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Aoristic Avant-garde: Experimental Art in 1960s and 1970s Yugoslavia

A Dissertation Presented

by

Katherine Ann Carl

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Art History and Criticism

Stony Brook University

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Stony Brook University

The Graduate School

Katherine Ann Carl

We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the

Doctor of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend

acceptance of this dissertation.

Professor Donald Kuspit – Dissertation Advisor
Distinguished Professor of Art and Philosophy, Art Department

Dr. Zabet Patterson – Chairperson of Defense
Assistant Professor, Art Department

Stephanie Dinkins
Associate Professor, Art Department

Eda Cufer
Dramaturg

This dissertation is accepted by the Graduate School

Lawrence Martin
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Dissertation

Aoristic Avant-garde: Experimental Art in 1960s and 1970s Yugoslavia

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2009

In the 1960s and 70s, throughout the world artists were questioning traditional methods, structures, meanings and role of art, and at this time artists in Yugoslavia contributed an exceptional conceptual art from their particular political situation that had a formative influence on building civil society in the Western Balkans today. This dissertation proposes that instead of operating as mimicry or time-delay of Western avant-garde, postwar experimental art in Yugoslavia offers from its specific socio-political condition a productive and influential new paradigm. This strategy of relay took place as communication and mobility between different cities of Yugoslavia, exchange with artists from the West, and most significantly through artists' interactive use of public space and resulting redefinition of public institutions.

The dissertation addresses the questions: How did neo avant-garde art in postwar Yugoslavia change notions of public space and communication at the time and what does it add to artistic practice in the Western Balkans today and to the international discourse of conceptual art? How did the artists put to use the special conditions of socialist self-management and non-aligned status to further their concerns? The main hypothesis to be

tested is: Their specific strategy of interactive relay through mobility and communication networks made for a conceptual art that emphasized the role of individual subjectivity more so than in the West through activating public space for creative and civic expression.

Through a discussion of the key artists of the time, the dissertation claims that individual and collective subjectivity and existential investigations played a much stronger role in conceptual art in the Western Balkans than in the West. Artists in Yugoslavia posed questions about ontology, utilitarianism, imagination, collaboration, and communication through the public realm. Furthermore, because public space was not an accepted venue for art, by simply activating this realm with creative expression, artists opened a new definition of place that was not orchestrated by state socialism. This approach to art provided the tools for today's artists and art managers to create their own organizational structures in the wake of the wars of the 1990s to forge constructive cultural and socio-political policy-making today.

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Acknowledgments

A project like this may be a product of solitary research, but in that process there were so many people in different places in the world who helped me enormously. I am glad to have the opportunity to name some of them, though there are many other colleagues and friends and family with whom I have had many conversations on the topic and who have encouraged me as well.

First, my thanks go to my advisor Professor Donald Kuspit whose strong support for the topic and my research, patience, and productive questions made the writing process a pleasure. Special thanks to Eda Cufer for her time to serve on my dissertation committee and for her engaged discussions with me on the topic. Hvala to Branko Franceschi, Zoran Pantelic, and to Branka Curcic, Kristian Lukic, Vesna Pavlovic, and Darko Simicic whose ebullient presences made research thoroughly enjoyable as they arranged meetings so that I could communicate in person with many of the key figures for my research. Meeting with the artists, curators, art historians and critics in many cities who made the art scene in the ‘60s and ‘70s so incredible was inspirational and I thank every one of them for their time and interest: Dunja Blazevic, Jovan Cekic, Jesa Denegri, Braco Dimitrijevic, Nena Dimitrijevic, Goran Djordjevic, Tomislav Gotovac, Sanja Ivekovic, Zelimir Koscevic, Dalibor Martinis, Bogdanka Poznanovic, Mladen Stilinovic, Misko Suvakovic, Branka Stipancic, Irina Subotic, Biljana Tomic, Goran Trbuljak, Jandranka Vinterhalter, Zelimir Zilnik. The consistent support of Richard Lanier and the board and Wendy Newton of The Trust for Mutual Understanding as well as Fritzie Brown of CECArtsLink sustained the exchange necessary to undertake such a project.

At home, my great appreciation to my mother and sister for their constant enthusiasm and belief in my potential. Thanks always to Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss, my partner in the world for all of our long conversations and analyses of everything from history of non-aligned movement and socialism, to differentiation, even jokes, and definitions and applications of the conceptual. His support made this effort possible.

Vita, Publications, and Fields of study

Curatorial and Arts Management Experience

Curator
December 2002-present
School of Missing Studies (SMS)
New York, NY/Belgrade, Serbia
Initiated an experimental education platform for emerging architects and artists to research the phenomena of transition in the cities of Belgrade, Munich, New York, Rotterdam and Zurich, with colleagues in these cities. Wrote program narrative, developed and nurtured international network of partners, wrote press materials and raised funds internationally. Organized and executed week-long workshops and public presentations with invited scholars and students at B92 Cultural Center in Belgrade, Van Alen Institute in New York, and Werkleitz Biennial in Halle-Leipzig, Germany. Contributed essays for Kunstverein Munich publication, Shrinking Cities Project book, *Trans:It Europe*, and *East Coast Europe*.

Curator of Contemporary Exhibitions
November 2005 to February 2007
The Drawing Center
New York, NY
Curator, *Yona Friedman* (Winter 2007), accompanied by *Drawing Papers* publication. Curator, *Fall Selections 2006: Common Destination* with curatorial essay in accompanying *Drawing Papers* publication. Curator with Catherine de Zegher, *Joelle Tuerlinckx: Drawing Inventory* (Spring 2006), co-wrote curatorial essay with de Zegher for accompanying *Drawing Papers* publication. Responsible for all aspects of nine shows per season.

Assistant Curator of Contemporary Exhibitions
February 2005 to October 2005
The Drawing Center
New York, NY
Co-curator with Luis Camnitzer and Catherine de Zegher, *Summer Selections 2005: Wall to Wall Drawing*, *Fall Selections 2005: LineAge*, *Winter Selections 2006: Analog Animation*. All accompanied by *Drawing Papers* publication. Assisted with *Persistent Vestiges: Drawing from the American-Vietnam War* (Fall 2005), co-wrote curatorial essay with Catherine de Zegher for exhibition catalogue.

Curator
December 2004 to August 2006
Lost Highway Expedition
New York, NY
Initiated with architects and artists Azra Aksamija, Ana Dzokic, Ivan Kucina, Marc Neelen, Kyong Park, Marjetica Potrc and Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss an expedition through Ljubljana, Zagreb, Novi Sad, Belgrade, Skopje, Prishtina, Tirana, Podgorica and Sarajevo, roughly tracing the former Yugoslav Highway of Brotherhood and Unity. The expedition in August 2006 was organized in cooperation with colleagues in each city and generated projects, art works, networks, architecture and politics based on the knowledge found in the Western Balkans. Outcomes include *Lost Highway Expedition Photobook* (ed. Carl and Jovanovic Weiss, October 2007); panel discussion at Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, *Cities, Art and Recovery* (September 2006); conferences organized at School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, and at MIT, Center for Advanced Visual Studies (October 2006); forthcoming workshops will develop the *Lost Highway Expedition Sourcebook*.

Curator, Flipside
September 2003-January 2005
Artists Space
New York, NY
Conducted all aspects of organization of an international exhibition of 32 artists from 14 Eastern European countries and the United States. Selected artists and works of art, commissioned new work, communicated with artists, designed exhibition layout, wrote press materials, raised funds, secured shipping, arranged technical details and prepared loan forms. Co-edited exhibition catalogue and contributed curatorial essay. Worked in close collaboration with catalogue co-editor and designer, selected images, invited guest essayists, contributed main essay, and edited all texts. Moderated symposium with Flipside artists and political philosophers Susan Buck-Morss and Elena Petrovskaya.

Curator, Urban Fog of Belgrade
May 2003-November 2003
Transformers/Urban Drift
Berlin, Germany
Presented the work of international artists and architects at an exhibition on the subject of the current foggy identity of the city Belgrade. Collaborated with Belgrade-based curators to develop concept, write curatorial statement. Moderated public panel discussion in Berlin with exhibition artists, architects and fellow curators.

Development
July 1999-September 2003
Dia Art Foundation
New York, NY
Foundation and Government Relations (January 2002-September 2003): Researched and pursued funding sources for Dia's exhibition program and collection. Developed program narratives in cooperation with curator Lynne Cooke, director Michael Govan, and all program area heads. Managed all major foundation grants. Supervised Development Associate and coordinated all research, grantwriting, and final reporting.

Acting Board Liaison (August 2001-December 2001): Worked closely with director Michael Govan on all funding initiatives and director's office business, with primary focus on communication with board.
Oversaw and coordinated all aspects of Dia's Fall Gala, raising $450,000. Acted as liaison between Dia and sponsor, designer, production company, Dia board, and guests. Managed artistic, educational, and financial components of the event. Supervised two Development Assistants and the Assistant to the Director.

Development Associate (July 1999-July 2001): Wrote descriptions of all Dia programs ansd exhibitions for grant proposals in consultation with program directors and curator Lynne Cooke. Increased funding overall and funding for education program twelvefold. Wrote grant proposals and final reports for all Dia programs. Developed and sustained successful relationships with new funders. Conducted educational tours of the museum exhibitions. Supervised Development Assistant.

Curator, Interactive Normalization
May 2002-November 2002
Normal Group for Architecture
Belgrade, Serbia
Developed concept for a two-week conference in collaboration with architect Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss to explore the local and global intersections of contemporary art and architecture. Wrote discussion topic introductions for all panel presentations with international participants. Wrote project narrative and raised funds. Moderated panel discussions and presented a paper.

Curator and Co-Director*, *Go_HOME
January 2000-December 2001
Artslink/CEC International Partners
New York, NY
Developed concept for four-month artist residency and monthly web-dialogue Sunday dinner discussions in collaboration with primary artists Danica Dakic and Sandra Sterle and participating artists Marjetica Potrc and Milica Tomic. Moderated monthly discussions with a dozen guests. Worked with international project partners WHW and Mama, Zagreb. Wrote texts for *go_HOME* website. Developed project discussion topics in cooperation with primary artists. Worked with artists and web designer to develop art and navigation for website. Structured logistics with technical team at non-profit media organization, Location One, to accomplish four web-streaming sessions. Presented paper at College Art Association conference, February 2002, and at Co.operation feminist video conference in Dubrovnik, Croatia, September 2000. Wrote successful grant applications. Represented the project in meetings with funders and project collaborators.

Curator*, *Tandem Project
August 1999-July 2000
District of Columbia Arts Center
Washington, DC
Developed exhibition concept and selected artists for month-long residency and exhibition. Planned and executed curatorial research trip to Ljubljana, Slovenia; Zagreb, Croatia; Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Worked with artists to develop new works of art for the exhibition. Designed and oversaw installation with artists and technicians. Wrote exhibition introduction with artist information and press materials. Wrote successful grant applications. Represented the project in meetings with funders.

Manager, National Centers for Contemporary Art Project
May-August 1998
CEC International Partners
New York, NY
Developed and organized a series of contemporary art exhibitions and related programming with contemporary art centers in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Nizhny Novogorod, Russia. Executed first project sending US curator Kate Horsfield, Director Video Data Bank, Chicago, to Russia to screen US video art from the 1970s and the 1990s and conduct artist workshops. Coordinated dialogue between National Centers for Contemporary Art and the project's US curators. Identified and secured exhibition sites in Russian cities and broadened base of Russian curatorial partners. Represented the project in meetings with funders.

Manager, ArtsLink Program
April 1996-July 1997
CEC International Partners
New York, NY
Managed all aspects of a grant program for US and Central/Eastern European artists, arts managers, and non-profit arts organizations. Developed contacts with non-profit arts organizations nationwide to place 50 Central and Eastern European artists for five-week residencies each year. Selected and oversaw national multidisciplinary review panels. Worked in tandem with director on program presentation, design and outreach, and on writing major funding proposals and reports to trustees. Designed and led activities for ArtsLink fellows' meetings in New York City. Supervised Program Coordinator and interns. Created and implemented financial spreadsheets to track all program expenses. Prepared yearly budgets, analyzed financial reports, and disbursed grant funds.

Assisting Curator
December 1995-March 1996
The Contemporary Museum
Baltimore, MD
Curated and installed contextual exhibition to accompany an installation work by artist Paul Etienne Lincoln in a temporary space. Co-wrote exhibition brochure with curator Lisa G. Corrin.

Assisting Museum Consultant
January 1996-March 1996
Nancy L. Pressly and Associates
Washington, DC
Assisted in conceptual and stylistic editing of planning documents for museums across the US. Researched and drafted analysis of museums' management, collection care, community, curatorial situations.

Program Specialist
August 1992-December 1995
National Endowment for the Arts, Museum Program
Washington, DC
Managed all aspects of Care of Collections funding category: Oversaw distribution of $1.4 million budget. Advised museum field on eligibility, scope of projects, review criteria, and application procedure. Selected advisory panelists and prepared and presented application materials for their review. Revised application guidelines to reflect shifting needs of the museum field. Researched and wrote descriptions of projects for review by the National Council on the Arts and the Chairman.

Assisted with Individual Artists' Fellowships funding category: Prepared and presented application materials for panel review. Advised individual artists and artists' organizations on review criteria and application procedure.

Assistant to the Director
July 1991-August 1992
National Endowment for the Arts, Museum Program
Washington, DC
Assisted with organization of application materials and their presentation for panel review. Drafted all correspondence. Made travel arrangements for director and all staff.

Gallery Assistant
October-December 1990
Riverside Studios Art Gallery
London, England
Provided information about current exhibitions to gallery visitors. Established contacts with businesses for sponsorship of public art projects. Researched strategies of public art programs. Assisted in formulation of policy for public art program.

University Teaching and Class Lectures

Adjunct Lecturer, Moore College of Art, Philadelphia, PA, Curatorial Methods, Spring 2009.

Moore College of Art, "Lost Highway Expedition," in Art and Social Change class taught by Prof. Janet Kaplan, February 26, 2008.

University of Pennsylvania, School of Design, "Lost Highway Expedition," in Architecture at the Scales of Geopolitics graduate seminar taught by Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss, February 5, 2008.

University of California, Santa Cruz, "Lost Highway Expedition," in Advanced Topics in Digital and Electronic Media: Stations, Sites and Volatile Landscapes class taught by artist Christina McPhee, January 16, 2008.

University of Pennsylvania, "Braco Dimitrijevic," in Curatorial Training seminar taught by Aaron Levy, October 3, 2007.

Adjunct Lecturer, Critical History of Art, Department of Art, New York University, New York, NY
Art and Contemporary Culture I (Fall 2002); Art and Contemporary Culture II (Spring 2003)
Taught class of 25 students: developed syllabus, reading list, lectures, class activities, museum visits, assignments and examinations.

Teaching Assistant, Art History, Art Department, State University of New York, Stony Brook, NY
Ancient to Renaissance Art, Prof. Zainab Bahrani, Fall 1997.
Renaissance to Contemporary Art, Prof. Richard Leslie, Spring 1998.
Visual Culture, Prof. Nicholas Mirzoeff, Fall 1998.
Greek Art, Prof. Zainab Bahrani, Spring 1999.
Twentieth-Century Art, Prof. Donald Kuspit, Fall 2000.
Taught undergraduate class of 20 students once a week, developed class lectures, activities, assignments, held weekly office hours to meet regularly with students, graded all tests and papers, provided students with feedback on their work.

Arts Writing/Editorial Experience

Managing Editor/Business Manager
September 1998-June 2001
Art Criticism
Art Department SUNY, Stony Brook
Edited manuscripts in conjunction with editor Donald Kuspit. Managed all financial issues.

Founder and Editorial Board Member
April 1994-August 1996
Link: A Critical Journal on the Arts in Baltimore and the World
Baltimore, MD
Developed editorial policy and edited manuscripts. Designed and implemented public relations strategies. Secured yearly funding from city, state, and regional arts and humanities councils.

Writer, Critics Residency Program
1992, 1993, 1994
Maryland Art Place
Baltimore, MD
Selected to work in writing seminars with visiting art critics Brian Wallis, Liz Kotz, Susana Torruella Leval, Robert Atkins, and Coco Fusco. Wrote essays published in the *Washington Review*.

Papers and Public Presentations

East Coast Europe panel discussion with Mladen Dolar, Oto Luthar, Alenka Suhadolnik, at ZRC SAZU research institute, Ljubljana, Slovenia, May 20, 2009.

Curating and Activism conference participant, Moore College of Art and Design, March 28, 2009. Co-hosted by Pew Exhibition Initiative.

Conceived and organized *East Coast Europe* roundtable discussion with Markus Meissen, Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss, and Alenka Suhadolnik (Consul General of Slovenia) at The Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School, April 15, 2008. (book published October 2008)

"Lost Highway Expedition" with Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss at SITAC, national conference on contemporary art and theory, Mexico City, directed by Ute Meta Bauer, January 2008.

"Mladen Stilinovic's Slogans and Cakes: Ideology, Contemplation, and the Perfection of Laziness," at *In Defense of Sloth*, Cooper Union, New York, organized by Cabinet Magazine and Slought Foundation, December 2007.

Interview discussion with Braco Dimitrijevic, public program at Slought Foundation, October 2007.

Evasions of Power conference conceived and organized with Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss at University of Pennsylvania, School of Design and Aaron Levy, Slought Foundation, Philadelphia, March 2007. (book forthcoming)

"Disproportionate Adjustments" School of Visual Arts, Graduate School, New York, March 2007.

"Reflections from Lost Highway Expedition" with Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss at Borders conference, Hellenic-American Association, Athens, organized by ArtBox, Thessaloniki and Apollonia, Strasbourg, November 2006.

"Future of Drawing" in *Beyond the Line* lecture series, Braunschweig University of Art, Braunschweig, Germany, November 2006.

Europe Lost and Found conference at Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs, conceived and organized in collaboration with Consul General of Slovenia, October 2006.

"Lost Highway Expedition" with Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss at *Hyperpolis*, Institute for Digital Media Initiatives, Brooklyn Polytechnic University, October 2006.

"NATO as Architectural Critic" performative reading with author Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss at *Dictionary of War*, Stadelschule, Frankfurt, Germany, June 2006.

"Lines of Thinking in Contemporary Drawing," at *Drawing is Here!* panel Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden, September 2005.

Panel discussion with Susan Buck-Morss, Jovan Cekic, Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss, Obrad Savic, and Misko Suvakovic, organized in collaboration with Belgrade Circle at Center for Cultural Decontamination, Belgrade, May 2005.

"Flipside" at OZONE media art gallery, Belgrade, January 2005.

Conceived, organized and moderated *Flipside* symposium with exhibition artists and political philosophers Susan Buck-Morss and Elena Petrovskaya at Artists Space, New York, November 13, 2004.

"Initial Public Offerings: Independent Curators," interview with architect Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss at Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, March 25, 2004.

"Looking for October –LFO/School of Missing Studies" presentation at University of Zagreb as part of the Swarm Intelligence project of Platforma 9.81 and Mama Institute for New Media, Zagreb, Croatia, December 2003.

Organized and moderated "Surveillance in Contemporary Art" with artists Ziga Kariz, Jill Magid, theorist Timothy Druckrey, curator Igor Zabel, film critic Marcel Stefancic at Max Protetch Gallery, New York, May 2003.

"Going Home" paper presented at Interactive Normalization conference, Belgrade and at kuda.org, Novi Sad, Serbia, November 2002.

"Go_HOME" paper presented at College Art Association Annual Conference, February 2002.

<u>Publications</u>

Book review of *Flashes of the Avant-garde: Croatian Art at the beginning of the Twentieth Century* in *Centropa* (forthcoming Summer 2009).

co-editor with Aaron Levy and Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss, *Evasions of Power*, Slought Foundation and University of Pennsylvania (forthcoming Summer 2009).

with Markus Meissen, Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss, and Alenka Suhadolnik, *East Coast Europe* (October 2008).

"Relay as Democratic Practice in Artmaking in 1960s and 1970s Yugoslavia" in *Centropa* issue edited by Piotr Piotrowski (January 2008).

with Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss, *Lost Highway Expedition Photobook* (October 2007).

with Catherine de Zegher, *Joelle Tuerlinckx: Circle Around Zero*, The Drawing Center, New York, *Drawing Papers* publication series (October 2007).

Common Destination, The Drawing Center, New York, *Drawing Papers* publication series (September 2006).

"Relay Network" in *Lost Highway Expedition Reader* (July 2006).

Monika Weiss, Kentler International Drawing Space, New York, (Fall 2006).

Antal Lakner, Art in General, New York, residency brochure (Fall 2006).

with Catherine de Zegher, "Drawing Like Singing Drowns out the Sound of the Bombs" ex. cat. *Persistent Vestiges: Drawing from the American-Vietnam War,* The Drawing Center, New York (2006).

"Relay as a New Economy of Scale" in ex. cat. Kuda.org, Novi Sad, Serbia (November 2005). Ex. venues: Zagreb, Graz, Vienna, Skopje.

"Self-Managed Relays" in *Weird But True*, ex. cat. Vilnius Triennial, Vilnius, Lithuania ed. Sofia Hernandez and Raimundas Malauskas (September 2005).

with Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss. "School of Missing Studies/Looking for October" in *Urban Ecology* ed. Kyong Park. Berlin, Germany: Shrinking Cities Project (Spring 2005).

"Gordon Matta-Clark's Interventions: From Outskirts to Common Practice" in *Zivot Umjetnosti*, Zagreb, Croatia (December 2004).

Flipside exhibition catalogue editor and curatorial essay. ArtsLink at Artists Space (November 2004).

with Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss. "School of Missing Studies/Manhattan Shadow Project" in *Teasing Minds*/*School of Missing Studies* catalogue, Kunstverein Munich (October 2004).

with Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss. "Topolitics of the Double Outside." *Trans_European Picnic! The Art and Media of Accession*. Kuda.org new media center and V2 institute for unstable media, eds. Novi Sad, Serbia (May 2004).

"Of Dishes and Divas" catalogue essay for solo exhibition of Fritzie Brown at Miroslav Kraljevic Gallery, Zagreb, Croatia (2002).

"ReAlignings?: Art in the Environs of Manifesta 3" in *Art Criticism* Vol. 16 No. 1 (Summer 2001).

"Ambience 90" catalogue essay for traveling exhibition Ambience 90, Miroslav Kraljevic Gallery, Zagreb, Croatia (2000).

"Video Art in the '90s" co-authored with Stewart Kendall and Kirsten Swenson in *Art Criticism* Vol. 14 No. 1 (Spring 2000).

"Uprootedness and Reception in the Photographs of Josef Koudelka" in *Art Criticism* Vol. 13 No. 2 (Spring 1999).

"Unspoken Reflections: The Mirror as Membrane Between Selves and Society" in *Link: A Critical Journal on the Arts in Baltimore and the World* Vol. 1 No. 1 (1996).

Appointments and Awards

American Council of Learned Societies, 2007-2008, Fellowship for Dissertation Completion in Southeastern European studies.
Goldberger Fellow, 1998-1999, State University of New York, Stony Brook, Art Department.

Juror, Sondheim Prize. Baltimore, MD July 2006.
Nomads and Residents, member, December 2002 to Summer 2004.
Advisory Board Member, Transformer Gallery, Washington, DC, April 2002 to Summer 2004.
Juror, WRO 01 Media Art Biennale, Wroclaw, Poland. May 2001.
Juror, Scholastic Art Awards. March 2001.

Education

PhD, Art History and Criticism, State University of New York, Stony Brook
B.A. in Art History Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH. June 1991.
Oberlin-in-London Program, study of contemporary art and music, Fall 1990.

Aoristic Avant-Garde: Experimental Art in 1960s and 1970s Yugoslavia
Chapter One
From Zenitism to Gorgona

Predecessors I: Zenitism and Avant-garde Art in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in the 1920s

Instead of attempting to place the art of Yugoslavia seamlessly into the story of postwar art history, it is more fruitful to assess it in context and to identify what it is that makes this art particular. To that end, a specific and accurate examination of postwar art must start chronologically earlier with the avant-garde practice in the region between the two world wars. In post World War I Yugoslavia, there were multiple avant-gardes, which were characterized by interest in revolutionary art practice and left political tendencies, much the same principles as in Western Europe, Russia and Central Europe. The movements that shaped the avant-garde landscape in Yugoslavia between the wars were the usual suspects of Dadaism, Surrealism and constructivism, but the most outstanding and influential in the region was a movement called Zenitism.

Zenitism was a proper artistic movement, but it was mainly the product of the creativity and skill of one famously contentious figure Ljubimir Micic. The two other most active artists in Zenit were architect Josip Seissel, known as Jo Klek and poet Ve Poljanski, whose real name was Branko Micic, Ljubimir Micic's brother. The main output of Zenitism, which operated from 1921 to 1926 was the magazine *Zenit* (*Zenith*)*: The International Review for New Art*. In visual layout and content the magazine deployed international modernism with an openness and cosmopolitanism in combination with a newly-formed national identity, which retained some aspects of local folklore according to the main Zenit scholar Irina Subotic.[1]

If it is true that Micic was more open to collaboration with foreign artists than with domestic ones, why did he pursue this course? How did it manifest in *Zenit*, and what was its impact? In fact, his deep artistic and personal conflicts with other modernists in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as the country was called until 1929, persisted until the 1980s. Micic was particularly opposed to the Belgrade circle of Surrealists because he rejected their links to what he viewed as bourgeois institutions.

Endnotes can be found on pages 25-28.

So instead, Micic collaborated with East-Central European reviews including the Polish *Blok*, Romanian *Contimporanul*, Bulgarian *Plamk,* Hungarian *Ma,* and pursued the most substantive work with Russian counterparts. This practice of relay—artistic and intellectual exchange between a local urban center and another location, in some cases another city within Yugoslavia and in other instances a city outside the country—is a specific characteristic of avant-garde artistic practice in Yugoslavia from Zenit through the present day that has become a fundamental constitutive factor of the artwork.

What made Zenitism stand out from the typical avant-garde revolt against the bourgeoisie was the strength of their eclectic visual methods and the vigor with which Micic pursued international collaboration. Zenit combined various influences of visual art, poetry, and typography in the magazine. A comparison of three covers of *Zenit,* number 14 from 1922, number 17/18 also from 1922, and the last edition from 1926, identifies the importance of collage of images and text, and the use of typography in their production. *Zenit* Number 14 resembles a flier that may have circulated on the street and announced "ZENIT" in huge letters. The composition was organized with "ZEN" as the horizontal heading and "IT" descending vertically on the right side. In a square at the lower left quadrant is a box made up of neatly arranged diagonal lines of text that described the contents of the issue. The text is a mix of French, Serbian in Cyrillic, and Serbian in Latin script. Just above the square with the contents listed diagonally, Ljubimir Micic's name is featured followed by the label "director" in small Cyrillic typeface and again in French. Zenit's address in Zagreb appears at the bottom. At the top left in English and on top right in Cyrillic the word Orient is printed with an arrow pointing to (or leading to) the word Occident. Similar small fantastical geographic references accompanying the mélange of languages recur throughout the life of the publication, however this early example shows *Zenit* at its height of eclectic openness in influences and output. This was a shift from the first year of *Zenit*'s production, in 1921, which was specifically marked by a strong influence of Expressionism. Issue 14 contains contributions from Ivan Goll, who was associated with the Expressionist *Der Sturm*, to Jean Epstein, to the local Dada-Jok poetry of Ve Poljanski. Contributions to *Zenit* were printed in their original languages.

The simple design of *Zenit* 14 displayed an affinity with Suprematist constructivism, however number 17/18 while infused with elements of Dada and Futurism, fully discloses its connection with Russian constructivism by featuring a cover designed by El Lissitzky, who co-edited the issue. As noted across the bottom of the cover in Serbian, the issue featured New Russian Art. The title *Zenit* heads the cover in tall slender Latin letters. S.H.S. (the abbreviation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians) in the middle of the second line of the header is flanked on the right by the word "Zagreb" in Cyrillic and by "Beograd" on the left in Latin lettering. Interestingly, Croatian uses Latin letters, so Zagreb would logically be printed in Latin, and Serbian uses Cyrillic, so printing Beograd in Latin letters is a reversal; the two cities also swap identities spatially on the page since Zagreb is located geographically West of Belgrade. In small type at the top an alteration of the description that appeared in French on issue 14 "Revue Internationale Pour L'Art Nouveau," now reads "Revue Internationale Pour Le Zenitisme et L'Art Nouveau," asserting the movement in the art object itself. On the

drawing in the central area of this cover, "Orient pointing to (or leading to) Occident" that appeared in issue 14 is omitted, yet El Lissitzky's composition abstractly rendered and upended this formula as he roughly bisected the image with a vertical bar and placed a large black letter R on the left side and a black rectangle with a smaller white letter S on the right side, perhaps referring to Russia and Serbia (or Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes). The word "Zenit" in Cyrillic occupies the upper left quadrant against an arc of black background. Another arc, this one in white, appears as if it sliced the vertical bar to swoop into the right half of the image, and as it does so it turns black. With this image, perhaps Lissitzky played with the dividing of hemispheres through his use of black and white reversals. Whereas they are on an East-East axis in real geography, Russia and Serbia occupy separate spaces in the composition. The R is larger, like the landmass of Russia, but the S of Serbia appears fictionally to the East. "Zenit" hovers above in an arc that can shift its shape as it twirls around and past the fictive East-West dividing bar. Furthermore, if the cover is viewed upside down, then the elements more properly inhabit their real places in geography, with "Zenit" floating in an intermediary space of the Black Sea and into the Mediterranean. This type of fantastical interpretation of the composition probably would not have appeared as far-fetched as it might appear to art historians today. Although *Zenit* had its own trajectory that was fiercely independent and very different from constructivism in Russia, as Boris Groys has written, pre-World War II abstraction in Russia was not as benignly emptied of references as the writing of that art history later asserted.

This issue of *Zenit* was a full editorial collaboration between Micic and El Lissitzky and Ilya Ehrenburg the editors of the Berlin review *Vesc/Gegenstand/Object*, whom Micic met on a visit to Germany earlier in the year. The publication featured poems by Ehrenburg, Sergei Iesenjin, Velimir Khlebnikov, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Boris Pasternak, Malevich's text "The Laws of the New Art," and texts on new art by Ehrenburg and Lissitzky. Also art by Aleksandar Rodchenko, Malevich, and Lissitzky was reproduced in addition to Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*, published for the first time outside Russia.[2]

The cover of issue 17/18's playfulness with direction, space and geography resolves into a provocative, emphatic, but slippery statement in the 1926 *Zenit* cover that Ljubimir Micic designed himself. The composition is stripped down to two geometric shapes with only four lines of underlined text. One 90-degree angle of the black polygon at the bottom part of the image cuts a wedge into a lighter-colored circle in the top area. On the partial circle, at the top the title of the issue "Antieurope" is written horizontally in capital letters in an art nouveau style. Nearly at the bottom in the black portion the title appears again in the same typeface in Cyrillic. The artist's name appears diagonally along the left upward slope of the black wedge as Lioubomir Mitzitch, a transliteration of his name in German, and it is written also in Serbian Cyrillic just above the Cyrillic title. Though it retains constructivist elements that had become the overarching artistic influence on Zenit, Micic here created a strange combination of the discarded past style of Secessionist typeface arranged in a slightly rough, handmade, or folk look unified in an overall constructivist composition. The title using the prefix anti- also denotes a rejection, retreat, or negation. However rather than acting as a proclamation for the issue,

this condensation of typeface and word may pinpoint Micic's belief that such bourgeois styles as the Secession, a product of Europe, had undermined the very core of progressive modernism that Micic held so dear as a universal ideal which he positively associated with West. This visual and cultural product of Western modernism and the ideal of new art that had become perverted and consumed by the bourgeoisie continually rears up from the past to threaten every new avant-garde attempt at creating something new and free. Zenitism's aoristic attitude of openness to contradictions of styles and influences was an attempt to address this cultural crisis. Zenit's stance was to hold Western Europe's modernism and avant-garde in suspension with contemporary artistic developments in the East. Micic's deployment of free combinations of styles, and contradictory means of expression yielded ambiguous messages. Micic employed this method as a means to address what he saw as the perversions and exhaustions of Western modernism. This method of severe questioning of the current avant-garde position of the time was a radical precursor to a tendency in Yugoslav art towards the retro-avant-garde that came to full prominence in the work of the Slovenian collective NSK in the 1980s.

Along these lines, in its emphasis on visual expression, typography and constructivist abstraction, the publication *Zenit* creatively evaded issues of language that were the major determining factor of national identity in SHS and Yugoslavia. Whereas it was believed at this time that art and literature especially were a constitutive part of national culture, Zenit operated aoristically beyond these debates about identity-formation through language. By not getting caught in this dead-end battle (which continues to no good result today), Micic also left this path open for the later generation of artists in the 1960s who forcefully played with language as a matter of freedom of expression.

What was Zenit's, and in particular Micic's view of modernism in Europe and the avant-garde and how did that manifest itself in their art? First, what were Micic's thoughts on art itself? Micic wrote manifestos, which was common at the time, and of particular interest were his *Zenitist Manifesto* and *Man and Art* both from 1921. In "Man and Art" he heralded a new age of expressionism to create new values and new art forms. Micic stated that Zenitism represented the "drama of our soul." He defined Zenitism as abstract metacosmic expressionism, Zenitosophy as physical, metaphysical-metcosmic-magnetic, and more in line with traditional avant-garde manifestos he announced that the "free zenitist anti-citizen" stood against bourgeois beauty.[3] Here as in the Anti-Europe title of the issue of Zenit to come later in 1926, he employed "anti-" as a negation evoking a specific dialectic purpose to hold up for debate the constitutive elements of "citizen" that might be taken for granted and unquestioned with the positive goal of inventing a new, better concept of citizen. Very similar to other avant-garde manifestos, yet still important to examine here is another part of Micic's statement in *Man and Art*:

> Our suffering generation is dying out. It has been completely overtaken and destroyed. The ghost of the red war fury with its criminal claws dug graves for us all, for millions of people. One dead body for every two soldiers. Never let us forget that 13 million people were killed during the past decade, that 10 million people died of poverty, that 150 million

> people became weak. And we, who remained as the last guard, we endure a common ache in our hearts, a common soul of despair, a common protest: no more war! Never! Never![4]

Micic uttered these sincerely felt words as a call to conscious reflection for artists in combination with these sentiments in *Zenitist Manifesto*:

> You—merchants of souls—art and culture—you lie the most!
> Against you—for Man!
> Bolt your doors West-North-Central Europe—The Barbarians are coming!...
> We are the children of the Sun and the Mountains—we carry Man's spirit
> And our spirit is the life of cosmic unity bound by Love.
> We are the children of the South East barbaro-genius.

Micic employs metaphors of the Barbarogenius as a rescue car and Zenitism as "floating high, high above the bodily spheres of the Globe" and beyond dimensions, it is eternity. A word diagram places Zenit amid the ethers above the earth upon which tragic man rests. It is in brotherhood through the mechanism of Zenitism, which he asserts is "an artistic affirmation of the Allspirit"[5] that man can help his fellow man. Typical of the Western avant-garde, he expresses deeply-felt desperation after World War I and holds out promise in the avant-garde. Zenit's unique stance emerges from the combination of these premises with a strong belief in mystical spirituality that yields Micic's construction of the Barbarogenius, which bore resemblance to Nietzsche's Ubermensch and Brazil's anthropophagia movement also of the 1920s. His embrace of illogical and unexpected attitudes that would prick consciousness and save it from sliding into banality that could lead again to evil was manifested in his belief in barbarism as a cultural ideal. He proposed that the balkanization of Europe through the infusion of the mythic spirit of the Balkans would bring a new civilization and would energize and breathe new life into an exhausted, frail Europe. He viewed the Balkan race as young and barbaric with a pure enriching energy. This appeal to mysticism was dangerous rhetoric at such a moment in history, as the actual reversion of enlightened civilization back to barbarism did occur in the Anti-Semitism of World War II. However Micic's belief in barbarism was vastly different from blind belief in the mystical because its goal was not to advocate expansion of homogeneity and expulsion of difference. Precisely to the contrary, Micic wanted to bombastically and visibly infuse and retain difference. It was this difference that at the time in Europe was being labeled perjoratively "barbaric" while homogeneity and racial purity was becoming a sweeping overpowering norm. Micic appropriated this term barbaric as the antidote to the ills plaguing Western, and in fact all of Europe. As Adorno and Horkheimer wrote, barbarians are outside and unknown; anything outside is a source of fear and must be subsumed, ingested in order to contain the fear. The goal of Enlightenment was to reduce to the One through mimicry and recognition: "bourgeois society is ruled by equivalence, that which is dissimilar is made comparable by reducing it to abstract qualities"[6] The role of the barbarogenius was to antagonize and reveal

dangerous normalization specifically through genius and creativity. It was Micic's idea to infuse Europe with difference and break hegemony. He respected Europe so much that he profoundly did not want to emulate its feeble reflection of its own potential in its condition at the time; instead he wanted to offer an injection from the outside.

