

*Living thoughts...*

The Living School is an independent meeting point taking place over four intensive sessions to be held in the spring and fall of 2020. The School focuses on questions of recognition and misrecognition, belonging and unbelonging, voice and listening, and the ways in which expressions of community may be creatively and critically manifest. Through discursive and material investigations, the School aims to foster a collaborative and performative space for thinking and working together that can traverse art and activism, research and education, discourse and dramaturgy.

How might community be conceived by way of listening understood as a critical economy of attention aligned with empathy, compassion, repair, as well as witnessing and recognition? What types of commoning may be performed to foster radical forms of exit, as a being-in-common that reworks spatial and temporal horizons? And that may reposition a politics of recognition in order to draw in the unrecognizable as what allows for radical civility: the refusal to exclude?

These lines of inquiry will be engaged through a collective and collaborative approach. From reading and re-reading of key references and presentations by invited guests, to exploring central topics and questions through forms of research action, including experiments in self-building, collective scripting, and local engagements, the School searches for putting community on the move as an inventive process.

As an experiment in pedagogy, the School is directed by notions of the Impossible: the impossible as what may compel the imagination toward an endless work, the work of thinking otherwise, and that may productively interrupt conceptualizations of a bordered self. As such, the School is posed as an impossible task, which can support an emergent sense of knowledge making – a poetic kitchen for cooking up an impossible feast!

The Living School

March 11 – 13, 2020

Session #1: On Affect, Voice, Listening, and Self-Organization

Ana Hofman  
Andreja Kulunčić  
Brandon LaBelle  
Mojca Piškor

Multimedia Institute (Club MaMa)  
Preradovićeva ul. 18, 10000 Zagreb

The first session is framed around the topics of affect, voice, listening, and self-organization, and brings together presentations by artists, musicologists, singers and educators. Presentations and discussions over the first two days will create a collective framework for thinking together about the affective capacities found in voice, and the ways in which listening may act as a form of relational activism extending what or who counts. This will be further elaborated by inquiring into methods of self-organization and artistic practices aimed at social injustice. The session will conclude with an open day, where we might speculate further into questions of shared voice and processes of self-organized community.

Schedule:

March 11, 19:00:

Keynote presentation by Brandon LaBelle, Towards the work of Acoustic Justice (Communities in Movement, Berlin / Art Academy, University of Bergen) (reception following)

March 12, 13:30 – 18:00:

Andreja Kulunčić, Ghettoized Communities (Academy of Fine Arts, Zagreb)  
Mojca Piškor, Reading the Sound, Listening through Words: Resonances of Auditory Regimes of Yugoslav *poena insularis* (Music Academy, University of Zagreb)  
Ana Hofman, Radical Amateurism: An Aural After-Life of a Mass Voice (Institute of Culture and Memory Studies, Ljubljana)

March 13: Open day: free discussion on voice, self-organization, and future plans.

### **Brandon LaBelle, Towards the work of Acoustic Justice**

The presentation will pose the question of acoustics as a critical and creative framework. In particular, acoustics will be underscored not only as a property of space, nor as a knowledge within the field of physics, but equally as a social and political framework. In what ways do acoustic norms and acoustic economies shape the experiences and capacities of listening and sociality within certain environments? In this sense, acoustics is highlighted as a performative arena that may enable specific articulations of agency. This will lead to theorizing acoustics as a platform for a range of practices that work at orientation and reorientation. From practices of rhythm and echo, noise and the making of vibrational constructs, for example, we find a means by which belonging and unbelonging may be negotiated. Following critical understandings of acoustics will further allow for reworking understandings of agency as based on appearance and legibility – a making visible. Rather, I'm interested in how the capacity to shift volumes, to rework rhythms, to retune or detune dominant tonalities of particular contexts may assist in nurturing one's right to listen.

