

ASPECTS OF THE CARNIVALESQUE AND THE PERFORMATIVE IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE

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This paper explores aspects of the carnivalesque and the performative in Croatian public discourse, considering them a form of communication, exchange of responses between the authorities and groups of citizens (associations, initiatives, trade unionists and opposition politicians). The language of delegated power and impenetrable imagery, on the one hand, and highly performative responses, on the other, paralyze communication, preoccupy the media with the illusion of conducting public dialogue and condemn such a format as immanently uncommunicative. From a broader perspective, the article notes an increasingly evident asymmetry – the more “carnival” in everyday political theater, the less carnival in the traditional carnival practices.

Keywords: Croatian public discourse, media, the carnivalesque, performativity

1. PUBLIC DISCOURSE AS A DYNAMIC AND DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

Sociologist Frank Furedi's thesis that politics is speechless illustrates processes that are simultaneous in contemporary political practice – on the one hand, the term *politics* freely spills over into different spheres of public activity (from language policy to body politics, food, victimization, etc.), while on the other hand, the operative political concepts of the *left* and the *right* lose their content, retaining only their rhetorical character!¹ “Vision” becomes the key word of contemporary political vocabulary, and Furedi defines it as a “product

¹ This work has been fully supported by the University North.

of intellectually grounded imagination”, which is joined by increasingly frequent “grand” words: transparency, social cohesion, inclusion, added value, sustainable development, etc. (Furedi 2008: 13–15). Furedi recognizes trends related to such political discourse in the infantilization of the electorate, the concept of vulnerability as a cultural metaphor, the tendency to pathologize the past, the professionalization of protests and fear as a common currency in public discourse (ibid.: 169). The fact that the public sphere is transformed into a play about the private lives and personal interests of politicians confirms the exhaustion of the public discourse (politicization of private and depoliticization of public), but also the support of the media for, or at least its malleability to, the manipulation that provides such projects with legitimacy.

Communicologist Thomas A. Bauer believes that media reality is not in competition with social reality, but an ingredient for the construction of reality (2007: 83), because the media society contains no non-media topics or people. The media are “agencies of ethics, aesthetics and pragmatics of society that bind to themselves the criteria of respect and contempt” (ibid.: 68) by publicly intervening with their interpretations or creating a binding picture of reality. Although elementary media literacy would presuppose a rational use of the media, Bauer concludes that the medialized construction of reality confirms the profiling of the media into communicative agencies for the acquisition of power (ibid.: 219–224). The romanticized image of human communication has definitely been replaced by the realization that communication “does not have a natural design” (ibid.: 41), but also that crisis is “a factor of productive communication because it provokes the desire to find meaning” (ibid.: 50).

This paper explores examples of modification of responses in public discourse in order to determine the extent to which this theoretical framework can be applied to the present-day Croatian public sphere. When faced with highly performative statements from groups of citizens (associations, initiatives, trade unionists and opposition politicians), the government responds by using the language of delegated power and impenetrable imagery, which paralyzes communication by denying a response, while at the same time providing the media with the illusion of conducting public dialogue. From a broader perspective, the article observes the inversion of carnival and political satire. Even though the carnival has always been a socially agreed way to turn the social glove inside out under controlled conditions, a certain asymmetry becomes evident – the more “carnival” there appears in everyday political theater, the less carnival there appears in traditional carnival practices. As an illustrative example, let us mention this year’s carnival in Čavle near Rijeka, where an effigy of “Škuribando Furešćić” (representing a migrant/foreign worker) was first hanged, and then, after the negative reactions from the public, replaced by a new culprit for all: “Journalist Škandalic”.²

² I. Z. 2024. “U Čavlima obješen novi pust – Novinaro Škandalic”. Available at: <https://vijesti.hrt.hr/hrvatska/u-cavilma-objesen-novi-pust-novinaro-skandalic-11316820> (accessed 16 April 2024).

