

CHAPTER 6

KPGT

(Y)Utopia Revisited in a Sugar Mill

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For several decades, deindustrialized landscapes throughout the world have seen an overwhelming wave of transformation from industrial to cultural production (O'Connor and Wynne 1996; Momaas 2004; Daniels et al. 2012). An important part of this process is related to spaces reclaimed by informal, independent and alternative groups attempting to acquire permanent premises for research and performance. This transformational model of obsolete industrial facilities often includes squatting, practised as exploitation of abandoned spaces (either with or without official approval) aiming at the encouragement and diversification of artistic production (Moore and Smart 2015); it often includes participation in a specific lifestyle of a specific community. Primarily due to economic reasons, there are abundant contemporary examples from Western Europe (and Eastern Europe to a lesser extent) of reclaiming abandoned industrial spaces for such purposes (Šentevska 2016: 209–14). This process was a fairly uncommon practice in Serbia and the neighbouring countries during the 1990s, which saw major transformations of the economic and political systems (with major consequences for the industrial geography of the region), along with the grave social crisis caused by the civil war in the former Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, in Belgrade, one factory was transformed into a permanent performance venue: the old sugar refinery (Stara šećerana) or, officially, the First Serbian Sugar Factory 'Dimitrije Tucović' 1898 on Radnička ulica (Worker's Street), as the home

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of the theatre company Kazalište-Pozorište-Gledališće-Teatar (KPGT). In this chapter, research on the history of KPGT and its occupation of the old sugar refinery in Belgrade combines secondary (historical) sources, including KPGT's archive material and conversations with artistic leaders Ljubiša Ristić and Danka Lendel Palian, with the author's personal experience as a theatregoer and witness of very different events taking place in the factory since the mid-1990s.

In recent years, nonrepresentational, also known as more-than-representational, theory has served as an umbrella term for diverse, interdisciplinary work that strives to reflect the world perceived as 'more-than-human', 'more-than-textual' or 'multisensual', or to impart 'new life' to dead landscapes or geographies (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000). According to Hayden Lorimer, 'it is reasonable to expect an explanation of what that "more than" might include. To summarize lots of complex statements as simply as possible, it is multifarious, open encounters in the realm of practice that matter most. Greatest unity is found in an insistence on expanding our once comfortable understanding of "the social" and how it can be regarded as something researchable' (Lorimer 2005: 84). Moreover, 'what has been identified as deadening effect – the tendency for cultural analyses to cleave towards a conservative, categorical politics of identity and textual meaning – can, it is contended, be overcome by allowing in much more of the excessive and transient aspects of living' (2005: 83). As a 'particularly effective lightning-rod for disciplinary self-critique' (2005: 83), nonrepresentational theory may serve as a valuable methodological asset in interdisciplinary studies, as it combines insights from human geography, poststructuralist theory, phenomenology, science and technology studies, feminist theory, anthropology, ethnography and performance studies. Choreographed movement (dance) has been identified as useful for introducing human geographers to a new language of performance (Thrift 1997; McCormack 2003). Exercising power and social position as work of performativity are also familiar issues for human geographers (Houston and Pulido 2002). The concept of performance (perceived as choreographed, citational, improvisational, etc.) is highly important to nonrepresentational theory (Pels et al. 2002; Crouch 2003; Latham 2003; Szerszynski et al. 2003), as well as the notions of performativity (Nelson 1999; Gregson and Rose 2000; Nash 2000) or enacting (Dewsbury et al. 2002).

This chapter draws from this methodological wealth of opportunities as it attempts to bring more-than-representational theory closer to (the more traditional and self-contained discipline of) theatre studies. It focuses on the nexus between cultural production (theatre), political and economic transition, war-induced social crisis and deindustrialized landscape in the specific case of the theatre company KPGT currently based in Belgrade, and specifically its artistic occupation of the dilapidated sugar mill in the historical working-class neighbourhood of Čukarica.¹ It explores the origins, development and sig-

nificance of KPGT as a cultural-political movement throughout the several decades of its existence and operation in the dramatically changing social (political, economic, ideological and cultural) environment in Serbia/former Yugoslavia. The stress in this historical overview is on KPGT's appropriation and use of public spaces (from main city squares to historical monuments, heritage sites and semi-urban landscapes). Its trademark site-specific (Pearson 2010) and environmental (Schechner 1973) productions are especially interesting when observed against the background of its collaboration and/or conflicts with the local (communist and postcommunist) authorities. Appropriation of the Dimitrije Tucović sugar refinery (which terminated production in 1983), adapted for KPGT during the NATO bombing of Belgrade and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999, is a final point in this winding trajectory of struggle for a physical space. This is seen as a liberated territory perceived as a space for noninstitutional (and therefore independent) cultural production, which results in new conflicts and new forms of dependence.