This infusion took the form of independent antagonism. As Subotic aptly frames his practice,

> Seeking to convert negation into affirmation, to introduce experimentation into artistic creation, and to exploit all forms of contradiction and antinomies, it was prepared to endorse sometimes incoherent, frequently illogical and unexpected attitudes.[7]

This stance was seen in vivid detail in writings of Micic's brother Ve Poljanski, the primary Zenitist writer. For example,

> Negation! I boldly claimed that this is a rock of wisdom and that negation is the sense of life. It is the principal law of nature. There is no internal logic, everything is rhythmical and in motion. Logic moves too….Art needn't be logical. Art can be paradoxical! But paradox is not senseless! … Paradox is the flexibility of the spirit and its plasticity.[8]

Zenit freely mixed artistic styles and embraced what were viewed as retrograde and anomalous values of spirituality, anarchism, mysticism and national pride. In the *Zenitist Manifesto*, Micic states,

> You cannot understand Zenitism unless you FEEL it. The ELECTRICITY we do not "understand" but feel is perhaps the greatest manifestation of the spirit—ZENITISM?[9]

This invocation of electricity on the edges of science and art brings up the much-disputed and alternately ironized or lionized work of scientist Nikola Tesla, which surely informed Micic's thinking from a larger cultural standpoint. The catalogue *In Search of Balkania* (2002) succinctly summarizes and positions the assumed impact of Tesla's work and philosophy on future artists. Tesla tells the story that he was moved to recite Goethe's *Faust* at the time when he came up with the principle of a rotating magnetic field, the polyphase induction motor, known as the AC motor. It all came intuitively he said, in an instantaneous flash; then he spontaneously drew it with a stick in the sand. Vision and visual memory were combined with science and technology into a mystical whole. Later in his life he was forced to perform in attempts to earn money, leading to increasing showmanship, which discredited him. Nonetheless, he contributed vastly to science by proving in 1899-1900 in Colorado that the earth is a conductor of electricity, and he then proposed wireless communication by conducting electricity through natural media.[10]

Like Tesla, Micic's fervor and social unacceptability marred success at the time, but gained him legendary status. Micic's active engagement in bolshevism eventually

destroyed Zenitism. This was partially due to the increasing untenability of his position, and also to the growing stringency in his own country, which was cracking down against dissent in the same way that he perceived was happening in Western Europe. Collaborators broke their alliances with him, and in 1926 he was jailed for being a communist agitator. So in the end, his strategy backfired, however as Micic stated in the "Zenitist Manifesto," "This is not a philosophy. The philosophy of zenitism is in the making."[11] So Zenitism is unfinished--like all great utopias—and in addition, most importantly, it is also to be found in the making process. Micic and Zenitism planted a very particular artistic attitude and relay between the Balkans and Europe that has survived as a persistent ingenious tool in complex ways still today.

Josip Seissel, who was an interesting foil to Micic's extreme views, worked as part of the Zenitist movement until 1925 when he was warned that Micic was an anarchist. Seissel, who used the name Jo Klek as author of his Zenitist projects, made lasting contributions to the movement and art in Yugoslavia through his architecture and drawing. Jo Klek's *Zeniteum,* 1924, is a stack of three tumuli-like mounds decreasing in size to the top with arches punched through the thick surfaces all around their bulbous exteriors. The bottom two mound-like domes are housed surrealistically in a classic horizontal and vertical wall and ceiling arrangement that is open on three sides. Another drawing resembles even more directly a mastaba structure of five squat hemispheres with a grand processional central staircase leading up into the structure. Both are massive and sturdy with thick exteriors, and look more like Egyptian funerary architecture than ideal futurist compositions, as they have been described.

In another drawing of the same year with a very different style, the slightly dizzying surrealist checkerboard floor from the second Zeniteum maquette appears again along with one thick archway. The overall image of this watercolor with India ink, tempera and collage titled *Tavern*, 1924, depicts an open-sided building with multiple levels on a black background. The structure is left to the visual imagination as it is formed by planes at varying angles in space like a paper unfolding into a radical cutaway view. The drawing of a clean Bauhaus architectural sensibility provides many simultaneous views of the object in an axonometric drawing in a futurist style. A few uncanny elements are present including a large bright red capital letter H that hovers to the right of the composition. This demarcates its own plane of the background, which highlights the illusion of the space similar to parts of the drawing that are shaded to represent the interior volumes of rooms or the way that shadows are cast strangely. This slight disorientation is more like an absurd eclecticism of styles than a menacing scenario. A playful rendering of a tree denotes an outdoor terrace level where a man sits splayed out at a table clutching his glass with a vastly oversized carafe in front of him. Here ideal constructivist futurist forms rise lightly upwards where street, house, courtyard, and nature easily fit together in harmony.

Jo Klek was an enthusiastic Zenitist and produced billboards, graphic designs, logos, and sketches for stage sets. His *Zenitist Construction*, 1923, is a monument fragmented into planes, in typical constructivist style. The word Balkan in large Latin letters marks the ground at the bottom of the image. A bit higher "Zenitism" is printed in Cyrillic. At the middle, a horizontal shelf-like plane holds Ljubimir Micic's name in

Cyrillic on one half and in German transliteration on the other. Just a bit higher is "zenitisme" poised at a diagonal, and at the pinnacle, predictably, is the term "Zenit" in Cyrillic and just beneath in Latin. A different version of this didactic diagram drawing style will appear again in later art in Yugoslavia, for instance in the work of the Slovenian group OHO in the late 1960s and the KOD group from Novi Sad in the early 1970s. Klek's drawings, although very influenced by Rodchenko and El Lissitzky, exude a spark of excitement at employing the formal methods of constructivism and the ideals that accompanied them.

At the other end of the spectrum, Ljubimir Micic tended to be enthralled by expressionism and even in his constructivist Zenit covers such as those discussed earlier, sentiment, subjectivity, and play were also always present. Subotic has noted that Zenit from early 1921 was full of inspiration from expressionism, and this is also seen in manifestos and programmatic texts, as well as the contributors with whom Micic worked. After his 1922 visit to Germany, some elements of Dada and Futurism were evident in the next issue, but overall *Zenit* underwent a strong shift to Constructivism. Art historians have differed in their interpretation of Micic's attitude towards Western Europe. Micic developed Zenitism at a time of modernization in Yugoslavia after the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (S.H.S.) was formed in 1918 after World War I. S.H.S was characterized by an ongoing battle between stances to preserve authentic national cultures against the corruption of the West and on the other hand integration with West through attempts to bring local culture in dialogue with the West.[12] Misko Suvakovic identified the particular need that Zenit filled at the time: there was a dire need for Zenit to shape culture, define a position and outlook against the prevailing trends of leftist social realism and right-wing capitalist realism showing bourgeois life mixed with folklore showing mythical, national, religious topics that became state policy. The state considered internationalism to be bourgeois decadence. During the time of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes from 1918 to 1929, (after which time it was called the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in an effort to unify national identity in order to consolidate power) Ljubljana, Belgrade, Zagreb began to interact. The avant-garde was born and distanced from the status quo of bourgeois society, moderate nationalism, rivalries of ethnic groups plus international integration. [13]

Increasingly from 1921 Micic clashed with official Zagreb culture, and in 1924 he transferred to Belgrade. With an understanding of his cultural and political context, Micic employed a method of relay that enabled the survival of *Zenit* for as long possible: he shuttled from Zagreb to Belgrade to avoid political pressure; he exchanged and collaborated with Russian and other Eastern European artists and writers; he embraced international modernist styles—from expressionism to constructivism, Bauhaus, dada and futurism—from outside his country at precisely the time that official State culture was attempting to obliterate these forms.

Those writers, like Dubravka Djuric, who viewed Micic as anti-European meant this in the sense that he did not want the Balkans to become a cultural colony of Europe. She proposed that Micic demonstrated a combination of pro-Western and anti-Western attitudes.[14] Also Micic was an opponent of the Western transplant of surrealism in Belgrade, which he saw as thoroughly bourgeois. Art historian Irina Subotic, who

continues to write extensively on Zenitism, stated that Micic embraced the West quite overtly and that he was reluctant to censure Western values.[15] Therefore he was actually a bit out of step with the Western European avant-garde, and perhaps this is one reason why he had a closer affinity with the Russian and Eastern avant-gardes of Czech Republic and Poland. Micic's more wholesale adaptation of Western modernism, not limited to the Western avant-garde, served his specific situation very well, allowing him to create alternative art in adverse circumstances.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that Micic easily utilized the range of influences and formal methods, sometimes contradictory ones, as tools for his own individual vision which persisted strongly above all. Despite what art historians on both sides have argued, Micic was neither purely an expressionist nor constructivist, instead his skill lay in assessing and employing these forms to his own individual, provocative and now legendary ends. Zenitism's eclecticism, misunderstood at the time perhaps, became its signature.

Alongside Zenitism there were several other active avant-garde art movements in Yugoslavia. Slovenian constructivism was very influenced by Zenitism. The publication *Tank*, edited by Ferdo Delak and based in Ljubljana, took over from *Zenit* after 1926. The principal contributor to *Tank*, Avgust Cernigoj, studied in Munich and then with Bauhaus and was influenced by Malevich, Rodchenko, Lissitsky.[16] He was active in Ljubljana in 1924-5, and then was accused of leftist tendencies and fled to Trieste where he created a constructivist school. At this point the group was officially banned and sought international support. Cernigoj successfully collaborated with *Der Sturm* in 1929 to produce issue number ten. The constructivist poetry of Srecko Kosovel published in the magazine *Integrals* started a lineage of visual poetry taken up again in the late 1960s by the Slovenian art group OHO.

Dadaism emerged in 1920-22 in Yugoslavia, however it was more successful as a literary movement. Dragan Aleksic was active in Zagreb and in Novi Sad and Subotica Dadaists produced the review *Ut*. Poet Rastko Petrovic was quoted as saying that

> until we have overcome our desire for Europe and have learned to speak European we will never succeed in discovering what is valuable inside ourselves, let alone expressing it in such a way that it may be of value to the rest of the world.[17]

This echoes Micic's insistence that the Balkans not imitate Europe but instead add something creative and vigorous to the West, while at the same time being very open to Western European modernism. This sentiment about imitation and speech will be taken up playfully in the 1970s by Mladen Stilinovic and Vlado Martek, members of the Zagreb Group of Six Artists.

Micic's brother Ve Poljanski was also active in dadaism and produced the journal *Dada-Jok*, which rejected Aleksic's rigid Dadaism and poked fun at the movement. The main publications *Dada Tank* in 1922 held exhibitions, matinee events and also engaged in activism in the town Osijek located in the middle of the country, and *Dada Jazz* held evening events in Prague, Osijek and Subotica.

In Belgrade, Surrealism was incredibly strong and was exhibited in state exhibitions. In 1927 the Fifth Yugoslav Exposition featured surrealism with work by Marko Ristic, Dusan Matic and Oskar Davico. Two publications that came to be very well known were produced at the beginning of the 1930s. In May 1930 the glossy 136-page literary and visual art publication *Nemoguce* (*Impossible*) appeared and from June 1931 to June 1932 three issues of *Surrealism Here and Now* were produced. Pieces by local authors and Paris-based surrealists Breton, Tzara, Char, Dali, Crevel, Eluard, Peret were featured as well as poems, polemics and criticism. At the end of the issues were reproductions of paintings and sculptures by Dali, Ernst, Zivanovic-noe, Tanguy, Giacometti, and Matic. Collective works such as surveys, automatic texts, and cadavre exquis were also published.[18] The intellectual left in YU referred to Marxism and psychoanalysis, and these continued as touchstones for the next generations.[19] The movement ended when Oskar Davico and Djordje Jovanovic were imprisoned because of accusations that they were communists.[20]

In 1926 Micic was jailed having been accused of communist agitation. Later F.T. Marinetti helped Micic get out of jail and go to Paris where he stayed until after the war. In 1969 the first retrospective publication about Zenit was produced in the Belgrade magazine *Rok*, which employed constructivist-like non-linguistic signs, drawings, lines, and typographic signs as part of the structure.[21] Zenitism truly had been excluded from official history, which was dominated at the time by surrealism. There was not a major exhibition of the movement until 1983. What about Zenitism resonated with artists and art historians in the late 1970s and how this was used in recent attempts to fit Yugoslav art into the progression of western art history will be addressed in later chapters. On the way to this discussion, Zenitism's shorter-term legacy can be evidenced through an examination of the work of the artists and groups active in Yugoslavia in the 1950s and 1960s.

Predecessors II: Neo-Avant-garde Art in Yugoslavia in the late 1950s and early 1960s

From the end of the 1920s through the thirties art all over Europe became increasingly manipulated as a tool of ideology; the art scene in the Yugoslavian dictatorship was no longer as open as it had been after WWI. In the 1930s in Yugoslavia there was a clash, as in other European art circles, that manifested most dramatically in the literary left and that marked the future. On one hand there was a call for art to be utilitarian and to serve the Partisan revolutionary struggle (the communists agitating against dictatorship and later during the war against fascism and the German occupation), and on the other hand for art to remain critical of society and retain autonomy, freedom of expression. Throughout the 1930s and through the war, the avant-garde in Yugoslavia ceased.

After the liberation of Yugoslavia, which came arduously city by city, and the victory of Josip Broz Tito's communist Partisans, there was serious ideological supervision of the art scene in the country.[22] From 1945 to 1950 there was a very short period during which the state imposed socialist realism as the official style, and during this time internationalism was considered to be bourgeois decadence, which was

incompatible with the progressive views of socialism.[23] In 1948 Tito refused to be part of Stalin's communist East Bloc and Stalin was growing tired of Tito and wanted to crush any regional power that he suspected Tito might be amassing in the Balkans.

So after the leaders parted ways without violence, though not without threat, the strictures on the art scene loosened and the country overall became increasingly open. Then came a very quick change in artistic orientation and the "socialist modernism" that was unique to Yugoslavia emerged. As art historian Jesa Denegri describes it was a cross-breeding of east and western art models. Because of the social and political circumstances, eventually the western model prevailed. This specific socialist modernism was the artistic parallel to Tito's imposed political system of socialist self-management.[24] In this brand of socialism that was completely unique to Yugoslavia, the economy was centralized and run by the state however there were designated forums at every workplace for each individual person, from the janitor to the director, to air grievances and contribute their ideas. In 1950 with socialist modernism the art world became homogeneous, ideological and mainstream. Although there was not an official artistic party line, artists were favored for social promotion if they were part of the mainstream. For example, they could earn exhibitions inside the country or be selected for exhibitions abroad, they could secure academic appointments, and their work could be purchased. With this situation, state officials not only tolerated artistic expression, they actively supported the change of artistic attitude towards modernism. This fit the new state image well, and they realized that this mode of artmaking would earn them favor in the eyes of the West. Therefore this was properly *Socialist* modernism because it became a strategic interest of the government.[25] Artists were among the first citizens permitted to go abroad to study. This took firm hold in the early 1960s, when Yugoslavia fully opened to the West and moved steadily towards internationalism in art.[26]

Socialist modernism was renamed after the fact "socialist aestheticism" to denote when it became encouraged by the state, lost all innovative properties and was definitively entrenched, neutralized and passive. In the late 1950s, a gap widened between aestheticism and important artistic issues, and this void resulted in crisis and fatigue among artists. [27] Tito's self-management was taught to schoolchildren as "Materialistic Marxism" as opposed to Soviet "Ideological Marxism," and it was nicknamed "softer" socialism, however this was still a dictatorship operating through a totalitarian ideology.

The years 1951 to 1973 are known as the neo-avant-garde in the current art historical nomenclature prevalent in the region. The first neo-avant-garde group to become active after the war was Exat 51 (Experimental Atelier) in Zagreb. The artists employed constructivism and geometric abstraction in their paintings, drawings, sculptures, and architectural design. According to the key art historian of Exat 51, Jesa Denegri, this movement represented a "drastic and decisive break" with prevailing cultural trends by opposing socialist realism and socialist modernism and asserting the legitimacy of abstract art. Exat 51 integrated the mediums of visual art with architecture and industrial design in an approach similar to Bauhaus. Exat 51's peers were Espace in France, Movimento Arte Concreta and Forma Uno in Italy, and 9 Abstract Artists in

UK.[28] Their practice mainly consisted of small-scale interventions in pavilions at trade fairs in Yugoslavia and abroad as well as exhibiting extensively.

Matko Mestrovic, an art writer at the time, explained that the group saw the function of art broadly, and while emphasizing the autonomy of plastic values of art, they sought to contribute to the construction of material culture in a constructivist idealist mode. This impetus coincides with "first significant steps towards the industrialization of the country and in the conditions of a backward material and technical culture." However Mestrovic points out the catch-22 that this was not accepted and could not be implemented because of the lack of this development and lack of understanding of its importance in the first place.[29]

Despite these obstacles, by the beginning of the next decade the ideals that Exat set forth became, according to Jesa Denegri, embedded in the cultural environment. How was this transformation achieved in the culture at large and for neo-avant-garde art in particular? A confluence of belief in technology and its practical implementation with a reliance on myth-making shaped the building of the country. This combination of values tempered by an earnest respect for imagination were fundamental to the neo-avant-garde. Exat 51 were informal educators and leaders of a new vision through their practice; they were "initiators and promoters of spiritual and material reconstruction."[30] With this, Exat 51's trust and hope in the logic of geometry is mixed with the earlier belief in the guiding force of the artist. Denegri points to the words of Italian writer Piero Pacini, a colleague of Exat, as characteristic of the mindset in Europe at the time,

> In a society emerging from the devastations and bitterness of war, the idea of geometry seems to be a new myth: it contains the myth of both solidarity and practicality at once, since it is reminiscent of architecture…On the scene of the early postwar period, geometry is one of the signs of optimistic and conscious reconstruction.[31]

In 1961, a group that was later dubbed New Tendencies emerged in Zagreb directly continuing the geometric abstract principles of Exat 51, and taking them a step further into kinetic and light sculpture. They strove to create art that was in step with technological achievements and internationalism with the belief that positive change in existence was possible.

The élan of reconstruction in the early 1950s, was felt distinctly in Yugoslavia through the euphoria of Tito's modernist building projects that were sustained by the labor of droves of enthusiastic volunteer citizens. Tens of thousands of people in all the regions of the country dedicated themselves to the cause of building housing blocks and needed infrastructure including the Highway of Brotherhood and Unity, which aimed to link the major urban centers in the regions the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Voluntary participation, responsibility, education are all very rich areas that postwar artists explored while persistently fighting for breathing room for their individual subjective expression.

Because there was no dialectical relationship between artists and the State, the position of the artist took shape in a very specific way throughout Tito's dictatorship. The

two entities were neither directly opposed nor in collaboration, and artists made the most of this very significant condition, which is wholly unique to the cultural system in Yugoslavia.

1950s Into the 1960s: Gorgona

Whereas Exat 51 and New Tendencies were logical outcomes of the excitement for building a new type of society after the war, another group operating at the same time in the same city with very different motivations and outcomes is quite a bit harder to characterize. This group named Gorgona (after a poem by one of its members) did not operate publicly at the time, and so has been analyzed mostly after the fact. The group consisted of painters Marijan Jevsovar, Julije Knifer, Djuro Seder, and Josip Vanista, sculptor Ivan Kozaric, architect Miljenko Horvat, art historian Dimitrije Basicevic, and art critics Matko Mestrovic and Radoslav Putar. Individually, the artists were all quite well known in the local art scene. The main collaborative artistic output of the group were eleven issues of *Gorgona* published between 1961 and 1966. During this time the group met often to exchange in private and to create manifestos, proposals for humorous artworks, and discuss the existential meaning of their group. In addition Gorgona also rented a place to show art, a ground floor picture framing shop where they made independent exhibitions without being bound to work with cultural institutions. The exhibitions were quite straightforward presentations of the individual members' paintings and sculptures. However their work as a collaborative and its legacy has not been so easily categorized.

What was the motivation for the group to gather and to create joint artworks, or more accurately to create artwork that they attributed to the entity Gorgona? It is significant to note that they often labeled works with their individual names, and often the work was very similar to output that they presented elsewhere in exhibitions individually. Therefore Gorgona's existential question, their reason for being, preoccupied the group and has been an intriguing dilemma for art historians in the region for good reason.

The first issue of the self-proclaimed "anti-magazine" *Gorgona* was a project of Josip Vanista. On each of the nine pages the same photograph was reproduced. The image was of a bare wooden geometric display structure in a storefront. This project was an outgrowth of Vanista's interest in his paintings and drawings in flattening space and rejecting illusion. His drawings *The Path* (1954) and *View Through the Window* (1960) retained aspects of geometrical abstraction and affinities even with constructivism. In *The Path*, the pencil marks do not create the path but instead outline the triangular shape that is left in negative on the bare white paper. Although the white triangular area is understood as the path receding in perspective, the image is devoid of depth and is a composition of positive and negative geometric forms. The charcoal drawing *View Through the Window* is bisected vertically by a black bar of heavy charcoal and in the center hover slightly fuzzy horizontal rectangles made with a much lighter application of material. Although the vertical bar is on top of the horizontal shapes and jumps to the

front, there is no illusion of dimension, and all the forms seem to occupy the same space. This is the opposite of a landscape unfolding from the open window.

Beyond the singular drawing, the opportunity to reproduce the image multiple times in the pages of a publication that in turn would be reproduced numerous times created a tautology that denied metaphorical references. The photograph of the found object itself and its inherent compelling visual qualities of lines in balance at ninety-degree angles are a contemplative study of form; its repetition further rejects additional meaning and enters the image into a loop in which it can only refer to itself, as there is no counterpoint or different image to offer comparison. Whereas the artist's aim in his drawings was to collapse the space of the image to the surface, in the Gorgona project the photographic image became flattened in time as well. With the turn of each page the next image in the sequence never moves from the starting point, and does not expand the view through the window.

Gorgona developed a drastically different approach to artmaking from Exat 51 and New Tendencies in the era of building the nation materially and communally. This first issue of the publication is mute; it displays an adamant withdrawl from society's preoccupations and the sensibility of negation similar to Zenitism in the 1920s. Also like Zenitism their main collaborative output was a magazine. However, *Gorgona* was an art object itself; it did not contain texts and art reproductions. Also for Gorgona the goal of producing an art object that would circulate was not to spread the word of a new art, but to experiment with the format itself and to question how images communicate, and what constitutes the limits of that communication.

In a 2001 interview, Vanista stated about Gorgona's method that their "reticence, passivity, meditativeness were above the ironic denial of the world we lived in."[32] This was in line with the first issue of the anti-magazine, however over the years Vanista has claimed a number of different missions for Gorgona. This contrariness, as well as contingency on different points in time and among various members of the group is an identifiable characteristic of Gorgona. In 1961 Vanista stated "Gorgona seeks neither work nor result in art," Later he said that Gorgona was the result.[33] Rather than seeing this as a disingenuous about-face, it would be more appropriate to think back to the contradictions of Ljubimir Micic. Micic drenched himself in paradox to open up the possibilities of what art could be in a modern and cosmopolitan fashion before the war. On the other hand, Vanista enjoyed tautology and created a mise en abyme in his images that could extend infinitely but actually shuts down meaning, and pointedly thwarts narrative. So his set of statements that "Gorgona seeks neither work nor result in art," and later that Gorgona was the result, meant quite simply that Gorgona itself, in all its aspects, was the art. There was no aspiration outside of Gorgona.

Thus Gorgona did not put their faith in ideals of geometry as Exat 51 and New Tendencies did. To the contrary, they continued to search the limits of image-making for potentials of expression. The main art historian of Gorgona, Nena Dimitrijevic, has attempted to define Gorgona's practice, and she has conjectured that Gorgona was a process of searching for artistic and intellectual freedom, the achievement of which was the aim of the group.[34] Acting as a group evading the public eye and the official art world

in Yugoslavia, they experienced a certain freedom, but what artistic freedom meant in their situation is worth assessing further by examining more of their art.

Ivo Gattin, another member of Gorgona, was a radical informel painter who destroyed his paintings by layering them so densely with matter that the finished object looked like charred, gauged wreckage. *Surface with Seven Holes,* 1961, is a burnt-red mottled pock-marked surface like that of an asteroid-bombarded planet. The punctures in the surface are not elegant Lucio Fontana slits but rather small pursed but nonetheless gaping orifices. They are positioned as if they could be remnants of a horribly mangled Cycladic face or a strange clustering of many faces melted together. Rather than a straightforward negation of the canvas or of the act of painting,[35] this was an elaborate drawn-out torture process of playing with the form and transforming it nearly into sculpture. This painting was not an exploration of methods but was a way of evoking stories directly with material.

Another artist in Gorgona who attacks the surface with paint is Marijan Jevsovar. In his *White Surface,* 1961, instead of corroding the surface he achieves a lifeless grey dirty plane. Yet it is lively because it is so tactile, with traces of sweeping gauging mark-making. The repulsion of the color contrasts with the lushness of thick paint. In the context of postwar art in Yugoslavia, this is an example of what can be termed aoristic painting because it is not simply a negation of painting, it was a process of experimentation and transformation in an attempt to find something further. Gattin and Jevsovar pursued a kind of a dialectical process by dealing with the limits of painting through painting, using the material itself, not walking away from it.

For the third *Gorgona* in 1962 Jevsovar selected one page of his "Perfect Drawings" series in which he attempted to draw a perfect geometrical shape freehand. Like Julije Knifer's paintings of meanders, these are not formal exercises or geometrical abstraction, and like Mangelos's paintings of writing they are a pursuit of control and its evasiveness. They are attempts at mastery as well as an affirmation of process and not only product, as Jevsovar said that he believed quality was achieved through process and that he left the mistakes in the final product and affirmed them.[36] Jevsovar highlights the part of an artist's process in which the artist's acceptance of the mark for inclusion in the final product is what determines quality. Gorgona were working earnestly with the limits of formal issues and not simply ironic or making anti-art statements.

By 1959 another Gorgona member Julije Knifer had begun painting black and white meanders on large-scale canvases and soon discovered that this shape provided room for endless experimentation and so decided to paint only meanders from then on. For example, *Meander,* 1960, is a bounded white meander on a black background and *Corner Meander,* 1961, is similar but not exactly the same as the white bands are more than five times wider than the black and are not framed by the black background. Significantly it is fashioned in a corner, and so is an installation that takes into account the space around the painting. For the second *Gorgona* in 1961, Knifer ventures further into sculptural installation even within the confines of the magazine. The pages are printed with a very thick black meander on white background and designed so that they fold out and are joined to form an endless loop. The extremely rigid format of the

magazine provides Knifer with an opportunity to highlight the most compelling aspect of his meander—their approximation of infinity.

Knifer's meanders can be termed non-declarative because they do not allow the viewer to enter the space or to enter a story. It presents just a surface like placing a wall in front of the viewer. It denies allegory or mimesis, and results in a private art. It is something quiet and not non-communicative but precisely non-declarative. It is simply the thing itself, a relative of Vanista's tautologies—another example of which can be seen in *Gorgona* 11, 1966, whose pages are photographs of the cover page of the title Gorgona. At times the terms hard edge formalism, seriality, and the reduction to an endless repetition of a symbol have been used in relation to Knifer's work.[37] This is accurate, however it should be pointed out that the other side of this reduction is an acknowledgement of magnitude that is beyond comprehension. If the distinction can be made, in each work he does not paint the same form over and over, but rather endlessly continues an unfolding of the form that happens to be made up of identical units. Thus his use of seriality points to the infinite with a meditative spirituality. In 1983 Knifer said that his painting was an "escalation of monotony" as he attempted to come to grips with the problem of the starting and the end point. His opinion was that it was best to start in the middle. He said his later paintings "carry in them the same spiritual origin and the same spiritual and physical structure" since 1959-60, and he believed it was important to continue the logic that he had begun then.[38] He summed it up when he said, "Perhaps I have already done my last works, and perhaps I haven't done my first."[39]

This preoccupation with the infinite and the sublime was perhaps the strongest hinge that held together the artists of Gorgona. At the same time that Abstract Expressionism was fully flourishing in the United States, Gorgona was exploring some of the same philosophical and existential issues but with different formal means. However a very important distinction was that Gorgona came from the legacy of Malevich and Suprematism, so their forms had a strict, at times geometric, minimal or restrained appearance infused with spirituality. What Denegri states about Knifer is an apt summary: "the geometry of Knifer's meanders instead of being constructivist, rationalist, was metaphysical, spiritual and sublime."[40]

The work of sculptor Ivan Kozaric furthers this point. His project for *Gorgona 5* in 1961 consisted of two photographs, the first was the front of one of his sculptures and the other was the back. The sculpture was a flat-bottomed vessel positioned on its side with two long thin rods protruding from the depth of the void. Kozaric's photograph emphasized the abstract forms attained by casting raking light over the front which created a strong shadow over half of the interior and visually flattened the interior volume to produce a very disconcerting space. These simple photographs create a strangely unsettled identity of the object from interior and exterior viewpoints. The front is a deep volume that contrasts with the flat back of the sculpture so that it does not look like the same object. On the other hand the light across the interior volume creates the illusion of a flat surface and so the front and back display simultaneous aspects of similarity and difference in the same object. This perception is heightened further because from the front, the volume looks like a stripped-down abstract face, so its interior qualities, difference and splitting or mirroring of inside and outside takes on not only a formal but a

psychological dimension. So what may seem to be an abstract constructivist experiment reveals breadth as a meditation on identity.

In a sculpture from 1959, Kozaric created a square-faced polygon of plaster, which looks as massive as stone. Lines gently slash diagonally across the front as if the monolith was a rough-hewn stone freshly quarried, or a fossil imprinted with ancient leaves. It could be imagined that this portion was retrieved from some natural process or place, but the title *A Piece of the River* brings surprise. The absurdity of the imagined gesture of holding onto a slice of the infinite brings a rush of sensation of the sublime and the limitations of human scale in the immense world of nature. The stark heavy object seems to stare blankly, making the reference to fluidity and indeterminate scale all the more disorienting.

Although this work's formal goals are completely different, it does share some common ground philosophically with Abstract Expressionists like Barnett Newman or Mark Rothko. Though Kozaric's objects are rough, uneven, dirty they convey a restraint that contrasts so drastically with the strong human emotion that they evoke that his individual works are probably closer to the painting of Robert Ryman than to the other Americans. In fact, Kozaric's art is closer in tone to Piero Manzoni, with whom Gorgona collaborated on an issue of *Gorgona.* The absurd played a central role in Kozaric's and Gorgona's oeuvre in a way that was not present in the Abstract Expressionists' painting at all. This humor and outright emotion did not fit within the formal parameters imposed in Abstract Expressionism.

Kozaric's 1960 collage *Unusual Object: Cutting a Piece of Mt. Sljeme* is a photograph of Zagreb showing the well-known scene of the central park in the city and the cathedral on the right hill. In the left background area where Mt. Sljeme is pictured, a small mound shaped area is cut out. More than just being a very usual scene made into an unusual object, the geometric cutout alludes with humor to a struggle for mastery over nature. This human touch of the collage becomes an intervention on a massive scale, as the untouchable and uncontrollable landscape is wittily altered. The small scale of Mt. Sljeme in the picture easily allows a human to tower over it and manipulate its organic geometry, fulfilling an archaic desire to overcome nature. This looks like the kind of cutting and photocollage that Gordon Matta-Clark would make a decade later in Soho in New York City, however Matta-Clark's were interventions in decaying urban buildings in reality as well as on paper. Kozaric's collage, again employing an overt sense of humor to address the unheimlich that Matta-Clark's work lacks, became a point of departure for the next two decades of art in Yugoslavia that was concerned with private individual mark-making in the public sphere.

Kozaric also proposed drawings and sculptures, some of which were never realized, and several never meant to be realized. His *Socket*, 1963, is a description of an electrical socket and the details of the wall around it including its color, material texture and a log of all the scratches and holes in the plaster that he saw, complete with measurements and description of what they look like. This resonates with Claus Oldenburg's *Three Way Plug* and other drawings and proposals for fantastical monuments to the everyday, which poke fun at modern hopes for the transformative power of technology. Kozaric's socket is the passive receiver of the plug; he defers the attention to

the environment, specifically the imperfections of the wall, the ultimate bland inert background. For example, he writes, "From where I stand which is not far away, I see on the left hand side a scratch in the shape of the letter V, and to the right another crack 0.1 cm wide."[41] Significantly different from American Pop Art of Oldenburg, Johns or Rauschenberg, Kozaric did not launch a critique of commercial or consumer culture. Specific to his environment, his banal but humorous proposals modestly deflated the grand mythical proclamations that were so prevalent in the re-building programs and rhetoric of Yugoslavia in the 1950s and early 1960s. However to say that his work, or Gorgona's work was proto-conceptual would be limiting. The aim and the method of their art were more broad and nuanced. Therefore it could also be said that their work expands the boundaries of the terms of conceptual art, as understood in a Western context still today.[42]

First, to return more specifically to the distinctions of Kozaric's work from Pop Art, a clue lies in the difference in their use of form and humor. Oldenburg is lighthearted and fantastical and Johns employs the object itself in the transformation of its meaning. Kozaric's humor is nihilist and tragic. At the end of the description of the holes of the socket, he writes, "On another place left of the socket, 5.5 cm away, is a hole in the plaster, the end of which I cannot see."[43] The humor of the mention of this small fact erupts like a nihilist gasp from out of oblivion. This absurdity is like evidence of an immensity that is too much to bear, an instance of the sublime, which the humor serves to dissipate.

The uselessness of the list of facts registering his vision contained the same kind of nihilist humor as another Gorgona artwork *Inspection of Springtime*, 1962. An art critic and member of the group Radoslav Putar sent a missive to the other members saying that the painstakingly collected scientific data on the season had failed and that there was a need for Gorgona to compose a project; he signed off with the extra impetus that "this is indispensably necessary."[44] Then the group gathered for one of its walks on Mt. Sljeme just outside Zagreb to "inspect the beginning of springtime." Putar stated in his fantastical note that the *scientific* data had failed, and it was necessary to make a human expedition. Gorgona focused on human senses and direct experience in their artmaking. Certianly, the humor lies in the fact that these undertakings were wholly unnecessary. Gorgona reveled in artistic endeavors that poked fun at the life-art dichotomy; they enjoyed an élan and joie de vivre, and took joy in actions that were unproductive—the opposite of Marxist discourse that seemed to be obsessed with labor and production. One of their invitations read "Gorgonize yourselves"—very much like "organize yourselves," but they used a completely open and playful tone making light of the rhetoric of the Yugoslav socialist system of self-management.

The *Questionnaire* filled out by the group at one of their meetings and compiled by member Dimitrije Basicevic also played lightly with the system of self-management. Random questions like "describe a Sunday morning from 8-12" were sprinkled among many that inquired as to the characteristics of Gorgona, like "is the Gorgona boring?" or "what is the Gorgona's profession?" that were put to the group. They each answered individually. By the 1960s the enthusiasm for the ideals of socialism became less naïve. At this juncture, Gorgona was sincerely concerned with the question of how to construct

something more than themselves individually, but this was not a political or social project. Through their own individual subjective expression they created a kind of transitional object, as conceived by D.W. Winnicott. Gorgona's *Questionnaire* and other projects that they undertook investigating the nature of the "collective work" were their way of coming to terms with the new reality of their society and what that meant for an individual artist's expression. They enjoyed the exchange among the group in which they could develop aspects of their true selves because they did not need to worry about professional success. Rather than give in to a bureaucratic style of critical artmaking, they made darkly whimsical fantastical art objects.