Brandon LaBelle is an artist, writer and theorist working with sound culture, voice, and questions of agency. He develops and presents artistic projects within a range of international contexts, often working collaboratively and in public. This leads to performative installations, poetic theater, storytelling and research actions aimed at forms of experimental community making. From gestures of intimacy and listening to creative festivity and open movement work, his practice aligns itself with a politics and poetics of radical civility. Works include "The Other Citizen: Archive", Club Transmediale, Berlin (2019), "The Autonomous Odyssey" (with Octavio Camargo), Kunsthall 3,14 Bergen (2018), "The Ungovernable", Documenta 14, Athens (2017), "Oficina de Autonomia", Ybakatu, Curitiba (2017), "The Hobo Subject", Gallery Forum, Zagreb (2016), and "The Living School", South London Gallery (2016). He is the author of *Sonic Agency: Sound and Emergent Forms of Resistance* (2018), *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary* (2014), *Diary of an Imaginary Egyptian* (2012), *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life* (2019; 2010), and *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* (2015; 2006). He lives in Berlin and is Professor at the Department of Contemporary Art, University of Bergen.

### **Andreja Kulunčić, Ghettoized Communities**

The presentation focuses on 3 projects dealing with different communities, but with the same pretext of social ghettoization. The first project was done in collaboration with psychiatric patients on the topic of stigmatization – "VRAPČE PILLOWS" – actions and interventions in public space, Facebook and the web site, with co-authors (2013 -2014). The project deals with the problem of dis-

crimination and prejudices about people who suffer from mental illnesses and disturbances. The second project was developed with Sans Papiers who formally do not exist in the society in which they live and work with their families – “1 CHF = 1 VOICE” – political art intervention (2007–2008), made in Switzerland together with the Sans Papiers, NGOs, gallery Shedhalle and politicians from the Green party. The project was a tool for the illegalized persons in Switzerland through which they were able to attain visibility on the political and public level. The Sans-Papiers (undocumented immigrants) were invited to donate ONE FRANK for the renovation of the Swiss Parliament (the Parliament building was under renovation at that time). The third project was developed with deprived communities on the outskirts of Mexico City – “CONQUERING AND CONSTRUCTING THE COMMON” – multidisciplinary research project, organized by MUAC (2010–2015). The point of departure for the project is the fact that the institutional mechanisms that should be there to meet the needs of the citizens are frequently inappropriate or inadequate, which gives rise to daily efforts at coping, the development of personal and group strategies and inventions. Subsequently, such forms of self-organization have created rich and useful resources for the improvement of the conditions of life.

Andreja Kulunčić is a visual artist, lives in Zagreb, Croatia. The artistic work of Andreja Kulunčić is characterized by its examination of different aspects of social relations. Interested in socially critical themes, she has developed a distinctive research methodology for work in the domain of the visual arts, focusing on neuralgic points of different societies. Her works always involve interdisciplinary processes of collaboration and the joint creation of a work in especially constructed networks of professionals of various disciplines (sociology, philosophy, science, design, programming). The works often demand the active involvement of the public, which is invited to “finish” the work. She works simultaneously inside and outside the art world, making use of gallery space and the institutional artistic framework as just one of the possible areas for an active consideration of social relations and practices. In her works, Andreja Kulunčić takes issue with some of the symptoms of contemporary society, from xenophobia to depression, with a special emphasis on the burning problems of transitional and post-transitional settings. She often turns a gallery into a space for a workshop and for learning, a kind of social laboratory, the results of which are felt in everyday life. During her artistic career she has exhibited at exhibitions and biennials, such as Documenta11 in Kassel, Manifeste4 in Frankfurt, the 8. Istanbul Biennial, the Liverpool Biennial04, the 10. New Delhi Triennial and also in museums such as the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, PS1 in New York, Palais de Tokyo in Paris, the Carré d’Art in Nîmes, Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo in Mexico City, in museums of contemporary art in Tallinn, Budapest, Warsaw, Moscow,

Ljubljana, Zagreb, Belgrade, Linz, Sain-Etienne, Napoli and others. She teaches at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb, Department of New Media. [www.andreja.org](http://www.andreja.org)

### **Mojca Piškor, Reading the Sound, Listening through Words: Resonances of Auditory Regimes of Yugoslav *poena insularis***

