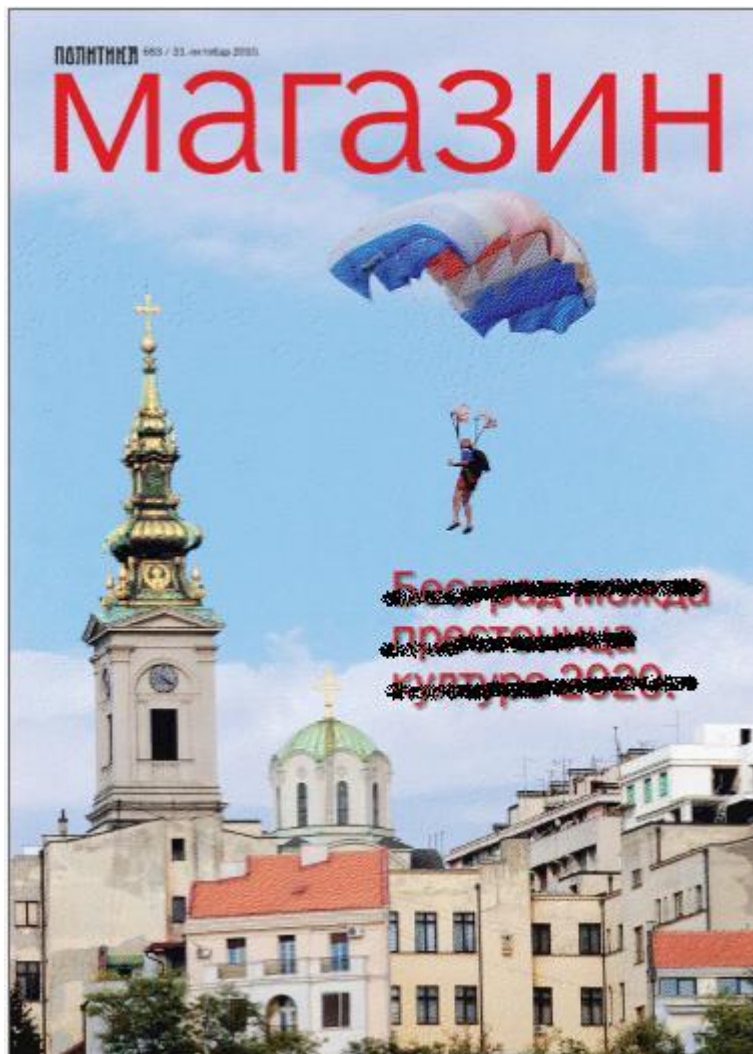


Belgrade 2020 – the city of wonders
– **New cultural policy in Serbia and spaces of struggle -**

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November 2010



„Scientific expedition ‘The sunken ships of Belgrade aquatorium’, launched by the Cultural Institution ‘*Parobrod*’ and subaquatic archaeologists from the non-governmental organization ‘Aqua et Archeologia’, commenced last Saturday, unfortunately, with an unsuccessful search for the steamboat ‘Zemun’, wrecked in 1926. (...)

- There is no official record that this steamboat indeed wrecked there – merely a fishermen’s tale; normally it is fishermen who report that their nets had been ripped by a wreck. (...)

- "We shall continue our research, namely locating the ships. We hope that the state and the city will support more serious expeditions as well. We often see on Discovery Channel ships wrecked in oceans and deep seas and admire them, unaware of the same things in our waters. We plan to expand the map charted by subaquatic archaeologists into a book, and shoot a documentary" – says Crnogorac. (...)

- "One of the aims of this expedition is official Serbian signature on the UNESCO *Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage* which facilitates protection of all these underwater wrecks. Our aim is not to bring them to the surface, but to leave them as they are. If the ships are protected, individual divers will be prevented from taking away various objects. It is not happening at present, but will inevitably start happening in the future", adds Crnogorac.¹

