

Self-limiting creativity: A case study of a metatheatrical approach to political correctness

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Abstract: This paper explores the phenomenon of self-limiting creativity in the context of contemporary theatre in Serbia. It examines the intricacies of theatre through a metatheatrical lens with a particular focus on political correctness. Political correctness, understood here as a cultural performance, is a contested terrain in Serbian theatre, where it is neither acknowledged nor demanded by the audience. Instead, it is introduced by the artists on the basis of their own inclinations, who serve as creators, enforcers and controllers of normative standards. This dynamic highlights the inherent tension between artistic autonomy and the regulatory mechanisms of political correctness. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives from theatre studies, critical theory and cultural analysis, the article examines the metatheatrical dimensions of "Before We Begin", which deals with the narratives of the transgender community in Serbia and was conceived by director Jug Đorđević and writer Tijana Grumić. The study reveals the performative mechanisms through which political correctness operates in the dramaturgical landscape. Through a close reading of the play's thematic engagement, character dynamics and narrative trajectories, the study unpacks the nuances of self-limiting creativity, which is both a symptom and a critique of contemporary discursive formations, and illuminates the ways in which such attitudes shape and constrain creative expression within the theatre landscape.

Key words: political correctness, artistic freedom, metatheatre, "Before We Begin", transgender

If we look at all the heterogeneous manifestations of Serbian theatre art through the prism of political correctness in recent years, we can see the parallel presence of resistance and the gradual acceptance of more responsible models of representation and inclusion. As an example, we can take the National Theatre in Belgrade, the central theatre institution in Serbia, whose incoherent repertoire policy reflects the larger contradiction of Serbian politics in the last decade, which has been described as "sitting on two chairs". It is characterised by the simultaneous cultivation of conservative values and the adoption of progressive policies from the West, the implementation of facade democratic procedures and authoritarian rights violations, what Freedom House describes as a mixed or hybrid regime.

In the social subsystem of art, the question of political correctness reflects the conflict of a broader socio-political agenda, which Janelle Reinert describes as part of the culture wars: "[Political correctness] has been applied to a large range of behaviours of different political and cultural dimensions. Art is frequently discussed in its terms: theatre productions, art exhibits and installations, film, dance – all may be said to be politically correct or incorrect. The term has become tangled up with the university as an institution in what is frequently described as the 'culture wars', and it has been associated with law through legislation concerning hate speech and other insulting or demeaning acts, gestures or images found to go over some limit case of social acceptability and license."¹ Reinert therefore points out that the discourse of political correctness should be seen as part of cultural performance, an umbrella term that encompasses different regimes of sociality and life experience: "'Cultural performance' is an expansive concept, pushing our field beyond a focus limited to artistic expression to try to capture the dynamism of cultural transmission and change, the embodiment and experience of culture as lived sequences of reputable actions, including theatrical performances, which constitute sociality."²

The specificity of political correctness in Serbia is that it is an imported form of cultural performance that is not widespread in local society. The practise of its acceptance is mostly performed by independent organisations, described by conservative thinkers as an auto colonial activity.³ Slobodan Antonić, Professor of Sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, cites the twenty-four-hour broadcast of Jan Fabre's play "Olympus" on Serbian state television as an example of autocolonialism. According to him, European countries, which are seen as exemplary by the autocolonial Serbs, would never allow the transmission of scenes simulating sex, nudity, anilingus and the like on their public television channels. Antonić also refers to a letter from Jan Fabre, who thanks Serbian state television for broadcasting his play with sincere astonishment. According to Antonić, Fabre is astonished because he himself knows that such a thing would not be allowed in "normal societies", but only as part of the cultural-colonial apparatus of self-occupation, i.e. Serbia. From this example, we can see that politically correct performances such as "Olympus", which celebrate sexual, gender, physical and similar diversity, are perceived as an attack on public decency, morality and traditional sensitivity to diversity. In Serbia, there is a culture war between what one would call "authentic" traditionalism and what one perceives as

¹ Janelle G. Reinert, "The Performance of Political Correctness." *Theatre Research International* 36, no. 2 (May 31, 2011): 135.