1.1. PERFORMATIVE RESPONSES

In this section we will provide a brief chronological overview of examples of performative responses from different groups of citizens (associations, initiatives, trade unionists and opposition politicians) in the past ten years, which were often covered by the media in a manner more sensationalist than informative.³ In May 2010, in Varšavska Street in Zagreb, members of the Zelena akcija and Pravo na grad associations protested against the mayor of Zagreb by carrying 500 cardboard suitcases with the inscription “Remetinec” (name of the municipal jail). The “performance” also featured banners with slogans “Kroejša spiking – litiv” (Croatia speaking – leave it) and “Kroejša spiking – ostavka” (Croatia speaking – resignation), which referred to the mayor’s public use of broken English. The “March on the City Hall” ended by a public display of the suitcase contents: “a toothbrush, soap, comb, slippers, razor, towel, exercise weights (because he won’t be able to do his usual jogging in prison), pajamas, toilet paper and a Ludo board game”.⁴ In April 2012, members of the Šibenik Civic Forum organized the “funeral of the city of Šibenik”, walking in a procession from the city center to the St. Anne cemetery carrying a cross with the inscription “1066 PEOPLE OF ŠIBENIK 2012”. As the cemetery entrance was locked, the cross and wreaths were laid at the entrance. The city was not interred, but popular ballads “Šibenska balada” (The ballad of Šibenik) and “Da te mogu pismom zvati” (If I could call you by my song) (often performed at funerals) were ceremonially sung. The entire performance was actually a response by the citizens to a series of moves of the then local government, through which the city had lost part of its urban identity, with the collapse of Šibenik companies and the shutdown or merger of civic institutions into larger regional centers.⁵

The citizens of Sisak expressed their disagreement with the Sisak-Moslavina County prefect in November 2013 through a protest initiated by the “Toy Cars for the County Prefect” Facebook group. Citizens peacefully protested against the purchase of an overly expensive official car for the prefect of one of the poorest counties in Croatia by leaving about two hundred children toy cars at the entrance to the county administration building under the motto: “Take your toy car and take it to the Sisak-Moslavina County prefect. She loves them so much.”⁶ And the luxury cars that the government treated itself to on the World Day of Social Justice were the pretext for the Labor Party to come to the Parliament in February 2014 carrying “underpants on a stick” (a traditional symbol of poverty) to warn about the increasing number of unemployed and the dramatic position of labor in general.

³ Note: for all examples, the authors list only one (more neutral) source from different Croatian portals.

⁴ Šimac, J. and Vidov, P. 2010. “Remetinec te čeka: Pogledajte što su Bandiću prosvjednici spakirali u kofer”. Available at: <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/video-remetinec-te-ceka-pogledajte-sto-su-bandicu-prosvjednici-spakirali-u-kofer/492381.aspx> (accessed 18 April 2024).

⁵ “Pogrebna povorka Šibencana za Grad Šibenik”. Available at: <https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/pogrebna-povorka-sibencana-za-grad-sibenik-20120406> (accessed 16 April 2024).

⁶ “Prosvjedni dječji autići za sisačku županiju Lovrić Merzel”. Available at: <https://www.poslovnih.hr/vratska/prosvjedni-djecji-autici-za-sisacku-zupaniju-lovric-merzel-255812> (accessed 16 April 2024).

Although “underpants on a stick” symbolically signified the powerlessness⁷ of citizens in the face of social injustice, it is interesting to note that some commentators on portals turned against the Labor Party and its leader (a former trade unionist), recognizing only the masquerade and public performance: “Dalkem and masquerade in the Parliament” (ćazim_1), or “Oh, this bunch has also felt that a performance should be made. If you are not ashamed to carry underpants on a stick, why haven’t you disbursed half of your salary to the poor from your cities? You are all the same. Lesar, I trust you a great deal, you old unionist and another defector from the HNS!” (popcorn220.2.2014.).⁸

In October 2017, activists of the Vigilare Foundation “walked” into the Parliament building with twelve baby strollers containing boxes with signed petitions for the prohibition of abortion; the number of strollers indicated the number of abortions performed daily in Croatia.⁹ In December of the same year, “maids” protested before the Parliament, organized by several women associations.¹⁰ Protesting the Government’s reluctance in the process of ratifying the Istanbul Convention, they were dressed as maids depicted in Margaret Atwood’s novel *The Handmaid’s Tale*, and the eponymous TV series and film. They expressed their disagreement with being pushed into the role of a “reproductive machine” or a “walking womb”. As unreliable as it may be, the so-called user-generated content once again confirms the perception of such acts as a form of performance, carnival or masquerade: “Congratulations on such an imaginative performance. Croatia is already deeply mired in a fundamentalist regime, full of hatred for dissidents, all under the leadership of the Catholic Church, the HDZ and of course our wonderful and smart lady president, and the regime-clerical organization under the honorable leadership of the one and only Źeljka Markić, who wants to return this country to the 18th century at any cost.” (Deactivated user). “Man, I didn’t know the carnival is on already, and the masquerade is on its way.” (username taken). “Isn’t the carnival in February?” (BernardaKrafna).¹¹ Activists from two initiatives protested at St. Mark’s Square, in front of the Parliament, in 2017. The GOOD initiative performed its “Become a plagiarist and the prime minister’s minister” and distributed their “Successful Plagiarism in 10 Steps Cheat Sheet” to the MPs and Government officials to warn against the message that the then minister of education, accused

