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How UNLISTED Used Abandoned Public Spaces in Belgrade: An Anthropological Deliberation on Three BITEF Performances*

Abstract:

In this text I wanted to explore, from an anthropological perspective, how abandoned courtyard spaces in the central part of Belgrade were used in the performative process of UNLISTED: Twice in a Lifetime. The relationship between the performance concept and space is examined through the different phases of three site-specific theatrical shows presented within the side program of the Belgrade International Theatre Festival (BITEF). Exploration covers the inception, production preparations, and realization of each show.

Keywords:

Urban anthropology, site-specific performances, abandoned urban spaces, BITEF, Belgrade

I Introduction

This text is about the relationship between art and urban anthropology. On the art end, it is concerned with the ways alternative theatre forms invade urban public spaces. On the anthropology end, it tries to deal with the borders and overlaps between what we call (and what Marc Augé defined as) “anthropological places and non-places”. The text is written with the ambition to examine the ways different theatre performances use abandoned urban spaces and to understand the effects they may have on the residents living around them.¹

* This text is a revised version of the paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Ethnological and Anthropological Society of Serbia, entitled „Ethnology and Anthropology in Serbia Today“ (Етнологија и антропологија у Србији данас) which took place in Belgrade on November 29-30, 2012. The research was realized within the project: *Cultural Identities in the Processes of Globalization and Regionalization* (no. 147035), supported by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia. I am grateful to all the members of the UNLISTED for friendly cooperation in this research project.

¹ Material for this text was collected through observation of all three UNLISTED performances, as well as conversations and formal interviews with the UNLISTED artists. In addition, I followed closely the production preparations and realization of one of the three performances called Everywhere is a Home (see Vučinić-Nešković 2012).

We are well aware of the fact that theatre (art) has been expanding and occupying everyday public spaces, both closed and open, for centuries. Nowadays, it is present in places where people live, work, shop, advertise, travel, and pass through. In Belgrade, though perhaps not as intensely as in other cities, performances have for some time been staged in “anthropological places”, such as streets, squares, parks, waterfronts, fortresses.² They have also started to take up archetypal “non-places” such as airports, train stations, and shopping centers. The most recent development is that of permanent occupation of abandoned urban places, both open and closed. In the last year or so, we have seen the initiatives of Belgrade NGOs and other formal and informal groups “take over” unused buildings or forgotten passageways for art-making and public art events.

At the same time, however, most Belgrade citizens who appreciate theatre stick to their “usual ways” of consuming it: they go and buy tickets, invite a friend, dress appropriately, and attend the play in whatever established drama institution it happens to be playing. After the event ends, they treat this experience as part of their social capital, proudly informing their office colleagues and friends about the “quality of the show” and recalling the names of the “most renowned Belgrade actors” that performed in it. The Belgraders with a taste for more experimental theatre need to wait for special festivals (usually of international character) to satisfy their thirst for “something original”. And yet, there is a whole army of young, well educated and ambitious artists who are trying to find their niche in the metropolitan artistic world, as well as a place to rehearse and present their work.

II About UNLISTED: Twice in a Lifetime

1. How the group was formed and got its name

UNLISTED, the group of young theatre artists that we will be concerned with here, recently contributed to the aforementioned alternative Belgrade scene. They are composed of a group of graduate students that found common ground while attending the Master’s in International Performance Research program at the University of the Arts of Belgrade. Besides ha-

² The early avant garde (conceptual) art movement has a rich history in Belgrade. Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the group „Six Artist“, „Generation 71“, or „October“ regularly included site-related performances in their work. The group comprised Marina Abramović, Slobodan Milivojević Era, Neša Paripović, Zoran Popović, Dragoljub Raša Todosijević, and Gergelj Urkom (see Denegri 1996, Popovska 2000-2001). Here we are speaking of the new wave of site-specific performances that spread in the last few years, and which focuses on a specific site as the primary artistic resource.

ving this University as their home base, they also spent part of the program (the second of the three semesters) at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, or the University of Warwick, the United Kingdom. During the course ‘Project Management’ in their first semester (Fall 2011) at the University of the Arts, the students were supposed to conceptualize group projects in art and/or culture. One of the projects, entitled UNLISTED, aimed at producing site-specific performances in Belgrade. After defending their project proposal in front of a jury, the artists were offered the opportunity to stage their performances within the side program of the Belgrade International Theatre Festival (BITEF), which was to take place in September 2012. Ana Letunić from Croatia, Christina Kruse from the US, and Monika Ponjavić from Republika Srpska (Bosnia) took on the challenge of participating in the renowned Serbian theatre event.³

The initial idea that inspired UNLISTED was that of the ‘speakeasy’. Speakeasies were establishments in the United States during the Prohibition Era where one could go to consume alcohol. They were very secret and mobile so as to be able to escape the hand of law. Christina recounted how she and her classmates thought that “it would be really cool to have a space that you knew was there, but where what was inside changed regularly. So, maybe one night you’d go there and there would be music, another night there would be an exhibition or a play, or something that would constantly change. But, then Maria, one of the course friends, loved how Belgrade is, how you always go up and down the underground passages, and she thought what if this ‘speakeasy’ is all over these secret places you really do not know.”

The thesis statement anchoring UNLISTED was that a „small change in awareness or perception can create a ripple effect, nudging the aesthetic and emotional life of a city in a new direction.“⁴ The aim of UNLISTED was to create three performances in three spaces, highlighting unused public space in Belgrade. The content was completely up to each curator, although they all worked loosely with the idea of “transformation”. Part of the concept was also not to start off with a pre-written dramatic text, but instead, to let the text (the dialogue between the artists, the space and the audience) come out of the process of performance research, i.e. an engagement with the subjects, be it performers themselves, residents of the buildings surrounding the performance site, or the spaces in which they chose to work.

