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/ CHOREOGRAFIA A INSTYTUCJE

(Non-)Institution(alization), Emotional Economies and the Undercommons of Slovenian Contemporary Dance

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Abstract

In this article, I thematize how the incomplete institutionalization of contemporary dance in Slovenia pushes this art field to a marginal and precarious position and how the lack of recognition affectively charges the scene's actors and impacts their making of choreographic work. By interviewing four choreographers, I trace these emotional economies and delineate two effects they have – defeatism and hopeful action. Furthermore, I detect an 'undercommons' (Moten and Harney, 2013) of the contemporary dance scene in Slovenia, which has the capacity to reimagine the usual function of institutions that serve the needs of state capitalism.

Keywords: Slovenian contemporary dance scene; (non-)institution(alization); emotional economy; despair; anger as agency; undercommons

In this article, I thematize how the delayed and incomplete institutionalization of contemporary dance in Slovenia pushes this art field to a marginal and precarious position and how the lack of recognition affectively charges the scene's actors and impacts their making of choreographic work. By institutionalization, I mean a thorough process that would enable a stable system with a complete educational vertical and a network of sustainable publicly funded institutions which would upgrade the existing precarious non-institutional scene with the professionalization of its artistic and supporting components (education, theory, archiving, criticism, production, administration, [international] promotion, agency services etc.) and infrastructure (studios, venues, archives, libraries, offices, etc.). In this article, I focus mostly on one of the early steps of such a process, which has been in negotiation and suspension for at least a decade and a half: the (non-)establishment of a publicly funded institution in a system functioning entirely as part of the precarious non-institutional sector. While aware that the existence of a single institution would not mean that the process of institutionalization is complete, the supposition in the scene is that it would bring some much-needed sustainability. The scene has undertaken extensive advocacy efforts and made considerable emotional investment, but the institution has not yet fully materialized. To trace these dynamics, I sent a set of open-ended questions to many actors involved in the scene, to which I received three written responses and one audio reply. I have found a number of patterns in the answers that I discursively analyse in this text. As there are only four responses (which are still representative for the small scene), there is no need for coding and anonymity, as my interviewees are all public figures engaged in contemporary dance advocacy in Slovenia. In their answers I trace emotional economies and delineate two effects they have had – defeatism and apolitical stepping aside on the one hand and a push

towards better organization and articulation of needs on the other hand. Furthermore, I detect an ‘undercommons’ (Moten and Harney, 2013) of the Slovenian contemporary dance scene, which has the capacity to reimagine the usual function of institutions that serve the needs of state capitalism. This knowledge comes precisely from the study of choreography, known for its tendency towards research, experiment and open process, which translates to alternative organizational models. But this undercommons is not a place that exists in exile from institutions, as the NGOization of contemporary dance also serves to tame the undercommons’ fugitivity. The institutionalization is thus a fragile process where fugitivity can be lost completely or reimagined at its edges, revolutionizing it from the inside out. In the current lingering promise of an institution, both options remain in suspension.

Exhausting Fight for Institution(alization)

In the rather young democracy of the Republic of Slovenia, established in 1991, all aspects of democratic society have not (yet) been successfully institutionalized but have been indefinitely pushed into the publicly (under)funded nongovernmental sector. This is characteristic of any indefinite ‘transition’ into neoliberalism, where the interest of capital is prior to the liberties articulated by civil society. The push into the nongovernmental sector is in evidence in a large part of the cultural sector, particularly in what the state regards as non-instrumentalizable, non-state-representative, largely avantgarde or ‘hermetic’ art. Therefore, it comes with little surprise that the delay in institutionalization also applies to contemporary dance, which is still struggling to be seen as an autonomous art form at the state level. It was supported only secondarily, if at all, when it was recognized as important by the West. In the early 1990s the

Orientalizing gaze of the West was for a period in awe of the ability of people in the East, or even in the barbaric Balkans, to dance in the most democratic, emancipated ways, presumably invented by the West (Kunst, 2003). But when the Western gaze shifted to the more other others, the enthusiasm (in the form of financial and institutional support) for it on the side of national subsidizers cooled down too.