Josip Vanista in 1960 drew views of an imagined *Gorgona House.* One was a very simply drawing of a solid black square with a thin line indicating a wall and another denoting a floor. Along the "floor of the house" are very delicate wave-like lines, making the floor appear to have a fantastical natural terrain. In another view, two very light vertical lines fade into the background behind four whimsical bulbous mounds drawn and shaded in pencil that have now taken over the architecture.

In response to Radoslav Putar's question, posed in 1963, about whether it was possible to make a collective work, Ivan Kozaric responded:

> We must also collectively make casts of the inside of all the Gorgonians' heads, no one may be let out. We must make, discretely, casts of the interior of…in short, of all the more important hollows in our city.[45]

So in Kozaric's expression, the collective work would be a negative of all the most important private and public interior cavities in town. Vanista imagined another proposal of a sphere that would fill the entire space of Gorgona's exhibition space, Studio G, in a simple diagrammatic drawing.

Gorgona member Duro Seder answered the question of whether a collective work was possible by telling a story, a very common mode of expression among the group. The work had been commissioned, the invitations were sent out, and on the day of the opening the work would be picked up and brought to the gallery, but "to our horror, the collective work is too big to be brought in through the door."[46] It is too big, overwhelming, disproportionate to the available space and resources. Like the projects of socialist Yugoslavia, it could not be completed properly within given conditions. Gorgona turn their horror at the overwhelming impossible situation into a play on scale. Out of the tragic-comic dream of being turned into a giant or a dwarf and feeling disoriented in familiar surroundings, Gorgona produced a proposal that does not fit neatly into set parameters for art.

Instead of adjusting to the system, Gorgona created their own disproportionate art objects and activities. Adorno spoke in his lectures on History and Freedom in 1964-65 that as freedom increasingly gets swallowed by adjustment to bourgeois society the impulses of freedom will seem old-fashioned, and even archaic. Adorno asserted (at odds with Kant) that this is necessary because spontaneous modes must be triggered by things other than reason. These impulses are involuntary and therefore irrational. The ego sees these impulses as chaotic and will try to squelch them.

> Something like freedom becomes possible only through the development of consciousness, at the same time this very development of consciousness effectively ensures that freedom is pushed back into the realm of archaic, mimetic impulse that is so essential to it. [47]

The concept of freedom exists in a bodily impulse that is something prior to the ego. The development of a healthy ego terminates the trajectory of freedom. This is the dialectic of freedom.

It may be that an ideal of freedom to be achieved in collective work in the end was a phantasm that remains an illusion, but for Gorgona it served its purpose. They created playfully to defend from fears of claustrophobia from the imposition of bureaucracy on artistic freedom. Their hybrid practice of drawings, photographs, sculptures, walks in the forest, group meetings, thoughts for each month, answers to questionnaires, paintings, artist books was their defense against being categorized and limited. Their collective practice was an attempt to be larger than themselves individually in order to expand their individual art.

This disproportionate practice defies adequate representation. By way of comparison, in the United States, Walter de Maria, Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson and others were creating monumental objects in the western deserts that absolutely could not be adequately represented in the New York gallery system. These projects were motivated in part by a defiance of the art market that later incorporated their artworks in the form of ephemera and ancillary drawings, smaller sculptures etc. Nevertheless, the actual Land Art projects remain disproportionate and can only be experienced directly and cannot be fully adjusted to the art system. Gorgona was not reacting to the art market since this did not exist in Yugoslavia, however they strove to create an artwork that extended beyond the horizon of the administrative bureaucratic society and the value system of state-run museums.

The other side of Gorgona's freedom to work in an oasis that enabled unhindered work was that they were isolated, and in fact had no retrospective exhibition until 1977. One member of Gorgona has since become well known individually, though at the time Gorgona was operating nobody knew exactly what he was painting and his work was not exhibited until 1977. Dimitrije Basicevic was an art historian and curator. As early as the beginning of the 1950s he was painting with tempera and oil on coated paper and binding the sheets in books. In the late 1950s he painted what he considered to be "non-stories" on board, canvas, or globes and generally limited his palette to red, black, and white. In his early work including *Alfabet*, 1952, he started to paint glagolytic script letters, which were the very early version of the Croatian and Serbian language used before the end of the first millennium. These hieroglyphic symbols appeared again and again in his work even later as he introduced Latin script. A page of the book of paintings *Pythagora 2*, 1953, on a muddy white page lined with freehand-drawn horizontal bright white lines, red letters at the top are written backwards, an instance that recurred often. On his blackboards Mangelos crossed out letters, wrote, and drew simple lines, unknown symbols. With these tools, he learned and unlearned in a mix of irrational and rational,

communication and pure visual abstraction, private meaning, and unreadable forms. This all started with his first endeavors from 1941 to 1944, which were based on the notion of tabula rasa. He had been looking at grave markers, and thought of this tragic inventory as a slate for learning.[48] He wanted to create a tabula rasa, perhaps in an attempt to emotionally and psychologically clean up the past of the war, yet first he acknowledged that he wished to organize visual remnants of past events and to try to make logical sense of the senseless. In 1953 he painted both *Homage to Pythagoras* and also *Tabula Rasa*. *Homage to Pythagoras* consists simply of the handwritten word Pythagora in white hovering just above the bottom of the board in a black void without a horizon line. The book *Tabula Rasa* contains black pages lined in hand-drawn white like a schoolbook.

Basicevic, in a similar vein as Adorno, stated that there could be no poetry after the devastation and deeply-scarring traumas of World War II. His painting fought to find a solution for this dilemma. He turned to a form of communication, the glagolytic alphabet that was not comprehensible in modern times. It is archaic, and with it he puts a stop to communication and highlights our inability to understand one another. The work is most powerful not as language or poetry, but as abstract visual form. He declared that the role of the artist was to teach people to speak again after the end of the world, when art can no longer help them, and he believed the path to language led through nothingness.[49] This path also led through painting. He doggedly pursued art when he thought that art could no longer help, whether in disbelief of his own statement or in true belief of the method. No matter, he needed to exhaust the possibilities before relinquishing control of his tool of expression.

His statements, also with Gorgona, continually worked with paradoxes in much the same way as Ljubimir Micic had done in Zagreb in after World War I. These sentiments would be echoed in his "Moscow Manifesto" of 1977 when he said that it was "time for end of gorgonauting, no longer profound thoughts, and that art was now only functional. Sense is dead and meaning is losing its function, no longer an avant-garde imposing itself on society, nor adjusting to machine culture."[50] He was preoccupied with attempts to regain meaning after the devastation of war and the alienation of the switch from agrarian to industrial society in Yugoslavia in the 1950s and 1960s. Therefore he wrestled with imagery related to Pythagoras and a belief in the power of numbers. *Number concept Pythagoras (0-10)*, 1977-78, is a globe with dark-colored bold numbers written in typeface around the line of the equator. On a deep black background the book *Alfabet* depicts glagolytic letters in red or in white mixed with numbers allowing the two to be read together, or one type of mark to be misread for the other, or misunderstood altogether. He blurred communication, symbol and factual registration together. In his search for the rational, he mainly dallied in the territory of the irrational. His negative dialectical method pervaded his thinking, feeling, painting. Branka Stipancic, the key scholar of Basicevic, keenly assessed that he negated painting by painting.[51]

As well as a dialectical method, Basicevic explored double and multiple identity in his painting. He enjoyed painting words that resonated aurally but in combination produced no meaning. The word mutabor, which is a magical word from fairy tales that means "I will change"[52] turns up in many of his paintings as well as Jighoura, which was the name the locals in his hometown used for the main street. In Yugoslavia there is still a

strong tradition of nicknaming that some say is perpetuated by mothers who when they reprimand their children use a nickname for the little beast so that when God hears the negative words he does not associate her or him with the real name of the child. Like Jo Klek, Ve Poljanski and many others, Basicevic used an artistic pseudonym. As an art historian and curator he used his given name, but as an artist he signed the name Mangelos, bluntly choosing a new name to represent his true self to the world.

His fascination with the mutability of identity mixed with mathematical systems was manifested in the way he dated his paintings according to what he dubbed the Sid theory. Named for his hometown, this was a biopsychotheory of life stages that he heard when he was in elementary school in which the cells of the body are replaced every seventh year.[53] He saw different persons in the same individual and life cycles that were continually being rejuvenated. His *Yearbook* ca. 1970 was a painted table recording the dates of his biography.

In the art of postwar Yugoslavia, existential concerns like Mangelos's were mixed with a heavy dose of belief in the power of mythic personality. Of course Tito was the largest and most mythologized personality at the time and now is the symbol for a hyper-inflated nostalgia for the whole era of Yugoslavia that ranges from sincere mourning to utter kitsch. At the core of Tito's identity as a liberator from fascism and the builder of a modern industrial state were self-styled myths that literally held the country together. As Adorno and Horkheimer famously wrote, "Enlightenment still recognizes itself even in myths."[54] When Tito died in 1980, unfortunately the other side of the mythology that had been subdued since WWII showed its face, and brutal war ensued.

Within this larger cultural context, Gorgona and Mangelos reveled in anonymity and nihilistic loss of identity that was rooted more in Buddhism than Duchamp. Turning to the formal qualities of Mangelos's work in relation to this, despite his deep belief in the adaptability of identity, from his painting *Paysage de la bataille,* 1957-1963, to *Moscow Manifesto,* 1977-78, his painting style remained unchanged. Both of these feature a black background and hand-drawn lines like those used for handwriting lessons in grammar school. Flowing script portrays playful, serious, nonsense sentences in red (in *Paysage*) or in white (in *Moscow Manifesto*) neatly filling the surface of the paintings from left to right. These works, painted on board, resemble blackboards, and many of his later works from the late 1970s were created on globes. Thus these materials manifest his continued preoccupation throughout his oeuvre with teaching and learning as key to rejuvenation similar to Joseph Beuys' practice of drawing on blackboards as part of his performance lectures. However, rather than being accoutrements and lifeless remnants of performances as in Beuys' art, Mangelos's blackboards, globes, and schoolbooks were transitional objects that he held onto through chaotic change.

Mangelos' work and that of Gorgona remained nearly unknown until the mid-1970s when Nena Dimitrijevic curated the first retrospective of their work in 1977. There were a number of reasons that artists at that time found Gorgona's artwork intriguing that will be examined in later chapters. Lines of official influence in the later 60s and 1970s were established through the academy and state museums whereas most artists of the younger generation were showing at the Student Center in Zagreb and Student Cultural Center in Belgrade. The power of the younger generation was and is still quite strong in

Yugoslavia; their decision as to whom to embrace or not played a significant role in determining what became the art historical lineage. However it can be said of this whole time period from the early 1950s through the 1970s that it was a time of peace and relative economic stability (though not necessarily prosperity) socially and politically. Artists could explore beneath the veneer, but certain criticisms were not allowed. From 1972 onwards the government became increasingly conservative. At the end of the decade, Tito was ill and many citizens of Yugoslavia anticipated that when the leader died a turbulent sea change was on the horizon. The existential crisis that Gorgona explored in the early 1960s underground, came to the surface in the late 1970s.

Gorgona's artwork raises themes that will continue to be of concern to artists in later decades. During the advent of self-management, Gorgona forged a private but collective mode of creativity. It had no public face, other than the group's Studio G, which was had quite a limited audience. Gorgona was a secret group that exchanged intellectually and socially among themselves privately. Even more importantly, the group did not collaborate on artwork or exchange to arrive at consensus. It was a group that enjoyed exchanging together but created a forum for each individual to retain his own subjective expression. This is a characteristic mark of art groups in Yugoslavia that will be seen again in Group of Six in particular. In this forum each artist was free to reveal and develop aspects of their true selves to the extent that they wished, as there was no exterior pressure for professional success. Within the group there was also the opportunity to explore their shared interest in nihilism and tautology that grew out of existentialism and Buddhism as well as dada and Zenitism.

Gorgona were not hampered in their experimentation because within their group identity they operated outside of official institutions, however in their career as individual artists they had to adjust and negotiate more with state museums. This did not adhere to the usual dialectic between avant-garde artists and a capitalist art market or refuses artists and state-mandated art practice that is associated with the western and eastern art worlds respectively. This is another characteristic of art of Yugoslavia that continues in the 1960s and 1970s as many artists created art independently and often in public spaces or showing in museums, yet all of this activity had to be acceptable to the government for it to exist at all. Therefore, there was not a strong dialectic, and the positions were not clearly demarcated, which had positive and negative impacts on their art and on the creation of the artists' interior dialectic of true and false selves. As seen in the art of Zenitism and Gorgona this manifests in humor, playfulness, and multiple roles as individual artists and the formation of a group.

After analyzing Gorgona's art and assessing major art historical texts written about their practice there are several key divergences in my interpretation that should be noted. Primary among these differences is that Gorgona has been categorized as proto-conceptual. This may be the case, however it is crucial not to limit their practice to this framework. Gorgona was much more overtly concerned with nature/landscape and spirituality than conceptual art of the West (despite its claims to mysticism, a la LeWitt). They had an existential concern for communication and combined this with making art objects in a range of mediums. Gorgona's core aim was not to dematerialize the art object; they addressed form and the overtones of political rhetoric of materialism with

humor. Most importantly, this is what distinguishes Gorgona and its antecedents from Western art of the time, and it is this complexity that makes it a rich lineage worthy of note. Both Zenit and Gorgona were more subjective enterprises than prior analysis has surmised.

Perhaps the accepted definition of official modernity in Yugoslavia as "late or overdue romanticist concepts creating a patriarchal, national, bourgeois culture or state"[55] was a motivating force for art historians to identify the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde with conceptualism so as to disassociate it as much as possible from a patriarchal, national, bourgeois status quo. The invaluable and groundbreaking book *Impossible Histories* addresses the neglect of critical and historical writing on avant-garde practice in Yugoslavia in the 20th century. After much hard work by art historians and artists in the region, the strong contribution from Yugoslavia to the international history of modern and contemporary art is starting to be established. It is now part of the curriculum in the United Kingdom at Goldsmiths and in The Netherlands at de Appel. That said, now it is important for the analysis of this art to enter another level. Art from Yugoslavia should be exhibited by museums in the United States and published in United States academia. Most importantly, the question is no longer whether art from Yugoslavia made a contribution but what makes it a distinct, special contribution? And what now does that tell us about the definitions of modernism and genres of postwar artmaking that we work with in the United States?

Could art from Yugoslavia be a subjective conceptualism? In the rush to claim international status in conceptual art, the most prevalent international mode in the 60s and 70s, art historians to date may have overlooked—or may have strategically underplayed—the very aspects of this art that makes it so unique: its engagement of human expression and penchant for storytelling. In order to be accepted on the world stage starting in the late 60s, delimited as conceptual art, the art of Yugoslavia has not yet been fully examined in its multiple facets.

Chapter One Endnotes:

1 Irina Subotic, "Avant-Garde Tendencies in Yugoslavia" in *Art Journal* (Spring 1990): 21-27.

2 Ibid., 22.

3 Dubravka Djuric, "Radical Poetic Practices: Concrete and Visual Poetry in the Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde" in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991* ed. Dubravka Djuric and Misko Suvakovic (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 68.

4 Darko Simicic, "From *Zenit* to *Mental Space*: Avant-garde, Neo-avant-garde, and Post-avant-garde Magazines and Books in Yugoslavia, 1921-1987," in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991* ed. Dubravka Djuric and Misko Suvakovic (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 298-299.

5 Ljubomir Micic, "Zenitist Manifesto," in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991* ed. Dubravka Djuric and Misko Suvakovic (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 525-531.

6 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 15.

7 Subotic, 21

8 Djuric, 71.

9 Micic, 525.

10 n.a. *In Search of Balkania: A User's Manual* ed. Roger Conover, Eda Cufer, Peter Weibel (Graz: Neue Galerie Graz am Landesmuseum Joanneum, 2002), 110.

11 Micic, 530.

12 Djuric, 68.

13 Suvakovic, 8.

14 Djuric, 71.

15 Subotic, 23.

16 Ales Erjavec, "The Three Avant-gardes and Their Context: The Early, the Neo, and the Postmodern," in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991* ed. Dubravka Djuric and Misko Suvakovic (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 45.

17 Sonja Briski Uzelac, "Visual Arts in the Avant-gardes between the Two Wars," in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991* ed. Dubravka Djuric and Misko Suvakovic (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 133.

18 Simicic, 313-315.

19 Uzelac, 154.

20 Simicic, 315.

21 Djuric, 80.

22 Simicic, 315.

23 Suvakovic, 10.

24 Jesa Denegri, "Inside or Outside 'Socialist Modernism'? Radical Views on the Yugoslav Art Scene, 1950-1970," in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991* ed. Dubravka Djuric and Misko Suvakovic (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 175.

25 Denegri, 175.

26 Simicic, 316.

27 Denegri, 176.

28 Denegri, 178.

29 Denegri, 182.

30 Denegri, 183.

31 Denegri, 182.

32 Branka Stipancic, "Gorgona Demands Neither Works Nor Results in Art" in *Living Art on the Edge of Europe* (Otterlo, The Netherlands: Kroller-Muller Museum Kerber Verlag, 2006), 30.

33 Nena Dimitrijevic, "Art as a Way of Existence" in ex. cat. *Gorgona* ed. Nena Dimitrijevic (Zagreb: Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, 1977), n.p.

34 Dimitrijevic, n.p.

35 Denegri, 200.

36 ed. Marija Gattin, *Gorgona* (Zagreb: Muzej suvremene umjetnosti, 2002), 30.

37 Dimitrijevic, n.p.

38 Julije Knifer, "Notes" in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991* ed. Dubravka Djuric and Misko Suvakovic (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 548-9.

39 Jesa Denegri, "In Memoriam: Julije Knifer 1924-2004," in ex. cat. *Julije Knifer, Tomo Savic-Gecan: Power of Emptiness* (Zagreb: PM Gallery, 2005), n.p.

40 Ibid., n.p.

41 Dimitrijevic, n.p.

42 The exhibition *Open Systems* at Tate Modern (2005) curated by Donna de Salvo was a landmark in opening a major institution's history of conceptual art to include Eastern European artists on their own artistic terms and also to release the practice from being bound to analysis only as a completely discourse and language-based endeavor. However, there is much, much more work to be done in this area.

43 Dimitrijevic, n.p.

44 Dimitrijevic, n.p.

45 ed. Gattin, 25.

46 ed. Gattin, 12.

47 Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom Lectures 1964-1965* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006), 213.

48 Mladen Stilinovic, "Interview with Dimitrije Basicevic Mangelos" in *Living Art on the Edge of Europe* (Otterlo, The Netherlands: Kroller-Muller Museum Kerber Verlag, 2006), 38.

49 Jiri Sevcik and Jana Sevcikova, "The Sixties and the East," in ex. cat. *Beyond Preconceptions: The Sixties Experiment* ed. Milena Kalinovska (New York: Independent Curators International, 2000), 40.

50 Mangelos, "Moscow Manifesto" in ex. cat. *The Misfits: Conceptualist Strategies in Croatian Contemporary Art* ed. Tihomir Milovac (Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002), 69.

51 Branka Stipancic, "Mangelos," in *In Search of Balkania: A User's Manual* ed. Roger Conover, Eda Cufer, Peter Weibel (Graz: Neue Galerie Graz am Landesmuseum Joanneum, 2002), 95.

52 ed. Gattin, 25.

53 Stipancic, "Mangelos," 95.

54 Horkheimer and Adorno, 6.

55 Suvakovic, 8.

Aoristic Avant-Garde: Experimental Art in 1960s and 1970s Yugoslavia
Chapter Two
OHO

Introduction

What was OHO? When did it start and when did it end? Such deceptively simple questions frame not only the writing of the history of this group of artists but also the development of their art practice at the time they were working. The group had no formal group members, and even the acknowledged core of artists changed throughout the life of the group. Also the group's practice varied widely over its lifespan. As art historian Igor Zabel, who organized the major retrospective of OHO's work in 1994, noted, OHO "functioned as a network of ideas and initiatives from a broad group of people linked by similar thinking and personal friendships."[1] This formation is appropriate to the artistic and philosophical questions that the group pursued. From the beginning, OHO's practice extended beyond questions of traditional conceptualism or debates of form/anti-form. Instead, their aoristic work was deeply rooted in questions not only of perception but of ontology; through all of their different phases and changes in membership, their artwork always investigated mutual relations and promoted relay between entities as a way of understanding the nature of being.

The practice of the Ljubljana-based OHO was divided into time periods by art historian Tomaz Brejc. First, from 1966-1968 there was reism, 1969-70 arte povera, land, body, process art, and in1970-71 what Brejc labelled transcendental conceptualism.[2] Art historian Misko Suvakovic describes the periods of their practice as first their reist phase, then structuralism and ludism from 1968 to 1970, and finally post-avant-garde including arte povera, process and land art and conceptualism from 1969 to 1971.[3] In contrast, OHO artist Marko Pogacnik uses the same time periods as Brejc but labels them in terms of social structures of a collective. The first segment of OHO's practice is defined by him as a broad movement, the next part of the practice was created by a specific group of artists, and in the third time period OHO was a community.[4]

This is more than the difference between art historians's perspective and that of an artist. It highlights a shift at the time in the definition of an artwork. Furthermore, the interactive aspects of artmaking took on a particular meaning in Yugoslavia that was unparalleled in Western Europe and the United States. In Yugoslavia artists promoted a social relay of artmaking built on the individual, not on an elusive collective will, like

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Endnotes can be found on pages 50-56.

that of the socialist propaganda of the time. Furthermore, artists in Yugoslavia did not trade in the sensual for the conceptual. Instead, the object and the idea cohabitated in their practice. So as OHO was introducing reism and transcendental conceptualism, they also introduced a social relay that was to become a hallmark of Yugoslav experimental art in the 1960s and '70s.

Art historian Misko Suvakovic succinctly outlined the typologies of postwar artmaking in Yugoslavia in his edited collection *Impossible Histories*. Moderate modernism was the style promoted by the government in Yugoslavia. This practice imposed strict professional regulations and upheld traditional narrow boundaries of mediums.[5] The neo-avant-garde in Yugoslavia from 1951 to 1973 defied social realism and moderate modernism by working in multiple mediums.[6] Furthermore, the neo-avant-garde expanded the framework of artmaking into the realms of everyday life (including psychology, mass media, politics), spiritual teaching, and also theory including Marxism, New Left Praxis in Yugoslavia, structuralism and post-structuralism. Suvakovic asserts that the neo-avant-garde dissolved because of the inevitable impossibility of bringing revolutionary change to the individual and society through art. Bureaucratic institutions and the absorption of art into mass culture sabotaged the modernist utopia.[7]

Whereas there was a distinct break between the neo-avant-garde and the post-avant-garde in Croatia and Serbia, OHO provided a link between these movements in Slovenia.[8] In 1963, the group's activities, undertaken by Marko Pogacnik, Istok Geister and Taras Kermavner, moved from Kranj to Ljubljana.[9]

Reism: The Particular Thing Beyond Utilitarianism

In 1965, after they had been working for some time already, OHO released their manifesto on reism. Later on November 23 1966 The OHO Manifesto and OHO Book were presented in the Tribuna art space in Ljubljana.[10] Through reism OHO countered the way that art was employed to privilege the mind over the body as part of the Enlightenment.[11] Reism revealed the bare object itself prior to meaning of an object and uncovered the reality of an object that was usually veiled by conventions and preconceived notions. [12] Interestingly OHO saw this not as a sterile reductive process but, as exemplified in their poems, as a means to find "mutual relations of the meanings of the written words…Grasping the meaning of a word means nothing other than its relation to another word."[13]

In 1964 when Marko Pogacnik introduced reism he physically impressed objects in clay and filled the resulting moulds with plaster of Paris to make the objects again as plain forms devoid of specific identifying details. Pogacnik called the objects that resulted from this formal manipulation "pop items" (pop artikles in Slovenian) because the materials were common everyday objects, and he hoped to make them accessible to any viewer anew by stripping them of prior meaning or associations.[14] He wrote about these objects, that "the impression ensured the distance between the object and, at the same time, enabling amazement with the liberated thing. And amazement with a certain phenomenon enables genuine contact with the essence of the world in which this

phenomenon takes place." He believed that by opening a distance between the creator and the object, a space for the participation of the viewer would emerge.[15] With pop items, OHO aimed to create a people's culture that would end the division of the ordinary and the precious, with this came the belief that the creative process should be integral to daily life and that art should be part of an attentive observation of the world.[16] Certainly, the notion of participation has been theorized and criticized in the past decade by writers including Nicolas Bourriaud, Claire Bishop, Markus Miessen, and Shumon Basar. However, at that time in Yugoslavia it could be said that this was part of a lineage of individual initiative and a sign of democratic notions embedded in the artists' reading of the real meaning of self-management.[17]

In 1966, the *OHO Book* was published in *Tribuna* (in the November 23 issue).[18] The *OHO Book* (which gave the group OHO its name) was produced by Istok Geister and Marko Pogacnik. It was a collection of cards attached with a ring so that it could be opened from the left or right in a variety of combinations and its text was largely dispersed throughout the form. The name OHO is derived from a mixture of the Slovenian words oko (eye) and uho (ear), which Pogacnik considered "organs of reistic attention." Furthermore, the word OHO is an exclamation of surprise at the "sudden disclosure of reality" upon the examination of a reistic art object.[19]

Pogacnik and Istok Geister (who took the artist name I.G. Plamen) created concrete and visual poetry. They made cartoons, drawings and graphic design in their books to diminish the hierarchy between text and image.[20] From 1966-68, OHO produced 20 books.[21] Art historian Darko Simicic has collected a comprehensive collection of books and periodicals from 20th-century Yugoslavia. He is an expert in this area and has published valuable information on the works of this era in this fragile, often overlooked medium. The *OHO Book* emphasizes the audio-visual nature of the name of the group as the combination of eye and ear and the exclamation of surprise.[22] The *Artikl Kniga* foregrounded the medium of the book as the subject matter. This was an expansion of visual concrete poetry to the scale of a whole book.[23] Created in 1966, this book was plastic with 27 pages and holes of different sizes. Their 1967 *Book with a Ring* comprises individual letters printed on pieces of paper and joined by a metal ring. Plamen's *Sound Book* (1967) is a project with paper that rustles in a box. The word silence is written on the front of the paper sheet and the back of the paper reads "noise." So the process of reading the book produces the output of the book and its content: noise. It is a rebus including sound and action on the part of the viewer. In 1967, OHO created the *pericarezeracirep* manuscript, based on the notion of the palindrome. Plamen and Pogacnik's 1968 *Mushrooms in a Book* was closer to a cartoon. Line drawings of mushrooms were accompanied by short witty descriptions.[24]

Art journals were crucial to the early development of OHO. The medium of the journal was particularly subject to the political climate. From 1960-64 *Perspectives* magazine represented pan-Yugoslav culture and its opening to the West.[25] OHO worked with this influential cultural magazine until 1964 when it was terminated because the government stated that it had overstepped a politically acceptable critical position and could potentially start a political opposition. What in the early 1960s had been a fairly open political situation became more closed and controlled. So OHO began to work with

two other publications *Tribuna* and *Problemi*, which had previously been uninspiring in content and approach.[26] Later in June 1968, the Katalog group formed and produced its first issue as part of *Problemi* (number 68-69). The group, which included OHO, philosopher Slavoj Zizek and others, became a forum for concrete and visual poetry, reism, programmed art, structuralism, semiotics, and post-structuralism, all of which were dubbed New Tendencies in art and theory at the time.[27] Katalog came under strong attack from the cultural establishment and state politicians. In 1969 their reistic and concrete poetry was published as *Signs* (*Znamenja*). Philosopher Slavoj Zizek was part of this group around the publication *Signs*.[28]

In 1966 they published the *OHO Book* which contained no words, only holes in the paper so that the object was something between a book and sculpture. This book contained poems and drawings and the last page is identical to the first. This exemplified OHO's interest in the early 1960s to combine traditional media. This was a material outcome of their "intention to liberate things and situations from the roles attributed to them by the human mind," and to invoke the material's true essence that would evoke surprise---the exclamation "oho!" In Pogacnik's words, "Ideally artwork should appear as a message causing momentaneous astonishment and then disappear as soon as possible thereafter."[29] They avoided "clothing the idea in matter" and rather published the idea as a drawing. They believed that "understanding through body (sic) experience is better than any explanation."[30] Thus their work provoked sensory and bodily experience not just the mind. Their notion of medial form was a way of synthesizing the provocation of the body and the mind, so as not to let the mind dominate.

OHO's early practice spanned books of poems, recordings of songs and also film. Matanovic also created visual gramophone records and Nasko Kriznar, Matanovic and Plamen collaborated to make audio recordings. OHO films were created by Nasko Kriznar and also Marjan Ciglic. Sometimes Geister, Pogacnik, David Nez, and Matko Matanovic joined to make films as well. They considered the camera to function like a reist eye that was attentive to the process of looking. Nasko Kriznar made forty films between 1964-70. He employed the camera as a reistic attentive eye, the film is itself "a thing" a topographic poem. [31]This interest in the mechanics of the film and still camera not just as a medium for documentation was similar to the way that United States artists like Joan Jonas and Dan Graham employed the camera as an object whose presence is part of the artwork. OHO's thinking at this time was also very influenced by Americans Robert Rauschenberg and Lucy Lippard.[32]

For these artists in socialist Yugoslavia, the pop artikl was interesting as a popular, common, mass-produced item whose use value as the basis of market relations could be opposed. Pop items were items created from a mass-produced good that the artist redistributed in a democratic way. Although Yugoslavia was by no means a consumerist society, some free market activity had started in the mid 1960s, and OHO commented on this development.[33] These items were not an expression of the development of a larger popular consumerist culture as was the case in the United States. Tomaz Brejc, the major writer on OHO at the time, deemed reism as the return to the object itself and Pogacnik's early casts of objects as a way for the viewer to see the object's actual existence that is usually obliterated by utilitarian function.[34] The

utilitarianism that OHO fought was part of everyday life in socialist Yugoslavia. For example, Marko Pogacnik made small simple line drawings on scores of matchbox labels and filled the boxes with drawings and texts and sold the matchboxes at his own table at the main marketplace in downtown Ljubljana. OHO editions and books were for sale in the arcade market 'Kazina' in central Ljubljana.[35]

The artists believed that their pop artikls removed the touch of the artist, which was a popular goal at the time in the west, through processes of casting and printing. However, OHO's larger goal of these processes was to point out the individual character of the artikl, so it was not lost to the generic. Although similarities can be seen between reism and the art of Ed Ruscha, John Baldessari, or Peter Weibel, crucial differences prevail. OHO created small items that were were personalized with names and humor. Reism was not a cold systematic exploration of linguistic and sign systems. Rather, reism illustrated OHO member I.G. Plamen's assertion in "The Manifesto of Seriality" that the function of art is "to create an order in which the differentiation of the specific becomes visible," drawing on Saussure's work on language as a system of differences.[36] Thus, reism could be seen as a kind of critical visual play on socialist propaganda. Reistic practice erased inequality--a goal of socialism as well--paradoxically in order to highlight subjective differences.

This reading is at odds with some previous readings of OHO's work as thoroughly depoliticized. Alex Erjavec has written in the recently published compendium *Impossible Histories* that OHO was completely modernist and untainted by politics, and he drew parallels between reism and Viktor Shklovsky and the Russian futurists as well as the French nouveau roman writers.[37] They may not have been motivated by politics, but they were certainly not untouched by politics. Furthermore, in the same collection of essays, Misko Suvakovic states that, "Eastern European conceptual art is politicized by the very fact of its critical and decentralized positioning in the political landscape controlled by the bureaucratic structures of single-party political systems."[38]

OHO stated that reism was non-humanist and non-anthropocentric because they wanted to re-orient the dichotomy of man as subject and artwork as object.[39] Pogacnik believed that art is "a task of formation and transformation of the world, or existence; in a certain way this work is objective," not an autonomous or subjective activity. He wished to liberate the art item from subjectivity in an attempt to prevent it from being taken over by ideology or anthropocentrism. He saw art as "an objective work in transformation of the world, in making sense of the self, or in the cheerful joy of life" not to be spoiled by personal expression.[40] The ways in which OHO addressed the art object sheds light on the paradox of a professed non-subjective practice that nonetheless addressed, in part, the sense of self of the artist. Along the lines of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, they wanted to explore "mutual and equal relations between things as individual and particular entities."[41] More accurately, reism and all of OHO's work, was not necessarily non-humanist but non-human-centric. Their work displayed an open dialectic between the autonomous object liberated from subjectivity or ideological meaning, on one hand, and the belief in the art object's existence as contingent in relay on the other. Underlying this is the necessity of creating distance in order to make sense of the self and setting borders

and limits for a healthy psyche. This approach has influenced the contemporary generation of artists in Southeast Europe.[42]

These questions of positioning took on spatial form in Pogacnik's series of "Family" investigations and OHO's later environmental art. Igor Zabel noted that their endeavor was a re-examination of the human condition in the contemporary world as man confronted new means of production and consumption; he called reism post-humanism.[43] Therefore Zabel must have used "post-"as a continuation of the practice of humanism in a new light, so calling it a non-humanist practice would be misleading. They focused on the specificity of objects instead of relying on a functionalist assignment of meaning to objects. OHO wished to replace the anthropocentric and classical notion of the subject "in which the position, activity and even the consciousness of man are merely elements determined by broader defining structures."[44]

OHO created in multiple mediums, in part, as a conscious criticism of mainstream practice of local existential modernism that was executed in strictly delineated mediums of painting, sculpture, poetry, prose, and theater.[45] OHO was opposed to the narrow local art environment in Slovenia, and focused on transparency in the art process. Although reism was specific to Slovenia as it grew out of Dusan Pirjevec's work, OHO made it their own.[46] Braco Rotar, a critic at the time, noted that OHO reacted strongly against the art scene's unspoken mandate for strictly controlled reading of meaning with their reism. OHO aimed for visual clarity and transparency of meaning, whereas the Slovenian scene was interested in expressionism and impressionism. He wrote that OHO wished to work on a visual level focused on direct experience of the world that was free from pre-determined meanings and ideology. Their notion of visual was the organization of the world according to a visual code. They did not speculate on truth, essence, nothingness, or existence and instead worked directly with experience of the world.[47] so that their work was infused with awareness and openness. The *OHO Book*, for example, was laid out so that the order and orientation of the pages could be reconfigured freely by the viewer.