This was one of the first programme of the *new* Cultural Institution ‘*Parobrod*’ (Steamboat), founded on the proposal from the Liberal Democratic Party.² Though advertised in the media as the *first* cultural institution of the Belgrade municipality *Stari grad*,³ ‘*Parobrod*’ in fact emerged on the foundations of a previous, long-standing cultural establishment of the same municipality. Cultural Center ‘Stari Grad’, in spite of numerous financial/bureaucratic problems faced by the majority of cultural institutions of similar profile, was a vibrant and relevant cultural establishment for the city of Belgrade. On behalf of the Center, in early 2006 its former director Ljubica Beljanski Ristić invited us to launch, in the frameworks of the programme *Forum mladih*, a new programme dedicated to visual art – thus initiating the *Kontekst* gallery. In the second half of 2009 we started facing certain problems concerning the possibilities of realization of our programmes in this institution; at the same time, the process of negotiating its future transformation was in its early phase. After the launching of the CI ‘*Parobrod*’, pressures to vacate the rooms previously used for work and the new management’s refusal to communicate largely contributed to our decision to cease further work in those premises. Our decision to quit the *Kontekst* gallery was all the more determined by our disagreement with the politics advocated by the new cultural establishment.

Our concern in this essay is critical analysis of the concept *New cultural policy*, currently implemented in Serbia. This cultural policy belongs to a wider framework of

¹ See: <http://www.24sata.rs/vesti.php?id=78948> (25 October 2010)

² See: <http://www.ldp.rs/stari-grad-kona%C4%8Dno-dobio-svoju-ustanovu-kulture.84.html?newsId=3065> (25 October 2010)

³ *Ibid.*

developments taking place in Europe since the early 1990s. Additionally, it is part of the policy of European integrations and introduction of the neo-liberal capitalism in Serbia (i.e. entire Eastern Europe), facilitating establishment of new colonial relations. Analyzing the programme document *Nove kulturne politike* (New Cultural Policy), the project *Belgrade 2020* and 'Parobrod's programme in terms of such developments, we may clearly perceive how much they are based on the neo-liberal logic, which apprehends culture merely as a realm of profit. We start from the political-economic concept of *monopoly rent* applied by David Harvey on the logic of contemporary cultural production, and his analysis of cities as *urban machines*. Subsequently, we resume Matteo Pasquinelli's claim according to which relations between *collective symbolic capital* and the post-Fordist economy are indeed parasitic exploitation of the immaterial sector by the material: we use this claim to analyze the current relations of production within the cultural sphere in Serbia. We suggest that potential for re-politization of the contemporary cultural production exist, it takes place within the system, and is based in attacking the urban machine.

Creative zombies

For almost a decade, Serbia has been part of wider developments happening in Europe since 1989. Following the introduction of the so-called democratic changes (taking effect since the year 2000) the Serbian government *cope*s to fulfill all the demands imposed by the process of European integrations with more or less intensity. The accompanying colonial relations are not created merely for economic reasons of gaining new markets, but also refer to control over knowledge, history, memory, culture, subjectivity etc. Neo-liberal capitalism is but one of many components of contemporary colonialism, where accumulation of capital takes precedence over human life.⁴

In order to critically analyze those global processes and their relations towards the local political and economic developments as well as the position of culture in those relations, we refer to David Harvey's essay *The Art of Rent*.⁵ To clarify these relations, Harvey uses the concept of monopoly rent, borrowed from political economy. The question of gaining monopoly rent is, nevertheless, rather complex and refers to assessment of the entire contemporary capitalist production, but in his essay Harvey focuses on merely one aspect – concerning culture as a social realm increasingly involved in the struggle for monopoly power. Monopoly rent is acquired when a group or individual obtains increased profit for a longer period of time, due to exclusive control over a mercantile object which is in some respect unique and may not be copied.

In the logic of contemporary urban entrepreneurship, the so-called *urban machines* and processes resulting in *monopoly rent*, Harvey recognizes the power of *collective symbolic capital* attached to each urban environment – city, state, region etc., and the role of marks

⁴ See: Walter D. Mignolo, 'The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference', in *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101:1, 2002, 57-96

⁵ See: David Harvey, *The Art of Rent: Globalization, Monopoly and the Commodification of Culture*, 2000; <http://www.16beavergroup.org/mtarchive/archives/001966.php> (28 October 2010)

of distinction based on categories like ‘uniqueness’, ‘speciality’, ‘authenticity’, which may best be articulated through cultural production. Such urban entrepreneurship became increasingly important on national as well as international levels; here different agencies interconnect in order to create *monopoly rent*.⁶ An important social segment of these systems of management is *creative class* whose members share common *ideals* based on categories of creativity, individuality, difference etc. Their major contribution is production of *creative values* in different industries (from high technology to art). As creativity is increasingly valued in the respective socio-economic spheres, significance of this category is rising, and the class itself is expanding. These individuals shaped and controlled by the neo-liberal developments and unaware of the ideological and political implications of their own production, are indeed no less than creative *zombies*.

