

How Theaters Remember: Cultures of Memory in Institutionalized Systems

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to explore organizational policies and strategies regarding the institutional memory of Belgrade's repertoire theaters. The concept of institutional (organizational) memory has not been developed within the culture of memory theory. The role of theater in the culture of memory has been researched mostly through studies of its repertoire, corresponding to how theaters deal with issues of glory, guilt, or shame. This study explores how theaters rethink their own past and organizational culture, how they use their capacity for re-imagining themselves, for clarifying their role and function in different historical moments. The objective of this research is to identify the main institutional policies and types of strategies used for preserving institutional memory through key narratives of remembering, and key methods of inter-generational transfer. The sample comprises of four Belgrade-based public repertoire theaters: the Yugoslav Dramatic Theater (JDP), the Belgrade Dramatic Theater (BDP), Atelje 212, and Bitef Theater.

Specific attention is given to the means of transmission, of individual (episodic) memories into the collective consciousness, influencing organizational cultures and

shaping a theater's identity (semantic memory). Research has shown that there are important differences in active policies of preserving institutional memory among Belgrade's theaters. Different organizational and programming strategies were implemented in order to safeguard institutional identity and memory, particularly in theaters with a permanent ensemble. The major difference is between theaters whose culture of memory might be called "non-existent" (Bitef), or "in storage" (BDP), and those succeeding in creating a functional memory (JDP, Atelje 212).

Keywords: institutional memory, organizational culture, memory policies, memory representations, Belgrade, theater, identity

INTRODUCTION

The concept of institutional (organizational) memory has not been developed within the culture of memory theory. Social scientists such as Maurice Halbwachs and Jan and Alleida Assmans have dealt mostly with collective memories leading towards

“national memory” that helps constructs national identity and its representation. The key research question in these studies revolves around the notion of how societies remember (Connerton, 2002), or how this transfer from individual to collective memory is realized. Thus, the politics of memory have been seen as a part of a larger cultural-educational public policy focusing on the development of national identity and its representation. In this sense, the role of theaters within larger national or city memory politics has also been researched (Banu, Dragičević-Šešić, Lužina, Gluhović, et al.), questioning the ways in which theaters, through their repertoires, contribute to national memory: what are the traumas, i.e., ethical and socio-political issues that are debated on stage; what are the forgotten facts that theaters makes public; or, how do theaters deal with issues of guilt and shame? However, the way in which theaters rethinks themselves, their past and culture, how they mobilize their capacities for re-imagining, i.e., clarifying their own role and function in different historical moments, and ostensibly how they communicate this to society at large. However, these questions have remained unanswered.

Managerial theory, though often emphasizing the importance of organizational cultures (organizational values, philosophy and identity), has not developed research linked to institutional memory. Strategic analysis comprised questions regarding a “corporate life cycle” (Adizes, 2011), namely, representing organizational history as a series of events worth remembering yet neglecting the issue of institutional memory as part of its identity. However, if we use as an example, we could trace museums of factories and mines created during the time of Socialist Yugoslavia

which rarely had an organic link with the institution’s enterprise and/or its daily life (*List of Technical Museums*, 2013). Thus, during the post-socialist political transition period, many of those “collections” disappeared in different ways. When cultural organizations are concerned, the idea of institutional museum collections resurfaced recently when the National Theater of Serbia opened its own museum, in 2010.

Institutional memory should be an important part of *knowledge management* (the management of facts and information which are the products of activity of an organization), a recent addition to managerial theory (Megill, 2007), mostly because numerous widespread international organizations (UNESCO, Open Society Foundation, HIVOS, etc.) have been facing problems in creating a unique organizational culture – but most of all, in exchanging and using knowledge developed in different, and sometimes distant, divisions of a single organization. It is not only that money had been wasted but also that human knowledge and achievements were left unused and forgotten. At the same time, the trans-generational and traditional tools of recognizing achievements and values (e.g., anniversaries, monographs) seemed to be insufficient and incomplete.

The rise of interdisciplinarity makes knowledge management even more important. For example, how can one analysis of “endangered heritage” completed by a UNESCO expert become known within other relevant departments of UNESCO, regardless of the sector or discipline in which it was originally created? Furthermore, how can we ensure that this analysis is remembered and utilized after a number of years? In the non-profit world, “knowledge management” has

simply become an alternate managerial discipline. As a result, no books and very few research studies in cultural management have been devoted to institutional memory and knowledge management, while, in accordance with the predominance of neoliberal thoughts in cultural policy (Belfiore, 2008), topics such as the philosophy of change, entrepreneurialism (Haghoort), strategic management (Burns, Colbert), project management (Dragičević Šešić, Dragojević, Stojković), leadership, accountability, and others were, and are still, dominating the cultural/art management discourse (Stefanović, 2012). The culture of memory in present-day Serbia focuses on big “national narratives”, or in civil society on actions about controversial (trauma) moments through the history of private lives. As a result, important “stories” linked to the identities and achievements of cultural institutions – stories which are significant for understanding larger social and cultural processes – have been put aside.

RESEARCH AIMS

The aim of this study is to identify ways and modalities of preserving institutional memory in the contemporary Belgrade theater system (within a larger research project titled *Organizational Cultures and Institutional Memory: The Cultural System of the City of Belgrade*). In Belgrade, numerous theaters have been created since the Second World War in different socio-political contexts, which have in turn influenced their respective missions and values. Some were created as state theaters, others as city theaters, but both types were later transformed into self-governing institutions. During the transition period, by law in

1992, they were re-étatized, and then with the law of 2008, they were reformed once again as public institutions. However, this more recent law has not been fully implemented (i.e., no real competitions or autonomy for theater directors), and the theatrical laws that the theater community continuously demands have never reached the level of public debate.