OHO emerged out of this philosophical background combined with the influence of the 1965 English translation of Hans Richter's *Dada-Art and Anti-Art* which touted "playful, spontaneous, irrational, collective creativity." Igor Zabel ascribes the character of OHO to the differences of personality in Pogacnik and Matanovic, which created a healthy tension between structuralism and semiotics of interest to the former and Dadaist tendencies which fascinated the latter.[48] Dada had been a strong force in Slovenia throughout the 1920s all the way to the 1960s with the publication *Tank* and Srecko Kosovel's poem *Integrali* published in 1967. OHO subscribed to the notion that "we can think (not understand) thought in a fantastic manner (this is not in the manner of representation). Ununderstood and unimagined thought which occupies its reality in a fantastic manner is absurd thought."[49] OHO continually used play and games throughout their oeuvre. They believed that "after the projects of changing the world proved themselves to be violence against the world and were given up, games and play remain a possible way of existing."[50]

In OHO's work from 1962 to 1965 connections can be drawn to early 20th-century avant-garde art of Kandinsky, Dada, T.S. Eliot, and Slovenian poet Srecko Kosovel.[51]

Kosovel (1904-1926), active in the late teens and early 1920s, started as an expressionist and moved to work in a futurist style. He made collages and was in contact with Ljubimir Micic and Ve Poljanski from Zenit. Kosovel used lines, as well as mathematical and other symbols in his work. Writer Dubravka Djuric quoted critic Denis Poniz description of Kosovel's poems: "Futurism and Dadaism taught the coldest, most sober and insensitive view of the poetic process, glorifying and focusing on the very means, process, and method of assembly. Instead constructivisim as Srecko Kosovel developed it was put on a different, human, ethical basis."[52] In 1925-6 Kosovel held radical political views and expressed them in his constructivist poetry. Srecko Kosovel's poem *Integrali* (*Integrals*) was first published in 1967, long after his death. This constructivist visual poem had an enormous impact on OHO. Kosovel's poetry and collage was considered to be mild and spare compared to Zenit's more extreme and provocative stance.[53] The avant-garde in Slovenia took a different form from the rest of Yugoslavia because the relationship between the political and artistic avant-garde was different. Slovenia was more isolated and the tendency was for art there to be more aestheticized.[54]

Geister and Pogacnik read Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Husserl.[55] Whereas Husserl differentiated between an act of consciousness and the "object in itself" at which the action was directed, OHO's application to reism of the notion of the "object in itself" was different from phenomenology.[56] Their goal was to rid perception of meanings created by humans that were merely appearances overlaid on the thing. This mode of detachment, aimed at revealing a core truth and ending preoccupation with transient notions, reflected general Buddhist philosophy that was popular at the time. In fact, art critic Igor Mandic wrote an article that addressed OHO's work in the Zagreb-based newspaper *Vjesnik* on January 22, 1967, titled "Dada, Beat, and Buddha." OHO combined these influences with Slovenian writer Dusan Pirjevec's notion that the experience of the thing's independence was inseparable from human finality and mortality. However Igor Zabel claimed that OHO was not as concerned with existential issues but with the "unbridled potential of liberation of 'the thing'."[57]

Geister and Pogacnik, who were knowledgeable in the areas of phenomenology and existentialist philosophy, as well as structuralism, post-structuralism, semiotics and the French nouvel roman, combined this background with Marxist and neo-Marxist though to produce reism. Most importantly, the popularity in 1960s Yugoslavia of the writings of the young Marx and his theory of alienation and reification had the greatest impact on OHO. In addition, the nouvel roman was very popular in Slovenian intellectual life, and its notion that being has no meaning outside of itself was central to reism.[58] Ales Erjavec has written that what he termed non-politicized art of visual poetry and conceptualism co-existed with the anthropological writings of Marx and Western Marxism of the Frankfurt School without political provocation.[59] However, this paints the artistic and political picture of post-war Yugoslavia with too broad a brush and does not go far enough to acknowledge the unusual nature of the interaction between art and politics at that time.

OHO was not politically engaged in an overtly activist sense. However, at the time, the artists were viewed as hooligans (beatniks) and promoted "radical non-conformity with the 'horizon of expectations'." The group expressed dissatisfaction with

the growing consumer culture (though quite small in Yugoslavia in comparison to Western Europe) and also with the protest against it.[60] This was similar to the attitude of Guy Debord. Throughout OHO's oeuvre, starting with reism, the group encouraged focus on individual details that would otherwise be lost in the generic. Different from other avant-garde movements, rather than a protest or an attempt to change the world, OHO "wanted to transform consciousness into a permanently open and attentive reistic vision."[61] Their concern with the liberation of the thing had strong ontological implications as manifested in their statement: "What does it (space) do in its freedom? It observes. To observe, to see oneself means to be free. To observe, to look elsewhere, further from oneself, means to be in a relationship or a dichotomy."[62] Through reism, they believed the point was not to change the world but that it was only necessary to truly see the world.[63]

Jesa Denegri's writing about OHO in his article in Marijan Susovski's landmark publication *The New Art Practice of the 1960s and 1970s in Yugoslavia* revealed the concerns of the late 1970s as much as analysis of OHO's projects. Denegri argued that the new art exposed the backward-looking art academy and established art institutions in Yugoslavia. The young generation of artists launched its criticism by developing a new process and aim for artmaking. He stated that the motivation for the new art was the "need of the subject for self-expression and self-affirmation in an active and contradictory spiritual reality which is always full of tension. It was the feeling of existential determination and not a purposely provocative or even socially deviant attitude that has led to the occasional conflict between an individual or the phenomenon as a whole and certain structures and institutions in the socio-cultural medium." So their work was not a priori opposition to society as a whole, but opposition to certain institutions that represented social privilege or retrograde ideas.[64] He asserted that the hallmark of the new art practice was the "independent behavior of the personality which expresses itself through the work. It is this characteristic in the structure of the meaning that expresses the awareness of the freedom to use one's own 'anarchy of the imagination,' which today is tolerated only in art."[65] This is truly the basis for OHO's oeuvre and is the feature that differentiates their art from other conceptual art of that time.

Attitudes Towards Form and The Contingent Individual in OHO's Oeuvre

Marko Pogacnik's 1966 solo exhibition at Preseren House in Kranj showed the expansion in his notion of reism. In his 1965 solo show at Preseren House he produced a forty-meter scroll of the progression of a line. This was his version of the history of modern art through drawing. From this formal presentation of the most bare essence of drawing he shifted to present his own body as the artwork in his solo show the next year. His 1966 exhibition was closed down by the authorities, and so the spontaneous decision to exhibit his own body was an act of political protest but also was a presentation of his body as an artistic medium as well as object.[66] Although body art in Southeast Europe had been pioneered years before in 1962 by Croatian artist Tomislav Gotovac and enacted by other artists in western Europe and in the United States, Pogacnik's act carried

an urgent proclamation. Despite the government's attempt to tamper with his art practice, Pogacnik asserted his physical presence and thus his artistic and philosophical stance.

The 1969 exhibition at the Student Center Gallery in Zagreb demonstrates a shift in the group's priorities towards an Arte Povera style of working with material that started in 1968. Tomaz Salamun, Matanovic, Nez, Andraz Salamun formed a splinter group of OHO called the Great Grandfathers. They were intrigued by Arte Povera and created many works in this vein. Tomaz Salamun worked at odds with reism during this period and instead favored witty invention in his process and with a poetic arbitrariness he chose and isolated a thing or event in an everyday situation and transposed it to become art.[67] His installation as part of the Great Grandfathers exhibition at the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb demonstrated this. He reproduced in the gallery a simple stack of hay that he saw in the field. The process of personal selection and presentation was of paramount importance to Salamun's work at this time. Igor Zabel points out that Italian artist Pino Pascalli was a strong point of reference for the group as seen in Matanovic's inflatable environment *The Wood* and Nez's *The Jungle* of draped steel wool.[68] David Nez employed a "less is more" approach in his work of this period. For *The Roof* he transferred the roof of the gallery onto the floor in an act of double nonsense. Rotar wrote that this was not just a play on meaning of the object or an ironic transposition of a familiar object, but his reconfiguration was a way to create a different perspective from which the viewer can perceive the object. Rotar claimed that not many people understood their exhibition in Zagreb, only art critic Zeljka Corak.[69]

The Great Grandfathers created their next exhibition at Youth Tribune Gallery in Novi Sad November 3-7, 1969 and titled this "Great-Great Grandfathers." This and their exhibition in Dom Omladine from the 20th of November to the 9th of December were both documented by catalogues. This year's BITEF "Happening with a Whistle" took place on the streets of Ljubljana and also in Belgrade during a "Programmed Theater" happening. Pogacnik created mobiles made of cards with drawings that were created with a strict numerical code, however the game was not limited to be only linear. Tomaz Salamun had a solo exhibition in Kranj at the Preseren Gallery, where he exhibited his famous piece, *Morje* (Sea). This dada poem as an installation consisted of six young men in military uniform lay on the floor with dough on top of them to spell out the word *Morje* (Sea).

In his writings, Art historian Jesa Denegri positioned Yugoslav art from 1968-1978 in the international context of events in Italy like Germano Celant's "Precronistoria" exhibition and "Arte abitabile" at Sperone Gallery in Turin and "Eccentric Abstraction" at Fischbach Gallery in New York. Also "Op Losse Schereuven" at the Stedelijk in 1969, Szeemann's groundbreaking exhibition at Bern Kunsthalle in 1969 and "The New Art" at the Hayward in 1972.[70] The change in material status of the art object had political and philosophical overtones in socialist Yugoslavia. However there is not a consensus on the degree or type of political involvement of OHO, and of all conceptual art in Yugoslavia.

After the "Great-Grandfathers" exhibitions, OHO's practice shifted to investigate relationships and processes.[71] Although OHO could be compared to Fluxus, the artists did not have access to information on Fluxus, and more likely it is the influence of Dada, which both movements share that accounts for their similarity in approach. In 1966, OHO

undertook their first public actions in an urban environment. The group published an open invitation in the art journal *Tribuna* for anyone interested to join in producing sounds with various objects.[72]

In 1969 and 1970 it has been written that OHO's work moved into a post-minimalist anti-form style. Igor Zabel has written that they most likely did not know much about "anti-form" as described by Harald Szeemann for his legendary *When Attitudes Become Form* exhibition at the Kunsthalle in Bern in 1969.[73] Szeemann highlighted the importance of the artist's activity. He noticed that in recent artmaking the activity of the artist became the subject and the content of the artwork instead of the production of a separate art object. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s there was a lot of artistic exchange between Italy and Yugoslavia, so Arte Povera was well known to OHO. On the other hand, they did not have clear role models for a more conceptual track of process art and anti-art.

Thus, they developed their own approach, which was a hybrid that emphasized a relay between process and object, and also among individual artists in a group. So their practice maintained a concern with metaphysics, specifically ontology, more than semiotics, which preoccupied much conceptual art of the time internationally. Conceptualism in Yugoslavia was not a delayed second-hand practice from Western Europe or the United States, but a practice developed by artists in Yugoslavia who were concerned with artistic processes and relationships of objects and people. Igor Zabel wrote that "OHO combined a conceptual approach with material form."[74] This is true, and furthermore it was an interest in the dynamic relationships of material forms and of people that generated their conceptualism. Information and communication, so central to conceptualism in the West, took form in Yugoslavia as objects and relationships of objects and people. As Marko Pogacnik has written, "A work of art is not only an object in itself but, rather, a factor of change in one's self, relation, culture, life, and civilization." Attentiveness or "OHO contemplation" asserted that being was more important than making. Pogacnik continues: "Artwork became a medium for the detection of transcendental, esoteric, and other spiritual content."[75]

In Andraz Salamun's *Reciprocal Symmetry* (1970) two participants stood on opposite sides of a river, each holding a stick in different colors. The first person made a series of predetermined gestures and the other responded with a symmetrical gesture. This is similar to Joan Jonas's *Songdelay* (1973). Both artists were concerned with physical gestures of communication, and in particular the synchronous and non-synchronous points of this interaction.

Whereas this piece of Salamun's took a performative direction, in the same year David Nez created a number of "time-space structures" that investigated relationships of form. These projects were forerunners to his later experiments with the form of group relations. One such piece was a series of photographs of a shifting point of light from different directions. These photographs of a glowing flare resulted in simple shapes of a straight line, a curve, and a circle as a visual and spatial manifestation of the movement of time. Similarly, in Nez's 1970 *Symmetric-Parallel Realization* two equally long parallel lines of poured gasoline were ignited. At midnight, the first line was lit from one end and at noon the second line was ignited at the far end.[76] These visual and spatial

projects did not use metaphor and did not create a tangible object as an output in a traditional artistic sense. The process was of paramount importance and presented an alchemical transformation of material. Another piece of Nez's in which transformation is the content of the artwork is a piece in which a stactometer drops water onto a hot aluminum plate and the water vaporizes.

Marko Pogacnik's *Family of Fire, Water and Air* explored material relationships and their transformation. *Family of Weight, Measure, and Position* was presented in Novi Sad in November and in Belgrade at Dom Omladine in December of 1969. Regarding this piece, Pogacnik maintained that the production of an art object could be 'replaced' by a diagram because the content of the work was actually the relationship between objects, and this could be grasped conceptually. Zabel concluded that OHO's conceptual art was one of relational patterns represented through geometric forms.[77] Indeed, just as OHO's conceptualism was not wholly anti-form, it was also not anti-representational.

OHO created installations in order to make sense of the self and setting borders and limits for a healthy psyche motivated their reist objects and also their work with spatial installations in gallery settings, as well as work in the urban environment and interaction with woods, entire city or country. Thus borders took on another dimension (from individual to geographic, and then to spheres of consumption and political practice) It could be said this was very much like Debord's Situationist undertakings. Pogacnik considered this process a type of democratization: because the object was liberated from personal expressiveness, anyone could collaborate and this was not limited to professional skills. In his words, "suddenly it was possible to create in common with others, without any feeling that our inner self was being threatened." In the years 1965-69, OHO worked as individual collaborators, with shared inspiration. Pogacnik emphasized that "OHO strictly sustained the principle of the individual artist throughout these transformations of collective creation. Although these claims might seem contradictory it was precisely the concurrence of these contrasting tenets that interested and inspired us." And furthermore, he wrote,

> As we wished to distance ourselves from the exclusive nature of ordinary authorship—since we were interested in the creation of a different kind of collective space, or another world—we were also distanced from contemporary socialist egalitarianism. Individuality certainly has to be preserved, even if something common is being created. Furthermore, an autonomous self is a condition for the development of a balanced and free collective. [78]

This statement is key to understanding how artists in Yugoslavia saw themselves and their practice in relation to the socialist state.

OHO's approach to body art was to create a process of liberating the body and then re-disciplining it through meditation and schooling to bring it back into harmony with the universe. In their last phase, OHO thought of the body as part of the idea to find balance between the individual and the group, nature, culture and the universe as a whole. As part of the schooling process, Nez engaged in body exercises in which he focused on

his diet, movement, and breathing in works including *Coordination of Body Processes*, 1970.[79]

Nez's 1969 *Cosmology* may have been a forerunner to Marina Abramovic's *Drawing and Positioning/Rhythm 5: Bright Burning Star, Lighting Fire Star, Cutting Hair, and Cutting Fingernails,* which she executed ca. 1970 in Belgrade. In this work, although the placement of the artist's body in the center of the circle is a direct reference to Leonardo da Vinci's *Cosmology*, the performance does not promote the notion of an anthropocentric universe. Nez's goal was to achieve an "ecstatic experience of a body that can (through breathing and meditation) harmonize and unite itself with the cosmos."[80]

OHO's body art co-existed with their practice of art in the environment. During the summer of 1968, OHO conducted many art actions in Zvezda Park in central Ljubljana. These were improvised projects completed by the spontaneous collaboration of passers-by. Matanovic inflated a long plastic tube with air from a vacuum cleaner to create tunnels in which participants could join and play. With this, he set up an environment for play instead of creating an autonomous object.[81] In late December 1968 David Nez, Matanovic, and Drago Dellabernardina staged one of OHO's most legendary performances, *Mt. Triglav.* They stood together and donned a large black piece of material with three holes through which they poked their heads at different heights. The triglav is the Slovenian national symbol. Enlivening this symbol in public view at the end of the year 1968, which marked the beginning of the erosion of decentralization (Tito's hallmark brand of socialism) playfully raised the political question in the public realm. Invoking a national symbol was a way of demonstrating freedom of expression and cultivating democracy by calling attention to decentralization---and to the dangers of its erosion. At the same time the performance was also an example of the notion of surprise that the name OHO implies that undermines recognition of symbols about which the viewer assumes prior knowledge.

Many of their art projects in the environment were a reistic response to the landscape. In the summer of 1969, OHO took their projects outdoors into nature in the woods near the River Sava, in Kokrica above Kranj, at Srakane, and in Koper. In these locations they made art that addressed the confrontation of man's states of mind with the natural environment.

Milenko Matanovic placed long thin wooden sticks connected by a rope into the Ljubljanica river. This piece, *The Snake* (1969) took on the shape of the river as the current gently moved the object. This poetic confusion of the meaning of an art object explored art as a medium for human understanding of natural processes. Matanovic's *Installations with wooden sticks in the forest* (1969) emphasized the relationship of materials manifested in the balance and tension between the rods, which held the piece together. A third piece of the same year *Wheat and rope* (1969), focused on the tension and balance of materials as a rope pulls gently across a field of wheat forming a line from the multitude of stalks. David Nez's 1969 photo project *A white line on black, a black line on white* also created a line, this time on the ground from unrolled newsprint paper and alternately of a path of cleared snow. This piece emphasized positive and negative as seen in the photogenic quality of the installations and the relationship of the two finished

photographs rather than the relationship of the materials. On the other hand, his *Sculpture* (1969) in which a string was attached to a rock on the ground and to a tree to make it bow under the tension, continued the exploration of weight and position of natural materials.

Nez tied 400 meters of invisible string around Ljubjlana castle for *Invisible Sculpture* (1969). He then affixed small pieces of the string to postcards and sent them to various addresses. The relationship explored in this piece was between the unmoving mount of the castle perch and the possibility of distributing the image of the castle. The flexible string was the common ground for these scenarios as it could be affixed both to the mount and also to the postcard. In the summer of 1969 Nez constructed several outdoor sculptures involving mirrors in the landscape. This was exactly the same time as Robert Smithson's *Mirror Displacements* (1969) in the Yucatan.[82] Brejc noted that paradoxically, the reflections were the optical 'matter' as the object became dematerialized by reflecting the landscape. The symmetry of the placement of rectangular mirrors created the contrast of a fixed optical drawing.[83]

A neat grid of small cube pavement stones underwent a change in Andraz Salamun's photo project *Pavement stones* (1969). The close-up scene was disrupted as several of the stones were dislodged from their places and left askew. The next photograph in the series showed more of the stones in disarray and then in the next, several more. His brother Tomaz Salamun's photo project *117 degrees Celsius* (1969) was even more succinct. In two images, he showed his foot above a fire made of twigs set ablaze on the winter snow. The companion photograph was simply his foot stamped into the snow to transfer the heat of the fire from his foot into the icy snow. Nez's humorous *Photoprojects: Sea, Adriatic and Atlantic Sea, David Nez Makes Bora, David Nez Drinks Up the Sea,* (1969) lightly played with OHO pursuit in their photo projects to show the "potential of photography to transpose a certain situation into a new context and thus give it new meaning."[84] The first photograph in the series was one glass of water; the second showed two glasses; the third was Nez making bubbles in the water (making bora, a weather condition of strong wind from the Adriatic), and the last showed him drinking the glass of water. OHO's photo projects were not documentation of land art or a performance; they were the art objects themselves. In addition, they were more than reist exercises that exposed a pure meaning of an object that had been covered up by preconceived notions.

In November 1969, for OHO's exhibition in Novi Sad, Pogacnik worked with simple materials to investigate the interaction of their elementary characteristics like weight, height and gravity. Marko Pogacnik's installations *Family of weight, measure, and position* (1969) depicted these three aspects of geometric forms and thus focused on the principle of the family or network of relations. With three different combinations of strings and weights—small weights to bend small razorblades, then a two-kilo weight that rested on the ground, and last, a rubber band with a five-kilo weight that hovered suspended—he wished to show the complexity of perception. In a related series *Family of fire, air and water,* he explored how "the elements were connected in dynamic functional and mutually defining relation and transformation."[85] As part of his ongoing experimentation with the notion of the "family of elements" he partially filled plastics bags with water so that two elements, water and air, co-habitated in the bags. Pogacnik

believed that the four elements were guides for man and universe and so his artworks were an experiential method to understand the interaction of the elements and the energies that direct them. Brejc wrote that with these simple studies based on direct experience, Pogacnik endeavored to find hidden energies in man and nature that had been obscured by positivist anthropocentric science.[86]

With the OHO Festival in fall 1969 (from November 20 to December 12) at Dom Omladine in Belgrade, each artist showed his notion of conceptualism. Brejc noted that this exhibition marked a move from an interest in objects and their positions to process. Their series of solo exhibitions shared an interest in the contingencies of natural elements. Andraz Salamun made a work with a combination of plaster, glass and metal pipes to register the inclinations and tensions of the elements and their weight and gravity and their sensory effect. David Nez placed a tile between two glass plates; tiny metal balls rotated on the plates. When a tube dripped liquid onto a hot plate the liquid evaporated. Pogacnik exhibited strings with weights. To say that his aim was not visual but was only to focus on the mental complexity of perception (as Brejc has written) misses the core of what made OHO's conceptualism so rare and important. They presented basic materials subjected to a process investigating their relations and from this produced sensory results. Although the projects worked with mental propositions, because this was combined with investigations of material processes, the results were sensory above all. Furthermore and very importantly, OHO were not interested in purely analytical processes or reductive techniques. Brejc wrote that reductive techniques were a hallmark of conceptual practice in general that OHO exhibited but that complex mental concepts were unique to OHO's conceptualism.[87]

However, an examination of their work reveals that their consideration of questions of perception and relationships as part of their ontological investigations coupled with the material processes and sensory results of these investigations were by far most important to OHO. At their exhibition in November 1969 at the Youth Tribune in Novi Sad, Nez and Pogacnik created spare installations with simple materials that revealed a banal humor in their experiments. Nez's *Project – a heater warms thermometer on the wall* and Pogacnik's *Project – water oozing from the lower into the upper bucket on a woolen yarn* were precisely what the titles described. The cause and effect relationships of materials and elemental states of warmth and wetness could also be seen as a wry comment on arte povera as the group transitioned to other concerns.

OHO's exhibition at Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade (1970), continued their interest in geometrical relationships as small manifestations of cosmic relationships. Matanovic aligned mirrors at the entry to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade for the Belgrade Triennial so that the rays of the sun would fall upon the entry of the museum on every hour. At the same exhibition, Andraz Salamun erected a stick outdoors at the museum to mark the movement of the sun by the shadow it cast. The path formed a circle of shadows. Marko Pogacnik calculated a numerical distribution of bands of aluminum that were affixed to 365 trees in a wood. This was part of his ongoing experimentation with his notion of the "family of elements." In these projects, he arranged the material according to a conceptual strategy rather than as a part of an aesthetic decision.[88]

OHO's environmental art had very different motivations and goals from land art created at the time in Britain and the United States. First, OHO created small works that did not change the landscape as opposed to the monumental Land Art of the United States. Igor Zabel has written that OHO's work was a reflection of Romantic contact and harmony with the landscape,[89] whereas in many cases US Land Art was an individual gesture of the artist, for example in the work of Michael Heizer. The most significant difference in Yugoslavia's environmental art and US land art is their relationships to the art market. Artists including Michael Heizer, Walter de Maria, James Turrell, and Robert Smithson headed to the American Southwest to challenge the art market's valuation of their practice. Their work was "deliberately made to resist any adequate representation elsewhere."[90] Although preparatory drawings and photo documents circulated on the market, inevitably implicating the American southwestern Land Art projects themselves back in the market. Land Art projects in Yugoslavia had not repercussions in the art market whatsoever. Also, these artists were not attempting to evade the market by turning to the landscape since there was no viable art market in operation. Instead they saw Land Art as a way to build relations among different locations including the gallery. Going out to the landscape was not a search for seclusion.

OHO's Land Art was marked by a particular combination of formal and spiritual concerns. James Turrell's and Michael Heizer's work similarly can be seen as metaphysical investigations as much as formal investigations. Specifically, OHO's land art was not minimal in a strictly reductive or analytical sense but was instead intuitive. Such was Milenko Matanovic's *Project* (1970), a constellation of candles in the field that corresponded to the constellation of the stars in the sky. Generally, OHO's land art was not permanent, left no scars on the landscape, and was quite small scale. This was completely opposite in methodology from United States land artists. Another distinction was that some United States artworks like Dan Graham's interactive sculptures and photo essay Houses for America and Robert Smithson's natural history projects pointedly address popular culture. In Yugoslavia this undertone was not present.

OHO, like their peers, were concerned with the problem of adequation; this is best seen in their drawing practice and its relationship to other mediums. Drawn diagrams were an essential part of OHO's oeuvre. Their diagrams are the artwork, not merely documentation or preparatory drafts for a work to be executed in another media. OHO's drawings raise the quandary of scale as they attempt to grapple with spatial and temporal questions of experience in the world through very simple means. OHO specifically put the medium of drawing into relation with their outdoor installation projects as a manifestation of their relational investigations. Theirs was a modest approach as compared to magnanimous land art. Such modesty is often the traditional assumption about drawing, though OHO's was not traditionally representational. OHO believed that if their drawings of an object awakened its presence, then this activated the space around the object and so space itself could be reist.[91]

They grappled with the question of adequation through drawing in a variety of projects. In November 1969, Tomaz Salamun walked from Petrovaradin Fortress in Novi Sad to the Youth Tribune gallery in the center of the city and drew a line marking his path through town with chalk. In Belgrade he drew parallel lines on the gallery floor of

Dom Omladine. Marko Pogacnik's *Spatial vibrations* (1970) drawings and Nez's drawings of the vibrations of travel were mediums for expressions of the artists' experiences of the world. Pogacnik dropped 200-centimeter lengths of string onto the floor. A grid drawn beforehand on the floor allowed the line of the random pile to be transferred easily as a drawing on paper. The results of Nez's *Drawings documenting vibrations of travel during the artist's trip from Ljubljana to Washington DC* (1970) are manifold. They are formal explorations of differentiation and quality of line as well as a record of the motion of the pen on paper caused by the mode of transportation and evidence of the randomness of this document. From the drawings Matanovic must have accompanied Nez on the train from Postojna to Trieste because two drawings of this stretch exist—by Nez and Matanovic. They were surprisingly different in texture, length of lines, though they both occupy the same quadrant of the page.

Transcendental Conceptualism

OHO's unique approach to conceptualism was concerned with material properties as a result of interaction or transformation rather than total dematerialization or negation of an art object. Brejc wrote in the late 1970s that OHO wanted to study and present processes that were not optically provable. Their work was to become a reference for the viewer to OHO's metaphysical and spiritual experiences.[92]

What Tomaz Brejc termed OHO's transcendental conceptualism started at the time of their invitation to participate in Kynaston McShine's "Information" exhibition at MoMA in 1970. In February of that year, Matanovic and Nez traveled to New York for meetings about the exhibition and began the *Intercontinental Group Project: American-Europe*. Specifically, in the first part of this work, the four artists drew a sign in the field at the same time and in the second part, the four simultaneously looked into the sun and dropped metal objects onto a piece of paper and marked its position. Combining simultaneous timing with fields for action and drawing, such projects were "systematic rituals to draw the group closer together."[93] The New York-Ljubljana project was an exercise to develop concentration and intuition in their relations. They wished to maintain strong communication regardless of spatial distance or time difference.

David Nez and Marko Pogacnik created a number of projects that investigated group ritual behavior and internal group relations. In *Simultaneous-symmetrical realization on two locations*, Nez linked actions by two people in the two cities of Florence and Ljubljana. Every hour on the hour between 10 am and one pm on April 25, 1970, Milenko Matanovic in Ljubljana and David Nez at the Gallery Techne in Florence held a piece of paper and decided whether to set it on fire or not. This act was analytical and systematic but also relational. Documentation of Nez's projects was presented at a variety of places and times. For example, a ritual he produced in Zarica yielded a text that he presented in the Belgrade Triennale catalogue. So the project became larger than itself through dispersal and relay between various sites and mediums.

Marko Pogacnik conceived of the "OHO Group-Man" as an imagined structure of individual points and positions to visualize a social group's internal relations. The OHO

Group-Man was a designed intersubjective subject fashioned from the relationships of systems, senses, rational thought, and intuition.[94] For example, in *OHO group-man* (1970) there were four individual positions of group members, which are the basis for the group's complex relational structure of differences and mutual relations. This structure, Pogacnik believed, then entered the relational structure of a higher order. Pogacnik's projects explored his notions that balanced and dynamic relations are the constitutive element of a group and their balanced position within the world of nature and culture and within the spiritual and cosmic realm.[95] This was the concept of the family that Pogacnik began to work with in this last phase before the move to Sempas. A family in his terms was a whole comprising different individual dynamic elements; the relations of these dynamics produce a unity of a higher order.[96]

Brejc wrote that their knowledge about one another acquired a broader spiritual context as seen in their projects at Zarica Valley near Kranj. This area had a rich spiritual tradition, and here OHO used sun and light, fire at night to link sky and earth, and ritual movements with stones and water to engage what they believed was the spiritual energy of the geographic site.[97] Milenko Matanovic created *Relation Sun-Zarica Valley-the star Venus* (1970) with mirrors which captured the path of the setting sun, and candles which marked the arc of the ascent of the star. The diagram of the project showed these paths in alignment with the axis of the valley floor.

At Aktionsraum 1 in Munich the group conducted meditation and breathing exercises to explore the spiritual projection of biological and mineral processes. With these exercises, they investigated spiritual communication with the past, the cosmos, and the rhythms of nature and human biology. These cathartic actions are embedded in imagination. Drawings survived from these exercises. Brejc claimed that because transcendental conceptualism was not based on stylistic, iconographic, or formal grounds, it eluded critical terminology and classification as it. Instead transcendental conceptualism was a turn to mysticism and transcendental meditation. OHO began investigating supersensory perception and energies as a group. "OHO still operated as a coherent group, but the individual development of each member, his perception of time and space, history and intellect became the source and structure of their conceptualism."[98]

Misko Suvakovic saw in transcendental conceptualism that, "aspects of the world accessible to the senses are not shown or documented. Instead the natural and human worlds are presented as an order of relationships that can be given conceptually (in terms) or mentally (in imagination) in the world or the mind."[99]

Transcendental conceptualism was for OHO a turn to mysticism and transcendental meditation. For OHO, this period could only follow reism since investigating the mental and spiritual for the group presupposed a full knowledge of the material world. This was not religious. Matanovic and Nez were studying Indian philosophy and contemporary experimental music. Pogacnik was reading Empedocles and Celtic texts and was most concerned with the ethical tradition of European art history.[100] In his 2007 essay, included in the new edition of Igor Zabel's monograph *OHO*, Pogacnik stated that their art in 1969-71 "was resistance against attempts on the part of official religions to exclusively appropriate the sphere that had always also been a domain of art, namely the sphere of exploration of the mystery of being, or establishing

the self. It was also resistance against the politics that supported such appropriation by covering information about the scope of the free search for the spiritual."[101]

What are the definitions and implications for art history of transcendental conceptualism? Very importantly, Brejc emphasizes that OHO conceptualism was not primarily a "semiotics of art." Their art was not a 'language.' In Brejc's words, their work was not focused on clever linguistics, semiotics, or information theory; their concerns were very different from analytical conceptualism, which proposed art to be ideas about art. Instead, to OHO art linked analytical propositions "with visions of inaudible but active energies of the positive, "good" consciousness, with ethical evaluation of art production and, lastly, with the spiritual interpretations of cosmic recollections."[102]

Unlike Joseph Kosuth or Art & Language, OHO introduced spiritual, esoteric and mystical dimensions to their artwork. Furthermore in 1970-1, the community of OHO was becoming the actual subject of their artwork. OHO aimed to achieve harmony through and in the group with their artwork, and that this harmony would allow art to transcend the border into life. In 1970, the four members of OHO were Matanovic, Nez, Pogacnik, and Andraz Saluman. Their relations became increasingly intense.[103]

Igor Zabel took a slightly different approach from Brejc. He pointed out that there were two threads in OHO's work: analytical and transcendental conceptualism. Understandably, he acknowledged that they were not completely separate. Furthermore, he breaks down analytical conceptualism into time-space, mediality, self-definition and analysis of works conditions and determinants.[104] With this interpretation, all definitions of conceptualism crumble and dissipate as the floodgates open to all designations of what could be conceptual art. Although Zabel wrote supportively, appreciatively, and very knowledgably about OHO, he seemed to disown the term transcendental conceptualism, perhaps because it appeared to be an oddity and did not fit into the international definition of conceptualism overshadowed by Joseph Kosuth or Art & Language.

Zabel argued that transcendental conceptualism specifically referred to the notion of "families" and communal relations.[105] Brejc commented that in these years OHO's their life and works "gained in intensity and further developed an indestructible link between tem as well as true spiritual work which grew out of friendship and evolved into an emotional, intellectual and experiential whole." As Pogacnik said, the OHO man was not fictional but could be experienced in their work and in conversations with the artists.[106] Decades later in the 1990s Russian art historian and curator Viktor Misiano, who worked extensively with the Ljubljana group NSK born of the 1980s, wrote part-manifesto, part-diagnosis of the artmaking of the post-socialist time as the "Institutionalization of Friendship."

Group artmaking pervaded the New Art Practice, but this did not operate as one might expect. In many cases, as was the case with OHO, the members varied from one exhibition to the next. Collaborations between artists were made through working together spontaneously, not for specific presentations. In nearly all cases, and certainly it was true of OHO, that the individual retained full authorship of the artwork. Sempas was a prime example of the fact that the group dynamic in experimental artmaking in Yugoslavia at this time functioned more as a "spiritual" rather than professional

framework. Furthermore, art historian Jesa Denegri has stated that OHO's (and other artists' at the time) collaboration with international artists was a planned strategy of participation in the contemporary art and cultural scene.[107]

OHO pursued their wish for spiritual unity through telepathic projects. In connection with this, their schooling projects aimed at harmony in the community itself and also with the surrounding natural environment. Even though the conceptual plan or logic of the work is its "primary structure" as in traditional conceptual art. Transcendental conceptualism marries this with an exploration of relationships of material form as well as a Romantic relationship with nature. OHO creates the system as a field for action, for interactions and relations. Their transcendental conceptualism was manifested in geometries that highlighted the connection of humanity to nature. This mode also permeated the schooling projects. [108] Thus transcendental conceptualism has at its heart not only the idea, but also the communication of this idea and furthermore, very specific to OHO, the relationships of ideas.

Jesa Denegri quotes Jack Burnham as saying that the "ideal degree of conceptual art is telepathy." This is certainly the track that OHO pursued. However, Denegri concludes that Burnham's notion goes beyond the scope of existing art practices and is not relevant for art history.[109] Similar to Zabel's tendency to downplay the transcendental aspects of OHO's work, this dismissal of the goal of telepathy maintains an art historical strictness that is at odds with the artists' practice. Misko Suvakovic has written that a hallmark of OHO's pursuit of the metaphysical concepts of art during this period was that they did not deal with the world objects but of intersubjectivity, psychology and spiritual relations.[110] Certainly OHO's focus was on the relations between objects, however they certainly did not abandon object themselves and object-making.

Although the critics Brejc and Denegri, who wrote at the time and in the decade following OHO's active period, as well as Zabel who wrote two decades later, pinpointed differences in OHO's approach from other conceptual artists, they did not promote this positively as an experiment with "traditional" western conceptualism. So as not to become marginalized in this sphere, they promoted OHO as part of this traditional conceptualism not an alternative to it. Only with the distance of decades, perhaps, can this be reclaimed as a crucial alternative that enriches the "traditional" definitions and limitations of conceptualism.

Schooling and Family at Sempas, Nova Gorica

In the summer of 1969 and 1970 OHO conducted summer projects on the outskirts of Ljubljana and also at canyons in the countryside in Zarica near Kranj. This "group schooling" as they termed it could be seen as a critical reinvention of the political schooling and self-management that was conducted at the time by the socialist government. Political schooling had a place in many aspects of life in socialist Yugoslavia like the volunteer effort to construct the Highway of Brotherhood and Unity as well summer programs for youth. Self-management was Yugoslavia's hallmark style of socialist governance of the workplace in which every single person from the janitor to

the head of the factory had a voice in how the operations should be run. OHO held group artmaking sessions in which all the participants shared knowledge and so were both educators and learners. American artist Walter deMaria came to Ljubljana to participate in one of these sessions. For this "night project" the artists took turns staying up all night, rotating the lookout each hour.

The schooling took place at Zarica in Sorsko Polje and in the village of Cezoca in Western Slovenia. The participants worked together continually all day and did not pursue individual projects. The group scouted for a pattern of relations and for "geometrical gestalts to represent such relations, expressing their complexity as well as harmony in precise geometrical forms." Their activities included practices to heighten their focus and awaken their attention, very much like reism. Their daily practice systematically conceptualized the minute details of all of their activities.[111] So in this last phase of OHO's work the senses were brought together with conceptual analysis to form the basis of a group dynamic, and crafting art objects played a central role, though was not as compelling an outcome as their overall approach.

