

Katalin Ladik

Oooooooooo-pus

edited by
Hendrik Folkerts

SKIRA

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Preface

Language is at the heart of Katalin Ladik's practice. Her experimental poetry of the early 1960s lay the foundation for her concrete poems, which in turn paved the way for her groundbreaking visual poems and scores of the 1970s and after. In the same period, she expanded her use of language to include the body, staging her poems as part of live performances that became synonymous with the artistic and literary avant-garde in her native Novi Sad, her adopted home of Budapest, and far beyond. The voice was her most important instrument for language to become embodied, buoyant, lived. Katalin Ladik's insistence on language as a living, moving, and physical phenomenon found an even more expansive form in her later photo-performances, in which she employs her body as medium and materiality to write with and perform through—often amplifying her interests in androgyny, folklore, and femininity that have been driving forces in her practice. And this is just one storyline in Katalin Ladik's six-decades-long career as a writer, artist, performer, film and theater actress, and vocalist.

We are profoundly honored to present this monograph on the work of such a foundational figure in Central and Eastern European art. The publication brings together an extraordinary range of authors, whose expertise and research expand the discourse on Katalin Ladik's oeuvre, as well as the histories of concrete poetry, performance, and experimental music, to which her work is so integral. The essays—varying between extensive reflections on a part of the artist's practice and texts that focus on a single work or body of work—build on existing scholarship while also offering new perspectives, especially on how Ladik's methodologies can be considered within art histories specific to former Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe, but also connect with avant-garde sound and performance practices in other parts of Europe and the United States. This is indeed the moment when an oeuvre becomes an *Oooooooooo-pus*.

This monograph is part of the series initiated by Muzeum Susch and Skira editore dedicated to the rediscovery of women artists who have been neglected by the main discourses and canons of art history. Moreover, the publication accompanies Katalin Ladik's survey exhibition *Oooooooooo-pus*

at Haus der Kunst in Munich (March 3 – September 10, 2023), Ludwig Forum Aachen (October 7, 2023 – March 10, 2024), and Moderna Museet in Stockholm (November 9, 2024 – April 20, 2025). Our shared mission to champion the work of women artists, and in particular the singular artistic vision of Katalin Ladik, is captured on the pages of this book.

We are deeply grateful to the authors for allowing us to share their remarkable writing on Katalin Ladik with our museums' audiences as well as readers all over the world. We would like to thank Hendrik Folkerts, the editor of this monograph, who has also conceived Katalin Ladik's survey exhibition, for his unflagging commitment to the artist and this project; Sarah Johanna Theurer for her conceptual partnership in co-curating the exhibition at Haus der Kunst, Munich; and Fanny Hauser, who co-curated the survey exhibition at Ludwig Forum Aachen. We are deeply indebted to the team of acb gallery in Budapest, particularly Gábor Pados and Róna Kopeckzy, for their expert guidance and steadfast support. And most of all, we would like to thank Katalin Ladik, whose brilliance not only shines through in the visual poem that she created especially for this book, but whose vision on language as a realm of infinite possibilities inspired every page in front of you.

Eva Birkenstock
Director, Ludwig Forum Aachen

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Oooooooooo-pus, an Introduction

Hendrik Folkerts

Katalin Ladik's foot gently touches the pedal of the Singer sewing machine that is placed in the first room of her survey exhibition at Haus der Kunst in Munich. The wheel starts spinning, the performance begins. From the machine—her machine—emanates a red thread, which connects all parts of Ladik's practice throughout the various rooms of the exhibition: her writing, her performances, her concrete and visual poems, her sculptures, her photo-performances, and her video works. The wheel keeps spinning. Ladik's otherworldly voice expands the sound of the needle that perforates a piece of paper as it moves through the sewing machine, while, with a pen, she marks the paper as if pulling a thread from it. With each stitch, Ladik opens a new register of voicing: a hum, a cry, a scream, a sigh, a moan, an ecstatic exclamation, or a silence that is given texture through a complex array of facial expressions. Ladik and the sewing machine act as one body, every stitch dictating another movement of the voice. Indeed, as Irena Haiduk argues in her essay on the context of Novi Sad in which Ladik was active from the 1960s onward, the artist brings her home, her body, everywhere: "Katalin Ladik's scenography carries easily so that it can be put down quickly, like a tent, and conjure a home, anywhere, for a ritual of transformation."

The sewing machine has been a presence—albeit by implication—in Ladik's oeuvre since the early 1970s. She assembled poems, fantastical stories, and short fairytales in *Mesék a hétfejű varrógépről* (*Stories of the Seven-Headed Sewing Machine*, 1978), but prior to that she already integrated into her collages the sewing patterns that one would find in women's magazines of the time. Ladik produced numerous collages (a practice she continues to this day), and among my favorites are *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* (1972) and *Sonate für die Frau DDR Leipzig* (1978). She created these complex compositions by assembling a variety of source materials, ranging from sewing patterns

Katalin Ladik performing at the opening of the exhibition *Katalin Ladik: Oooooooooo-pus*, Haus der Kunst, March 2, 2023. Courtesy of Haus der Kunst, Munich
Photo: Julian Baumann

and colored sheets to cut-out linguistic elements—words and letters, in both Hungarian and German, as floating signifiers. These two collages stage a reversal of sorts, as the sewing pattern is used as a backdrop for the dynamically choreographed yellow shapes and the letter “E” in *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, while Ladik cut the sewing pattern in a multi-angular geometric form with added language and letters in *Sonate für die Frau DDR Leipzig*, floating on a monochrome purple sheet. Similar to how the sewing machine has always been an apparatus that catalyzed process and transformation for Ladik, rather than, let’s say, a fixed symbol denoting domesticity or female labor, her use of sewing patterns in the collages allowed her to stage the web of dotted and angular lines, with their letters, numbers, and, for the untrained eye, cryptic instructions, as an *expanse of language*, signifying the transition from written poetry to visual poetry—hence the artist’s choice to refer to these works as visual poems. Evidently, as Fanny Hauser illustrates in her text on the visual poems vis-à-vis processes of dis/identification, there is a feminist critique present in these works. Pierre Bal-Blanc and Sarah Johanna Theurer expand the argument in their respective essays and contend that Ladik insists on unsettling sexual difference and androgyny in her work, advancing, through the sewing patterns, a critique anchored in “the anatomical study of the ‘universal’ woman—her regimented behavior, essentialized features, and servile figure,” according to Bal-Blanc.

Ladik’s buoyant performance with the sewing machine exemplifies that the voice is an essential instrument in her oeuvre for language to become embodied. This harks back to her early performance practice, for instance the famous staging of *Shaman Poem* at the Genre Experimental Film Festival (GEFF) in Zagreb in 1970, which is the focus of Ana Janevski’s essay. In this performance, an ironic and highly charged engagement with folkloric motifs that were prevalent in the then Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, Ladik recited a poem in both Serbian and Hungarian, using language not only as a means of communication, but as a sound that may be devoid from the meaning we usually ascribe to it—indeed, sound as a form. This further resonates in many other of Ladik’s performances in the 1970s, such as *R.O.M.E.T.* (1972), in which a concrete poem and a script formed the score for a ritual



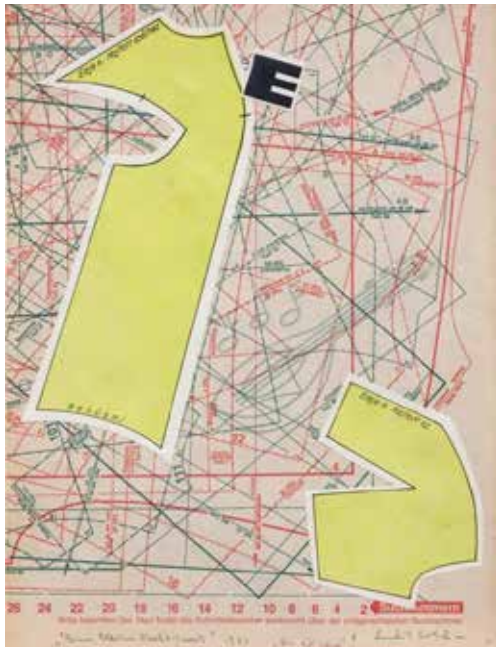
Cover of *Mesék a hétfőjű varrógépről* (Stories of the Seven-Headed Sewing Machine), Novi Sad: Forum, 1978

performance: an embalming of pharaoh Tutankhamen and an evocation of ancient gods through the sound of language as a mystical rather than a signifying agent. Indeed, to channel Mónica de la Torre’s lyrical poem on *R.O.M.E.T.*, a spell was cast:

I recite spells from the Book of the Dead (Pert Em Heru) and the names of gods and goddesses so that the parts of your soul, Tutankhamen, will reunite: ba, which lifted off your body bird-like and is free to come and go between the realms of the living and the dead, as well as ka, your protective double dwelling in your tomb and in your effigies. Once ba and ka rejoin, your transfigured spirit, khu (or akh) will be reanimated, retaining agency in the next world. See, your khu is already almost alive on the score, a beating heart.

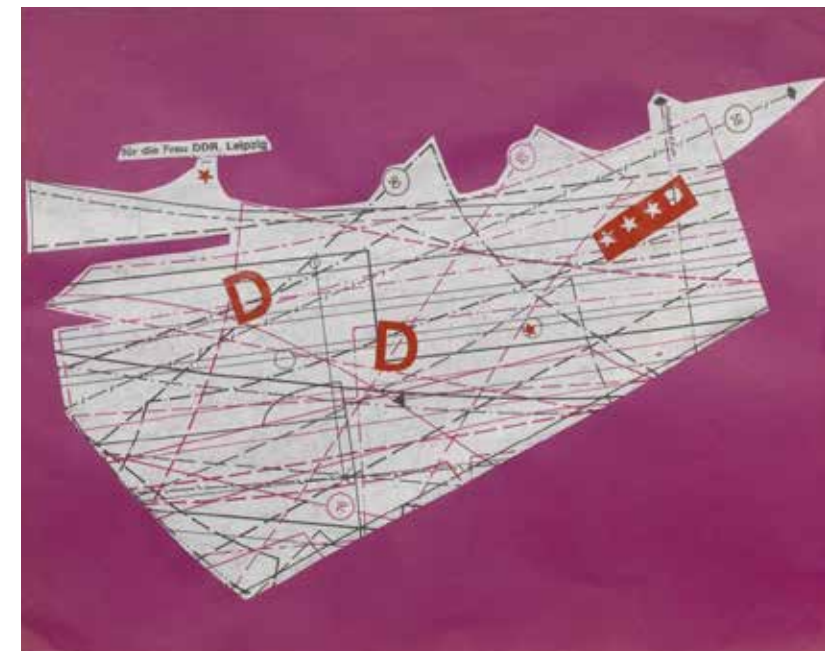
This spell is anchored in the score for *R.O.M.E.T.*, a concrete poem that breaks up language into smaller elements: some just letters, repeating to compose a tone, or dancing with diacritical and punctuation marks; others clinging together to form a word that may or may not be a word, the promiscuous pairing of consonants and vowels that offer the possibility of an invocation through the voice—a possibility that is fully realized in the performance. Or consider Ladik’s concrete poem *Song for Oiled Stove Tube*

and *Female Voice* (1977), shaped like a letter in reverse, a cap mimicking a sentence with a path trailing down a *hu* that could be a cry, a sigh, or a breath, ending with—or, I daresay, climaxing on—a diptych of *hi* and *oh*, the latter letters just extending a bit longer. While Dieter Roelstraete, in his essay on the history of concrete poetry, leads us further down the trail of that literary form that “not only accepts, but positively *celebrates* the irreducible materiality of the written word,” I want to emphasize the relationship to the voice here. I personally cannot read Ladik without listening to a chorus of potential utterances in my mind’s ear. The *hu* or the *hi* or the *oh* are certainly shapes that constitute form through language, subverting processes of signification as we know it, yet they hold the promise of the voice, as is the case with all language in Ladik’s oeuvre, whether it be written or visual. The *hu* and the *hi* and the *oh* read and sound like the stitch of the sewing machine, a repeated gesture producing a sound that manifests minute difference. Through Ladik’s voice, the sign becomes an iterative and ever-changing possibility, a *repetition to alter*.¹

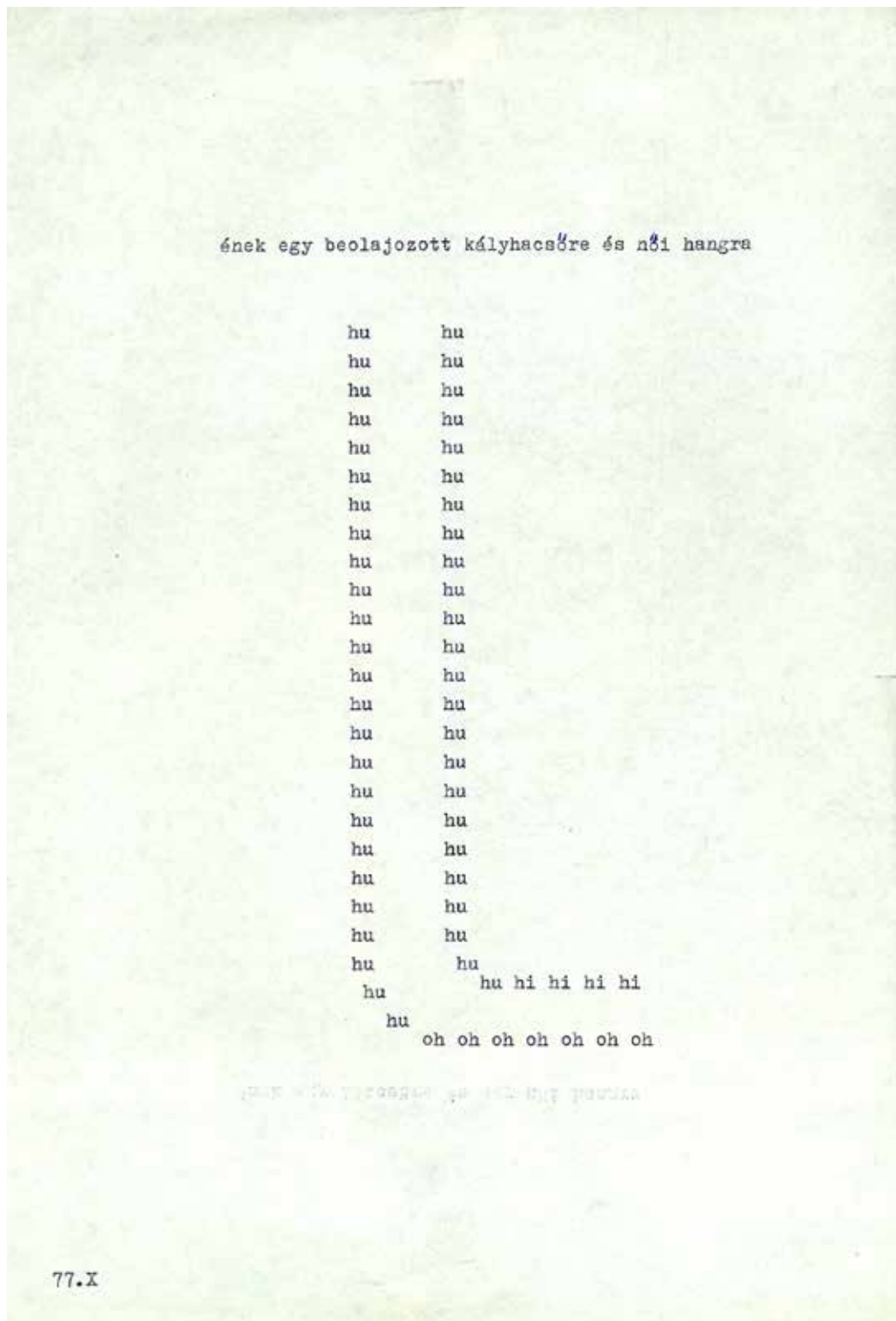


Eine kleine Nachtmusik, 1972, collage on paper, 28.5 x 20 cm. Courtesy of MACBA, Barcelona