The name chosen for the project, which ended up being the name of the group as well, was “UNLISTED: Twice in a Lifetime.” Christina ex-

³ Initially, the UNLISTED class project had five members, so that in addition to Ana, Christina, and Monika, Julie DeMoyer (Belgium) and Maria Tsachouridou (Greece) were part of it.

⁴ This thesis statement came out of the previous performative experiences and theoretical stances of the UNLISTED members.

plained how the name came up: “We had a lot of names to start with, and then we went with ‘UNLISTED’ because the intent was that the spaces we were using were the spaces that were being overlooked by the inhabitants of Belgrade. Part of it was also that we were all newcomers, so we had this newcomers’ gaze that we were looking with. The spaces that we all found were not on anybody’s radar. That’s kind of where the ‘unlisted’ came from. And then, ‘twice in a lifetime’ was because strange things kept happening in our everyday lives. You know, the things that might be happening only once, like a button breaking on a cab door. Just little things, bizarre things, but they were happening twice. So, you would say ‘Oh that happens only once in a lifetime!’ Well, we would say, ‘that only happens twice in a lifetime,’ and it became a joke. And then, with those spaces, it was like, ‘Well once they had sort of a function, a life to them, so let’s acknowledge them, give them a second life. So, ‘twice in a lifetime’, that’s how it came to be.”

2. About the Three UNLISTED Performances

As it will be shown in the proceeding, the three UNLISTED performances presented within the BITEF side program grew out of the same general concept, and developed in quite different ways.⁵ Their characteristics pertaining to time and space, structure, actors, dramatic texts and artifacts varied quite a bit. At the same time, the performative process in each of them ended up being quite different from the one envisaged and outlined at the beginning.

a. *Inception*

The three curators within the UNLISTED group started to further develop their individual performance concepts in December 2011, and within the following months they were looking for collaborators.

Wasted Youth

Ana Letunić, a theatre producer from Croatia, invited her colleague Dino Pešut, a young dramaturge (playwright) and theatre director from the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Zagreb, to develop the concept for her UNLISTED performance with her. She wanted to devote her performance to transition, i.e. to speak about the migrations and abandoned places of work. The concept was being developed throughout the spring of 2012, while finding an appropriate site was left for the summer.

⁵ More about UNLISTED (including the background of the artists) may be found at the website: www.unlistedbelgrade.wordpress.com

Ana and Dino came to Belgrade together in July to do „location scouting.“ Ana’s first source of information was a webpage of the „Ministry of Space“, an NGO composed of young people who initiated the takeover of unused public spaces in Belgrade for art work and events. The webpage listed unused spaces in Belgrade, along with information on the degree of their damage and level of security. The first on Ana’s list was the former Beobank building at Zeleni Venac, a large traffic junction, commercial and food market area. Ana recounts that once they went in, they indeed „fell in love with the space,“ while Dino observes that this space for him was „the metaphor of all the frustrations“ he wanted to speak about. However, as Ana later learned, the use rights for the property had been lost somewhere between the Municipality of Belgrade and the Ministry of Justice. When Ana reached the Bureau of Real Estate Ownership, she was told that the building was not structurally secure, and that it could be risky to bring an audience there. She unwillingly had to give the space up. Dino and Ana came back to Belgrade on September 1st, with only three weeks left to produce the show. The rehearsals started in Magacin, an alternative public arts space in Kraljevića Marka Street. Ana then contacted the „Ministry of Space“ directly, explained her problem and performance needs, and asked for help. They immediately recommended the Terrace of the former Srbijateks Department Store in the very center of Belgrade, called Terazije, as a space with high potential for art events. She was assured that there would be no problems with the approval of use and security issues since a concert was organized there a few years back. Ana and Dino went to the Terrace straight away, and they instantly knew that this was the space they wanted/needed. It was already September 7th. Ana efficiently acquired the permit to use the space for the performance from the lady manager of the Sorella Department Store, a company that was now occupying the building to which the Terrace belonged. Structurally, the space is a large, unevenly structured courtyard between buildings of different ages and styles (from the early 1900s to 1980s), with one longitudinal side open, overlooking the city of Belgrade towards the Sava River.

Finding performers for their show was not an easy task either. As September was a period when many dancers were abroad or very busy, it was difficult to find a one. Finally, they found Julija Gorosito, an Argentinian dancer who has been living in Serbia for six years. Some of the actors they interviewed were not enthusiastic about participating in the project either. They were nervous about taking part in a production in which their opinions about their country, the possible reasons for leaving it, or what they like and dislike about it would become part of the dramatic text. However, they did find two actors, Milena Predić and Željko Maksimović, who were willing to engage in such conversations. This is how the space and the artists found themselves together in performance that was, in fact, a reenactment of a „farewell party for an anonymous youth that leaves, and is still leaving.“

Initially, there were more options for the title. One of them was „Territory of Departures“ (Teritorija odlazaka). Ana recounts that the final title, „Wasted Youth,“ “came out of Dino’s persistent deliberation⁶ on our generation as lost somewhere in between the transition from one system to another, the question of East and West, the war in former Yugoslavia, and the birth of new states.” And „even now,“ Ana adds, „we are in a period of economic crisis, which at the very moment at which we should start working, does not give us the chance to work. Thus, the idea of ‘wasted youth’ came out from this never-ending frustration of our generation.”

Everywhere is a Home

Christina Kruse, a theatre maker and actress from the US, had her performance site determined right from the beginning.⁷ In fact, she had one hidden Vračar courtyard in mind as a space for potential art project much before the UNLISTED project was even conceived. On the way to the National Library to work on papers, she somehow always ended up going down Kneginje Zorke Street, where through one of the passageways she noticed „a large tree, and the graffiti, and the sunlight which so beautifully hit the inner courtyard.”