⁷ They were made as theater props.

⁸ Bilešić, Romana. 2014. “Poruka premijeru: Laburisti u Sabor došli s gaćama na štapu”. Available at: <https://www.24sata.hr/news/poruka-premijeru-laburisti-u-sabor-dosli-s-gacama-na-stapu-354459> (accessed 16 April 2024). Note: the comments are provided without any intervention.

⁹ Brakus, Ana. 2017. “Batarelovi policajci”. Available at: <https://www.portalnovosti.com/batarelovi-kolicajci> (accessed 18 April 2024).

¹⁰ The protest campaign “STOP to fundamentalist violence against women”, which was also held at Narodni trg in Split, was organized by the Croatian Women’s Network, Autonomous Women’s House Zagreb, Lesbian Group Kontra and Domine of Split. Cited according to: “Sluškinje’ pred Saborom: Priče Źeljke Markić i desničara su laž”. Available at: <https://www.24sata.hr/news/sluskinje-pred-saborom-price-zeljke-markic-i-desnicara-su-laz-552718> (accessed 18 April 2024).

¹¹ Cf. <https://www.24sata.hr/news/sluskinje-pred-saborom-price-zeljke-markic-i-desnicara-su-laz-55-2718> (accessed 18 April 2024).

of plagiarism, was sending to the public.¹² The Pokret otoka (Island Movement) initiative protested against the Concession Act by not only carrying banners but also spreading towels on the square, “turning St. Mark’s Square into a beach”.¹³ We will conclude this review with the March 2021 performance of the candidate for Mayor of Zadar, who “played the tragic Greek hero, Sisyphus”, pushing a red-painted cube (instead of a rock) up Mt. Velebit, marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Croatian Spring nationalist revival movement. (Red-colored squares and cubes are popular symbols of Croatian identity).¹⁴ Regardless of how literally or symbolically they demonstrate aspects of the carnivalesque and/or the performative in their actions, these examples of grassroots public gestures all function as responses in public discourse and correspond to different levels of the government and their recent policies (economic, social, educational, gender, etc.). Their representational aspects increase the social visibility and media attractiveness of such protest activities.

1.2. “ZORANISMS”

Bourdieu’s thesis on linguistic exchange as a form of economic exchange implies that the discourses involved in it transmit both signs of material status and signs of authority, which is why discourses in public communication are, at least in part, euphemisms, “*compromise achievements*, the result of a bargain between interest as a motive for testimony [...] and *censorship*” (Bourdieu 1992: 51–67). In principle, in this context, politicians are characterized by the so-called “strategy of benevolent friendliness”, addressing others in “their” language, whereby profit is capitalized by the very act of symbolically denying the hierarchical relationship (ibid.: 53–54). However, discourses circulating on the “language market” are also stylistically marked. The example of the current Croatian president and former Prime Minister Zoran Milanović illustrates the extent to which this is true. His statements have become recognizable in the broader public as “zoranisms”. Journalist Boris Rašeta described them in January 2014 as unprecedented metaphors that cannot be translated into understandable Croatian. They are most often composed of two parts: the first part of the sentence offers “some ordinary, trivial, familiar object”, while in the second its place is taken by “an unknown, hyperbolic, sometimes diabolical finale”. For example, “you hunted a fox, and you will drive out King Kong”, or “we are not geese in the

¹² P. N. 2017. “Postani plagijator i premijerov ministar: Aktivisti pred Saborom dijelili šalabahter za plagiranje”. Available at: <https://www.novolist.hr/novosti/hrvatska/postani-plagijator-i-premijerov-ministar-aktivisti-pred-saborom-dijelili-salabahter-za-plagiranje/> (accessed 18 April 2024).

