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## BELGRADE JUNE '68 AS A THEATRICAL EVENT

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper examines the June 1968 demonstrations in Belgrade. This week long series of events (demonstrations, rallies and university occupations) is now known as the “June ’68 events” or, more simply, as the “’68 protest’. Considering diverse socio-cultural factors which led to the ’68 protest, this paper suggests these events could be examined as a theatrical event. For this purpose, the paper applies Mikhail Bakhtin’s theoretical framework in the analysis of participants’ testimonies, and focuses on the protest’s sensory, artistic and symbolic elements. The research attempts to define the protest’s “theatrical vocabulary”, based on specific local circumstances, but also on ideas common to all left-wing youth movements at that time. By exploring the ways in which Belgrade’s ’68 rebellious identity was created, the paper maps the events’ positioning in the construction of Belgrade’s modern, post-dissident identity whose agenda is still marked by the struggle for freedom of thought, civil rights and participation.*

### ***Key words***

*June Movement, sixty-eight, Belgrade, testimony, theatrical event*

Student rebellion in Belgrade in June 1968 was grounded in local circumstances but also in ideas that far exceed national frameworks. Therefore, its narratives represent an important chapter in contemporary readings about dissident movements from the end of the Second World War to the fall of the Berlin Wall. The intention of this paper is to suggest a novel research ap-

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proach in analysing this historical event, understanding the concept of protest as being both a political and a theatrical event<sup>2</sup>.

The term/concept *theatrical event* appears for the first time in the paper “Approaching the Theatrical Event” by Willmar Sauter (1997), who asserts that theatre should be understood as “a place of meeting, encounters and confrontation between performer and spectator” (Sauter, 2004: 1). Over the years an increasing number of theatre scholars have joined the dialogue regarding the concept of theatre event, trying to illuminate specific characteristics of “eventness” of theatre performance from a variety of angles. However, one of the common questions related to this is: Are rituals, ceremonies, processions, dance and street performances or preaching at a church mere events or do they have such qualities that make them a kind of theatrical events? To this we add: Is not a protest – being an organized act of rebellion, involving speakers and (active) audience, occupying particular space and trajectory, using designed banners, having a recognizable style (specific details, masks, dress code) and developing according to a semi-defined scenario (often including diverse types of live performances) – as much a theatrical event, as it is a political event?

### 1. Protest as a theatrical event

Both the theatrical event and the *protest event* are culturally determined situations in which theatrical, political, social communications take place, conditioned by factors such as: perceptual scheme of spectators, organizational character of the event and the type of “performance”; and where all of these factors are pre-conditioned by a spectrum of other socio-cultural factors (see: Edelman, Van Maanen, & Shorley, 2015: 223). In case of an act of collective rebellion, as well as in the theatre, interaction between “the audience and performers” is the “nucleus of the event” (Sauter, 2004: 11) and is defined by its position in the social and cultural environment.

Sauter affirms the standpoint that every happening (live event) has the “theatrical function” which does not exclude the event’s primary or other function(s), e.g. religious function of the ceremonial performance or politi-

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2 The paper is the result of the research done within the COST action *New Exploratory Phase in Research on East European Cultures of Dissent – NEP4DISSENT* (CA16213). The paper was presented at COST Conference “East European Dissent between Agenda & Legacy” that took place at the Brussels Campus of Maastricht University on Oct 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019 (<https://nep4dis-sent.eu/events/conference-report-east-european-dissent-between-agenda-legacy/>)

cal and socio-emancipatory functions of a protest. Rather, one complements the other and is reflected in the enjoyment, involvement and experience of the spectators who, together with the “performers”, form inseparable partners of there-created theatrical event (Sauter, 2004: 4). He defines the artistic, organizational, and structural conventions of the theatrical event (which together constitute “contextual theatricality”) as being determined by the social and political context (Sauter, 2004: 12)<sup>3</sup>, while the analogy with the events we are examining in this paper is more than obvious. Protest events are also deeply grounded in the social situation, they exploit the socio-cultural characteristics of their environment and thus we can speak about their *contextual performativity*.