On April 11, 1971 OHO moved to the village of Sempas and founded "Family." OHO moved their activities to Nova Gorica when they, "decided to leave world of art and enter life."[112] In Misko Suvakovic's words, Sempas was a gesture of refusal by "choosing an aesthetics of silence over the corruptness of the ruling postmodernism world of art and social realist dreariness."[113]

OHO concluded that art can be "a carrier of spiritual information and energy that is indispensable to mankind."[114] Sempas was a working farm. The group's move could be said to be an experimental realization of the pure socialist dream of voluntary self-management on a small scale working on a collective farm. In a later chapter on art in Novi Sad, Zelimir Zilnik's merciless satirization of this ideal in his film *Early Works (Rani Radovi)*, (1969) referring to the immense popularity of the early period of Karl Marx's writings among young Yugoslav students is examined. At Sempas, formal schools of drawing and sculpture were instituted and in evening sessions everyone gathered to draw familiar natural objects. The thinking behind this was that because energy and thought and perception and form are inseparably linked, the elements are linked to mediate the course of the idea, therefore returning it to earth. Here a direct link back to OHO's arte povera period can be identified. Individuals in the group created hanging sculptures for example with draping threads to nearly touch the ground. Salamun's sculptures were direct visual realizations of Heraclitus' thoughts and NeoPlatonsim; he made straightforward spiritual propositions through his art practice. OHO's aim was the spiritual metamorphosis of man and of the world and the healing of the earth through movement, meditation and conversation to remove pollution from human activity. [115]

Furthermore, Suvakovic sees this era of OHO's art as a ludistic game, a return to ritual and the ritual nature of the game in everyday life. In Suvakovic's reckoning, life becomes the substance of art as art has lost its autonomy. He has written that when the ideal of the avant-garde was won, then the exclusivity of art was lost in day-to-day relations.[116] Though he acknowledged the avant-garde's overall failure because of the

impossibility of changing society and the individual through art.[117] It is precisely at the crux of this unresolved dialectic that art in Yugoslavia resided.

OHO's formation of Gesamtkunstwerk to connect art and life in a total artwork was to "apply the contemplation and attentiveness achieved in their artwork to life."[118] For OHO "Life was in fact an endeavor to 'realize' the possibilities preserved in art as something fictional."[119] This paradox lies at the heart of OHO's artmaking. This attitude laid the groundwork for the Ljubljana-based art collective of the 1980s NSK, which in turn inspired the new generation of neo-conceptual post-Yugoslav artists who emerged in the late 1990s. Looking at OHO's work in this light, calls attention to important connections with the legacies of distributed media, open source media, participatory modes of artmaking that became so important in Yugoslavia during the wars of the 1990s. Furthermore these modes were inspirations to western European and US new media and neo-conceptualists, whether the inspirations were conscious or not. Thus the questions "What was OHO?" and "When did it start and when did it end?" remain fruitfully at large.

Chapter Two Endnotes:

1 Igor Zabel, "A Short History of OHO," in *OHO* 2nd edition ed. Igor Spanjol (Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija, 2007), 114.

2 Ibid., 105.

3 Misko Suvakovic, "Impossible Histories" in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991* ed. Dubravka Djuric and Misko Suvakovic (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 29.

4 Zabel, 105.

5 Suvakovic, 26.

6 Ibid., 27.

7 Ibid., 26.

8 Ibid., 29.

9 no author, "Chronological Review" in *OHO* 2nd edition ed. Igor Spanjol (Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija, 2007), 146.

10 Ibid., 147.

11 Zabel, 109.

12 Zabel, 108.

13 Zabel, 115.

14 "Chronological Review," 146.

15 Marko Pogacnik, "OHO After OHO," in *OHO* 2nd edition ed. Igor Spanjol (Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija, 2007), 8.

16 Zabel, 109.

17 See my article "The Relay of Art and Democracy in 1960s and 1970s Yugoslavia" in *Centropa* (January 2008): 49-61, for an in-depth analysis of this.

18 "Chronological Review," 147.

19 Ibid., 147.

20 Zabel, 25.

21 Darko Simicic, "From Zenit to Mental Space: Avant-garde, Neo-avant-garde, and Post-avant-garde Magazines and Books in Yugoslavia, 1921-1987," in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991* ed. Dubravka Djuric and Misko Suvakovic (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 321.

22 Ibid., 321.

23 Zabel, 116.

24 Simicic, 321.

25 Igor Zabel, "From Reism to Conceptual Art," in *OHO* 2nd edition ed. Igor Spanjol (Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija, 2007), 29.

26 Zabel, 107.

27 Ibid., 148.

28 Ibid., 147.

29 Marko Pogacnik interviewed by Nathalie Zonnenberg, "Marko Pogacnik on OHO," in *Living Art: on the Edge of Europe* ex. cat. Kroller-Muller Museum ed. Nathalie Zonnenberg (Bielefeld, Germany: Kerber Verlag, 2006), 50.

30 Ibid., 52.

31 Zabel, 117.

32 Ibid., 110.

33 Ibid., 110.

34 Pogacnik, 13.

35 Zabel, "From Reism to Conceptual Art," 22.

36 Zabel, 112-113.

37 Ales Erjavec, "The Three Avant-Gardes and their Contexts: The Early, the Neo, and the Postmodern," in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991* ed. Dubravka Djuric and Misko Suvakovic (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 54.

38 Misko Suvakovic, "Conceptual Art" in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991* ed. Dubravka Djuric and Misko Suvakovic (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 213.

39 Zabel, 117.

40 Marko Pogacnik, "OHO After OHO," in *OHO* 2nd edition ed. Igor Spanjol (Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija, 2007), 8.

41 Zabel, 117.

42 See "ReAlignings?: Art in the Environs of Manifesta 3" in *Art Criticism* Vol. 16 No. 1 (Summer 2001) for more on this.

43 Zabel, 117.

44 Ibid., 117.

45 Misko Suvakovic, "Conceptual Art," 213.

46 Jesa Denegri, "Art in the Past Decade" in *The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1966-1978* ed. Marijan Susovski (Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1978), 10.

47 Tomaz Brejc, "OHO as an Artistic Phenomenon 1966-71" *The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1966-1978* ed. Marijan Susovski (Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1978), 13-18.

48 Zabel, 119.

49 Zabel, "From Reism to Conceptual Art," 15.

50 Ibid., 24.

51 Marko Pogacnik interviewed by Nathalie Zonnenberg, 52.

52 Dubravka Djuric, "Radical Poetic Practices: Concrete and Visual Poetry in the Avant-garde and Neo-avant-garde," in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-*

avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991 ed. Dubravka Djuric and Misko Suvakovic (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 79.

53 Ibid., 48.

54 Ibid., 46.

55 Zabel, 118.

56 Zabel, "From Reism to Conceptual Art," 19.

57 Ibid., 19.

58 Zabel, "A Short History of OHO," 118.

59 Erjavec, 55.

60 Igor Zabel, "From Reism to Conceptual Art," 20.

61 Ibid., 21.

62 Tomaz Brejc, "OHO as an Artistic Phenomenon 1966-71" *The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1966-1978* ed. Marijan Susovski (Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1978), 13.

63 Igor Zabel, "From Reism to Conceptual Art," 21.

64 Denegri, 12.

65 Ibid., 11.

66 Zabel, "A Short History of OHO," 146-147.

67 Zabel, "From Reism to Conceptual Art," 28.

68 Zabel, "A Short History of OHO," 119.

69 Brejc, 14-15.

70 Denegri, 5.

71 Zabel, "A Short History of OHO," 123.

72 Ibid., 114.

73 Ibid., 123.

74 Ibid., 125.

75 Pogacnik, “OHO After OHO,” 10.

76 Zabel, “A Short History of OHO,” 130.

77 Ibid., 125.

78 Pogacnik, “OHO After OHO,” 9-10.

79 Zabel, “A Short History of OHO,” 127-129.

80 Ibid., 129.

81 Ibid., 114.

82 Ibid., 64.

83 Brejc, 16.

84 Zabel, “A Short History of OHO,” 116.

85 Zabel, “From Reism to Conceptual Art,” 31.

86 Brejc, 16.

87 Brejc, 16-17.

88 Ibid., 16.

89 Zabel, “From Reism to Conceptual Art,” 30.

90 Lynne Cooke in “Remote Possibilities: A Roundtable Discussion on Land Art’s Changing Terrain” *ArtForum* Summer 2005, 366.

91 Brejc, 13.

92 Ibid., 17.

93 Zabel, “A Short History of OHO,” 131.

94 Misko Suvakovic, “Conceptual Art,” 215.

95 Zabel, “A Short History of OHO,” 132.

96 Ibid., 130.

97 Brejc, 17.

98 Brejc, 17.

99 Suvakovic, “Conceptual Art,” 215.

100 Brejc, 17.

101 Pogacnik, “OHO After OHO,” 10.

102 Brejc, 18.

103 Zabel, “A Short History of OHO,” 129.

104 Ibid., 130.

105 Ibid., 130.

106 Brejc, 17.

107 Denegri, 10-12.

108 Zabel, “From Reism to Conceptual Art,” 33-34.

109 Denegri, 6.

110 Suvakovic, “Conceptual Art,” 212.

111 Zabel, “A Short History of OHO,” 133.

112 Ibid., 149.

113 Suvakovic, “Conceptual Art,” 215.

114 Brejc, 18.

115 Ibid., 18.

116 Suvakovic, “Conceptual Art,” 214.

117 Suvakovic “Impossible Histories,” 26.

118 Zabel, “From Reism to Conceptual Art,” 21.

119 Ibid., 34.

Aoristic Avant-Garde: Experimental Art in Sixties and Seventies Yugoslavia
Chapter Three
Urban Actions and the Chances of History

Gallery of the Student Center in Zagreb

From 1968 through the 1970s, the cultural centers across Yugoslavia that were associated with students actively shaped a new art scene: in particular, the Student Center Gallery in Zagreb, the Student Cultural Center in Belgrade, the Youth Tribune in Novi Sad and the Belgrade International Experimental Theater Festival (BITEF) in Belgrade. They all presented experimental work created by a new generation of artists. Young people were employed in these organizations, and thanks to the dedication of these directors and curators, the organizations argued on behalf of artists' free expression during an increasingly restrictive time in the country. In some cases, the cultural centers' support included negotiations with the local government to present artwork in unconventional urban spaces and circumstances.

The 1968 demonstrations in Yugoslavia took aim at the "red bourgeoisie" that ruled the country. Although Yugoslavia's official line touted the power of the working class, in fact power was fairly concentrated at the top.[1] In 1969-71, a drastic power shift in the government structure occurred. A process of decentralization ("de-statization") was instituted in Yugoslavia. This was a political move in the opposite direction from Tito's mission of soft socialism in which power was consolidated in the central federal government so as to promote "brotherhood and unity" of the five republics of Yugoslavia despite their many religious and ethnic differences. Decentralization opened the path for local bickering and close-minded personal politics, which led to severe crackdowns on public service workers and independent institutions like cultural spaces and universities. In 1972 and 1973 the situation worsened. Many people lost their jobs and at this time some artists were "blacklisted" and prohibited from creating their work inside the country.[2] This was certainly the beginning of the end of the nation.

However, from the perspective of artists and art spaces, it is important to note the nuance of this situation. First of all, each city had a different tenor and way of working with artists. To illustrate this point, a joke from the time goes,

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Endnotes can be found on pages 78-83.

> If you created an artistically-cultural felony in Ljubljana you were given a stipend for America; if you did a similar thing in Zagreb, your passport was repossessed; if you committed this felony in Belgrade, you would be summoned for an informative talk; if you did this in Novi Sad you were arrested, and there is a tragic part to this story if you committed this kind of felony in Sarajevo you would disappear! If you followed this pattern, it is almost the same way the second Yugoslavia fell apart.[3]

With this in mind, the slightly protected space of the student cultural centers was considered by some to be a ghetto, an artificial bubble, or even a place where the government corralled artistic expression to keep it contained. The cultural centers in Zagreb and Belgrade weathered this storm, whereas the independent Youth Tribine in Novi Sad, Serbia, which was not part of the university system, did not fare so well. What were the artistic consequences of this situation in which there was not a clear or strict dialectic between artists and the government?

This raises the question of the professional stature and the subjectivity of the artist. Artists were not able to live from their work, and even though the government did not pay much attention to visual art and museums were open to exhibiting art by some artists from the new generation, if an artist started to question the political and social situation, the government authorities cracked down.[4] This situation stood in marked contrast to Arte Povera in Italy, which was regarded as high art there. In the late 1960s and 1970s it was necessary to position oneself carefully. Critic Jesa Denegri noted that in the shift from modernism to postmodernism in Yugoslavia, the subjectivity of the artist remained a central issue in artmaking. Artists reshaped the question, but did not do away with the notion of an author altogether. Because the museums and student centers were open to experimental work and the government sanctioned this activity, the pursuit of the individual subjectivity of the artist was not set in stark contrast to a market or a government policy.[5]

In Yugoslavia, nonetheless was an "art bureaucracy," and though not many artists of this generation became professors, there were some who found a place in the academy and became established and institutionalized. There was some buying and selling of art that was allowed by the government, but there was not any established art market. Mainly there were individual curators who were supportive of new practices in artmaking even though museums were not buying this work for their collections.

At the Student Center Gallery, Zelimir Koscevic organized new types of exhibitions. Writer Davor Maticevic noted that these exhibitions contributed to the emergence of a new attitude to artworks, in particular these exhibitions addressed the demands that new art placed on audiences. Judging from an exchange in the Croatian newspaper *Vecernije List*, journalists at the time were not covering the activity of the Gallery of the Student Center as much as Koscevic would have liked.[6] Therefore *Novine*, published by the Student Center Gallery, was an invaluable diary of activity of the moment. Also the New Art Practice retrospective exhibitions in 1978 at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade and Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb with their

catalogues provided an unparalleled resource. In his essay in the retrospective exhibition catalogue, Maticevic succinctly pointed out the new ideas that artists pursued in the early 70s in the Zagreb scene: interest in the process of artmaking, audience participation, spiritual and physical play, designs for a specific location with materials that cannot be placed in a museum, interest in ephemerality and decay, idea as a medium, and actions and situations in which documentation superceded the original.[7] The Student Center gallery was so important for the development of young artists because the new generation at that time was dissatisfied with the paternalism of the system and did not establish contact with older artists so they were not influenced by them. Knifer and Kozaric were exceptions who did support younger artists.[8]

Koscevic also wrote about this extremely fruitful period of artmaking in Yugoslavia from 1968 to 1972 and the Student Center Gallery's role in the scene. He stated that it was as if the gallery since its founding in 1961 was an empty vessel that realized its potential in the late 1960s with the new generation of artists. Koscevic pointed to the September 1967 exhibition "Hit Parade" as a watershed event. At this exhibition of work by Galic, Kuduz, Ljerka Sibenik, and Sutej the audience destroyed the entire exhibition, apparently misunderstanding the artists' intentions for the exhibition. They mistakenly thought that the opening was meant to be a "happening." Since that exhibition started such an uproar in the press, it opened the way for those that Koscevic identified as the new generation of artists: Dalibor Martinis, Boris Bucan, Slobodan Dimitrijevic, Davor Tomicic, Sanja Ivekovic, Jagoda Kaloper, Goran Trbuljak, Gorki Zuvela, Dejan Jokanovic, Janez Segolin and Petar Dabac, Enes Midzic and Marija Braut. He characterized their work as the creation of overall environments, interventions in outside space, and communication.[9]

The Student Center Gallery's "Exhibition of Women and Men," (1969) featured a completely empty gallery and left the audience to look at itself. The project commanded: "Be the exhibition itself! At this show you are the creation, you are the figuration, you are the socialistic realism. Watch out, your eyes are directed at you!…Art is not beside you. Either it does not exist, or you are the art."[10] This was also an opportunity for the viewers to reflect on the space itself and the experimental programming for which it was becoming known. The Student Center Gallery newspaper *Novine* presented images of eight previous exhibitions on the page advertising "Exhibition of Women and Men." The photographs featured the viewers prominently rather than the artworks on view.

Another such tautological project was the exhibition "Mail Items from Paris" (1971). When the shipment of the traveling show arrived from Paris, Koscevic decided not to show the individual mail art works but to make a new mail art project by exhibiting the crates themselves as the artwork.

In 1969, in one of his earliest exhibitions, Braco Dimitrijevic filled the Student Center Gallery space with 680 small cylinders that viewers could roll around on the floor as they pleased creating sound as well as movement. Dimitrijevic wrote that "The *Sum 680* in its dynamic state represents also a new quality. In this context the same two objects acquire different values through different relations through different positions in relation to place and space—and thus the slightest change holds an exceptional

significance in an integral observation."[11] This intensive focus on the impact of the chance intervention of the viewer on the perception of the artwork would be elaborated in his later installations.

In these years there were a number of collaborations between local factories and student art groups signifying the solidarity of students and artists with workers. In 1969-70 at the Student Center Gallery there was a competition for the best environment created with materials from local factories. Students at the Academy of Visual Arts Dalibor Martinis, Slobodan Dimtrijevic, Sanja Ivekovic, Janez Segolin, Dean Jokanovic, Gorki Zuvela, and Jagoda Kaloper participated. They all made haptic phenomenological environments from a variety of materials from lightweight tubes and blown-up plastic structures to heavy concrete slabs.[12] For the project "Plastex 75" in Sopot, plastics were donated and so the participating students of architecture Zeljko Kovacic, Neven Mikac, Aleksandar Laszlo and Nikola Polak made a large triumphal arch from Styrofoam blocks. These were erected on the footpaths worn by local inhabitants accentuating their free choice to disregard the existing orthogonal plan made by the housing plan developers.[13]

The group A3: Action and Anonymous Attraction was hosted by the Student Center Gallery in Zagreb in June 1972 for a public art project and again at the end of December of the same year for an indoor project. For their summer action, Group A3 from Belgrade created a cardboard cutout bus, which the members placed on wheels and occupied to walk through the city. They proclaimed it the bus of tolerance and drove to particular sites all around the center city. The bus did not use any oil of course and was also a statement against consumerism, which was part of the life of the bourgeoisie.[14] In December they created an environment of black reflectors in theater ITD in Zagreb that demonstrated the absorption of light.[15] These were examples of lighthearted mildly political commentary and a kind of hippie aesthetics of the time.

At the beginning of the 1970s it became clear that the central concern of the time was what role artists could play in shaping the urban environment. The "Proposal" section of the 6th Zagreb Salon in 1971, organized by Zelimir Koscevic and Zeljka Corak, the art critic of the weekly *Telegram,* took this concern as its focus. For "Proposal," the Salon had a special fund to consider anonymous proposals for urban interventions. Zeljka Corak continued to curate her project, "The City as the Scene of Visual Happening" for years afterwards.[16] In the same year as the inauguration of "Proposal," the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb mounted "Possibilities for 1971," an exhibition of work by architects and sculptors. Dimitrijevic proposed painting the tram tracks and Goran Trbuljak wished to abolish the traffic in town and replace the street with artistic content.[17]

The motivation to create art in public for artists in Yugoslavia was different than in the West. Artists sought direct communication with the public and were not concerned with protesting against a gallery system. Thus, artists in Yugoslavia offered constructive options for artmaking in an inadequate system. Their whole practice arose out of necessity. They were truly experimental processes rather than simply alternative because they forged new practice and were not simply by-passing systems to which they had access.[18]

The group exhibition organized by Koscevic, "Gulliver in Wonderland," took place in Korana Park in Karlovac, a city nearby Zagreb also in 1971. This provided free

range for the artists who were so active already creating public work in the city of Zagreb. Trbuljak contributed a plaque inscribed, "my sculpture is hidden in the park" Martinis mounted large-scale photographs of hands performing different gestures interspersed throughout the trees in a forested area. Sanja Ivekovic made an environment of a multitude of lightweight fluffy balls suspended on strings. These works were fairly tautological insular gestures that were appropriate to the fantastical title of the exhibition, but lacked the kind of critical social commentary that their work in urban space provided.[19] Another exhibition "Idea for Test Range," proposed for Sid in 1972, that would have had to engage social reality, was never realized. The project was to give young artists the opportunity to plan the cultural life of a community to stimulate specific developments for a small town.[20]

However, for another project conceived by Zelimir Koscevic, "Village Fete" in Sopot (a new neighborhood of Zagreb), artists were invited to work with the town itself in its form and social interactions. For example, student of architecture Zeljko Kovacic researched the town and made recommendations about what activities could enrich the residents' life there. He proposed a stand for selling chestnuts on the street and phone booths painted so that they highlighted communication points in the town. Exhibitions took place in shop windows, poetry recitations were held on the street and family films were projected by inhabitants of the town.[21]

The next year at the 1972 Zagreb Salon, the group TOK emerged. For "Proposal" they created transparent garbage cans for the center of the city and transferred banal phrases of everyday conversation into a comic strip format on large posters. At Urbofest in Pazin they organized games to be played in the streets and squares of the town that highlighted the absurdities and paradoxes of social situations. In Graz and Belgrade they displayed placards with drawings of basic elements of visual expression. Maticevic noted that the group was more interested in social messages than artistic innovation and worked in the realm of tautology rather than representation.[22]

After 1971 came a great calm in artmaking. There simply were not many opportunities and the political climate had become very closed. Later such artists as Martinis became graphic designers, others like Trbuljak took up commercial filmmaking, and some including Dimitrijevic left the country to work abroad. After the lull of 1972 and 1973, some artists turned to video.[23] In the next few years, the center of activities moved from SC Gallery to Nova Gallery run by Ljerka Sibenik in the center of the city. Also the multimedia center run by Ivan Galeta was very active. Additionally, individuals opened small art spaces as gathering points for presentations and exchange. Artist Dalibor Martinis opened "pod room" in his former studio, which attracted a mix of generations. Sanja Ivekovic hosted discussions at her apartment, which often included art luminaries who were visiting the city at the time.[24]

In addition to the Zagreb scene, in Split, Croatia, the group Red Peristyle was active in 1968. They gained legendary status for the highly provocative art action that gave the group its name. The artists were Vladimir Dodig Trokut, Pavoa Dulcic, Toma Caleta, Slaven Sumic, Nenad Dapic, Radovan Kogej, Srdjan Blazevic and a teacher at the School of Applied Arts Bozo Jelinic. The group concocted grand plans for interventions in public spaces in the town. As Dulcic's notebooks showed in his drawings of fantastical

structures on "sacrosanct and fetishized places" around town, the group was preoccupied with the collision of historical constructions of sites with their natural geography.[25] In this coastal town, and all along the Dalmatian coast, the sea is a constant presence of significant magnitude that informs nearly all aspects of daily life and certainly the history and identity of the people who live in the region. Also fiercely guarded as a source of identity is the region's connection to Italy, both ancient and modern. Diocletian's Palace is located in the heart of the old Roman city of Split. In the middle of the night in 1968, the group painted the ancient stones of the open-air palace floor with red paint. (Image 8) The action caused a huge outrage and became instantly hated by some and revered by others for their daring.

Another more poetic project that the group dreamt up was to tie a rope around the palace and tow it into the sea. For yet another scheme, they planned to connect the island Brac to the mainland with a thread. At the time, Zelimir Koscevic invited Red Peristyle to exhibit in Zagreb, but they did not respond. The group was never interested in documenting or showing their work, and they gained mythic status for their extreme ideas and behavior. Critic and art historian Misko Suvakovic characterized their activities as

> aimed at shocking the people of Split, provoking incidents, individual emancipation, and anarchistic individualism. In an eclectic way they mixed into their work underground tactics, hippy behavior, free sexuality, magic, beatnik behavior, drug-taking, and a Fluxus-like drawing of attention from the works of art to action and the act.[26]

The group used drugs heavily, (which was still typical of Split up to today because of the economic hardships in this working class port city after the transition and wars of the 90s) and often clashed with each other and authorities. Dulcic and Caleta committed suicide.[27]

A few years later, Trokut made contact with the Zagreb scene, and made the actions of Red Peristyle known. He was most occupied with environmental art and transformational alchemical processes. He exhibited air, water and soil, and wrapped rocks with gold foil. He made an exhibition under the sea by creating and exhibiting photographs underwater. He also worked often with magical signs and in one piece he painted poetic messages including these signs on trains just before they set out for destinations unknown to the artist. At the first Split Salon he exhibited various liquid solutions and objects displayed in glass bottles and became more involved in cabalistic magic experiences. He turned to distributing small brochures with photo-portraits, or instructions. Trokut remained a kind of mystical figure who is still active today.[28]

Collaborative Authorship and Pensioner Tihomir Simcic

Braco Dimitrijevic and Goran Trbuljak collaborated in the late 1960s because they shared artistic tendencies, particularly an interest in dada and readymades. The first exhibition of Dimitrijevic and Trbuljak's work was at the 23rd of May Festival of Yugoslav Students' Theaters in 1969 in the Chamber Theater at the Black Salon of the Student Center in Zagreb. In an arte povera style, Dimitrijevic exhibited *The Triptych,* three discarded wire armatures with mortar. In a similar vein, Trbuljak presented a poem on the wall that was to be read through a hole in a mattress.[29]

In 1969 Braco Dimitrijevic and Goran Trbuljak formed the Pensioner Tihomir Simcic group when the first passerby who opened a door handle left his handprint in soft clay that Dimitrijevic and Trbuljak had set up on the handle. The passerby was named Tihomir Simcic and because of his unwitting act his name was bestowed on the group of which he automatically became a member. Writer Nena Baljkovic noted in her 1978 essay that democratic principles underpinned the impetus and meaning of the work.[30] Membership in the group could expand indefinitely. The artists believed that they could democratize art through reproductive media like printing, photography and video.[31] Trbuljak and Dimitrijevic wrote in *Novine* of the Pensioner Tihomir Simcic Group's work, "When everyday fragments of life become the object of interest for the ordinary person, he will be in the position of a creator…the next step towards the realization of our assumption would be the creative act of an ordinary man."[32] Despite the resonance with Joseph Beuys' rhetoric, Trbuljak stated years afterwards that he was not acquainted with the work of Joseph Beuys at the time.[33]

Dimitrijevic, Trbuljak, Nada Orel and Nena Baljkovic formed another group to create exhibitions in the entry hallway at 2a Frankopanska Street. With this act the group wanted to democratize art and emancipate themselves. Dimitrijevic in particular wanted to make the site a center of activity but not open an established venue. In June 1970 the arte povera "Show with Water" was presented. Dimitrijevic presented his Borges-inspired *Three Sets of Objects,* which defied positivist classification following his interest in alternate taxonomies, and Trbuljak showed his recent photographs. In February 1971 Trbuljak made a solo show featuring vibrating rubber bands. In April 1971 the legendary international exhibition "At the Moment" was mounted in the small space. It took place from 5-8 pm on April 23rd and was well recorded in the press.[34] The Student Cultural Center in Belgrade presented a version of the exhibition titled "In Another Moment" accompanied by a catalogue.

Although Dimitrijevic and Trbuljak were alone in their pursuit of conceptual art, their efforts were documented and exhibited to some extent. In March 1971 curator and art historian Jesa Denegri organized an exhibition of Yugoslav conceptual art at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, even though that type of experimental art was not active yet in that city.[35] Dimitrijevic and Trbuljak had exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb. However museums did not collect their work, and in general people did not understand the questions that these artists posed of art institutions. Despite

the lack of official recognition, at this time excitement was brewing in response to their new artistic approach.[36]

Dimitrijevic and Trbuljak ended their collaboration in 1971 as they pursued different methods in their own artmaking.[37] At this time, Dimitrijevic undertook his major work *Casual Passer-by*, which Trbuljak thought to be too big, too commercial. Dimitrijevic thought that it was necessary to be part of the art market whereas Trbuljak really believed that conceptual art could change society. These two paths marked a crucial difference in opinion between artists working at the time. For example in Belgrade, Marina Abramovic was an example of "in museum" thinking and Rasa Todosijevic believed that artmaking had merit solely on its own.[38]

It is worth noting that there were many incongruities in the critical writing and the documentation of the two artists' collaborative work that even seeped into the historicization of their solo work from the time. For example, since their art actions and objects necessitated photographic representation as part of their production, Dimitrijevic has said that in a number of cases he set up the situation and Trbuljak made the photographs that became the residue of the action.[39] However, there are different retellings of their process depending on the source. In Trbuljak's monograph it is clearly stated that he set up the clay on which the imprint was made.[40]

In another case, there is not consensus on the attribution of a dusty trace left on a wall after the removal of a painting by another artist that had been on display for some time. In her 1978 essay Nena Baljkovic wrote that *The Background of F.K.'s Picture* was jointly signed by Trbuljak and Dimitrijevic.[41] Branka Stipancic wrote in her 1996 monograph that Goran Trbuljak enacted this and claimed it as his work.[42] In Dimitrijevic's 2004 monograph, Nena Dimitrijevic (nee Baljkovic) wrote that Braco Dimitrijevic entitled the work *Dust Trace of the Painting of F.K.* and showed it as his own work.[43] These competing claims, after the fact, to the originating idea are incongruous with the initial project, which was to provide alternative definitions of authorship. However, for these two artists who were so occupied with authorship and making history, it would be no surprise that they would actively write and re-write their own histories.

Most importantly, these incongruities provide insight on the significance of the individual subjectivity of the artist that Dimitrijevic, Trbuljak, and others in the communal self-managed, socialist system of Yugoslavia held onto dearly—despite their experimentation with conceptual strategies that had very different meanings in the West.

History and Authorship in Braco Dimitrijevic's Art

A core concern of Braco Dimitrijevic's artmaking and writing on art was that "aesthetic judgment is based on historical convention and that art and its exhibition should demystify the mechanism and aim of the construction of this convention"[44] His first attempts to counter these conventions were expressed through actions and environments to alter perception. For example, his 1970 happening series entitled, *Ali Baba,* Dimitrijevic distributed popcorn at another artist's opening reception at the

Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, thus changing the entire feel of the event. In another *Ali Baba* action in the same year, he distributed red tinted glasses at a screening of a Bergman film at BITEF.[45] Concurrently in 1969 -1971 he created art in the streets and claimed that "public space is not neutral!"[46] In some of his first actions in 19699, he explored chance and spontaneity by setting out cartons of milk to be run over by passing cars to create random 'paintings.' The point of this action was for the audience to make a value judgment on the artwork, to define her/his attitude to the happening, and to formulate and register thoughts. For *Painting by Kresimir Klika* (1969) he asked the driver to stop and assess the painting and to accept it as art and attest to his role as co-author of its creation. To Dimitrijevic, the street was an arena for spontaneous interaction, rather than for preconceived work.[47]

Dimitrijevic's *Portraits of Anonymous Citizens* was selected for the "Proposal" section of the 6th Zagreb Salon (1971) (later re-titled *Casual Passer-by*) Dimitrijevic highlighted an individual everyday person out of the crowd to point out that not just those who are powerful can be pictured as icons in a public space. Dimitrijevic asked people at random whom he saw on the street to stop and have their photograph taken. With the help of Peter Dobac he made six huge photographic portraits measuring 2 by 3 meters.[48] He then displayed three portraits as huge banners on the façade of the buildings in the main square in Zagreb. This site was reserved only for images of people who held political power in Yugoslavia, and the action was made possible through Zelimir Koscevic's negotiation with the city authorities.[49]

Dimitrijevic preferred the urban environment as the site for his artmaking early in his career because the cityscape contained many layers of historical and ideological meaning and was the central arena for the spectacle of power. For *Casual Passerby*, Dimitrijevic led the viewer into believing that the people pictured were in positions of power. Far from wishing to make these people famous, his goal was to show how spectacle was deployed in the urban sphere to build up and maintain power structures. The figures pictured on the banners in the main square were automatically assumed to hold political power.[50] With this gesture, Dimitrijevic disrupted the accretion of power generated by the reification of a person's image. In other words, if Tito was represented again and again, the people of Yugoslavia believed he was powerful. Alternatively, by placing an image of an anonymous person in that position of visibility the system of reification was disrupted. This functioned specifically in the main square in Zagreb in 1971 because this was a time of dire political upheaval, and there were many rumors of a new triumvirate coming to power on the local scene.

In this artwork, the ambiguous accretion of value of the image was deeply connected to the production of identity. Although this could be compared to Andy Warhol's work, Dimitrijevic's goal was very significantly different. When Dimitrijevic inserted the names or faces of "unknown" everyday people on plaques, monuments, and banners his impulse was the opposite of Warhol's. He did not promote uncritical acceptance of mass media or wished to elevate "unknowns" to the status of celebrity as Warhol did. Furthermore, working in the context of Yugoslavia he did not wish to glorify the masses, as socialism did, but to comment on individuality and totalitarian regime's manipulation of individuality through the cult of personality as the domain of only those

in power. Unlike Warhol, his practice was not meant to be a mise en abyme in which the work became an alienated spectacle. Rather Dimitrijevic was and continues to be a passionate discussant. Dimitrijevic stated that the first *Casual Passerby* work was nearly invisible at a glance because it faithfully imitates historical glorification.[51] However in more recent incarnations such as the piece in Fall 2007 at University of Pennsylvania, the banner is highly noticeable because of its incongruity with its surroundings. However, the particular building on which it was hung tended to color the meaning of the image. In this way the image's subject acts as if it was somehow camouflaged by history.

This large-scale public work exemplified Dimitrijevic's skepticism of authority of the history of art and his suspicion of what he believed to be the arbitrarily imposed values of that system, and his criticism of the hierarchical structure of this value system. Dimitrijevic questions and offers alternatives to this system by asserting the role of critical evaluation instead of passively accepting its order and its myths. Dimitrijevic employed chance in his art to this end.[52] Dimitrijevic saw chance as a characteristic of disorder that could shake the established order of things. Chance is based on the principle of actively making a selection or choice. This was in opposition to historical ways of imparting value, used to impart doubt in existing criteria.[53] Again, Dimitrijevic's purpose was not to make accidentally chosen people famous, like Warhol or reality television. Rather the *Casual Passer-by* embodies the principle of chance, or making one choice, a selection, from a broad spectrum of possibilities.

With these art objects, he highlighted the role of chance in determining what is deemed valid and what is remembered in history. In this way, Dimitrijevic wanted *Casual Passer-by* to call attention to the polysemic nature of the image.[54] Even more, the chance selection in *Casual Passer-by* and his series of plaques and monuments entitled *This Could Be a Place of Historical Interest (*1975)enacted from this polysemy or polyvalence points out how history operates to manipulate the subject. This can be considered in relation to Theodor Adorno's assertion that, "acts of suppression characterize history."[55] Furthermore, he stated that the spell that holds sway over history continually turns like into like. In the exchange relation structure of history, or the dialectic of history, both options are wretched, self-same.[56] Hegel wrote of the unity of chance and necessity that what they have in common (lethally in common) is fate.[57] It is necessary to escape this exchange of like for like[58] because in this process freedom is swept away and becomes chance--as anything different is defeated and perverted into chance.[59]

Difference or particularity is constant fodder for the mechanism of history, which perverts it into chance and replicates its necessity as fate to produce more fuel for the machine of totality. "Totality preserves itself and prevails through conflict…through the enduring persistence of particularity."[60] Dimitrijevic points out the way history toys with particularity through his commemorative plaques and monuments to particular, though randomly chosen, not popularly recognizable people.

Dimitrijevic employed mimicry, which should not be confused with the readymade. He has stated explicitly that his public work and his installations, which combined natural, historical and art historical objects, were not made on "the principle of the readymade, which is based on the change of context."[61] His goal was to bring into

visual dialogue elements from different disciplines that had been separated over the course of history. He considers his practice to be one of "ready aesthetics" that ascribes aesthetic quality to objects and situations of everyday life that have been cordoned off from "art" practice over time as in a Wunderkammer or Borghesian taxonomy. As Dimitrijevic put it, his art objects operated through the process of cognition and recognition, and were thus conceptual; they were not autonomous entities beyond the judgment of the maker or an audience.[62]

Materialization and formal creation was key to this mimicry and his conceptualism overall. Nena Baljkovic pointed out specifically that Dimitrijevic's art objects functioned on the level of form. Dimitrijevic painstakingly replicated the form of established visual codes in his banners, plaques and monuments.[63] He worked in many diverse mediums from classical materials including marble and oil paint to oversized materials and outdoor settings. For example the original *Casual Passer-by* images were photo printed on sailing cloth and pieced together, and the plaques for *This Could be a Place of Historical Interest* were consciously made to be heavy marble objects. Dimitrijevic's tactic was to create a faithful replica of form filled with different content that would elicit a surprise as opposed to the conditioned reaction. Examples include the factual plaques bearing inscriptions with unknown persons' names: *John Foster lived here, 1972* and *Sarah Knipe was staying here 1971*.