At the occasion of her friend and colleague Cory Tamler visiting her in Belgrade in January 2012, Christina showed her the Kneginje Zorke courtyard, and they started discussing the possibility of Cory joining the performance as a playwright. Soon afterwards, Cory applied for a grant with CEC ArtsLink in the US that would support her travel and part of the UNLISTED project. After she got the grant in April, they started to develop a concept for the performance that would involve the residents of the courtyard, who possessed past memories and present knowledge of the space, as the primary resource, potential audience, and as possible actors in the future transformation of the neglected yard. Their goal was to „transform the physical space via the working body, while transforming the world of the space via performance and storytelling“. Tanja Šljivar, a playwright from

⁶ In his work, Dino was influenced by writings of several philosophers and art theoreticians. He found inspiring Jacques Rancière’s texts on the politics of the image (Rancière 2004), Michel Foucault’s work on the body (Foucault 1975), Giorgio Agamben’s understanding of ontology (Agamben 1998, 2005), and Gilles Deleuze’s affect theory (Deleuze and Guattari 1980).

⁷ Christina’s concept of the performance was influenced by literature that dealt with urban space and culture generally, and more specifically by the works of Lewis Mumford on the city in history (Mumford 1968), Michel De Certeau on the practice of everyday life (De Certeau 1984), Henri Lefebvre on the production of space (Lefebvre 1991), Malcolm Miles on public art, space and the city (1997), as well as a number of texts in Nicholas Whybrow’s edited volume on performance and the contemporary city (Whybrow 2010).

Bosnia living in Belgrade, joined their team in August. Her classical education in Serbia, which focused on dramatic writing, was complementary to the background that Cory had gotten in the US and Germany. About the same time, two actresses, Milica Stefanović and Tijana Kondić were recommended by Aleksandar Brkić, Christina's professor in the Project Management course. They came into the yard a week before the performance.

Christina based the name „Everywhere is a Home“ on an early e-mail that Tanja had written to Cory and her. Christina had sent Tanja some photos of the courtyard so that she could gather an idea of what it looked like. In her response, Tanja talked about how the photos reminded her of her own courtyard in Banja Luka. She said: „What I love the most about Balkans is that feeling when you go to Bar, Podgorica, Sarajevo, Banjaluka, Belgrade, Zagreb, whichever town of former Yugoslavia, that you are somehow in your hometown. You can always find a part in new town you visit that is so similar, almost identical to the one in your hometown“ (August 17, 2012). Christina found this point very interesting. While similarities between places in the US and Europe could be found, the uniformity of Socialist architecture amplified such similarities even more. For her, „Everywhere is a Home“ spoke to possibility, primarily that „any space has the potential to become a home to someone or something“.

SingularPlural: Or How I Remembered to Listen, Hear, Touch, Sense and Smell

Monika Ponjavić, an architect from Bosnia and Herzegovina, initially developed her performance concept on her own, and tied it to her residential space in Belgrade. Her intention was to organize a workshop that would produce a dance/movement piece on the spot. Her architectural background led her to focus on the space and the body, as well as on the mutual impact they have on one another – body on space, space on body, and body on another body. She wanted to „put together five performers who had one thing in common – a passion for dance.“ Everything else, „such as where they came from, the heritage they brought with them, their dance roots and dance practices, their backgrounds in general, was to be vigorously diverse.”

From the very start, Monika had her mind on the courtyard of Kosovska 39, where at the time she shared an apartment with Ana and Christina. She was influenced by theoretical works that dealt with the architecture of senses; works in which the philosophical, psychological and sensorial sides of architecture were explored.⁸ She wanted to investigate the architecture she

⁸ The works Monika was the most influenced by were the philosophies of space and architecture of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty 1964), Gaston Bachelard (1994), Juhani Pallasmaa (Pallasmaa 2005, 2011, and Holl, Pallasmaa, Pérez Gómez 2006, and Peter Zumthor (1999, 2006).

lived in through her own body: “Then, I found something special about this small, neglected courtyard I passed through everyday to my apartment. I found that there is this moment when you enter that space, everything kind of stops. You are behind the Parliament, in the middle of the rush, central part of Belgrade, and then you step into this space and you are in another world. This was fascinating for me because no one in this building ever took this space in a serious way. They only took it as a passage. And I wanted to create this moment where people would stop and just be in the space, to embody that space by dwelling in it for a while. I wanted people to experience the peace this building contained.” Monika’s concept included the approach of not having an end goal, not having a plan. „It was about the process, about the work, so it was kind of ‘let’s see what happens day by day’“.

Monika did not worry about acquiring any formal permission to use the Kosovska 39 courtyard for her performance. The BITEF office told her that, as similar performances had been staged all over the city without any problems, there was no need for such a thing. This feeling was reinforced by the fact that Monika had once been a resident of the building, and thus, she perceived the space as her own neighborhood.

Monika found most of her collaborators among her international master’s program colleagues. Aparna Nambiar, from India and Singapore, was in her class in Amsterdam. She met Juan Aldape, from Mexico, and Colin Lalonde, from Canada, in Belgrade in April during a workshop. Things started taking shape, however, in May, during a summer school program in Helsinki. Marina Radulj, from Bosnia, was Monika’s former professor at the School of Architecture and a friend, and Tatjana Vukelić was another schoolmate from Belgrade.

The title, „SingularPlural“, was given because the workshop aimed to explore how the dancers would be reacting individually in space, as well as as a group. The subtitle, “How I Remembered to Listen, Hear, Touch, Sense and Smell“, tells of the practical technology of the performance. „I wanted to give all of them a sense, I chose these five people according to five senses. Because I know them all pretty well, I took the liberty to assign them each a certain sense and they were supposed to explore the building through that sense. Aparna had the sense of taste, Colin the sense of touch, Marina the sense of smell, Tatjana the sense of sight, and Juan of hearing. They were supposed to meet in this space in silence, explore it individually, and then introduce to each other their sensorial experiences of the courtyard through the movements of their body. That was the original idea, and then we were to slowly build from there.”