² *Ibid.* 137.

³ Slobodan Antonić, "Samookupacija I Autokolonijalizam U Srbiji Sprovode 'Patriote.'" *SRBIN.info*, October 3, 2017. <https://srbin.info/pocetna/aktuelno/antonice-samookupacija-i-autokolonijalizam-u-srbiji-sprovode-patriote/?lang=lat>.

"autocolonial, imposed and imported" immoral political correctness. It is therefore not surprising that the reception of politically incorrect manifestations of cultural performance, which includes theatre arts and exists as a complicated relationship between different cultural performances, is not sufficiently sensitised to recognise offensive stereotypes, the mockery of physical flaws, the sexualisation of women, the affirmation of one's race, religion or sexual orientation through the negative portrayal of otherness, the trivialisation of serious issues such as war, poverty or mental health, etc.

I would like to briefly highlight two National Theatre performances as a benchmark for political incorrectness. In 2021, Milan Nešković staged the play "Vlast", which consists of a series of scenes from many comedies by Branislav Nušić, the most represented comedy writer in Serbia. The performance has a satirical character. It shows people who abuse positions of political power, but also subjugated individuals who, through manipulation, try to teach and satisfy those who enjoy privileges. In one of the scenes, a minor character is portrayed as a helpless and incompetent weakling. Homosexuality was used as a frame to unify his negative characteristics. In the same play, the sexualisation of the female characters is also highlighted as a means of characterisation, with a costume that magnifies the female breasts and an action in which a woman dramatically and unmotivatedly shaves her legs. The climax is a female character who pretends to be a victim of domestic violence in order to achieve her goals. She offers her sexual services to a naive man and then attacks him until her male victim cries. Women who accuse men of violence are portrayed as sexual predators, manipulators and liars.⁴

Siniša Kovačević, a well-known writer and conservative politician, is writing and directing the National Theatre's 2022 repertoire hit entitled "The Years of Crows", an epic melodrama set during the occupation of Belgrade in the First World War. The story focuses on the crimes committed against the Serbs, the difficult living conditions under occupation, the endurance of the human spirit and the romantic love between a Serb and a German woman at the centre of the story. Nevertheless, Kovačević uses the process of generalising national characteristics. Ethnicity is the starting point for the creation of a binary opposition: Serbian soldiers are portrayed as brave, honest and worthy sufferers, while the ability to commit crimes is reserved for non-Serbs. The valorisation of one's own people at the expense of others reaches the proportions of national hatred.⁵

These two plays produced by the National Theatre, the most important theatre institution in the country, which are still in the repertoire, are not the only ones, but they are a paradigmatic example of the indulgent attitude of a part of the Serbian theatre audience towards politically incorrect topics. On the one hand, these examples show that the represented, esteemed and recognised artists use negative models of representation of marginalised social groups at will, so that their performances more or less clearly show sexism, homophobia or national intolerance. On the other hand, the lack of engagement with such artistic outcomes in theatre criticism is conspicuous. Not a single review, apart from my own, has analysed the aspects that I highlight here as problematic.

⁴ See more at: Andrej Čanji, "Vlast." See Stage, December 14, 2021. <https://seestage.org/reviews/review-vlast-branislav-nusic-narodni-pozoriste-belgrade/>.

⁵ See more at Andrej Čanji, "The Years of Crows." See Stage, January 31, 2023. <https://seestage.org/reviews/years-of-crows-sinisa-kovacevic-national-theatre-belgrade/>.