In this deindustrialized landscape and this specific context, the spatial and the textual meet and interact in highly peculiar ways. Interaction between human bodies and machines (or their obsolescence and subsequent removal) create new spatialities. I identify the unconventional, found, ready-made or site-specific performance space(s) in the old sugar mill in Belgrade as such highly specific instances of spatiality conceived as a contested territory (Bender 2001). I argue that independent cultural production in a transitional postsocialist country, gravely affected by military conflicts and permanent economic crisis, is unsustainable without some form of dependence on the official political sphere. The physical space of performance (in this case an abandoned industrial landscape) thus becomes the main locus of this contestation between artistic liberation and economic dependence.

Postcommunist transition in Serbia saw rapid transformations of the theatre system in terms of management, financing, public relations and methods of creative work, which opened new possibilities for noninstitutional (independent) cultural production. Against this background, it seems that the closest and most diverse encounters between the theatre and the urban space, happened precisely in the period of the most acute social turmoil – in the 1990s, during the wars in the former Yugoslavia. In other postsocialist countries of Europe, the 1990s was a decade of transformation of production models, with the rigid system of state support for institutions giving way to project funding, internationalization, networking, and the rise of independent arts scenes with contributions from private and public foundations, including the European Union, the Council of Europe and corporate sponsors. In Serbia, because of United Nations (UN) sanctions and the overall international isolation, transformations (Đurović 2002) amounted only to occasional assistance given to an independent scene that was decidedly feeble. In those circumstances, KPGT established a specific model of interac-

tion between the theatre, as a traditional artistic medium of reflection of the social reality, and the space of everyday life in the city.² As opposed to other models of interaction between theatre and the urban landscape in the Serbian and former Yugoslav context, the case of KPGT's reclaiming of the sugar refinery in Belgrade is probably the most locally specific, but is nevertheless reflective of the wider developments in the postsocialist realm, especially in terms of the nexus between politics, (industrial) economy and art. Occupation of abandoned industrial facilities usually implies attempts at advancement and diversification of the artistic scene. In a typical scenario, a group of like-minded artists occupies a space deemed as obsolete and abandoned by the community and the local authorities. After a process of negotiation with the authorities, the artists eventually receive permission (and additional support) to maintain the premises and work towards accomplishing their creative goals. Such scenarios are especially plausible in the postindustrial landscapes of abandoned factories and other now-obsolete remnants of the industrial era. In the Serbian context of the 1990s (with the rare exception of a few organizations),³ the artists were not able to negotiate with the authorities for some form of permanent use of abandoned spaces for artistic purposes. Those who did succeed typically used spaces that had previously had a cultural purpose like art pavilions, community halls, etc. The case of artistic occupation of the old Dimitrije Tucović sugar mill in Belgrade is exceptional, because this was the only postsocialist factory in Serbia refurbished as a permanent theatre venue in this period. In this case, the nexus between politics, economy, industry and art is reflected in the long career of the talented director and controversial politician Ljubiša Ristić. This chapter gives a historical overview of Ristić's theatre activities and KPGT in four chronological phases: (1) the early stages of Ristić's career, formation and operation of KPGT as a nomadic theatre movement; (2) KPGT's permanent settlement in Subotica and work inside the structure of institutional theatres; (3) the (political) circumstances of KPGT's relocation to Belgrade and new permanent settlement in the old Dimitrije Tucović sugar refinery; and, finally, (4) KPGT's survival strategies in the changing political and economic environment of post-Milošević Serbia.

A Brief History of KPGT

Phase 1: Guerrilla Warfare

With his parallel engagements as a director in the national theatres across Yugoslavia and *spiritus movens* of the cultural movement KPGT, Ljubiša Ristić inaugurated in the Yugoslav theatre scene in the 1970s a blend of institutional and alternative, publicly funded and self-financed, bourgeois and

communist, conventional and unconventional, progressive and reactionary, leftish and rightish, elite and populist theatre.⁴ The name KPGT used all the forms of the word 'theatre' that existed in the south Slavic languages spoken in Yugoslavia: Croatian *kazalište*; Serbian *pozorište*; Slovenian *gledališče*; and Macedonian *teatar*. Exploring the cultural and political history of the Yugoslav idea, KPGT was a rare artistic project that articulated reflective conceptions of Yugoslav identity and cultural space.⁵

After Yugoslavia's split with the Soviet Union in 1948, the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (SKJ) suspended the instruments of control and censorship previously adopted from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Nevertheless, the onset of economic and political crisis in the early 1960s and the wave of student protests culminating in June 1968, which among other things criticized corruption among the communist elites, made the Yugoslav cultural scene a target of renewed political control and pressure. The launch of KPGT as a noninstitutional theatre movement was, in part, a creative response to these dynamics of negotiations with the authorities on what can and cannot be said and done in the theatre. This response reflected a keen awareness of the specificities and peculiarities of Yugoslavia's political, economic and cultural systems, especially in the Cold War context.