The objective of the research is to identify the main institutional policies and types of strategies used for preserving the institutional memory of Belgrade’s city theaters through key narratives of remembering. Specific attention will be given to the means of transferring individual (episodic) memories from private to collective, by influencing organizational cultures and shaping theater identity (semantic memory). Research questions include: do theaters have active policies regarding institutional memory; what are the organizational and programming strategies implemented in order to safeguard institutional identity and memory; what are the defining narratives (explicit and implicit) and how they are used in preserving institutional memory; how do institutions remember the dark sides of their history, or institutional trauma (censorship and self-censorship, rejection of creative dissident personalities, etc.); and how is “dissonant heritage” memorialized?

This research takes into account the difference between episodic memory and semantic memory (Wickery, 2011), focusing on the ways in which individual recollections are transferred into semantic memory (long-term memory based on structured and systematized knowledge about an institution). Semantic knowledge overcomes meanings of individual episodes memorialized in different

“institutional corners”, thus becoming a kind of knowledge that can be transmitted to the public. We will focus on the dynamics between individual and collective memory, starting with the thesis that memory structuration is necessary within cultural institutions so as to enable the creation of their resilient narratives and identities.

In creating institutional politics of memory, *horizons of memory* are usually defined within the mission and vision, or implicitly expressed within the said organizational culture. Those horizons in the case of Belgrade’s theaters might be extended by institutional identification with the nation, city, region, Europe, or the world (contributing to local, national, and supranational identities, religious or cultural communities, etc.). Thus, institutional memory widens its horizons towards the past, but also towards the future (Assman, 2011: 21). The assumption is that besides the National Theater, which is defined as a “protector” and creator of national identity, Belgrade’s city theaters have been “freer” in choosing and defining their horizons of memory.¹

The other hypothesis relates to the importance of intergenerational memory communication and transfer; in theater these “crossings between generations, mean[s] crossings of their experiences, narratives and destinies” (Assman, 2011: 21). How does this intergenerational aspect function in theater institutions with and without ensembles (as this should be one of the key aspects of institutional memory policy)? Are there narratives which can survive their initial generation and be interesting and valuable for those who have heard the narrative after the fourth or the fifth generation shift? There is no research showing the extent of “multi-generational”

institutional memory, namely, how past events and experiences are transferred as memories to newcomers (Assman, 2011: 25), although this question is important for theater management (each generation might change their memory perspective in accordance with the value [mission] changes or changes in the socio-political context).

Institutional memories are developed and endorsed only in communication with other people, particularly in verbal communication (Assman, 2011: 24). Collective memory develops only in proximity to everyday interaction and common experiences. Theater is a space that provides both an artistic collective and audiences to share common experiences and verbalize/re-tell stories in theater foyers, salons, cafes, and restaurants. The research takes into account the existence and use of those gathering spaces in theater institutions as well as the policies regarding them. The main focus of our research will be the narratives through which memory is transferred from the individual to the collective, namely from the older to the younger generations. Was there any “grand narrative”, and is there still any need for a grand narrative in these organizations?

A narrative might be the accumulation of past events or a carefully-selected set of events, yet in both cases it has to be articulated, “to be a story”. Sometimes a story about “founding fathers” is not a single narrative but rather a set of micro-stories (Benali, 2012). Namely, a narrative has to inspire new artists entering the collective, to keep the loyalty of audiences, to help endorse identity, but also to open new roads to the future. Although it would be important to study “bottom-up narratives” (how people outside of an institution talk about it), this

study focuses on top-down narratives created by theater institutions themselves (politics of memory).

Institutional memory, even more than national memories, keeps remembrance on “triumph and not on trauma”, which are, according to Assman, the two main categories of collective remembrance (2011: 12). Our hypothesis is that memories of traumatic moments are not kept in institutional memory but rather in the collective memories of other theaters, or the larger cultural sphere.

The last hypothesis is related to links between institutional and the wider socio-cultural memory. As Assman emphasizes, social memory is based on biology; it has its time frame (80-100 years), it is inter-generational and based on conversations. In other words, cultural memory is trans-generational and it based on material artifacts, without time limits, as it uses signs and symbols, monuments, anniversaries, customs, texts, and photographs. To be really functional, cultural memory has to surpass its “storage for artifacts” status. Memory-storage has an interest in everything, and archives everything, without taking into account values, norms, etc. In times of value changes, without certainty, many institutions have opted for this fact-based and objective approach. However, real cultural memory is created *today, for tomorrow*, by selecting the facts to be collected, and then explaining them in big narrative ways. Without storage-memory accumulation, they run the risk of becoming illegible or being thrown away as information of no use in/for the future.

Functional memory is the result of memory politics based on institutional values and norms, attempting to forge links between past, present, and even future developments. Certain things from the institutional

past might be temporarily forgotten or re-read according to current institutional values. To test this thesis, we will examine monographs written for different anniversaries and repertoires (where repeated texts and authors testify about how theaters canonize their achievements – the method of canonization starts with selection but depends more on repetition). Cultural memory can be fostered by “storage-memory” (which usually relies on books, images, films, archives, museums, and libraries) and functional memory, which uses more performative practices (Connerton, 2002) like traditional customs, rituals, processes of canonization, and artifacts (Assman, 2011: 68).

The research sample will involve four Belgrade theaters created in different historical periods: Yugoslav Dramatic Theater (in continuation identified as: JDP, founded in 1947), Belgrade Dramatic Theater (in continuation identified as: BDP, 1950), Atelje 212 (1956), and Bitef Theater (1989). These four case studies will be used to investigate all the instruments of memory communication (internal and external), through the following methods: interviews, observation, content analysis, discourse analysis, and narrative analysis. The materials for qualitative analysis and interpretation comprise of monographs, brochures, marketing material, theater archives, and photo documentation. The instruments of memory policy and memory communication that will be analyzed include: annual celebrations, anniversaries, prizes and festivals, dedicated theater spaces, memorabilia, photographs, sculptures and paintings in the theaters’ buildings, logos, lettering, and other marketing tools and artifacts.