¹³ Gašćić, Denis. 2017. “Prosvjed protiv koncesija: Na Markovu trgu napravili plažu”. Available at: <https://www.24sata.hr/news/prosvjed-protiv-koncesija-na-markovu-trgu-napravili-plazu-529106> (accessed 18 April 2024).

¹⁴ “Performans kandidata za gradonačelnika Zadra: Guraó crvenu kocku do vrha Tulovih greda na Velebitu”. Available at: <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/performans-kandidata-za-gradonacelnika-zadra-gurao-crvenu-kocku-do-vrha-tulovih-greda-na-velebitu-15061056> (accessed 18 April 2024).

fog, we are an Airbus in the fog” (Rašeta 2014). Rašeta’s column ends with an invitation to readers to come up with something on their own, like “We entered the term of office as Denis Rodman, and now, only halfway through it, we are on a quarter note, and there is no clef anywhere”. However, among the 96 comments offered there are no successful “zoranisms”. A commentator (skypilot) explains this as follows: “It is not possible to find counterparts to zoranisms because irrational currents are native to each individual by nature and habitus. They cannot be found in other individuals with similar ideological or worldviews, nor can they be used for purposes other than those defined by their legal owner. In other words: no one has a clue what the poet meant, and the ‘poet’ is each owner of ‘zoranisms’ and other rhetorical acrobatic devices.”¹⁵ In an even more participatory genre of a survey published in March 2021, journalist Višnja Kragić Mahmutović invited readers to choose the “craziest zoranism”. We highlight a few examples: “We are not the same ecosystem, he is a hippopotamus, chews water lilies, but he has a nature his own. I’m an eagle, a hawk.”; “Who is he to speak? He didn’t throw the gauntlet; he threw away a gangrenous bone, that’s where things stink.”; “We’re going to fake it, it’s going to be a farce, we’re going to put on wigs and heels and pretend to be ladies, when in fact we’re just concubines.”¹⁶

Rather than continuing to list examples from the media, we will refer to Boris Beck’s consideration of what a “zoranism” means in the first place: it is an “inappropriate statement that causes confusion and frustration in the listener”. There are consistently “ironic sentences, sometimes auto-ironic, often clumsy, but strangely rational”, while the source of it all is that “one speaks when one should be silent, and one speaks even after one has already said everything that should have been said” (Beck 2015: 10–11). Beck considers the (former) mayor of Zagreb, Milan Bandić the rhetorical antipode to Milanović. “He rarely gives interviews, his statements are short and effective, and, while his word is still floating in the air, he has already left”, says Beck. The third type, who “talks a lot, but says little or nothing” is embodied in (the former Prime Minister) Tomislav Karamarko (ibid.: 11–12). Pondering on the rhetorical question of “Why are there no tudmanisms, čačićisms, kerumisms, mesićisms, bandićisms, karamarkisms... while there are zoranisms?” Beck replies: “In order for someone to be mocked for saying something, they must say something first”. Milanović frequently shows “that he knows more than others” (ibid.: 10–12).

We can agree with Bourdieu (1992: 62–65) that there are no neutral words in public communication. Each speech is produced for the market and via the market, and the pre-calculated conditions of reception are part of the conditions of production. Performative statements that contain a publicly advanced claim to power still imply a sense of probable acceptability.

¹⁵ Rašeta, Boris. 2014. “Čuveni premijerovi ‘zoranizmi’ nadmašili su i latinske izreke”. Available at: <https://www.24sata.hr/kolumna/cuveni-premijerovi-zoranizmi-nadmasili-su-i-latinske-izreke-348724> (accessed 2 May 2024).

¹⁶ Kragić Mahmutović, Višnja. 2021. “Birajte najluđi ‘zoranizam’: Bit će farsa, stavit ćemo perike, štikle, pravit se da smo dame”. Available at: <https://www.24sata.hr/news/birajte-naludi-zoranizam-mi-nismo-isti-ekosistem-on-je-nilski-konj-ja-sam-oral-sokol-753942> (accessed 2 May 2024).