The National Theatre, as a place where contradictory cultural achievements are reflected, is also an example of positive examples. I would like to mention here the play "Bollywood" by Maja Pelević from 2018, which partly draws attention to the problem of racism towards the Roma population, which is very little talked about in the Serbian public, except when they are exposed to police, institutional and physical violence. "The dystopian dance-music kitsch shows the troupe of actors in a small town where a "Bollywood" producer comes to supposedly open a film studio. The clash between the fantasy of a promising future and the miserable reality experienced by the ensemble reveals the impact of the economic situation on socio-political conditions and locates the cause of widespread hatred, intolerance, selfishness, envy and vanity in poverty. But in "Bollywood", the perspective of the most marginalised social group is introduced alongside the dominant civil society, impoverished by predatory privatisation. The Roma character also wants to play a role and utilises his acting skills as well as his singing and dancing talent. The rejection he encounters when he is mockingly shooed away with shouts that he is a gypsy clearly shows the class and race-based distance and disgust inherent in our society and its relationship with the Roma community. Although "Bollywood" introduces the issue of racism in Serbia into the mainstream of theatre, the production does not manage to completely leave the racist milieu in which it was made. The role of the Roma was given to Pavle Jerinić [a white actor], not to a representative of the Roma ethnic group. The failure to include Romani actor in the role of the Romani character through social activism and the process of inclusion in the Belgrade National Theatre, an institution of national importance, revealed both a lack of artistic vision and an inability to recognise a unique opportunity for theatre to become a place of genuine social change. Rather than emphasising the issue of racism in the play through social engagement, and conversely implementing a political choice through an artistic choice, the National Theatre did not have the courage to raise the paradigm of theatrical possibilities to a higher level which would problematise the boundary between art and politics. Such a notion of careful casting should not be understood as a denial of the universal potential of acting representativeness, where an actor can portray anyone on stage, but as an emphasis on a specific, purposeful creative process that establishes an active dialogue between the thematic scope of the play and the context in which it is created."⁶

In the three performances mentioned, differently conceived mechanisms of self-restraint can be seen. The plays "Vlast" and "The Years of Crows" reveal the ideological conditions of self-limitation. In "Vlast" the Me Too movement and gay rights are denounced in order to uphold patriarchal values, while in "The Years of Crows" a positive view of other nations is denied in order to unquestionably emphasise the values of one's own belonging. The example of "Bollywood" is important because it reveals two important constitutive mechanisms that are relevant for understanding the gradual acceptance of political correctness in the Serbian theatre space. The self-limiting mechanisms are located on the aesthetic level. Firstly, "Bollywood" is permeated by a metatheatrical self-questioning. The concept of metatheatricity mentioned by Lionel Abel will not be discussed here. His book "Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form" has been criticised as overloaded with various definitions and sometimes irreconcilable conclusions⁷, but also as a problematic attempt to

⁶ Andrej Čanji, „Pozorište, paralaksa, provokacija – preispitivanje angažovanosti 64. Sterijinog pozorja“ “Сцена 2019. Бр. 3: 43-44.

⁷ Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, „‘Metatheatre’: An Essay on Overload.“ Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics 10, no. 2 (2002): 87–119. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20163888>.

define an overly broad concept full of overlooked and vague implications (Chiara Thumiger)⁸. Instead, I will content myself here with the concept of metatheatricality, as proposed by Zoran Milutinović in his analysis of immanent poetics in 20th century drama. For Milutinović, metatheatricality occurs when "the intellectual communion between authors, performers and spectators is interrupted and when the manner of theatrical presentation and its purpose become an open problem that needs to be answered".⁹ According to Milutinović, some simpler changes in drama and theatre, as well as changes in the intellectual situation of the time, can lead to: "...works that represent forms of self-interpretation of an artistic practise that can serve as an occasion for a self-examination of the theatrical mode of representation. Their task is to internally explain and codify the change that has already occurred or to suggest possible responses to the challenge facing drama and theatre."¹⁰ In this sense, "Bollywood" is an example of a metatheatrical play that addresses the position of artists and art in a commercialised society and the issue of racism in relation to employment and equal opportunities in work and individual development.

Another constitutive mechanism of "Bollywood" results from its metatheatrical structure. When it refers to its own status as a fictional creation by, among other things, criticising the racism towards a Roma actor who does not get a job because of his ethnicity, the play "Bollywood" does not live up to the value it propagates. One of the reasons why a Roma actor was not offered the role of a Roma is that there was no professional Roma actor in Serbia at the time and the artistic and production team did not have the courage or vision to hire an amateur actor. What should not be overlooked, however, is the fact that "Bollywood" belongs to the theatre of representation, i.e. the theatre of the dramatic paradigm, as Hans-Thies Lehmann would say. The dramatic paradigm is limited to the level of autonomy of the fictional universe, which only and exclusively imitates the factual.