In addition to making art outdoors in urban spaces, in the years 1968-1971 in Yugoslavia, artists created a number of projects in remote villages and the natural settings of the mountains and seaside. This was motivated by a desire to speak directly to everyday people. This would be in keeping with the ideals of self-management in which everyone had a say in the way institutions were run and spoke directly to one another in open forums. Some artists, intellectuals, and students of the time idealized the working class and peasants--believing that they acted in a more pure version of collective practice of socialism. Some others like OHO created art in the landscape because it provided a new form of expression. Others still, like Dimitrijevic and Trbuljak, worked outdoors to establish a critical attitude towards their surroundings. All three of these approaches left valuable influences on today's art practice in ex-Yugoslavia. This critical attitude is shared by new media practitioners, philosophers, and urbanists working today in the social realm in Yugoslavia. They concur that this mode of critical engagement with urban spaces is necessary in order to recover from the fatalistic ideological linkage of geography and historical destiny employed in the wars of the 1990s.

Theodor Adorno's suspicion of immutability, and specifically the claim that laws of nature underpin history, is key to Yugoslav experimental artists' practice from the 1960s to the present day. Hegel proposed that nature provided the basis for history, that the geography where events occur shapes these events and their historical meaning and power.[64] Thus, he defined the constitution of the historical world as something posited by nature, though he did not perceive history as second nature but rather as a zone of spirit (a positive aspect of history). Theodor Adorno has noted that this aspect would be incompatible with Hegel's notion of freedom.[65] Furthermore, Hegel was sympathetic with the immutable aspect of history whose totality is intact. Marx's view was different; he wished to escape a notion of history that is based in natural history.[66] Marx spoke of

natural laws of economics but also acknowledged this as mystification and illusion. Adorno argued that natural laws of society are ideology inasmuch as they are claimed to be immutable. [67]

Braco Dimitrijevic has created numerous artworks throughout his career that examine the binaries of nature and culture, and fact and myth. Early in Dimitrijevic's career, his "Summer Projects" in 1970 investigated the relationship of nature and history on a playful note. These "spatial sketches of hypothetical geomorphological changes" involved emptying bottles of fresh water into the sea, elevating vessels of sea water to hang like a mobile, and sketching an underwater bridge of fresh water between Dubrovnik, Croatia and Bari, Italy. He continued these fantastical schemes on a subsequent trip through Europe. He mused on the repercussions of the transfer of several liters of Adriatic water to the North Sea and the relocation of beetles from the Alps to the southern coast of England. He enacted all of these as well as a project to bury several cubic centimeters of soil from Zagrebacka gora in the Swiss Alps. [68]

These actions were reminiscent of the Situationist pursuits of Constant and the fantastical projects of the architects of Archigram. Because Dimitrijevic was very well informed about international art movements, although he may not have been acquainted with these endeavors specifically he was definitely in tune with the art activity of the time. More directly, his line of thinking was reminiscent of the earlier local group Gorgona, however, this work was not well known in Croatia until later in the 1970s. Also the group OHO had an exhibition early on at the Student Center Gallery 1969, which was most likely an influence. Another relevant connection was the local neo-Constructivist group New Tendencies, which left a strong mark in Croatia. New Tendencies shared the Bauhaus utopian belief in the potential of artists to change and beautify the environment and improve living conditions. Dimitrijevic and Trbuljak did not subscribe to this fully as they believed that the function of art was to establish a critical and creative attitude towards one's environment. This led them to investigate Dadaist tendencies to a certain extent. Also although American art, and especially culture, was influential in Yugoslavia, these artists severely questioned American conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth and chose not to pursue a fully hermetic tautological semiological approach.[69]

Looking back now, it is important to remember that in the very beginning of their careers in 1968 and 1969, Dimitrijevic and Trbuljak were alone working in a conceptualist vein as they did not know the international scene and did not share the outlook of their local peers. The artists were criticized by their colleagues at the Student Center, who felt that their work lacked dignity because it was stripped art of formal and aesthetic qualities.[70] Dimitrijevic believed that the promise of the avant-garde was not to be found in the creation of art but in its perception. Dimitrijevic fully embraced and enjoyed interacting with his audience in a critical discussion of art.

Goran Trbuljak: The Artist's Identity

In his art, Goran Trbuljak played with hiding and revealing, almost imperceptibly adding to and taking away from a context, challenging the viewer to recognize it as art and to determine its artistic value. Although his work could be labeled immaterial, he was nonetheless very concerned with acts of transformation by altering circumstances and behaviors. Although he did not adhere to one particular medium, Trbuljak was very specific in his choice of materials. When he created art in public space he used everyday material. He did not import material to the street; he used the material of the street. By the same token, for museum pieces he never imported material from the street. He made different work for the museum since the museum context was different.[71] A very early example of this sensibility was explained in his 1996 monograph by Branka Stipancic. Trbuljak presented *Imprint of a Painting by F.K*., which was the dusty imprint from a painting that had been hanging on the wall for some time. This took place in the Round Salon of the Student Center Gallery during the May Festival of Student Theaters in Zagreb. Trbuljak used the context of the gallery to create a "new painting, equally valuable as the one that used to hang on the wall before it."[72] Trbuljak enacted private gestures that were critical of an additive notion of artmaking. His photograph, "A bang on this pipe produces a sound different from the sounds of the neighboring pipes, 1971" showed the metal handrail of the simple concrete staircase leading to the Gallery of Contemporary Art. This photograph was exhibited at "At the Moment" exhibition at Frankosanska 2a.

Trbuljak created small ephemeral barely noticeable interventions in public space that subtly played with realism, perception, recognition, and mimicry. In one, he photographed a building that he shot from the tram as he passed by. Then, he placed a photocopy of the photograph on the tram window, "supposing that during the tram's circling the town, the photographs and the building would at one moment overlap."[74] Squares of asphalt that were being repaired were the subject of another such action, which the artist described as: "Photographed holes in the asphalt in different places around town. In the immediate vicinity of the photographed holes, I stuck Xerox copies of the photographs. The unsigned Xerox copies were displayed in the street for ten days in April 1970." Rather than being a mise en abyme or an exercise on the difference between copy and original, the photographs of this piece portray details of texture and a sense of the potential of infinite repetition that places the work closer to minimalism than appropriation. In *See Landscapes of Kvarner and the Southern Adriatic* Trbuljak threw picture frames into the vast expanse of the sea, alluding to the impossibility that a specific detail could be framed. This action was in keeping with the sensibility of Gorgona, and in this way shared common ground with Dimitrijevic's fantastical landscape projects. However Trbuljak's art, even at its most critical, inspires a wonder at infinity, often with humor that was in marked contrast to the artistic practice of Dimitrijevic.

Artist Goran Trbuljak had a very private reaction to this Yugoslav art system. He was dismayed by the imposed social position of artists and limitations on his/her activity because of the hierarchy of the art system. Yet he recognized that this was the only

system through which to express oneself as a professional artist. This process of realization of his own social position and limitations as an artist resulted in the piece titled, *Through a hole in the door of the Gallery of Modern Art I occasionally showed my finger without the knowledge of the gallery management* (1969). With this action, the artist himself determined when he would show at the Gallery, he chose what to show and where in the space to show it. He decided to show a minute part of himself. Yet, the catch was that what he revealed to the art world, in the form of the institution of the Gallery, was never seen. His insertion of himself in the art world remained undetected. He put his finger out, but it did not yield anything palpable. This project displayed the strategy of humor (shared by many conceptual artists) that has a particular significance to the Western Balkans that is darker and bolder than most.

Trbuljak's work was nearly immaterial, and the artist has stated that the crucial element of his artmaking was recognition. He spoke of visual recognition as part of perception, but certainly professional and historical recognition was another theme of his art.[74] Some of his works were registered only as slogans written as sentences in the gallery space, on posters, or as advertisements in the local paper. When he was confronted with an invitation to mount a solo show at the Gallery of the Student Center in Zagreb in 1971 after having worked almost exclusively on the street, he chose to make the poster with a photograph of himself saying, "I do not want to show anything new and original." For his solo show at the Gallery of Contemporary Art in 1973, he made a poster which read, "The fact that someone has a chance to make an exhibition is more important than what will be exhibited at that exhibition" (1973) He did not exhibit work in the museum on the occasion of this solo exhibition titled "The Fact;" instead he published a catalogue. Partly documentation and partly a venue to show clandestine and previously anonymous works, Trbuljak made in effect a new additional space for exhibition.[75] In a local Zagreb newspaper in 1971, he advertised an exhibition of work by the artist Goran Trubuljak. He stated about the work that, "A misspelt name is the same as somebody else's name, that is, anonymous". "The correctly spelt name makes an artist"[76] At SC Gallery he used the name Torbuljak and in Turin at Studio 16e he used an anagram of the letters in his name.[77]

Trbuljak asserted the importance of the individual, at the same time as he observed how the mythology of the individual artist was convenient fodder for the capitalist system. This, like Dimitrijevic's art and writing on the creation of history, is another example of Adorno's assertion that difference or particularity is constant fodder for the mechanism of history. As he wrote, "Totality preserves itself and prevails through conflict…through the enduring persistence of particularity."[78] Marcuse concurred that reflection on difference does not eliminate the totality, but helps with reconciliation. And that true understanding is reached when one is no longer content with existence for itself through particularity.[79]

This is in part the answer to the question, "so if individual identity was so important to the experimental artists in Yugoslavia, why did they so often work in groups"? Their goal was not so much expression of individual identity and a search for acclaim as the freedom for individual expression and also bringing to light the dangers of co-opting individual identity for commodified celebrity status. They addressed this goal

with a strong sense of humor, playing with fragmentation of authorial identity. Many were identified by group names such as Gorgona, Pensioner Tihomir Simcic, OHO, KOD, and Group of Six. However Branka Stipancic noted that group names were in some cases umbrella terms for a varied individual practice, but nonetheless the group name highlighted a shared philosophy and offered support and ease of operation.[80]

Upon reflection, Trbuljak felt that it was dishonest not to claim authorship of his art made anonymously, so later he published them as his own. He contended that anonymous art did not allow for interchange or communication,[81] and this was at odds with the notion that forcefully prevailed in Yugoslav experimental art that communication was key to productive interaction. Communication was the central concept for art at that time internationally, however in Yugoslavia this notion was urgent because communication relay and travel to other locations both within and outside Yugoslavia was the key to their specific socialism, self-management, voluntary participation, and artistic freedom.

His work did not contain overtly political content but instead his art operated critically in the larger social cultural sphere. This was a hallmark of conceptual work at the time in Yugoslavia. In his action *Referendum* (1972) he stood on the main square in Zagreb with a polling box and asked people to vote on the question of whether they believed he was an artist. Trbuljak explained the motivation for this piece: "We lived in a society where people voted without being given a choice, for names that guaranteed nothing."[82] This piece recalls Hans Haacke's 1970 *MoMA Poll*, which was part of the *Information* exhibition, yet was different in crucial ways. Whereas Trbuljak pointed out the lack of power people in Yugoslavia had at the ballot box, Haacke highlighted voting as a system and created another space in the museum in which people could voice their opinion and spread awareness. (Haacke's question was: Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon's Indochina policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November?) Trbuljak did produce art specifically for his social context. He has stated, "My work seemed suited to the society I lived in. It felt wrong to paint large or small formats in a country where only state committees bought art. Wasting enormous quantities of paint and material on something nobody cared about and nobody bought, just so that the state could pretend it had art, seemed stupid."[83]

Trbuljak's introduction of conceptual art in Yugoslavia extended beyond the typical mode of conceptual art of the time. In addition to structural critique and proposals for open systems, Trbuljak elaborated on self-recognition as creative expression. This specific mix of personal subjectivity and idea-based art placed more of an emphasis on individual expression than most conceptual art. Because of its task of questioning systems, conceptual art was preoccupied with the social and public realm. Trbuljak certainly sought a connection and interaction with the audience, but he offered a much more subjective and self-reflective creative stance than was usual for the time. His interpretation of conceptual practice inside the context of Yugoslavia yielded a democratic art practice that combines self-reflection and individual creative action and social and political criticism.

Tomislav Gotovac and Artistic vs. Freedom of Expression in Yugoslavia

Tomislav Gotovac's oeuvre combined filmic structuralism with intense personal feeling according to critics Jesa Denegri and Hrvoje Turkovic. Turkovic noted that "Gotovac is consistently interested by the personal chemical reaction between the filmic approach procedure and the scenes that were valuable in his life."[84] Though an unlikely pairing, this was precisely the particular combination that pervaded experimental work at the time. His art was a pointed example of Yugoslav experimental artists' search for individual expression. The only modes open to them at the time were the conventions of modernist painting, which they did not believe satisfied their ends. So they adopted a new visual and behavioral mode for their expression. The story sounds the same as that of experimental art at the time in the west, however the reasons for the artists' choices were different. In Yugoslavia, modernist painting was the ideological domain of the state, not necessarily of the market as in the west. Furthermore, artists in Yugoslavia chose to work in a conceptual mode not to circumvent the art market, which western artists did not succeed at anyhow, but to circumvent the state's definitions of appropriate artistic expression.

Gotovac was a key figure for understanding how artists came to this conceptual mode. Gotovac had been watching films since he was four years old, before WWII. So he became familiar with documentary newsreels and later American Hollywood movies. His works paid homage to these films and he did not seek to replicate their style but to employ techniques he learned from these masters in his own visual language. Some of these structural techniques were akin visually and in tone and sensibility to conceptual art of the west, and so as Denegri and Turkovic have noted his work was read more in terms of artwork rather than cinema.[85]

During the war as a child, Gotovac began his habit of attending the Prosvjeta Cinema in downtown Zagreb. After the war, there was a flood of American Hollywood movies that most likely had been shipped to Yugoslavia earlier but were not shown during the German occupation. During this time four newsreels were screened before each feature: one from Yugoslavia, one Russian, one English and one American. The American reels, which contained the bare facts about Nurnberg and executions by hanging stayed in his mind in particular.[86] He found this clear documentary style to be ultimately compelling, and so he wished to create in this very direct mode. This meant for Gotovac attention to the mechanisms of the storytelling: "We talked more, not only about more, but also about how. It seemed that we were only talking about technique…The content interested us only in relation to a procedure."[87] Later in 1951 Gotovac began intently listening to "The Jazz Hour" on *Voice of America,* which was aired nightly until 1960. Goran Trbuljak remembers that films and mass culture from Europe and America were very influential in the sixties. "Everyone was lining up to go to the movies. Also what was even more striking to me was that the United States government posted large photographs of news from America in the glass windows of the US Embassy along the main park. People constantly gathered there to see the news."[88] Tomislav Gotovac was thoroughly ensconced in this influx of films, news, and jazz music from the United States. Gotovac also attended the local theater and visited the museum regularly. He was

captivated by Ivan Kozaric's plaster sculptures and Josip Vanista's paintings, mentioning their 1954 exhibition at the Museum of Arts and Crafts in particular.[89]

Gotovac attributed Kurt Schwitters' collages at the exhibition of the Urvater collection in the Modern Gallery in Zagreb in May 1959 for inspiring him to explore collage himself. He made collaged "intimate diaries," as Denegri called them, in the next few years but did not exhibit them until 1976 in SKC Belgrade. During the time they were made he was separate from the local art world and made these in seclusion. These combinations of newspaper clippings, ads and photographs were made primarily, Denegri argues, for self-expression even though art historically they were rare local examples of contemporary trends in post-Dada and European New Realism.[90] Gotovac's oeuvre is full of self-portraiture and self-expression, and thus the definition of conceptualism was certainly not a realm free from subjectivity.

Gotovac was dedicated to an investigation of filmic techniques in a variety of media. Gotovac's *Heads* (1970) was created just before Gotovac left to serve his mandatory military service, and the series documents the artist's hair being completely shorn. It was a cinematic set of photographs that Jesa Denegri considered to be an example of "Photography as the medium of the artist," taking on a conceptual bent.[91] However, this example and Gotovac's oeuvre overall raises an important distinction in the definition of conceptual art. For *Heads,* Gotovac used photography to achieve his desired ends because he was not able to shoot a film. In this and other series, Gotovac explored the breadth of possibilities of the medium of photography, and therefore his mission was not only conceptual but also formal experimentation. This could be said of much of the New Art Practice of the time and thus adds a nuanced dimension to the usual definition of conceptual art.

For the exhibition *Rhetorical Image* at the New Museum for Contemporary Art in 1991, curator Milena Kalinovska included Tomislav Gotovac's series of photographs *Dokumenta* (1956-1990). Gotovac had been collecting documentary material from his own life since 1956, mimicking the process of idolatry that the state used to bolster political figures. She wrote of the series, "By documenting his own life, Gotovac parodies this obsessive documentation of both political figures (by which they were made into shining examples for the people) and individuals (to prove that the state knew what everybody was up to)."[92]

Gotovac identified the spectacle and mythmaking that created real everyday life in Yugoslavia. Gotovac stated humorously in a 1991 interview that, "I maintain that Josip Broz Tito is, and will probably remain for years to come, the best-known artist from the territory of what is now called Yugoslavia!…The fact of the matter is that without America's economic, military, and so on, aid (*Homage to Glenn Miller)*[93] the movie *Communist Yugoslavia*, starring the communist Josip Broz Tito, couldn't have been produced."[94] This was not simply the blurred boundary between art and life that was touted in the West. For Gotovac, everyday life was continuous with movies because ideology employed the mechanisms of spectacle. Nena Dimitrijevic characterized Gotovac's response to this situation as 'the pronouncement of subjectivity': "Gotovac's use of the private and the subjective to resist the ubiquitous politicization of everyday life displays an ironic attitude common to a number of dissident artists in the countries of

'real socialism.' Confronted with the project of the total ideologization of life and consciousness, artists countered with irony and pronounced subjectivity, and thereby symbolically defended freedom of choice."[95]

Artist Tomislav Gotovac used public space as an extension of his own personal life just as he saw his own life like a film. As early as 1962 he invited a few people to witness *Showing Elle* (1962) on a mountain outside of Zagreb. This was the first performance of it kind in Yugoslavia in which the artist used his own body as the object of the artwork as well as acted as the protagonist and author. Gotovac stripped to the waist and presented the western fashion magazine *Elle* to the audience. For Gotovac, going to the mountains represented an expanded sense of place outside institutions. With this performance as a precedent he then created actions in the Zagreb city streets where he continued to use his own body as the art object, and he performed actions that were completely outside of the norm for public space in Yugoslavia. To begin with, just the presentation of the individual artist's body was itself a challenge to the socialist state and collective format of all actions in self-management.

An example that makes this point is a comparison between Tomislav Gotovac's nude street performances like making a rhythmic hopscotch game for the Zagreb Music Biennial in 1978 and Vito Acconci's *Following Piece* (1969). Acconci selected an unknown person and followed the person wherever they went in public, and stopped only when the person entered a private space, like a residence. Acconci's piece mapped the distinction between the public and private sphere. On the other hand, in Yugoslavia, the friction and disconnect between these two spheres erupted within the public social sphere because there was no determinate division between private and public. Gotovac explained that the "naked body in the public space, in my town, is a blasphemy, an insult to the petit-bourgeois."[96] Zdenka Badovinac, curator of the exhibition "Body and the East," explained that in Gotovac's actions, "the appearance of a naked artist in public had a political dimension. In the East, where the threat of police surveillance and censorship was omnipresent, pleople were very cautious in their public behaviour and communication."[97] Jesa Denegri concluded that exposure of Gotovac's body in public was his own self-styled freedom. In short, "Artistic action in a public place, in a word, art, serves Gotovac as a cover, an alibi, as auspices for his ultimately anarchic political deed, for his exemplary, even, ethical instance."[98]

At first, Tito's Yugoslavia allowed Gotovac's nude performances with little official question or comment even though the presence of an individual body engaged in action on the street—whether nude or not—was quite unorthodox, unexpected and even suspicious. It was the action of begging and cleaning that caused the authorities in 1980 to take notice with bad repercussions for the artist. Gotovac operated on his own. He did not negotiate ahead of time with the police; his actions were a form of artistic research to find out what reaction it would provoke in the authorities.[99] When Gotovac begged for money on the street in his action *Begging. Can you spare a dime? Thanks!"(*1980) the police arrested him, confiscated his income of 233.85 dinars and imprisoned him for 10 days. His act lodged a critical commentary on the foundation of socialism—that every person is taken care of by the government and nobody is in economic need. Gotovac pointedly exposed that by taking care or not taking care of material needs, the

government infringed on people's lives in a manipulative manner in the name of socialism. His actions pointed out that the government's paternalistic stance controlled, limited and prohibited rather than fostered free decision-making, creativity, and engagement in public space.

Despite these public actions it still can be said that in Yugoslavia art itself was generally elitist, not democratic, and thus the avant-garde engagement of public space was not intrinsically democratic. (This criticism also pertains to the Western art sphere.) However, experimental Yugoslav artists' turn to the public sphere made the point that artists wanted to achieve more than simply another venue for their art. Their use of the public sphere was not only a vehicle or a location but was a fundamental part of the expression.

Denegri characterized Gotovac's work as a quest for individual freedom. He thought that Gotovac's activity was a clear example of "a persistent individual struggle in a society that theoretically accepts and encourages the right to freedom but in the reality of a hyper-organized society at almost every step denies this right with the hypocrisy of education the conventions of the petit-bourgeois mentality, the standardizing effects of institutions and finally by the repressive ideological postulates of the political system of all the years in the past in this part of the world. Gotovac first of all sensed a way out of this intolerable situation and then definitely grasped it, under the auspices of the fictional world of art."[100]

The first part of Denegri's analysis resonates with Theodor Adorno's discernment that the theory of freedom leads to repression. Authorities make sure that those who are supposedly free feel the weight of the law at every opportunity---precisely because they are free. Talk about freedom lends itself to justification for restrictions on freedom—thus talk of freedom is perverted into its exact opposite. The substance of freedom is that you are free when you freely accept what you have to accept anyway. Therefore the concept of freedom is abused and twisted to its opposite.[101] Furthermore, the proclamation of freedom is now in the service of repression because humans are inwardly free, so the situation reinforces the sanctions of the state.[102] Therefore, a rift between individual and society is a necessary element for the emancipation of the individual.[103]

In Yugoslavia, artistic free expression was treated by the state as something separate from free expression of the individual, especially on political topics. The former was viewed as fairly benign and was allowed, and sometimes used as evidence to the West of the progressive nature of the state as in its support of abstract modernism. The latter, that of individual expression, was strictly forbidden and was sometimes punished harshly. The disparity between individual expression and the communal order was a difficult border to police and thus was a fertile area cultivated by artists as vehicle for critical expression. Making art in the social sphere was complicated because the power of the communal order was so highly valued and also contested; artists pushed the boundaries and effectiveness of the communal order to the limits.

Conclusion

Personal freedom was not to be found in Yugoslav socialism, however safe havens for creativity were possible if one worked within the socialist party. The artists working in the Zagreb scene in the late 60s and early 70s were not idealistic about their art's social usefulness, however they were socially committed. They were thoroughly dismayed with the emerging consumer culture and the socialist bourgeoisie that developed despite the government's claim to adhere to true socialism.[104] Artists saw the falseness of the government's actions and this became a commonly-held concern not only in Zagreb but also in Belgrade and Novi Sad.

Many artists in Yugoslavia held onto the ideal of pure socialism. The generation active in the 60s and 70s protested against Tito's government in 1968 for straying from the true path of socialism, which they basically believed to be the early works of Marx. The psychological dimension of politically and socially engaged conceptual art in Southeast Europe takes on a different emphasis from that of the West. This art concerned with free expression and political commentary does not stem from narcissism nor the very active superego, acting out of guilt, and hence replicating guilt, and instituting strict authoritarian practice as is sometimes the case in the West. Socially and politically engaged experimental art in Southeast Europe stems from a different strategy that deals with identity, trauma, and responsibility for ideology. Is there a bit of Milosevic in all of us, or do we think about the questions of evil that are essential to 'moral experience,' as Hannah Arendt would term it. Do we ask ourselves, "can I live with myself if I do this deed?"[105] This artmaking operates from an understanding that nobody can absolve him or herself of the evils and traumas of society. Nor can they single-handedly solve these problems.

Although the artists in Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 1970s enjoyed fairly unhindered mobility, Yugoslavia was not an open society. There was and still is a thick layer of claustrophobia often coupled with a stifling imperative for correctness that can be overwhelming leading to a sense of emotional and psychological suffocation in the society. It surfaces unconsciously in daily interactions. Artists then and now arduously wipe this away layer by layer. Partly out of necessity artists in Southeast Europe seized every opportunity to take a stand. Their aim was to expand the network of multiple and sometimes opposing positions.

A practice of exchange between regional capital cities was official practice in Yugoslavia in order to establish a common cultural identity. Intellectuals and artists embraced this specific practice of "relay," which created a healthy flow of ideas and a forum for sharing different perspectives. Today there is an understanding among the young generation that this is still necessary for the region's cultural, economic, political, and social survival.

Therefore although there was not a strict authoritarian dialectic between artists and the government, a dialectic existed for artists on many levels: in the artist's persona on a regional and national level, both inside and outside Europe, as part of an open and closed society, and with both a Western and Eastern identity. Rather than labeling this a schizophrenic situation, a borderline syndrome, or a trauma, this can be seen as a

dialectic of aoristic relay. It may be disproportionate in that it calls for a consciousness beyond one's immediate locale, but with this also comes a sense of healthy cosmopolitanism or participation in the wider world.

Endnotes:

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3 Ibid., 59.

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6 Interview with Zelimir Koscevic, December 2003, Zagreb.

7 Davor Maticevic, "The Zagreb Circle," in *The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia*, ed. Marijan Susovski (Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1978), 23.

8 Ibid., 21.

9 Zelimir Koscevic, *Student Center Gallery, Zagreb 1961-1973*, (Zagreb: Student Center Gallery, 1973), 12.

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29 Nena Baljkovic, "Braco Dimitrijevic and Goran Trbuljak, Zagreb," in *The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1966-1978* ed. Marijan Susovski (Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1978), 29.

30 Ibid., 29.

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32 Branka Stipancic, *Goran Trbuljak* (Zagreb: Galerije grada, 1996), 7.

33 Interview with Goran Trbuljak October 7, 2002, Zagreb.

34 Baljkovic., 31.

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36 Interview with Jesa Denegri, November 2002, Belgrade.

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39 Interview with Braco Dimitrijevic, October 2007, Philadelphia.

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41 Baljkovic, 29.

42 Stipancic, *Goran Trbuljak*, 5.

43 Nena Dimitrijevic, "Braco Dimitrijevic: The Posthistorical Dimension," in *Braco Dimitrijevic* ed. Antun Maracic (Dubrovnik, Croatia: Museum of Modern Art, 2004), 10.

44 Baljkovic, 29.

45 Baljkovic, 30.

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60 Ibid., 95-6.

61 Dimitrijevic, “Braco Dimitrijevic: The Posthistorical Dimension,” 17.

62 Ibid., 17.

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64 Adorno, 116.

65 Ibid., 119.

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69 Interview with Jesa Denegri.

70 Baljkovic, 31.

71 Interview with Goran Trbuljak.

72 Stipancic, *Goran Trbuljak*, 5.

73 Baljkovic, 30.

74 Interview with Goran Trbuljak.

75 Stipancic, *Goran Trbuljak,* 26.

76 Stipancic, “This is Not My World,” 33.

77 Baljkovic, 33.

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80 Branka Stipancic, “This is Not My World” in *The Misfits: Conceptualist Strategies in Croatian Contemporary Art* (Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002), 33.

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84 Hrvoje Turkovic, "Tomislav Gotovac: Observation as Participation," in *Tomislav Gotovac: When I open My Eyes in the Morning I See a Movie* ed. Aleksandar Battista Ilic and Diane Nenadic (Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2003), 278.

85 Denegri, 269 and Turkovic, 277.

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89 Goran Trbuljak and Hrvoje Turkovic, "It's All a Movie (A Conversation with Tomislav Gotovac)," in *Tomislav Gotovac: When I open My Eyes in the Morning I See a Movie* ed. Aleksandar Battista Ilic and Diane Nenadic (Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2003), 283.

90 Ibid., 270.

91 Ibid., 269.

92 Milena Kalinovska, *Rhetorical Image* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1991), 9.

93 Homage to Glenn Miller is the title of one of Gotovac's films. Many of his films were titled as homages to American jazz musicians or Western structuralist filmmakers.

94 Kalinovska, 49.

95 Nena Dimitrijevic, "In the Mirror of Rhetoric," in Rhetorical Image ed. Kalinovska (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1991), 24.

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97 Zdenka Badovinac, "Body and the East" in Body and the East: From the 1960s to the Present (Ljubljana: Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 16.

98 Denegri, 274.

99 Interview with Janka Vukmir, October 7, 2002.

100 Denegri, 276

101 Adorno, 197.

102 Ibid., 198.

103 Ibid., 208.

104 Maticevic, 28.

105 Sarah Kerr, “The Horrible and the Ridiculous” in *BookForum* (December-January 2007), 18.

Aoristic Avant-garde: Experimental Art in 1960s and 70s Yugoslavia
Chapter Four
Art's Third Way in Novi Sad and Belgrade

Student Cultural Center, Belgrade and Belgrade International Theater Festival

Similar to the situation in Zagreb, the Student Cultural Center (SKC) was opened in Belgrade in 1971 to "pacify the students" after the student demonstrations of 1968. The 1968 student demonstrations protested the fact that the majority of power was concentrated in one party.[1] Also they responded to the shortcomings of the socialist government, in particular economic problems and "rifts in the fragile harmonies among national identities" came to light in the mid-1960s.[2] There are a number of different characterizations of the 1970s: the lead seventies after '68, the pluralistic seventies; the happy years of consumerism and popular culture.[3] As curator and critic Branislav Dimitrijevic characterized it, the SKC was created to "channel political dissatisfaction into marginal cultural experimentation."[4] To critic and art historian Misko Suvakovic, the Student Centers were spaces of "freedom in reservation" that were separate from the everyday drab modernism of the time.[5] Curator Irina Subotic saw the government's strategy as a way to usurp the avant-garde by welcoming it into the official cultural structures so that the students and artists could not occupy an "outside" position. The government tried to shut down any dialectical position.[6] It was necessary for the new generation of artists to create a new position for dialogue. In 1972 the political situation in the country became regressive, and there were mass firings of editorial boards; bans on films escalated. A number of artists and filmmakers were arrested and convicted.

The new generation of artists found themselves in a complicated situation. Artist Zoran Popovic described the dilemma for artists at the time: "On one hand there was a demand that art in a revolutionary society should be socially beneficial to build socialism. On the other hand, there was the belief that art's only real obligation is to explore formal issues. Both positions were an established part of the society. Young artists were caught in this bind, and so they decided to look at art and politics in a third way—a way it could be said that was truer to the real impetus for the creation of Yugoslavia with its claim to a political and economic "third way." This resulted in a fundamental change in the social role of the artist.[7]

Endnotes can be found on pages 105-109.

Artists Rasa Todosijevic, Marina Abramovic, Era Milivojevic, Nesa Paripovic, Zoran Popovic, Gergelj Urkom gathered informally as a group with similar artistic sensibilities at the Student Cultural Center in Belgrade, from 1971 to 1973. At the time, this radical practice was limited to the very edge of the cultural scene and had no official cultural currency.[8] They did not advocate autonomy of art from the social sphere but did believe in the necessity of a critical distance to forge, as Dejan Sretenovic phrased it, "an emancipatory and socially grounded function of artistic production."[9]

According to Jesa Denegri in his salient assessment of the art scene in Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 1970s written in 1978, there was a drastic rift between the new generation of artists and the one preceding it. Curator Irina Subotic, who curated BITEF (Belgrade International Theater Festival) in the late 1960s and directed the Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art starting in 1974, concurred with this point. She was highly criticized for including younger artists in her program. This was not an official crackdown, but she was criticized publicly.[10] Denegri asserts that the animosity between generations was not necessarily because of direct provocation but because of vastly different approaches to artmaking. The new art scene steered a completely new course: not only was their art different, their very notion of art and its function was different.[11] He explained that artists acted in "opposition to certain institutions which represent socially privileged or retrograde ideas," and the "inert functioning of most galleries…the uniformed criticism, and the hidden existence of a market mechanism, which differs from that in the West but is powerful and dangerous in its own way."[12]

The circulation of people, art, and ideas through Belgrade was extensive. Jesa Denegri makes the case for the cohesiveness of this activity in and of itself as an art movement. This, I argue, is the unique aspect of conceptual art in Yugoslavia that can be called "relay." Denegri made a point in his 1978 essay to track precisely all the names of the international artists who participated in actions and talks at SKC Belgrade and at BITEF. He also detailed the exhibitions, mostly in Europe, in which young Yugoslav artists were showing their art at the time. He asserted, "it has above all been motivated by the need of the subject for self-expression and self-affirmation in an active and contradictory spiritual reality which is always full of tension. It was the feeling of existential determination," more than an opposition to society or structures and institutions.[13]

In the late 1960s, the Belgrade International Theater Festival was the hub of experimental art and performance and international relay. Such innovative international programming was unheard of before this in Yugoslavia. Irina Subotic and Biljana Tomic organized the cultural program and later when SKC opened, the two organizations and their curators collaborated to host programming that connected Yugoslavia with the most current international art. For example, the exhibition Arte Permanente in September 1968 included electronic music, concrete music, experimental film, and computer art based on the ideas of multiples and technologies of reproduction. The next month BITEF hosted an exhibition of Arte Povera featuring Giovanni Anselmo, Alghiero Boetti, Mario Merz, Gilberto Zorio, Michelangelo Pistoletto and his group Lo Zoo, Giulio Paolini, Luciano Fabro, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Emilio Prini, Jannis Kounellis, and Pino Pascali. This exhibition proved to have an enduring influence on the young artists in Yugoslavia.

Curator Biljana Tomic said of this time that art was not political: at first the artistic practice and presentations were not affected by politics. At BITEF, they felt they could do anything because they were working completely unnoticed by the authorities. This was before the transition in politics in the early 1970s when things became much more difficult for artists. In the 1960s artists made happenings, fluxus, land art, video and wanted to push traditional mediums and explore. They felt completely free to do this and to work with colleagues at home and abroad. They were interested in working collectively. They created a collective situation through which they were able to express individual subjectivity.[14]

Paper was a key mode of communication, like email is today. Exchange internationally was central to the practice. Artists discovered that they were able to be present through distribution of paper correspondence.[15] Tomic mounted an exhibition of her archive of international invitation cards to demonstrate this relay network and also to show the structure of the art system and its physical manifestation. Documentary exhibitions take on a particular importance in Yugoslavia, even today. The thing itself, the work of art was in some ways not as important as the social network, the ambience, and the act of gathering people together for dialogue.