Since the exchange of ideas about the performance from May onwards had to be done mostly at a distance, Monika sent her collaborators e-mails with ideas she was coming up with, and a few books, and asked them “to think about what kind of a body they are, who they really are.” The point was that she was not interested in ‘Hi, I am Aparna, I am from India, I live in Singapore’. “I was interested in what really moves her in this very essence of her body.”

*b. Preparations***Wasted Youth**

Due to all the complications Ana had with finding her performance site, the Wasted Youth show had to, almost until the end, keep the rehearsal space and the performance space detached. The artists came into the Terazije Terrace to rehearse only a few days ahead of the performance. Dino explained that in the meantime „Magacin was our space of intimacy, the place where we could openly discuss, but also a laboratory. After collecting most of the material, we would go out to the Terrace to grasp the idea of the space, feel it and perceive its potential.“ They also wanted to „present the space to the audience: this is the stage, that is some middle space, and from here is a nice view at sunset.“ He gave full freedom to the actors and the dancer to explore the space „which is a bit imbalanced in its proportions, but extremely suggestive in its references. The questions I wanted them all to consider (reflect on) were: What is now with Srbijske, what is that house at the side used for, what about the stage?“

Once in the Terrace, the Wasted Youth artists did not encounter any observers of their rehearsals except a few accidental passersby and the employees of the nearby commercial establishments who would come out for a cigarette break. On the other hand, thanks to the officially established relationship with the Sorella Department Store manager, the Wasted Youth team got unselfish assistance from the store’s electrician and staff. They were able to secure electric power for their sound system, and to keep their props in the store’s storage.

Everywhere is a Home

The performative process for Christina’s group started as soon as Cory and Tanja arrived to Belgrade, where Christina awaited them. They came into the Knežev Zorke yard on September 11th, with 12 days to work. The aim was to transform the space (non-place) into a place for their final performance.

Their first week of development was slow, but as the preparations got closer to the performance day, the project accelerated at almost unmanageable speed. Their priority was to inform and receive consent for the performance from the presidents of the Residents’ Boards of the apartment buildings surrounding the yard. Previously informed by the BITEF organizers that no official permit is needed from the municipal authorities, they still wanted to secure at least the informal approval from the individuals representing the residents.

They started off by leaving materials (a notebook and a sketchpad) through which the yard users could start communicating with them by writing notes or making drawings. Then, they put up announcements on the

front doors of the apartment buildings surrounding the yard introducing themselves, their project, and letting the residents know about the performance time and place. They also asked for any photos or stories related to the yard, and left Christina's mail and mobile number as a contact. Small interventions in the yard space were another form of their interaction with the social ambiance, starting with making their own graffiti, and organizing a „trash picnic“, whereby they made piles of trash from the most often found objects, such as cigarette butts, lighters, and beer bottles. Interestingly enough, some of these objects disappeared soon after they were placed in the yard, but others were marked with a message (a note and a drawing of ghosts).

In order to collect the memories of the yard, and learn about how people use it and what significance they assign to it, Christina, Cory and Tanja conducted interviews with the people who passed through the yard or the surrounding streets, or lived and worked in the nearby buildings. Interviews were mainly led by Tanja in Serbian, and their contents were recorded to be later used in the performance. The most fruitful interview was with the president of the Residents' Board of the Molerova 11 building, who spoke extensively (both in Serbian and English) about the yard's history. He was the neighborhood old-timer, since his family moved into the building as soon as it had been finished, which was in 1978. He told them that, originally, the yard was a pretty nice and quiet place for children's play, with the sand box in the middle, and the curved concrete wall with wooden bases for sitting across from it.

Once the actresses, Milica and Tijana, came on site, it was decided that a serious cleaning job needed to be done. They brought tools, clothing and gloves and started to work on collecting trash, in which dog waste prevailed. They tried to involve the yard residents in the cleaning, but the only one that joined in was Angelina, an old lady who recently moved to Knežinjke Zorke 42. She was the first friend the artists made, always ready to come out with freshly cooked coffee for them. Interviews with random passersby continued, but also new acquaintances were made with the more regular, or simply more interested, users of the yard. As the girls recollected: „We began to uncover a place within a non-place – and discover allies: a skateboarding gym instructor, two refuse collection boys on their break, a pack of „Wolves“ who work out in the gym next door, construction workers at work in the yard, an urban anthropologist who lives in one of the two surrounding buildings,⁹ a new tenant who allowed us to use his still empty apartment after we lent him our mobile phone.“ As the time went by, even more memories of the yard were uncovered, and more notes were left – this time as a response to the note saying: “Write one thing that you

⁹ On how the urban anthropologist (who happened to be the author of this text) got involved, see Vučinić-Nešković 2012.

would like to change in this courtyard on a piece of paper. Open the box and put the paper in it (two smileys).”

The girls made friends, but also enemies in the yard. A woman with a small child living in Molerova 13, her bedroom windows facing the yard, was the only real protestor against the performance. Early on in the preparation period, she called Christina’s mobile number and started arguing against the disturbance that their presence was causing. On the morning preceding the performance she came down to complain again. Another old lady appeared on her terrace in Kneginje Zorke 42 the same morning, and complained about the noise, not distinguishing the sounds that the construction workers made from those of UNLISTED, who actually had no real sound system. Once Tanja talked to her in a friendly manner, she was appeased.

Three or four days preceding the show, „all started to move so quickly that the days were difficult to disentangle“. The final interventions were made in the sandbox, preparing the background for the first scene: Milica and Tijana playing as children would. There was a new flower planted, and two installations from materials found on the premises – an empty beer bottle, pebbles, branches and isolation material. The rehearsals *in situ* were going on until noon on Saturday, September 22nd, when the final show was to begin. Actually, there was no clear division line (in terms of space, time, content or form) between the rehearsals and the show.

SingularPlural

The performers for Monika’s show appeared in the Kosovska 39 courtyard at somewhat different points in time. While the first group gathering was determined for Tuesday, September 18th, most of the crew made separate visits in order to start off with individual experiences of the space. This is how Colin spent some time there late Sunday night, and then Monika came in with him and Juan again on Monday night.