As founding members of KPGT, director Ljubiša Ristić and playwright Dušan Jovanović, initially started to work together in Ljubljana, Slovenia, outside of their native republic of Serbia (Toporišič 2009a: 254). Like many other artists in the repressive post-1968 atmosphere, these members of the *soixante-huitards* generation who actively participated in the student protests in Belgrade (2–9 June 1968) were either forced or chose to work in other parts of Yugoslavia in order to circumvent the institutional obstacles they faced because of their public engagement and exposure. In 1976, Ristić staged Dušan Jovanović's play *Igrajte tumor v glavi in onesnaženje zraka* (*Play Tumour in the Head, or Air Pollution*) which associated the crisis of the wider society with the crisis in the theatre itself, in the Slovenian town of Celje.

As a noninstitutional theatre formation, KPGT operated throughout Yugoslavia between 1978 and 1984. Its prehistory was marked by the production *Oslobođenje Skopja* (*The Liberation of Skopje*) written by Jovanović and directed by Ristić. An all-Yugoslav group of artists (led by Ljubiša Ristić, Nada Kokotović, Dušan Jovanović and Rade Šerbedžija) assembled in 1977 in Zagreb, Croatia, around this joint venture, which subsequently achieved the status of the season's major theatre event. The brand name KPGT entered into circulation in late 1981, on the poster for the production *Karamazovi* written by Dušan Jovanović. This play addressed the controversial subject matter of the Goli Otok prison camp, already present in the Yugoslav theatre at the time.⁶ In this production, KPGT retained the model based on a voluntary working community with shared responsibilities and profits.⁷ In

1984, KPGT unsuccessfully attempted to register a space in Knez Mihailova ulica (Prince Mihailo Street) in Belgrade, the venue of its Godot Fest launched earlier that year. Interestingly, the next venue to be artistically exploited by KPGT was nothing less than the major congress centre (Centar Sava) of the Yugoslav capital where it produced two quite ambitious projects, *Tajna Crne nuke* (*Secret of the Black Hand Society*, 1983–84) and *Carmina Burana* (1984–85). In a way, these two productions announced the promotion of Ljubiša Ristić to manager of the (Serbo-Croatian/Hungarian) National Theatre/*Népszínház* in Subotica in 1985.⁸

Phase 2: The Long March through the Institutions

The (communist) municipal authorities summoned Ljubiša Ristić to the multinational and multicultural town of Subotica, located on the border between Serbia and Hungary and with a mixed population. His plans for the National Theatre received explicit political support and KPGT's transfer into the institutional framework of Subotica's major theatre was programmatically announced by the production *Madač – komentari* (*Madách – Comments*), which premiered in October 1985. Territorial expansion in Subotica not only included the summer festivals in Palić between 1986 and 1991, but also the festivals of Grad teatar Budva and Kotorart on the coast of Montenegro, which systematically explored unconventional venues for theatre performances, from historical buildings to natural landscapes.⁹ In 1987, YU-Fest (Jovanov 2016: 159–204) toured fifteen cities, while Avala Fest in Belgrade, which lasted for two months, became an exceptional success. In the late 1980s, Ljubiša Ristić and his partner, choreographer Nada Kokotović, assumed management of the Serbian National Theatre in Novi Sad and created a bicameral system with parallel production facilities in Subotica and Novi Sad. In this period, the repertory of the Serbian National Theatre reflected the characteristic pro-Yugoslav KPGT orientation, with innovative works from Ristić's collaborators from all parts of the country. Basically, Ristić's leftist theatre utopia was an attempt to create a cultural model that aimed at preserving the Yugoslav cultural space, i.e. the Yugoslav state. Ristić was convinced that theatre could (and should) demonstrate that life in the common state was still possible; however, Yugoslavia was about to disintegrate.

Phase 3: Coming Home (to the Factory)

In the late 1980s, the overall political support for KPGT gradually diminished, both in Subotica and in Novi Sad. Slobodan Milošević began to dominate the political scene, and the rapid fragmentation of the Yugoslav cultural space made KPGT's mission politically undesirable. Pro-autonomy politicians in Vojvodina were deposed in 1988 on Milošević's orders in the so-called yoghurt revolution. Also termed the anti-bureaucratic revolution,

this was a campaign of street protests by Milošević's supporters (1988–89), which overthrew the governments of the Serbian autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo, and the government of the Socialist Republic of Montenegro. Milošević's newly appointed supporters in Subotica and Novi Sad did not look upon KPGT favourably. When the war in Yugoslavia broke in 1991, Nada Kokotović decided to leave the country and move to Germany, leaving Ristić to work in Subotica and KPGT's production facilities in other Serbian towns.¹⁰