THE BELGRADE THEATRE SCENE: FIELD RESEARCH

Art-centered theaters have always been very conscious about the need to archive and memorialize. However, there were no official standards and procedures for this in Belgrade, thus each theater institution had to define its own policy and ways of collecting and archiving memories. In this chapter, we'll discuss the data collected from the conducted field research in an attempt to identify types of memory preservation, the existence of key narratives (semantic memory), and the extent of functional memory creation.

Yugoslav Dramatic Theater (JDP)

JDP was created in the turbulent postwar period when the new federal socialist state wanted to form its own institutions as a representation of new values, ideas, and orientations. The ideaⁱⁱ to establish the theater came from "above", and the prominent, energetic young Slovenian theater director, Bojan Stupica, was invited to select the best actors from across the whole country and bring them to Belgrade so as to constitute a repertoire theater that would reflect the needs of the new society. Consequently, the official day of the theater's birth is taken to be April 3rd, 1948, when its premiere performance was staged (Ivan Cankar's *King of Betajnova*, directed by Stupica himself).

Since its beginning, JDP had an active policy regarding preserving its institutional memory. In the beginning, the theater had an archive and a museum departmentⁱⁱⁱ (*Pet godina rada*, 15), which do not exist as such today. Regularly, for every anniversary since

the five-year celebration, a monograph book (one or more) was published, with the history of the theater re-evaluated and revalorized, its main narratives repeated. However, besides the initial institutional strategies regarding memory preservation (archive and publishing departments), later policies were incoherent, i.e., defined by the "person in charge". For example, "Žika Stojković was archiving materials for each performance, I continued that as a dramaturg, but both times I left the theater, it was thrown away and this policy was interrupted – there is unfortunately no system" (Ćirilov, interview, 2013, our translation). The main permanent activity in this sense (besides celebrating anniversaries) is an annual celebration on the 3rd of April – the moment of "remembering", but also the process of evaluating and canonizing for the future memory of the previous season (selecting best performances, actors, directors, giving prizes to other theater employees). During Stupica's last mandate, the second theater stage opened, in 1969, later to be named "Bojan Stupica" out of respect for its famous director and founder, while in 2006 the main stage received the name "Ljuba Tadić" (a company member since 1961 and one of the star actors of the theater), a year after his passing.

JDP's horizon of memory is extended to "Yugosfera", as its name attests to. The key founding narrative was not, and is not, Yugoslav unitarism, but rather the *idea of brotherhood and unity* as a founding ideological narrative that did not keep on with time but was replaced with genuine regional theatrical interests (expressed through the repertoire, the programming policy, and its guest directors). This "regionalism" was linked to the *narrative of importance and "grandeur"* – always underlying that

this theater was established by regrouping the most creative and the most talented actors and directors from all over the former Yugoslavia. The “Yugo-orientation” should officially be abandoned after five years (as the theater was downgraded from a federal to a city theater), though the name has remained till present day. This idea of its creation as a Yugoslav theater did not allow information about the transfer of the founding rights (to the city of Belgrade) enter institutional memory, as it would definitely narrow the horizon of memory.

This horizon of memory is transferred inter-generationally by using different communicative means – from name, logo, and lettering, which still keep the Yugoslav^{iv} socialist character, to texts in monographs, which underline this narrative. Key agents of memory safe-keepers are three member-founders and artistic legends of this theater: Marija Crnobori, Mira Stupica, and Branka Veselinov, who all acted in some of the first performances, but who have also remained quite active in contemporary Belgrade’s cultural life. The commitment of this first generation of actors was demonstrated on numerous occasions: stories about Crnobori coming every day during the theater’s reconstruction (even when it was snowing, when she’d fashioned for herself specific “snow-chains” to brave the winter weather) were among the many demonstrating this devotion.

The most important space where this inter-generational communication took place was the theater’s salon, as well as the rehearsal rooms where artistic team members would remind ensembles about the values and norms instituted through time. However, with time – especially since its damage in the fire of 1997 till the spring reconstruction of 2003 – the

salon and the other collective spaces within or in the proximity to the theater lost their importance, as a new generation of actors do not hang around in the theater beyond the rehearsal or performance times (Babić, 2009 : 140).

JDP’s main narrative is a *narrative of stars in a cohesive, firm ensemble, collective* (Mata Milošević^v); a “talented ensemble” (Gligorić), characterized by a collective endeavor and the constructive contribution of each individual to collective achievement (Belović), as it is a “theater where big actors are playing small roles” (Ćirilov, 103, our own translation), where “artistic unity” in spirit and style is achieved. In this respect, the key repeated memory was the one about rehearsals and trainings “in church”, which in the first five years were the usual method of work, followed by permanent discussions around their own achievements (self-evaluation as method). However, this narrative about collective unity has changed over time, from hot words like *devotion, enthusiasm, passion, ambition, sacrifice*, etc., in monographs up until 1973, to more “cold ideas”, to use this Dahrendorfian expression, as *quality* and *professionalism*. The fact that this theater could bring stars to be part of a team was always a point of pride, even when a group of young actors came together in the same year (1969) – Bojan’s babies, as they were called (Babić, 2009: 63) – they were raised individually to the levels of stars, while at the same time accepting a collective JDP identity and still keeping their unique generational identity.