Contemporary dance in Slovenia has fought for its professionalization for more than 30 years now, mostly through the Contemporary Dance Association Slovenia (CDAS). The first initiatives to found such an association emerged in the mid-1980s, but the CDAS was not founded until May 1994.[1] The CDAS functions as an association of active contemporary dance professionals at the national level, operating mostly on a voluntary basis. Nationwide, out of roughly 500 contemporary dance professionals registered at the Slovenian Ministry of Culture as self-employed artists (in a country with a population of two million)[2] – of whom there are around 150 choreographers, 230 dancers (there is some overlap between the two) and a number of others working in complementary professions such as critics or producers – 64 are currently members of the association.[3] Several generations have dedicated their professional lives to the field, but their working conditions are far from sustainable. Despite the existence of quite a few venues (mostly centralized in the capital Ljubljana) where contemporary dance is regularly presented, including the Old Power Station, Španski borci, Dance Theatre Ljubljana and Cankarjev dom, most of which are run by NGOs dedicated to producing contemporary dance work, not a single institution has been established at the national or municipal level to promote the field's prosperity and development. Neither was there a full vertical of educational institutions built (the level of specialized higher education, in theory and practice, is lacking). All the actors are self-employed cultural workers and/or

run their own production houses (NGOs). They are educated abroad or self-educated. Under various financing mechanisms, which are the result of constant negotiation involving civil society professionals and of the efforts of cultural policy associations, the sector is roughly preserved for democracy's sake (under constant threat of being shut down every time the right wing comes to power), but never truly systemically supported to be able to thrive. The scene's institutionalization thus means not only the establishment of one or several state-funded contemporary dance institutions, but the creation of a wholesome and sustainable infrastructure that would thoroughly support the field in its formation, development, distribution and promotion. The non-governmental sector is an important part of the system, and institutions can never wholly replace it, but when everything is carried on its precarious shoulders, we cannot speak of a finished process of institutionalization.

In 2011–2012, a step in the direction of institutionalization was taken with a 'near'-establishment of a contemporary dance institution. After many years of advocacy for contemporary dance and with general consent within the scene (with the initial romanticism long gone) that after decades of precarity there was indeed a need for an institution. In that moment, establishing a state institution was understood as the only possible step that could be taken towards more stability and systemic support so that the contemporary dance field could prosper. And indeed, a state institution, the Centre for Contemporary Dance (Centre), was established in 2011. It was an institution without a building, with a small mobile studio (which the dance scene professionals did not even begin to use), rented office spaces and modest initial funds earmarked for the first year of the Centre's existence, during which it would be legally established as a public (state) institution. It was not ideal but it was a start and a promise, something concrete from which one could expand. But in 2012, before a board of trustees vested with the

authority to officially appoint the Centre's Director was formed, the newly elected right-wing government under Prime Minister Janez Janša swiftly dismantled the Centre under the pretence of austerity measures (STA, 2012).

Since then, the Slovenian contemporary dance scene has struggled to reestablish the institution under the different governments that followed.[4] Another false promise was made in 2017 by Tone Peršak, the Minister of Culture of the central-left government led by Prime Minister Miro Cerar. Now, in 2025, the establishment of a centre for contemporary dance is included in several crucial strategic documents of the incumbent left-wing government in the final year of its mandate (Asta Vrečko from the left-wing party Levica is the current Minister of Culture).[5] The centre is envisaged as complementary to the existing non-governmental sector. It is not yet clear if it will have a venue. There is a lack of studios in Slovenia, so a new one would help meet the high demand for such spaces, but the country's contemporary dance professionals would settle for an office-only institution. A strategic document, which was drafted in consultation with them (a special working group had been formed),[6] contains plans for new infrastructure, including several studios, a stage and production venue, a multimedia space, a specialized library and archive, a common working space, an exhibition/conference space, administrative spaces and residency apartments.[7] As the conversations progress, it seems that the centre will be a dispersed institution headquartered in one of the smaller cities and with spaces in several municipalities, as one of this government's priorities is decentralization. The centre will employ professionals, who will work on creating the conditions for freelance choreographers' work to be more visible, on establishing gig work networks, etc. Thus, the institution will not undermine the vibrant non-governmental scene and its existing funding

system. It will promote plurality and will not employ choreographers and ensembles. It will aim to be inclusive and plural. The plan co-created with the scene's representatives looks good on paper, but many dance professionals are sceptical and will remain so until the institution is established, or even later, as a similar scenario has already played out in the past. Obviously, one such institution cannot make up for years of neglect, and it cannot meet everybody's needs or serve to rectify every gap of institutionalization. Expectations are high as ever but scepticism serves as a counterbalance to hope as a defence against further disappointment.