In addition, at that time, Tomic and her colleagues were art nomads: there were no borders, they were free to travel totally. In the late 60s and early 70s, there was never a sense that they were "Eastern" or "Yugoslavian" artists. She felt at that time, that the motivations for making art were the same in West Europe and Yugoslavia. Both Western European and Yugoslav artists were reacting to modernism, formalism, and the art market and using ephemeral practices. There was no difference at first in Yugoslavia because of the socialist system; she maintained that this was not an issue. Tomic invited Achille Bonita Oliva and some of the artists from his exhibition "Persone" to Belgrade in 1971 to discuss their work. She was in correspondence with Joseph Beuys in 1972 and 1973, and he came to Belgrade and lectured and gave posters of his Bureau of Direct Democracy to SKC archive. Daniel Buren participated at the "Marking the Positions" exhibition at Dom Omladine (House of Youth). In the same exhibition, Goran Trbuljak from Zagreb made chalk outlines of his body on the street. It was in 1975 when Marina Abramovic left for Amsterdam, and the next year when de Appel in Amsterdam requested that Tomic put together an exhibition of "Yugoslav art" that she first realized a differentiation in artmaking in Yugoslavia versus West Europe.[16]

The New Generation of Artists in Belgrade

Dunja Blazevic was the first director of the exhibition program at the gallery of the Student Cultural Center when it opened in 1971 (she later went on to be the director of the whole SKC from 1975-9), and the board of the SKC was also made up of the younger generation so the space became a good place for the cross-fertilization of ideas.[17] Blazevic was the daughter of very powerful official in the government so she had a certain amount of immunity and was able to mount projects that others may not have been able to accomplish. She used her position to open the cultural environment.[18]

The new generation of artists wished to place their art in concrete reality and move away from metaphorical meaning. The first exhibition "Objects and Projects" at the Student Cultural Center in collaboration with BITEF in Sept 1971 was organized around the question of how everyday objects might be considered art. Slobodan-Era Milivojevic, Rasa Todosijevic, Nesa Paripovic, Zoran Popovic, Marina Abramovic, Gergelj Urkom and Evgenija Demnijevska participated. Abramovic showed *The Liberation of the Horizon* consisting of two photographs taken from different angles of the building Studio 212. In one of the photographs, the building was erased. These large-scale photographs were shown in Republic Square. Todosijevic's construction *The Window* included the frame of a window with sand and grass. Popovic drew lines around the art objects accentuating the negative space around their forms. The artists filmed the events of the opening as its own transitory art action that provided more information as to the nature and function of the art on view.[19]

The next month, the exhibition "October 71" was staged at SKC gallery and also in other rooms throughout the building in a conscious statement to move outside of the usual exhibition site. For this show Gergelj Urkom exhibited the photocopied objects: *The Evening News of 31 October 1971*, *The Story of a Shoelace*, *The Carpet, Hair, the Tassel, The Newspaper*. In *Six Minutes in the operation of a Clock* (1971-72) Urkom attempted to record the action of a clock with the Xerox machine, as the clock also captured the work of the machine. He used various mechanical methods of reproduction to conceal and revealing the art object. For this exhibition, Rasa Todosijevic made several arte povera style objects to underscore the elusive nature of reality and negate the aesthetics of art. Era Milivojevic adhered tape to all the mirrors around the SKC building in an act to negate surfaces for representation and for his performance at the opening, he put tape all over Abramovic's body.[20] This action could be read as the antithesis or antidote to his act of covering surfaces because he interacted and called attention to the live body of an artist. Zoran Popovic showed office equipment as part of his series called *Kancum Art* (office art).

In 1972 the exhibition Young Artists and Young Critics was mounted at the Museum of Contemporary Art and at the SKC the Festival of Expanded Media took place, known as the legendary first "April Meeting." This event occurred annually until 1979 to address new forms of artmaking, especially video, performance, and photography. The third major exhibition that year was October 1972. That year the curators introduced a new important component of the project in the form of public extemporaneous discussions that related to all of the exhibition projects, to provid another layer of analysis and interaction. Dunja Blazevic, Nikola Vizner and Jasna Tijardovic-Popovic, who were members of the art board of the SKC, curated the exhibition.[21]

At the "October '71" exhibition, Marina Abramovic created a public sound art piece, the first of its kind in Yugoslavia, *Birds Twittering in the Tree*, which consisted of a loudspeaker perched in a tree outside SKC that projected the sounds of birds chirping. Inside she created a series of sound boxes with the sounds of *Bleeting*(sic), *Moaning*, and *A Shot*. She created a number of Sound Spaces in 1972, which were meant to provoke shock in the audience.

For one of her *Sound Spaces*, sounds of the body seemed to inhabit open empty room punctuated by light beams and surrounded by white drapes. Video and sound were recorded and immediately played back so that the recorded activity was of equal importance to the live action.[22] Abramovic's sound pieces created for "October '72" imitated the destruction of buildings while she aimed floodlights at the actual standing building of the SKC. *Airport Sound Environment* featured the voice of an airport announcer. *Circular Space* was the echo of a wire strung through the space.

For his performance installation at "October 72," *The Dark Chamber,* Era Milivojevic stood in the corner of a very dark room under a dim red light with a jar of marmalade and a knife with marmalade on it. As visitors entered the room, unaware of his presence, he observed them. As visitors eyes adjusted to the dark, they were surprised to find that another person, the artist, was also in the room.[23]

Zoran Popovic worked in a variety of mediums and started making films in 1966. His film *The Head/The Circle* (1968-9) consisted of eight projectors and 8 different shots of rotation of the artist's head. Zoran Popovic's *Axioms* (1971-72) were basic signs or notations constructed on the basis of symmetry, fitted into a grid structure, and presented in photographs, on slides, in film on videotape and in drawing, performance and posters. By employing these systems he wanted to show the incongruity between objective, formal truth and sensory or experiential truth.[24] He also performed these signs with his body in a pitch-dark room with light bulbs attached to his fingertips.

In addition to filmmaking and performance, Popovic also wrote theoretical and critical essays. He wrote a text to accompany *Axioms* that discussed his thoughts on the nature of art. His other texts were critical of the art system in Yugoslavia. Later he made two films, *Without a Title* and *Struggle in New York,* using the method of improvisation as a tool to voice criticism. The latter film, shot while Popovic was in New York in 1974-5, revealed underlying conflicts in collaborative artmaking of the group Art and Language.

In contrast, there is very little documentation of Gergelj Urkom's art as it is nearly impossible to reproduce visually in photographs. He called his art "the interspace, an interlayer of the invisible, which he adopts as a radical attitude to life and behaviour."[25] Gergelj Urkom's *The Definition of What Art is Not* made for October '72, was a cassette-shaped piece of paper on the glass of the gallery door. This was to Urkom an "interstratum" or "hidden object" that addressed positive-negative relations. This 'mental object" was a reflection on physicality of new media. Often Urkom used Xeroxes of previous works to highlight the dichotomies of negative and positive and old and new.

The previous year, Gergelj Urkom created homage of sorts to Marcel Duchamp at the October '71 exhibition at Student Cultural Center--a tubular tin object entitled *Urinal M.D.* He subsequently wrote a text in 1973 on the importance of the influence of Dada and readymade objects. However his interest in the readymade was quite different from its historical notion. Instead of using its everyday-ness to provoke shock in contrast to its high-art context, he strove to eliminate the found object's familiarity. He took a more existential approach to the readymade: "The object formally exists in a different way from a similar one in a non-work…My intention is to do something descriptive within this experience. …it can be empty and thus self-sufficient. Emptiness as a principle….in

a way this is connected with my consciousness."[26] In the early 1970's, he conducted mental exercises that were papers imprinted with asterisks. He also made paintings at that time, which he subsequently painted over to create a neutral tone, an interlayer as he called it. In 1977 for his solo show at the Student Cultural Center he exhibited five works dealing with his notion of "interlayer." Each was a triad of a white, black and dark blue painting in different arrangements. The center painting in each was the finished work and the process of painting-over could be observed in the other two. In the 1977 5th Triennial of Yugoslav Art, Urkom used the same format realized through photography. He pursued a notion of "imaginary mathematics" consisting of a photogram on platinum paper with geometrical symbols in the corner, "which suggest the progressive and infinite spreading of the imaginary space."[27]

Nesa Paripovic had an exhibition of his minimal paintings at the SKC in 1971, but the year before this he presented the installation *Red Square* at the exhibition Action T-71 at gallery T-70 in Groznja in Istria. For this exhibition of outdoor works Paripovic affixed an object with a nylon string so that it obscured the view of the landscape. With this he wished to explore the presentation of the object. (59)

With a comparable goal but using different materials, Nesa Paripovic's *Possibilities of the Camera from 1 to infinity* (1974) explored the technical aspects of photography. He was interested in the photo as a material object, not as a mode of representation Similarly, the film *1942-2001* was a 40-photo record of his everyday behavior. The film *NP 1977* shot by artist Jovan Cekic, was shown with a text "Report on Movements of NP, 31 Vojvode Brane, Belgrade on 25th October 1976." With this he began a dossier on himself. In 1976 he made the photobook *The Photo Dossier, NP 1976,* which was shown at SKC in 1977. Later he made a film with Misko Suvakovic comprised of three slow motion scenes. For Paripovic, "the record of an artwork is at the same time the work itself."[28] The psychological qualities of the art object and the technical means of its creation, are of equal worth. Also equally important are the recording possibilities of photography, video and film.

Suvakovic has written that the main concern of Paripovic's art was research into the status of the painter and the art of painting through other media: photography, film, text. He documents the life of an artist who does not paint. He explored relations of public and private, autobiography and psychoanalysis. In Suvakovic's assessment, conceptual art for Paripovic was not a meta-linguistic, but a meta-media investigation.[29]

Also an investigator of painting but coming from a different background, Goran Djordjevic was not trained as an artist but was a student at the Electrical Engineering Faculty in Belgrade. He painted in seclusion for several years before making his first appearance at the 2nd April Meeting at SKC in 1973. He enjoyed the connections he saw in the painting of Malevich and Supremetism and the rigorous methods applied in science. His 1974 drawing *Examples of Process in Square System* was the result of his inquiry into these connections. On the occasion of presenting his drawing *Some elements in the analysis of spatial-quantitative structures and processes* at SKC in December 1976, he stated, "My research aims at setting up a formal-logical system of a visual character, which by its very nature could be classified as a set of fundamental principles of the organization of thought processes. The nature of this system is determined by the

possibility of its graphic representation."[30] At Trigon 77 in Graz, Djordjevic presented *Discrete special structures and their connection with the theory of graphs*, which used exact structures to create the work of art. In 1976 and 1977, Djordjevic wrote several texts that linked his logical and exacting approach to art to sociopolitical thought. He was concerned with the way that the art system exercised economic and ideological exploitation of art and artists. At this time, Djordjevic began practicing what he called "constructive diversion" by setting up an extremely rigorous, exact formal artistic language with the intent to rebuff manipulative ideologically-based interpretation. "…to maintain…through formal, rigorous methods---the integrity of their work."[31]

This was just the beginning of his interest in the creation of the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, the historic Armory show and the trajectories of movements, including futurism and the temporal imprecision of the notion of the avant-garde. The notion of the Western avant-garde has been a major source of artistic dialogue and innovation in the 20th century. However the artists in the Western Balkans, like artists in many parts of the world, have never seen this art in person. Its dissemination has taken on mythic proportions, and in some cases its visual language was co-opted by the state as official art (as was the case of abstract modernism in Yugoslavia). Today, even despite globalization and virtual presences, the actual avant-garde art object remains primary but elusive, even imagined. It could be argued that the iconoclastic tendency of conceptual art is sparked by fetishization. Djordjevic takes up this problem in his extensive practice that he began presenting in the 1980s.

Rasa Todosijevic also raised questions about the ideology behind arrangements and collections of art. His earliest installations consisted of arrangements of objects that had no exact meaning, but whose arrangement as a group created meaning. In 1972 to 1975 he made performances, and in 1975 he turned to the use of language, arranged similarly to his previous work with objects. The impulse for Rasa Todosijevic's work was to denounce dogmatism or conformism in the creative process His generation was subjected to education through propaganda of the Popular Liberation War, the Partisan liberation from German occupation during World War II. Later in his study at Belgrade Art Academy he was schooled in "art for art's sake" modernism that was the neutralizing ideological tool of the socialist bureaucracy.[32] Todosijevic assessed the art historical schooling in 60s and 70s Yugoslavia, stating that "there was no Duchamp, only Bonnard; no Malevich, only Chagall; no Pop, only New Figuration."[33] Early twentieth-century avant-gardes from both abroad and inside Yugoslavia were given no scholarly attention.

In the exhibition "Frippery Land," (Drangularijum) at the Student Cultural Center in June 1971, when invited to exhibit non-art objects dear to him, Todosijevic presented his wife Marinela Kozelj along with a bottle, a chair, a night-table, and a small Calder-like mobile. In the exhibition catalogue, Todosijevic made it clear about the objects he chose to present that he did "not wish them to be interpreted as symbolic, associative or that they are given or taken away some attributes. Marinela is not an exhibit. She is in constant relation with all things. She passes by them, touches them. I wished to note down their mutual relations, not as a photograph or a dead museum exhibit. Marinela moves, she speaks."[34] With this early work, he began to articulate his reasons for choosing performance as his main mode of work for the next several years.

Todosijevic used symbols and systems in ways that emptied their meanings, and showed their absurdity and critical breaking points. He was critical of nationalist ideology and connected totalitarian discourse with institutions of art. His use of symbols was multiple: referential, structural, contextual. For example, he often used loaves of bread in his work. The postcard "Series of Decisions: Yes," featured a photograph of a loaf of bread with "Da" ("Yes") painted on it. The price of the postcard corresponds to the price of bread. *Nailed Bread* (1972) were loaves nailed to thick wooden boards to become heavy objects violently stripped of their use as nourishment—their only reason for being. In Yugoslavia, although the government promoted bread as a symbol of a never-starving nation,[35] it was popularly known that many people lived in poverty.

Todosijevic's use of basic materials in an arte povera style translated into real physical scenarios in his actions like *Was ist Kunst?* He forged direct expression and communication through bare actions. However he did not elide representation or metaphor. He continually replenished meaning in everyday objects and sayings by putting them to use over and over again in new scenarios. *Drinking of Water-inversions, imitation, and contrasts* done at the Student Cultural Center in 1974 was one such performance. Over the course of 35 minutes Todosijevic ingested 26 glasses of water. He swallowed in rhythm with the breathing of a large fish that he took out of an aquarium and laid on a dry cloth on the floor between him and the audience. At a certain point in the action, the artist threw up the water because his stomach was too full. The duration of the performance was determined by violet pigment under the tablecloth. Once the cloth turned from white to completely violet when saturated with the water, the action was over. All the while Marinela Kozelj sat by stoically, as was her frequent position in Todosijevic's works. She was dressed heavily against the cold in the room whereas in contrast Todosijevic wore no shirt.[36] The events took place in front of large white sheets of paper on which Todosijevic had written key words like "fish, water, measures, disinfection, Marinela, silence, Josephine Beuys, Rasa, R. Mutt 1917, Decision as Art, Presumption about Art."

With these acts, Todosijevic tortured a fish and his own body. He denied the fish and alternately flooded his own body with the compound that provides life for both. He demonstrated what results from the vast contrast between the positive and negative extremes of a banal glass of water. In a rare statement, Todosijevic explained the setup of the action and insisted, "not even one physical element, color, relations, organism condition or mental sensations in my work, do not have descriptive, symbolic, metaphoric or ritual character."[37] This translation into English of the double negative in Serbian was incorrect, so the meaning of his quote was actually that his art emphatically did not employ or create any metaphors whatsoever. This statement stands at odds with the heavily symbolic, though mundane, materials that Todosijevic chose to work with: bread, water, fish, which all carry biblical meaning as well as particular local political resonance (as with the bread). The more basic the materials, the more universal and symbolic the meaning. The artist's statement and the interesting slip in translation may owe something to the fact that Todosijevic in the early 1970s in Yugoslavia was at the crossroads of several significant art historical moments. In the several years prior to this, Joseph Beuys had been making art with everyday materials that he chose for their

symbolic meaning and energy. Beuys attended the 3rd April Meeting and gave a lecture at the Student Cultural Center in 1974. The impact of the visit still resonates strongly even today. Although he was clearly deeply influenced by Beuys, Todosijevic was part of the next generation who were interested in doing away with metaphor in favor of direct communication.

From 1976 to 1981 Todosijevic performed *Was ist Kunst?* scores of times in a variety of cities and setups. The action was always the same: the artist confronted a female partner (usually his long-time partner Marinela Kozelj) demanding "Was ist Kunst?" The artist repeated the question over and over insistently, almost violently, interrogating her until he could no longer speak. The question "Was ist Kunst?!" lingered unanswered no matter how much it was demanded. Despite the agitation of the questioner, the interlocutor shut down the conversation by remaining stoically silent. She bore the rage of her interrogator and defiantly rejected it through silence. The woman never replies, as Dejan Sretenovic has written, "like a passively-masochistic attitude of a citizen who, in a totalitarian regime, loses his will and thus contributes to maintaining the repressive apparatus."[38] In fact, Todosijevic linked totalitarianism and the art system in much of his art. Kozelj's calm silence in the face of Todosijevic's nightmarish anarchic behavior carried the quality of an antidote. Her solid presence kept the pendulum of rhythm of Todosijevic's extreme expression swinging back to the center and not careening off the deep end. It seems Todosijevic saw that much psychological power could be wielded through such determined silence. However the meaning or use of this power was never revealed as it could never be expressed, as then it would be lost.

The result was horribly unsettling for the audience, although no overt violence occurred. Todosijevic performed this, obviously, for the benefit of the audience. It was the negative reaction on their part that he sought. Todosijevic has said, that his performance, "seeks to irritate a negative side of man in order to make him aware of it—your bitterness after the performance is that negative side of you."[39] This operates much as Antonin Artaud's concept of "theater of cruelty." Whereas Marina Abramovic's Belgrade-era performances were masochistic acts of injury or exhaustion meant to elicit an empathetic reaction from the audience, Todosijevic directed his aggression towards others.[40] Both artists engaged in real violence, not representations of it, but they exercised this in opposite ways.

Rasa Todosijevic's performance *Art and Memory*, originally titled *My Last Masterpiece* (1975)[41] for the 4th April Meeting, Student Cultural Center, Belgrade was a cross-reference of subjective memory and the official story of the history of art. In the performance he sat at a table wearing a handkerchief covering his nose and mouth for four hours listing artists names from art history verbally until he could not remember any more names. With this act he was building art history, marking those names that can be recalled. During the performance he shielded his identity from view, perhaps to dismiss his particular identity as an artist. He thus created an interplay between the identity of specific artists and general art history.

Since the 1960's, Belgrade artist Rasa Todosijevic has addressed the impossibility of foreclosing meaning. His unremitting critique of ideology takes the instability of the symbol as a means to achieve freedom. Recently Rasa Todosijevic has gathered friends

and viewers together at group dinners around a very large swastika-shaped table. This act explores dialogue and shared experience and addresses the impact of loss of individual identity in collective rituals. His critical practice, based on the incessant invention of the meaning of the sign, particularly of ideological symbols, was one of the foundations of NSK's work in 1980s Slovenia. Rasa Todosijevic today continues to employ rhetoric with the goal of provoking the audience towards the actualization of an idea or a position. When an artist has the freedom to generate expression and meaning, this begins a dialogue. Todosijevic's artistic acts are intended to evoke this engagement.

The context for experimental art in Novi Sad and Vojvodina

The new generation of artists' pursuit of an "artistic third way" had the most serious ramifications in Vojvodina, the northern region of Serbia, bordering on Hungary. The region has had a tradition of being home to people of many different national origins, and so has always been fairly progressive. It was known in the early 70s that in Novi Sad there was a counter-culture movement,[42] and so the government was monitoring art activities there more than in any other region. The Youth Tribune in Novi Sad, played a similar role to the Student Cultural Centers in Zagreb and Belgrade. However its administration was very different: it was founded in the 1950s and was a state organization. So it did not have the immunity of being part of the university that the student cultural centers had. Its day-to-day operations and cultural programs were directed, however by local curators and artists and were very open to new artistic activity. At the beginning of the 60s, Zilnik was the chief manager of the Youth Tribune. Later in the early 1970s, Dejan and Bogdanka Poznanovic organized the programs at the Tribune and were also editors of the cultural journal *Polja*. At the time these outlets were very open to new artistic activity.[43]

For Balint Szombathy, an artist from Subotica, the Tribina Mladih was "complete freedom, as a great possibility." For large events like concerts and performances, after the members got their seats, the doors would be open to the public to buy tickets. Of course the government comrades were in the crowd, taking note both of the content of the events and also of who was in the crowd attending. This was a very open atmosphere as opposed to the situation in Krakow, Poland, for example, where only members were allowed. [44]

In 1969 information about art activity from abroad became more readily available. The art section of the student's paper *Index* was edited by Slobodan Tisma, Janez Kocijancic and Mirko Radojicic. They were also members of the editorial staff of the Youth Tribune, later joined by Miroslav Mandic.[45] The opportunity that these publications provided for the artists to express their views and present their work should not be underestimated. Today, art publications do not carry nearly the weight of these journals. In fact, the full editorial board of *Index* was fired when the government changed in 1971 and became more conservative, as part of de-statization when more power was given to the local level.[46] Some published sources state that the Tribune was also banned from operating at certain points in this time. However Bogdanka Poznanovic, who headed the Tribune at the time stated that it was not true that it was closed. The Tribune

was not allowed to hold activities openly for the public. Certainly in Novi Sad, the state was monitoring the art scene more than in Belgrade and other cities.[47]

For example when Dejan and Bogdanka Poznanovic invited OHO to Novi Sad in 1969 the public and the authorities reacted strongly. Tomaz Salamun made a drawing with chalk from the Youth Tribune in the center of the old city along the main boulevard and across the Danube up to the fortress. He wrote a poem "Why did I draw this line?" OHO also performed *Triglyph* in the public square. The police checked in on the group's activities and spoke with Marko Pogacnik to ask for an explanation of the group's actions.[48]

During the time that the Tribune was under heavy scrutiny, Dejan and Bogdanka Poznanovic opened DT 20 Studio. As Balint Szombathy described it, "In their flat, in their studio, exhibitions were held, leading art magazines were delivered there from all over the world. It was some sort of an academy, an academy in a different sense, no like the state one. And we had very energetic discussions about art as young people who felt art even more than we knew about it or understood it."[49] They published the column "Information from DT 20 Studio," which was a translation into Hungarian, Serbo-Croatian, and English of current international news in experimental art, in *Polja* and *Student* magazine. Two of the issues of *Student* that Szombathy edited were banned.[50]

Index was the publication of the Students of Vojvodina just as *Student* was the voice of the Alliance of Students of the University of Belgrade in the years after 1968. These publications had an important voice and were separate from the University Communist Unions at both universities. There was an open clash between the CU and *Index,* and the publication was eventually banned because of its content and support for the Alliance of Students in opposition to the Provincial Committee of the Communist Union.[51]

Latinka Perovic, who was a member of the Communist Union explained that the communists were "between a rock and a hard place," faced with the tough decision of whether the country should go towards liberalization or towards Stalinization. In the 1970s it started to choose the latter course.[52]

The government did not target visual artists, rather editors, filmmakers and writers were imprisoned.[53] In Belgrade, Lazar Stojanovic's film *Plastic Jesus* was immediately banned after its release in 1971, and he was jailed for three years. The film was a collage of acting and archival material. Croatian performance artist and filmmaker Tomislav Gotovac played the protagonist. The archival material was presented as a subversive commentary on the socialist government and the connections between Titoism, Stalinism, and totalitarianism. Stojanovic placed archival images of Tito and Hitler side-by side in the film. Also he inserted imagery of Serb and Croat nationalist forces from World War Two into the storyline, which took place in the late 1960s, implying that ethnic hatred was part of the operational mode of the current socialist state. He did not offer any value judgment on the images.[54]

In Novi Sad, Slavko Bogdanovic, a writer primarily and a member of the artist group KOD, was imprisoned for eight months because of a song that he and co-member Miroslav Mandic wrote. The offending words that made light of Tito were: "Why would Richard Burton play Tito while Tito is alive?"[55]

Films by Novi Sad filmmaker Zelimir Zilnik were banned, and so he moved to Germany until recently in order to continue his filmmaking career. In his film *Early Works* (referring to the early works of Marx, which were favored by the student revolutionaries), the woman comrade protagonist was named "Yugoslavia." Everyone wanted her and only could have her by killing her in the end. Throughout the film, she constantly criticized the socialist aristocracy while she and her student friends met with little success with their own brand of revolution. The film portrayed the academic revolutionaries as naïve voices who believed in "real" communist ideals that would never be fulfilled. They ran into trouble out on the Fruskagora mountain, on the river, and in the villages. In one scene there was a clash in the mud between the revolutionaries and the "village comrades." Yugoslavia pronounced, "I am happy there will be no peasants in communism."

Zilnik attended the Korcula Summer School, which was a yearly international gathering of philosophers started in the early 1960s by the Praxis group from Zagreb. Zilnik felt ill at ease with all the compliments paid by Marcuse, Fromm, and others about the country of Yugoslavia, which they considered to be a possible model of social organization. "Those were just their superficial opinions. We were the ones who lived there, constantly facing and stumbling against dogmatisms even in the most ideal of times."[56]

> Socialist times were much more closed than nowadays. The ideals of Marxism were not upheld by the state at the time and there was no distance for reflection or analysis of the socialist situation. Now there can be more discussion. Back then, once socialism became the official mode, it was doctrine, dogmatic, ideological and bureaucratic: this was the socialist aristocracy. These were difficult circumstances for making art. Self-management became a parody and Yugoslavia was only a corrupted state at the end. Ideals had been abandoned, and in fact, these ideals were out of touch with real people.[57]

In *Early Works*, the contrasting imagery of the student revolutionaries reading theoretical texts and the mayhem that befalls them when they set foot into nature resonates with Theodor Adorno's contention that the bourgeois modern nation replaced natural association, and that by retreating from natural bonds, the nation also suppressed them. Thus the nation acts "as if" it were a natural association. When a form of association that is dynamic misunderstands itself as a natural formation or misconstrues itself ideologically as natural, the delusion of a nation emerges. This can also be characterized as racism. [58] Such a delusion was the notion of "Brotherhood and Unity" in socialist Yugoslavia. In an attempt to unify the country, ethnic difference was minimized. Adorno describes the relationship between the nation and nature:

> In the concept of the nation, repressed nature is mobilized in the interests of a progressive domination of nature, progressive rationality, and as a regressive phenomenon, that is to say, as a return to something already

> rendered obsolete it is just as contaminated by that as it is by its untruth, which compels it constantly to gloss over its failings and exaggerate its virtues. Precisely because the nation is not nature, it has ceaselessly to proclaim its closeness to nature, its immediacy and the intrinsic value of the national community.[59]

In Yugoslavia, fellow countrymen were linked rhetorically as brothers--as family--in the notion of "Brotherhood and Unity," even if they belonged to very different classes, ethnicities, or economic backgrounds.

Groups Bosch + Bosch and KOD

Balint Szombathy began his essay in the *New Art Practice in Yugoslavia*, published in 1978 with the statement:

> The seven years covering the activity of the group Bosch + Bosch contain very few works which can be related to the conceptual views of Kosuth or of the group Art & Language….[which are concerned with] a notionally and linguistically homogeneous core. It is therefore, more correct if we say that the manifold and rather heterogeneous creative work of the group Bosch + Bosch is permeated by a conceptual matrix….or as Adorno would call it "aura" is not an external manifestation of a strong, homogeneous and narrow philosophical system; it is rather a consciously developed practice and improvement of a given attitude, view of the world and way of thinking. The new art of the time was marked by a general change of attitude, a conscious departure from the usual, the traditional, the stereotype of a given environment, protest and dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs.[60]

Bosch + Bosch was founded in 1969 by Szombathy and Slavko Matkovic, and included the members Laszlo Szalma, Laszlo Kerekes, Katalin Ladik, Attila Csernik, and Ante Vukov.[61] The group came to be in Szombathy's thinking an umbrella term for a wide range of visual experimentation in Vojvodina (excepting Novi Sad, which had its own groups) from 1969 to 1976.[62] Although the output of this group was largely language-based including concrete poetry and phonic poetry, the impetus for this work belonged to a larger concern with mark-making as individual expression.

The group had participants of Croatian, Serbian and Hungarian backgrounds,[63] so language and ethnic identity were also at issue. The group, though disparate, shared the view that "art is above all an activity of marking."[64] They undertook visual mapping of the environment as well as investigations into the psychophysical condition of the personality. Kerekes was a member from 1971 to 1974 and during this time articulated his own large gestures in the parched lakebed of Lake Palic. With this, he combined his own personal marks with nature.[65]

Szombathy's performance *Lenin in Budapest* (1972) was to Misko Suvakovic a political and critical statement on Eastern European art.[66] To Branislav Dimitrijevic it was a political subversion. Szombathy walked around the streets in Budapest with a placard of Lenin's face. Of course, public space all over Eastern Europe was glutted with this image, so certainly, another image of Lenin was unnecessary. So Szombathy was focused not on the representational meaning of the image, but on the act of presenting the image. Dimitrijevic argued that it was an ambivalent gesture, to which no particular meaning could be attached. Also presenting the image of Lenin in this situation was not a collective spectacle, but an individual act.[67]

Group KOD was founded in April 1970 at the initiative of Janez Kocijancic, Slobodan Tisma and Mirko Radojicic. The original members included also Branko Andric, Slavko Bogdanovic and Miroslav Mandic. The members were all critics, poets, and writers, not actually artists. They shared an interest in the problems of language, phenomenology, and an eclectic array of topics. They wanted to address the latest trends in art in order to become engaged in international activities of which they had insufficient knowledge at the time. In writing an application for the funding of their Review publication, they arrived at a definition of the constitution of their own practice. "…a review of this kind is a medium for the re-examination and discovery of different possibilities of expression with new values."[68] Their application was not funded, though their ideas became a guiding premise for their continuing practice.

The name KOD (Code) was chosen from information theory, the system that enables communication. KOD did not consider documentation to be relevant because it would be an extraction from a dense context, that of life, which was interwoven with their art.[69] KOD did not wish to banalize art. To the contrary, their sense of life and intense interaction, like that of the OHO Group, was so robust and overflowing with energy that they wished to infuse art with such humanity. On the other hand, they also strove to "live artistically, to live art." They also identified the key problem "to free art of all the functions ascribed to it, starting from the educational and cognitive functions to the religious and ideological ones."[70] Radojicic, one of the group's members, wrote that the group's impetus was "to retain independence of art in relation to any ideology, to bring it closer to life, a desire to democratize and de-institutionalize art."[71] This developed in the last year of their art activity into a need to be socially engaged, though as they put it, "not with a view to politicization."[72]

Group KOD believed democraticization existed in tandem with de-institutionalization of art: that art should not be subsumed and dictated by the socialist government, nor by a commercial gallery system. For this group, an essential element of open, democratic art was the artists' mode of participation. Group KOD was very dismayed that the European exhibitions in which they participated were mounted with an eye to the commercial end product. They worked toward an artmaking that incorporated democratic values distinct from, and unhindered by, capitalism.

KOD were intrigued by semiotics, sign systems and communication, and created linguistic analyses and structuralist poems. Most compelling were their projects that extended their experimentation with communication into the public sphere. *Public Art Class* was held on the banks of the Danube in Novi Sad in October 1970. The group was

joined by Goran Trbuljak from Zagreb, and Braco Dimitrijevic also sent a contribution. Miroslav Mandic floated styrofoam letters spelling Dunav (Danube) along the bank of the river. Radojicic poured paint along the embankment, which dissipated and disappeared into the waters of the river.[73]

At the cultural event Sutjeska Youth 1970, at Tjentiste, Slavko Bogdanovic created a number of land sculptures based on primary colors. First, he created three interconnected holes in the ground that were flooded with red, blue and yellow paint. The land sculpture, titled *Cascades,* resulted in a flow of changing-colored paint when it arrived at the surface from grey to white and then to blue. Bogdanovic created a series of painted land sculptures with Mirko Radojicic titled *Apotheoses to Jackson Pollock*. First, they poured paint on a square meter of grass and made a print from the surface and then set the print on a board adrift in the Sutjeska river to meet up with the Drina, the Sava and the Danube and eventually reach the Black Sea. Another in the series involved pouring paint on a large round stone near the national monument to the liberation. The artists poured primary-colored paint into a funnel inserted into the ground in *Multi-Colour Interaction*.[74]

During the youth event, Bogdanovic also created *Black Tape* on the façade of the Youth Centre in Tjentiste. This was simply a line of three meters of black tape affixed to the side of the building with the words black tape underneath. This was one of the first and most severe tautological gestures that KOD made. Janez Kocijancic independently created several works under the name of the group, but then left the group before they were completed. *Phila Series 19104* included dumping red pigment into the Sutjeska River to color the water as an allegory of the blood spilled during the liberation fighting that took place at the site.[75]

Other members of KOD, Miroslav Mandic and Slobodan Tisma contributed to the 4th Triennial of Yugoslav Visual Art in August 1970. For *Ad Acta Mobile 452* the artists counted the paces from the train station to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Novi Sad. Tisma connected the interior and the exterior of the Youth Tribune building with black and yellow ropes tied together, extending through the entrance door and the second floor window. *Coordinated Sensitivity* was an action very much in the vein of OHO's group projects. Mandic and Tisma compared the degree of similarity of five geometrical forms that each drew independently.[76]

KOD were dedicated to making projects in urban or natural environments. One such work is *Projekat 3p4a2k* (1970-71) by Janez Kocijancic of Group KOD. Three areas on the map of Novi Sad are highlighted: the Petrovaradin Fortress, the square in front of the main Catholic Church where the Youth Tribune was located, and the Danube Park. Very much in the vein of the Situationist International, whose activities included the construction of game-like situations in existing urban spaces, Kocijancic proclaimed that the three areas of urban topography—the fortress, the square and the park—would be rotated so that the square in front of the Catholic Church would move tot he site of the Danube Park, and that that location would migrate to the Petrovaradin Fortress, which in turn would replace the Catholic church square. The text accompanying the project states that this maneuver would be achieved by painting each location a color and would be completed by proclaiming that the act had been accomplished. Their project was based on

the manipulation of physical presence—not through a physical process but by the proclamation and dissemination of information. By proposing possibilities for physical space through an idiosyncratic act of the circulation of spaces they parodied the absurdity and randomness of accepted belief systems underpinning not only the art market, but also political ideology. To rearrange iconic urban monuments such as Petrovaradin Fortress played with historical constructions much in the same way that Braco Dimitrijevic's art explored. Just as important as the critical component of the work was the aspect of play that KOD introduced in this project.

Spontaneity and play was also a key aspect of the group's 1970 performance *Three Three* in which the artists stood amidst various stage set elements of six different colors: six pillars made of colored paper, and six colored circles dangling from ropes. The performance began when the first person entered the room and ended when the last left. The actions were spontaneous, and at the end the artists stood side by side motionless, facing the audience. Some of the spectators persisted in continuing the performance by interacting with the artists. They climbed onto the stage and lit cigarettes for the artists, spread the paint from the artists' faces onto their bodies, wrapped them in string, carried them down and tied them to the theater seats. The artists did not react; they let the spectators become the actors while the artists became the objects of artistic activity.[77] The way in which the spectators became participants in the performance by acting upon the bodies of the artists was similar to the premise of Marina Abramovic's legendary *Rhythm 0* (1975) which took place a few years later in Belgrade at the Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art.

Despite the group's analytic tendencies, their art was suffused with flights of fancy and humor. On several occasions, Slavko Bogdanovic announced his fantastical notion of the exhibition of the earth and of the moon. He selected specific times that demarcated the time for viewing these objects. As part of the exhibition "Examples of Conceptual Art in Yugoslavia," at the Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, he announced that the planet Earth was on view from March 3, 1971 to March 3, 1972, and the Solar system from March 3, 1971 onwards. KOD group were in close touch with OHO (configured as the Family at Sempas at the time), visited regularly and collaborated in discussions. KOD's art reflected the dual influence of reism and OHO's ontological questioning. Specifically, Bogdanovic's announcement of the viewing of the earth and the moon as well as KOD's open-air actions and spatial proposals pointed to a humorous sensitivity to disproportionate scale. How absurd to put the moon on a human schedule.

Radojicic's *Millimeter Paper* for the same exhibition also pointed to the disproportion of the calibration of nature and human time. A telegram was sent from Novi Sad at the time of the opening of the exhibition in Belgrade. The amount of time between the moment the telegram was sent until it was delivered delineated the space of the work--the lifetime of the work. Text in the catalogue elaborated that the

> action of restoration of spacious distance, precision of time, and choosing the wave length are elements of initiation of optimal communication. District of optimal communication is where three areas overlap: space,

> state, time from the district of action. This makes consciousness, which is before communication. Communication is space of consciousness, state of consciousness, time of consciousness, consciousness of consciousness.[78]

KOD said of their performance *Intimate Circle*, in which four of its members stood in four spaces of a square, that the four equal squares represented the four elements, four sides of the world, four seasons, four psychological functions. This was a metaphor for their oeuvre of which they said, "the work is continued individually, but each member fully endorses everything done by the others."[79] these and other experimental artists at that time were individuals who self-organized communally to make expressions separate from those of the imposed hierarchy of socialist communal order. With these expressions, the artists introduced the tenet of a democracy of free expression.