In the post-1989 context, the art worlds in the majority of postsocialist countries retained and even consolidated their social and political prerogatives.¹¹ According to Slovenian philosopher Aleš Erjavec, in such circumstances the notions of nation and culture were inextricably linked: 'It is politics that links them and that has caused art and culture to play such a significant role in the 1980s and early 1990s, enabling writers to become heads of state; painters and poets, ambassadors; and sociology professors, city mayors and foreign ministers, just as in 1918–20 or in the years following 1945' (Erjavec 2003: 13). In Milošević's postsocialist regime (with few exceptions), artists and intellectuals did not claim institutional positions of high significance. A necessary condition for leading an institution was open or tacit loyalty to the regime, so the wave of intellectualization of the political scene would be delayed for a whole decade in comparison to other postsocialist countries. Ristić's status on the political and cultural map of the country became a prime exception to this rule.

In 1992, due to the outbreak of war in Bosnia and Croatia, the renowned Belgrade International Theatre Festival (Bitef) hosted only one international production. In the absence of foreign guests, the official programme of the festival was dominated by several KPGT productions. In the heated atmosphere surrounding the festival, theatre critics and scholars refused to take part in the so-called 'Bitef under Sanctions' (Ćirilov 2002; Stamenković 2002; Suša 2002), convinced that the festival was creating a false picture that nothing out of the ordinary is happening in Serbia, thus legitimizing Milošević's politics. A notable KPGT contribution to this programme was the production *Boj na Kosovu* (*Battle of Kosovo*), which had premiered at Lake Palić in Subotica three years earlier. Initially, that premiere was perceived by many as a politically incorrect marking of the sixth centenary of the mythical medieval battle against the Ottoman Turks (1389), which opposed Milošević's nationalist speeches on the controversial subject of Kosovo.¹² However, the 1992 production took place in a different atmosphere, to the point where Belgrade's cultural and political nationalist mainstream began to recognize Ljubiša Ristić as 'one of their own' (Dević 2018: 207).¹³

YU-Fest 1994 was hosted by the cities of Subotica and Niš, where Ljubiša Ristić staged *Antigona* by Dušan Jovanović on top of the Belgrade

Gate of the old Niš fortress. Serving as KPGT's statement against the war in Bosnia, *Antigona* depicted the siege of Thebes as a war between brothers, neither of whom could win the war. References to the current, real-life siege of Sarajevo were more than obvious.¹⁴ For the purposes of staging this production at the 28th Bitef Festival in Belgrade, KPGT occupied the dilapidated sugar plant in the workers' neighbourhood of Čukarica. This historical landmark of the socialist movement in Serbia was to become the first permanent KPGT venue in the capital. 'It would soon become apparent that the prospect of moving to Šećerana (the old sugar refinery) was assisted by a new patron whose concern for KPGT seemed as unfathomable as the possibility of Ristić accepting their assistance' (Dević 2018: 208). By the end of 1994, Ristić entered mainstream politics and, at the invitation of the first lady of Serbia, Mirjana Marković, became the President of her new political party, Yugoslav United Left (YUL), as a renowned leftist intellectual. Ristić also became YUL's Head of the Committee for Foreign Relations. This left party gathered together mainly the Serbian new rich recruited from the ranks of business executives with longstanding political privileges, whose wealth was mainly accumulated from semi-legal or illegal business operations during the international sanctions imposed on Serbia. This party had no significant electorate and was mainly seen as Milošević's pet project. Ristić's longtime collaborators and associates were mostly shocked by his new appointment and conviction that he could align with the ideals of genuine socialist revolution and multiculturalism as an official of YUL.

Ristić's new capacity as an active politician largely facilitated KPGT's occupation of new premises in the old industrial complex of the old sugar refinery in Belgrade. In 1995 with his partner Danka Lendel, Ristić launched the KPGT Foundation, the International Art Centre and KPGT Theatre, with three stages bearing the names of the founding members of KPGT: Studio Kokotović, Theatre Šerbedžija and Penthouse Jovanović. In this period, marked by political, economic and cultural sanctions imposed on Serbia and Montenegro (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) by the international community, Ristić's antiwar engagement included outstanding international collaborations. Under the patronage of famed British actress Vanessa Redgrave, Ristić revived the early KPGT production *Liberation of Skopje* at the London Riverside Studios, with Rade Šerbedžija reprising his leading role from the original staging. Vanessa and Corin Redgrave's initiative marked the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation from fascism in Europe and aimed at drawing the attention of the wider international public to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Invited to participate in this programme scheduled for the beginning of May 1995, theatre director Haris Pašović (a former KPGT collaborator) also came with his troupe from the besieged Sarajevo. However, the troupe cancelled their performance because Sarajevo was ferociously

shelled, with civilian casualties, on the very day they were scheduled to perform. The other stated reason was the presence at the festival of a theatre director who was 'a party leader in a fascist state' (cited in Dević 2018: 209). Another significant international collaboration in this period included the 1995 joint production of *Assimil* in the main industrial hall of the old sugar mill with the Dutch location-specific theatre company Dogtroep.