Emotional Economies in the Scene

Engaging with Sara Ahmed's *Cultural Policy of Emotion* (2004), I will explore how the objects of emotions (and words used to describe them, like defeat, disappointment, pessimism, despair) circulate within the scene and impact the bodies with which they come in contact. This is especially important as these same bodies are the very instruments of the scene's production. Can engagement with depression, as Ann Cvetkovich writes, lead to 'forms of hope, creativity and even spirituality that are intimately connected with experiences of despair, hopelessness, and being stuck?' (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 14). Is despair inevitably debilitating or can it be the key to a source of reimagining the world and a source of collective action?

Before writing this article, I sent a set of questions to several important actors in the country's contemporary dance scene. Four of them replied: the current CDAS President and former choreographer and performer Teja Reba; the former CDAS President and dancer Dejan Srhoj, who is also a member of the Nomad Dance Academy Association; the choreographer and co-manager of the NGO Federacija Andreja Podrzavnik; and the retired

ballerina and active contemporary choreographer Mateja Bučar, who also runs DUM, an art gallery hosting contemporary dance classes and events in addition to visual art exhibitions. Their answers will serve as a grounding for my analysis of the current emotional economy in the contemporary dance scene in Slovenia and of how it impacts further action to promote the field of choreography and choreography itself. The interviewees speak for more than themselves. Their answers capture a general feeling among the core of the active choreographers and other professionals in the field of contemporary dance in Slovenia today.

Ahmed's ideas of emotions differ from the ones prevalent in psychology where emotions are understood as coming from the inside out, seen as private, belonging to the subject and pathologized and treated individually. But her approach is also not one from the outside in, as is the case in sociology, where history is seen as moving rather passive bodies. In Ahmed's view, emotions are what binds the social body together, they are crucial in the very 'constitution of psychic and social as objects' (Ahmed, 2004, p. 10). Objects of emotions circulate and accompany the emotions that bodies feel through contact with them. They make an impression on the bodies and thus shape them. Coming into contact in the same way with the same object of emotion does not necessarily produce the same emotion in everyone. Yet some emotions are, as Ahmed explains, stickier than others, which means that they can cause similar effects or affect a group of subjects in a similar manner and can thus be used for certain politics or against them. Ahmed investigates how 'words for feeling, and objects of feeling, circulate and generate effects: how they move, stick, and slide. We move, stick, slide with them' (p. 14).

Let's first isolate the objects of emotions that circulate within the Slovenian

contemporary dance scene due to the situation described above. I posed the following initial question to my interviewees: ‘What effect did the long process of (un)successful establishment of the Centre for Contemporary Dance have on your work?’ The response from Dejan Srhoj was that he probably has fewer opportunities to collaborate on bigger productions as a dancer or choreographer. He claims that in the current situation he is dependent on tenders (precarity) and has fewer opportunities for long-term collaborations and formats that do not fit the predefined categories.[8] His answer demonstrates that although the uncertain situation feels *restraining* to him and limits his creativity, there is nevertheless a horizon of hope where these limitations do not exist, and it is projected in the idea of a ‘Centre’. The Centre here represents an imaginary projection, a *hopeful* horizon beyond precarity. Similarly, the choreographer Andreja Podrzavnik emphasizes that she spends a large amount of her time creating the conditions that make her work possible, which takes a lot of energy and effort. This typically takes the form of unpaid work done in her free time and her private spaces and has serious consequences for her health and relationships. For Andreja, the projected Centre removes some of the precarity. This well-discussed, enduring situation of precarity is not a choice in the field of contemporary dance in Slovenia. Those who engage in professions in the field of contemporary dance can do so only as self-employed individuals who have to multitask and be their own managers, which makes it impossible for them to focus primarily on their profession. Podrzavnik’s most prominent feeling is that of *exhaustion*. In her projection of the Centre, the production process is systematized, enabling artists to focus on their creative work. The Centre would take away some of the burden of her job’s precarity. In her subsequent answers, however, she expresses a certain *scepticism* whether this is something her generation (50-

or-so-year-olds) is even capable of, as they have the career-long habit of attending to every aspect of their work.