Let us return to the collages, as they not only staged an important transition towards visual poetry, but fulfilled the promise of the voice we encounter in Ladik’s concrete poems. As Diedrich Diederichsen asserts in his analysis of Ladik’s experimental sound practice, this did not happen in a vacuum, as female artists internationally used what he calls “the undomesticated voice” as an artistic medium in the early 1970s. Echoing the radical experiments with open-ended music scores by composers such as John Cage and Cornelius Cardew, Ladik interpreted the visual poems with her voice, indeed as scores. Her vocal interpretation of *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* is a deeply sensual sonic collage of the voice breathing, sighing, and moaning, culminating in a climactic scream, interspersed with a rather ominous repetition of a single word uttered in a lower register of the voice, as well as a melody with an echo that feels uncanny and slightly menacing. The score’s soundtrack of two minutes and five seconds seduces as much as it repels, it invites and threatens at the same time. *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* and many other collages Ladik created in this period are not just visual poems that upend the way language



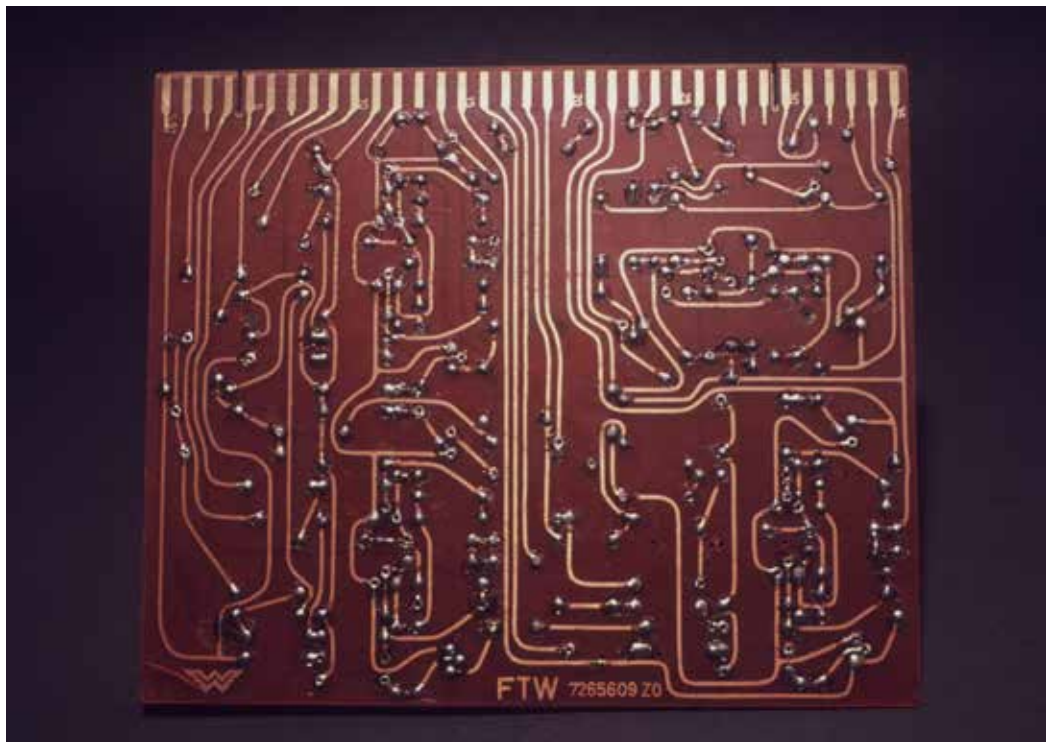
Sonate für die Frau DDR Leipzig, 1978, collage on paper, 26 x 32.5 cm. Courtesy of MACBA, Barcelona



*Song for Oiled Stove
Tube and Female Voice,*
1977, 29.6 x 21.1 cm.
Courtesy of
Petőfi Literary Museum,
Budapest

communicates and signifies, but the vocal interpretations are sonic poems that open up embodied registers of language through the artist's vibrant, vigorous, and at times otherworldly voice. Many of these "soundtracks" emerge from a pairing of poetry and sound that has marked Ladik's practice from the outset—her debut poetry volume *Ballada az ezüstbicikliről* (*Ballad of the Silver Bike*, 1969) is a case in point, published with a gramophone recording of the poems in the book—and set the stage for Ladik's larger sonic experiments, for instance her groundbreaking album of sonic poetry *Phonopoetica* (1976), which is the topic of Bhavisha Panchia's essay.

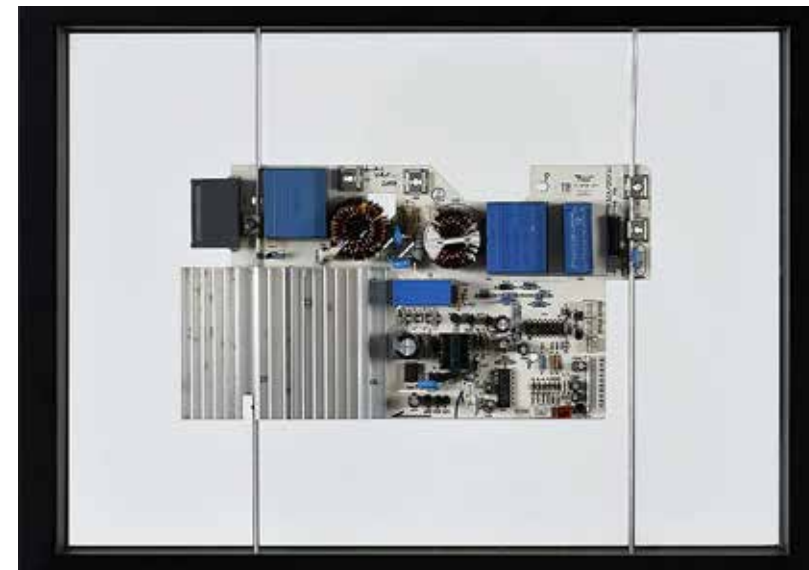
Ladik's voice transforms language. It is no wonder that the artist became interested in electronic circuit boards and mother boards (note the gendered nomenclature) as scores for the voice as early as 1975. Coded language flows through the diodes, inductors, resistors, transistors, and capacitors of these objects, connected by wires and traces—for Ladik, they epitomized all the possibilities of the linguistic sign. While it would be tempting to read the appropriation of these objects simply as an interest in new technologies, Ladik's use of the circuitry of domestic objects such as a radio or an induction cooker in fact activates multiple temporalities. As Gloria Sutton asserts in her text on *Genesis 1–11* (1975/2016), these objects reveal the artist's "commitment to tracing processes of transformation and her recognition of how materials such as silica can be simultaneously read as ancient (sand) and futuristic (silicon semiconductors)." For Ladik, these objects look—and speak—forward and backward at the same time, evoking a mythological past (a "genesis") and an uncharted future. The domestic objects from which these circuit boards were sourced from now come to mean differently as well: not as static signifiers of female labor and femininity, but, like the sewing machine, as objects that hold new possibilities inside them, quite literally in this case, channeled and released through the voice that once again becomes the instrument with which these objects-cum-scores are read and performed. The sewing machine does not only return metaphorically here, as it is hard not to hear the stitch, the pace of the needle if you will, in the repetition of tones that form the baseline of Ladik's vocal interpretation of the transistors and inductors in the circuitry of *Genesis*.



Genesis 8, from the series *Genesis 1–11*, 1975/2016, color photograph and sound recording, 22 x 31 cm. Courtesy of Katalin Ladik and acb gallery, Budapest

Performance appears in many guises in Ladik's oeuvre. In language, in the voice, through the body; on the theater stage, on the small screen, and the big screen; in festivals, cinemas, museums, or theaters; and in photography. Ladik's photo-performances of the 1980s often collect gestures and motifs from her live performances, yet also mark a unique space in which the artist probes modes of self-representation with the photographic lens as an ambiguous agent—symbolizing both the patriarchal gaze upon the female body and a tool of liberation and emancipation. The sewing machine continues to rattle. Take the series *Poemim*, for instance, which is the subject of Emese Kürti's text. A windowpane forms a precarious barrier between the artist and the spectator, framing and exposing the grotesque and torturous transformation of Ladik's features, yet, at the same time, it shields her from the viewer's response. Kürti: "*Poemim* constitutes a powerful gesture in Ladik's performance practice, as she dismantles the previously constructed visual representation of the public persona—the *topos* of the so-called 'naked poetess'—thus neutralizing the impact of negative responses to the eroticized female body." Indeed, in these and other photo-performances from the same period, Ladik reclaims her body through a process of distortion and destruction, liberating it from the stigmas of beauty, desire, and, ultimately, objectification. In the

Induction Cooker Aria, 2017, integrated circuit, 27 x 36 x 4 cm. Courtesy of Katalin Ladik and acb gallery, Budapest



accompanying video work, which emerged from a collaboration with multimedia artist Bogdanka Poznanović in 1980, the artist expands the register of gestures that ridicule, make absurd, desexualize, draw in, seduce, and repel, combining it with the sonic poetry that connected her body with language in the first place.

There is always an invitation in Katalin Ladik's work—to follow her into mythology, as she would say, which is precisely what Paolo Thorsen-Nagel does in his text on the eponymous performance that was staged at documenta 14 in Athens in 2017. In her visual essay for this book, Ladik extends yet another invitation for us to trail and shadow Matilda's dream. Matilda, Ladik's former mother-in-law from whom she inherited a dowry, already appeared in a 2021 (sound) poem by the artist:

The Milky Way above my pillow. Blueness.
 Milk glass dream. Blueness. Twilight.
 The Moon's milk. Blueness
 My milk-buds are exploding. Milk shower. Twilight.
 A woman's breast above my lips.
 The nipples of the moon above my laughter. Blueness.
 The nipples of the dream. Twilight.
 Moons of the female breast. Blueness.
 The milk glass breasts of loneliness. Twilight.

The sky of the female Milky Way. Blueness.
Moon nipples. Blueness.
Moon of Solitude. Twilight.
Tears of nipples over my sorrow. Twilight.
The lightnings of the Milky Way Above my scream. Twilight.
Moon-scream. Blueness.
Flashes of nipples. Blueness.
The female Milky Way between my thighs. Blueness.
A flashing sky above my pain. Twilight.
Lightning. Blueness. Twilight.

As parts of Matilda's dowry are arranged on the colorful sheets of paper in Ladik's essay—spread out, folded, crumpled, scattered—we see the movement of a dream, as if we could momentarily gaze into the twilight that separates realities, where each fold in the fabric holds another Milky Way. I hear the moon-scream and ponder Ladik's title for the last poem in the essay: "Can you dream without me?" I don't think I can, Katalin. But as this book so beautifully shows, Katalin Ladik leaves us with a world to dream with, an *opus* with many Ooooooooo's, which, as Quinn Latimer proclaims, continues to give voice to us all:

O starting to speak!

O breath! O throat!

O thirst! O voice!

O O-pus!

¹ Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), 307–330.

The Fates of Katalin Ladik

Irena Haiduk

There are many markers, but the best place to look is in small towns. Usually they host an inter-city bus station, flanked by a row of service kiosks for the waiting people: a bakery, an all-day café or bar, and a newsstand. Right there, magazines, newspapers, and comics hang on a line, clipped by clothing pins. Rows of neatly stacked cigarette packs insulate the kiosk's glass walls. A low, horizontal window is at shoulder height, so that you can see and hear the clerk before placing money on the tray. Pornography is fully out, and by that I mean naked bodies of women and girls, scarlet nails pressing into their bowling ball breasts. The cock is always absent from the cover. Inside the pages it is never alone. The magazines fade and buckle over time, waiting for teenagers and truck drivers. The rest ignore them, like dog shit, and avoid eye contact.

But this is the place to look. Not at the porn itself, but at the fact of it being there, on the newsstands of the small-town bus stops. If you live in a minor language (not English, German, or French), porn means peace. When bodies on the covers start deforming into pictures of lined-up corpses, mass grave pits, smoke, uniformed men in flag flying tanks, the sound of war follows, like a late film effect, closer and closer until the gunfire is within earshot. If you live in a minor language, like Serbo-Croatian or Hungarian, the newsstand is an oracle. You have to be sensitive to all kinds of slight shifts in order to decide the best time to flee.

To Katalin Ladik this moment was highly legible. She decided to be a poet very early, in her teens, after starting her acting career on Radio Novi Sad, where she performed in ensemble radio plays for the Hungarian-speaking public of Vojvodina, Yugoslavia. This country, the second iteration of Yugoslavia (*yug* or *jug* meaning "south" in most Slavic languages, and *slav*, from *slovo* meaning "letter," marking people who speak the same language,

also slaves), was an artwork, held together by a spell cast by a powerful magus, Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980), after World War II. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) consisted of six newly defined republics spanning the Balkans from the Adriatic Sea all the way to the Alps: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia (with autonomous regions Vojvodina and Kosovo), and Slovenia. Strong magic was necessary to create this world from rubble. It required a loss of memory charm, a forgetting, so that friends and enemies could live together in a wonderland built only from what they shared. The spell worked.

Katalin Ladik felt it work, she was three years old at this founding. One night, she fell asleep in Újvidék, Magyar Királyság, and woke up in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, without moving an inch. Changing countries while staying in place happened for centuries to people living in this stretch of the Danube, where conquest defined ever-shifting borders between empires. Since the 1500s, the city was known by many names left by the Ottomans (Varadin), the Habsburg Monarchy (Ratzen Stadt), the Austrian Empire (Neoplanta), the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Neusatz), the Kingdom of Serbia (Нови Сад), the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Novi Sad), Hungary (Újvidék), SFR Yugoslavia (Нови Сад, Novi Sad, Újvidék), FR Yugoslavia (Нови Сад, Novi Sad, Újvidék), and by the Republic of Serbia where it stands as Нови Сад, Novi Sad, and Újvidék today.

Unlike the rest of the Balkans, peoples living in Vojvodina, north of the Sava and Danube rivers, went through both the Ottoman occupation, where the ban on writing and representational images evolved an array of oral techniques. Through the Enlightenment, Cartesian systems instilled Western ways of knowing, brought in by the Habsburgs. Five hundred years of amalgamated West-European and Balkan mythologies, aesthetics, and politics primed this place for further entanglement. Here, prophecy and reason still stand on top of one another. Binaries have no jurisdiction in a vertigo of perpetual coming together and coming apart. What spins out of this vortex provides the only way to stay sane: the third way.

The enchantment of Yugoslavia was greater than yes or no, true or false, on or off, 0 or 1, the East or the West, Warsaw or NATO. This phase, a once-in-a-world scenario, begot nonalignment. Together with Egypt, Ghana, India, and Indonesia, SFR Yugoslavia became the founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), a cultural and economic allegiance advocating for a “third way” against the Cold War power bloc: imperialism, (neo)colonialism, racism, and all forms of aggression, occupation, domination, interference, and hegemony. The spell, nourished by temporary stability, traveled far finding those who knew that there was a way beyond what was on offer.

This is where Katalin Ladik learned to speak Hungarian and Serbo-Croatian, and where she, after deciding to become a poet, was informed by an oracle that she would die at the age of thirty-seven. At this moment, her life acquired the dimension of an epic, a ballad about a woman destined to make a world with art, a task no constraint could extinguish. This frame of finitude, outside of regular flows of time and standardized motivations for living, required compression, speed, and an economy of extraordinary efficiency. Katalin Ladik finished two acting schools, studied economy, worked in a bank, had a long career as a radio play actress, married, had a son, divorced, published her first book of poetry, then a second book with an accompanying record, started performing her poetry, expanded into sculpture, performance, photography, married again, traveled, found her people, notoriety, respect, divorced her second husband, toured the Balkans, Europe, and beyond; she was filmed, recorded, interviewed, studied, quoted, celebrated, honored, defamed with charges of immoral conduct by the communist party, harassed for years, rescued by artists with higher party standing, more books, more exhibitions, happenings, letters, married again, raised her son, buried her husbands, wrote her autobiography, part one and two.

Much of Katalin Ladik’s early work camouflaged as harmless, undetectable to those in pursuit of major meaning extraction. Her art, like the rest of her, could not be categorized, and it thrived in a place like Yugoslavia where most activity of this kind was permitted, even supported. She, like many others, was left in peace for a great while and allowed to do her work.