JDP’s second big memory narrative is a *narrative of grandeur and quality* linked with *renomee* (reputation and renown), and the informal status of a leading Yugoslav theater. Even the memory about the way the founding decision was executed contributes to its cult

status: the role-model was MHAT – not aesthetically but due to its importance and representativity (Ćirilov, 2013); the main managerial aim was always to regroup, to involve the best, those who could introduce new qualities of “modernism” in the theater’s esthetics – Stupica, Milošević, Belović, Tanhofer – directors who were famous for their zeal to overcome a realistic approach (prevailing in the National Theater in Belgrade), while Dedinac and Gligorić were praised for the high literary value of their plays. They “brought absolute quality” in the selection of the repertoire, which was immediately recognized both by the critics and the public as an anthology of world drama. Yugoslav classics came later, slowly; besides opening with a socially-engaged Slovenian Cankar piece, and the huge success of the Dubrovnik Renaissance writer Držić and the Serbian romanticist Sterija (with his *Patriots*, repeatedly on the repertoire^{vi}). However, it took some time to allow contemporary dramatic writers to be staged.

This story *about repertoire as “anthology”* will be repeated from monograph to monograph, perpetuating the image of JDP as a theater with high literary and directorial standards, one which avoids experimentalism and innovation. One story written by Slobodan Selenić (in the monograph devoted to the 25th anniversary), and then revived by Milosav Mirković (in the monograph for the 50th anniversary) deserves to be told as one significantly contributing to the narrative of grandeur:

Some theaters are built to last, such as Comedie Française (a theater of national culture). Some theaters are created to move and change ideas, or aesthetics, such as Antoine Theatre Libre, which moved world

theater into a new direction, but had a very short life. Without those first theaters newly-created knowledge would not be codified and canonized. Without the second, theater would be dead. Yugoslav Dramatic Theater always saw itself as belonging to the first group.

Theater also memorializes through programming – for JDP, re-making or regular iterations of key world writers, from Shakespeare and Molière, Sophocles and Plautus, to Dostoyevsky and Ostrovsky. This was not only a part of repertoire policy but also of the policy of institutional recollection and identity reinforcing. The publishing department not only offered dramatic texts to audiences but also very significant program catalogues with literary, historical, and contextual analysis. Through the repertoire, several main lines have been maintained – although in the new socio-political concept one line might have a completely different meaning. Programming Dobrica Ćosić’s *Otkriće/Discovery* in 1960 as a highly-stylized recitative drama was quite significant, while staging Ćosić’s *The Kolubara Battle* (1983) and *Valjevo Hospital* (1989) in the 1980s was read as entering the nationalistic trend in Serbian “high culture”. However, in 1989, Haris Pašović directed Aristophanes’ *Birds*, Edward Miller Anski’s *Dibuk*, Nikita Milivojević Ionesco’s *Jack, or the Submission*, Larry Zapia Mamet’s *Life in Theater*, and more, all showing this continuity as a principal value in making the repertoire while addressing the best young Yugoslav theater directors. It seems that through these different implicit strategies of recollection, JDP succeeded in achieving a functional memory, betting on continuity as a value and trying to recall certain past values, by integrating them in their organizational policies under different management

and thus creating a firm link with the future. Through narratives which ensure semantic memory even the youngest members of the ensemble know not only the history of the theater, and its achievements, but also its constant values, such as the use of a star ensemble and commitment to the team, the repertoire as an anthology of plays, professionalism, quality, and stylization (the modern approach) without experimentation.

Finally, we wanted to see how a theater deals with trauma, how it memorializes traumatic moments from its own history, for example the removal of the performance of *When the Pumpkins Blossomed* in 1968. The trauma in Serbian theatrical censorship was linked to the fact that there was no official censorship. That message would be transmitted mostly by telephone to theater managers, and then through a complex procedure the collective "decided" to remove the performance from the stage. Therefore, it was more traumatic than as it would have been in the situation of real state censorship. This fact began to be mentioned only after the period of transition, and it was widely-publicized by theater scholars (Klaić, Jovičević, Pašić), while in the monographs it appears only as factual data without a narrative, especially without valorization of what that fact meant for the atmosphere in the theater and for the careers of its participants. Trauma was disposed of. This has partially changed in the last "memory book" through the personal stories of different artists (Babić, 2009: 71, 103, 110).

Belgrade Dramatic Theater (BDP)

BDP was founded in 1947 as a city theater on the outskirts of Belgrade, with the idea to offer theater art

to the working class community. "The space where the theater was built was once a place where circuses put their tents and offered performances" (Pašić, 2007: 11). The first premiere was Boris Gorbатов's *The Youth of the Fathers* on the stage of the National Theatre in 1948, and its first performance on its own stage was *The Suspect* by Branislav Nušić in 1949. In the beginning, this theater staged Soviet writers and Russian classics (Ostrovsky, Chekov, Dostoyevsky), as most Belgrade theatres did. Very quickly, however, BDP discovered American and English playwrights and while it seemed that socialist society started liberalizing, this theater experienced its first case of censorship with *Thieves' Carnival* by Anouilh, after the third showing, when it was taken off the repertoire. However, this period is still considered as the golden age of this theater.

The methods of memorializing are mostly standardized as in other theaters. For every anniversary, since the 5th year celebration, a monograph is published where memories are presented through individual views of different stakeholders. For the 60th anniversary, in 2007, the theater published an ambitious monograph, in which its history was recalled through different perspectives, from sets of facts through personal memories of the main participants. This monograph represents a relevant resource for small stories about the theater that can be transferred between generations.

The anniversary, as the main permanent event which happens every February, is an opportunity to memorialize achievements and reward accomplishments. Instruments include a prize with the name Tatjana Lukjanova (an actress), which in 2013 was not given to one person but rather to the whole ensemble

(the idea was to boost ensemble spirit and collective affiliation). In order to preserve the memory of one of the most prominent actors of the golden age of this theater, the main stage was named Rade Marković. Restaging as a tool for institutional memory and identity preservation was also used, and signature plays from the golden years, like *The Glass Menagerie*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, were put on again.

The horizon of memory in the case of BDP is as it is stated in the name: a Belgrade theater that in the beginning was set in a remote location of the city. Today this district of Belgrade represents a dynamic urban community where the narrative from the 1950s of a *neighborhood theater* has changed to the narrative of an *urban city theater*. This horizon of memory without specific urban narratives is not endorsed, and it seemed that the theater had not developed small urban (or neighborhood) stories to remember.