Preceded by more than forty years of silence, written and recorded testimonies of women prisoners of socialist political labour camps on islands Sveti Grgur and Goli, first started to appear in publications, radio interviews and tv documentaries at the beginning of 1990s. Although understandably not focused explicitly on sound and music, these narratives are nevertheless replete with references to acoustic dimensions of experience of imprisoned life, instances of (mis)use of music (reproduced or performed) within the everyday regimes of torture, as well as rare occasions in which the sound of/or music appeared as an unexpected and at times misplaced symbol of “normal” life lived beyond the island shores. In this presentation I will try to offer a sound-focused reading of this relatively unknown written archive, hoping to contribute to understanding of intricacies of (collective) listening and affective power of voice in the suspended lives of political prisoners confined to the indefinite state of exception in which “logic and praxis blur with each other and a pure violence without logos claims to realize an enunciation without any real reference” (Agamben 2005).

Mojca Piškor earned PhD in ethnology and cultural anthropology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb with the thesis *Politics and Poetics of Spaces of Music: Ethnomusicological and Anthropological Perspectives* (2010). From 2001 she has been affiliated with the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb. Since 2013 she is permanently employed as an assistant professor of Ethnomusicology at the Musicology Department of the Academy of Music, University of Zagreb. Her field of interest includes issues pertaining to the nexus of music and politics (racial imagination, gender, censorship) and intersections of music and discourse on music. In recent years she focused on the use of music as a tool of torture and is currently starting new research on auditory regimes of irregularized migrations, which is part of wider international research project *The European Irregularized Migration Regime in the Periphery of the EU* (ERIM).

### **Ana Hofman, Radical Amateurism: An Aural After-Life of a Mass Voice**

Post-Yugoslav activist choirs are (self)represented as the voice of the voiceless, people or masses that help to articulate their presence and positions through collective singing. Their performances vocally evoke the collective political agency in the current political condition defined by individualization, social fragmentation and exhaustion. In my analysis of this perception, I approach evocation of the mass

voice by activist choirs as a response to the dominant Western-liberal concept of community singing that draws on the values of cultural pluralism, multiculturalism and social justice. Antifascist and revolutionary choristers aim to challenge a liberal celebration of diversity and intercultural understanding, which they see as the politics of difference based on the ideologies of racialization. Instead, they promote radical equality and strategic essentialism, questioning the very operations through which the processes of producing difference occur. I examine both the potentials and limits behind such a quest, following the thought of philosopher Alain Badiou, who claims that masses have a minimal intensity of existence structured by exploitation and oppression and can be themselves downplayed, absorbed and used for identitarian instrumentalization (2012: 79). I consider how the historical legacy of socialist revolutionary mass voice plays an important role in the activist choristers' experimenting with an acoustic experience that aims to give the prohibited mass voice a new aural life beyond identity politics of the neoliberal state.

Ana Hofman is a senior research fellow at the Institute of Culture and Memory Studies of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts in Ljubljana. Her research interests lie in the intersection between music and sound studies and memory studies, with a focus on activism and the social meaning of resistance in the past and present. She uses both archival and ethnographic methods to examine musical sound during socialism and the present-day conjuncture of neoliberalism and postsocialism in the area of former Yugoslavia. She has published many articles and book chapters, including two monographs: *Staging Socialist Femininity: Gender Politics and Folklore Performances in Serbia* (Brill, 2011) and *Music, Politics, Affect: New Lives of Partisan Songs in Slovenia* (Biblioteka XX vek, 2016). She was a post-doctoral Fulbright Fellow at the Graduate Center of the City University New York in spring semester 2018. She is currently working on the monograph *Socialism, Now! Singing Activism after Yugoslavia*, dealing with the sonic reactualizations of cultural memory on antifascism in the societies of neoliberal fringe.