Work of the *creative class* is, also, narrowly connected with the concept of *immaterial work* which addresses new forms of management of the capitalist production. Specificities of the post-industrial economies are recognizable precisely in the form of this *immaterial* production; audiovisual production, marketing, fashion, design, territory management etc. are defined by the new relations between production on the one hand and market (or consumers), on the other. Analyzing the new relations between the capitalist production and consumption, in order to define them, Maurizio Lazzarato employed the notion of *communication*.⁷ In this case, communication operates as an *interface* which negotiates real social processes between production and consumption. While producing social relations, such immaterial work also produces new subjectivities, including the ideological context of their realization and reproduction. As we can see from Lazzarato, precisely such production of subjectivities aims at becoming an instrument of social control with a purpose of creating an (post-industrial) apolitical society of *active* consumers.

One of the most frequent and dominant definitions of *creative industries* refers to a form of exploitation of individual intellectual property⁸; however, in his essay *Immaterial Civil War* Matteo Pasquinelli focuses on the research of collective dimension of value creation that lies behind all creativity.⁹ Therefore, according to Pasquinelli, every immaterial

⁶ Harvey identifies these agencies as: state power (local, municipal, regional, national and supranational), various forms of organization of the civil society (chambers of commerce, trade unions, churches, educational and research institutions, local/communal groups, NGOs etc.) and private interest (corporate and individual).

⁷ See: Maurizio Lazzarato, *Immaterial Labour*, 1996; <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcimmateriallabour3.htm> (28 October 2010)

⁸ UK Government [Department for Culture, Media and Sport](#) (DCMS) defines creative industries as: „those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.“ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creative_industries (27 October 2010) *Creative Industries Mapping Document* (2001) lists the following segments of creative industries: advertising, architecture, art and antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software, music, performing arts, publishing, software and computer services, television and radio. http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk+/http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/4632.aspx (28 October 2010)

⁹ See: Matteo Pasquinelli, *Immaterial Civil War, Prototypes of conflict within cognitive capitalism*, 2006; <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcimmateriallabour5.htm> (28 October 2010)

object (idea, brand, event...) is derived from exploitation of collective symbolic capital and its value is reproduced in distribution, dissemination and interdependence. Pasquinelli starts from Harvey's claim: every immaterial space has its material parasite. What does that mean in reality? It means that generating collective symbolic value engages all of us: inhabitants of a particular region, urban environment, municipality etc., accidental passers-by, foreigners, workers, migrants, members of different classes, all the *others*, invisible, marginalized – influencing with their very past, present and future the creation of such *marks of distinction* and *uniqueness* so needed for establishing monopoly rent. However, what happens in the neo-liberal economy, indeed in the cognitive capitalism of the so-called First capitalist world, is parallel exploitation of the *collective symbolic capital* by the few members of the so-called *creative class* – *creative industry* – which commodifies general social creativity and transforms it into commercial brands, further employed for generating *monopoly rent*. Therefore, Pasquinelli defines the *creative class* as a parasitic simulacrum of the *social factory* which is detached from the precariat and attached to the upper class, but whose *creativity* is further exploited by the multinational companies or small but powerful segments of the local power elites.

Shaped by the neo-liberal processes of production, these individuals generally lack awareness of belonging to a particular class. In Belgrade, the class of *creative zombies* was promoted and represented through the *Council for media, culture and creative industries* (Savet za medije, kulturu i kreativnu industriju) assembling „about a hundred of creative individuals from Belgrade of various artistic profiles, people who are, in fact, not political figures.“¹⁰ The article refers to the growing number of professionals appointed to administrative positions in cultural institutions, who deny any political and ideological determination; at the same time, for their actions and work in general they are responsible to political parties and their ideological frameworks.