BDP, contrary to JDP or Atelje 212, did not have a narrative of star actors – even less of star directors. Since its beginnings, the main narrative of this theater was its ensemble, as a team in which every actor could play any role. The other important narrative was a theatre of new modern literature, which introduced American writers like Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller as well as American culture to Belgrade audiences. During the presentation of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, most of the audience members saw a refrigerator for the first time on the stage.

The institutional trauma that marked the history of this theater was the censorship of *Waiting for Godot* in 1954. Although it seems that there was no official censorship, it was a clear case of self-censorship, which for an ensemble was even worse. After seeing a

controlled rehearsal Miroslav Krleža, a prominent writer and figure in Yugoslav cultural life, commented to the theatre director Dinulović that *Godot* was a nihilist performance, which signaled a red light. Dinulović linked nihilism to concepts of liberalism. Furthermore, Dinulović was afraid that playing *Godot* would destroy the theater and organized a meeting of the artistic council, who then decided to veto the play (Marković, 2008: 166).

Godot premiered in an alternative space (in the atelier of the painter Mića Popović) and was immediately seen as an event to provoke many stories in Belgrade's cultural circles (Marković, 2008: 172). In 1956, *Godot* continued to be present on the Belgrade theater scene, but this time at the new theater Atelje 212. Besides *Godot*, one other case of self-censorship happened in 1952, when *Thieves' Carnival* was removed from the repertoire after three performances. These events announced the beginning of the end of the modern narrative, a narrative of an “open, innovative theater”, and led to confusion over the identity of BDP, as well as its mission and repertoire. The actors and the audience demanded national authors but there were none available at that time^{vii} (Pašić, 2008).

The second large trauma was when the theater's founder (the City's Council for Culture) decided to merge BDP with the Comedy Theater, into a hybrid called the Contemporary Theater in 1959. The idea was to cut expenses and have a joint management and ensemble. No one thought about the respective theater identities and specificities. This artificial fusion provoked perplexity and uncertainty among the staff, and during this time many popular actors left BDP, thus a specific collective memory was lost. This

attempt at integration failed, and the Contemporary Theater existed as a single company only until 1975. Afterwards the renewal of BDP began, inaugurating a tumultuous period in the 1980s and 1990s.

In the monograph's index of plays there is no information about *Godot*; however, many personal memoirs mention this event as a tragic one for the theater. For Atelje 212, staging *Godot* symbolizes a heroic and epic narrative, while in the official history of BDP it is sent to oblivion. Still, on the website the story about the merger with the Comedic Theater is remembered as part of the organizational design, as historical data, although Minja Dedić, Lela Kurtović, and Slobodan Stojanović, in interviews and memoirs, admit that this fusion was absurd and unsuccessful. In the conclusion of his interview, Slobodan Stojanović says that: "we shared good and bad, but we remember only the good" (Pašić, 2007: 157, our own translation). It is obvious that lacking both artistic and managerial leadership, and having several traumatic re-organizations, it was difficult for the present management to create a unifying explanatory narrative that would lend coherence to this theater. The situation in the 1990s, when several members of its ensemble left the theater while some were degraded (Borka Pavićević), is objectively described on the theater's web page, but without a storyline which would afford the younger generations' an understanding.

Atelje 212

Atelje 212 was founded in 1956 by a group of Belgrade intellectuals led by Mira Trailović. "She succeeded in developing her theater space as an

organization that would place its mission in concordance with the international *zeitgeist*, while adhering to certain social norms and regulations" (Dragičević-Šešić, 2013: 4, our own translation). The opening play was *Faust*, directed by Trailović. Four years later, Atelje 212 was transformed into a theater with a permanent company (on Stupica's demand as its new director, and in 1962 it moved into a new building designed by Stupica himself.

Atelje 212 was a theater that wanted to change society by having an international vanguard repertoire that opened new and brave questions – "theater as a laboratory" (Dragičević-Šešić, 2013: 5, our own translation). The person behind this narrative was Trailović herself, the first female leader on Belgrade's theatrical scene. Aware of the context and the political sensitivity, she knew that the subversive nature of Atelje 212 had to be hidden since the communist regime could easily feel threatened by the openness and modernity of the surrounding events. The outcome of the theater's foundation was that this narrative of experimentation produced a setting in which Bitef was created in 1967.

Although the policy on preserving institutional memory is not explicit or an official part of the organizational or human resources allocation of tasks, Atelje 212 always had an active approach. The methods and activities in this regard were determined by each of the leaders, and the lack of continuity made evident. However, there has always been recognition of the need to preserve institutional identity that has been maintained throughout history. If we talk about programming and organizational activities, preserving institutional memory depended more on the respective leaders' decisions, their preferences, poetics,

and ambitions. For its anniversaries, Atelje 212 published monographs in which current and former members usually assessed and reconsidered the achievements of the company. Exhibiting photographs from famous performances in common spaces, like the halls and corridors, was always present, no matter the changes in management.

One other important instrument in preserving memory includes the building itself, situated in a non-theatrical street with no cultural infrastructure (Dragičević-Šešić, 2013: 6). In front of the building is a statue of Zoran Radmilović, one of the most popular actors in all of Yugoslavia. In the hall, there are busts of Ljubomir Muci Draškić, Bojan Stupica, and again Radmilović. The theater's bar also had a special role to play in internal memory politics. This bar was a place for inter-generational memory transfer. The narrative about the bar used to have a special meaning for the staff, but also for the public. Stories about gatherings and intellectual debates in this bar were legendary among the cultural and political elites.