The final comparison, aiming to verify the set thesis on the possibility of analysing protest event as a theatrical event, is related to the theoretical concept postulating that theatrical playing comprises three important levels of communication: 1) the sensory, 2) the artistic and 3) the symbolic. The sensory level of communication refers to making a connection (even emotional connection) between the audience and the performer; artistic level refers to the use of artistic means that the performers use to communicate with the audience; and symbolic level considers the connection of what is shown on stage and the audience’s response (see: Sauter, 2004: 9-11). In our analysis we point out that for both theatrical performance and the expression of political ideas during a protest the strength of the sensory level of communication is crucial, because “if a performer is not able to attract my attention, so that I look and watch him or her at all, the whole communication breaks down” (Sauter, 2004: 10). Furthermore, the use of artistic means (or more broadly – the use of sound and visual means designed for the specific event) influences the success of the achieved communication, as “just this level determines the difference between the *event* and what happens on a daily basis” (Ibid.). Finally, it is the synthesis of the sensory, artistic and symbolic levels of communication that enables the success of a theatrical event; likewise, the transmission of political ideas is enabled by the establishment of emotional connection and easy to understand artistic means, all of which lead to the symbolic level of communication through which ideas and ideologies are adopted. As such, the protest represents a theatrical event of the specific immersive type – a performance in which the audience actively participates and determines the course of the “play”.

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3 This is related to the theories of earlier theorists and theatre makers (Coppieter, White, Fo, Schechner, etc.) who all point out that theater is a “culturally constructed product” (Bennett, 1997: 106)

## 2. The protest as Bakhtin's carnival

Thesis about the protest being at the same time both political and theatrical event is correlated with the more "traditional" Bakhtin's theory of Carnival. The concept of the carnival came from his analysis of the culture of popular laughter in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, but it has often been used in cultural studies – especially in studies of social (re)actions and movements<sup>4</sup>. The use of theory in this context is grounded in Bakhtin's definition of carnival as a form of ritual-representation of culture of popular laughter, which lasts for a certain time; is held in a public place (usually the main city square); is characterized by multitude of people among whom close relationship is established; and lead to the annulment of the rules of the official world by introducing new, carnival rules (see: Bakhtin, 1978: 235). Using this theoretical approach in analysing protests is also justified by Bakhtin's explanation of carnival as the purest representation of the expression of culture of "the others", by which he means the "unofficial" world – the one opposed to general rules, governing hierarchy, mainstream ideas and ideology (Ristivojević, 2009: 200-201).

One of the main characteristics of carnival is laughter. Bakhtin defines it as a collective, subversive laugh with the function of overcoming fear and expressing freedom of thought. This subversiveness is best seen in the inversion of roles and grotesque – used within it as means of rethinking established social relations, ridiculing ruling norms and prohibitions, and describing vibrant and untamed energy of the people. Another element of the carnival is heteroglossia which overcomes a single meta-voice and meta-truth, by transgressing and confronting different discourses and relativizing everything (Ristivojević, 2009: 205).

The protest also implies an aspiration for dialogue as a communication model, as opposed to the monologue used by the authorities, and creates a utopian, subversive world, established over the duration of the protest with the aim of social transformation and critical commentary on reality. As such, it includes one more characteristic of carnival identified by Bakhtin, the creation of "unofficial world", "carnival rules" and polyphony. In this way, the protest always hinges on becoming (and recent history, such as the 1991 Student protests in Belgrade, confirms this) a carnival itself. This depends on the way

4 Thus, in the paper "Street as a Political Space: The Space of Carnivalization" (1997), Milena Dragicevic Sestic analyzes civil protests in Serbia in the 1990s by using Bakhtin's notions of dialogism, polyphony, heteroglossia, grotesque, ... etc.

its dialogue is created – i.e. the level of practical use of all of carnival means that Bakhtin mentions: grotesque, inversion of roles and production of strong laughter as emotional reactions by which protest participants overcome fear and discomfort.