The Urban Machine

Processes addressed by the already mentioned authors did exist in Serbia in the past; however, their conscious articulation and appropriation by Belgrade's *urban machine* currently becomes self-evident. One of the symptomatic projects reflecting the abovementioned processes in our local context is *Belgrade – cultural capital of Europe 2020*¹¹. The complex interaction between local initiatives and global phenomena, and the *synergy* between state power, civil sector and private interests are the main agencies effecting changes in local configurations and possibilities for monopoly rent. Web site of the project clarifies the concept *European cultural capital* in following terms: „ (...) Preparing a European Capital of Culture can be an opportunity for the city to generate considerable cultural, social and economic benefits and it can help foster urban regeneration, change the city's image and raise its visibility and profile on an international scale. It is also a real asset for attracting tourists in the city. (...) A 2004 study conducted by Robert Palmer (known as the “Palmer Study”) for the European

¹⁰ See: <http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/Kultura/Beograd-axis-mundi.lt.html> (25 October 2010)

¹¹ See: <http://www.beograd2020.com/> (3 November 2010)

Commission demonstrated that the choice of European Capital of Culture served as a catalyst for the cultural development and the transformation of the city. Consequently, the beneficial socio-economic development and impact for the chosen city are now also considered in determining the chosen cities¹².

Therefore, the first steps of creation of monopoly rent are recognition and starting the engine of *collective symbolic capital* and creating the marks of distinction. Belgrade is, furthermore, represented in following terms: „Devastated more times than any other city, Belgrad has persistently risen from its ashes, constantly changing its visible qualities. Yet, it has never changed its authentic and essential “spirit of the city”, its unique lifestyle. It is characterized by a remarkable charm, cheerfulness, hospitality and eternal optimism. Unburdened by prejudice of any kind, Belgrade does not belong to any ideology, nation or religion, it does not check passports or skin colour of its visitors, nor is it a slave to stereotypes of any kind. A natural consequence of such an environment is the idea of Belgrade 2020 or the “Belgrade’s Race of Life” in the field of culture, along with the concept of Belgrade as the European Capital of Culture¹³. The text continues clarifying the need to emphasize Belgrade’s specificity: „... to make its environment recognised across the world, to change the unfavourable image about its people, and to show its uniqueness, richness of spirit, tradition, artistic potential and creativity¹⁴. How cultural production leads to subsequent profits may also be seen from an interview with one the leading figures of this project: „Culture and arts are best evidence of social development... This project will grant Belgrade with great benefits in cultural, social and economic terms. This is a unique opportunity to renew our city, improve its image within the European cultural circle and make it known and remarkable on an international scale. This project aims to regenerate Belgrade in cultural, infrastructural and economic terms... And the third, long-term benefit includes: raising the scope of foreign and domestic investment, advancing the cultural industries, creating an environment attractive for business and top-level professionals. A report from the consulting agency *Palmer-Rae*, the official representative of the European Commission, demonstrates that with each Euro invested into the European cultural capital, the city returns eight to ten Euro¹⁵.

How local traditions and culture, their invention and revival may be used for acquiring or confirming a monopoly position is additionally demonstrated by the project *Beogradizacija Beograda* (Belgradization of Belgrade), launched alongside *Belgrade 2020*.¹⁶ July 2010 saw the signing of a protocol between the City of Belgrade and Petroleum Industry of Serbia (Naftna industrija Srbije – NIS) on ‘strategic work in the field of culture’, inaugurating the project *Beogradizacija Beograda*. At the official launch of the project the mayor of Belgrade stressed the following: „We shall revive the old

¹² See: <http://www.begrad2020.com/en/european-capital-of-culture/> (3 November 2010)

¹³ See: <http://www.begrad2020.com/en/beograds-application/> (3 November 2010)

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ See:

http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/srbija/beograd/kultura_najbolje_afirmise_drustveni_razvoj_prestonice_.39.html?news_id=180979 (3 November 2010)

¹⁶ See:

<http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/125/Dru%C5%A1tvo/745128/Beogradizacija+Beograda.html> (30 October 2010)

Belgrade on certain locations in the city. We shall welcome tourists on the marina with our folk dances, the action will take place also at swimming pools, markets, squares – everywhere¹⁷. On the same occasion the general manager of NIS Kiril Kravčenko confirmed that investment into culture falls into strategic goals of the company he directed: „We are convinced that in 2020 Belgrade will be ready to become the cultural capital of Europe, but we also see other Serbian cities as candidates for this title¹⁸. If we have in mind that NIS is the ‘largest private company’¹⁹ operating in Serbia, with an elaborate network of business interests, it may become clearer how its strategic investment into culture coincides with the monopoly position.