Near the end of their work together, KOD formed groups named for the month, so that their name changed each month. They sought a space to present their work, and for the first time they exhibited at the Youth Tribune in January 1971, and at the House of Youth in Belgrade in February. Group KOD pushed the elasticity of material form in artmaking to the limit when it debated the best way to record and represent the nature of their artmaking practice. The members decided that, instead of presenting works or even texts and documents on the works, in their culminating act it was more important to exhibit the recording of the group's last conversation. They ceased their group art activities in March 1971. After this time, activities continued through the group (ə and in conversations with Goran Trbuljak and OHO. The group was discontented with conceptual art as it did not meet their needs for communication and creativity, particularly because it had become so integrated with the commercial art system.[80]

Group (ə was an offshoot of the groups KOD and the following (ə KOD. The artists Vladimir Kopicl joined by Ana Rakovic, Decomir Drca and Misa Zivanovic had all studied literature at the Arts Faculty in Novi Sad and continued to pursue this course in the group. Their art revolved mainly around problems of semantics, sign systems, analytical mathematics and set theory. Although the most analytical of all the experimental art practice in Yugoslavia, critic Jesa Denegri maintained that their art contained a symbolic character and avoided the dangers of tautology in art. Of Vladimir Kopicl, Denegri wrote: "he was aware … that the conceptual treatment does not consist in the simple substitution of the material part of the work by the idea of the work, but that such treatment actually raises the question of the relation between theory and practice."[81] Kopicl was preoccupied with the nature of representation and that the very act of materializing the artists expression became something different from the original impulse. An excerpt of the artist's text stated: "19 my real art is that which it cannot be; it is my awareness of it; 20 thus my work exists which is not my art; it is external to itself and thus it does not exist as such."[82] At the Youth Tribune in Novi Sad in 1973, Kopicl presented this sentence via projected slides: "Nothing is yet here but a certain form may already correspond to it."[83] He created photographs of the phrase and projected them on the opposite wall. Even more interesting was his examination of how his artistic impulse might be materialized, which was exhibited in 1976 at the Student Cultural Center in Belgrade. For him, the best artistic manifestation was the symbolic meaning drawn from

the material itself. Thus the material carried its own meaning and was much more than simply a conduit for the concept. At the SKC he worked with natural materials including vegetable and animal fiber and minerals.[84]

In 1971, KOD and (э KOD were invited to participate in the Youth Biennial in Paris. This extremely important exhibition introduced conceptual artists from Europe and the United States, and marked the moment when this work was first considered significant historically.

Conclusion

The connections between the art scenes in the regional capitals in the 60s and 70s were a strong precedent for the interconnections of today's artists. This relay operated in multiple complicated ways in Yugoslavia. First and most surprising, Misko Suvakovic made the point that the government used this circulation as a cultural policy specifically meant to neutralize artists and their free expression. For example, the free-thinking group OHO was truly subversive in Ljubljana, so by disseminating OHO's art to other regions, its meaning became highly aesthetic and therefore the group's free expression was neutralized. So a truly underground radical cultural scene could exist, but its voice was also effectively neutralized. The right to be different and to associate with different ideas, international ones, was crucial. There was a great distinction between dissident practice in Yugoslavia and neo-avant-garde art. The dissidents were mainly nationalists whereas the neo-avant-garde artists were connected to "mondialism" or internationalism. Novi Sad was a mixed environment where Hungarians, Serbians, Romanians and others lived together and continue to do so today. [85]

Second, was the way that relay operated aoristically in Yugoslavia. The time of this neo-avant-garde art activity was the last moment of utopian modernism before postmodernism. "This gathering of phenomena that took place in this city [Novi Sad] was a sort of excess in relation to the ruling literature and art, moderate modernism and its political cultural institutions."[86] This art—this "sort of excess"—was aoristic, pertaining to the outside, aspiring to be more than itself, more than a closed, local situation or mindset. This was diametrically opposed to the nationalist sentiments that embraced *nas* (one of our own) without critical judgment.

> Conceptual art was the discourse that gave international sense to the productions that emerged through …experiments in Novi Sad, and this meant a critical position of an artist towards the medium and the context he or she lived and worked in. The position of critical separation and distancing oneself from self-satisfying, hedonistic action…"[87]

Next, this relay has become invisible in the history of Yugoslav art. Experimental artists of the 1960s and 70s created parallel to their peers who were painters and poets in the art historical mainstream. The experimental artists at the time, like Slavko Bogdanovic, filmmakers Lazar Stojanovic and Zelimir Zilnik, and KOD group not only

provoked the Communist Union, they were at odds with the bureaucracy of moderate modernism. So, Misko Suvakovic contended that the great problem today is that the history of such groups as KOD still cannot be read in art history, not even locally in Serbia.[88] Suvakovic explained further that this excess was invisible in Yugoslavia at the time. Today internationally, conceptual art, body art, performance, new media are taught at the university. However even today in Novi Sad these practices are invisible. "They are disturbing for many because they speak of the world one does not want to see even today, because those were works of art that disturbed-not sedated…Some would like to look back to the modernist period to see only heroes from "our" past." [89]

However invisible in art history, this relay built healthy communication among artists, curators and art historians within Yugoslavia. Art historian Zvonko Matkovic recalled that, "in Zagreb I was friends with people who shared the same standpoint, and had similar taste in art and I was glad to make links between these environments. I have always thought that such connections are healthy for a number of reasons, and that you can build a more quality relationship towards your own production through a dialogue."[90] "In its own time, a healthy network was being created, that connected the new, original, above all experimental events."[91]

Most significantly, this relay network of communication survived the wars of the 1990s. Now relay operates in a new way with an even stronger impetus for the current generation. Zilnik explained that during the 1990s,

> communication in ex-Yugoslavia was torn in the most savage way with war and bloodshed, and then it was barred by the established institutions through these new histories being written now, as if that communication had never existed and even when it did exist it was not natural. However, what is surprising is that a completely informal new communication that is practically not supported by any institution is taking place now among the latest generation of artists. Young artists from Slovenia, Zagreb, Belgrade exchange information about each others' work and even do joint projects so that even this most stringent wave of provincialism with knives and guns could not disturb this communication.[92]

The development of artists' relay in response to the formation of the Yugoslav nation and its breakup and reconfiguration bears consideration with respect to Adorno's characterization of history as a gigantic exchange relationship. Adorno asserted that perhaps the telos of history is actually to liberate it from the exchange of like for like (to liberate it from everything that is has been up to now). If the exchange structure of history is the wretched exchange relation in which both positions are equally repugnant and despicable, then the free relation towards history would be to see the transcendent option outside of this exchange.[93]

The third way of Tito's Yugoslavia faced with the option of joining Russia or the West and also the artists' search for a third way in the midst of exploring only formal issues or building socialism in their art practice were aoristic attempts to break this cycle. However, Adorno claimed that rival power bases could not be brought together in a

unified state structure, and that the tendency of society to break down into competing overpowerful groups will continue for the foreseeable future. Pluralism is ideology describing the centrifugal tendencies of a society that threatens to disintegrate into unreconciled groups under the pressure of its own principles.[94]

Progress is based on the inequality of exchange. For progress to occur, there must be an expansion in exchange, and so the more powerful party always receives more than the other. Revenge is the mythical prototype of exchange; as long as domination through exchange persists, so will revenge. The more the system expands, the more it hardens into what it has always been. [95] Although the relay of art in Yugoslavia was aoristic it did not rely on expansion. Rather than expansion, which leads to a type of dominating incorporation of one set of ideas into another, in order to maintain communication, fragmentation may be necessary so that new positions emerge from which relay can be configured. Today the new national capital cities of the former Yugoslav republics have defined their own distinct identities and have an active relay mechanism in all fields including art.

The relay involved in experimental art in Yugoslavia differed considerably from the preoccupation with communication of Western conceptual art. One of the basic premises of Western conceptual art was more direct communication with other people and life outside of art. However, so much art in this genre was absolutely unreadable to anyone who was not in the know. Zoran Popovic's film *Struggle in New York*, which he made while he and his wife Jasna were in New York City in 1974 and 1975, documented some of the arguments between the members of Art & Language. The film was revealing for several reasons. First, Popovic was astonished at how thoroughly Western conceptual art was part of the art market despite its claims to be at odd with this system. Also it was perhaps the arch irony of conceptualism that the group, which so intensively scrutinized language and communication, experienced such a breakdown of communication.

Conceptual art in Yugoslavia stood in stark contrast to its counterparts in Western Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States. As discussed in previous chapters, the material character and in some cases formal aspects of much of the art in Yugoslavia still played a positive role in the new generations' artmaking. Subjectivity and the voice of the individual was a generative force in this art. This was due in part to artists' opposition to the state, which often spoke on behalf of the collective from a position of authority that was rebuked by the younger generation. Another hallmark of conceptual art, communication, meant something very different to Yugoslav artists. This was not treated as a strategic move in maneuvering through art history, but was a manifestation of consciousness and relay.

Milo Petrovic, the organizer of the SKC's series of public panels and roundtable discussions (*tribina*) explained their intense drive for openness and the reasons for the artists' and the organizations' focus on dialogue and relay with each other and the international arena:

The collective effort in the search for answers to important issues of our, and not only our society and time, assumes the spirit of tolerance and takes into consideration a difference of opinion. In this sense, we believe that we can say that our efforts were aimed at developing a democratic culture, so significant for successful democratic and

self-managing communication. Being open to the world and new experiences, nurturing a sensibility based on universal humanism, is also a permanent preoccupation of our activity.[96]

Artist and writer Jovan Cekic noted several years ago that artists in ex-Yugoslavia can once again travel like they did in the seventies, but they do not necessarily belong to the outside world. They are now searching for the subject after the subject was lost during the wars of the 1990s. He stressed that there had been a very strong human subject in the conceptual work of 60s and 70s. However, now after the turn of the 21st century in ex-Yugoslavia, the human subject has been lost, though not in way that the subject is lost in the West, where people were ready to throw away subject much too easily.[97]

Rather than a matter of exchange on the preset grid of the chessboard of art history, Yugoslav artists, critics and curators pursued artistic communication through relay among the cities of the country and with outside cultural centers to retain healthy boundaries with their world. This drive became most urgent in the early seventies when they saw that the artistic freedoms that socialism provided in the early sixties were being replaced with suspicion, monitoring and repression.

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48 Interview with Bogdanka Poznanovic, May 2005.

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64 Szombathy, 51.

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71 Ibid., 38.

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73 Ibid., 43.

74 Ibid., 41.

75 Ibid., 41.

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87 Ibid., 58.

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90 Ibid., 65-6.

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92 Ibid., 68.

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Aoristic Avant-garde: Experimental Art in 1960s and 1970s Yugoslavia
Art of the late 1970s: Preparing the Highway to Emerging Democracy
Chapter Five

Sanja Ivekovic and Video Art

For Yugoslav artists and artists internationally, video held the promise of democratization and internationalization. "Video was also seen as promoting social solidarity, individual creativity, and the availability of information and knowledge, and questioning the existing hierarchy of values."[1] In the end, these tall orders were not actually realized. Much early video art of the time consisted of a static camera shot of a performance in real time. Often the subject and object were the artist him/herself. It was rare to see edits or framing; spatial and temporal unity was retained in these early videos.[2]

The Trigon video festival in Graz at Neue Galerie in 1973 was very important in the beginnings of video art in Europe. There, video artists from Italy, Austria, and Yugoslavia had the opportunity to meet each other and see lots of work. Sanja Ivekovic remembered that it was sponsored by Sony, which had just recently released the Portapak video recorder, and the corporation was giving out technology for free to the artists. She met many international artists and saw all of Vito Acconci's tapes there.[3]

Sanja Ivekovic and Dalibor Martinis often collaborated in the early 1970s, and later went on to separate projects as pioneers in video art. Their early video *TV Timer* (1973) pointed out the aesthetic and ideological framing of television by inserting images of everyday objects and of themselves into a television program.

Sanja Ivekovic's notable and internationally-recognized oeuvre comprised video, performance, and photography, all of which addressed the status of women in public space. *Double Life* (1975) examined the fictions of both public and private space. In 62 pairs of pictures, Ivekovic placed photographs of women from magazine advertisements next to photographs of herself in comparable situations or using similar gestures. Cindy Sherman's later *Untitled Film Stills* (1977) also examined the construction of public female personas and stereotypes through media.[4]

As one of the first artists to use video, Ivekovic employed the medium to complicate her relationship to the viewer instead of a means of direct address. It became an obstacle between the artist and the viewer in her video *Inter Nos* (1978). Two rooms were connected by closed circuit television, one inhabited by the artist and other by a single visitor at a time. The artist interacted with the image of the visitor and

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Endnotes can be found on pages 120-121.

s/he in turn reacted; a mediated visual dialogue developed. In a third room, the image of the visitor was visible only to the general audience. Set in dialogue with this piece was her work *The Opening* (1976/77) which involved touch in performance. She used the video camera and video image alternately as a mediator and a separator. Furthermore, the videos could also be seen in dialogue with each other as they capture a range of different tones of interaction.

In socialism, there was a special role for women, and Ivekovic pointed out strongly and articulately the hypocrisy of the Yugoslav state's and society's claim that class-consciousness was ungendered. Women were paid equally at work, however their domestic work was never paid and certainly not equally shared by men. In Yugoslavia, ideologically-based egalitarianism was superimposed on the foundation of a stable patriarchy.[5] For example, in *Triangle* (1979), Ivekovic focuses on the relationship of the socialist woman to power, status, ideology, and authoritarian rule. The triangle was the ancient symbol of feminine gender and genitalia. As Bojana Pejic noted in her analysis of Ivekovic's art, in modernity the flaneur was known: he was male; there was no flaneuse.

The artist described the three protagonists of the eighteen-minute action that took place on the day that Tito visited Zagreb, and unfolded as an interaction between three people who could not speak to each other but only surreptitiously surveyed each others' movements from a far distance: "1. a person on the roof of the tall building across the street from my apartment; 2. myself on the balcony 3. a policeman on the street in front of my house." The person on the roof, she assumed, had a walkie-talkie and binoculars, and the policeman carried a walkie-talkie. "The action begins when I walk out onto the balcony and sit on a chair. I sip whiskey, read a book, lift up my skirt and make gestures simulating masturbation. After some time, a policeman rings my doorbell and orders that 'persons and objects should be removed from the balcony'."[6] In this configuration Ivekovic became a spectacle that disrupted the male order of Tito's public procession through the streets of Zagreb. It was not the representation of politics but the politics of representation that ruled man's space—i.e., the public space in Socialist Yugoslavia.[7]

Furthermore, this performance was documented and has been exhibited widely internationally as four photographs, which recorded the three interactive positions plus an image of Tito's motorcade. Now one of the most famous and recognizable works of art from Yugoslavia, it was perhaps so appealing to foreign viewers not only because it posited an individual woman resisting the public display of state ideology, but even more because the photographs serve up the spectacle of this ideology within which, furthermore, she has placed herself. This was similar to the function of the collaged photograph series *Double Life*, in which commercial stereotypes of women were reified and again the artist's similar image is smoothly inserted. Still, Ivekovic's body of art

work has consistently brought much-needed attention to the hardships of women in Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav society.

Group of Six Artists

Experimental artists opened the concept of what material objects of art could be in the artistic milieu of Yugoslavia. Their connection to form and their interrogation of subjectivity was a special hallmark of Yugoslav conceptual art that made it stand apart from Western conceptual art. These experimental artists used traditional art mediums in new provocative ways. For example, the Group of Six created paintings, sculptures, and drawings, but instead of presenting their art in a gallery, they showed it in the Flower Square and other public locations in Zagreb. Their presentation format was thoroughly egalitarian—they spread the art out on the pavement or propped it up again fences. Neither ephemerality nor formal innovation were goals of the work; instead the media of painting, photography, etc. were conceptual tools.

From the outset, the group deployed traditional art mediums as means for performance, communication and public art that directly carried the artists' mark and presence. For example, it was extremely important to Zeljko Jerman to use the medium of photography as a way for the artist to make a creative mark and leave a trace of his presence. In May 1975 he made this manifest in a performance at a beach on the river Sava, when he laid in the sun for an hour on a sheet of photographic paper and left his visual imprint. With this and *My Year* (1977), Jerman explored the medium of photography itself and also applied it as a means in his larger conceptual project.

While the material form of their art was a subject for examination by the public, these groups were also reinventing structural forms for their own groups and artistic networks. They did not choose to call themselves a group. Critic Radoslav Putar called them the Group of Six and later upon the publication of New Art Practice in Yugoslavia, Marijan Susovski dubbed them the Group of Six Artists. The group was: Boris Demur, Zeljko Jerman, Vlado Martek, Mladen Stilinovic, Sven Stilinovic, and Fedor Vucemilovic.[8] They formed a loose ensemble which did not make joint artwork, but formed a free association that exhibited together, operating not as a collaborative but as a self-organized entity, thus manifesting free assembly and individual expression in a public space—hallmarks of democracy. The formation of their own artistic and social network was a democratic act itself. The group functioned loosely so that each artist had relative autonomy, posing an alternative to the self-managed mode of operation in socialism, in which every member could comment on the functioning of the overall system.

The Group of Six was part of the first generation to be raised in the social system of self-management. As art historian Marijan Susovski put it, "this system was no different from many other undemocratic and totalitarian regimes."[9] In its first years, The Group of Six tried to establish a direct communication between themselves and the public. They did not exhibit in art spaces, but for the most part in the public squares of Zagreb, Belgrade, and other towns. Importantly, "exhibition-actions are not only the

expression of their attitude towards art, but also a form their art takes. However, such activities also became their exclusive goal. According to these artists, the process of creation and the reason for which a certain work is created are identical and need to be explained at the time of their creation, which requires contact with the public."[10]

The Group of Six published the magazine May 75 from 1975 to 1981. Each artist produced a page of his own for the publication, and over time other artists were invited to make art for the magazine as well. In addition they produced 21 what they termed exhibition-actions between 1975 and 1979, most of them in public spaces. Exhibition-actions juxtaposed static and dynamic types of art objects and experiences and ways of exhibiting. They each chose their own art objects to present, and they were present throughout the duration of the exhibition-actions to speak with viewers about their art.[11] The format and relatively short time span of a few hours was more of an event than an exhibition. However, it was not meant to be a performance. Thus this new format was their own particular mode of artmaking.

Many of the group members were not trained formally as artists and their formal approaches were diverse. Boris Demur wrote analytic texts, Vlado Martek made visual poetry, Stilinovic worked with slogans and icons, Jerman mainly created photography and also statements. Fedor Vucemilovic made crafted photographs and Sven Stilinovic worked with film and invoked absurdity. Martek carried language from a book or text into form, to give words "corpuscularity."[12] Martek created scores of samizdats full of slogans that quarreled with the oppressive state and scuffled with poetry and its structures. From 1978 to 1983 he informally mounted a series of poetic agitations in public sites with statements like "Read Mayakovsky!" These open-ended announcements left interpretation completely to the viewer. Art historian Jadranka Vinterhalter noted that, "The fact that the content of their works questioned 'public matters' – slogans, syntagms, tautologies, sayings, common places, but in a totally personal interpretation, is another link between their works and their actions."[13]

Misko Suvakovic has written that the Group of Six focused on the deconstruction of the ideology of late socialist realism as a horizon of social definition."[14] This is particularly evident in their use of slogans as artwork, as in Stilinovic's *An attack on my art is an attack on socialism and progress* (1977) written in red paint on pink silk. This statement emphasized the degree to which political ideology in socialist Yugoslavia permeated everything, including the cultural realm. Their evasion of the usual venues for art exhibitions and their straightforwardly personal use of sloganeering usually reserved for the state disrupted the normality and "regularity" of the production, distribution, exchange, reception, and consumption of art in the modern society of late socialism."[15] Their art was harshly attacked by art critics in Zagreb, who called their art "deceitful," "dangerous," "thoughtless," and a "plagiarism of the avant-garde." One writer went as far to state, "we can justifiably accuse those who sell us nonsense under the guise of the avant-garde of polluting our (spiritual and natural) environment."[16]

Zeljko Jerman's series of 365 snapshot photographs *Moja Godina* (*My Year*) (1977) recorded a simple moment from each day of his life for a year. Through this mode of straightforward documentation he sustained his own real world of art in a world he did not agree with. As art historian Branka Stipancic has asserted, This was an act of defiance

and "his strong individualism was certainly provocative in a milieu still affected by the pressure of socialist collectivism."[17] In addition it was an individual activity of democracy in which the artist created his own private, though also narcissistic, history separate from that of the state. At the same time, this register of mostly mundane daily actions poked fun at the mythology that surrounded the modern artist---and also that surrounded the mythology of heroic political figures, first and foremost being Tito. The exercise of individual subjectivity by means of humor and play was central to the Southeast European mode of conceptualism.

Mladen Stilinovic used symbols of state power like banknotes, the color red, and the flag to inscribe them with new meanings outside the socialist state, which prohibited the free use of these symbols. Unlike the state symbols of the flag and banknotes that are unarguably part of the realm of the state, the color red was a "neutral" aspect that during socialism was filled with the exclusive meaning of the socialist state.[18] For example, Stilinovic's series of photographs *My Red,* (1976) in which he wrote "moja crvena" (my red) in his own blood on his hand, attempted to uncouple the limited pairing of the color red and the state. With this, he showed the color's larger human dimension. *Whitened Red* consisted of a small container of red pigment to which white was added similarly expressed that the color red was not pure or singular in meaning. Embedded in his actions was the knowledge of the futility of the fight to de-ideologize the color. This can be seen particularly in *Yugoslavia* (1978), in which red strokes cover key border areas of the map of the country. With Group of Six and also Sanja Ivekovic's art, gone were the days of utopian creativity of the sixties and early seventies.

The most compelling features of his early art of the seventies were the ways that Stilinovic found to insert himself into political history and into ideology through imaginative manipulation of symbols of state power that were revealed on a very public, everyday, mundane level. On the level of the shop window, the street, or the market square, Stilinovic opened a private space outside the state for commentary. In the mid-1970s, he took many photographs of advertisements in shop store windows--the commercial version of slogans. His series of photographs *First of May, 1975* record displays of the celebration of the Day of Workers, the 1st of May. In shop windows, official state slogans celebrating the day were placed next to the store's commercial visual and textual imagery. In one, the celebratory text stood disconcertingly next to a display of shoes; in a store that sold roasted meat specialties a sign hailed the long life of May 1st.

As part of the *First of May, 1975* series, Stilinovic installed a handmade banner on a residential street in Zagreb that read "Ado Voli Stipu (Mladen Loves Branka)" (referring to Branka Stipancic, his wife and intellectual partner). With this, he inserted himself into the authoritarian order that was normally the instrument of propaganda. Zeljko Jerman's banner attached to the exterior wall of the Belgrade Student Cultural Center *Ovo Nije Moj Svijet* (*This is Not My World*) (1976), was another key example of this play between multiple positions. In the banner reading, "This is not my World," the semantic shifter "my" created a direct communication between viewer and art object. The use of this type of direct language pops up again and again in art in Southeast Europe, notably in the graphic stickers and small banners of the contemporary Belgrade-based

skart group, which read, "Your Shit Your Responsibility." Of course, the meaning of this phrase depends on who speaks it and to whom it is addressed.

In the late 1970s the Group worked hard to open up discourse around new forms of artmaking by presenting their art in public spaces. Existential and ethical concerns played a great role in their art, where the "the world and consciousness converged"[19] as Sonja Briski Uzelac has described it. Stilinovic framed this in his statement, *The conditions of my work are beyond my control, fortunately they are beyond your control, too* (1979). Later, in the eighties and nineties, Martek's and Stilinovic's art evolved and critically assessed the ways in which their art was seen as marginal in relation to official culture in Yugoslavia and also in relation to the West and the Western art market. Martek's combination of the statements "I am a nomad" and "I am in the East," in his writings from the 1980s revealed a new self-consciousness about the artist's geographic location. The later work of Demur, Martek, and Stilinovic took on a mode of semiotic play, but their art of the late 1970s used humor as subversion to create a feeling of expansion in public discourse. Their art was not action in the service of an idea, but action as communication in "a liberating play and display of speech."[20] The Group of Six's art was characterized by joyful, playful communication and "emphatically personal acts"[21] with an acknowledgment of responsibility because the artist is part of the social context around himself.

The use of public space for art was not by default democratic, egalitarian, or did not result even in more direct communication with the public. Rather, as noted earlier in this text, the shift to the practice of exhibiting work in public space marked a fundamental change in artists' expression in Yugoslavia. Branka Stipancic noted that the Group of Six worked in different typologies of urban space: the town center (Trg Republike), relaxation (beach of the Sava River), new residential area (Sopot), historical part of the town (Jezuitski Trg), and education (Faculty of Philosophy). She wrote of the Group of Six Artists' expression without invitation in public space that they were temporary guerilla actions designed "not to submit to any requirements"[22]—not only spatially but ideologically. Their method of dissent against the lack of freedom was the exercise of artistic expression itself. Thus the experimental artists' exercise of democracy had a two-fold effect. Through exercising freedom of expression and enacting democracy they communicated the fact that the government was suppressing freedoms and in so doing they created the beginnings of a sphere of democracy.

Stilinovic's use of absurdity was most effective to question the extent to which the individual respected the written and linguistic conventions of society. Would an individual obey conventions even if this jeopardized reality, common sense and personal freedom? In one of his public works Stilinovic labeled the pavement as grass and erected a small sign reading, "keep off the pavement." Another textual drawing stated, "I hear the talk of the death of art, the death of art is the death of the artist, someone wants to kill me, help! (1977) Stilinovic's quip pointed to his ambivalence about collectivity and the urge to do away with individual authorship.

Critical writing from the time about the Group of Six stressed over and over that the artists followed their own individual visions and contributed their own art to the group's magazine and exhibition-actions. Zelimir Koscevic went so far as to say, "It

could be claimed that in the unwritten program of the group individuality formed the basis of their collaboration."[23] In this way, the Group of Six embodied relay among different positions within the group itself. Instead of trying to fine-tune their internal communication to create a bond between the members like OHO or KOD groups, the Group of Six each pursued their own courses within the loose, self-organized group structure. This recalls the Gorgona group, however the Group of Six practiced openness and direct dialogue with the viewing public, whereas Gorgona's discussions were very internal and secretive. The Group of Six's way of working was in keeping with their time, and most significantly indicated the beginning of the end of the hopes for Titoist Yugoslavia to adopt a more pure socialism that had been so strong among artists and intellectuals in the late 60s. Then in the late 70s, Tito was ill and increasingly secluded. Political power struggles and grave uncertainty about the future of the nation after Tito's impending death colored life in Yugoslavia. So, the Group of Six's practice signals an overt interest in democracy's relationship to artistic practice.

Susovski pointed out the crucial distinction between conceptual art and "New Artistic Practice" as it was called in Yugoslavia: "Although the seventies in Croatia is considered to be a period of conceptualism, the 'New Artistic Practice' is more appropriate as a description of the art of that period. This name has a far broader sense than conceptualism, which can only really be applied to two or three artists. The name 'New Artistic Practice' covers the great variety of visual events and of other forms of creativity that marked that decade."[24] New Art Practice in Yugoslavia was more intricate than the international definition of conceptualism.

Instead of trying to squeeze Yugoslav art into an international definition of conceptual art that is too narrow, Susovski widened the terms on which this new art was practiced. Furthermore, as argued earlier in this text, perhaps it is the international term conceptual art that could be rethought and broadened in light of Yugoslav art in the 60s and 70s. In writing about the Group's use of photography, Mladen Lulic noted,

> Although the Group of Six have often been called conceptualists, this name does not cover all the aspects of their work, which is equally concerned with social criticism and the questioning of the materials with which they work, or rather, with the demystification of these materials and a primary analysis which often consciously reduced them to their elementary level."[25]

The ideas of Yugoslav experimental artists were different from those of Western analytical or linguistic conceptual art. Their practice aptly fit Sol Lewitt's description of conceptual artists in the first part of his *Sentences on Conceptual Art*. He said that conceptual artists were mystics rather than rationalists as they leapt to conclusions that logic cannot reach.[26] Put another way in the words of Goran Djordjevic, "sometimes it is necessary to accept the logic of a fairy tale, or a myth, in order to arrive at a place where rationalism, common sense, or logic never could."[27] Close to the Beuysian mode of conceptual art, the Group of Six forged a "local derivation of conceptual 'existentialism.'"[28] The influence of Beuys was central to the development of

experimental art throughout Yugoslavia, which could be termed "existential conceptualism."

Aoristic Art and Emerging Democracy

Today, the art of 60s and 70s is being examined and presented by cultural organizations made up of a new generation of artists, critics and art historians in the Western Balkans. Today these groups are fighting the politicization by the state of their art, just as the artists in the 60s and 70s were doing at that time. The artistic exchange begun in the 60s and 70s in Ljubljana, Zagreb, Novi Sad, Belgrade and in the eighties in Sarajevo and Skopje laid a cultural network between these cities that survived the wars of the 1990s and were activated again at the end of the 90s to be a strong voice for democracy with a social conscience and social mandate even today. Branka Curcic of kuda.org has noted,

> It could be said that the interconnectedness, communication and network cooperation among the members of these groups around Youth Tribune, as well as with other artistic circles in Yugoslavia (Ljubljana and Zagreb for instance) and worldwide, was a kind of predecessor of the community and cooperation that is being generated nowadays due to global communication technologies.[29]

The aoristic relay of experimental artists in Yugoslavia provided fertile ground for younger generations to reach out of the height of the violence and isolation of the '90s and see themselves in relation, as contingent subjects, to the world. The strengthening of these networks were then achieved mainly through new media.

The experimental artists active in Tito's Yugoslavia were not aiming to undo socialism in favor of democracy. To the contrary, many wanted to build a more pure socialism than Tito's dictatorship and state bureaucracy allowed. In the official climate of self-management, the artists were moving towards self-organization that is still active in experimental groups today in the Western Balkans. Today's new generation provides clear critical thinking and a strong alternative to complaints about the socialist past that have been perverted into excuses for divisive rhetoric and violence. As filmmaker Zelimir Zilnik explained at a roundtable on Yugoslav experimental art and its political context,

> The usual post-Socialist discourse supports the dominant neo-liberal views on socialist Yugoslav modernism as unilaterally totalitarian and authoritarian. Also, local nationalist and chauvinist discourses present the Yugoslav socialist modernism as a mere tool of dictatorship and tyranny. This is exactly where post-socialist neo-liberal and nationalist discourses meet.[30]

Today, threats on civil society in the Western Balkans come from fanatically conservative nationalistic churches, the neo-nazi fascist youth and also the ultra-rich who spearhead new development of the economy and infrastructure with money gained through illegal arms, drugs and human trafficking during the wars.

The dedication of experimental art in the sixties and seventies to the particular mix of free individual expression with collaboration, and their communication and dissemination of information formed a crucial basis for vital contemporary non-governmental non-profit organizations. The state-initiated student organizations in Belgrade and Zagreb and later in Ljubljana survived from the 1970s to provide critical programs today. The Soros Centers for Contemporary Art that were active in the mid to late 1990s in the new capital cities of ex-Yugoslav nations were originally formed with the incredible energy and knowledge of some of the proponents of experimental art and free expression from the 1970s, like Dunja Blazevic and Branka Stipancic, among others. A number of contemporary artist-run organizations and cultural collaboratives, including Metelkova cultural and social center in Ljubljana, kuda.org center for new media in Novi Sad; Mama new media center, the curatorial collective WHW (What, How and for Whom), and the architecture group Platforma 9,81 in Zagreb; Remont, and Rex B92 in Belgrade; Expedition in Kotor; Projektor in Podgorica; Center for Contemporary Art in Prishtina, as well as others, maintain a deep sense of civic and humanitarian commentary as part of their creative output that is built on the legacy of self-organization of the artists of the 60s and 70s.

There remain many questions about the status of democracy and freedom in the countries of ex-Yugoslavia today. However, because the artists of the 60s and 70s practiced individual free expression from a strong critical stance, the current generation now can build on this platform with more stability. Most important, this democratic practice stems from local precedent; it is not transplanted.

The exhibition "Interrupted Histories" curated by Zdenka Badovinac in 2006 asked, on one hand, "what are the implications of the absence of systematized historicization in spaces outside the Western world or on its margins?" Also, on the other hand,

> what sort of methods are needed to accelerate the processes of such historicization?…The most urgent questions in these spaces are today connected, first and foremost, with the processes of integrating into the global exchange of ideas, that is to say, with the total modernization of various fields of activity in these spaces of interrupted histories…At present it seems that the only way to foster awareness of the contemporary cultural identity of these places is through a system that is able to link artists in internationally analogous networks.[31]

To write the history of Eastern European experimental art would be to write a new history or a continued history of conceptual art. So much of the neo-conceptual art of the late 1990s and the early 21st century bears strong visual and methodological resemblance to experimental art of Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 70s. Perhaps this is because of

attention paid by the West to art from Eastern Europe, or perhaps because of post-socialist artists' interaction with their own history. Most important is to assess the history and trajectory of Yugoslavia's distinct conceptual art practice that paid particular attention to subjectivity, conscience, form, and aoristic relay that continues not to adjust to society.

Chapter Five Endnotes:

1 Barbara Borcic, "Video Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism," in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991* ed. Misko Suvakovic and Dubravka Djuric (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 494.

2 Ibid., 496.

3 Discussion with Sanja Ivekovic, October 2002, Graz.

4 Silvia Eiblmayr ed., *Sanja Ivekovic, Personal Cuts* (Innsbruck: Galerie im Taxispalais, 2001), 14.

5 Dasa Duhacek, "Women's Time in the Former Yugoslavia," in Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller eds., *Gender Politics in Post-Communism* (New York: Routledge, 1993, as quoted by Bojana Pejic in "Metonymical Moves," *Sanja Ivekovic, Is This My True Face?* (Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), 29.

6 Sanja Ivekovic, *Performance/Installation* ex. cat. Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1980, as quoted by Bojana Pejic in "Metonmymical Moves," *Sanja Ivekovic, Is This My True Face?* (Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), 27.

7 Bojana Pejic, "Metonymical Moves," *Sanja Ivekovic: Personal Cuts* (Innsbruck, Galerie im Taxispalais, 2001), 99.

8 Marijan Susovski, "The Seventies and the Group of Six Artists," in Janka Vukmir, ed., *Group of Six Artists* (Zagreb: Soros Center for Contemporary Art, 1998), 18.

9 Ibid. 20.

10 Ibid., 21.

11 Jadranka Vinterhalter, "Group Phenomenon," in Janka Vukmir, ed., *Group of Six Artists* (Zagreb: Soros Center for Contemporary Art, 1998), 44-45.

12 Branka Stipancic, "This is Not My World," in Janka Vukmir, ed., *Group of Six Artists* (Zagreb: Soros Center for Contemporary Art, 1998), 102.

13 Vinterhalter, 45.

14 Misko Suvakovic, "Conceptual Art," in Misko Suvakovic and Dubravka Djuric ed., *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 223.

15 Ibid., 223.

16 Sonja Briski-Uzelac, "In the Aura of the Avant-garde, Voices of Difference," in Janka Vukmir, ed., *Group of Six Artists* (Zagreb: Soros Center for Contemporary Art, 1998), 90.

17 Stipancic, 101.

18 Ibid., 103.

19 Briski-Uzelac, 92.

20 Ibid., 93.

21 Ibid., 94.

22 Stipancic, 101.

23 Zelimir Koscevic as quoted in Vinterhalter, 45.

24 Susovski, 22.

25 Mladen Lulic, "The Group of Six and Photography," in Janka Vukmir, ed., *Group of Six Artists* (Zagreb: Soros Center for Contemporary Art, 1998), 54.

26 Sol Lewitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," *Art-Language*, no. 1, March 1969.

27 Goran Djordjevic, "Story on Copy: An Interview with Goran Djordjevic" in *Prelom: Journal for Images and Politics* (Fall 2006), 266.

28 Janka Vukmir, "Conceptual Co-existence," in Janka Vukmir, ed., *Group of Six Artists* (Zagreb: Soros Center for Contemporary Art, 1998), 30.

29 Branka Curcic, "Collective Cultural Practices: Between the Sentiment and Functionality of Creative Communities," in kuda.org, ed., *The Continuous Art Class: The Novi Sad Neo-Avantgarde of the 1960s and 1970s* (Novi Sad: kuda.org, 2005), 33.

30 kuda.org, ed., *Omitted History* (Novi Sad: kuda.org, 2006), 13.

31 Zdenka Badovinac, "Interrupted Histories," in *Interrupted Histories* (Ljubljana: Museum of Modern Art, 2006), n.p.

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