Re-staging plays that have already been very successful (e.g., *Hair*) was always part of the unofficial policy that most of the leaders respected. Domestic authors like Aleksandar Popović, Bora Ćosić, Ljubomir Simović, and Dušan Kovačević were always on the repertoire; this continuous policy reinforced the theater's image as one of satirical contemporary comedy. Horizons of memory in the case of Atelje 212 are identified with Belgrade, with a strong cosmopolitan character. This character is preserved by stories about touring all over the world (USA, Mexico, Iran), also about taking part in different festivals (Dragičević-Šešić, 2013). For example, the play *Miracle in Shargan* participated in the Theatre of Nations in

Paris (Theatre Escape Cardin, 3-4 June 1977), which was a big success for a city theater from Eastern Europe.

Although institutional identity is safeguarded through narratives and material artifacts, some of the stories are forgotten and rituals like celebrations and customs are not developed. Functional memory is achieved despite sporadic rituals and festivities which depend on current management decisions. Episodic memory exists, as it is partially transferred via written documents. However, it needs to be upgraded in view of coming generations that would need new narratives to safeguard the spirit and collective identity of Atelje 212 as a compact troupe, since Atelje 212's café-bar lost its central communicative function.

There are two grand narratives at play here: one, about a specific semi-dissident collective identity, and the other, about the uniqueness of the troupe and its members. Collective, critical thinking, semi-dissident Atelje 212 was a story in the wider narrative about the opening of culture in the city of Belgrade in the 1960s. These two narratives are interconnected, since the spirit and identity of Atelje 212 was based on the great artistic personalities who formed the semi-dissident circle marking Belgrade's cultural scene and put the theater on an international map.

The most famous generation of the theater's actors came between the 1950s and the 1970s. During this period, Atelje 212 was home to stars like Radmilović, Slobodan Aligrudić, Bekim Fehmiju, Danilo Bata Stojković, and many others. In the first period, it was a narrative of stars, in the second, a narrative of ensembles, which is still valid today. Previously, the audiences came to Atelje 212 because of Radmilović performing *Radovan III* or *King Ubu*, not necessarily

because of the play itself. Together with directors and writers like Stupica, Trailović, and Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz, actors developed something called the Atelje 212 performing style, characterized by cynicism, irony, sarcasm, and private or self-reflexive remarks with insinuations to daily events (public or private).

If we look into the memory policy of the recent period we find two important decisions. The theater in the basement is named after Petar Kralj, in 2012, memorializing the actor who performed the monodrama *Tola Manojlović Lived his Life* more than 400 times between 1967 and 2011; the other is about a festival devoted to former director Ljubomir Muci Draškić (it took place only twice, in 2011 and in 2012). These attempts to preserve the memory of two important figures have been initiated under the directorship of Kokan Mladenović. Muci Draškić was chosen as “he was the last one to bridge memories and the spirit between generations” (Novakov, interview, 2013, our own translation). He worked together with Trailović in the 1960s and 1970s, and in the 1980s continued as the theater’s manager.

Over time Atelje 212 modified its original mission, and from theater as a laboratory space that changes society, it developed into a socio-political critical force that was sarcastic and farcical. After 1964, the theater’s repertoire changed and contemporary Yugoslav drama was introduced with a lot of success (Aleksandar Popović). Staging liberal or subversive plays caused confrontations with political structures and censorship sometimes occurred. Although Atelje 212 was the first Eastern European theater to stage *Waiting for Godot* in 1956 – a play banned in all communist countries and previously canceled from the repertoire of BDP – in some other cases censorship

was inevitable. Still, a policy of remembrance is based on triumph and not on trauma; this is the important legacy of Trailović. If she was not successful, like in the case of *Hats Down!*, she would find another solution for ‘keeping the team spirit up’ by suppressing the memory of the difficult incident. In the case of *Hats Down!*, that meant undertaking a successful tour in the United States during the revolutionary 1968, ending with her selection, as one of the most critical contemporary performances for Bitef. (Dragičević-Šešić, 2013: 10)

The theater’s approach to censorship was to neglect this event, and Trailović tried to present the censorship as a (her) managerial decision.

Bitef Theater

The stories of the Bitef Festival and the Bitef Theater overlap, as the Bitef Theater has been charged with preserving both institutional memories. However, there is a huge discrepancy in institutional memory policies regarding the two. In spite of the fact that the Bitef Festival was created in Atelje 212 by Trailović, the festival’s history has been memorialized independently from its organization-founder.

When Bitef Theater was created to be the institutional support for the Bitef Festival (as it has its own manager and artistic director), Jovan Ćirilov, the festival artistic director at the time, kept the festival’s identity separate, which was even reinforced by the installation of Anja Suša as co-selector (at that time she was director of the Theater Duško Radović). To be certain that the festival’s identity and its institutional memory would be safeguarded, Ćirilov transferred all of its organizational memory to the city’s archive,

which has since published two monographs and registered all relevant documents. Thus, important recollections about the life of the festival, its guests, performances, and role in the cultural life of Serbia and Yugoslavia, are preserved as anecdotes, while narratives of a “festival of new theatrical tendencies” and a “platform between West and East”, of “top-level professionalism” (Ćirilov, our own translation) give meaning to each of them. It can be said that semantic memory is achieved, as the festival’s leaders always knew that some narrative support is necessary for enabling an understanding of the festival. The repeated key words, accepted internally and externally, were *discovery and quality*.