Picture this: *Shaman Poem V*, Zagreb, 1970. Katalin Ladik mid-channeling, bending her minimally costumed body (a long strip of fur held up by a wide leather belt), surrounded by ceremonial props, such as *goč* (sheepskin drum), *gajde* (traditional Balkan bagpipes), *gusle* (a single string bow instrument used for performing epic poetry), a chair, and candles atop thin cylinder candelabra stands. The score is in her hands and scattered on the floor; she is reading, doing a reading, like an oracle reads. Her body is in perfect proportion to the desires of everyone around her, she moves in shapes that demonstrate its agility, its beauty, its power to attract those who were, are, and will be present. Her nipples are not big, they are wide and light but contract to dark tight raspberries on cue. Dušan Makavejev is sitting transfixed in the first row, the charge of this event echoes in his future films. Mladen Stilinović is in the back, standing up with arms crossed, straining his neck to see it all. Now imagine: the black-and-white photograph, so fitting to how the Eastern European socialist domain is pictured, has colors under the grayscale film. Makavejev's top and trousers are cobalt blue, Stilinović's sweater is an outrageous lemon yellow. Katalin Ladik's hair is Cleopatra black, the eyeliner is turquoise-black, her eyes are purple, her mouth warm coral. The sound pulsing in the picture is almost audible from the center of the performance: it is all Katalin Ladik. It issues from the most economical studio of all: the mouth.

Her top lip is flat and fully arched from both sides, shaped as a two-part bridge. The parts closer to the nose are higher than the corners and the bottom lip is a bit fuller, a long horizontal bean nestled under the arc of the top lip. Her speaking voice is an alto only when she exhales or is about to take a pause. On the inhale, it is a deep grounded base, a pitch where all words return and where her laughter ramps up. Her speech is constantly shifting pitch from alto to base, making curves on a surface with both polished and rough parts. The bottom corners of her lower lip pull downward every time her voice hits the base. When she is reading or channeling, her mouth assumes all possible shapes: the lips pull over or away from the teeth, or they close tight to make more sounds. This instrument, like her awareness of everything it can do, is truly open, her lips mold auxiliary tongues, her throat, diaphragm, and lungs protract into limbs. The shapeshifting is a symptom

of the multi-lingual, that, for Katalin Ladik, never requires the purgatory of translation to make contact. For those who do not speak Hungarian, the material simply expands into sound, already resistant to interpretation and categorization. What is offered, body to body, is the arousal of being open to mixing limbs, tongues, sharing skins.

Play powers Katalin Ladik's way with language. Her body is an instrument *of* play and an instrument *to* play. This labor is pure eros, pure desire, and pure courage, because it unfolds in public. Sounds issue in Serbo-Croatian, Hungarian, and elemental phonic groups. Her body processes them, their forms and categories, their addressers and addressees, to constitute an archaic space-time. This otherworldly Babylonian ability can only be called a spell.

A spell is a deed made from sound, an agent (agency), an actor (act) traveling toward those who will absorb it and carry it further until it is carried out. Everything encountered on the way—attached, released, and incorporated—passes through animate bodies, smoke, dust, goo, and fluids. Once a spell is cast, it cannot be denied, vibration can't be shut out. Uttering spells generates time and space: the work of traveling, accumulation, and seduction.

For Katalin Ladik, incantation and enunciation are not a matter of individual concern. Her voice must pass through others. It needs others. Through this contact, in all its forms, she has developed a deep awareness of how to host. This hosting is embodied in multiple ways, ripple-shaped. It starts as a voice, a sound, a spell, a sounding within the self, contained within her body. Her hands draw it out to inscribe a score. The score articulates a public place where others can be hosted to behold and host the act of casting. To host in a traditional Balkan way is to have no conception of the guest: the task is highly communicable, transferable, and reciprocal, shared by all present.

If we think of the Balkans as a zone where entanglement is modeled at the most fundamental level (either by being forcefully inscribed or voluntarily accepted), it is no surprise that these lands are volatile, fluid, in an ongoing state of making themselves. To be a host in the Balkans, in a perpetual state

of occupation by others, requires both intimate knowledge and reversal of the values of the occupying force. The occupier wants to conquer, to own, to have, to grow, to amass, and to acquire. To exist here you must turn possession on its head and become possessed—become host to a demon. To be possessed requires a loss of control. Let the unknown in, to live and do its work inside you, so that you may become another self, made from all of those who possessed you.

The host is an amalgam. Her home is made from what she already has, what is on hand. To work with what you have is to exercise the economy of constraint. This is the domain of the home, the matriarchal and the domestic, and in Katalin Ladik's enterprise it answers to its Greek name—*oikos* meaning “home,” *nemein* meaning “to manage.” This kind of economizing requires virtuosity, imagination, and improvisation.

Yugoslavia had no support for single mothers when Katalin Ladik became one. Still, women could earn enough to support themselves. She always had to have a full-time job. To make art, she could not make distinctions between the different kinds of labor in her life. Katalin Ladik managed with sorcery, by sourcing and gathering from what was available, what surrounded her: the domestic and the occupational, private and public, intimate and common,



Shaman Poem V, 1970, black-and-white photograph, dimensions unknown. Courtesy of Katalin Ladik and acb gallery, Budapest

the sewing machine, the clothing pattern, her son's kraft paper, wiring from switchboards and tape decks at the radio station, her underwear, her organs, her skin, her muscle, epic songs, lyric songs, wailing songs (*narikače*), electronics, folklore, *gusle*, *gajde*, candles, her hair, her eyelashes, her eyes, her ears, her mouth, tongues.

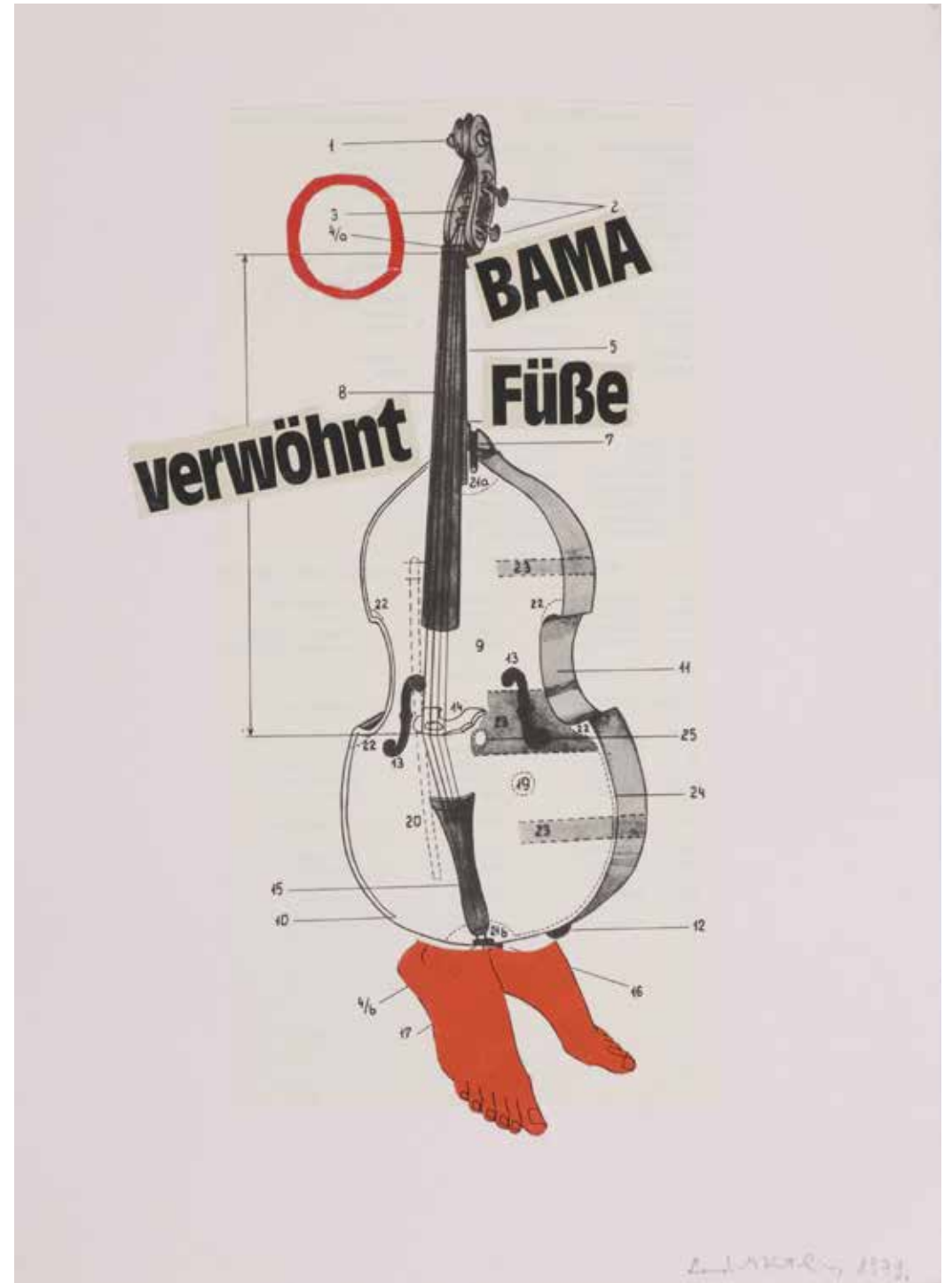
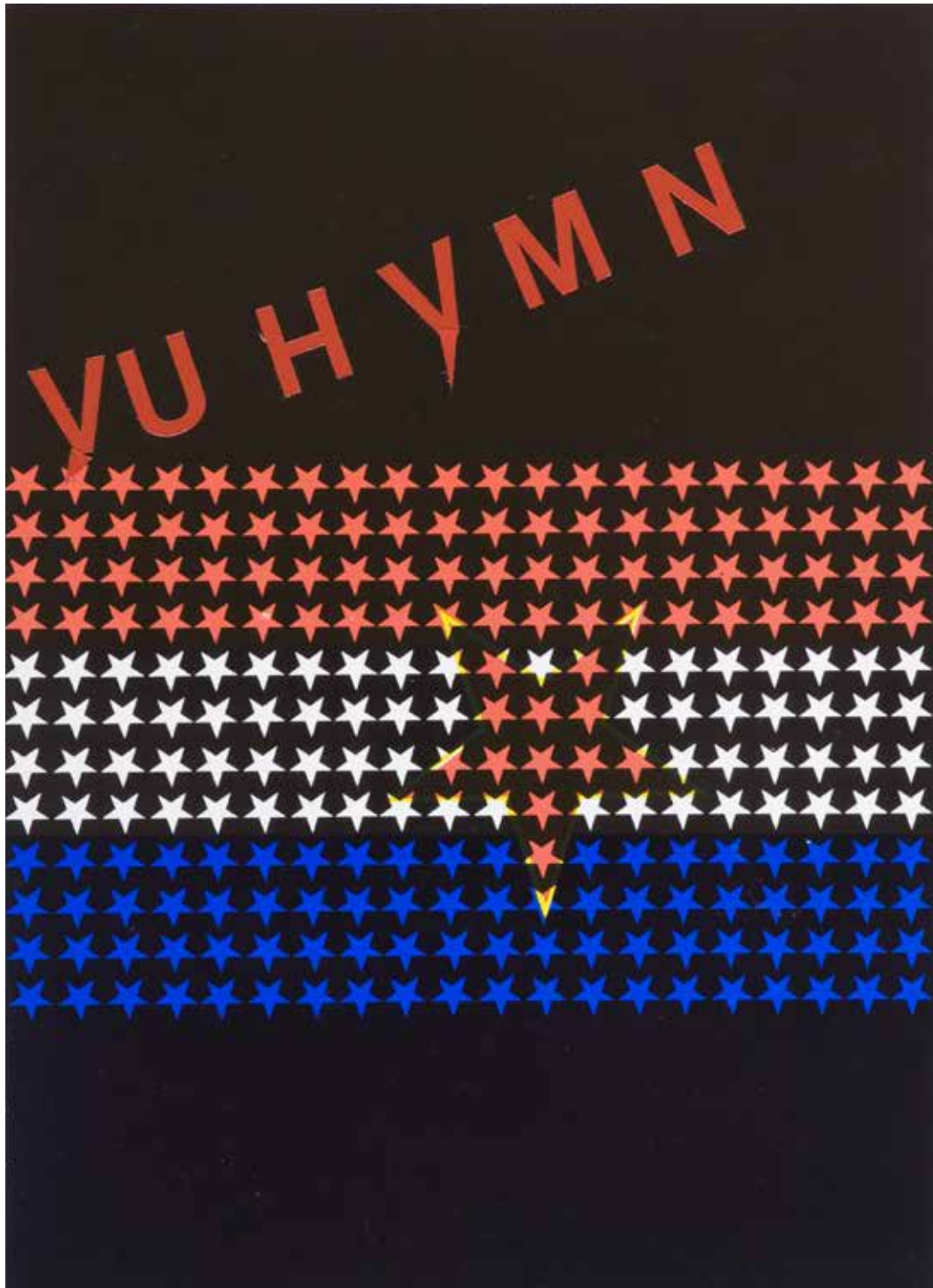
Katalin Ladik's *oikos* is highly portable, harkening back to a time before harvests, the time of hunting and gathering, where what is accumulated has to be attached to one's body at all times, like the traditional vests sewn over with rows of silver and gold coins worn as currency by Balkan women as they ran from Ottoman retaliation. They enable movement at the speed of someone being chased or running out of time. The lack of time, the pressure of constraint enables leanness, lightness, leaping, and flying, like winds, like grasses, thoughts, songs. Katalin Ladik's scenography carries easily so that it can be put down quickly, like a tent, and conjure a home, anywhere, for a ritual of transformation.

Since agility leaves no room for permanence, the need for stability is fulfilled by the score. The score is a cutting, akin to a plant, coding the ingredients and procedures necessary to graft new generations from a living source. Katalin Ladik (re)produces generations of improvised versions from a singular score whose variable nature is activated by different environments, weather, props, identities, and witnesses. The score is fixed, but it never reads the same.

But things are not what you think they are not—they are not ready-mades. What Katalin Ladik orchestrates as the shaman, the androgen, the angel, the poet, the animal, the child, the mother, the composition radiates a lack of aboutness. There is no time or space for critical distance when you are witnessing Katalin Ladik's making. Your presence alone implicates you, and you are (a)part from your self, an actor, engaged in the labor of mutual making. She performs the score, takes it in, absorbs it back and forth, inhales and exhales, ingests and returns. In this kind of (re)production no stable reference holds, as Katalin Ladik's gives birth through her mouth. This instability stimulates both sound and language to construct a sonorous house,

Following pages:
YU HYMN, 1973, paper collage, 28 x 20 cm. Courtesy of Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest
Photo: József Rosta / Ludwig Museum – MoCA. © Katalin Ladik

March of the Partizan Woman, 1979, paper collage, 31.5 x 22.5 cm. Courtesy of Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest
Photo: József Rosta / Ludwig Museum – MoCA. © Katalin Ladik



shimmering with vibration of what is arriving, appearing, in the process of making itself. To witness this process of making, in public, is political in a world that alienates e-v-e-r-y-t-h-i-n-g: people, places, and things from their own bodies, histories, thoughts, interests. This is where history-making converges with the history of making.

In this foreground, another kind of image is constructed. The sonorous room is a camera—in the original sense of the word, as a room inside a house. It loads images slowly, rendering and accumulating over time, like learning, weaving, reading, cutting, pasting, telling, singing across two mountains, acquiring experimental rights, scanning the radio. Katalin Ladik's camera is a home for language-based image-making. By “language,” I mean embodied forms of communication that condition listening, absorption, and presence into active and intentional construction of images.

To construct images slowly and carefully is radical in a time characterized by such a ravenous demand for images. Katalin Ladik's “camera” models an image ecology of sense equality. To shrink our eyes and put them back into their sockets, to blink and close our lids again, to return the sense of smell from the eye to the nose, taste to the mouth, touch to skin, hearing to the ears—this is what Katalin Ladik is offering today, the ability to take our bodies back. This proposition may seem destabilizing since our haptics prepare us for living in high-resolution images only, our world soon being impossible to physically inhabit. To be intentionally in one's body today is to insist on the possibility of living in five senses.

Katalin Ladik's work arrives just in time to bring the wisdom of those who survived outside of optical representation, who make living images that nobody can own and everyone can use. The spell says: read me, hear me, be with me, stay with me, feel pleasure arrive, eros, feel your senses start to cook together, feel everything act, regardless of what it is, see everything take part. This is the kind of art that gives power by giving up power. To take time with it is to get time.