## Radical Amateurism, Affect and Mass Voice: The Post-Yugoslav Activist Choirs

Ana Hofman

In 2000 Dragan Protić Protá and Đorđe Balmazović, both members of the artistic collective Škart, founded *Horkeškart*, a choir that was supposed to act as a part of their artistic project “Your Shit—Your Responsibility” at the Center for Cultural Decontamination in Belgrade.<sup>2</sup> In 2007 the choir continued its life under the name *Horkestar* (Alternative Choir and Orchestra),<sup>3</sup> while Škart founded the new choir *Prroba* (Rehearsal). In 2005 the first feminist lesbian choir in this region of southeastern Europe, *Le-zbor*, started singing in Zagreb. Inspired by their predecessors, new choirs appeared almost every year: the female choir *Kombinat*, founded in Ljubljana in 2008, and soon after *Hor 29. Novembar*, which started singing in Vienna in 2009. Two choirs established in 2014 are women’s choirs: *Praksa* from Pula, Croatia, and the feminist choir *Z’borke* from Ljubljana. In recent years, some of the choirs are no longer active (e.g., *LewHORE*, Belgrade’s equivalent of *Le-zbor*, and *Raspeani Skopjani*, from Skopje, Macedonia), whereas some others emerged in 2016—Belgrade’s antifascist choir *Naša Pjesma* (Our song) and *Domaćigosti* (Hostguests), a choir that gathers refugees from the Middle East and Zagreb residents.

The choirs vary in the intensity of their activities—there are periods in which they grow and those in which the number of their members, rehearsals, and performances stagnates. Singing talent, prior music knowledge, and sheet music reading skills are not required when people join the choirs. Singers come from various geographical areas and very often have different generational, family, professional, social, and cultural backgrounds. The majority of them range in age from twenty to forty-five, yet particular choirs (such as *Naša Pjesma*, *Le-zbor*, and *Kombinat*) also have older-generation members. Four of them are all-female (*Praksa*, *Le-zbor*, *Z’borke*, and *Kombinat*), including one feminist choir (*Z’borke*) and one feminist-lesbian choir (*Le-zbor*).<sup>4</sup> The choirs are in constant mutual contact by organizing visits, meetings, and joint performances on various occasions—joint public rehearsals, concerts, and flash mobs in Ljubljana, Zagreb, Pula, Belgrade, Skopje, and Vienna. As of 2018, they had organized three festivals of activist choirs, entitled “Svi(e) u jedan glas” (All in one voice), in Belgrade (2010), Ljubljana (2013), and Zagreb (2018). They exchange lyrics, ideas, and information about songs, “borrow” repertoires and arrangements, and share instrumental ac-

companiment.<sup>5</sup> As their common goal they state evoking a collective spirit of choral singing, emphasizing its revolutionary, rebellious side and emancipatory potential. In contrast to the other forms of collective public engagement, such as protests or rallies, for them, singing is a more effective form of activism, as a day-to-day experience that creates a space for alternative social relations and collective organizing. “Singing in a choir, especially in a public space, gives you the opportunity to be spontaneous, to react swiftly, something that other forms of activism don’t offer,” explained the members of *Le Zbor* (Prtorić 2016).

The activist choirs use singing to reflect, cope with, and oppose ongoing structural conditions of political exhaustion, economic precarity, and social disintegration in the area of former Yugoslavia. The dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia in 1991, followed by bloody ethnic conflicts from 1991 to 1995 in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Hecegovina and in 2000 in Kosovo, resulted in a decade of political and economic instability.<sup>6</sup> Restoration of capitalism and aggressive introduction of neoliberal economic “reforms” after 2000 brought about new structural challenges and uncertainties, which in different scale and aspects even more intensified from the global economic crisis in 2008. Despite the different ways post-Yugoslav societies have responded to these instabilities, all share the particular condition of neoliberal post-socialism that has marked the period from 2000 onward and produced an intensive social atmosphere of foreclosure, particularly in relation to political agency. Writing about the complete lack of politics in the common interest in the region, post-Yugoslav intellectual Boris Buden (2017) asserts people’s general feeling of the inability to intervene in politics. In his words, they feel completely excluded from decision-making and are left without any power and at the mercy of the elites. Jessica Greenberg (2014) has developed a concept of the politics of disappointment for people’s awareness of the contingency of political agency in the region caused by violent conflict, poverty, and corruption. As a response to that, choirs opt for repurposing the antifascist past as an important political act of hope and imagination of possibilities.