All these *mantras* we have been exposed to, coming from leading figures of such initiatives – like those on Belgrade ‘unburdened by prejudice of any kind’, the city which ‘does not belong’ to ‘any ideology, nation or religion, ... does not check passports or skin colour of its visitors, nor is it a slave to stereotypes of any kind’ – are merely empty phrases which help creating the *categories of uniqueness*. They are also employed for the cause of European integration (i.e. expansion of the European Union), of nominal respect for human rights and tolerance, as well as the process of ‘culturalization’ of the society with the aim of producing apolitical subjects of the dominant ideology. However, many examples from our reality, like demolishing and fencing of the Roma settlement adjacent to the new housing complex *Belville* (including numerous other instances of racist violence against Roma men and women), various forms of homophobic attacks on people of other sexual orientation than heterosexual, attacks on activists struggling against the hegemonic matrix of power, and attacks on foreign citizens (culminating with the violent death of the French football fan Brice Taton) are confirmed as everyday occurrences which are not only tolerated, but supported in our society.

Despots of Enlightenment

The project *Belgrade – cultural capital of Europe 2020* and the already cited initiatives of the new Cultural Institution ‘*Parobrod*’ are but a symptom of an overwhelming ideology whose key (and manifest) premises may be found in the abovementioned paper titled *Foundations of the new cultural policy (Osnovi nove kulturne politike)* and authored by Nenad Prokić, member of Parliament and member of the Council for Culture in the National Assembly (Liberal Democratic Party). This text is an integral part of the document *Agreement for future, Belgrade – cultural capital of Europe 2020 (Dogovor za budućnost, Beograd kulturna prestonica Evrope 2020)* issued by the Council for media, culture and creative industries of the Liberal Democratic Party.²⁰

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ See: <http://www.seecult.org/vest/beogradizacija-beograda> (30 October 2010)

¹⁹ See: http://nis.rs/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=178&Itemid=219&lang=en (30 October 2010)

²⁰ See: http://www.ldp.rs/o_nama/programski_savet/savet_za_kulturu_medije_i_kreativnu_industriju/beograd_-_kulturna_prestonica_evrope_2020.1103.html (30 October 2010)

As we can read in this paper, this new cultural policy aims at overall changing of the dominant cultural model in Serbia and founding of a *new* one, grounded in *progressive* European values – which will nevertheless continue to foster what is *noble* in the local cultural tradition. The author suggests: „ (...) our subsequent tasks is identifying cultural components for conceiving working strategies which will change the society and make most of its subjects happy. While doing this, it is good to remember the formula which brought about the most successful societies on the planet. It is very simple: the first-class chooses the first-class, the second-class chooses the third-class, only the best choose better than themselves (...) “. And furthermore: „ (...) Accordingly, we propose the basics of a new cultural policy which aims at shaping the physiognomy of a cultured citizen – the strongest support of a society with full respect for human rights, international agreements and our natural environment (...)“.

The *vision* of this new cultural policy is perhaps best reflected in the following remarks: „ (...) finally, the whole society, in all its segments, will be able to imbue its criteria with beneficial impacts of thus created new cultural models. Healthy cultural models had always been founding blooming civilizations and particular societies within them; likewise, monstrous models had always been causing their demise. Instead of political despots, let us search in all of us for despots of enlightenment and progress. No less will suffice for recovery of the collapsing Serbian society and its successful inclusion into the European family (...)“.

In the paper, the author defines somewhat more precisely this dichotomy of healthy cultural models vs. monstrous cultural models, in the sense of traditional ethno-nationalist patterns opposing *sincere* and *happy* cultural models (according to the recipes of the most successful – European – societies), however we can not escape the impression created by this distinction between *healthy* and *monstrous* culture. Merely one historical example from the 20th century (producing comparable discursive frameworks) was the 1937 exhibition titled *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art), organized in Munich by the Nazi regime with a view to disqualifying *ugly* and *decadent* art as opposed to that *affirmative, true, German*.²¹