In 1980, the magus Tito died. Katalin Ladik was in New York when it happened, where I live now. She was offered to stay, to bring her son, to get a job. Nobody here could understand why she refused; this country being made up of many who live outside their mother tongue. She could not accept the offer. She explained that she lives in language, and that language is a place, more than a home. She had to be in language, practice it, keep drawing from it. It furnishes her studio, inscribes her scores, erects her sonorous room. She returned to Нови Сад, Novi Sad, Újvidék.

Over the next decade, the magus' spell weakened—the memory charm especially—and many remembered only what divided them. In 1991, the covers on the newsstands of small-town bus stops started to deform from naked bodies of women and girls with scarlet nails into gray and dark red corpses, smoke, and uniformed men. Yugoslav passports dropped in mobility rankings from Swiss (welcome everywhere) to Iranian (nobody can leave), and the sound of artillery drew closer. In 1992, the sound of gunfire was within earshot. This is when Katalin Ladik decided to leave. She moved to Budapest, Hungary, for a while. The war did not skip a generation. It inflicted familiar kinds of waiting. In 2006, Katalin Ladik could finally return to Нови Сад, Novi Sad, Újvidék. She lives there, in Budapest, and on the island of Hvar, Croatia.

Yugoslavia's uniqueness, its values, labor forms, economies, productions, and artforms are now an unstable and obscure history. The half-century-long demonstration of the third way is evidence that another way of life is possible. It continues to find those, unsatisfied by the binary, who knew that there is a way beyond what was on offer. When you visit Zagreb, Ljubljana, Skopje, Prishtina, Belgrade, Sarajevo, Novi Sad, Podgorica, do it on a clear night. You may notice a shimmer of unfamiliar form, buried in the aesthetics of privatization and Western secondary markets. It is the shimmer of the sonorous house, the sound of history and history of making, casting its spell. Katalin Ladik lives there, hosting her Fates. Seduced by what issues forth from her mouth, her Fates let her live past thirty-seven. Spellbound, they only wish to keep listening.



Shaman Poem

Ana Janevski

“From ’69 it was clear that I need to search for new forms of artistic expression. Then I was invited to a program on Radio Belgrade where I read my poetry in Serbian and performed sound poetry pieces. After that a journalist from a national newspaper interviewed me and I told him that I had a performance in which I recite my poetry as a shaman while naked. So I said this and it was published as if I had already had such a performance.”

Katalin Ladik¹

With these words Katalin Ladik announced her performance *Shaman Poem*, which premiered at the Theater in the Basement of the Atelje 212 avant-garde theater in Belgrade in 1970, immediately followed by another staging of the work at the Genre Experimental Film Festival (GEFF) in Zagreb. Extensive documentation shows Ladik’s appearance at GEFF. The series of photographs meticulously records the performance, almost like a film strip. Ladik is dressed in black trousers and a black turtleneck with a necklace amulet, surrounded by the audience in an unconventional gallery space, with a burning candle in the middle. Her open mouth suggests the use of her voice, and with each photo her gestures become more energetic—her arms are raised, her head is bent backwards, her torso is twisted. Then the camera zooms out and we see that she is performing while standing amid textual scores scattered on the floor. She keeps using her voice, moving across the paper. At a certain point she even holds a mirror to reflect the audience in the room. Midway through the photographic sequence we see a drastic outfit change: a costume of animal skin or fur that reveals her breast—the naked body articulates itself. She moves even more emphatically until she starts playing a number of folk instruments, including drums, bagpipes, and jug pipes. Finally, she turns her own body into an instrument as she plays her hair like a string with an object resembling a bow.

Shaman Poem V,
1970, black-and-white
photographs,
10 x 15 cm each.
Courtesy of Katalin
Ladik and acb gallery,
Budapest

The documentation of the performance evokes a balance between motion and stillness, the multitude of images bringing an immediacy to what would otherwise be a sequence of still images. Other sources tell us that the artist started the performance by reciting poems written in Hungarian and gradually transitioned to Serbian—she considered her mother tongue to be more appropriate to folk and ritualistic sound—before eventually moving to the more experimental phonic poetry she would become known for. At the time, Ladik had already published some of her poems in Hungarian and she was working as a speaker at Radio Novi Sad. She had to negotiate the multicultural coexistence between two languages; the assigned social roles and norms of being a wife, a mother, a cultural worker, and an artist; and the artistic tension between her shamanic phonic poetry and the more conceptual art scene in Novi Sad and Yugoslavia. Ladik stated: “As I felt too restricted as an actress, and did not really belong to either the Serbian or Hungarian scenes, I decided to create my own theatre, my own presence, with a single actor or performer. I used my own texts.”² *Shaman Poem* allowed the artist to explore the realm of sound and voice, devoid of conventional semantics, while also blurring the lines between poetic performance, experimental music, and body art. Moreover, by claiming her own body as an active agent of artistic creation, she proposed a distinctly feminist stance on the commodification of the female body—a phenomenon still prevalent in the socialist society of Yugoslavia at the time.

If Ladik’s sense of self is indeed shaped by the sociopolitical and cultural context she was living and working in, the festival hosting the performance *Shaman Poem* deserves more scrutiny. During his visit to Zagreb in 1967, historian Paul Adams Sitney described the GEF festival as follows: “... the bi-annual festival of GEF is a remarkable affair in which the entire Yugoslavian cinema comes together, [including] feature makers, professional animators, experimenters, dadaist on the film and rank amateur in 8 mm cinema clubs.”³ The festival was indeed a “remarkable affair.” It was established in 1963 after a group of amateurs gathered around the cine-club Zagreb and coined the term “antifilm,” which they defined as “no longer films by authors who are conveying expressing and communicating with a viewer, but rather an act of

discovery and exploration.”⁴ Or, to put it more straightforwardly, “antifilm is an integral part of life.”⁵ The festival had four editions. As early as the first edition, titled *Antifilm and New Tendencies in Cinematography*, GEF made visible its inclination to connect all activities across art, science, and technology in the name of experimentation and research.⁶ The festival was accompanied by thematic discussions and performances, historical retrospectives, and screenings of foreign films. Sitney was a guest star in 1967 and presented twelve hours of American avant-garde and Fluxus films at the festival. In the last GEF, Paul Morrissey was among the guests (with films from the Warhol Factory), along with Carolee Schneemann, who presented her film *Fuses* (1964–67).

GEF existed within a bigger political and cultural experiment. After World War II, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia promoted itself as the “Land of the In-Between,” a “third way” characterized by market socialism and nonalignment with either the capitalist or Soviet-communist blocs. Its version of state socialism championed a multinational and multilingual society, and allowed a cultural and artistic openness to avant-garde experimentation. Reflecting on the modernization of Yugoslavia in 1979, Miroslav Krleža, a Croatian writer and prominent intellectual in Yugoslavia, claimed that Tito’s socialism contributed more in the last thirty years to the cultural prosperity and development of the Yugoslav nation than other regimes had done in one hundred and fifty years. However, he also contended that “the Party has been overcome by the peasant uprising, and it accomplished to orient the masses, but unfortunately its symbol is ‘kozaračko kolo’ [a traditional and folkloric dance], while we should move forward. *Kozaračko kolo* should be left to history.”⁷ Krleža thought that Yugoslavia could not move into the third millennium without emancipating itself from the past, its nationalist myths and folklore. Ladik and her work are certainly “product[s] of the historical processes,” as Antonio Gramsci would have put it.⁸ Merging new forms of performance and body art with folkloric elements, the artist situated herself in the tension field Krleža described, highlighting the parallel existence—rather than the clash or duality—of the urban and the rural in Yugoslav politics and popular culture, as well as in her own life. To engage

with such themes while performing semi-nude constituted a major intervention by Ladik into the patriarchal art system at the time, which later, in 1975, would lead to accusations of “immorality” and her expulsion from the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, while, at the same time, she was a star on state television—another paradox of the Yugoslav system: to have cultural freedom within a state-sanctioned and state-funded institution.

Shaman Poem is an emancipatory and visionary performance in which Ladik embodied the coexistence of being a woman and an artist in the highly complex and often contradictory conditions of Yugoslavia. She observed the symptoms of the impotence of the state ideology and the paradoxes present in Yugoslav socialist society, inserting her body in the male-dominated, puritanical culture of the time. The artist turned towards a shamanic figure, a figure of power connected to nature and all creation, a healer and a leader with mystical powers. Ladik thus claimed her role of female artist for herself, toward a new folklore beyond national and ideological categorizations. Or, as the artist Joan Jonas stated: “The performer sees herself as a medium; information passes through.”⁹

¹ “They expected us to be pretty but I dare to be ugly,” interview with Petra Bakos, [https://pukt.hu/en/2019/10/25/they-expect-us-to-be-pretty/](https://punkt.hu/en/2019/10/25/they-expect-us-to-be-pretty/) (accessed April 26, 2023).

² Quoted in Emese Kürti, *Screaming Hole: Poetry, Sound and Action as Intermedia Practice in the Work of Katalin Ladik* (Budapest: acb ResearchLab, 2017), 52.

³ Ana Janevski (ed.), *As Soon as I Open my Eyes I See a Film: Experiments in Art of Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 1970s* (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 257.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ The other three editions were titled *Exploration of Cinematography and Exploration Through Cinematography* (1965), *Cybernetics and Aesthetics* (1967), and *Sexuality as a New Road Towards Humanity* (1970).

⁷ Quoted in Damir Pilić, *Tito očima Krleža revolucija i zebnja* (Zagreb: VBZ, 2020), 72.

⁸ See Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks. Volume 2: 1930–1932* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

⁹ Douglas Crimp (ed.), *Joan Jonas. Scripts and Descriptions 1968–1982* (Berkeley: University Art Museum, 1983).

Poetic Extensions

Diedrich Diederichsen

Katalin Ladik is considered a “sound poet.” She has received widespread recognition from numerous other international exponents of the discipline—for example, Henri Chopin—and her work has been acclaimed and responded to the world over. Yet, in a 2018 interview she gave for the Izlog Festival that took place from May 2 to 5 at the Student Centre Zagreb, she begins by asking how she should introduce herself—as a poet, lyricist, performer, or visual artist, since ultimately she is all of these?¹ (As well as, one might add, a musician, actor, filmmaker, and novelist.) She points out that there are also—and continue to be—texts of hers that can be read in books, performances that can be experienced live (or as documentation), and visual objects, as well as musical works produced in collaboration with relevant composers and ensembles of so-called New Music and, more recently, her version of slam poetry with Endre Szkárósi, her colleague in sound poetry.² These genres and disciplines do not constitute a hierarchy in which the conventional genres are positioned “below,” while the unusual, sometimes self-developed ones are situated “higher;” she does not proclaim this kind of genealogy of radicality and innovation. She does claim, however, that in everything she does—even in her visual objects, collages that function as scores—what is at issue is “extensions of poetry,” to borrow the expression she uses in the interview from 2018. Among these extensions, sound poetry—the practice of composing and improvising with collaged or invented, language-like sounds, not primarily determined by pitches and produced by the voice, in various versions—is the terrain that will be my principal focus here, particularly with regard to a feminist body politics that in the late 1960s became just as conspicuous in Novi Sad or Zagreb as it was in New York, Munich, Tokyo, or Buenos Aires, even if the particular, individual scenes and milieus from which it emerged otherwise had relatively little to do with one another.

The genre of phonetic poetry seems bent on escalating the confrontation between the semantic and the sonic, which of course plays a role in all music and

all poetry. The fact that every acoustically produced semantics is threatened on the one hand with the danger of descending into unintelligible noise, while on the other it can be transformed into abstract, meaningless beauty, is the point of departure for *Sprachkunst*. The same could be said about its opposite: the hallucinatory or simply interpretive attribution of semantic clarity to meaningless sound, noises, and absolute music. Protagonists of voice-based art often claim that in written language one loses the physical production of signs, the bodily and embodied aspect of semantics, to disembodied abstraction through conventionalization and the ascendancy of the written form. Against this argument stands the position—supported, for example, by Derrida’s attack on phonocentrism—that the subordination of signs to the voice and the body that produces it in the classical positions of linguistics and the philosophy of language misunderstands their character and falls into an authenticist metaphysics of the natural.³ Dadaist sound poetry, for its part, used the phone—the sonic embodiment—not to supply the sign with its semantic truth via physical authentication but to annihilate a semantics of any kind in the corporeality of sound and rhythm, while not, however, destroying the formal character of the linguistic signs by which the sounds are notated: they have letters, are grouped into words, a written image, and can be performed by reading them aloud. Their semantic emptiness may be filled with something quite different, while on the other hand it is always easily laid open to notions of authenticity and depth, indeed to the metaphysics of a “true language.”

The liberation and autonomization of signs, the “decomposition” of semantic units, the attack on language’s meaning rather than its abstractness (and hence on the given language as the interface of meaning) are characteristic of many avant-garde sound-poetic projects after World War II.⁴ From the Lettrists surrounding Isidore Isou, whose concern was not least with the individual, liberated letter, to Hans G. Helms, who discovered the phonetic scraps of multilingualism in the displaced persons camps after the end of the Nazi era in his “experimental speech composition” *Fa:m’ Ahniesgwow* (1960), the emptied, decomposed sign, stripped in its sound of its denotative plainness, was not attacked in the struggle for something else, something better, but exposed to a radical and fundamental critique. A reading of that kind,

however—one focused on amelioration—has become possible at least since free jazz and rock music and the emancipation of the scream, especially from a feminist perspective. Of course, it has its foundations much earlier, in the views of Cratylus, for example, who airs them in Plato’s eponymous dialog.⁵ Cratylus views words not as arbitrary designations but as the truth of the things to which they refer—contrary to the view that signs are arbitrary or conventional, which is already skeptically suggested by his interlocutor but governs the modern philosophy of language.

If Cratylus were right, however, then the undesigned, the excluded, would have to make themselves heard through new signs. Here, the hope of the pre-semantic phonic dimension for articulation meets the (political) aggression of anti-semantic Lettrism, a feminist idea of the phonic that implicitly (for there are hardly any explicit manifestos) views the arbitrariness of the sign as the formalist reduction of a neutralization, demarcation, and ontologization—perhaps patriarchal or caused in some other way by the hegemonic epistemic conditions—of a primarily historical or otherwise specific attribute of linguistic signs. The problem with this position, of course, is its (unintentional?) proximity to etymologizing language mysticism, an essentialist semanticism of the kind that was cultivated by Heidegger. Yet even the anti-colonialist critique leveled by a Hubert Fichte, say, at the structuralism of the Levi-Strauss school,⁶ attempts to position this kind of semanticism politically as the possibility of transcultural communication and ethnographic knowledge beyond the observation of structures. It is no wonder that feminist stances were also able to embrace the idea that the wide-ranging cultural exclusion of women is perpetuated in the dominant ideas of the philosophy of language. In Ladik’s case, the emancipation of the phonic as she promotes it in the 1970s can be read in this way, but there is also an entirely different history at work.

To put it in somewhat abbreviated form, Ladik’s contributions to literary and poetic movements and their journals (such as *Uj Symposium*) are notable not only for their humor, their directness, and a certain delight in the grotesque, but also for their references to folkloric forms and formats. This folkloric element, of course, is also linked to another tradition of language’s embodiment



Snail Aria, 1979,
collage on paper,
26.5 x 32.5 cm.
Courtesy of Katalin
Ladik and acb gallery,
Budapest

in so-called “oral cultures,” in which, if one follows Walter Ong,⁷ the word is much more a thing than a sign, a utilitarian object in my hand—not so much a thing that stands in an indirect or complex and referential relationship to the world and its predominantly absent elements, but one that deploys its power here and now like a tool. This would represent a closing of the circle: the seeming metaphysical authenticity of a bodily expressive sound poetry would then have the character of a “thing in the hand,” uncoupled, in good structuralist fashion, from the thing in the world. It may be a somewhat reckless maneuver to detect an (old and new) culture of orality in Ladik’s poetry and its various media, but she does after all make the move to sound poetry and its associated performance formats with reference to folkloric and ritualistic practices (as early as 1968, for example, in *Sámánének* (*Shaman Song*), that is to say, as a transformation of language’s performance, not in relation to its objects—unless of course a scream is truly meant to be understood as a direct expression of the body, not as an expression aided by a certain relationship to the body.