The interviewees gave much more extensive answers when asked about how the situation affects ‘the scene’, stating that the permanent delay in establishing the Centre not only impacts individuals but has wider effects, affecting the scene’s self-perception. But these effects, even though negative, are, to borrow Ahmed’s words, the glue that binds the scene together (p. 14). The choreographer Mateja Bučar stresses that without the Centre the conditions can never be as professional as they would be within a more stable model, and what she means is not necessarily the artistic potential it would enable but the stability of the production process, the existence of post-production networks, international invitations, and recognition by the wider public. As things stand now, there are persistent gaps in finance and infrastructure as well as in technical and bureaucratic support and context creation. Srhoj describes this in terms of feelings: ‘The actors have become quieter, *inert* and *sad.* They lack the strength to protest or engage in any sort of fight. The defeat was *painful* and made them get more involved with the development of their own small projects. They turned away from common aspirations.’ Andreja considers the general effect of this ‘defeat’ on the scene as negative. It could be summed up as *despair, defeatism, lack of belief in change.* She stresses the persistence of the fight, which has involved a few generations. With each new generation there is initial energy which gets*exhausted* as a result of blows from or ignorance of officials, she explains, and then the story repeats once again. Nevertheless, she adds, there is *persistent self-organization*, an informal form of association, which continues to exist and has a considerable impact – it has become a substitute for infrastructure, which is not something easily found in the other scenes.

In her answers CDAS President Teja Reba makes it clear that the defeats did not lead her to pin the entire blame on politics. She does not want to make a victim out of herself and the scene. The defeats made her more persistent in striving towards improvements in advocacy itself, in aspiring to make it more systematic and professional, learning about it and practising it regularly. Her turn towards activism is similar to Ahmed's when it comes to feminism, which, in her opinion, should not be a sheer ontologizing of victimhood of women but an emotional as well as ethical and political response to what feminism is against, so that that which feminism is against is not regarded as 'exterior' to feminism (Ahmed, 2004, p. 147). The despair of victimhood can be transformed into productive anger that gives one the energy to articulate why the opposition between the two should be dismissed. If everyone became a feminist, there would be no need for feminism. Or, if everybody understood the benefits of contemporary dance for society, there would be no need for advocacy anymore.

What we can learn from these answers is that there are shared feelings of exhaustion, tiredness, despair, sadness and defeatism among the scene's professionals. Most of the time, these feelings are connected to uncathartic 'ugly feelings', such as anxiety (resulting from the uncertainty and precarity the field is embedded in), irritation (indicating the presence of power in every micro-situation) or 'stuplimity' (a mixture of stupor and sublimity, a numbness caused by overwhelming bureaucracy, as emphasized by Andreja Podrzavnik), which Sianne Ngai (2005) speaks about. These are 'minor', even 'petty' ambivalent feelings that don't necessarily act as calls for action, but they are a symptom and index of the structural impasses of late capitalism, 'diagnostic of situations in which action is blocked or suspended' (p. 6). Regardless of this clearly detected inertia, these initial feelings, especially when they are analysed, can turn into grander emotions, such as

righteous anger, which have the potential to provide common ground that calls for action and mobilizes the scene's actors. My assumption is that this kind of common action would not occur without such stimulus, as negative as it is. 'A scene' establishes itself through ever more articulated advocacy.

As Sara Ahmed clearly explains, objects of emotions have the power to draw people together or apart but are not essential, as the same objects can provoke different effects (Ahmed, 2004, p. 10.). They can be used as a weapon of political mobilization but also as a tool of political abdication. It seems that several things happened as the story of (non)institutionalization of contemporary dance in Slovenia unfolded. What was first an idealized democratic fight for the field's autonomy and for the establishment of a paradigmatically liberal profession that did not exist in a newly established national state founded on liberal values, where everything should be possible, was overridden by private interests in a 'transitional society' that had a weak spot for corruption and privatization. Private interests were negotiated under the table under the guise of common goals and values. What is more, this same argument was later employed by the central-left political parties to justify their not fully supporting the institutionalization, as the scene was accused of not being able to collaborate and act as one. It took tremendous willpower to negotiate the establishment of the almost-institution in the climate of this semi-support. However, the politicization of the scene only became fully evident when the project was brushed off by the next, right-wing government. The contemporary dance scene was successfully presented as an 'other'. And, as Ahmed explains, 'such others threaten to take away from what "you" have, as the legitimate subject of the nation, as the one who is the true recipient of national benefits.' (p. 1). When anger was spun against the scene as an illegitimate spender of the taxpayers' money, a 'counterforce' could emerge within the scene itself as