### 3. Socio-historical perspective of June Movements

From the onset of 1951 economic measures (most notably decentralization of state managed enterprises and introduction of workers' self-management) until 1961 the official statistics of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia recorded a tremendous increase in social production and investments. Art historian Branko Dimitrijević interprets this as a consequence of "post-revolutionary enthusiasm for productivity", but also as a consequence of Yugoslavia's foreign policy in the 1950s which provided significant foreign investments and credits to the Yugoslav economy (Dimitrijević, 2016: 31). This situation, in addition to the specific position of Yugoslavia "between the east and the west", led to the creation of a consumerist socialist society. On the wings of this enthusiasm the League of Communists of Yugoslavia adopted the new program in 1958 which announced a "more comfortable life" and "better service to consumers of goods". Furthermore, it advocated "ownership of various consumer items" and expressed concern for "daily necessities and free time of the working man" (Duda Igor, 2010 according to Dimitrijević, 2016: 32). The program was promoted as a way of strengthening self-management, while political cohabitation of the development of workers' self-management and economic liberalization was to be concluded by the 1963 Constitution (Ibid). Yet, the economic reform had negative social consequences. Most were related to layoffs, uneven regional development, increasing population migration and the first recorded economic stagnation of the post-war Yugoslavia. The reform was criticised by quite a few members of the Communist Party who understood them as "dangerous revisionism and a departure from the principles of the socialist revolution" (Dimitrijević, 2016: 35), and also by the younger generations that grew up on socialist ideas of equality and were dissatisfied with repressive policies and strict social norms. The student protest in June 1968 in Belgrade was the first public expression of such views and the first public voicing of demands for "more humane socialism".

The reason for the outbreak of the protest in the "Student City" (student campus in New Belgrade) was a clash of students and brigadiers on the evening of June 1<sup>st</sup> 1968, sparked by students attempting to enter the "Carnival of

Friendship” – a party organized in the small hall of the Workers’ University. As there was not enough space, a tussle between students and brigadiers started, leading to an (unnecessarily rough) intervention by the police force. The police pushed the students away from the place of the conflict by beatings and threats. Provoked by this, the students started gathering in large numbers and marching to the centre of Belgrade with the idea of waiting there until the morning and protesting in the main square with demands for a better position and revision of social anomalies. On their way, they were met by a cordon of armed police officers who used batons and gunshots to force the youth back into the campus. After a night during which the revolt spread throughout the entire population of the campus, a student procession carrying numerous slogans headed towards the city centre with the intention of holding peaceful demonstrations. However, the scenario from the previous night was repeated in the clash known as the “Overpass conflict”, a brutal confrontation between the armed police and unarmed students. Following the order not to allow the protesters to pass, policemen brutally beat up the students using tear gas and batons, injuring more than 130 people, 105 of whom were students.

After these events, a revolutionary atmosphere prevailed in the Student City: slogans were written, revolutionary songs were played, and a riot was called. Few politicians came to try to resolve the situation peacefully, but no consensus could be reached between the students and government representatives with respect to student demands: to find and punish those responsible for beating up students, better social position of students and workers, abolition of privileges to the authorities, greater autonomy of the university etc. The demands were promptly supported by the entire student community, as well as a significant number of professors (especially from the Faculty of Philosophy) who initiated the student strike organized at the Captain Misa’s Building (an open amphitheatre within the architectural ensemble of the Faculty of Philosophy). The strike lasted the following seven days and was known as the “June ’68 events”.

#### **4. June ’68 Events in Participants’ Testimonies**

Analysing the June ’68 events as a theatrical event requires exploration of the sensory, artistic and symbolic communicativeness of the event and the context in which this communication was made, and this shall be done through

the analysis of the experience of its participants<sup>5</sup>. The data were collected from archival photo and video materials; testimonies from participants and event leaders were obtained through interviews organized as part of the COST action NEP4DISSENT<sup>6</sup>; as well as the other oral testimonials given by some of protest participants in the years following the protests.

#### 4.1. The context of the event

Apart from the specificities of local circumstances, Belgrade students' motives had much in common with other student movements, e.g. May street demonstrations in France, the Tet Offensive, the Prague Spring, Student protests in Mexico, Japan, Brazil, etc. These events had different political contexts, but their ideologies were very similar, as were the images of young people in the streets of Belgrade, Prague, Berlin, Chicago, Paris (Tuma, 2008: 41; Daniel, 2008: 43). The protest reflected inter-generational conflict (Meshkat, 2008) and were a reaction to a "crack in the concept of society" (Hana Arent, according to Kon Bendit, 2008: 104). The desire to push the boundaries of freedom was expressed everywhere. The goals were affirmation of academic freedoms and the autonomy of cultural institutions; fight against repressive ideology, authoritarian and totalitarian rule, and especially against the violence whose paradigm was the Vietnam War (Popov, 2008: 84).

