

Nevertheless, Jelena Novak provides a broadly informed work and shows her great overview to the theoretical and philosophical discourses. For further studies, her book offers the way to connect the discussion of these selected operas with the history of opera and some other concrete and outstanding works of music theatre of the 20th century. It would be interesting to historicize the discourse and to show how some of the body-voice-relationships, shown in the present study already, were prepared in the operas and pieces of musical theatre and opera of the last century. One example of my special interest: the separation of body and voice in music theatre already occurred as early as in some of Bohuslav Martinů's stage works of the 1920s and 1930s, for instance, in his opera *Hry o Marii* (1935), where he divided some of the figures into a singer and a dancer, combining folkloric traditions, ideas of the mystery play of the Middle Ages and epic theatre. The additional view to some contemporary composers like Heiner Goebels, Helmuth Oehring and Olga Neuwirth could also enrich the discussion about Postopera just as the perhaps complementary voice-body-theories by Christa Brüstle or Helga Finter.

Jelena Novak establishes a comprehensive examination of the term Postopera, using it as a concept of post-dramatic and simultaneously postmodern recent opera. This term should be established in music theatre sciences because of its ability to describe the phenomenon of such operas more exactly and to differentiate the various development directions in contemporary music theatre.

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**Sanela Nikolić: *Avangardna umetnost kao teorijska praksa:*
Black Mountain College, Darmštatski internacionalni letnji kursevi za Novu muziku i Tel Quel
[*Avant-garde art as theoretical practice:*
Black Mountain College, Darmstadt International Summer Courses for New Music and Tel Quel]
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The book *Avangardna umetnost kao teorijska praksa: Black Mountain College, Darmštatski internacionalni letnji kursevi za Novu muziku i Tel Quel* is the revised PhD thesis by Dr. Sanela Nikolić, defended at the University of Arts, Belgrade (Interdisciplinary Studies Programme, Art Theory and Media Studies Group) in 2011. The reviewers were Dr. Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman (who was also the mentor) and Dr. Miodrag Šuvaković. In her book, the author questions the status of theory in art, politics and culture, focusing on the three chosen avant-garde art worlds, and states that the roles of artistic and theoretical

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practice within these worlds were equally important. More precisely, the main thesis is that “in relation to existing and surrounding discourses, every avant-garde made an impact as a *theoretical practice*, but also, the theoretical work of artists was a constitutive part of the mechanism of every avant-garde, the common signifier of mutually different phenomena and an important condition of shaping the avant-garde as *theoretical practice* and acting out specific *epistemological breaks*” (13). Nikolić defends her thesis through an argumentation based in interdisciplinary research which draws on the metatheoretical approach where Louis Althusser’s concept of theoretical practice is in question, but also on examination of the published material/texts by actors of three chosen art worlds.

The book is divided into five chapters with an author’s foreword, an introduction which presents the research subject, problem and theoretical frame (*Predmet istraživanja, problem i teorijski okvir* [The Subject of Research, Problem and Theoretical Framework]), a bibliography, name index and biographical data on the author. There is also a valuable contribution in the form of lists of selected writings by teachers and students of Black Mountain College, texts published in the *Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik* from 1958 to 1990 and texts published in the *Tel Quel* magazine between 1960 and 1983, which served as the source material for the research.

In the first chapter, titled *Avangardna umetnost, teorija i praksa* (Avant-garde art, theory and practice), Nikolić lays the theoretical ground on which her analysis of chosen artworlds will be given. First, she presents different theories and discourses on the avant-garde which enables her to

draw the conclusion that the avant-garde both *practically* (through artistic work) and *theoretically*, radically deals with both intrinsically artistic questions and the status of art in the social context, leading to the problematisation of the mechanisms of the constitution of social acting (37). Because of this, Nikolić brings in Althusser’s concepts of social practice and epistemological break, and works with them in the context of the theory of the artist, as another important concept for the development of her argument. Since the role of theory in the avant-garde was not only to explain the artist’s poetics *a posteriori*, but to legitimize new forms of artistic production and to mediate between arts and culture, Nikolić sees theory as the constitutive discourse of art (44), leading to both art and theory as equally important parts of the realization of avant-garde art. The theory of the artist, according to Nikolić, results in epistemological breaks since it deals with the ideology of modernist art and brings new models, and it is recognized as practice because of its form of “doing and questioning in relation to the ‘social’ of art” (56).