Bitef Theater, however, does not archive an institutional memory. It seems that a policy of “erased memory” was there from the beginning. The previous history of the building as a theatrical space (the first rehearsals at JDP, later used as a storage space by the Boško Buha Theater) was erased from public memories (except in 1974 by the Bitef Festival for a performance of a Eugenio Barba play). Every new director and artistic director created their own managerial and artistic policy that prevented any continuity or safeguarding of memory. This was endorsed by the fact that Bitef Theater does not have its own ensemble – thus, does not have agents of memories, those who are capable to transfer this to new generations and teams. As a result, new programming policy cannot build on the achievements of any previous period, hence each manager has to start building their own repertoire and ensemble as well as their own audiences. There were many distinctive periods in the history of Bitef Theater, including:

-1989-1990, with artistic director Arsa Jovanović who contributed to the idea of Bitef Theater as a laboratory, also characterized by being open to multidisciplinary programs accentuating elite Serbian national culture;

-1990-1995, with artistic directors Olivija Mihajlović Domić and Ivana Vujić, who attracted innovative performances such as *Saint Nick* by Gorčin Stojanović, also characterized by numerous “happenings”;

-1995-1997, with artistic director Branka Vuković, who oriented the theater toward popular and commercial performances;

-1997-2004, with artistic director Nenad Prokić, who encouraged an engagement with critical issues and opened the stage for Belgrade’s dance troupes and non-verbal theaters (thus partially returning Bitef Theater to its earlier laboratory practices);

-2005-2008, with artistic director Nikita Milivojević, who moved closer to the format of a repertoire theater, characterized by naming seasons according to a certain concept;

-2009-present, with artistic director Jelena Kajgo, who turned the theater into a platform for dance companies and the home for the Bitef Dance Ensemble.

Repertoires and policies never crossed during those periods, therefore inter-generational and intra-theatrical communication had bigger ruptures than in any other theater.

Besides the annual anniversary party which was created by Ivana Vujić, there are no other systemic activities to preserve institutional memory. Even the memory of its founders and previous leaders is not kept, as the theater’s mission changed too often. This rupture is exacerbated by the fact that the offices and

the performance building are far away from each other. This managerial overlapping is also one of the reasons why Belgrade's theaters find it difficult to initiate a precise policy of memory, as those few theaters often memorialize the same person, which complicates the process of creating a comprehensive policy of memory (semantic memory). In spite of the fact that the horizons of memory of Bifef Theater are cosmopolitan, those horizons, even with recent European projects, are limited to Belgrade. The main identity narrative is about the buildings, although since the beginning all marketing material has been created without this important architectural information. In his non-published book about the theater opening Arsa Jovanović states:

The church at Bailoni Market is transforming itself in front of me into a magical theatrical space. This miracle of theater creation has in itself something ritual and mythical. (1)

In his manuscript Jovanović describes the difficult private circumstances under which this theater was born. Trailović, recently diagnosed with cancer at the time, learned that her husband also received the same diagnosis (Jovanović: 6). Also, the difficult socio-political situation with the rise of nationalism and the break-up of Yugoslavia was on the horizon. Henceforth, Bifef Theater and Festival are faced with the most challenging task of preserving institutional memory as part of its organizational culture. It is not only that the world theater scene has changed, "that now every festival and theater is fighting for new theatrical tendencies" (Ćirilov, our own translation), but that the world scene is now global and the

"creative cities" platform raised the level of festival competition. As such, small important festivals such as Nancy (founded in 1963 as a university company festival, and in 1968 as a festival of experimental theater) closed in the 1990s.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: DOMINANT TRENDS IN INSTITUTIONAL MEMORIES

Belgrade's theaters remember differently. They do not have explicit memory policies and strategies but certain instruments are in place in all of them, such as anniversaries, printing monographs, dedicating stages, rehearsal rooms, even squares by the names of famous members, creating memorabilia (such as photos, busts, and paintings), and more. There are no discussions about the theater's mission and its identity, thus there is no consensus about a policy of memory in an institutional setting.

Through repertoire and other programming activities, theaters strive to keep the continuity lines (by re-staging their iconic performances, returning to the same writers and/or styles, etc.). This does not concern Bifef Theatre, where a policy of remembering is lacking.^{viii}

The culture of memory of Belgrade's theaters depends heavily on leadership decisions and to organizational culture – not on systemic procedures, organizational solutions, and long-term strategies. In spite of the fact that all four theaters are city theaters, their horizons of memories are different, spanning from the cosmopolitan to the very local. Those horizons and other explicit and implicit narratives are transferred inter-generationally through all previously-mentioned instruments, but most

specifically through stories which are codified and shared in monographs devoted to theater anniversaries.

The challenges in transferring institutional memories are biggest in theaters without a permanent ensemble, where a core group is lacking, and also where frequent changes of management are bringing different programming policies (changing the previous theater identity). It is not possible to achieve complex semantic memory from the sporadic episodic memories of different persons and periods by creating a story, a narrative to give a sense to the theater identity. However, all four theaters have a sentimental founding narrative, so that facts and stories from the first period of their existence *have become the stuff of romantic legends*.

JDP speaks about the devotion and commitment of the “founders from the church”, Atelje 212 speaks about its underground beginnings and “dissident atmosphere”, BDP about introducing Western culture through American dramaturgy, or Bitef Theater about the triumphant legend of Trailović as a pioneering woman. These sentimental narratives about the founding fathers (and mothers) are endorsed if combined with the narratives about the collective spirit of their respective ensembles. BDP’s story emphasizes the enthusiasm of the young generation devoted to renewal after the Second World War and during the construction of a socialist society, while JDP’s story emphasizes a devotion to art and the artistic experience, i.e., to permanent learning and training.

The other key theater narrative is the narrative of representation, importance, and social respect, which JDP and Atelje 212 nurture in very different ways.

While the former has its narrative of *grandeur*, the latter trades on its small but experimental grandeur and world relevance, keeping its cosmopolitan spirit both by its repertoire and touring. The other narratives are more specifically linked to each individual theater. Bitef keeps its narrative of specificity and exclusivity, devoting itself to contemporary dance but not practicing the art of memorializing its own achievements. The reasons why BDP and Bitef do not have clear narratives of remembrance (and even of identities) is due to the organizational transformations and managerial changes these two theaters have passed through. Every new managerial period brought new aims and repertoire policies, neglecting everything that happened previously. This also relates to the question of how theaters deal with traumatic moments in their history, and with a heritage which in today’s context might be considered dissonant. The traumatic events are not represented and discussed as such.