such ‘other’. Only then could the scene auto-detect that the field’s public presence and articulation of its values was so feeble that any mobilization over this controversy was impossible and its efforts could be easily dismissed. When the right-wing government chose contemporary dance as one of the first targets of its austerity measures (shutting down of the newly established Centre), the field, ironically enough, was acknowledged. It was taken seriously, perhaps for the first time. Sadness and hopelessness gradually evolved into anger-as-agency with the potential to unite and mobilize the part of the scene that after an initial shock started to organize more thoroughly and articulate their position more precisely. Public advocacy efforts followed. Chiming with the logic of the ‘killjoy’ strategy (Ahmed, 2023), which brings to the surface what is suppressed, the efforts revealed that the perception of contemporary dance as an unnecessary financial burden and a field no one was interested in was not widely shared. Not surprisingly, the politization of some members of the scene caused a division – the agenda was not embraced by some, and contemporary dance had in the meantime become so diverse in its ambitions and values that not every aspect of it could be advocated for under the same banner.

Challenging Institutions with Knowledgeable Bodies

Do contemporary dancing bodies, by virtue of their practice, have access to knowledge that could more easily produce a movement able to change the decision makers’ wills and priorities? What kinds of objects of emotion specific to their profession, if any, can they help create and how can they move them to affect the decision makers?

I will delve into these questions again by analysing some of the practitioners’

answers. My question was: ‘Which contemporary dance practices or theories have impacted your consideration of possible models for a new Centre for Contemporary Dance?’ Most of the practitioners reported that they were inspired by the existing institutions they had encountered abroad, mostly in the West. Dejan Srhoj mentioned the Ufer Studios in Berlin. Moreover, he opened up about his experience of squatting in an empty movie theatre, Kino Šiška, where dance classes were self-organized. Thus, for him, self-organization from the bottom up is an important feature of a dance institution. As a member of the Nomad Dance Academy network, Srhoj was involved in the processes of establishing a number of other spaces for dance in the region, which gave him ideas, inspiration and the awareness that this is possible. Similarly, Mateja Bučar believes that it is possible to imagine an institution based on good practices and models from abroad. Her experience in ballet, which is a highly professionalized field, has convinced her that salaries, fees, continuation, infrastructure and (good) artistic leadership are crucial for any kind of breakthrough. Andreja, who works with improvisation a lot, thinks, by contrast, that what we can learn from practice is processualism, where one thing leads to another and not everything has to be planned in advance. Processualism, in her opinion, could serve as a model for the Centre.

Teja Reba’s elaborate vision of the Centre is directly connected – artistically, organizationally and in its political and ethical dimensions – to the practices and theories of contemporary dance. She explains that contemporary dance is known for its research, experimentation and open process, which translates to organizational models: offering time for artistic research in the form of residencies without the pressure for immediate results. Many contemporary dance practices are based on collegiality, mutual decision making, shared authorship and collaboration. The Centre would adopt these

horizontal forms of collaboration, and the traditional institutional hierarchy would not apply to it. Contemporary dance affirms the body as a carrier of knowledge, it is a way of thinking through moving, which opens the space for redefining what knowledge, education and artistic proficiency are. This should be, in Reba's opinion, reflected in the Centre's future programmes. Furthermore, dance is a praxis of defying norms and encouraging a plurality of expressions, so the Centre should establish the conditions for inclusivity, accessibility and representation for marginalized groups while opposing efforts to canonize a sole artistic model. She emphasizes that dance is a part of a wider ecosystem: it is not an island but a node that connects. It should research societal and artistic systems, foster criticality, theory and documentation, and be transparent in managing and always double-checking its role in society. She believes it should be transnational, offering opportunities for dialogue, learning and solidarity. Teja Reba thus proposes an institution model different than the models we know, one informed by the exploratory and research models that are at the core of contemporary dance. She is aware of the rigidity of the existing institutions and dedicated to bringing the peculiarities of art practice into institutional acts, if any such acts occur.

This special knowledge does not apply solely to the set of practices of contemporary dance, though its materialization is accentuated through corporeal manifestations. In her book *Modelling Cultural and Arts Institutions*, Biljana Tanurovska Kjuljavkovski, a North Macedonian arts activist and long-time managing producer of Lokomotiva, a local non-governmental organization for contemporary dance, argues that the very institutions that have long been developing their practices in precarious conditions, have accumulated an unprecedented know-how that can shape future institutions (Tanurovska-Kjuljavkovski, 2021, p. 38–46). In the

politically corrupt country of North Macedonia, despite the circumstances working against an optimistic outlook, hers is a politics of hope where institutions are not regarded as fixed pillars of society but imagined as shaped by the good practices that the civil society already engages in under challenging circumstances. The institutions' important democratic, creative and innovative work should be rewarded by a form of flexible institutionalization which should be shaped from the bottom up. But can this transition be successful? Do the grass-root values find their way into the institutions, where there are more means, more power and more involvement with the interests of the power-hungry politicians? Is a step towards institutionalization a step away from autonomy?