There are still other lines, however, from which we must approach this crossroads where the pictorial quality of language, the performance of language, and the sound of language meet, and from which we can reconstruct Ladik’s position and path. The closest to hand would be this one: in the post-war history of pop and African-American music, we see a unique development of the emancipation of “small,” untrained, or harsh voices—thanks to the

microphone, which can amplify weak voices and make their individual character clearer, but also because of a shift in the prevailing aesthetic attitude, which has learned to appreciate the untrained, accidental, uncontrolled, and involuntary as values (a development that was very much also inspired by folkloric precursors in the form of the blues and other predominantly African-American traditions). Bob Dylan, Ray Davies, Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry, John Lennon, and many others flouted every standard of vocal beauty: they sang through their noses, had narrow vocal ranges, and were anything but trained. They did have one thing in common, however: they were all men. This emancipation was a masculinist one; the female artists of the same era, by contrast, still performed either collectively as girl groups, in the background, or alone with an acoustic guitar and with normatively beautiful, old-school singing voices. Even for the women singers of jazz and soul, who were in many respects more advanced, the standard of vocal power continued to apply. With the sole exception of some forms of urban blues, women were not allowed to rattle, croak, or screech in the way that it was soon de rigueur for the men of rock music to do.



Die Meistersinger,
1980, collage on paper,
28.5 x 20.5 cm.
Courtesy of Katalin
Ladik and acb gallery,
Budapest

That changed around 1970, however. There was now a whole host of women, not just in the rock music world, who recognized the undomesticated voice as an artistic medium, albeit in a very different way from most men. In the realm of free jazz, these were Jeanne Lee and Patty Waters. Lee delivered vocal acrobatics that went far beyond the so-called scat singing of the jazz tradition, even to the point of extreme feats of vocal artistry, while Waters could go directly from a whisper to prolonged screams. The artist who went the furthest in this direction was Linda Sharrock. With her then husband, guitarist Sonny Sharrock, she recorded two albums—also around 1970—in which she developed a scream aesthetic that presented itself as decidedly female (*Black Woman*, 1969; *Monkey-Pockie-Boo*, 1970). She has continued to work on it to this day, primarily in Vienna—with interruptions, during which she got involved with funk and disco, or appeared on Georg Danzer records. Ladik probably did not know her at the time (her recordings for the Paris-based BYG label were not very widely distributed). Nor did she know Yoko Ono, perhaps the most prominent of the female artists who around 1970 took part in the attempt to reclaim the intensified and sharpened bodily sound of a female-coded vocal space as a new expressive register. The painter László Lakner called Ladik the “Yoko Ono of the Balkans” in a letter to the artist and later film director Gábor Altorjay after seeing a performance by her in Budapest, also in 1970.⁸

What is present, however, in this—though limited, nonetheless quite striking—convergence of projects by women artists in the most disparate parts of the world, who probably knew very little about each other, is the shared suspicion of a specifically corporeal dimension of the exclusion of female subjects from discourse, a suspicion that also always takes other, adjacent exclusions into account, like that of a certain crude folklore in the work of Ladik. This raises the question of whether the recourse to the corporeality of speech should be understood precisely not in the sense of an authenticity of the voice of the kind that was criticized by Derrida, but as a different “artificiality,” a different “passion,” a different “monstrosity” distinct from that of writing⁹ precisely because it is based on a different vocality. It is not the “natural,” unmarked voice of phonocentrism but a voice that calls both the

Pseudo-Presence 3–4,
Acezantez, 1972,
 contact sheets.
 Courtesy of Katalin
 Ladik and acb gallery,
 Budapest



understandable, notatable, natural voice as well as its notations into question. Also in 1970, a text appeared by William Hedgepeth, a U.S. journalist specializing in the hippie and counterculture, who saw a new reality dawning for which there was no language yet, only the “wails, grunts, growls, shrieks” of a Janis Joplin. “Does she *mean* it? Does she *mean* it? ‘WAH!’ Mike jammed to her teeth, kicking, stomping, keeping time. Crouch down, up slow, louder now—tell us, tell us—‘Awww wah hoo heee.’ ... Did she mean it? Did she? Yes! Yes! The hall explodes.”¹⁰ Is this new reality, then, one that can be “meant” and referred to, provided one does not drop out of articulation altogether but rather extends it or shapes it? For there is, after all, in every phonetic articulation an unmarked physical element which is not without its semantics but which does not admit that fact openly. A civilized adult man pronounces his matter-of-fact, authoritative sentences without putting the pitch at which he utters them up for discussion or evaluation.

Yet despite the simultaneity with which women around the world pursued this expansion from a speech in the service of articulation to a use of the voice that goes beyond articulation (without abandoning it completely), the theaters for these acts of pioneers remain distinct. For Ladik, who as an ethnic Hungarian belonged to a minority in Yugoslavia, a hippie culture in search of a new language was not the most obvious source of resonance for her work, despite the presence of a highly developed countercultural scene in Yugoslav cities.¹¹ Her Hungarian background and a small art and bohemian scene in Novi Sad that divided itself among a number of new practices—which it often combined and merged into one another based more on the Fluxus model than the hippie one—these were the ingredients from which Ladik’s projects (her 1968 *UFO Party*, to name but one) developed. In addition, there were the provocative performances in which she deployed her naked body, with which she conquered a larger audience less among like-minded people than among an irritated but fascinated broader public, with all the voyeurisms and sexism that went along with that, and from which she also suffered. At the same time, the deployment of the (naked) female body, never unspectacular under patriarchal conditions, suggests a (not unproblematic) semantic framing for sound poetry as well, which is figured as stripping articulation

of its supposedly inessential decoration. In Ladik’s work, however, nakedness has nothing to do with this pathos of laying bare. Rather, with its elegance of motion and physicality, it has a closer parallel in the crude poetry and directness of the folkloric material she works with elsewhere.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that there were at least two other artistic formats at this time which point in a completely different direction, at least when read in light of their programmatic statements, which may have been more programmatic than the way they were actually practiced and intended at the time: concrete poetry and New Music. While sound poetry has a relationship to both, they represent antagonisms to Ladik’s other practices. Concrete poetry foregrounds the visual, written symbol (effectively against the bodily produced spoken symbol), while New Music escalates the Western tradition of a notated, script-based music into a new and abstract sonic language (essentially against the performance-based, emotional, and situationally anchored folkloric music to which Ladik refers—for example in her sound collage based on the Hungarian folk song “Three Orphans” from 1990—as well as against the staging of her vocal performances with their resemblance to free jazz, as in the dialogues with a double bass on the record *Phonopoetica* from 1976). From this simultaneity of practices, one can infer on the one hand a commitment to diversity—by inclination as well as on principle. However, one can also seek to understand these other, seemingly contradictory practices in a more open way: less as principles or as decisions that lay down principles but rather as attempts to employ means of expression from all directions and not bow to the pressure toward professionalization and specialization exerted particularly in recent decades by the art system, through rivalry and seemingly in accord with aesthetic dogmas such as the importance of employing the appropriate medium for one’s project and using it correctly.

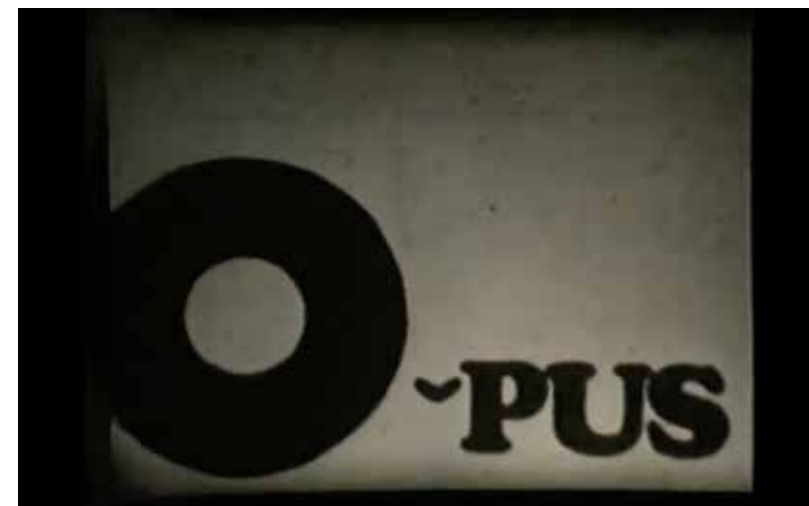
Thus, Ladik not only worked on musical projects with her former husband, composer Ernő Király, as early as the 1960s, she could also be heard in the 1970s in numerous performances and recordings with Ensemble Acezantez. That meant collaborating with the leading composers of the Yugoslav New Music world (Dubravko Detoni, *Bajka za komorni sastav i elektroniku / Fable*

for *Chamber Ensemble and Electronics*; Boris Kovač, *Caravan Orient*; Milko Kelemen). While the realm of New Music can certainly be described as experimental, these were still efforts embedded in a disciplined and highly sophisticated international conversation, a theoretical and conceptual world that conducted its discussions in Cologne, Warsaw, Darmstadt, Utrecht, Bratislava, Tokyo, Zagreb, and New York within the same categories and tensions between determinacy and indeterminacy, corporeality and electronic incorporeality, chance and violence, ritual and rationality. Whereas in her constant boundary transgressions of her sound poems and performances Ladik had to forge a path for herself more or less alone, in this world there was well-connected artistic research into all questions of sound, including that of the human voice, as for example in the third part of Detoni's *Phonomorphia* series.

The simultaneous presence of two different practices, one lone and “heroic,” the other networked and collaborative, pervades the work of this artist to this day. More recently, she can also be found as a participant in avant-garde pop music like the concept band Broadcast (*Berberian Sound Studio*, 2013) or on albums by Mitar Subotić, who later achieved success in Brazil as the producer of Bebel Gilberto and others but at this time still called himself Rex Ilusivii for his experimental albums. Within the same relaxed production logic, in addition to her performances, she also worked as an actor in countless roles for television, film, and theater. An even more essential factor for me, however, is that her sound poetry always had visual, often concrete-poetic equivalents as well, sometimes intended as scores, sometimes as poems to be read, but always with their own peculiar visual logic. This is not just an additional argument against the simplistic understanding of her work as predominantly explosive, expressive, and visceral which one sometimes encounters. Rather, it points to another global project that in the 1960s primarily was concentrated in the epicenters of Western culture (Brazil, Baden-Württemberg, Styria): the visually oriented medium of concrete poetry.

If we call to mind one of her best-known works, the film *O-pus* from 1972 (together with Attila Csernik and Imre Póth), we gain a particularly clear

Katalin Ladik, Attila Csernik, and Imre Póth, *O-pus*, 1972, video still



picture of the twofold movement of the extension of the poetic mentioned at the beginning of this essay. At the center of the film (as well as of other preliminary and related works) is the letter and phoneme O,¹² an image, a sound, a performance, and thus a representation of corporeality overwritten by bodily action. In this work, the deliberate alternation and then reuniting of investigations into the image aspect of sound and into the sonic aspect of images and the mutual intersection of their significations—a program also pursued in the New Music of Detoni (see his *Grafika* series on the one hand and his *Phonomorphia* series on the other)—achieves maximum integration.

There are thus at least two levels on which Ladik deals artistically with the diversity that repeatedly enables her to leap not just into other genres and disciplines but also from solo work to small groups (like the artists' collective Bosch+Bosch or the New Music ensemble Acezantez) as well as to a cultural-industrial division of labor. The first is the curiosity—especially pronounced among the happening generation, particularly in Yugoslavia—that led small scenes to try out, import, and export every advance in the arts into the other arts as well. The second, however, was the proto-feminist conviction that the exclusion of women from the arts constantly requires them to scrutinize all territorial rules and distinctions between the arts. Beginning with the fact that the exclusion from everyday, argumentative public discourse already leads to an artistic (visual and phonetic, abstract and decontextualized) approach to language, a dialectic opens up which combats and subverts this exclusion—where it shows itself as immaterial and symbolic—with acts of corporeality (shouting, whispering), and undermines it

Phonopoetica: Writing with Voice, Voicing with Body

Bhavisha Panchia

through aestheticization and poeticization where it appeals to corporeality as the ultimate (athletic, sexual, ergonomic, etc.) reality. The result is the poetic threat that the female body can take the place of language, from which women have been excluded, or/and open up another world in which language no longer appears as made up of various different distinctions but as capable of introducing new distinctions into the world from within a utopian wholeness. Is the extension of poetry, then, just its expanded territory, or is it the infiltration of poetic capacity into the territories from which we or others or even just portions of our human capacities were once excluded or expelled?

Translated from German by James Gussen

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6kMuajpjm8&t=96s> (accessed June 18, 2022).

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70xqAbQFLyU> (accessed June 18, 2022).

³ See especially “Linguistics and Grammatology,” chapter 2 in Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967); the chapter is directed against Saussure and Rousseau.

⁴ See Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus, *Stimme und Sprechkünste im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001).

⁵ Plato, *Cratylus*, in *Platonis Opera*, ed. E. A. Duke, W. F. Hicken, et al., 5 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995-), 1:187–275.

⁶ Hubert Fichte, “Das Land des Lächelns— Polemische Anmerkungen zu *Triste Tropiques* von Claude Lévi-Strauss,” in *Homosexualität und Literatur I: Die Geschichte der Empfindlichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1987–88), 319–51.

⁷ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁸ Emese Kürti, *Screaming Hole: Poetry, Sound and Action as Intermedia Practice in the Work of Katalin Ladik* (Budapest: acb ResearchLab, 2017), 49.

⁹ “Artifice,” “monstrosity,” and “passion” are terms from the rejection of writing that Derrida finds in traditional linguistics and revalues; see Derrida, “Linguistics and

Grammatology,” note 3.

¹⁰ William Hedgepeth, “Growl to Me Softly and I’ll Understand: We Need New Ways to Say What’s Real,” *Look*, January 13, 1970, 46, 48.

¹¹ Ladik’s dual background (Novi Sad, Yugoslavia/Hungary) enabled her to have very different experiences with the backlash against counterculture under two very different socialist regimes. There was a strong reception of Fluxus in both countries, especially of Kaprow, but in Hungary “happenings” had been banned since 1966, while in Yugoslavia there was a scene in the cities that was quite visible and well-connected internationally. The broader Hungarian public also reacted more aggressively than its Yugoslav counterpart to the provocation of nude performances. See Kürti, *Screaming Hole*, note 8, 58f.

¹² “The main motif is an image of the letter ‘o,’ which is subjected to various transformations. The film, as a visual score created by Attila Csernik, is used to create the performance. Ladik sings, whispers and shouts, exploring the relationship between visual effects and their reflections in sound. The film is a poem, a piece of music, and the documentation of a highly erotic performance, all at the same time.” David Crowley and Daniel Muzyczuk, *Sounding The Body Electric: Experiments in Art and Music in Eastern Europe 1957–1984* (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2012).

Pressed in an edition of 1,500, *Phonopoetica* was released on 7-inch vinyl by Dunja Blažević for Galerija studentskog kulturnog centra (SKC) in Belgrade in 1976. Within the grooves of this record are four phonic interpretations of visual poetry, with a total duration of 14:29 minutes. *Phonopoetica* assumes a hybrid form, traversing categories of art object, image, script, visual score, sonic performance, and poem. As Ladik slips across the literary, graphic, phonic, and performative, the album encapsulates the fluidity and simultaneity of media embodying her practice as a writer and poet, performance and visual artist, vocalist, and actress.

Her interpretations embrace subjective translations as well as the emancipatory potential of sound in expanded modes of working with instruments, recording, playback techniques, and performance. The poems reproduced inside this gatefold album are the work of experimental artists and poets Gábor Tóth, Bálint Szombathy, Gerrit Jan de Rook, and Franci Zagoričnik. Their graphic, onomatopoeic, and typographic forms are exploratory scores whose acoustic properties Ladik probes as she experiments with language as a phonic substance. These poems present marks and movement, a lexicon of phonemes for Ladik to read and interpret, treating language as material for action. Ladik writes for the ear and the eye, a practice demonstrated in her fluid traversal from the written to the visual to the sonic, as she transforms two-dimensional work on flat surfaces into dynamic events. She captures speech through writing, while she simultaneously liberates that writing through her voice.