Postdramatic, on the other hand, opens itself up to a partial fictionalisation of the factual origin of the performance. Lehmann's definition of postdramatic theatre is well known. It is described as: "...more presence than representation, more shared than mediated experience, more process than result, more manifestation than marking, more energy than information",¹¹ so that one can speak of a spectrum of expressive possibilities rather than a polarised aesthetic. From the above definition it can be concluded that postdramatic theatre is not formulated on the basis of exclusivity and the confrontation of two paradigms, but as an extension of the spectrum of contemporary performing arts and the theoretical legitimacy of such an extension is recognised. Dramatic and postdramatic are not mutually exclusive categories, but rather tendencies that are more or less strongly realised in concrete artistic practise and often permeate each other. There is a real world and a fiction that imitates reality. The foundations of the dramatic paradigm imply that it is fictional in nature and that it artistically represents real particulars (e.g. concrete historical figures, real events, real toponyms, institutions, ethnic, political or social groups, etc.) or real generalities (political situations, ideological principles, human nature, characters, typical social situations,

⁸Chiara Thumiger, "On Ancient and Modern (Meta)Theatres: Definitions and Practices." *Materiali e Discussioni per l'analisi Dei Testi Classici*, no. 63 (2009): 9–58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27784314>.

⁹Zoran Milutinović, "Metateatralnost. Imanentna Poetika U Drami XX Veka." *Studentski izdavački centar*, 2014: 5-6.

¹⁰Ibid. 6.

¹¹Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramsko kazalište*, CDU – Centar za dramsku umjetnost, TkH – centar za teoriju i praksu izvođačkih umetnosti, Zagreb-Beograd, 2004: 111.

emotional experiences, etc.) through the construction of the plot, the imitation, the construction of characters, etc. Lehmann says of mimetic dramatic theatre that "the aesthetic creation of theatre is conceived as a variable that depends on another reality - life, human behaviour, reality, etc. The dramatic text thus imitates life, human behaviour, reality, and so on."¹² Because dramatic text imitates the real world, its staging aims to bring the written word to life in the best possible way. In this case, the theatrical act is based on playing with a fictional experience formulated through established formal patterns and conventional semantics of the text's stage markings.

Postdramatic, anti-mimetic theatre functions as a communication that is not based on the representation of factuality through a fictitious text, but is organised as an immediate presentation of experience. The performance is no longer a coherently organised group of signs presented in the form of a final performance result, but is the expression of a free artistic process that arises here and now. The postdramatic mode of expression does not represent an absent world, but implies a volume that overwhelms the performers and the audience with its immediate presence. Postdramatic scenicity is an aesthetic experience that is not mediated by a mimetic system of signs, but lives the truth that dramatic theatre tries to represent but never achieves. A theatre art that moves away from representational expression and turns to the representation of the here and now, a performance that does not signify because it is an identity that shows itself without any mediation.

In the play "Bollywood" we can see that there is an awareness of the ideological acceptance of political correctness which is not problematised at the level of production aesthetics - there is no willingness to reconceptualise the form of theatre art itself. Vlatko Ilić calls this kind of inertia ghostly: "The local scene is haunted." Its spirit is haunted by images of what it is not, what it could be, what it would like to be or what it thinks it is. Possessed (by ghosts), its representatives (agents) and its public persistently dream of something else, of a secure symbolic order or of inclusion in the international art scene. Two processes (or two sides of the same process) are at work: the expansion of the neoliberal market and the sucking out of concrete contextual references and, on the other hand, the (local) reluctance to undertake a radical re-examination and re-articulation of the status of art."¹³ "Bollywood" thus has the dramatic desire to realise itself as a postdramatic revolution. Such pursued desires are characteristic of certain institutional productions. Only within the framework of an independent scene does theatre art have the opportunity to free itself from the limitations imposed by institutional ethics, aesthetics and ideology.