Another question posed to the interviewees was 'How are these visions then communicated to the decision makers?' Dejan Srhoj points out that a constant pressure is needed to push the decision makers to take further action. Organizing international advocacy events gives them the impression that they are a part of international processes and the development of the field. But it is hard to maintain constant pressure for free. As soon as it eases, the importance of the issue is forgotten, as contemporary dance is never top of the to-do list. Mateja Bučar points out that the few institutions that were established under the new state's consecutive governments and its municipalities, only came into being because of serious full-time dedication of particular people. The decision makers in the young democracy have not come to a point where they would see culture as important, and the newer the forms of art in question, the lesser their perceived importance. In this regard, their thinking remains provincial, adds Bučar. Reba's answer is that it is only possible to be in communication with the policy makers if advocacy becomes stronger, cohesive and more knowledgeable, defending public interest, whereas it has for too long been reactive, tied to individual needs or

personal agendas. A constant presence is crucial, and advocacy should emphasize the benefits of contemporary dance for other sectors, such as health, education, community building, environment, etc.

The answers show that the conversation partners are rarely on equal ground. Efforts are being made to cajole the decision makers into supporting the cause, but they seem to lack the sensitivity to see its importance or remain fully ignorant of the problem. They regard contemporary dance as mostly harmless and non-urgent and, given the fact that there is guaranteed support in the form of regular open calls for tenders, they don't feel it is necessary to do more for the field. The small size of the country also means that the 'minorities' are smaller and have little bargaining power. This does not mean that they do not try – advocates of the scene are doing an unproportional amount of work, preparing arguments and organizing discussions, often free of charge, fighting not only for more security in their profession but also standing up for values which they see as important and impactful for society at large. If it weren't for the current minister, who represents the left-wing party Levica (a minor party that relies heavily on the support of the urban left, which includes the non-governmental, 'independent' arts sector), the situation would be hopeless. But even this reemergent glimpse of light is being obscured by clouds as the election day swiftly approaches with no tangible results yet in sight.

I contend that the emotional economy (Ahmed, 2004) in the dance scene in Slovenia is fuelled by two factors. The first is the lack of (wider society) consensus on the importance of the field, which results in self-consciousness, exhaustion and idleness. The field is thus controlled by the 'ugly' feelings of anxiety, irritation and 'stublimity' (Ngai, 2004), which are an indicator of the precarious living and working conditions of late capitalism. The second is the

politics of explicit hatred, powered by a hate campaign organized by the right-wing government, portraying the independent cultural scene as parasites on the taxpayers. This campaign, however, has paradoxically mobilized a wider consensus on the mostly indecisive and idle left side of the political spectrum. The anger that followed as a reaction to the hatred aimed at them as 'others' has made the left more active and prepared to fight, which is an emotional economy pattern that has powered Slovenian politics for more than thirty years and which has intensified with the radicalization of the right in the last decade, triggered by the right wing and its populist rhetoric. The Centre for Contemporary Dance is too minor an institution to be of concern to the political left and too big for the right and its politics of hate to be left with its minor 'privileges.' Thus, the scene is being ping-ponged between the two positions, but, at the same time, it is fugitively collecting resources to bounce off the table.

I believe that this emotional economy has a consequence on the choreographic work done in the scene, as the bodies that engage in choreography and dance are the same bodies that are shaped by despair, exhaustion and even hatred. Therefore, there is a lot of improvisational work that can be adapted to such shifting and precarious conditions, including the work of Andreja Podrzavnik, DisCollective and Dejan Srhoj.[9] Somatic work, such as the work of Snježana Premuš, Dragana Alfirević and Anja Bornšek, is thriving too as it is aimed towards regeneration following the prevalent feelings of exhaustion and despair. These efforts are not only reactionary. Extensive in-depth research had been conducted into these forms even before the effects of the emotional economies under discussion paralyzed the scene. The urgency and the popularity of these practices are of course interconnected. Another characteristic of the work in question is modest stage design and small numbers of performers, which is not due to a lack of

ambition but, first and foremost, to financial precarity. Moreover, the majority of the scene's actors are middle aged, which is a consequence of scarce opportunities in a system that doesn't invest in its own regeneration. Nevertheless, the scene, though small, is resilient. It has managed to work together through meaningful action, which is more than many much more institutionalized fields can boast of.