From 2000 on, their singing has greatly influenced practices of political activism in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. A collective voice of activist singers is a soundtrack of civil disobedience to xenophobia, fascism, and the cultural and symbolic reconstitution of their cities as they referred to the particular historical past—a legacy of Yugoslav antifascist resistance during World War II—as the most potent framework for articulating an alternative form of political engagement. How does repurposing of the antifascist legacy by activist choirs mobilize people to imagine potentialities of thought, action, and life beyond the given conditions of being, doing, and living? How does collective voice making call for new perspectives in thinking and practicing political engagement?



## Antifascism as an Affective Technology of Resistance

The choirs sing in various performance settings, spaces, and occasions: from neglected monuments of World War II, abandoned privatized factories, and fired workers or evicted families in gentrified city outskirts to protests, flash mobs and public rehearsals in main city squares, activist poetry festivals, commemorations dedicated to World War II, concerts, and festivals. Across these diverse settings, singers claim to revive a “primary function” of the core of their repertoire, partisan songs,<sup>7</sup> during World War II: to invite people to self-organize and fight for freedom and radical social transformation. The songs choirs perform have powerful lyrics that describe a strong spirit and dedication to resist and fight even in the most difficult moments, as in “Bilećanka”:

Sredi pušk in bajonetov, sredi mrkih straž,  
se pomika naša četa  
v hercegovski kras.  
Čuje se odmev korakov  
po kamenju hercegovskem Hej haj, ho, hej haj, ho!  
Daleč zdaj si domovina, nas izgnali so  
ko da krivi smo zločina, ker te ljubimo.  
Vzeli materi so sina, ženi so moža,  
lačna je doma družina, dosti je gorja.  
Skoz pregnanstvo in trpljenje, skozi ječe mrak,  
prišlo novo bo življenje,  
čujte mu korak.  
Ko brez pušk in bajonetov, prosta nam bo pot,  
stopala bo naša četa, svobodi naprot’.

Amid rifles and bayonets  
and guards around us,  
our troops are silently moving through the karst of Bileća.  
An echo of the footfall  
on the Herzegovinian rocks is heard. Hey, hi, ho! Hey, hi, ho!  
Homeland, you are far away now. We have been deported.  
They persecuted us  
because of the crime of loving you.  
A mother has lost a son and a wife a husband.  
A family at home is hungry. Our fate is bitter.  
Through persecution and suffering, through dungeon’s darkness,  
a new life will arrive.

Hear its steps.

When without rifles and bayonets our way is free,  
then our troops will march toward freedom.<sup>8</sup>

In reclaiming the political potential of partisan songs, activists assert their ethical valency in a fight against current apathy, conformism, and selfishness. As Teja, a member of Ljubljana’s *Kombinat*, explained, “The reason why we started performing songs of resistance is actually very simple: these are the songs that transmit values of solidarity, friendship, courage, freedom, and empathy. We emphasize that this is still possible, even at a time when people are more and more convinced that they cannot do anything, not even complain” (interview with the author, March 28, 2013). Going against this grain, partisan songs are employed as a wake-up call for people to start taking their political destiny back into their own hands and to openly express their disagreement with the passive bystander position.

However, for singers, lyrics are not the most important trigger of a song’s mobilizing force. In their understanding, partisan songs are affectively imbued sonic objects able to mediate a particular set of ideas and values through somatic means. The fact that they were “born” in a historical moment of struggle and resistance, members assert, suffuses partisan songs with a particular drive that enables affective and somatic mobilization. Songs’ political capacity derives from the affective intensities of revolutionary moment and the extreme material conditions of their singing and listening. That specific power of songs is narrated as an intensive somatic encounter that is generated in the moment of performance. Talking about the first meeting and the moment of foundation of *Hor 29. Novembar*, Aleksandar evoked: “From just ‘let’s sing’ we suddenly started experiencing how powerful these songs are, how deeply they touched us. . . . I mean, our bodies shuddered. . . . It was such a powerful experience” (interview with the author, January 5, 2014). As visible from his statement, singing partisan songs is experienced as full of high energy, passion, and emotional and bodily investment (*naboj*). Such an affective expression of meanings and values of the songs is presented by the members as the main reason to join the activist choirs and a crucial difference from other groups or performers that share the same repertoire. They, however, do not see themselves as passive interpreters of the given content but emphasize the fact that they deeply believe the ideas and values described in the songs, which enables them to more powerfully express the songs’ mobilizing power. “When you see all these people who smile at you and sing along with you . . . your heart is huge. Because it is not that you just sing and people sing . . . but these are powerful songs . . . people crying. . . . We sang ‘Konjuh planinom,’ and a woman came and said that she could not