The tenth YU-Fest (1995) marked the successful occupation of the Dimitrije Tucović sugar factory for KPGT's purposes, with strong support from the factory management, Belgrade's municipal authorities and Nebojša Čović, the Mayor of Belgrade, in person (Lekić 1995: 36). Various indoor and outdoor spaces of the partly abandoned industrial complex were used for staging the productions *San letnje noći* (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Ljubiša Ristić), *Kralj Džon* (*King John*, directed by Ferenc Peter), *Timon Atinjanin* (*Timon of Athens*, directed by Saša Gabrić), for which one of the industrial halls was transformed into a flea market, *Bubnjevi u noći* (*Drums in the Night*, directed by Saša Gabrić), *Mara/Sad* (*Marat/Sade*, directed by Peter Ferenc), *Gospođica* (*The Woman from Sarajevo*, directed by Ljubiša Ristić), *Antigona* (*Antigone*, directed by Ljubiša Ristić), *Kralj Ibi* (*King Ubu*, directed by Haris Pašović) and *Assimil* (co-production with Dogtroep from Amsterdam). All of these productions, staged in different parts of the industrial complex, had been to a greater or lesser extent site-specific. This means that at the conceptual level, they significantly relied on what was visible and already present in those largely dilapidated spaces. In general, one could observe the relationship between these productions and the respective performing spaces as entangled.

There are few traces remaining nowadays of one of the most ambitious among these productions that marked KPGT's artistic conquest of Šećerana. What Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Ljubiša Ristić, is remembered for is Ristić's lucid use of the industrial environment. In these unique settings and with changing performance spaces, the audience could intensely experience the aura of what Elinor Fuchs terms as 'you'll-never-be-here-againness' (1996: 135). The performance was staged outdoors, in front of the main factory building and below a long structure once used for the industrial production of sugar. It was now a catwalk for the Athenian wedding couples, while the fairies splashed in a monumental pond with islands and rafts constructed especially for the production. This artificial lake was 60 metres long, 30 metres wide and 1 metre deep. A total of 300 kilograms of plastic were used to build it. Some of the spectators at the opening night remember the inconvenient access to the factory, sand in their shoes and problems with the rain, the cold October evening and dedicated actors who were swimming half-naked in the cold water at the temperature below 10°C. Young actress Baya Bangué Namkosse later recalled her first

role (Puck) alongside established actors Neda Arnerić and Miodrag Krivokapić: 'The performance was really difficult, because only the three of us, in addition to thirty members of the cast, spoke in the old Dubrovnik dialect' (Savić 2007). Nearly all the elements characteristic of Ristić's theatre poetics were there: playing with different languages of the Yugoslav cultural space, work with a disciplined and dedicated ensemble, eclecticism, occupation of space and radical interventions in this liberated territory. Finally, there was the factory itself, a unique monument of industrial archaeology and a highly symbolic venue. In 1907, it had been the site of a massive and historically important workers' strike, which ended in blood and repression.

Despite Ristić's claims that the refurbishing of the old sugar refinery, which was later turned into the International Arts Centre, was going to be mostly a self-financed enterprise, involving fundraising and corporate contributions, he admitted that the state had to have a substantial role in securing funds for his ambitious plans. Major works on preparation of the grounds, cleaning and rebuilding in the vast industrial spaces took almost three years of concentrated effort. In this period, there had been a decline in the number of staged performances: Ristić's association with YUL contributed to a growing odium in theatrical circles, resulting in modest coverage of KPGT's productions. This was partly compensated for by Ristić's interviews, which combined detailed descriptions of the construction works in Šećerana with his political comments, mainly assessments of the international position of Serbia in this turbulent period.

Ristić's vision for the revitalization of this still partly active industrial complex comprised new theatres, a chamber opera, a dance hall, a venue for rock concerts, and vast spaces dedicated to visual arts and other cultural forms (e.g. a museum of industrial archaeology). Ristić also took into consideration the broader urban context around the industrial complex, including the recreation area Ada Ciganlija on the River Sava and the Belgrade Hippodrome. In the late 1990s, while the KPGT industrial headquarters was turning into a permanent construction site, KPGT was touring inner Serbia, Vojvodina, Kosovo and Montenegro.

The final phase of reconstruction of the old sugar mill reached its peak during the NATO bombing campaign in Serbia and Montenegro (Operation Allied Force, 23 March–10 June 1999).¹⁵ The grand opening of the International Arts Centre KPGT followed in the summer of 1999 after the end of the NATO campaign. The partially dilapidated industrial complex now contained four performance spaces, a glass greenhouse foyer with tropical plants, two restaurants and a small swimming pool, built during the safe periods between curfews and emergency hours. With a large company of some fifty actors and fifteen dancers, KPGT entered the new millen-

nium ready to welcome guest performers from India, China and the rest of Europe.