More radical ideological and formal theatre interventions in the Serbian theatre space have been carried out since the 1990s, not on the institutional but on the independent stage. Ana Vujanović writes about this using the term "Soros realism": "Soros realism, which refers to the non-institutional art scene in the transitional states of the 1990s and continues to the present day in the form of so-called "foundation art". The term "Soros realism" was articulated by Miško Šuvaković, with the thesis that this scene was critical of the prevailing (cultural) policies in the countries of the region, but at the same time implemented the (cultural) policies of neoliberal capitalism and civil society created by international foundations - at the time primarily Soros - that supported this scene. This idea is

¹² Ibid. 45.

¹³ Vlatko Ilić, „Sablasti pozorišta i post-disciplinarna platforma“ in Zbornik radova FDU br. 15, Fakultet dramskih umetnosti, Beograd 2009: 42.

fundamentally problematic and provocative, because it means that the critical political position of the non-institutional scene in the 1990s did not emerge autonomously and from the bottom up, but was basically created on a macro level and implemented from the top down. A consistent consequence of this is the (auto)standardisation of the discourse of this scene.¹⁴ In this context, political correctness, understood here as a cultural achievement, is a contested terrain in Serbian theatre, where it is neither recognised nor demanded by the audience. Rather, it is introduced by the artists on the basis of their own preferences, who serve as creators, enforcers and controllers of normative standards.

Theatre is particularly representative of independent artistic practise as a whole because a certain number of playwrights from the institutional scene are simultaneously active in the independent scene. Such a change in environment is important because we can see how, for example, queer stories and artists are more openly and directly represented in the independent scene. So, the conclusion is obvious - what seems rare and reserved in the institutional framework finds its place in the independent sector. The independent art scene in Serbia plays a key role in creating a safe space for queer creativity and experiences, but it also allows to confront social prejudices. In this area, theatre proves to be a powerful medium that enables the exploration of different narratives and identities.

The young author duo, director Jug Đorđević and playwright Tijana Grumić, occupy an important place in the Serbian institutional scene today. The two are a good example of how a special space of freedom is opening up in the independent scene. Before they created a play about transphobia entitled "Before We Begin" at the independent organisation Hartefakt in 2021, they will discuss the topic at the National Theatre Sombor using the example of Tennessee Williams' play "A Streetcar Named Desire". In the dramatisation by Tijana Grumić and directed by Jug Đorđević, the main character Blanche Dubois, a woman deeply wounded by a tragic past and on the verge of a nervous breakdown, becomes a trans woman. Such an intervention, which together with several smaller dramaturgical interventions fits perfectly into the context of Williams' play, was realised so subtly that at the premiere one could not even guess the author's intention to transform the protagonist into a trans person.¹⁵

This expressive restraint in no way means that there is an explicit prohibition or restriction on the choice of themes in the institutional context, but it goes without saying that there is a structural inertia in institutional theatres, a situation of very slow change and fear of the reactions of conservative political leaders who ensure the finances and concern for the mostly middle-aged and old audiences' morality and "refined" tastes of the middle-class public. It is a general atmosphere in which the management and authors often suffocate their artistic vigour without them or the public realising it. After all, how else can we explain the fact that in 2023, just two years later, the same team of authors is getting together again to revisit the same theme in the independent sector, which offers them complete artistic freedom?

In contrast to "Streetcar", which was staged in the tradition of the director updating a dramatic classic, the authors project "Before We Begin" is characterised by a fragmentary dramaturgy and a postdramatic approach to theatre, in which the stage event becomes "more

¹⁴ Ana Vujanović, „Policije i politike izvedbe“, in Teatron nos. 154/155, 2011: 23-24.