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5 This research methodology aims to be analogous to the methodology used in exploring the experiences of a theatrical event. Research in this context, i.e. surveys of audience experiences (reactions), are most often methodologically conceived as an interview in which, after watching a performance, the audience is questioned about the experience of what it has attended. Such research, as Matthew Reason notes, is problematic from at least three aspects. The first relates to the fact that any interpretation of the experience (by the respondent) is prone to subjective interpretation (by the researcher). The second aspect is that people are often unable to explain their experience in words and then they harmonize the experience with the possibility of interpretation – not the other way around (Wilson, Schooler, 1999, according to: Reason, 2010: 17). The third aspect relates to the difference between exploring an experience over the course of its duration and exploring the reflection on that experience. However, Reason favors exploring retrospective, conscious experience of the individual and defends such attitude by the thesis that this experience is the goal, even the "continuation of the play". That means that the experience is characterized by the fact that it leaves an (emotional, spiritual, intellectual) impact on a personal level, thus it engages the thoughts of the individual and invokes remembering. "Conversation after a play (or other event of a similar type) is more than a process of reminding one's experience, it is an integral part of the experience for many people" (Reason, 2010: 27).

6 During the COST meeting in Belgrade (8-9 October 2018) the Faculty of Dramatic Arts organized an evening program *Discussions and testimonies of actors of dissident movements in Belgrade (1960-1970)* that consisted of 4 parallel sessions – group interviews with some of the most influential activists in this context

Related to this Ljubinka Trgovčević, protest participant and later professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, remarks: “In 1966 we organized a protest against the Vietnam War. Later, Rudi Dutschke was killed, Martin Luther King was killed, and these were all the facts that led us to seek a better world” (Trgovčević, 2018, in: documentary “Ideal ‘68”, 29:03). International, global left-wing character of this event *de-facto* is one of the main points in its narratives, “the fact” that has been repeated continually in all its interpretations:

*The 68, however, was preparing, it did not just happen. We were discussing what was going on in France, about student demonstrations there, demonstrations in Germany, the USA (...) It was a period of fantastic left-wing freedom, and we were all left-wing. Only the students acted more radically to the left. The whole world was left-oriented.* (Pešić<sup>7</sup>, 2018, from the interview conducted within the program “Discussions and testimonies of actors of dissident movements in Belgrade (1960-1970”))

The wick of the protest has been lit due to local problems such as increasingly frequent workers’ protests and (more generally) negative consequences of economic reform “which had a direct impact on the fundamental rights of student population” (Perović<sup>8</sup>, 2018, in: documentary ‘68: Vrisak generacije, 1. deo”, 8:14). In the interview conducted within NEP4DISSENT event Dragomir Olujujić – a prominent participant in the protest (later, participant of Open School, a dissident jailed several times, philosopher and political activist) – says: “we reacted to social problems – not just those of students”, and goes on to define June Movments as a political and cultural act with a unambiguous attitude toward social contradictions of Yugoslav socialism.

More, not less, socialism was demanded; more state control over the means of production; more ideology (Dimitrijević, 2016: 68). Echoing in students’ voices were influences of the Frankfurt School, French existentialism, American Beat Generation, anit-colonial movements, and Russian (the Soviet Union) critique of the ‘cult-of-personality’. Also, one could also hear voices from the 1930s revolutionary student movement and its leaders, most notably Veljko Vlahovic. Although present in the June events’ narratives, the general

7 Vesna Pešić (1940-): protest participant, sociologist and politician.

8 Latinka Perović (1933-): Secretary of the Central Committee of Communist Party of Serbia (1968-1972), historian and (former) politician.

attitude toward them (particularly Vlahovic) is best described as ambivalent, from heroes to figures of disappointment<sup>9</sup>.

#### 4.2. The sensory level of communication

The testimonies analysed clearly indicate a high level of emotional engagement of participants in the June Events. The experience of event is described as: a flood of revolutionary energy, pride, release from the grip of conventionality, release from fear and staleness. Therefore, in their recollections of the event, the participants remember:

*We thought that the police would break into the faculty and arrest us. Many parents (my father as well) were against our action and threatened to come for us, saying that we should not overthrow the regime, that we were foreign mercenaries (Trgovčević, 2018, in: documentary “Ideal ‘68”, 23:12).*