Phonopoetica was recorded at Radio Novi Sad in 1975 under the guidance of sound engineers Ivan Fece and Borislav Stajić, whose technical expertise in the studio was crucial for generating and manipulating the sounds inscribed on the album. During the 1960s and 1970s, Radio Novi Sad in Belgrade was



Cover of *Phonopoetica*, 1976, 7-inch vinyl record, 14:29 minutes. Courtesy of Katalin Ladik

an important site for experimental and avant-garde practices that superseded conventional music practices, championing electroacoustic ways of working. From cutting, looping, and manipulating the vocal and instrumental, to the use of found cassette tape recordings, *Phonopoetica* presents a heteroglossia of sound that renounced hierarchies and boundaries between art forms, and distinctions between art and the everyday—the outcome of which traversed boundaries and exceeded expectations of ears that were attuned to more stable, traditional sounds. This sonic collage of intuitive interpretations is also born from improvisation and chance, an inventiveness characteristic of jazz and Cagean sensibilities, whose coupling with the experimentalism brought forward by Fluxus in its various manifestations remains a historical breakthrough.

Phonopoetica draws upon the voice and body as a technology to liberate and unhinge language from the comprehensible, thereby exposing language as an inherently unstable and mutable form for signification. Ladik's contribution to this historic moment of male-dominated avant-garde sound practices insists on language as something physical, sculptural, and performative, with the understanding that the word is always sound, manifesting power and presence.¹ Her voice becomes the conduit of her and other writers' poetry, making her body an instrument or sounding vessel through which she expels phrenetic utterances or extended plosives. These tracks make us aware of the physicality of sound, as her vocal cords are instantaneously stretched and strained, especially when her plosives slip into one another and are swallowed. At once sensual, threatening, and unpredictable, Ladik's vocal range exceeds and transcends the limits of language.

It is through her sounding out in *Phonopoetica* that she carves a space for her own voice as well as the voice of other women. Therein she speaks with intimacy and intensity, arguably “talking back” to these visual poems in a defiant way that refuses the limitations placed on female bodies and subjectivities.² This talking back is both a critique and subversion of traditional forms of art making, to grasp and shift the direction of sound to her own will. Ladik does not ask but demands. These phonic interpretations resist signification



and referential meaning, yet insist on being heard, listened to. Relinquishing herself from the prescriptive limitations of the written word (and its linearity), she offers collisions of phonemes that may be incomprehensible, not least creating a dynamism of feeling and affect through her vocal range. She unhinges her voice from her body, mouthing out distinct units of speech sound, where each phoneme is an expressive interpretation of a visual form that is at once evanescent and enveloping. Such a performative extension of poetry is amplified through her voice that yells, mumbles, screams and stumbles, moans, shrieks, gasps, and sighs. What we hear is Ladik as a *siren*, offering listeners a sonic account that bears both fear and seduction.

Without melody nor harmony, these aural textures and tensions ask us to listen to an emergent sound, a sound that is leaving at the moment it arrives. Despite the inscription of Ladik's utterances into the grooves of this vinyl, her voice that once reverberated across performance halls and radio broadcasts continues to reach an inquiring ear.

¹ Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).
² bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press), 5–9.

Phonopoetica, 1976,
 7-inch vinyl record,
 14:29 minutes. Courtesy
 of Katalin Ladik

RO-M-ET: An Embalming Spell

Mónica de la Torre

I am voice. Voice severed from the written sign. Woman's voice missing from the written records. Daughter. Sister. Wife. Mother. Distinct, possessing a music uniquely my own. Reproducible only through devices that render me incorporeal. I know I am not actually saying this to anyone—out loud, that is. I can't say anything in writing. I cannot be inscribed. I hear ambient noise, uninterrupted by my continuous silence on the page. Believe it. I am not here. Do not take me for what you read here on the page.

Romet. Ruins. Strewn about the page as puzzling sequences of consonants—transliterated, vowelless hieroglyphs, perhaps. Punctuation marks; the letter u set in motion; the names of ancient Egyptian gods; the names of pharaohs, queens, and high officials. I have the authority to animate these signs. I can mark and bend them at my will merely by uttering them. It pleases me to say more than once those with which I feel an affinity: Hatshepsut, second female pharaoh. Like her and Nefertiti, I am powerful.

I am an event produced by a body channeling breath through its hollow circuitry. An event produced by the synchronized movement of lips, tongue, cheeks, jaw, glottis, vocal cords, larynx, diaphragm. I am prosody. Invisible tones and intonations. Cadences that rise and fall. I occur in the here-and-now. When speaking, I can choose any and all tenses, but I live only in the present tense. I am the unassailable power of presence and speak a borderless language. The alphabet and the pronunciation rules of official languages try to choreograph me. The logic of print culture hates my rumblings, my repetitions, my irrational fits and starts—to standardize is to control. Yet how I shapeshift! Though I've been scored, only in performance is my true nature revealed. There is no predicting the outcome of my actions and no two of them are alike.

I recite spells from the *Book of the Dead (Pert Em Heru)* and the names of gods and goddesses so that the parts of your soul, Tutankhamen, will reunite: *ba*, which lifted off your body bird-like and is free to come and go between the realms of the living and the dead, as well as *ka*, your protective double dwelling in your tomb and in your effigies. Once *ba* and *ka* rejoin, your transfigured spirit, *khui* (or *akh*) will be reanimated, retaining agency in the next world. See, your *khui* is already almost alive on the score, a beating heart.

Tutankhamen, hear how I ululate. Hear my spiraling vocalization of the u sound, u being a letter whose origin, incidentally, is to be found in the Egyptian hieroglyph of a mace or fowl. You know hieroglyphs are not only picture writing—they're also meant for me to decode since they double as phonic signs.

Tutankhamen, my magic is sound. I sing as you descend to the underworld to await final judgement presided by Osiris. If I perform these mortuary rites properly, your passage to the afterlife will be swift and you won't have to die twice.

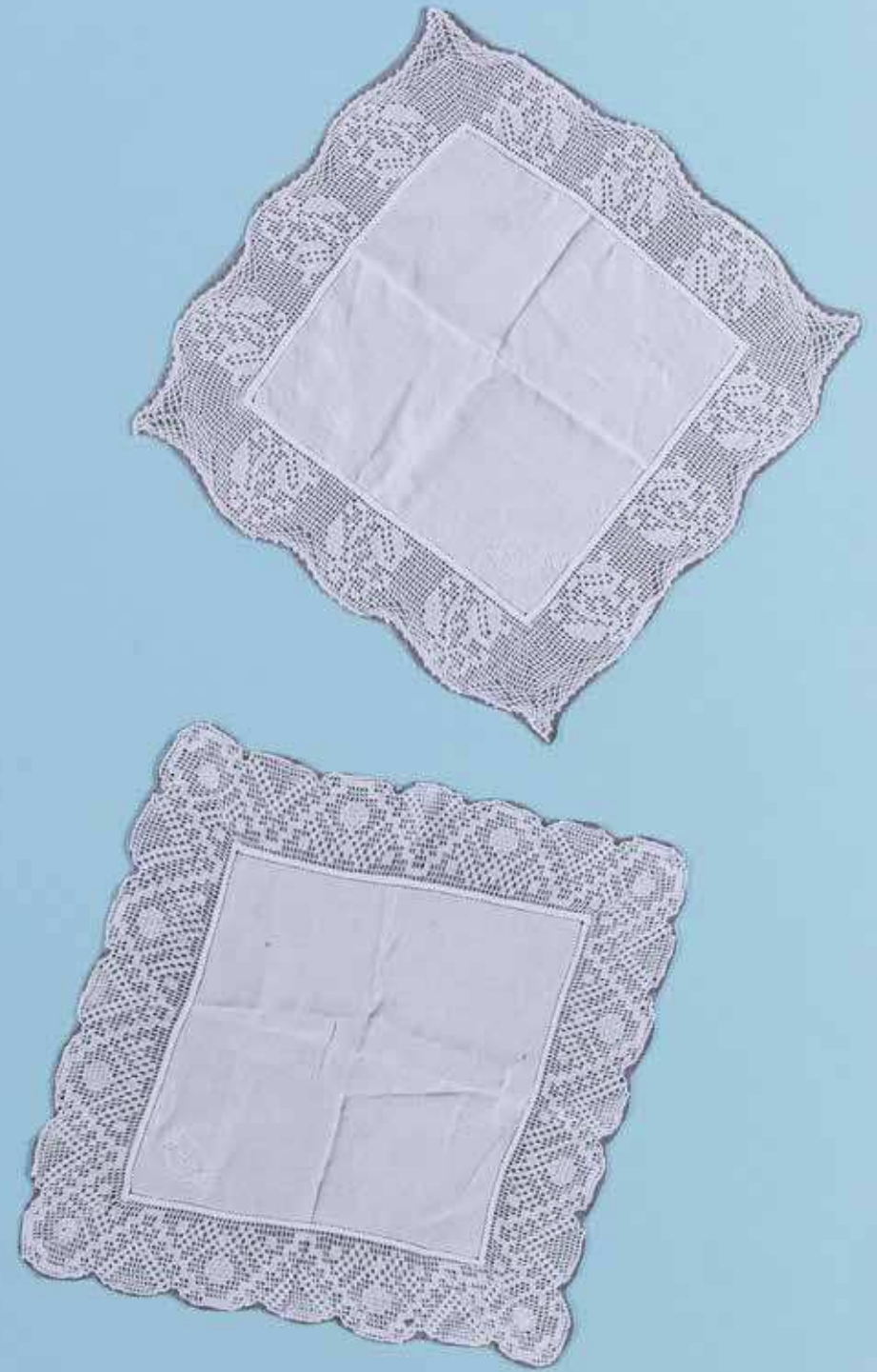
Before I fade to silence, I commend these ghostly records: ruins and pure potentiality, eloquent proof that only transience lasts.

Matilda's Dream

Katalin Ladik

Laugh and cry at the same time

Egyik szemem sír, a másik nevet



The empty small cushion cover
does not dream

Az üres kispárnahuzat nem álmodik



What a red delight penetrates me!

Micsoda vörös gyönyör fúródik belém!



I'm escaping from a blue to a pink dream

Kék álomból rózsaszín álomba menekülök



Is this the Reality?

Ez lenne a valóság?



Crumpled dream

Gyűrött álom



The empty pillowcase dreams

Az üres párnahuzat álmodik



Crumpled dream on red paper

Gyűrött álom piros papíron



Dream escaping from pink to red
Rózsaszínből pirosba menekülő álom



I feel good sitting in my belly
Jól érzem magam a hasamban



What's that twilight there?

Mi az ott, az a szürkesség?



Should I get going? Should I not?

Elinduljak? Ne induljak?



Is this the red anger of God?

Ez Isten vörös haragja?



I am the Chosen one!

Kiválasztott vagyok!



Musings at the shore

Merengés a vízparton



I feel like a woman in the purple sky

Nőnek érzem magam a lila égbolton



I'm a little girl under the purple sky

Kislány vagyok a lila ég alatt



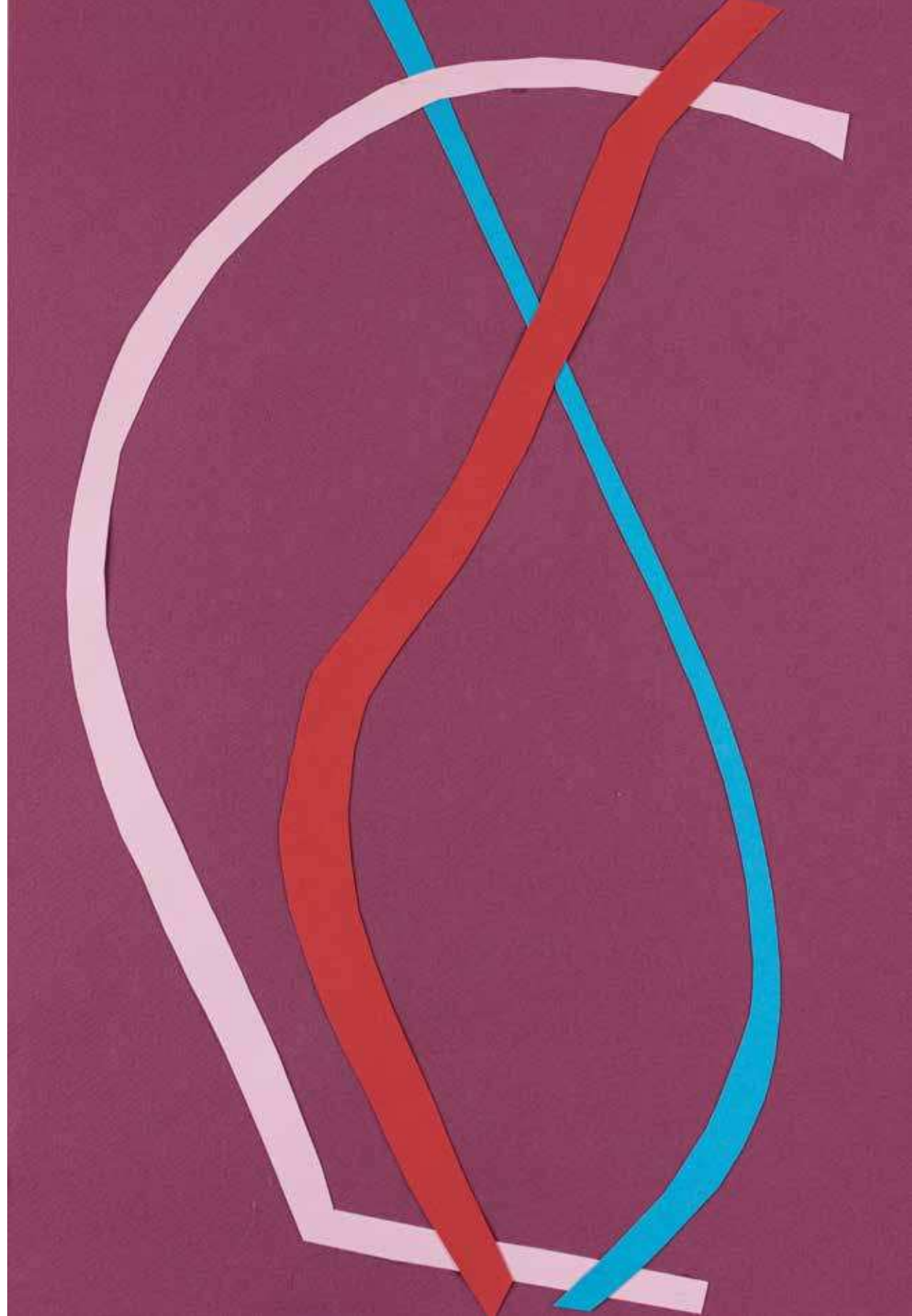
Please praise me!

Kérem, dicsérjete!



Can you dream without me?

Nélkülem is lehet álmodni?



PATOIS: Katalin Ladik's Way with Words

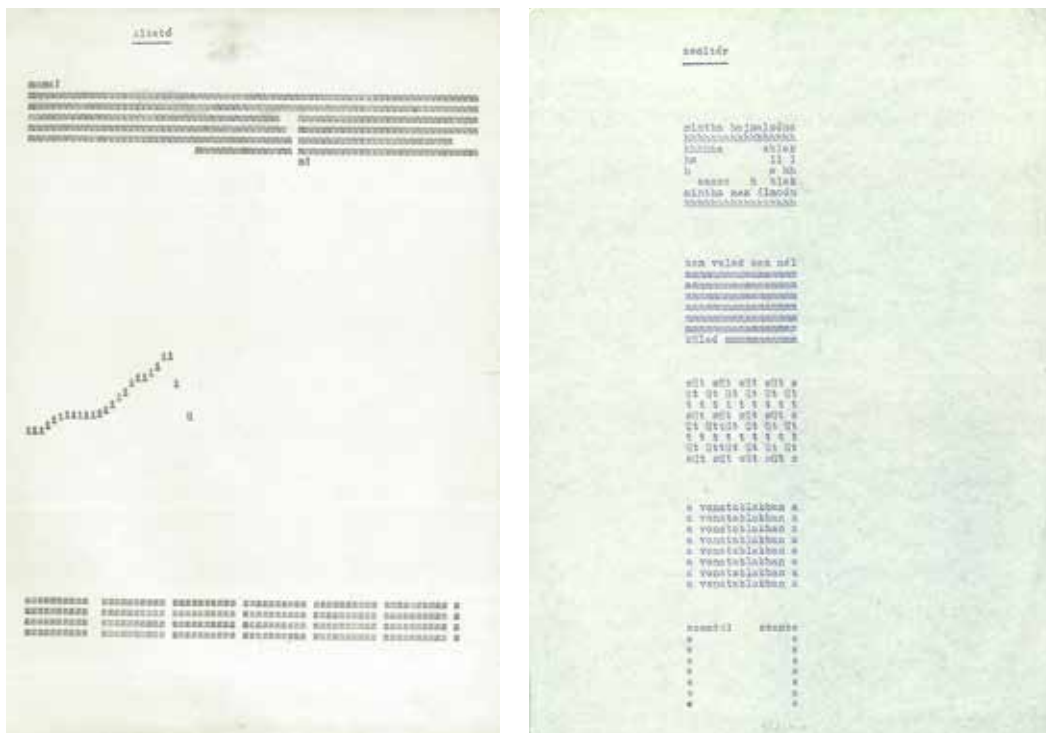
Dieter Roelstraete

“Information is the resolution of uncertainty.”

