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The Politics of Interconnectedness and the *QueerBeograd Cabaret*

Tracing recent local proposals for the politics of interconnectedness and exploring historical genealogies of gender and political difference, my Ph.D. project looks at transnational encounters in Belgrade as spaces of critique and negotiation driven by the desire to transform subjectivities into actors less entangled with hierarchical and exploitative social relations and less defined by different intersecting violent vectors of power. The research focuses on the QueerBeograd festival which was organized by the transnational collective QueerBeograd, formed within the framework of the alter-globalist movement of the 2000s, in the hostile social situation of post-socialist Serbia. The collective organized a clandestine cultural festival in Belgrade and annually produced *QueerBeograd Cabaret*¹ which departed from “Weimar Cabaret,” globalized queer-core subculture and local activist and cultural history, creating a satirical political (leftist) performance platform serving as the space for the articulation of dissent and production of social protest.

The dissertation is structured in three parts. In the first part I argue for the break in the image of the hegemonic genealogy of queer, questioning the totality of the “East”-“West” binary. This approach conceptualizes the relations between the “West” and the “East” in a new way. I point out the local history of production of gender and political difference through art, visual culture, activism and underground culture before, during and after socialist Yugoslavia. Looking at QueerBeograd cultural activist positioning and at international queer discourses, I argue that the intervention by QueerBeograd in the queer discourse is a political act of transformation.

In the second part I turn to the creative practice, i.e. the *QueerBeograd Cabaret* in order to examine how the premise of the politics of interconnectedness, that the collective proposes,

¹ The cabaret was directed by Jet Moon, an activist and artist from London. Performances were collectively produced by her and local activists featuring international activists-performers.

by distancing itself from identity politics, is embodied and represented in its performance production. I expose empirical material about the *QueerBeograd Cabaret* along with my interpretation of single performances of three cabaret editions (altogether sixteen performances). I argue that the *QueerBelgrade Cabaret*, which consists of gender and sexuality performances, exposes two different aspects of performativity: its compulsory gendering and the necessary failure of such force. This is however complicated by its contesting of rigorous “EUropean” immigration policy and opting for free border crossing policy, rejecting local nationalist agenda, discussing history politics of the post-Yugoslav space, and formulating capitalism critique.

In the third part I perform an analysis of the referential framework (Weimar cabaret, globalized queer cabaret culture and queer-core, No Border politics as well as local cultural history) in order to understand the production of meaning of this trans-cultural production and to situate it as a transversal practice which was operating outside of the institution of arts. Further, my interest is to identify the grammar and the form of the politics of interconnectedness in this specific artistic and cultural production: what are the elements of interconnectedness and how they are staged – through what kind of images, texts and by using which kind of iconographies? Additional aspects of analysis deal with the question how trans-nationality affects the process of artistic creation and how it affects the politics of interconnectedness. Out of this, I proceed with concluding points.

Methodology and approach

The thesis takes the multi-actor perspective that insists on multiple power relations and the role of different actors in society. The topic is under-researched². Along with interviews that I conducted, I use exiting written accounts on the festival, incomplete video documentation, photographs, and my own memory. I take an interdisciplinary approach, combining academic disciplines of queer studies, queer art theory, transnational studies, performance theory, art theories and histories concerned with the analysis of leftist art and activism.

² Irene Dioli, in her master thesis (defended in 2006) wrote one chapter about the very beginnings of QueerBelgrade’s work. As far as I know, this is the only study of what will later become *QueerBeograd Cabaret*. Cf. Dioli, Irene. 2011. *Queer Theatrical Performance and Social Action in Belgrade*. In *PECOB’s Volumes: MA theses selected for publication*. Ed. Ms Aurora Domeniconi, vol. 1, 104-195. Bologna: PECOB: Portal on Central Eastern and Balkan Europe (www.pecob.eu) <http://www.pecob.eu/flex/cm/pages/ServeAttachment.php/L/EN/D/e%252F4%252F5%252FD.1ec23e04ec65d38e8a26/P/BLOB%3AID%3D3038> (accessed May 27, 2014).