1.3. INVERSION OF THE SUBVERSIVE CHARACTER OF CARNIVAL

Let us also refer to the aforementioned asymmetry – the more “carnival” there appears in everyday political theater, the less carnival there is in the traditional carnival practices; that is, to the increasingly common examples of the inversion of the subversive character of carnival, recognizable in the change of its social and symbolic function. For example, in March 2014, the “Omiš Pirates” association burned an effigy of journalist Vinko Vuković, as Krnjo (the symbolic figure of the carnival), who “had a folded copy of the *Slobodna Dalmacija* (daily paper) in his back pocket, held a laptop in his hand, and carried an editorial tag around his neck” – because “he writes critically about our city” and “makes it look like Omiš is a city (of dubious character).”¹⁷ At the same time, in the town of Selce – as the BETA association (of people with the problem of infertility) warned – “an effigy was fashioned to depict a mother with a child in her arms, with the inscription ‘Gay child from a test tube’”. The Youth Association of Selce proposed that everything at the carnival was the exact opposite of the way it was presented in the media. The carnival figure was named Katarino Katarinčić after St. Catherine, the patron saint of Selce. It was symbolic of the unnecessary referendum on marriage and intended to ridicule the right-wing political option that does not support the law on same-sex partnership because, allegedly, “homosexuals raise homosexuals.”¹⁸ The Croatian Journalists’ Association also reacted to the burning of the effigy of journalist and writer Ante Tomić as Krnjo in Proložac in February 2015, stating that Tomić was “a satirist with an attitude and worldview that does not leave anyone indifferent”. It added that, “Whenever an effigy of a specific person is burned at carnival – rather than a symbol of some vicious social phenomenon – this is morbid and disturbing. When the person in question is a journalist and writer, it is associated with jails and prison camps.”¹⁹

In March 2017, in Novi Vinodolski, the “Asylum Seeker” carnival figure was condemned for all evil, a will was read to “him”, after which the effigy was carried around the city and along the sea to the bridge where it was burned, accompanied by the singing of Ljudevit Gaj’s patriotic song, “Croatia Has Not Perished Yet”.²⁰ In February 2018, at the children’s carnival in Kašтеля, a carnival figure representing a children’s picture book

¹⁷ “SKANDALOZNE HDZ-OVE MAŠKARE Spalili novinara Slobodne koji je pisao o gradonačelnikovoj krađi”. Available at: <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/video-foto-skandalozne-hdz-ove-maskare-spalili-novinaru-slobodne-koji-je-pisao-o-gradonacelnikovoj-krađi-869983> (accessed 3 May 2024).

¹⁸ Erdelja, Ana. 2014. “Na maškarama u Selcu spalili ‘gay dijete iz epruvete’, u Omišu novinara”. Available at: <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/u-selcu-na-maskarama-spalili-gay-dijete-iz-epruvete-924881> (accessed 3 May 2024).

¹⁹ “Skandal u Proložcu: HND šokiran spaljivanjem lutke u liku Ante Tomića”. Available at: <https://www.novlist.hr/novosti/hrvatska/skandal-u-proloscu-hnd-sokiran-spaljivanjem-lutke-u-liku-ante-tomic/> (accessed 3 May 2024).

²⁰ “U NOVOM VINODOLSKOM SMAKNULI ‘AZILANTA!’ Građanima Novog za sve je nedaće upravo ‘azilant’ najveći krivac”. Available at: <https://riportal.net.hr/lifestyle/u-novom-vinodolskom-smaknuli-azilanta-gradanima-novog-za-sve-je-nedace-upravo-azilant-najveci-krivac/43869/> (accessed 3 May 2024).

featuring families “with two Moms and two Dads”.²¹ We will single out two comments on this carnival practice. Dragan Markovina notes that it is an inversion in which “instead of a cathartic reading of the indictment to real rulers” we witness a publicly legalized lynching of minorities and the powerless, all because carnivals are organized with government sponsorship.²² Mašenjka Bačić points out the change of the symbolic function of the carnival: “mocking the weaker, the less powerful, members of the most vulnerable parts of society, as well as those whose public speech is not in accordance with the generally propagated values of the political order” (Bačić 2019).²³ It is interesting to note that these extremely medialized themes do not point to the government as the target of traditional carnival practice, but rather the opposite – as the financial and ideological sponsor of the aforementioned inversions of the subversive character of carnival.