—Claude Shannon

In the summer of 2016, my colleague, friend, and neighbor Hendrik Folkerts invited Katalin Ladik to participate in documenta 14. Around the same time—this was not a coordinated campaign—I extended the same invitation to Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, the *grande dame* of East-German mail art and concrete poetry, the art form which I will be focusing on in this essay. Wolf-Rehfeldt had just turned a chipper and sprightly eighty-four at the time of my visiting her at her long-time home in Berlin-Pankow, and I will never forget the slightly bemused sense of exasperation that greeted me when I rung her doorbell—nor will I ever forget her gently damning first question as she ushered me in with a telling sigh: “Documenta, eh? You’re coming to see me *now*?” The first thing I noticed as I entered the living room and was asked to take a seat for coffee and cookies were her prominently displayed copies of the catalogues of documentas 6, 7, and 8, organized in 1977, 1982, and 1987 respectively: exhibitions I assume she must have seen, featuring artists of her generation, making the kind of art in which she must have felt at home at the time (documenta 6 in 1977 remains particularly memorable for its diplomatic inclusion of the premier artists of the German Democratic Republic of the day, such as Willi Sitte and Werner Tübke—a gesture of some consequence in the context of a cultural project, much like concrete poetry itself, with such deep roots in Cold War politics.)

But here we were, three decades later, and Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt had long ago given up making art; she was an artist no longer. The event that had prompted this decision was, unsurprisingly, the fall of the Berlin Wall in



late 1989—an occasion which not only heralded the twilight of the world she had inhabited and made art in until then, but also took place against the broader backdrop of momentous technological changes (these things were of course closely related) that saw her weapon of choice, the typewriter, gradually give way to computers and printers. The inglorious, rushed demise of the GDR and the surrounding Warsaw Pact member states spelled the inevitable end for a particular brand of Mail art that had long depended on the samizdat energy of informal communications networks across tightly guarded borders, and the steadfast replacement of typewriters by word processors “robbed” Wolf-Rehfeldt (and many artists like her) of the tools of her trade. (She had started making her abstract typewritten drawings while working as a secretary at the Academy of Fine Arts in East Berlin in the early 1970s.) Now I do not know whether Wolf-Rehfeldt and Ladik, who is ten years her junior, had an opportunity to meet in the context of documenta 14, but if indeed they did—perhaps they exchanged typewritten postcards, even—I imagine they would have found much to talk about in their shared experience of the vagaries of “taste.” The spiraling trail of typescript in Ladik’s concrete poem *R.O.M.E.T.* (1972) inevitably comes to mind, and how, behind it all, an inextricable tangle of geopolitical

Notes, 1977,
typewritten text on
paper, 29.6 x 20.8 cm
Courtesy of
Petofi Literary Museum,
Budapest

Psalm, 1977,
typewritten text on
paper, 29.6 x 21.1 cm
Courtesy of
Petofi Literary Museum,
Budapest

and technological shifts can force the rewriting (or rather, rewiring) of art history. Or: how the never-ending revaluation of concrete poetry as a fully historicized form is a function, in essence, of our *nostalgia for the future*.

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In the fall of 1995, over forty poets, performers, and critics from all corners of the globe gathered under the auspices of the Yale Symphosiphia to “produce a retrospective review and critical appraisal in international perspective of almost half a century of experimental, visual, and concrete poetic production.”¹ Among the speakers was the august Austrian-born American literary critic Marjorie Perloff, who proposed the following historicization of what she referred to as “concretism”: “concretism was born after World War II in Switzerland, Brazil, and other non-first-world powers as part of the larger avant-garde ‘revolution of the word’ that taught us that we can no longer take the printed page for granted.”² In a more recent contribution to the historiography of the genre, the Vancouver-based scholar Jamie Hilder enriched Perloff’s sketch with some crucial details: “most histories of the form point to the 1955 meeting in Ulm, Germany, between Eugen Gomringer, the Bolivian-Swiss secretary to the concrete artist Max Bill, and Decio Pignatari, the Brazilian poet and co-founder (along with the brothers Augusto and Haroldo de Campos) of the Noigandres group, as the initiating moment of the concrete poetry movement.”³ That said,

¹ K. David Jackson, Eric Vos, and Johanna Drucker (eds.), *Experimental—Visual—Concrete: Avant-Garde Poetry Since the 1960s*, (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1996), 9.

² Perloff continues: “In the nineteenth century, the “look” of the poem was largely taken for granted, and the reader was given directions to read from left to right, from top of the page to the bottom. The typographic revolution of modernism changed this forever. By mid-century, with advertising techniques, billboards, magazine collage layouts, and so on flourishing, poets began to see that the possibilities for deriving meaning from the actual placement of words and letters were endless—that the *verbivocovisual* language of Joyce and Pound

could be adapted to new ends.” See “The Yale Symphosiosposium on Contemporary Poetics and Concretism: A World View From the 1990s,” in Jackson, Vos, Drucker, *Experimental—Visual—Concrete*, 395.

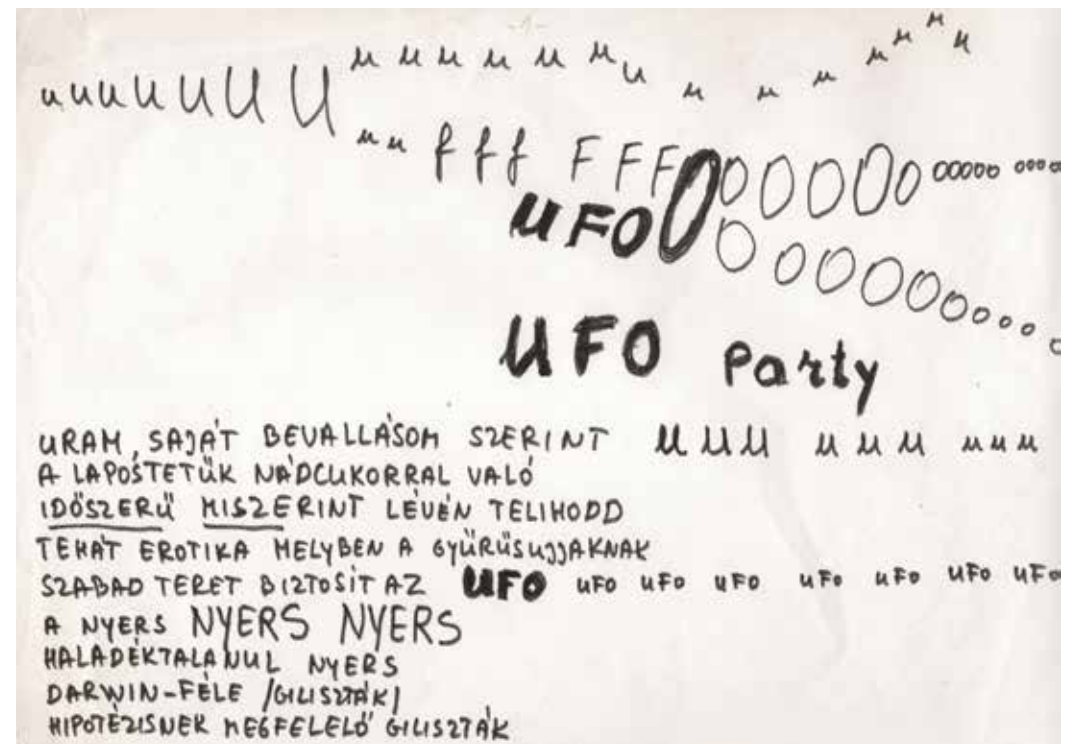
³ Jamie Hilder, *Designed Words for a Designed World: The International Concrete Poetry Movement, 1955-1971* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016), 5–6. Hilder’s titular closing year, 1971, marks the moment of Wolf-Rehfeldt’s “discovery” of the genre. Ladik’s first forays into the form date back to the late 1960s. Both Hilder and Perloff’s histories, of course, are primarily *literary*; a history of concrete poetry as a primarily *pictorial* form might propose a different chronology.

the phrase *concrete poetry* did make an earlier appearance, namely in the work of the Swedish artist and writer Öyvind Fahlström, who coined the term as early as 1953 in his “Hatila Rägulpr på Fätsklikaben, Manifesta för Concrete Poetry.” “Concreta” was likewise used to describe August de Campos’ “Poetemenos” in *Noigandres 2*, published in 1952, and the Austrian concrete poet Reinhard Döhl locates the term’s beginnings even further back, referencing a 1951 essay by Hans Arp entitled “Kandinsky, le Poète”: “in the year of dada, poems by [Wassily] Kandinsky were read for the first time in cabaret voltaire in Zürich ... the Dadaists were fervent protagonists of concrete poetry.” From the very start, in other words, concrete poetry was an exemplarily elusive, slippery term, moving with great ease—that of the upbeat post-war dissolution of borders between artistic disciplines—between visual art and performance, music and writing, always resisting disciplinary definition in the process. (At a later stage in his richly researched study, Hilder returns to concrete poetry’s multinational origins, noting the following: “the Brazilians were, along with the Bolivian-Swiss Gomringer, the major developers of the poetic form, and the most articulate and prolific theorists of the movement. Daniel Spoerri, a Romanian living in Germany, and Dieter Roth, a Swiss-German who moved to Iceland in 1957, were also major figures in the form’s development.”)

From its very inception, concrete poetry was not just a deliberately cosmopolitan, multinational affair, but a form that actively sought out the comforts and consolations of the periphery and the provinces as well—those proverbial borderlands some safe way removed from imperial centers and similar “seats of power.” It became the preferred mode of articulation and expression for artists, often hailing from “minor” literary traditions

⁴ “A minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language. But the first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in it, language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization ... The second characteristic ... is that everything in [it] is political ... The third ... is that in it everything takes on a collective value ...

We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature.” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 17–18.



UFO Party, 1969, excerpt from manuscript. Courtesy of Katalin Ladik and acb gallery, Budapest

(in the empowering Deleuzian sense of the term, that is),⁴ who were both comfortable with, and used to, crossing borders and boundaries between disciplines, forms, and methods, as well as between countries, cultures, and most importantly perhaps, *languages*. Katalin Ladik is such an artist, having been born in 1942 in what was then known as the Hungarian city of Újvidék, now better known as Novi Sad, Serbia’s second largest city and the capital of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. She was the beneficiary of a formal bilingual education in Hungarian and Serbian (historically multicultural Novi Sad is located halfway between Belgrade and Szeged, while the Romanian city of Timisoara, an earlier capital of Vojvodina, lies just another one hundred fifty kilometers further to the east),⁵ who has spent much of her creative career divided between the artistic microcosms of Novi Sad and Budapest. Ladik *crosses borders for a living*, and the one border that may matter more than most, from the perspective of the

⁵ Novi Sad was founded in 1694 as a predominantly Serbian settlement in the Habsburg Empire (the region had been under Ottoman rule from 1526 to 1687). After being incorporated in the Austrian Empire (1804–67), the Austro-Hungarian Empire

(1867–1918), the Kingdom of Serbia (1918) and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918–41), it was briefly occupied by the expanding Kingdom of Hungary (1920–46) during World War II, which is when Katalin Ladik was born there to Hungarian parents.

historical development of concrete poetry and her contribution to it, may be that between *alphabets*, i.e., between Serbia's Cyrillic and Hungary's Latin script. For nowhere does one get a more acute sense of the materiality of the signifier—the physical fact of language, both spoken and written, as a key concern of the “concretist” paradigm, if not its defining obsession—than in this physical chasm between languages, where the fact of writing collapses into the act of making. (Concrete poetry is the one literary form which not only accepts, but positively *celebrates* the irreducible materiality of the written word.)⁶ It is this founding paradox—working “with” language in one of the most linguistically complex parts of Europe, where the potential for confusion, misunderstanding, and “loss in translation” is at its most volatile—that invests the concrete poetry of Ladik and her allies, associates, and contemporaries from said “borderlands” (countries like Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia were disproportionately influential in spreading the gospel of “concretism”)⁷ with the historical sheen of a universalist dream, namely that of transcendent legibility. Concrete poetry

⁶ “No matter how hard [written poetry] seeks to transcend its condition, [it] can never escape its material origins”—the exact cause for concrete poetry's *embrace* of this very fate. Willard Bohn, *Modern Visual Poetry* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001), 15. Here, incidentally, lies the source of the peculiar historical friction pitting concrete poetry against conceptual art: both forms shared an interest in the depiction and displaying of language, but the latter did so from the perspective of the *rematerialization* of the word versus the latter's vaunted dematerialization of the object.

⁷ See, for instance, Sezgin Boynik (ed.), *OEI # 90-91: Sickle of Syntax & Hammer of Tautology. Concrete and Visual Poetry in Yugoslavia, 1968-1983* (Stockholm: OEI editor, 2021). It would lead us too far to theorize the political ramifications of concrete poetry's remarkable success in the countries of the former Eastern bloc—that historical mosaic of “minor” literatures that also encompasses Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Macedonian, Polish, Slovene and Slovak traditions (to which one could even add Esperanto, the brainchild of a Polish-Jewish ophthalmologist from Bialystok)—but it seems especially useful to note the parallels between the specifically Yugoslav rhetoric of the multi-ethnic “post-national” state on the one hand and the

universalist claims of much concrete and visual poetry on the other hand. As Max Bense, one of concrete poetry's primary theorists put it in an oft-repeated statement in 1965: “concrete poetry does not separate languages; it unites them; it combines them. It is this part of its linguistic intention that makes concrete poetry the first international poetical movement.” See also Jamie Hilder: “from its beginnings, practitioners of concrete poetry aimed for a supranational, supralinguistic poetry, one that would strive for a fusion of form and content by foregrounding the visual character of words and letters over their semantic or phonetic functions.” Hilder rightfully laments the fact that “the national mode has persisted in concrete poetry criticism in spite of the fact that the movement had no geographical center. Unlike earlier twentieth-century movements such as Dada, Surrealism, or Futurism (or, more recently, Lettrisme), which seemed to nest in major cosmopolitan centers such as New York, Paris, Berlin, Zurich, and Milan, concrete poetry grew out of Bern, Ulm, Darmstadt, São Paulo, Stonypath, Bloomington, and Stuttgart.” Novi Sad would make a worthy addition to this string of toponyms—indeed, a concrete poem in its own right. Hilder, *Designed Words for a Designed World*, 20.

speaks the anti-hegemonic pidgin of the truly borderless, those whose only attachment is to the global community of “art.”