The Undercommons of Contemporary Dance

Having outlined the situation of the Slovenian contemporary dance scene and its struggle for institutionalization, which is by no means an isolated case, I can now proceed to the final part of this article. I contend that some of the objectives envisioned for the Centre are readily applicable while some could only be applied after a radical rethinking of what institutions are or could become in the future. I believe that emotional economies are important in these struggles and that awareness of how they work is crucial for anyone engaging in them. Furthermore, I'd like to emphasize how the notion of undercommons (Moten and Harney, 2013) is important for institutions to remain open to play and change so that they don't become fully co-opted by systems of state capitalism. Is it possible to stay disobedient within the institution itself, within its legal framework, while stealing from it to carve out something else inside its walls?

All the respondents agreed that the effects of non-institutionalization on certain generations in the scene are beyond repair and cannot be undone by any future institutionalization. Reba specifies that many well-established actors could have by now emerged in the field, which would help develop it and make it more sustainable in every aspect. If an institution had been established at an earlier time, some creators and their 'poetics' would have

been supported at crucial moments of their careers, their work would gain more visibility, etc. What is still possible, however, in the view of my interviewees, if the institutionalization happens in the near future, is the creation of a system of long-term and stable funding, the professionalization of the professions of dancer, choreographer, producer, dramaturg, theorist, critic, publicist, archive curator, etc., the creation of postproduction capabilities across the country, internationalization, long-term equal partnerships with international organizations, increased funding for international projects, the recognition of dance as a field and of its connection to other arts fields and to broader fields such as education, health, economy, technology, research, as well as recognition by a wider audience. Bučar expects an increase in production quality. With the creation and diversification of supporting professions, Podrzavnik expects more time for creative work in the studio and a platform helpful in developing one's career. This is of course a projection, a wish list derived from practice and from a feeling of lack of support for contemporary dance practitioners. The emotional economy that is a mix of escaping the feeling of defeat and transforming anger into a better articulation of the field's needs has triggered a self-examination by the local contemporary dance scene. The scene insists on the establishment of an institution and doesn't want to settle for compromise, which might be its most salient hallmark, with its ultimate objective being the reshaping of what an institution can be. Of course, the problems of the contemporary dance field in Slovenia would not be eliminated by one institution, so the imagined Centre remains partly utopian. The primary reason for this is the fact that institutions, besides bringing stability, tend to rigidify the terms of conduct exactly by introducing more professionalization and bureaucratization. Some problems would be solved, but new ones would probably arise.

What Harney and Moten rightly say about the University – an institution that is typically presented as an autonomous public actor of the enlightenment but in fact reproduces the dominant (capitalist, colonial, racial) projects (p. 26) – is even more valid for other institutions established by the state or even privately owned public actors. The reproductive mechanism in question plays out through professionalization, financialization, managerial oversight, programming exclusions, etc. Contrary to the idealization of becoming a 'professional' in order to escape precarity and insufficient means and conditions and to implement a certain choreographic vision or postproduction plan, Harney and Moten speak of professionalization as capture where one becomes legible and useful to capital (p. 30–9). This process extracts knowledge, polices desire, and trains obedience. Institutions in-debt us. They provide us with credentials, but they insist we pay the moral and financial debt by serving them, by becoming good professionals, by representing them (p. 61–8). Their concept of undercommons describes a mode of being, studying, gathering and surviving at the edges of an institution's official life – not in order to attain success, credits or promotions, or to comply with other institution's terms of engagement, but for the sake of survival, creativity and joy. Undercommons is a way of fugitive planning where people are strategizing for freedom under conditions of constraint. In the words of Moten and Harney: 'Planning in the undercommons is not an activity, not fishing or dancing or teaching or loving, but the ceaseless experiment with the futurial presence of the forms of life that make such activities possible' (p. 74–5).