Monika accounts for the first exploratory moments in the yard, which happened the night the three of them went in: „I was just sitting and observing while the two of them, Colin and Juan, they started to interact with the building in a very, not strange, but very emotional way, I cannot even begin to explain. Juan was lying on the ground on his back, looking at the sky, at the stars, and started whispering slowly to the building. He was in fact reenacting a scene he was fascinated with while living in this building (the previous spring), the scene of a moonlight that gets into the yard during full moon, and its perfect framing by the courtyard walls. Meanwhile, Colin was walking around, touching the walls, and with each touch, or a little hit, a bit of the façade would fall down, and that echo was amazing because it was quiet, in the middle of the night. And then these sounds started intertwining and the two of them were responding now to the so-

unds of each other, and all that was building up, becoming louder, until a girl came out on the window. She started looking at us, and then we just went away, we didn't want to cause any trouble to the people living there.”

Tuesday was the day when real group work started. They were investigating the space individually, and then working on movements with each other. After becoming acquainted with the courtyard, they sat down and discussed what they could make out of it all. That's how they conceptualized the four scenes for the final show, Mapping Landscapes: A Play on Space, Cracks, Archetypes, and Senses.

The first scene, called Mapping Landscapes, was about following the movement patterns they noticed happening in the courtyard. The residents of the courtyard always went from point A to point B, corners avoided, so just back and forth, first door, second door, third door, fourth door. These standardized, repetitive and geometrized movements symbolized the specific relationship of the residents to the courtyard – they saw it as a space of utility, and not as a space of play or assembly.

After this, they felt the need to break this deterministic movement and open up the space for creativity. Thus, Juan introduced a game that had to do with moving in space by following different patterns. Each of them was to draw a composition of three circles and two squares, and move between or along the newly created figures. The second scene dealt with the cracks in the pavement that they tried to follow, and thus find another, less efficient but more playful way of moving through that space. With this act, they wanted to reenact the joy and excitements of children's play, when they “twist and turn to the grooves in the ground, jumping from one lineage of cracks to another, as if dancing upon the history of the courtyard,” a long-forgotten history from when playing was allowed.

The third scene was to be Archetypes, and it grew out of two sources. The first was Monika's perception of the courtyard as a window into the tenants' lives. “It is where they can see the others, yet know that they themselves can also be seen. It is where their characters are on display to each other and to the world around them. It is where they connect without connection, communicate without communication.” The second source for the archetypes came out of Marina's wish to be a child who “when in space has these rules she follows, such as not being allowed to stand on two feet, but only to jump from one leg to another”. So, they developed an idea of archetypes with the focus on the neighborhood, i.e. on the people that they saw around them. One such archetype would be a grumpy neighbor, someone looking through the window and complaining about the noise that is being created in the yard. Each performer was to create his/her own archetypical character.

The fourth and last scene was to be devoted to the senses, where each dancer would perform his/her own perception of a sense initially assigned by Monika. This process of perceiving the yard and its surrounding ambi-

ance through listening, hearing, touching, seeing and smelling was broken off suddenly by an unexpected flow of events. A loud protest against the SingularPlural group's presence in the Kosovska 39 courtyard by a first floor lady resident on Tuesday, accompanied with threats of calling the police, and their fulfillment on Wednesday, completely changed the course of the performative process of the group.

Even though there were many positive inquiries about the performance and its actors by the residents all through Tuesday, the most distinct reaction to their presence was the one of a lady who said that many people complained and were wondering about what was really going on. What seemed most outrageous to her was the fact that the young people who suddenly occupied their yard did not, in fact, look or behave like dancers. In all of this, Juan's lifting the manhole covers and Aparna going barefoot were pointed out as the most questionable (and suspicious) aspects of their behavior. The next day, the same lady threatened with calling the police, which she eventually did. In fifteen minutes two police officers came around, taking a very relaxed and even joking attitude to the whole situation. They did not tell the artists to go away, but asked if they had a permit to use the courtyard for the performance. Since the answer was negative, the officers suggested that they should not continue their rehearsals there since the communal police could fine them for the lack of permit for using public space. The next day, Monika went to visit the angry lady with a representative from BITEF, taking some coffee and wine along, and succeeded in persuading her that their intentions were purely artistic. She also invited her to join the common party that was to take place at the end of the performance. But, this wasn't the end to the problems, as the president of the Residents' Board asked them to change their performance site due to too many residents, especially the elderly ones, complaining. After all of these conversations, the question of whether to stay or retreat from the Kosovska 39 courtyard for the final performance remained open. Monika and her collaborators had little time to decide what to do.

c. Final realization of the performances

Wasted Youth

The performance starts with a scene of a party that is falling apart. All of the artists involved (including Ana and Dino) sit or stand around a table in the back stage, immersed in a grim atmosphere. Christina, an American, reads out Mladen Stilinović's text „The Praise of Laziness“ in Serbian, a text that talks about the process of artistic work itself, and the differences that determine the production of art in the West and the East. Ana explained: „Christina represents a hybrid of these contrasting conditions of work, with her personal stances that are in accord with the text she reads and yet

with her Western background.“ The text begins: „As an artist, I learned from both East (socialism) and West (capitalism). Of course, now when the borders and political systems have changed, such an experience will be no longer possible.“ It goes on: „... Why cannot art exist any more in the West? The answer is simple. Artists in the West are not lazy. Artists from the East are lazy, whether they will stay lazy now when they are no longer Eastern artists, remains to be seen. Artists in the West are not lazy and therefore are not artists but rather producers of something. ...“

The second scene was a conversation between two actors, Željko and Milena, on the relationship between the state and the individual. It went: „This country gave me nothing. And what did you give to it? Nothing. This country didn't do anything for me. And you for your country?“ The same question-answer sequence is asked continually in numerous variants. This question exemplifies the eternal dilemma about whether one needs to show loyalty to his/her mother country, or go elsewhere where it is easier to find a job. While the two actors lead the conversation sitting in chairs in the front stage, the dancer reacts nonverbally to the content of this conversation by dancing on the wall („on the edge“) of the terrace, symbolizing the existence of the very crossing, between staying and departure.