Phase 4: Trench Warfare

Nevertheless, after the violent change of government in Serbia on 5 October 2000, Ljubiša Ristić fell out of favour once more. Even the Bitef coordinators, in spite of Ristić's and KPGT's former services to this festival, turned their back on him; according to Nenad Prokić, ex-director of the festival, although KPGT's productions met the criteria of the festival's selection, KPGT was not included 'as this was deemed inappropriate, considering this theatre's reputation' (Bogdanović 2002: 30). This reputation, the odium that Ristić had been exposed to since 2000, was to a large extent associated with the downfall of Slobodan Milošević (see e.g. Jovanović 2006), and Mirjana Marković fleeing to Russia in order to escape prosecution and responsibility for the war conflicts and large-scale embezzlement of public funds. The change of the political regime cut short the plans for the further refurbishing of Šećerana. KPGT was subsequently abandoned by its ballet troupe and several team members. The shortage of funds had, as a consequence, longer intervals between premieres and revivals of old productions. The new authorities had been generally indifferent to KPGT's goals and ambitions, including the financial problems the company encountered in the post-5 October period. Criticized throughout his career for his nontransparent business operations, Ristić had no option but to enter the free-market economy. As a result, after 2000, theatre productions in Šećerana gradually diminished. A number of legal cases were raised against the company as the leaseholder of the space in the industrial complex, which is still a public asset, because of its inability to fulfil its financial obligations. Nevertheless, there had been no interest in taking over from KPGT these cultivated ruins, set against the surrounding historical working-class and low-income neighbourhoods. Like the industrial complex itself, which was formally proclaimed a Monument of Culture in 1984 (Vuksanović-Macura 2012: 119), these neighbourhoods are currently being subjected to the processes of chaotic, arbitrary and unsystematic gentrification that mark the overall contemporary urban development of Belgrade.

In his assessment of KPGT Ristić's longtime collaborator, theatre scholar Dragan Klaić, concluded that KPGT had been less a protest against institutions than a search for an institutional home, even in a dilapidated industrial space.¹⁶ Ristić's theatrical and political radicalism was regularly accompanied by efforts to revitalize concrete spaces and persuade the political establishment to support such claims (Klaić 2006). In the many decades of their career, KPGT artists have established a reputation for their innovative theatre

aesthetics, but it is their equally innovative organizational practices working equally against and alongside the institutional theatre and cultural systems that made them extremely vulnerable to the turmoil created by daily politics.

Accordingly, a new change of government in 2012 considerably affected KPGT's position on the cultural map of Belgrade and Serbia. A broad populist coalition of nationalist, conservative, right-wing parties and former supporters of Milošević's brand of socialism assembled around the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), won the elections and established an effective political monopoly unseen in Serbia since the break-up of Yugoslavia and fall of the one-party communist regime. This new political nomenclature includes many officials who were politically active in the 1990s, including Ristić's close associates during his term of office in YUL. This might mean that KPGT's material position would improve in this period. However, this has not effectively happened, mainly because this new political set-up puts remarkably low emphasis on the development of cultural production (especially the noninstitutional), instead favouring controversial projects of urban development, refurbishing of official institutions, and ideologically and aesthetically problematic interventions in relation to the existing cultural and environmental heritage. In a recent interview with Goran Vesić, Deputy Mayor of Belgrade, the old sugar mill was described as the prospective, new cultural centre of Serbia's capital city. Vesić explained that the current municipal authorities of Belgrade are in favour of the policy, according to which cultural institutions 'should be independent and financed on a project basis' (Kralj 2018). There has been no intention on the part of the authorities to take over KPGT and to provide permanent funding for the company; however, they 'would finance their good projects' (Kralj 2018). One such project was the event Liberation of Belgrade performed on 19 October 2018 in the old sugar mill, marking the joint military operation of Yugoslav partisans and the Soviet Red Army in 1944 that ended the Nazi occupation of Belgrade. After the show, which was attended by many high officials of the current government, the President of the City Assembly of Belgrade announced that the 'City of Belgrade together with the government of the Republic of Serbia would buy out the Šećerana area from bankruptcy next year and transform it together with the Theatre KPGT into one of the most beautiful artistic quarters of the city of Belgrade' (Radović 2018). Deputy Mayor Vesić announced in his already-quoted interview that from 2019, KPGT would host a summer theatre festival dedicated each year to a different Serbian playwright. He also explained that the sugar refinery had filed for bankruptcy, but was under protection of the state, which meant that the only possibility for development of that area was renovation of the existing structures: 'Prime Minister [Ana Brnabić] and I have recently visited Šećerana and we shall work toward making the City of Belgrade and the Republic of

Serbia legal owners of this space at some point ... With over 12 hectares it is ideal for cultural events and creative industry, for hubs. This means that KPGT would remain in the current premises and acquire other parts of the structure as well' (Kralj 2018).