express her feelings . . . and I think, This is it” (Edna, *Praksa*, interview with the author, June 15, 2015).<sup>9</sup> As illustrated by Edna’s statement, what gives value to the performance is an intensity of emotional exchange between singers and listeners through an intensive affective and somatic encounter. When talking about these experiences, members usually struggle to express verbally the energy that circulates and coagulates but that is “felt” in the body as a fleeting vibration that erupts and decays. Teja recollected this strong sense of the materiality of affect that goes through bodies: “I feel that as I go forward to the audience, physically. It is very difficult to describe that, this feeling when your skin crawls and you feel inside of your body a kind of grace, affection, and mutual connection” (Teja, *Kombinat*, interview with the author, March 28, 2013). Such sensory interactions are narrated as the most powerful force in rebuilding a collective on a temporal and spatial scale. Collective singing and listening discipline bodies in a particular way, creating an invisible network of power. “This was like we were one body, like we were breathing together,” as Teja described one of the performances. An emergent sense of collectivity is thus galvanized through the transmission of affect (Brennan 2004) that moves and mobilizes bodies and creates, in singers’ words, “an emotional-energetic collective.”

Described by singers and listeners as simultaneously a strong embodied stimulus and an intensity of feeling, affective encounters are also the most important confirmation of successful performance. Without an adequate response, singing partisan songs can even be an unpleasant experience for members: “Once it happened to us that we sung in a youth center, and these young people did not feel us at all. At the end of the performance we were completely exhausted, like we were singing in a vacuum. There was no reaction” (Maja, *Kombinat*, <http://www.delo.si/arhiv/pesmi-upora-in-revolucije.html>). This statement demonstrates that listeners’ reactions oscillate from one performance to another. Still, in the cases when the listeners did not seem to react to their singing, it does not necessarily mean that the affective exchange was missing. In some cases, singers explain, a reaction can happen after the performance as a kind of a postponed emotional reaction. Regardless of different types and intensities of the affective encounters, collective singing of and listening to partisan songs are perceived by singers and listeners as energetic, vital, and mobilizing and seen as an affective rupture in the political climate of apathy and exhaustion. In the following sections, I examine how such vitalizing potential and emerging sonic alliances, usually seen as limited to the moment of performance and musically bounded context (see Hofman 2015b), are transmitted into other aspects of the social life of activists, singers, and listeners—the life of alternative forms of social organization.

## Radical Amateurism

The choirs’ self-organization is strongly embedded in an “open participation” approach. Musical skills or previous singing experience are not the main criteria for membership, and most singers do not have formal musical education. More than half of them have no previous singing experience, and they emphasize the importance of this distinction from traditional choirs. In doing that, activists often directly refer to the so-called democratization of art fostered by the Yugoslav antifascist resistance movement during the course of World War II. Encouraging all people to play, sing, or write music as a deelitizing and decolonizing bourgeoisie approach to art, the partisan movement promoted a new role for music activities as the most powerful transformational force of the masses (see Komelj 2009:13). As already pointed out, collective singing is not a tool for improving musical skills or broadening singers’ musical subjectivities but primarily a channel for practicing collective political engagement. Choirs refuse to be assessed by the quality of their performances, which is supposed to be a “product” of their activities. “Flexible structure and non-goal-oriented process are crucial. We do not strive to deliver a product, we are interested in the process,” explained Milan from *Hor 29. Novembar* (interview with the author, January 15, 2014). For singers, being a member of an activist choir is a process of (self-)emancipation and a counterresponse to capitalist culture production based on passivity. They call for the importance of regaining the power amateur singing activities as an alternative form of music performing and listening in capitalism. By cherishing self-organization and open participation, they express a critique of the commodification promoted through the music industry and professionalism after the collapse of Yugoslavia (Paunović 2011:10).