The next three chapters are dedicated to the analysis of the three chosen artworlds, which are, in Nikolić’s opinion, institutionally constituted as such precisely because of the interrelation of artistic and theoretical practice, variously exemplified between them. Methodologically, these chapters follow the clear idea of presenting a given artworld in the first part as a social practice, with informative details on the context in which they emerged and the intervention they were going to make, and then as avant-garde theoretical practice in the second part of each chapter. The changing conceptualization of both avant-garde

theoretical practices and their recognition in discourses on the avant-garde is given in understanding Black Mountain College as avant-garde, Darmstadt International Summer Courses as neo-avant-garde and Tel Quel as post-avant-garde practice.

Thus, the second chapter, *Black Mountain College kao teorijska praksa* (*Black Mountain College as Theoretical Practice*), deals with the formation and activity of the College in the midst of educational reforms in the democratic American society and the need for profiling American art as opposed to European artistic tradition. Ideas of 'progressive education' and active aesthetic experience with art as part of everyday life, coming from the philosophy of pragmatism, were at the core of these reforms. Experimental artistic practice, nourished at the College, became the specific signifier of American art. After examining various artistic problems (fluxus, performance, events, poetry as verbal action, open work, etc.) and texts of artists active at the College (for example, Joseph and Annie Albers, Cage, Olsen), Nikolić concludes that their theoretical practice gave a new epistemological model different from the high modernist conception of art as an autonomous sphere, which served as a radical avant-garde move from the traditionally established European paradigm of autonomous art (94).

The Darmstadt International Summer Courses for New Music, the subject of the third chapter (*Darmštatski internacionalni letnji kursevi za Novu muziku kao teorijska praksa*), were formed as part of the process of the denazification of Germany in the post-war period and, because of the specific role of music for the German cultural identity, played an important part in

that process. The continuation of the line of modernist music and the international character of the courses were both established as opposite values to those of Nazi Germany and the concept of the modernist autonomy of music had its role in Cold War politics, as an opposition to the realism of the Eastern Bloc. Nikolić explains that through their artistic work (aimed at the critical deliberation of musical material) and theoretical practice (autopoietic texts, the educational dimension of courses, magazine), composers (notably Boulez, Stockhausen and Cage, but also others) formed the system of meaning which legitimized New Music and overcame existing modernist norms (149). Thus, theory was a constitutive part of the idea of New Music, whose neo-avant-garde effectivity was evident in its intrinsically artistic sphere, as well as the social, political and ideological problematizations related to art.

In the fourth chapter (*Tel Quel kao teorijska praksa* [*Tel Quel as Theoretical Practice*]), the author examines the activity of the group related to the Tel Quel magazine, which emerged in the time of the New Left in France and its ideas regarding the end of capitalism. The activity of the group was directed towards the transformation of language, because of the idea that the deconstruction of language in bourgeois society leads to the deconstruction of other forms of ideology and the capitalist system as a whole (229). Nikolić emphasizes the innovations of the group which included the elaboration of the concepts of language, writing and text, the semiotic platform, signifying practice and intertextuality (203). After a detailed examination of these and other problems and the texts of authors like Sollers, Althusser, Derrida and Kristeva,

but also of the question of “theory after the end of theory”, Nikolić concludes that, with *Tel Quel*, theory had the role of critical practice because of “the revolutionary status of theory and the role of theory in the transformation of social relations” (252). Further, theoretical practice was the field of social work where epistemological breaks were played out (252), and, with the distinctive post-avant-garde effect of the group’s activity, the borders between literal and theoretical work were deconstructed, leading, with emphasis on writing as a meaning/means of problematization, beyond the artistic in the field of the political, ideological, social and cultural.

The final chapter brings *Conclusive remarks – the importance of the avant-garde as theoretical practice* (*Zaključna zapažanja – značaj avangarde kao teorijske prakse*), where the author completed the argumentation by summing up the different

roles of the theoretical in the constitution of the artistic, with the conclusion that the avant-garde served as an initiator of the productive powers of theory, which resulted with new epistemological models of understanding art and permanently changed the relation between the ‘artistic’ and the ‘theoretical’ (261).

The book by Dr. Sanela Nikolić brings an exciting thesis, with an effective argumentation and examples, delivered in a true interdisciplinary manner, through systematic and firm presentation. Bearing in mind that literature on the local theoretical scene dealing with (discourses on) the avant-garde is not quantitatively strong, the publication of research which covers the different avant-garde artistic activities and emphasizes the crucial role of theory is also a valuable contribution of the Faculty of Music’s publishing activity to the literature on art theory.