After this, we hear the repetitive, recorded conversation of the two actors on the problem of nepotism and corruption in Serbia, a conversation that came out of their (real) personal dissatisfactions, and which could represent reasons for their own potential migration. Coming up with a collection of political, institutional, social and other connections that you need to have today in order to live well, the text went on and on about how: They didn't take me because I don't have a friend in this or that party, an uncle in the ministry, aunt in the court, neighbor in the military, etc.

The next scene is about the emotion of departure, which appears once the migration happens, the emotion of missing each other. The two actors sit at the terrace wall and read out a fable about an ant and a squirrel at the point of departure. They discuss whether they will miss each other or not, and in the end it proves that they do. Julia, the dancer, meanwhile dances this love story, using her hands to enact the process of coming together and distancing away.

The performance ends with a „fade out“ in which Christina reads again part of the text on „The Praise of Laziness“. As the aim was to reenact the party, this 20 minute long performance ended with the audience being invited to join the artists in helping themselves with drinks.

Everywhere is a Home

The performance is set into a chronological framework, relating to the yard through its uncovered and imagined past, experienced present and unresolved future.

Part One is entitled „Ambrosia”, referring to the allergenic shrubs that used to grow in the central part of the yard. It treats The Past as “material that can be remembered in pieces, ignored, forgotten, or formed into story“. The performance starts suddenly with playful house-making in the circle under the big tree, tended to by the two actresses, Tijana and Milica, who then read out a short text explaining all of the possible reasons for which people pass through the yard in their everyday lives. In the next scene, they announce a tour of the premises, whereby each girl takes part of the audience on a tour of the courtyard. The scenic spots in the yard at which the groups stopped and listened to stories about their past were: the sand box (or the circle) with the big tree, one of the buildings in which a well known general lived, the building under reconstruction (burnt in a recent fire), the graffiti walls, and the arena with the bench.

Standing in the niche in the new white wall, Dino (the director of the first show) then reads out the performance announcement, which is in fact the text of the notice left at the front doors of the surrounding buildings during the preparation period. Immediately afterwards, the music from J. Lo’s song „If You Had My Love“ was played, to which the actresses started dancing, relating to what some other girls their age could have done in this yard sometime in the early 2000s, when the song became a world hit.

In the scene ‘Interviews’, Milica and Tijana, standing in the arena, start reading out questions that were posed to the residents and passersby in the previous days when the memories of the yard were collected. While reading each question, they looked up, focusing on one of the apartment windows as if calling people to come out, but the residents did not respond. Disappointed with the fact that there were no memories of the yard, Tijana and Milica decided to create a memory of their own. They went off to “the garden”, a small grass-space nesting between the buildings where, acting as teenagers, Milica would strike a pose for Tijana and they would fantasize about Milica’s soon-to-be-launched modeling career. When Milica discovered she had lost an earring that had been a gift from her grandmother, they started looking around for it. Instead of the earring, they found an old diary, and began reading from it. These were, in fact, the personal impressions of the yard written by the five „Everywhere is a Home“ artists in their native languages the day after they visited the yard the first time. This part devoted to the past of the yard ended with a pause for refreshments and cigarettes.

Part Two, devoted to The Present, was called “Only Wolves”, paying homage to the Krav Maga Club, situated in the basement of one of the yard buildings, whose members willingly joined the performance. The program announced: “The present is chaos. It is now. It cannot be predicted or explained. It cannot be storyfied.“

In the first scene, called “Upstairs”, Milica and Tijana suddenly appear at the second floor apartment window with construction helmets on. They

were engaged in a humorously coarse discussion between two female construction workers, showing off how sexually liberal they were, how they beat their husbands, and how the fire next door could not be extinguished efficiently because the fire truck was blocked by their irresponsibly parked cars.

Uroš, the instructor from the nearby fitness center, who was UNLISTED's friend from the yard, then came down to the arena on a skateboard, and repeated once again the notice from the front door, the same one that Dino read previously. At the sound of Rihanna's song "We Found Love", Milica and Tijana ran to Uroš and danced around him. Tanja then received a phone call, and together with the actresses following the same music, started singing: "You shouldn't popularize this yard, Drug addicts use it, It's very acoustic, We can't sleep, we can't sleep, we can't sleep..." Those were the words that the grumpy lady with the baby kept repeating while they were rehearsing.

The next scene was devoted to the Wolves. Two young men appeared from their club, dressed in black pants and black and yellow T-shirts. They took off the shirts and started training in the arena. Tijana and Milica joined them after a while, following their moves at first, and then "training" with them one to one.

Meanwhile, two typewriters were placed on the wall of the circle in preparation for a "duel" between the two playwrights. Tanja had a mechanical typewriter and Cory an electronic one, with white sheets of paper in them. The actresses then asked the audience to go around the yard and bring over whatever objects they found interesting. Placed in glass jars, these objects would serve as an inspiration for text writing that would last for the next ten minutes. In the end, actresses read out Tanja's and Cory's inspirations.

Part Three was related to The Future, and it remained untitled. The program had the following sentence about it: „The future is a story we write with every breath“. It started with each of the five artists reading the impressions they wrote about the prospective futures of the yard.

Milica then posed a question on whether the audience/participants thought the yard was worth improving. She asked for a vote. The result was that the majority voted „for“ improving the yard, and only a few voted „against“ it. Since so many people were „positive,“ Milica suggested that having no other means to enhance the yard at this point, we could at least start with cleaning the mess created during the performance, which we did.