This is why choirs’ activities act as a (self-)emancipatory venue for what I call “radical amateurism,” a political position that fuels the politicization of a field of leisure. During socialism, official rhetoric promoted the concept of amateurism (*amaterizam*) as an important feature in the creation of a new model of leisure activities as communally based active participation in the social life.<sup>10</sup> Renowned Yugoslav sociologist Rudi Supek (1974:8, 9) defined amateurism as a spontaneous collective expression and a basic necessity of each individual in the aspiration to be part of the wider social community. That also meant creating broad infrastructures that supported music, film, sports, and other activities. After the breakup of Yugoslavia and particularly after 2000, shifts toward the commodification and commercialization of public culture did not just promote a figure of the passive consumer of cultural products but also significantly reconfigured the field of leisure. Musical amateurism certainly remained strong after the 1990s in folklore groups and church choirs, both of which were associated with nation-building

processes, but the figure of the public amateur as an engaged social and political subject that was promoted during socialism was not desired. Through their dedication to self-organization and open participation, choirs aim to provide a space for care for leisure beyond the culture production of the capitalist corporate state. Their activities are close to Maurizio Lazzarato's (2004:187) claim that each human being should be an artist as a precondition to challenging capitalist accumulation, which is no longer based solely on the exploitation of labor but also on that of knowledge, life, health, culture, and leisure. Moreover, choirs' activities call for shifting our attention from work as the most important field of political struggle in neoliberalism to leisure, which becomes a crucial arena for contemporary political struggles for alternative social relations. This, I believe, not only is relevant for the post-Yugoslav choral movement but also can be a productive point of discussion of amateur music activities today globally.

### **Romantic Anticapitalism?**

The choirs' engagement with both resistance and self-organization is certainly not a one-sided undertaking; instead, as presented, it is a complex and ambiguous way of using the past as a platform for experimenting with new forms of political engagement. In fact, the activities of activist choirs can be seen as an example of contestations and challenges in the sonic articulation of political becoming in the current moment: singers refer to partisan songs as sonic artifacts that carry an affective power in mobilizing people. They avoid any kind of ambiguities or negative values associated with this repertoire and present it as cleaned of the historical and sociopolitical appropriations by different groups and individuals, particularly during state socialism after World War II. They attempt to temporally transcend concrete historical experience by reawakening the affective intensities attached to the notion of Yugoslav antifascist resistance and socialist revolution. Such a "romanticized view" is criticized as depoliticization and dehistoricization, which, in Mitja Velikonja's (Perica and Velikonja 2012:155) words, makes it easier to commodify the legacy of Yugoslav antifascist resistance. Choirs' approach to antifascism is also seen as a result of the fact that the majority of the activists are well-educated young upper- and middle-class people who take an elitist approach that does not necessarily mobilize the marginalized social strata they sing about. Some critical voices even claim that choirs are alternative, urban, pop revolutionaries (see Matoz 2013) that care more about their self-representation than the concrete effects of their activities.<sup>11</sup>

However, I do not agree with the stance that romanticizing necessarily makes choirs' undertakings depoliticized, banal, or a joyful nostalgic commodification of resistance in a moment of political exhaustion. I would instead argue

precisely the opposite: by taking the romantic approach, choirs produce a fictional space positioned in the interplay between experience and expectation, memory and possibility, bringing new dimensions into the politics of the future through a reconnection with the past.<sup>12</sup> Choirs do this by enabling affective alliances through collective re-sounding of the antifascist past. Singing about collective resistance, class solidarity, a vision of a better day, and a utopian reality helps to cultivate new political feelings in an environment of political exhaustion. Moreover, in a time when alternative political projects have seemed to vanish from the political imagination not just in the post-Yugoslav societies but also in many societies in the neoliberal fringe, members of activist choirs are on a quest for future-oriented idealism. They reconsider the idealist view and utopia from the renewed sense of the social and argue that it is not just allowed but also necessary to strive for new social relations and another, "better" world. Recalling both affective resistance and self-organization, choirs simultaneously remind us that utopia exists only in the quotidian as a concept that embraces the politics of the here and now (Muñoz 2009:10).