Contemporary dance has long been an underdog in the strategic visions of the country's cultural development models, where it was viewed either as marginal and harmless or as a (still marginal) threat. But this does not mean that it was always subversive just because it was not institutionalized. Most

of its creative forces were tamed by NGOization. NGOs too are but an extension of governance, as Harney and Moten argue (p. 123–25). They mediate and absorb dissent, translating it into ‘manageable’ projects, grants and service provision. Instead of collective, fugitive or insurgent practices, struggles get channelled into measurable outcomes, reports and funding cycles. What was once joy, creativity and insurgency, becomes ‘service delivery.’ By making initiatives dependent upon grants, which is only possible if they are formalized as private NGOs, the state privatises its own failure and calls it community. This goes not only for social welfare struggles but also for cultural endeavours. Through NGOization, contemporary dance has exhausted its joyous artistic explorations in an increasingly project-oriented structure – what was claimed to be its freedom was simultaneously its curse. The striving for institutionalization in the contemporary dance scene of Slovenia is therefore paradoxically a means to plan a fugitive undercommons of the institutionalization and thus escape its repressive structures. Only where a state institution is established and fully functioning, one can work against it by stealing and using its resources to claim back the practice of study, joy, survival and refusal.

I believe that the emotional economy within the ongoing struggles in the contemporary dance scene has helped shape this awareness. It has also helped to develop the (fugitive) value system of the scene that comes from practice and to direct its anger into vocal and confident ‘killjoy’ negotiation. Hopefully, what will have been conquered will not devour that fugitive drive that is at the scene’s core.

Waiting for a Conclusion

Whilst the mandate clock is ticking for yet another Slovenian Ministry of

Culture and perhaps even the current left-wing government which repeated the recurrent promise to the contemporary dance scene to finally proceed towards its goal of institution(alization), the tired but never fully defeated scene is once again quietly waiting for the outcome in the back-row seat. Nothing can surprise its members any longer. It seems that no matter what the politicians present or not present to the scene, the scene will continue to shape its agendas based on its values derived from its practices. These still make sense if there are enough young people who find them meaningful and enjoy practising them. But for that the right conditions need to be created, which are now lacking. The scene has repeatedly managed to recover from despair and turn anger into action. Before her are difficult times, but nothing she could not handle as she continues to firmly stand for her values as a mature and dignified 'killjoy' negotiator she has become. The contemporary dance scene in Slovenia will continue – and I say that as her hopeful member – to fugitively plan from the undercommons of the NGOs OR the possible institutions of the future.

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Footnotes

1. The main driving force behind founding CDAS was Ksenija Hribar, the founder of Dance Theatre Ljubljana, the first contemporary dance company in Slovenia. The author of this article was President of the CDAS between 2017 and 2020. More about CDAS at: https://sodobniples.si/en/the-contemporary-dance-association-slovenia-cdas/ [accessed: 1.09.2025].
2. See https://remk.ekultura.gov.si/razvid/samozaposleni [accessed: 17.09.2025] and Development Strategy for Contemporary Dance (2004–2008): https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MK/Gradiva/MZK-Strategije-Sodobni-plesi.-Web.pdf [accessed: 17.09.2025].
3. See https://sodobniples.si/en/members/ [accessed: 17.09.2025].
4. For a list of Slovenian governments, see: https://www.gov.si/drzavni-organi/vlada/o-vladi/pretekle-vlade/ [accessed: 1.09.2009].
5. Development Strategy for Contemporary Dance (2024–2028): https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MK/Gradiva/MZK-Strategije-Sodobni-plesi.-Web.pdf [accessed: 17.09.2025].
6. The working group consisted of Tamara Bračič Vidmar, Nastja Bremec Rynia, Petra Hazabent, Mojca Jan Zoran (from the Ministry quota), Kim Komljanec (from the Ministry quota), Andreja Kopač, Nina Meško, Tjaša Pureber (from the Ministry quota), Maša Radi Buh, Teja Reba, Dejan Srhoj, Rok Vevar.
7. See the Developmental Strategy for Contemporary Dance (2024–2028).
8. All the answers were provided by the respondents via email between 30 June 2025 and 15 July 2025. They have been translated from Slovenian and paraphrased by the author of this article. Most of the answers were delivered in written form. Andreja Podrzavnik's answers were delivered as an audio recording, which was transcripted, translated and parahprased in this article. The original answers are kept by the author and available upon request.
9. For more on Slovenian choreographers, see: https://koreografski.info/en/about-directory/ [accessed: 17.09.2025].

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Interview with Teja Reba (conducted via email on 11.07.2025), available by request from the author.

Interview with Andreja Podrzavnik (conducted on 15.07.2025 via the use of voice-recorded answers), transcripted, available by request from the author.

Interview with Dejan Srhoj (conducted via email on 30.06.2025), available by request from the author.

Interview with Mateja Bučar (conducted via email on 10.07.2025), available by request from the author.

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