*My mother and father were angry, told me they were against it and that they wanted me to get out of all of that. I – for the first and last time in my life – told them to get out of my room, that it was my business and that my (our) revolution was waiting for me (Liht<sup>10</sup>, 2018, in: the documentary “Ideal 68”, 23:53).*

Although the dissatisfaction had lasted for some time, it wasn't until the June '68 events that those feelings found a way to express themselves. According to testimonies, especially the stories of the “Overpass Conflicts”, provoked revolt caused release of inhibited ideas and leading to feelings of dignity and joy. Individuals describe such emotional flow as their own experience, but also as their collective experience which connected the protesters into a single being. Archival video materials show that protesters were called from loudspeakers and the stage to stay there. Throughout the night they talked, sang, recited, did not allow anyone to provoke them, i.e. there were asked to be there – “for dignity, not for fear”<sup>11</sup>.

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9 This is due to the fact that the former revolutionist and later high official of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was one of the leaders of unsuccessful negotiations between students and authorities (on the side of the authorities).

10 Sonja Liht (1947-): participant in the demonstration and one of the leaders. Sociologist and political activist, founder of several non-governmental organizations dealing with human rights.

11 One of the protestors (probably D. Mićunović) addressed the students from the loudspeakers: “We will be here talking all night tonight. We will sing. We will recite. We will not let anyone

Dragoljub Mićunović – assistant Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy at that time, Vladimir Mijanović, aka Vlada Revolution (a student from the countryside), Professor Ljuba Tadic and several others<sup>12</sup> appeared to be the leaders in the participants' narratives of the protest. Their speeches and rapport with the protesters contributed to the establishment of collectiveness and shared emotions. Equally significant is the fact concerning the anti-hierarchical structure of this event and its polyphony.

*Many spoke. I held that microphone for ten days, but it could be taken by anyone who wanted it. We played a little bit of Greek democracy, so every morning an action committee was re-elected. Like in Athens during the marathon battle when power was over lasted 24 hours – from sunrise to sunset.* (Mićunović, 2018, in: documentary “Ideal ‘68” 26:34)

In his many testimonies on the subject, Mićunović refers to the June protest as an event of emotional emptying and catharsis – a time when and a place where he has been in tune with himself and his opinion – more than ever. Similarly, Borka Pavićević – a participant in demonstrations, dramaturg, journalist and cultural activist says:

*For me it was a great liberation. It was there that people of my age and even younger learned to speak out publically and in the name of what they really thought. Paradoxically, there was no fear that prevails in people today. That's the big difference.* (Pavićević, 2018, in: documentary “Ideal ‘68” 33:57)

“No fear” and “liberation concept” created during a week in June '68 became a significant legacy of this event, and this is particularly important considering the influence the event had on the wider society. Students remained in and around Captain Misa's building for several days and the entire area around and inside the building was organized according to their own rules<sup>13</sup>. Other citizens, especially those feeling themselves out of the “fortification” reacted to the protest. Živojin Pavlović writes about this in his book “A spit full of blood” pointing to wide acceptance of student ideas. He describes the citizens

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provoke us in any way. But at the same time, those who think to provoke us have to know that we remain here. For dignity, not for fear!” (in: documentary “Ideal ‘68” 20:00)

12 Zagorka Golubović, Mihajlo Marković, Trivo Indjic, Svetozar Stojanović, Nebojša Popov and Miladin Životić – the professors of the Faculty of Philosophy who made up the Praxis group and were later expelled from the university as “youth spoilers”.

13 An agreement was reached with the local authorities that students would not leave building and that police would not enter.

gathered around Captain Misa's Building as the mass initially made up of curious but unbiased bystanders, and who were drawn in, showing solidarity and who became one with the protesters by embracing the Proclamation of the Student Action Committee (Pavlović, 2008: 34-35)<sup>14</sup>.

#### 4.3. Artistic level of communication

Participants testify about being supported by many artists: poets: Desanka Maksimović, Vasko Popa, Matija Becković, writers: Danilo Kiš, Borisav Pečić, Živojin Pavlović, film director Dušan Makavejev, actor and theatre director Branko Pleša, actors: Mira Stupica, Ljuba Tadić, opera singer Živan Saramandić and many others. An illustrative artistic dimension of the protest is the story about the actor Stevo Žigon delivering a Robespierre's monologue from Bihner's "Danton's death" (which was played in the Yugoslav Drama Theater the previous day) that made the protesters feel "as if the text spoken was their own – then and there" (Olujčić, 2018, in documentary "68: Vrisak generacije, 1. deo", 49:58)<sup>15</sup>. Similarly, the choir of the National Theatre came to support the students by singing the aria "O give me freedom" from the opera "Prince Igor" and these words became one of protesters' recognizable slogans.