¹⁵ See more at: Andrej Čanji, „Predstava Tramvaj zvani želja: Znakovi koji vode u ćorsokak“, - Oblakoder, 2021, <https://www.oblakodermagazin.rs/predstava-tramvaj-zvani-zelja-znakovi-koji-vode-u-corsokak/>.

presence than representation, more shared than mediated experience, more process than result". The author's team staged the development process of the play itself. The metatheatrical structure they created contains stories about why they decided to address the issue of gender identity in the first place, whether they as cis authors have the right to talk about transgender identity at all, why they invited people from the trans community to participate in their project, why there are no professional transgender actors and actresses in Serbia, why it is necessary for transgender people to represent themselves in theatre even if they are not professional actors, and so on.

Trans activist Matija Stefanović and cis actress Ema Muratović introduce themselves at the beginning and then announce that they will play the authors Jug and Tijana. The actors tell us who the director and the playwright are, how they grew up, what kind of relationship they have with their family, how they met, where they studied and how they came up with the idea of tackling this topic in their first authorial project. The director was inspired by a taxi driver who spontaneously decided to tell him the story of his transsexual son. This encounter and the subsequent communication between the taxi driver and the director is portrayed by Ema Muratović. Together with Matija Stefanović, she narrates the author's encounter with the trans community, while at the end Matija reads out the notes of trans people while trans dancer Aleksandar Zain performs his dance. Zain moves with short, almost unfinished movements that simultaneously suggest an outburst of joy and vital energy, but also their restraint. He performs a seemingly inarticulate choreography that simultaneously expresses tension and joy, restriction and freedom. However, the concept of a safe art space in a generally unsafe environment works on the principle of paradox. The subject of the artistic work in the safe space oasis is precisely the crisis of violence that is in full swing outside of it. Introducing the crisis through artistic processing within the framework of a safe space is a necessary step towards strengthening the community. "Before we begin" is a representative theatre piece, because it has two endings: one optimistic and encouraging and one realistic and poignant. The performers read a series of confessions written for the play by representatives of the trans community. The last in the series is the most impressive, as it looks back on the difficult existence of a trans person in Serbia, but at the same time tells of an orderly, stable and happy life despite the transphobic society. Afterwards, trans activist and performer Matija Stefanović decides to prevent an optimistic ending and offer a different perspective by pointing out the high suicide rate among trans people, unfavourable legislation and a generally hopeless situation. The double ending has a revitalising function in both versions. First, it points to the problem in a safe and organised context, offers a critical apparatus to understand it, and presents a model for overcoming the problem.

This collage show speaks of activism in an honest and open aestheticised language. The authors first expose their somewhat privileged position and then give a voice to those marginalised by society. The director and the dramaturge take the position of the organisers of the spontaneous circumstances that led them to deal with the fate of a group of people, expose their own role in it and then give voice to people from the community to share their personal thoughts and confessions. However, metatheatrical and postdramatic methods of portraying political correctness bring the authors into the realm of contradiction.

For example, we hear how the director and playwright have considered whether they should deal with the subject of transsexuality because they have no experience of it and therefore have no right to talk about it. The problem is that it is not explained why they have the right

as artists to talk about a subject that is outside their own experience (such as the subject of refugees, deceased parents, etc., which they have dealt with in the past), with the exception of the subject of trans identity. They give the audience no explanation as to why the topic of transgender identity is privileged in this sense, but also failing to mention that they have dealt with this topic in the past in the adapted version of the play "A Streetcar Named Desire", in which they portray the main character Blanche Dubois as a trans woman played by cis actress.

In the play we also hear a number of fairly detailed confessions from the authors themselves, but we never quite understand why. If they have already decided to dedicate the play to a community they perceived as marginal, why do they spend twenty minutes talking about themselves? And if the authors are also telling their life stories alongside the trans community, why was only the story of the actress, but also an activist, Emma Muratović, deemed unworthy of being told? It is also suggested that the topic of the trans community is completely marginalised in theatres in Serbia, even though there are at least three other plays besides the aforementioned "Streetcar": "Zrenjanin", by the National Theatre "Toša Jovanović" in Zrenjanin (the main character is trans), "Three Sisters", by the National Theatre Subotica (three of Chekhov's heroines are cast as trans women by the trans director), "Major and Helena", independent productions by the Theatre of Change and Cloud production (about the true story of a trans officer in the Serbian army). It should be added that the authors themselves say at the beginning that they will not deal with the issue of trans identity if someone from the community they come into contact with rejects them. Later in the play, they themselves admit that a trans girl turned them down on the grounds that she is tired of educating cis people about trans and queer issues, and that she will not invest her time to help them with their project, while trans people are economically disadvantaged and do not have the opportunity to develop such a thing themselves. Similarly, the narrative about the taxi driver they have been communicating with, who had originally agreed to take part in the project, is abruptly interrupted with the statement that he has stopped answering their calls. Authors do not take into account that the man may have given up on making his family's story public.