Such, we may confidently claim, Fascist terminology (*healthy vs. monstrous* culture; *shaping the physiognomy of a cultured citizen*; distinction between the *first-class, second-class, third-class* and *the best*; etc.) broadly reflects the circumstances inside the *fortress* of Europe, based on the procedures of inclusion and exclusion, abolishing the borders from one side (in order to secure the uninterrupted flow of the capital) while on the other they are repeatedly reproduced on other levels (poverty, racism, patriarchy, etc.)²²

According to this paper, some of the aims of the new cultural policy concern the question of market as a space for self-regulation of the demand for cultural products: „Technical introduction of continuing competition and constant comparing of the achievements and

²¹ See: Vlastimir Kusik, ‘Nacionalisocijalizam i „izopačena umetnost“’, *Moment* 13, Belgrade, 1989, pp. 16-22

²² For more on policies of exclusion within the EU, including our opinion on the matter, see: <http://workshopwithoutborders.wordpress.com/>, <http://www.reartikulacija.org/?p=647>

capacities of all the agencies constituting the market automatically apply to all by the very prevention of the persistent favoring of the few“. However, as Harvey reminds us, what is at work here is structural dynamics of the contemporary capital saturated with contradictions, one of which concerning the inescapability of market competitiveness which leads to monopolization. In Serbia, the power structures are already busy acquiring monopoly over cultural production and control over symbolic content. Although the paper mentions „prevention from favoring the protégés of the current political nomenclature“, it is quite obvious that culture is subject to distribution of authority between political parties which claim control over its institutions and secure the domination of the ideology in power.²³

Repoliticization of the contemporary cultural production

All these processes result in pacification and professionalization (demanding efficiency, productivity etc.) of cultural production, and neutralization of its antagonistic political potential. This is the case with the new Cultural Institution ‘*Parobrod*’, as well. In this venue, collective symbolic capital was previously generated through the activities of the Cultural Center ‘Stari Grad’ and former People’s University, which were parts of a wider network of public institutions operating in the field of culture and education. They were based on the principles of SFR Yugoslavia’s self-management socialism and its policy of permanent education.

Various aspects of CC ‘Stari Grad’'s history and policies partly informed our own work within the gallery *Kontekst*. This mainly concerns the form and methodology of our work (collective work, interactivity, workshops, experiments etc.), but partly its content as well (collaboration with subjects marginalized and excluded from the hegemonic system). In accordance with the local and global political, economic and social transformations our attitudes and programme content were gradually radicalized through attempts at repoliticization of the local cultural production and re-production of Leftist ideas, which are currently completely marginalized.

Finally, we employ Pasquinelli’s concept of *immaterial civil war* as an attempt to conceive new spaces of conflict and resistance. What Pasquinelli suggests, following Harvey’s statements, is an attack on the *urban machine* i.e. *creative city*. Radical actions (focusing on their own media visibility and representation) which often – already in their conception – may be appropriated by the capital, should be performed with cautiousness. It is necessary to aim towards intervention in the realm of the hegemonic matrix of power based on the capitalist production. We fully agree with Harvey’s claim that it is one thing to be transgressive in the matters of sexuality, religion, social norms and artistic conventions, but completely other to be transgressive against the institutions and practices of capitalist domination. We should start recognizing the material exploitation of our immaterial work. Likewise, we have to be cautious and critical against the

²³ At the time of writing of this paper, *Council for media, culture and creative industries* had 14 regular members – heads of major cultural institutions of the City of Belgrade. <http://www.ldp.rs/vesti.84.html?newsId=2130> (25 October 2010)

reproduction of neo-liberal power relations within the network of autonomous organizations and individuals from the artistic and activist scenes. Struggling for grants, positions, projects, spaces we are constantly involved in contributes to overall diminishing of our critical and political potential. However, we think that work in culture possesses potential for conceiving an alternative to the capitalist globalization. One of the ways of achieving this is collaboration with artistic and activist collectives and individuals who share our political struggle.²⁴ In order to gain monopoly rent, the capital will (unwillingly) support even authenticity and creativity produced by extreme opposition: this opens new possibilities for us to appropriate these instruments and use them for creating an alternative to the capitalist exploitation.

Translation: Irena Šentevska

²⁴ In our case, it is collaboration with the groups *Teorija Koja Hoda*, *Queer Bg*, *Žene na delu*, *Prelom kolektiv*, *CRužok*, *Odbrani Filozofski* etc. and many individuals.