The June Movement gained broad cultural significance. Protesters' words and archive video materials show clearly that there many public workers considered it an honour to come to support the protest ("68: Vrisak generacije, 1. deo", 48:39). Moreover, the stars of the Yugoslav cultural scene were the protest's integral part<sup>16</sup>, while Captain Misa's building as a sheltered and rounded atrium, provided adequate "stage" for the revolution scenario (Pavićević,

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14 Still, the truth is a bit less romantic. For example, although students defined their "struggle" as geared toward improving student and labor rights, expected support from labor unions was lacking. The prevailing thesis is that this was a consequence of intimidation and indoctrination of the working class by way of skewed media interpretations of student arrogance and intentions of overthrowing the socialist order.

15 Žigon chanted "Did they rob the people (traitors to the revolution)" and then paused, and the mass began shouting a 10-minute "Yes, yes they did!".

16 Related to this, in testimonies we can find different stories, such as the one about Dušica Žegarac (known actress), who with rubber gloves and a bucket, early in the morning was cleaning the toilets at the Faculty of Philosophy – alone, with no one around. When rumors began that the government is planing to use tanks to move protesters, poet Duško Radović sarcastically spoke: "You are threatened, but remember: in 1941 the Germans killed 500 students in Kragujevac. So those who want to break this record are given the opportunity tonight, because there are 55 000 of you here". In the same context, famous actor Dragomir Bojanić – Gidra calmed those gathered by humor "Brothers, students, you are threatened by tanks, but Gidra will buy you a tank."

2018, in: documentary “Ideal ‘68” 26:05). A significant “episode” was the declaration of the autonomy of the university, renamed into the “Karl Marx Red University”. It had a specific “socialist red” aesthetics achieved with banners affixed to the facade of the faculty that exclaimed ideas of the Protest Manifesto: “United in victory”, “Down with the princes of socialism”, “Revolution is not over yet”, “Down with the red bourgeoisie”, “We are entitled to our revolution”, “Oh give us freedom”, “They shot at us”, “Worker-students”, “Trust us”, “We will pass this exam”, “While the amateurs are ruling, the proletariat is suffering”, “The unity of workers and students”, “Jobs for everyone, bread for everyone”, “Don’t trust the press”.

Tito’s image from the partisan days and the Yugoslav flag were raised in between shouting of the slogans, as a clear depiction of the fact that the students did not want to overthrow the order, but – on the contrary, to “cure” the society and to draw the president’s attention to the anomalies that he “was not even aware of”. The slogans, speeches and performances were accompanied by the singing of the Yugoslav hymn “Hey Slavs” and revolutionary songs “International” and “Bandera Rosa”, and the anthem of protest was written with the suggestive refrain “Left, Left, Left”.

#### 4.4. Symbolic level of communication

The June ’68 events ended with Tito’s declarative admission that students were right, but without fulfilment of their demands. Even today, it is inexplicable that so much “energy” was willingly extinguished immediately after Tito’s speech, unless one accepts the point of view that in their flamboyant naivety young revolutionaries actually saw absolute authority in Tito who “did not know” what was being done around him, so he needed to get a strong message about social deviations. However, reflecting on later testimonies of the participants, it would be more realistic to conclude that students, in the system as it was, could not have expected a more radical change, at least not without more radical acts. At that moment, what was radical enough was the achieved social influence<sup>17</sup>. Regardless of the final outcome, when it comes to their cognitive engagement participants of June Movements fully agree that this event had a significant impact on their adoption of social, political and cultural ideas and attitudes.

17 The protest’s significance is confirmed by the subsequent decades-long repression of the authorities over the leaders of the student movement and the artists who spoke through their works about the ideas of the 68 (Želimir Žilnik, Dušan Makavejev, Aleksandar Popović et al.).