2. RITUAL AND LINGUISTIC PLAY OF FREEDOM AND CROSSING OVER

In his analyses of folk-humor carnival culture, Mikhail Bakhtin detects three basic forms: ritual spectacles, comic verbal compositions, and various forms and genres of freer street speech (Bahtin 1978: 10). All ceremonial-presentational forms are marked by a strong presence of an element of play, which brings them closer to the theater. The place of difference is established in the fact that carnival does not accept the division into performers and audience, i.e. it does not recognize the barrier; the carnival is not observed but lived. Bakhtin’s interpretation of the barrier that would negate the carnival also points to the carnival idea of the universal: by embracing universal participation, carnival tries to join real life as well as its transformed form, organized on the principle of the ridiculous. Carnival thus represents the “festivity life” of the people and celebrates a “temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it mark[s] the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions” (ibid.: 16).²⁴ The ambivalence of carnival laughter, which both mocks and gloats, consists in both denying and confirming the relativity of the ruling truths and powers (ibid.: 18–19). Therefore, carnival, temporary and agreed upon, does not play (with) reality, but reality itself plays out in the carnival. The most suitable place for this was the town square with the right of extraterritoriality

²¹ Žarko, Jakov. 2018. “Sramota u Kaštelima: na dječjem karnevalu pred mališanima spaliti LGBT slikovnicu s dvije mame i dva tate”. Available at: <https://slobodnadalmacija.hr/dalmacija/sramota-u-kastelima-na-djecjem-karnevalu-pred-malisanima-spalili-lgbt-slikovnicu-s-dvije-mame-i-dva-tate-529660> (accessed 3 May 2024).

²² <https://www.telegram.hr/politika-kriminal/bit-je-karnevala-da-obespravljen-puk-osjeti-pravdu-i-simbolicno-spali-mocnike-a-mi-lincujemo-manjine-i-nemocne/> (accessed 3 May 2024).

²³ <https://www.portalnovosti.com/sovinizam-pod-maskama> (accessed 3 May 2024).

²⁴ Given that Bakhtin’s idea of the carnival is based on a very concrete historical period and literary template, Igor Bezinović (2006: 10–11) recalls that in this historical context, it is necessary to “separate the necessary and contingent features of this idea” in order to determine how much this “indestructible and universal Dionysian drive”, i.e. the utopian potential of the carnival, is really an inspiration to new(er) social movements, too.

in relation to the world of the official order and the official ideology. Play as the principle of life was expressed by the central motif of a mask, which denies personal identity and legitimizes bold metamorphoses. Richard Parker recalls the sharp dichotomy established between the street and lounge carnival that still exists today – unlike the noisy, vulgar and aggressive street, the lounge carnival presupposes an invitation or a paid ticket, rich costumes and masks, which is why it is most often located in theater spaces. However, Parker looks for the real difference between these two carnival formats in relation to the material, the ability of the carnival to create a “folk counterbalance to the myths about the origin of the elites that sought the possibility of the past giving meaning to the present”. The folk carnival plays a “cannibalized” version of that past, “but not simply to reimagine the past, but to invent the future” (Parker 1993: 189).

Expanding further on Bakhtin’s element of play with erotic capacities, Parker concludes that the carnivalization of everyday life, however, does not encourage participants to disregard the “evasive character” of the utopian image of the world offered by the carnival (ibid.: 188). Paul Connerton also mentions an interesting aspect of ritualized seasonal festivities that owe their expression to “conspicuous regularity”. Such formalized procedures “aim at stylization, stereotypes and repetition”, which “automatically implies the continuation of the past”, although the distribution of collected images of the past and knowledge of the past clearly shows that it is a matter steeped in conflict and overloaded with the strategy of denial (Connerton 2004: 65–72). Or, as Ivan Lozica synthesizes, “Carnival freedom is strictly controlled. In fact, it is just a play of freedom, much like a theatrical play. Just as the military exercise merely plays at a war situation, the carnival acts as a diversion of folk culture, staging a rebellion without damaging the existing structure of society” (Lozica 2007: 200).