Discussion on how the yard could be improved was the last part of the performance. Experiences of the audience on similar spaces were shared. Tijana suddenly remembered that they still had not opened the plastic box with the „wish notes“ suggesting changes in the yard, so she read them out loud. „Coffee and Cigarettes“, offered by the artists and accompanied by relaxed conversation about the previous hour and forty-five minutes, marked the performance's end.

SingularPlural

The performance started by the Kosovska 39 entrance, where Monika and Colin were awaiting the audience. Colin had a long white cotton sheet wrapped around his shoulder. The performance started with an “Introduction”, which the two of them read first in English and then in Serbian. They welcomed the audience and announced the following: “In a few minutes we will be entering the space. In respect for those that live within these walls we ask that you kindly take hold of this fabric and follow the person in front of you as we explore the space within in silence. Take in the space, let your minds wander; take note of what makes this space special and unique. After a short time in the space, we will be going for a five-minute walk to a different location.”

Led by Colin, everyone took hold of the sheet, entered the corridor, continued into the courtyard, and made a circle around it. Six pieces of cloth cut into rectangular shapes were lying on the pavement, symbolizing the artists that were supposed to be there. Coming out into the street again, the „procession“ turned left along Kosovska Street, crossed another major street (Takovska), and went up the stairs into the building of the Belgrade Youth Center. The narrow corridor on the top floor led to a relatively small practice room. The audience remained on the upper (stage), and the performers stood on the lower level of this space.

Colin and Monika read the text explaining how they adapted their original performance to the new circumstances, and asked us to first look at the exhibition of their materials that were produced during the previous days they spent in the Kosovska 39 courtyard while rehearsing their dance pieces there. They started with: „We are here to tribute an event that was not but could have been. An exploration into the conflict between public and private space. The development of this event that was not, brought those involved down unexpected paths that were riddled with challenges. It included conflict with authority, the push and pull of a debate of public and private space between tenants, and the always present challenges associated to creative practice and working with performers from different artistic traditions. What was lost remains only in the artifacts you see in this room and in the ever-developing relationship the artists, tenants and yourselves have with the Kosovska 39 courtyard.“

The audience was asked to find out about the processual approach employed by the artists by looking at the materials exhibited in the room – photos, drawings, and texts that resulted from learning about the courtyard. Meanwhile, the performers were standing orderly and motionlessly along the side of the room. Once we finished our inspection, Colin and Monika read out short texts devoted to the originally planned scenes of the performance, namely: Mapping Landscapes, Cracks, Archetypes, and Senses. After each text, one of the performers enacted the contents of the text,

which was a reworking of the original dance segments they were going to present in the courtyard individually and collectively.

The final part of the performance was devoted to a discussion on „What has actually happened here?“ Dino was the moderator, speaking in both English and Croatian, and the questions started with the representative of the Indian embassy asking the performers to introduce themselves. After this, the discussion was about the perception of the courtyard ownership along the line of public and private authority, the power of the majority vis-a-vis the power of a single person, but also about the perception of the familiar and unfamiliar (related to the performer’s national and cultural backgrounds and the expected appearance of a dancer). In the end, the question that remained in the air was why they did not go all the way with the performance. In other words, why they did not take the risk and perform it as planned. The explanation was that as foreign citizens in Serbia, they did not want to provoke further problems for themselves, or for the residents of the Kosovska 39 courtyard.

III Comparing How Spaces Were Chosen and Used

This part will summarize how the curators of the UNLISTED project decided upon the spaces for their site-responsive performances, and what happened in them during their research and realization phases.

On how the performance spaces were decided on

We have seen that the curators of the three performances came up with their spaces in very different ways. Ana took an analytical approach, looking for an abandoned space of work/employment. The building of the Beobanka at Zeleni Venac, her first choice, seemed ideal in all its aspects – conceptually, structurally and atmospherically – but had to be abandoned because the permit for its use could not be acquired. The terrace of the former Srbijateks department store came up in the very last minute, and ended up the perfect solution. Because of its former function as a restaurant and then a one-time concert site, it could now serve as the metaphor of both an abandoned place of work, and a partying place. It was a space in which a farewell party for the unknown youth could be rightfully staged.

Christina found „her space“ even before the UNLISTED project was initiated. Passing by the Kneginje Zorke yard daily, she developed an aesthetic attachment to this secluded and abandoned yard. The feeling of peace created by the beauty of the large tree and the sunlight hitting the ground, mixed with the uneasiness produced by the unwelcoming graffiti messages and self-awareness of being a foreigner here, made this space a perfect stage for some future artistic project.

Monika chose to do a performance in the courtyard of Kosovska Street, where she lived at the time. The vacant, cracked space that led to the entrances of four apartment buildings built before World War II was a space of peace, away from the bustle of the central city area. It was a purely transitional space, space for passing by, in which she wanted to make people stop and see it in another way. The space rediscovered by dancers through their different senses, was to become a stage of neighborhood interaction.

On the use of spaces during the process of preparation

Due to delayed entry into the Terazije terrace space, preparations for Wasted Youth were dislocated to Magacin, an alternative arts center space, where discussions and rehearsals (led by Dino, as the director, took place for ten days. Thus, the dramatic text, and the scenes made out of acting and dancing were created in Magacin, and put into a whole on the final performance site two days before the performance.

The Everywhere is a Home artists were fortunate to enter the space early enough to be able to go through a complex process of becoming acquainted with their space, and inviting the space to become acquainted with them. Within a twelve day period, they applied different methods of research (observation and interviews), interventions (leaving a notepad, a wish box, house cleaning, collections of typical rubbish, ikebanas of the objects found in the yard, flower planting), communication with the yard residents (leaving performance announcements and asking for photos, making friends with the regular users of the yard), and doing the final rehearsals.

The SingularPlural crew got to use their Kosovska courtyard for group research and practice for two days only. After the police came to inquire about their activity, they tried to negotiate their presence in the courtyard with the most resolute opponents of the show, the lady who called the police and the president of the Residents' Board. Once they decided that they would give up the original space, their work continued in Magacin, the cafes, and Monika's apartment, to be finally transferred to an alternative space of a Belgrade Youth Center practice room twelve hours before the performance.

