemporary visual arts. This decade is indelibly marked by internationalisation and institutionalisation of contemporary art and could also be described as one of exploration of different models of production which are closely connected with aesthetic, political and social issues.

III.

A distinctive characteristic of contemporary art practises is thus their involvement in different fields of activity. We are presented with contemporary artistic creativity, which is inextricably linked to reality and does not traverse only artistic genres but also the borders between

creation, reflection and production. In order to stress the importance of understanding the field of contemporary art as an interdisciplinary and a cross-genre activity the new educational project was given the title **Performance Art Research Ljubljana**. The educational process is thus oriented to interdisciplinarity, traversing the borders between theory and practise and to the opening up of not only the creative aspects of individual candidate, but also its production, research and organisational aspects.

IV.

Interdisciplinarity, intermediality, connections with the contents of the humanities and science, research processes and foregrounding of the work of art are few of the fundamental traits of contemporary art of the nineties of the 20th century. Contemporary art breaks with the traditional modernistic division between the genres and puts to the fore interdisciplinarity, connections between practical and theoretical research, examination and questioning of the field of art itself and its relation to reality as well as a reflection on art institutions. The central point of interest becomes **processuality**, where the result is not always an object or a predetermined goal but research, artistic and research process, connections of art with social contents, interdisciplinary application of technologies and **new methodologies, new forms of authorship and collaboration.** With the development of intermedia forms the field of contemporary art advanced to the research of science and technology, the media and the spectacle, and thus directly drew on contemporary social and political changes. In the nineties the field of contemporary art unfolds and thus has a considerable influence on institutional and production changes of art itself.

V.

Slovenian cultural space is marked by a rich and diversified creativity in the field of contemporary culture and art. Unfortunately, despite the creative and dynamic developments in the last two decades it has not yet been institutionally positioned in an appropriate way, be it in the organisational or educational sense. At the same time a need for a specific profile of the artistic and cultural profession has arisen during the last 20 years. **The PARL project would thus answer to the joint interest of research activities** (among many Ljubljana based artists and producers) and expertise insights in this field, while it would at the same time contribute to meeting the needs for new forms of profession in the field of (international) art and culture.

VI.

In spite of individual initiatives (mainly initiatives of nongovernmental organizations and private institutions in the field of culture and art), contemporary art still does not have an institutional and educational network and PARL also corresponds with that fact. At the same time Slovenian cultural production received stunning responses from abroad, particularly in the fields of contemporary theatre, visual arts and intermedia art. The situation in Slovenian cultural

space could thus be described as paradoxical. On the one hand, there are a great number of distinguished and excellent authors, on the other, there are no proper educational institutions which would provide for contextualisation, research and positioning of contemporary art and thus deepen the quality of contemporary creativity. This paradoxical situation might result from the fact that 20th century contemporary art always needed to fight for recognition from the Slovenian cultural space, in fact, it always stayed on the margin, politically and socially problematic. Although Yugoslavia was the only country from an ex-socialist block with a **Museum of Modern Arts** – a phenomenon which can be interpreted as the legitimisation of the emergence of contemporary art and as a representative institution of a more »open« politics of socialism of the time – apart from this manifestation there were not a lot changes in the field of institutionalisation of contemporary forms. It is interesting that this condition somehow persists in the last decade of the 20th century. In spite of diversified creativity the changes in the institutionalisation of art practises, be it in terms of production or education, are nearly indiscernible.

VII.

The proposed educational international programme Performance Art Research Ljubljana (PARL) could thus establish a systematic and sustained international pilot programme, which at the moment exists only as a series of particular and dispersed initiatives. The programme would thus be deeply oriented towards the development of new methodologies of art education which would emphasize the importance of connections to theoretical and practical approaches, intertwinement of art with social reality and daily life, interdisciplinarity and research processes.

VIII.

Namely, Western art history and theory of art allow for a somewhat generalized thesis that the countries of socialist East Europe, which have not gone through the experience of modernism, in fact, did not develop contemporary artistic forms.¹ This thesis is problematic since it debar, in its starting point, the possibility of having parallel and diverse experiences and histories of modernism. If institutionalised history of modernism is known in Western Europe and in the American cultural space, than the East, on the contrary, presents us with an un-institutionalised history, namely, many artistic articulations and attempts which have never been given a systematised and analytical account or reflection. Contemporary Art Studies would thus establish a relevant programme not only in the Slovenian context but also in the international context of Eastern and Central Europe. The structure of the programme is international but also bound in the referential and cultural space of Slovenia and its surroundings, thus making the programme specific and particularly interesting when compared with other existing programmes in Europe. Particularly important is the awareness of the receiver of art itself, as it is displayed through the continual reflection of the role of the audience and the resulting modification of production forms, as well as the reflection of cultural

¹ This thesis is later criticized by many theoreticians and historians of art, like e.g. Boris Groys, Boris Buden, etc...

and social contexts within which contemporary art is conceived. On the one hand, contemporary art production is well aware of the spectacular dimension of contemporary culture, with which it is seldom in a paradoxical relation, and tries to avoid it, but is, on the other hand, bound in it through large and esteemed manifestations. On the other hand, theoreticians of contemporary art detect a more and more pressing need to discuss specific contents, which open up different ways of coexistence and discuss aesthetic issues in relation to topical contents and problems of contemporary culture.

IX.

Interdisciplinarity of contemporary art does not consist only of transitions between individual artistic genres but develops a different kind of poetics and aesthetics, unfolds new interdisciplinary creative processes, thus bringing together art and parallel fields of science, technology, the media, politics, reality and the humanities. Contemporary arts, therefore, spring up from the cross-section of self-reflection of artistic disciplines, transitions between different modes of artistic work and, simultaneously, from the cross-section of contemporary humanistic, political and cultural sciences. Consequently, educational methodologies are interdisciplinary, connective and open, no longer setting boundaries between theoretical and practical models, between research and experimental models of art.

PS: PARL is continuation of (failed) initiative of study programme: Contemporary Art Studies from 2005, curriculum for which was prepared by Bojana Kunst, Aldo Milohnić and Andreja Kopač. Text from above corresponds the same idea as study programme that was unfortunately not realised. Author of the written initiative above is Bojana Kunst, adaptation is written by Andreja Kopač.

X.

In 5 Questions interview as a part of the Challenging the Global: C-MAP Experts Respond (postnotes on modern and contemporary art around the globe) Eda Čufer, slovenian art historian and member of the art collective Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK), sheds light on the challenges in negotiating between canonical art histories and local specificities in Eastern Europe, specifically in the countries of former Yugoslavia. In contrast to the continuities of so-called "Western" art history, art histories in this region have been frequently disrupted. Čufer advocates for the support of institutions and scholars who can work together to create **new strategies for the future. She specifically cites the importance of transnational movements as foundational for many artist practices in Slovenia.** Eventhough Čufer is cautious in defining a global art, she appreciates the efforts made through cross-cultural networks enhanced through increased global communications. And PARL also corresponds with that. See more on: <https://post.moma.org/5-questions-with-eda-cufer/>