The urban landscape organized around the Dimitrije Tucović sugar mill is nowadays a postindustrial ecosystem where a variety of users cohabitate within the larger complex, including staff in cafés, restaurants and clubs, KPGT's artistic and technical collaborators, and members of the audience. Also, parts of the complex occupied by KPGT contain apartments where members of the company may dwell for shorter or longer periods. Security staff protect the public property from gatherers of secondary raw materials. The factory, which used to have some 500 workers, now has three employees for administrative and technical tasks, three lawyers, a bookkeeping agency and a security service. Furthermore, the traditional manufacturing part of the complex, the Vrenje factory, which produced baking yeast, now produces ethyl alcohol.

In this patchwork of living and working routines and artistic practices, processes of industrial and creative production meet and often overlap. What makes this landscape even more intriguing is the fact that these practices were shaped in different historical periods and by different economies (socialist industrial production, transitional restructuring of the economy, postsocialist emphasis on leisure and consumption), and they co-exist with KPGT's notions of artistic independence as materialized in the space of the abandoned factory and of its affective and reflective potentialities.

The deindustrialized landscape of the old Dimitrije Tucović sugar refinery may be observed as a space of interaction between human bodies and machines (even when their obsolescence and subsequent removal are taken into account). This interaction creates new spatialities, conceived as conditions and practices of individual and social life that are linked to relative position of individuals and groups with regard to one another. Performance space in the old mill, claimed by KPGT, may be observed as a highly specific instance of spatiality conceived as a contested territory, in analogy with the notion of contested landscape as explored in Barbara Bender's edited volume *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place* (2001). Landscapes are not mere backdrops to human action; people make them and are made by them. These engagements with the landscape are dynamic, variable, contradictory and open-ended. Landscapes are thus always evolving and are often unpredictable and contested. People who share the same landscape may have different and often violently opposed ways of understanding its significance, and a completely different sense of place. In the old sugar refinery complex in Belgrade, the artists involved in KPGT projects, their staff and audiences, office and industrial workers, security staff and gatherers of used metal, and

even the stray dogs and other animals meet and interact in the same physical space, but have different and often contested experiences and memories associated with this socially and economically troubled space. In the context of KPGT's long struggle for a permanent physical space for performance, research and independent reflection of theatre, art, society and politics, this landscape became a liberated territory. But liberated from what? Initially, in the rigid socialist system of state-funded theatres, this liberation meant freedom from the constraints of work in a theatre institution. Independent space meant independent work, independent aesthetics, independent experimentation and independent budgets. In the postsocialist context, liberation amounts to the same ideals of independence. KPGT's liberated territory is the materialization of Ljubiša Ristić's radical leftist (Y)utopia that found its ultimate home in the historical sugar refinery. However, KPGT's long history of struggle for independent cultural production in a transitional country gravely affected by military conflicts and permanent economic crisis turned out to be impossible without some form of dependence on the official political sphere. The semi-abandoned industrial landscape of the old sugar mill in Belgrade thus became the main locus of this contestation between artistic liberation and economic dependence.

Conclusion

The 1990s, a decade of political and economic transition in Eastern Europe, saw major transformations of its industrial geography. In the countries of the former Yugoslavia, these transformations were accompanied by the grave social crisis caused by the civil war in the region. While deindustrialized landscapes have been subject throughout the world to an overwhelming wave of transformation from industrial to cultural production, this was a fairly uncommon practice in Serbia and the neighbouring countries. In Belgrade, as an exception to this rule, one factory was transformed into a permanent performance venue: the Dimitrije Tucović sugar mill in Radnička ulica (Workers Street) as the home of the renowned Yugoslav theatre company KPGT launched in Zagreb, Croatia, in the late 1970s.

With production facilities and performing venues in Subotica, Novi Sad, Budva, Kotor, Belgrade and elsewhere, KPGT's productions, international tours and talent breeding in the pre-Maastricht Treaty atmosphere of Europe were an early instance of mobility and networking later to be embraced by the cultural policies of the European Union. Other features of KPGT encompassed an interdisciplinary approach to radical artistic practices, postdramatic tendencies in theatre and references to literature and visual arts, as well as their relations to the post-1968 international Left. Further characteristics

included the partisan legacy of the Second World War in Yugoslavia and the construction of the Yugoslav identity in general, followed by the redefinition and reforms of the national institutions (national theatres in Subotica and Novi Sad) and their multiethnic heritage. Of particular interest in this chapter were KPGT's relations to power structures (League of Communists of Yugoslavia – SKJ, later Yugoslav United Left – YUL) in materializing the radical leftist utopia conceived by director Ljubiša Ristić, especially in its ultimate home found in the old sugar refinery named after the pre-First World War leader of the socialist movement in Serbia.