Simultaneously, choirs, through their singing activities and their internal organization, demonstrate a need for new forms of political subjectivity based on radical amateurism and politics of leisure as an alternative to "market-led democratic individualism" (Šuvaković 2012:311). This looks even more important if we understand neoliberalism as a technology of managing and administering our social lives through a system of calculations (Lazzarato 2004; Ong 2006). Further developing an argument of Jonathan Crary (2013), Marina Gržinić writes that a way to escape neoliberal devastation is not just to take time for yourself but to "make time for [ourselves] and with others" (Gržinić and Tatlić 2014:17). Re-sounding partisan songs in a community with others cultivates the feelings that compel people to start cooperating in ways alternative to those espoused by neoliberal capitalism. In this way, affective solidarities produced through the collective experience of singing and listening foster new forms of social organization, making choirs' activities an important vehicle for both thinking about and practicing alternative social relations, transforming political imaginaries, and emancipating potentialities.



## Notes:

1. This text is an excerpt of the article Hofman, Ana. 2020. *Disobedient: activist choirs, radical amateurism and the politics of the past after Yugoslavia*, *Ethnomusicology* 64 (1): 89-108, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/ethnomusicology.64.1.0089?seq=1>
2. For information about the Škart collective and that particular project see: <http://www.skart.rs/>.
3. The choir name combines the words *hor* (choir) and *orkestar* (orchestra).
4. The fact that one-third of the choirs are all female also shows a high female presence in the movement and a general dedication to the women's and LGBTQ+ rights.
5. For existing studies on individual choirs, see Paunović (2010); Petrović (2011); Radulović (2012); Hofman (2014, 2016); Reitsamer (2016); Reitsamer and Hofman (2017).
6. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was formally founded on November 29, 1943, under the name Democratic Federal Yugoslavia (*Demokratska federativna Jugoslavija*). Until its dissolution in 1992 it was led by the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, and it consisted of six republics, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia, and two provinces, Kosovo and Vojvodina.
7. The genre of partisan songs was considered problematic not just after the dissolution of Yugoslavia but also during socialism. Dominant approaches treated partisan songs as a broader category that includes not only songs created within the partisan units but also other revolutionary and resistance songs “from all times and nations” that were performed during the People's Liberation War. In the accounts of the Yugoslav folklorists and ethnomusicologists, this genre was discarded as not being “real” and authentic folklore (for more about the genre of partisan songs, see Hofman 2016: 27–54; Hofman and Pogačar 2017).
8. Song written by Milan Apih (1906–92), a writer, pre-World War II Yugoslav communist activist, partisan fighter, and functionary after World War II in 1940 during his prison days in a political prison camp in Bileća, a town located in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The English translation of the lyrics is by the author.
9. Miloš Popović, a philosophy professor and poet, wrote the lyrics of “Konjuh planinom” at the end of 1941. He used a melody of the Russian song Там, вдали за рекой (There, far beyond the river), written by Николая Кооля (1924) and composed by Александр Васильевич Александров in 1928, and added lyrics dedicated to the Husinjski miners, who massively joined the Yugoslav partisan movement. Soon after, many partisan units adopted the song, which became widely popular among fighters. Activists emphasize an essential link between a fight for workers' rights and antifascist resistance.
10. This concept was often applied controversially, and it has been changing in accordance with the overall socioeconomic transformations of Yugoslavia; however, establishing an infrastructure (culture centers, music schools, or other institutions) proved to make the most visible impact in culture and artistic activities.

11. Activist singers are completely aware of such critical stances and embrace them in their discussions and public appearances. See Hofman (2016:163–71).

12. For extensive discussion of the role of sound in the articulation of new notions of actuality, possibility, impossibility, knowledge, and value, see Voegelin (2014).

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The Living School is organized by the Multimedia Institute (Club MaMa) and Brandon LaBelle, an artist based in Berlin, as part of the artistic research project Social Acoustics / Communities in Movement. The School is open to everyone: no prior skills needed.

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