This policy of oblivion is absolutely coherent when it comes to non-honorable behavior and acts – like those prior to the forced retirement of Trailović in Atelje 212 (when several other staff members also left, like Beka Vučo and Borka Pavićević), or Bojan and Mira Stupica leaving JDP, or a group of artists leaving BDP at the beginning of the 1990s. These non-discussed and non-recorded events, and the diminishing of the importance of theater salons and coffee bars in contemporary theater life (as well as the method of working which brings actors directly to rehearsals and performances without socializing) prevents the creation of institutional memory. This would also enhance the capacities of ensembles in dealing with controversial situations (such as the

actors' strike against the director in *Atelje 212*), but also the respective leaders' capacities to understand the needs of their ensembles and their sense of collective identity, which they should nourish through adequate memory policies. If leaders create their own memory policies and strategies which are not shared and are different from the organizational culture, it would be probable that those activities will not survive the next leadership change.^{ix}

CONCLUSION: INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY AS A CHALLENGE TO NEW LEADERSHIP?

Although the last 20 years in Serbia were characterized by "the reconstruction of memories through official and populist monument projects" (Dragičević-Šešić, 2011), theater institutions did not experiment much in this sense, maintaining their conservative policies of preserving the social respect and status of the theater as an elite cultural expression. Keeping in mind the transitional nationalistic hysteria and market adoration, these conservative policies helped theaters avoid joining those trends.^x Memory artifacts were used in order to safeguard the main theater narratives, such as the narratives of excellence, quality and devotion. Only in cases of politically inadequate nominations or contradictory visions of ensembles and nominated directors were there crises and ruptures in memory policies.

However, even in cases of consensus it was visible that organizational culture and its memory politics depended on leadership values and styles. Although it is confirmed that collective memory relies on "agreement" (Sontag, 2003), it would be important in the future to verify this hypothesis if leadership

policies might be decisive in this process. As our research has shown, those policies are integrated in both artistic (repertoire) and managerial strategies and decisions. Memory policies depend, to a smaller extent, on social trends and cultural context (audience expectations), or the demands/needs of the socio-political settings. Theater management seems not aware of the potential of institutional memory in preserving the good motivation of the ensemble, of keeping its spirit and ambition, but also of maintaining the interest of audiences and public opinion, as well as using nostalgia and past qualities as part of marketing and public relations strategies.

In order to preserve a theater's identity new leadership should focus great attention on the issue of institutional memory, developing policies and strategy of memory as integral parts of organizational culture. It can then be consistent in internal and external communications, facilitating the marketing of the new repertoire and enhancing audience loyalty – but most of all, enhancing the collective consciousness of the ensemble, motivating them for new endeavors and achievements in the spirit of the poetics of the concrete theater. At the same time, horizons of memory of Belgrade's city theaters and their respective narratives might be important for general cultural ambience in society, opening perspectives and preserving unique identities.

In cases when the mission of the theater has changed or become unclear (sometimes due to social and historical changes, but more often due to unsuccessful leadership changes in a bureaucratic political system) it is self-evident that it would affect policies of memory, as there would be no clear indicators about how to select narratives and episodic

individual memories for further integration into a semantic comprehensive memory. Going back to the initial mission statements and values on which the theaters were founded would help in a necessary reconceptualization of the contemporary mission and vision of development. A real institutional memory as semantic cultural memory would be created, also

aiding a profiling of the theater system in Belgrade as well as the reconsideration of the cultural and theater history of the city, which still has its blind spots with regards to Belgrade's cultural life and cultural policies as a whole.

ENDNOTES

- [1]. ⁱA specific case is the Yugoslav Dramatic Theater, which was created as a supranational institution, but five years later, in 1953, it changed from a federal to a city institution. The original name of the theater was preserved even during the transitional period when it faced huge pressure on renaming.
- [2]. ⁱⁱ There is no trace regarding whose idea it was, as the most prominent theater figures from all around Yugoslavia (such as Gavella) were against the idea, thinking that theater is the most important part of national culture and cannot be unified (culture in Socialist Yugoslavia was left to federal republics and the Ministry of Culture, created according to the Soviet model of centralization, which was soon abolished). It seems that theater people have memorialized Stupica (the individual with the most charisma, respect, and authority) as the father of the theater, blurring the political-ideological roots of its creation.
- [3]. ⁱⁱⁱ "The archive collects: reports on rehearsals, sketches for stage and costume design, diaries from theatre discussions, press clippings, reports of performance duty officers (important for analysis of audience behavior), etc. The museum is closely related to the archive and is only sporadically open to the public, but always during performance breaks. The museum exhibits: stage design models, costume sketches, photos of actors in specific roles and of specific mis-en scenes. After five years the library had 2,000 professional titles."
- [4]. ^{iv} The term "Yugoslav" in the Serbian collective consciousness is linked to socialism in spite of the royal state policies that introduced "Yugoslavia" as the name of the kingdom in 1929.
- [5]. ^v All quotes are from the theater monographs

- [6]. ^{vi} *Patriots* was staged in 1949, 1956 (renewal), 1986, and 2003.
- [7]. ^{vii} One of the reasons why the festival Sterijino pozorje was created was to stimulate contemporary domestic dramatic writing.
- [8]. ^{viii} Thanks to the wide intellectual and cultural scene around the theater more than to the theater management certain efforts to honor Mira Trailović, for example, were done.
- [9]. ^{ix} This is the case with the festival devoted to Muci Draskić at Atelje 212.
- [10]. ^x In spite of contemporary criticism towards escapist theater policies of the 1990s, which staged a lot of classical authors and comedies, it must be said that this conservative nature prevented the use of theaters in the promotion of nationalism and chauvinism (unfortunately, theaters have not been brave enough to protect their non-Serbian members from nationalist attacks or to stand more firmly against the politics of war and conflicts).

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