This chapter has aimed to contribute to a better understanding of practices of discursive representations and performative approaches to dealing with the past – industrial, historical and social – in the specific context of the transitional region of Serbia and the former Yugoslavia. As a complex postindustrial ecosystem where humans, machines and animals interact in different and very unusual ways, the Dimitrije Tucović sugar refinery was identified as a testing ground for a more-than-representational approach to a deindustrializing landscape. This landscape was shaped both by the processes of postsocialist economic and political transition as experienced in the formerly communist world, and a singular artistic vision that was highly reflective of both the physical space it occupied and the social processes that brought it into its current shape. Accordingly, this chapter has sought to demonstrate how the discipline of theatre and performance studies may benefit from more-than-representational approach to performing space conceived as a landscape informed by complex political, economic and cultural aspects of social transformation.

As for KPGT, this and other artistic groups that claim abandoned industrial landscapes for artistic production still challenge the currently prevailing tendencies of withdrawal of theatre from urban public space into the closed preserves of commodified middle-class entertainment. The long history of KPGT, which has been in constant dialogue with the social transformations in socialist Yugoslavia and postsocialist Serbia, has been observed in this chapter as a struggle for a physical space, a liberated territory for independent reflection of society, politics and art. However, this struggle has always involved contestation with the official political sphere – at times, this implied active collaboration with or participation in party politics, while at other times, it meant struggle for survival and economic pressures. The complex of the old sugar mill in Belgrade, which became a permanent venue for the company with a long history of mobility and migration, has become the ultimate contested landscape in this pursuit of the impossible dream of artistic independence and integrity, in a context where cultural priorities are dictated by short-term interests of the political elites currently in power.

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Notes

1. For the history of this industrial complex built between 1899 and 1901 (as the oldest sugar refinery in Serbia), see Vasiljević (2016) and Vuksanović-Macura (2012: 117–20).

2. Other approaches included the use of urban attractions as performance spaces by (usually publicly funded) theatre festivals, projects aimed at establishing a meaningful dialogue with its urban surroundings and a population not usually perceived as theatregoers, and conceptual theatre that uses everyday life and its arenas as artistic devices (Šentevska 2018a).

3. For example, the Centre for Cultural Decontamination (CZKD) or Cinema Rex in Belgrade.

4. On the ambivalent (and quite unique) position of KPGT between independent and institutional theatre in Yugoslavia, see Šentevska (2013) and also Jovanov (2016).

5. Namely, multicultural and multilingual Yugoslavia never succeeded in creating truly Yugoslav art.

6. Goli Otok was an uninhabited island off the coast of Primorje-Gorski Kotar County in Croatia, where a political prison was in operation between 1949 and 1989. Until 1956, it was used to incarcerate mainly known and alleged Stalinists. Later on, detainees were criminals and grave juvenile offenders.

7. For the specificities of the Yugoslav self-management economy and its impact on the cultural production in the country see Jakovljević (2016).

8. For more on KPGT's Subotica period, see Jovanov (2016: 73–125). This author pays additional attention to KPGT's activities in the wider urban area of Subotica and its revitalization of Lake Palić. See also Klaić (1989a).

9. On the early seasons of the Grad teatar Budva festival, see Ćirilov and Pašić (1998).

10. On the response to the war situation from theatre professionals in Serbia, see Jovičević (2002) and also Šentevska (2017). For a comparative perspective on the various countries of the former Yugoslavia, see Jestrović (2013) and especially Dolečki et al. (2018) – the contributions to this volume from Pavičević, Šentevska, Radulović, Dragičević-Šešić and Jovičević focus on the general situation in Serbia, while Ana Dević discusses the specific case of KPGT.

11. On the theatre in Eastern Europe after the Cold War, see Stefanova (2000).

12. The culminating point in this campaign of nationalist mobilization in Serbia was the speech given by Milošević at the memorial complex Gazimestan in Kosovo Polje on 28 June 1989 during the central commemoration of the sixth centenary of the Battle of Kosovo.

13. On nationalist themes in Serbian theatre productions in the 1980s (including the sensitive issues of the situation in Kosovo), see Radulović (2002b).

14. Sarajevo was initially besieged by the forces of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) and subsequently by the Army of Republika Srpska between April 1992 and February 1996 (more than 1,400 days).

15. How the institutional theatres in Serbia operated in these circumstances was well described in Milosavljević (1999); see also Radulović (2002a). For cultural memory and narratives of the NATO campaign, see Atanasovski (2016), Fridman (2016) and Rácz (2016).

16. During the war in in former Yugoslavia, Klaić left Serbia to continue his career in the Netherlands. He was Director of the Netherlands Theatre Institute (1992 to 2001) and later resumed his teaching career at several European universities.

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