The wide-open stylistic register of laughter in carnival conditions does not only relieve tension in the social matrix. Laughter that “lowers” also affects the language, “the natural storehouse of the forces of power, as well as the support of their vault” (Katunarić 1994: 39). For Bakhtin, speech is a “genre of behavior”, because the word does not convey only meanings but also values in disguise (as cited in MacCannell 1992: 47–52). Street speech is free to resort to forms of communication repressed or forbidden in official speech, ranging from shaming and cursing to (most frequently) profanity. Carnival-time speech amply supports the granularity of vulgar and grotesque realism; in it, shaming is addressed at deities, curses are a form of street advertising, while profanity is used as a proverb. Hyperbolized physicality adds a *snout* to the motif of the *mouth*; the act of speech thus acquires a strong erotic determinant.²⁵ The research of speech acts, determined equally by the

²⁵ Referring to Pierre Guiraud’s considerations about the body scheme that defines the “articulatory style” of a particular social class, Pierre Bourdieu derives a sexual opposite from the *mouth/snout* pairing – the *mouth* is female because it is closed and clenched (tense and censored), and the *snout* is male because it is gaping, wide and brazenly open (relaxed and free). For men, folk speech, in relation to the dominant linguistic habitus, represents a refusal to renounce the social and gender identity that constitutes their class affiliation. This is unlike women, for whom the acceptance of the language of the dominant class does not mean their separation from their own class (Bourdieu 1992: 76–80). Since the folk-laughter tradition is not

social and linguistic context, is (also) related to the notion of the *performative*, a term used by John L. Austin to refer to statements whose task is not to inform or describe, but to perform an action by pronouncement – to perform the act by the act of pronouncing it (Austin 2014: 5).²⁶ Typical performatives, such as the sentence by which the registrar declares the marriage concluded, also mean the performance of the social act. Judith Butler uses the same term to describe how *gender* identity – but also identity in general – is not given ontologically or biologically but is the result of multiple interpretations of gender. Her analysis of the performativity of gender, which constitutes identity, which should be assumed (the self, constructed by discourse), approaches the conditions of the emergence of theatrical performance (cf. Butler 2000: 8–21). Both Butler and Austin “perceive the execution of performative acts as a ritualized public performance” (as cited in Fischer- Lichte 2009: 24).

On the other hand, the relocation of theatrical performances from theatre buildings (to markets, former factories, military facilities, etc.) follows more radical concepts of presentation and returns to the idea of the theatre as a social game that does not exclude the dichotomy of seeing and touching (distance/proximity, illusion/reality, public/private). A more intense mixing of the aesthetic and the social blurs the boundaries of the notions of *performers* and the *audience*, making them more permeable. As the performative space is less imbued with the character of the work²⁷ and more with the character of the event – because it is a liminal space “in which metamorphoses and transformations take place” (Fischer-Lichte 2009: 139–145) – the experience of presence not only enhances the level of authenticity but also the capacity for subversion. The performative space is unstable, transient and even unpredictable; but, no matter how credible, the audience’s interventions in it do not focus on the sphere of the aesthetic but on the sphere of the ethical (social and political). They represent a *threshold* between the unaesthetic and the aesthetic, that is, they offer a *threshold* experience that – with the collapse of the *reality/art* conceptual pairing – enables transformation. Exploring the links between ritual and theatre, Victor Turner divided rituals of transition into three phases – separation (exclusion from the social milieu), threshold (transformation), and incorporation of changed identities into a new status. Turner called the condition produced in the second phase *liminal*²⁸ and

unfavorable to women and transvestism is predominantly realized by turning men into women, the question of the relationship of overdressed/*temporary* women to the language of power remains open.

²⁶ Cf. Felman (1993: 13–16) and Fischer-Lichte (2009: 17–18), but also reflections on the revision of the performative concept of language by Dieter Mersch, who finds “failure” in the very definition of the performative, because “there is no adequate concept of the act as an act, as an implementation in terms of performance, production and placement, because they prejudice the act unilaterally to such actions, which are intentionally tailored. What counts is the actor, the speaking subject, who disposes of his speech in a sovereign manner.” Therefore, the revision of the notion of performativity should start from the “disparity of telling and showing” (Mersch 2012: 158, 169).

²⁷ Cf. Turner (1989), who interprets theatrical dramas as metacommentary on great social dramas that can never be completed, among other things because they appear at all levels of social organization and reveal the taxonomic relationships among participants.