In this regard, they remark that all subsequent activism of the late 1960s and 1970s started with the '68, when society became politically aware, interested in revelation of the responsibilities of the police and state, and in creating a different discourse of political thinking than the official one. The protest *de-facto* contributed to the development of polyphony and the idea of expanding the sphere of democracy – democratization of schools and universities, participation in economy, participation political process, and creation of citizens' initiatives. "It goes without saying that democratic virtues, such as the courage to defend one's beliefs, the engagement of the masses, the association of citizens, and self-determination, were not invented by the sixty-eight. However, it was not until the sixty-eighth that these virtues began to define political culture" (Ralf Fix, 2008: 13-14).

Yugoslav students fought for specific (local) rights and freedoms, but by participating in the process they joined global youth struggle aimed at examining the relationship between youth and adults, between men and women, issues of sexuality, consumption and lifestyle. Violence was no longer a taboo topic, patriarchal mentality was rejected, the path to greater personal expression was opened, and sexual minorities began their path to achieving equal status (Fiks, 2008: 14). Therefore, throughout this event students grew up in the Kantian sense of the notion, which means – as Anka Jakšić (protest participant and chair of the 1967/68 faculty committee) explains "rejecting dependence on others' opinions and establishing action in relation to your own critical perception of reality" (Jakšić, 2010, <http://www.audioifotoarhiv.com/gosti%20sajta/AnkaJaksic.html>).

Although, the testimonies contain quite a few examples of "self-mythologizing", the prevailing impression is that there exists the June '68 events myth. Participants' stories emphasize the significance of the event as a whole, i.e. the significance of there-created community acts, while achieved personal roles are interpreted as a "product" of collective acts. In this sense, the experiences and reactions of the participants are seen as parts of a strong self-actualizing process, process of development and maturation of individuals and the society as a whole.

## 5. Conclusion

Analysing the June protest in Belgrade as a theatrical event confirms the thesis that this historical event has grown into an urban myth and a myth

of the European left. However, it is not particularly present in the dominant national mythology which does not celebrate enough cultural-emancipatory and democratic potentials of the event. Taking into account the social environment, and especially upbringing and educational background of the protest's participants, we cannot say that this event was carnival *per-se*, but it included important carnival's characteristics such as emotional engagement, polyphony and creating a temporary community within the (official) community. Read against this discourse June '68 Movement could be perceived as a precursor of the three-decades later students' protests (during the '90s) which were fully structured as a carnival, using grotesque, inversion of roles and sarcasm as their principal means.

The communicative elements June '68 Movement created – the “play” of democracy, sarcasm in speech and slogans, actualized use of (well-known) works of art, the use of sharp-cut aesthetics symbols etc., could be understood as its legacy to later social movements. Together these symbols constitute a “vocabulary of rebellion” present in the images of various protests – then, later in history and today. In this regard, the analysed event represents a model of communication of “the others” or “unofficial world”, which is simultaneously adaptive to circumstances, and universal in terms of its democratic intentions to which “unofficial world” aspires. As such it is important dissident heritage, whose continuous exploration from different time perspectives is significant – in the context of actualized and up-to-date reflections on the history of democracy and development of civic participation.

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## BEOGRADSKI JUN '68. KAO POZORIŠNI DOGAĐAJ

### **Apstrakt**

Struktura protesta, njegova komunikativna dimenzija, kao i preduslovljenost spektrom različitih socio-kulturnih faktora, ukazuju na mogućnost razumevanja ovakvih događaja kao pozorišnih događaja per se. U takvom diskursu, i uz korišćenje teorijskog aparatusa Mihaila Bahtina, u radu istražujemo studentski protest koji se odigrao u junu 1968. godine u Beogradu, analizirajući (kasnija) svedočenja učesnika protesta, te rekonstruišući senzorne, umetničke i simboličke ravni tada i tamo ostvarene komunikacije. Istraživanje teži definisanju „pozorišnog rečnika” ovog istorijskog događaja, zasnovanog na specifičnim lokalnim prilikama, ali i idejama koje su bile zajedničke za različite, mladalačke, levo orijentisane pokrete toga vremena. Istražujući pojave kroz koje je u prvoj nedelji juna kreiran revolucionarni identitet beogradske šezdeset osme, mapiramo i poziciju ovog događaja u procesima konstruisanja modernog, postdisidentskog identiteta Grada, na čijoj su agendi i dalje – i posle intenzivnih događaja devedesetih – borba za slobodu misli, građanska prava i participaciju.

### **Ključne reči**

junski protesti, šezdeset osma, Beograd, svedočenja, pozorišni događaj