On the space use during the final performances

The Wasted Youth performance used a large part of the Terazije Terrace, and divided it into three sections, the stage, the front and the edge. The first, elevated part was used for the prologue and the finale, when the artists' stances on art were being read out. The discussion on the relationship between individual and the state (nation) and the reasons for leaving the home country was held in the front stage, and at the terrace wall. The

fable bringing out emotions of loss and missing that occurs after the departure was played out at the wall again. The performance had this geometrical movement from the back, straight to the front, then to the side, and back again. Every phase of “departing” was set into a different space.

Everywhere is a Home used every possible part of the Kneginje Zorke yard for its scenes. They used all the sections of this space discovered during their stay in the yard. The performance started in the very center, which looked as a natural stage (an elevated area surrounded with a concrete wall), the place artists called „circle“ or „sand box“. It further moved all through the yard proper, bringing the audience along (while touring the scenic spots), having objects like the big tree, the white wall, or the bench as the markers of its parts. The second stage area, called „arena“, was by the semicircular concrete bench (across from the circle), from which the pathways led again to the secluded space of „garden“, the niche in the white wall, or the clear space next to the bench. The performance even succeeded in occupying the inner space, that of an unused apartment overlooking the yard.

SingularPlural in the end used three spaces. It started with a commemorative walk through the original Kosovska courtyard, which was a tribute to the event that was meant to be but did not happen. Their performance continued along the streets and into the Belgade Youth Center in a form of a procession, and ended up in one of its practice rooms. This is where a multimedia show was set up, composed of an exhibition of the study materials that were produced within the research and practice phase in the courtyard, the reading of texts that were the artists’ interpretations of what really happened, their dance mimicry of this event, and finally the discussion with the audience.

Coming back to the UNLISTED thesis statement about wishing to create „a ripple effect in the aesthetic and emotional life of a city“, it may be said that the performances called certain attention to the spaces they were performed in. As Christina summarized: „In all three cases something was provoked. That provocation is something that leaves a trace. Perhaps the spaces won’t noticeably change, but those that experienced the performance or performance-making process have certainly been marked by it.“

In the end, it may be concluded that all three performances were successful, each in their own way. They all inspired the participating artists to think further about the outcomes of their shows and of their responsibility as theatre makers related to their activity in public space. They remained with questions about the responsibility they had taken towards the residents of the neighborhoods in which their performances were staged. Of course, many other questions remain to be discussed, especially those concerning the role of public art, and the different approaches the theatre makers can have while using seemingly abandoned (physically neglected, and yet socially meaningful) urban spaces.

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Весна Вучинић-Нешковић

Како су UNLISTED користили напуштене јавне просторе у Београду: Антрополошко разматрање три перформанса ВИТЕФ-а

У овом тексту желела сам да кроз антрополошку призму истражим на који начин су напуштена дворишта у средишњем делу Београда била коришћена у оквиру перформантивног процеса UNLISTED: Twice in a Lifetime. Однос између концепта перформанса и простора је истражен кроз различите фазе три позоришне представе које су биле изведене у оквиру придруженог програма Београдског међународног позоришног фестивала (ВИТЕФ). Истраживање полази од формирања пројекта око заједничког концепта, а затим се бави разрадом, припремама и реализацијом сваког перформанса понаособ. Завршни део посвећен је поређењу и исходима перформанса, као и преиспитивању улоге уметности која делује у јавном простору.

Кључне речи: антропологија града, перформанси, напуштени урбани простори, ВИТЕФ, Београд

Wasted Youth (Terazije Terrace)



Preparations in Magacin. Milena and Željko rehearsing. (Photo by A. Letunić)



Performance at Terazije Terrace. Scene 1. A farewell party for the anonymous youth that leaves the country. Dino and Ana in the background, Christina and Željko sitting at the table. Christina is reading Stilinović's text "The Praise of Laziness". (Photo by N. Žugić)



Performance. Scene 2. Julia dancing “at the edge”, symbolizing the existence between staying and departure, while Željko and Milena lead the conversation about the relationship between the state and the individual. (Photo by N. Žugić)



Performance. Scene 4. While Željko and Milena are reading the fable about the ant and the squirrel, Julia dances their love story, using her hands to enact the process of coming together and distancing away. (Photo by N. Žugić)

Everywhere is a Home (Kneginje Zorke Yard)



Preparations and interventions in Kneginje Zorke yard. Tanja showing the construction workers the notepad the artists hung on the tree. (Photo by C. Kruise)



Performance in Kneginje Zorke yard. Part 1. Ambrosia: The Tour. The audience participating in a tour of the yard led by Milica and Tijana. (Photo by V. Vučinić-Nešković)



Performance. Part 2. Only Wolves. The Wolves' training session, with Milica and Tijana joining them. (Photo by M. Tesla)



Performance. Part 3. Future. Christina, Tanja, Tijana and Milica present their contemplations on the potential of the yard. (Photo by M. Tesla)

SingularPlural: Or How I Remembered to Listen, Hear, Touch, Sense and Smell (Kosovska Courtyard and Belgrade Youth Center)



Rehearsal in Kosovska courtyard with Aparna, Juan, Colin, Tatjana and Marina (from left to right). (Photo by M. Ponjavić)



Performance beginning in the Kosovska courtyard. A silent walk “paying tribute to the event that was not, but could have been.” Colin leads the “procession” with the audience. (Photo by V. Vučinić-Nešković)



Performance continues in the streets of Belgrade. Colin leading the way across the street towards the Belgrade Youth Center. (Photo by V. Vučinić-Nešković)



Performance in the Belgrade Youth Center. Artists and audience participate in a discussion on what actually happened in Kosovska courtyard. (Photo by V. Vučinić-Nešković)