²⁸ The difference between *liminal* (collective, forced, stereotyped) and *liminoid* (a consequence of the separation of spheres of work and leisure) is defined by Turner as follows: “Optation pervades the liminoid

described it as a state between all possible areas made possible by new, partly confusing experiences (such as the *transition* of boys into warriors, or unmarried people into married couples). Erika Fischer-Lichte defines it more precisely as an intermediate space, “a state of unstable intermediate existence *betwixt and between*”; a state of transition and transformation, at the same time the aesthetic starting point of performative art (Fischer-Lichte 2009: 215). While the function of ritual is to “found, strengthen and sustain the community” (as the theatricalized political performances try to do today), the aesthetics of the performative encourages the “aspect of *overstepping* and crossing over” (ibid.: 242–253), thus contributing to the dynamics of differences between the aforementioned dichotomous couples, which, in turn, does not exclude the occurrence of violence in the liminal phase.

Three points in the Croatian public discourse discussed here (performative responses, “zoranisms” and the inversion of the subversive character of carnival) function as a mixture of ritual, theatrical and political events. The penetration of the carnivalesque into hierarchically different spheres of politics shows that the performative character of protest activities is superior to their linguistic aspect, which is also confirmed by their media coverage.

3. CONCLUSION

Unlike a text, which is a product or record of a communicative act, discourse is defined as a process, a complex image of language activity that includes elements outside of linguistic circumstances where communication takes place. As both private and public discourse are prone to stratification and merging, and it is only possible to talk about their boundaries on the Internet conditionally, their non-differentiation is also reflected in the seemingly unlimited democratization of the communication chain (cf. Badurina 2007: 14–17). Media coverage of the Croatian public discourse – which has been explored in this paper as a form of communication, as an exchange of responses between the authorities and groups of citizens (associations, initiatives, trade unionists and even opposition politicians) – is primarily characterized by weak points of *online* journalism: a sensationalist approach to topics, *clickbait* titles, a dominantly visual layout, interpretative rather than informative texts, author and participatory genres, etc. The media should mediate social reality (as objectively as possible); instead, the media-created reality competes with social reality. These aspects of the carnivalesque and the performative in public discourse are evident in a wide range of ways, from the choice of space (the square, the street, the Croatian Parliament) through the performance/playing of reality (the funeral, the prison, the beach), to the props (real/symbolic) and the uncensored language of the protesters,

phenomenon, obligation the liminal” (1989: 85), “One *works* at the liminal, one *plays* with the liminoid” (ibid.: 113). That is why the theater of the Western liberal-capitalist society is seen as “a liminoid process, set in the liminoid time of leisure between the role-playing times of *work*”, that is – it is “in a way *play* or *entertainment*” (ibid.: 243).

which is parallel to the so-called “zoranisms” which illustrate the language of the government, delegated power and impenetrable imagery, ultimately denouncing this format as immanently uncommunicative. This is also confirmed by the implied subversive capacity of the liminal space, which also remains unrealized; however strong and authentic, it does not offer a *threshold* experience because it does not exceed the sphere of the social and the political. Furthermore, in a broader social context, the article refers to an increasingly evident asymmetry – the more “carnival” there is in everyday political theater, the less carnival there appears in the traditional carnival practices. The carnival idea of the universal – which conjoins real life through its transformed form organized on the ridiculous principle of the temporary abolition of hierarchical relations, norms and prohibitions – is more and more frequently being put to rest under the financial and ideological umbrella of the government, thus changing the symbolic function of the carnival.

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ASPEKTI KARNEVALESKNOG I PERFORMATIVNOG U JAVNOM DISKURSU

Aspekti karnevalesknog i performativnog u hrvatskom javnom diskursu istražuju se u ovom radu kao oblik komunikacije, razmjene replika između vlasti i skupina građana (udrugâ, inicijativâ, sindikalistâ, pa i oporbenih političara). S jedne strane, jezik delegirane moći i neprohodne slikovitosti, s druge strane, izrazito performativni odgovori – paraliziraju komunikaciju, zaokupljaju medije iluzijom o vođenju javnog dijaloga te prokazuju takav format kao imanentno nekomunikativan. Dodatno, u širem socijalnom kontekstu, rad registrira i sve zamjetniju asimetriju – što više "karnevala" u svakodnevnome političkom teatru, to manje karnevala u tradicionalnim karnevalskim praksama.

Ključne riječi: hrvatski javni diskurs, mediji, karnevalesknost, performativnost