In the piece, the writers make a series of claims that they seem to forget, because they soon contradict them. In this way, their play undermines itself, especially as the open and transparent postdramatic directorial concept they have chosen would have allowed them to address all the issues of inconsistencies. Instead, such inconsistencies can confuse the attentive viewer and make them distrust the authors and the show. Despite all this, the project makes an important contribution to the mission it has set itself, as it presents a series of authentic confessions from trans people and gives them the opportunity to present and represent themselves.

These inconsistencies clearly show the effects of self-limiting creativity as a result of the adoption of political correctness and the transitional tendencies of Serbian theatre practise, which is moving beyond the dominant framework of the dramatic paradigm into the post-dramatic realm. The inconsistencies are therefore not due to the authors' inattention, but to the ideological-aesthetic framework in which they operate. In "Streetcar" they thematise violence against transgender people within the boundaries of the representative dramatic paradigm, while in "Before We Begin" they transpose the same theme in a metatheatrical way, re-examining not only the content of the play but also its entire structure. A

metatheatrical approach to this tension is fertile ground for simultaneously embracing the positive values of political correctness, naturalises its introduction in a context that is not conducive to it, but also for resisting it by critically problematising its, conditionally speaking, unfavourable implications.

All of this leads us to the conclusion that political correctness reveals the nuances of a self-limiting creativity that is both a symptom and a critique of contemporary discursive formations, and illuminates the ways in which such attitudes shape and constrain creative expression within the theatrical landscape. The source of contradiction in "Before We Begin" is not the author's shorthand, but a manifestation of the tension inherent in the demands of political correctness in conjunction with various theatre forms and practises as constitutive factors of artistic expression. The authors are not the owners or beneficiaries of political correctness, but one could rather say that such a cultural performance owns them. Just like the authors of "The Years of Crows" or "Vlasti", who belong to different cultural and ideological positions. In all cases, both those whom I have declared politically incorrect and those who achieve a certain degree of political correctness, a certain kind of self-limitation, i.e. self-censorship, is in force. In order to realise ideological and artistic ideas in their art, authors have previously adopted certain value systems on which they base their creative endeavours. These value systems are based both on positive stipulations, which can be described as freedom of expression, i.e. artistic freedom, and on restrictions, which can be described as censorship, i.e. self-censorship. Here at the end it is appropriate to refer to the idea of Stanley Fish and his thoughts on the relationship between freedom of expression and censorship. In a book dealing with freedom of expression that focuses on the First Amendment of the US Constitution, Fish asserts the following about censorship: "Limitations on speech are part and parcel of any context in which speech is produced for a reason and not just for amusement. The standard story has it backwards. Censorship, in the form of it-goes-without-saying restrictions on expression, is built into ordinary occasions of speech production. It might seem odd to say so, but censorship precedes free speech and is its precondition: if there were no censorship in the form of social or institutional purposes and goals that mark out what is appropriate and inappropriate to say, there would be no speech that was meaningful."¹⁶ Therefore, political correctness as a concrete form of restriction, originating in left-liberal thought, is thus not fundamentally different from other ideological patterns of affirmation and elimination of values. The tension that exists between political correctness as a restrictive factor and artistic freedom of expression corresponds to any other combination of dominant ideology and artistic practise as such.

¹⁶ Stanley Fish, "The First: How to Think About Hate Speech, Campus Speech, Religious Speech, Fake News, Post-Truth, and Donald Trump", Atria/Signal Press, 2019: 15.

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