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One might define concrete poetry in its historical guise—as an art form, that is, whose historical flourishing dates from the mid-fifties to the mid-seventies—as the folk art of the emerging computer age. Kenneth Goldsmith, one of today's most influential and tireless advocates of the genre, and the founder of UbuWeb to boot, has famously stated that concrete poetry was made for the computer screen *avant la lettre*, “a conclusion he came to after listening to the Brazilian poet Décio Pignatari speak of interfaces, multi-media, and distribution as the concerns of concrete poetry. In some sense, the international anthologies of concrete poetry that came out in the mid-to-late sixties and early seventies enact the poets' project of international connectivity in a way that anticipated the spatial turn of the internet.”⁸ Indeed, if the universalist claims of a transcendent legibility that constitutes concrete poetry's “classic” phase now inevitably sound somewhat naïve in their utopian charge, this trusting goodwill likewise resonates in the general technophilia of the late fifties and early sixties, a time of great expectations vis-à-vis the emancipatory potential of emerging information and communication technologies, especially alluring to artists working in conditions of limited expressive freedom. (I cannot help but note here that one of the pioneering spirits at the forefront of computer art's historical development was Ladik's compatriot Vera Molnar, who is still active, as a longtime resident of Paris, at the venerable age of ninety-eight.) The clear and sheer joy of the “discovery” of the typewriter (or the computer printer) as an expressive tool—as opposed to, say, a weapon in the arsenal of the “administered society,” as the melancholy parlance of the Frankfurt School would have it—evokes an era in which momentous technological changes in everyday life were greeted with great enthusiasm instead of knee-jerk suspicion or luddite antagonism. (I am referring here

⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

to the mild, qualified technophilia of much sixties and seventies art, and to the comparably qualified technophobia of much contemporary art.)

It is surely no coincidence, in this regard, that one of Ladik's emblematic early works was titled *UFO Party*, a notion coined at the height of the space race pitting the capitalist West against the nominally socialist East. A seminal work marking Ladik's broadening interest, as a burgeoning poet, in the physics of embodiment, *UFO Party* refers to an illustrious happening (1968), a handwritten score (1969), a contribution of written and visual poetry to the literary journal *New Symposium* (1969), and a sound performance (1970)—an archetypal collapsing of *langue* and *parole*, in Ferdinand de Saussure's classic dyad, that echoes the gradual shift in Ladik's work from writing to vocalization.⁹ Although Ladik's appropriation of the concept of the "unidentified flying object" was clearly a reference, in the first instance, to the feminist inspiration behind her gutsy challenge to post-war Europe's patriarchal art world—it hardly needs restating here that Ladik's was a lonely female voice in an overwhelmingly male milieu, no matter what its ideological orientation may have been—it also signaled the avant-garde's enduring commitment to thinking artistic and technological progress as deeply, definitively entwined, a sentiment that was about to enter its twilight years at this very moment in time. This is also the tail end of the glory years of the kinetic and Op art movements, which had deep institutional roots in both Hungary and Yugoslavia in particular. Concrete poetry, in some ways, could certainly be understood as a literary complement to the spirit of "concretism" inherent in both kinetic and Op art.¹⁰

⁹ It is interesting to note here that Katalin Ladik's *UFO Party*, although appearing towards the end of the golden age of concrete poetry, first sees the light of day at a time of intensifying philosophical scrutiny of the brotherhood of writing and speaking and its ramifications for our understanding of language—a process of questioning that acquired its most dramatic expression in a number of books published by Jacques Derrida around the same time (*La voix et le phénomène*, *De la grammatologie*, and *L'écriture et la différence*, all published in the fabled *annus mirabilis* 1967). Indeed, one could claim that, in shifting some of her artistic energy away from

writing pure and simple to performing the written "word" around this time, Ladik subscribed to what Derrida identifies as a "metaphysics of presence."

¹⁰ The cultural politics of kinetic and Op art in the context of the Cold War are the subject of a reader I co-edited with Marta Dziejawska and Abigail Winograd, *The Other Trans-Atlantic: Kinetic and Op Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art, 2017). For an in-depth analysis of the Yugoslav context of this moment in particular, see Armin Medosch, *New Tendencies: Art at the Threshold of the Information Revolution (1961-1978)* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).

The *locus classicus* of this particular constellation of aesthetic-political concerns is undoubtedly *Genesis 1–11* (1975/2016), in which Ladik used printed circuit boards scavenged from domestic and office appliances such as radios, computers, and television sets as scores for a suite of increasingly complex and intricately layered "sound poems"—phonic utterances that may easily register as mere "noise," much like the corresponding images may appear as mere machinery.¹¹ Not only do these circuit boards, in the soldered patterns of their wiring, mimic the geometry of bodily movement, communicating and interacting (linguistic and otherwise)—think, for instance, of the passion for circuitry subtending the use of diagrams in information theory in its "classic" phase of the early 1950s¹²—they are also the physical building blocks of both our informational universe and its "ecstasy of communication"—the fever dream, that is, of the total communicability (and hence, comprehensibility) of all that exists.¹³ (As building blocks go, they also happen to be quite, or quietly, *beautiful*.) As Willard Bohn, one

¹¹ Discussing the politics of "noise" that are so central to Ladik's sound art lies outside of the orbit of this essay's immediate concerns. However, I highly recommend anyone interested in the politics of noise as such to consult Jacques Attali's peerless *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, which was originally published in 1977. It opens with the dramatic assertion that "for twenty-five centuries, Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for the beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, it is audible." Further, Attali holds that "more than colors and forms, it is sounds and their arrangement that fashion societies. With noise is born disorder and its opposite: the world. With music is born power and its opposite: subversion. In noise can be read the codes of life, the relations among men. Clamor, Melody, Dissonance, Harmony; when it is fashioned by man with specific tools, when it invades man's time, when it becomes sound, noise is the source of purpose and power, of the dream—Music." Attali's insights seem tailor-made for a broader understanding of the status of *sound* in art. Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 3, 6. In his preface to this volume, Fredric Jameson makes much of the seemingly paradoxical

fact that the author of *Noise* is a professional economist: "while [music] is by no means absolutely unrelated to other forms and levels of social life, it would seem to have the strongest affinities with that most abstract of all social realities, economics, with which it shares a peculiar ultimate object, which is *number*." Jacques Attali was a counsellor to President François Mitterrand from 1981 until 1991.

¹² The canonical frame of reference is provided here by Claude Shannon, the father of information theory whose landmark essay "A Mathematical Theory of Communication" was first published in 1948, famously introducing the specter of "noise" into the messaging chain of language (see my previous footnote). Emergent information theory's love of diagrams greatly influenced the "administrative" aesthetic of early conceptual art, and likewise made its presence felt in certain aspects of concrete poetry, among which we must list the form's fondness for the bureaucratic allure of typewriting and assorted graphisms (consider, in this regard, Ladik's *Tavaszi zsongás* [*Spring Buzz*] from 1977).

¹³ The latter formula is a reference to the eponymous publication by Jean Baudrillard from 1987, signaling the French theorist's shift away from his theory of the simulacrum to a greater preoccupation with emerging digital technologies.

of the leading historians of the revolutionary impulse in modern poetry, has observed, the ascendancy of concrete poetry in the post-war era was powered in no small part by “the anxiety of communication in the age of mechanization”,¹⁴ and the corresponding sense that every “crisis of the sign” is inevitably always also a sign of crisis. This, too, colors the background of concrete poetry’s utopian yearnings: the rise of the machines—typewriters, computer chips—and what it meant (*means*) for the future of art, human speech, language, and the everyday transgressing of borders and boundaries that constitutes true community. Yet behind each such crisis, and implied in the very act of this border-crossing and trespassing, we may discern the contours of a *freedom* without which there would be no art or poetry to speak of to begin with—“the experimental exercise of freedom” will forever remain my favorite definition of art, first formulated by the Brazilian art critic Mário Pedrosa in 1970—and this, in the end, is what I believe to be the true achievement and lesson of Katalin Ladik’s art: to unleash and set free both sign and sound.

¹⁴ Bohn, *Modern Visual Poetry*, 4.

Circuit Anatomies

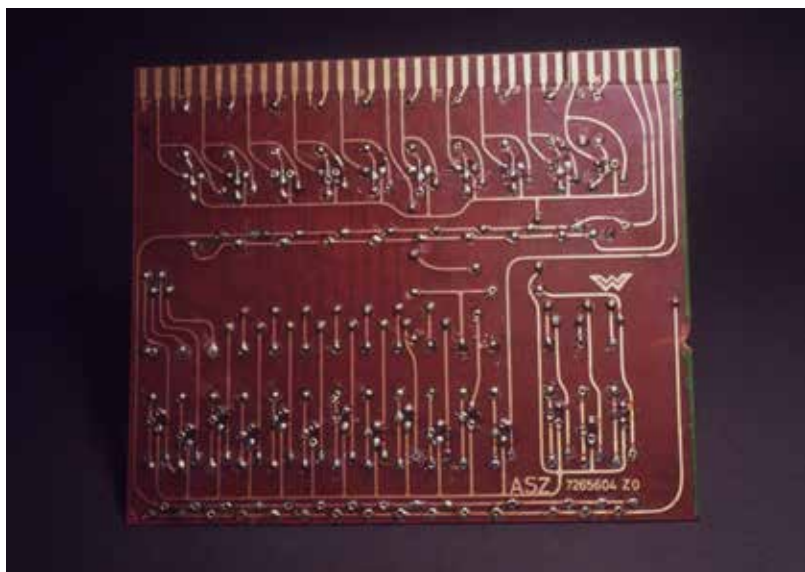
Gloria Sutton

“The material of my work is basically transition... what shifts, what drifts, what remains?”¹

—Katalin Ladik

Encountering *Genesis 1–11* (1975/2016),² a viewer faces a compact row of eleven color photographs, each 22 x 31 centimeters, evenly spaced along the wall. Less image and more artefact, each photograph tightly frames an electronic circuit board, what Katalin Ladik referred to as an *objet trouvé*, culled from the inner workings of household and office equipment such as typewriters, telephones, radios, televisions, and computers, now appropriated by Ladik as a visual score.³ Set against a flat mat background, each laminated board is imprinted with pathways of conductive materials configured in an array of open and closed circuits. Like veins delivering oxygenated blood throughout the body, the soldered copper and aluminum lines direct and amplify the flow of energy modulated through a series of transistors and resistors that dot the board’s surface.

Embodied and time-bound, each iteration of *Genesis* correlates with a soundtrack of the artist’s own resonant and percussive vocal tonalities, which are filtered through headphones that literally tether the listener’s body to Ladik’s body of work. For example, in *Genesis 4*, the rumbling of lip trills morph into a vibrato of sharp pants of breath that rise and fall over the course of about a minute. Throughout the series of tracks, tight squeaks soften into moans that shift in pitch and duration conveying the alternating lengths of lines and spatial gaps on the pictured boards. Overall, Ladik’s virtuosic delivery of staccato hisses and glottal hums remains anti-melodic, mechanized rather than musical. Using acrobatic levels of vocal control, she activates the mechanisms of her own body’s sound system to generate complex acoustic

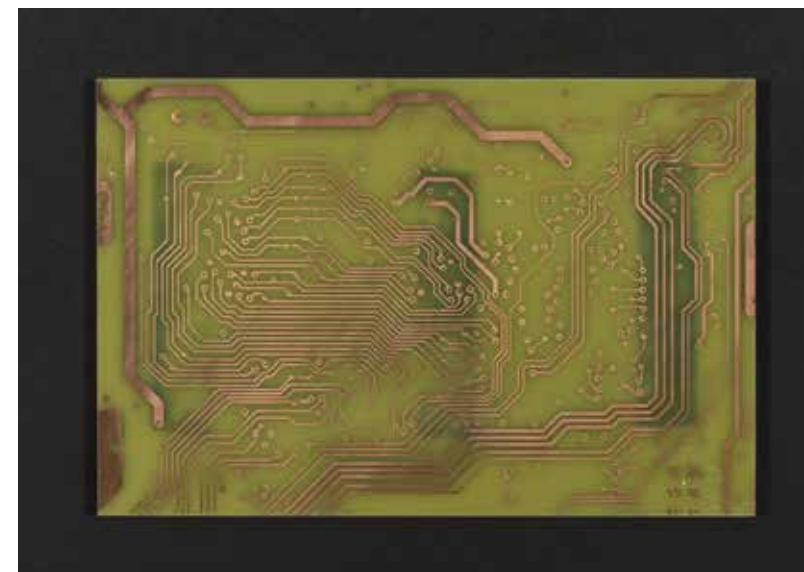


Genesis 4, from the series *Genesis 1–11*, 1975/2016, color photograph and sound recording, 22 x 31 cm. Courtesy of Katalin Ladik and acb gallery, Budapest

sequences and composites. Each is a deliberate act of *glitch* that generatively connects the anatomical with the computational in a manner that remains eminently palpable, utterly human, and distinctly Ladik.

Instead of connecting what is being said or sounded out directly with what is being seen, *Genesis 1–11*, like many of Ladik's visual scores, evokes an abstracted condition of being, a transition from one state to another. Ladik points to epistemic transformations, particularly the shift from the industrial to the informational. Her use of obsolete components should not be read as an atavistic loyalty to objects, but rather as the artist's commitment to tracing processes of transformation and her recognition of how materials such as silica can be simultaneously read as ancient (sand) and futuristic (silicon semiconductors). In her choice of materials and references, Ladik focuses our attention on the transitive properties of matter. She reminds us that we constantly toggle between systems built on levers and pulleys and ones reliant on algorithms and software that often attempt to synch up with our own internal anatomic circuits. Even in works that seem stable and fixed such as *Ólomszonett* (*Sonnet of the Lead*, 1975), in which she inscribed horizontal graffiti markings that resemble devices such as standards for measurement including rulers and protractors as well as armaments or weapons into a zinc photo-etching plate, the material itself retains its transitional properties. Zinc, a metal whose isotopes and blending properties make it a reliable compound or alloy, is also a vital mineral fueling the body's own chemical

Golden Apocalypse, 2017, integrated circuit and sound recording, 30 x 39 cm. Courtesy of Katalin Ladik and acb gallery, Budapest



processes: the creation of DNA, growth cells, and building proteins. As a photo-etching plate, *Ólomszonett* is also suggestive of the permutational qualities of images themselves, which rely on transformative acts of replication.

While steeped in layers of Judeo-Christian mythology and Hungarian folklore, the titles and inferences made by Ladik's works discussed here eschew the formalities of narrative structure. Instead, I would argue that *Genesis 1–11*, like much of Ladik's work writ large, pressures the conventions of visual art's communicative paradigm, which often prioritizes written or image-based information over other sensory inputs. Tracing the components of the circuit board while listening to Ladik's voice, the circuitry between human and machine becomes inextricably fused as something deeply visceral and cerebral, instantly apprehended through the mind and the body. While Ladik's circuits operate as visual scores, the soundtracks do not follow a specific libretto or story line. Unplugged and framed by glass, the circuits are reanimated by her vocalized glitches that produce something generative from an inert state. Thus, *Genesis 1–11* can be thought of as a type of critical media archaeology, making the argument that material formats shape how informational content is transmitted and received on par with the messages that are being conveyed.⁴ Moreover, Ladik's works offer a pressing and necessary mode of structuring existence in the long digital age—a direct reference to the mid-1970s, when many of her works were first instigated, to the current moment of their public interface—which valorizes the so-called clarity of data yet

Scores of (Dis)Identification

Fanny Hauser

relies on a political and social media-landscape that is powered by generating static and noise. Ladik's circuits link mechanisms of power and control with guttural renderings in a manner that remains deeply resonant, giving voice to a range of conditions throughout history that so often leave women's bodies speechless: abuse, discrimination, and state-sanctioned suppression that circulates in recognizable patterns and cycles.

In *Golden Apocalypse* (2017), a more recent iteration of her circuitry and sound works, Ladik noted that she “called the last piece I found the ‘Golden Apocalypse’ ... I wanted it golden, because I wouldn't be comfortable to associate the apocalyptic end of the world of circuits with pessimism.”⁵ She often evokes the term “apocalyptic” in her titles to signal an ongoing state of material transformation, the modulation of energy from one state to another rather than nihilism, demise, or total destruction. If Ladik's commitment to an expressively vocalized disjunctive and dissociative range of allegorical connotations has deeply manifested in what she calls “transitions,” then the ethical stakes of her works have always been the idea of the conduit itself—a long-standing engagement with forging an interconnection between bodies and space (in all its complex meanings, from the domestic to the cosmological), and the insistence on recognizing the porosity of materials which allow for a broader distillation of time and energy. While the metaphorical implications and significations of Ladik's material choices remain fundamentally heterogeneous, they also express the inherent symbiosis of bodies and power mechanisms and how energy (human and mechanical) circulates in and through figures and structures, both organic and human-made in equal measure.

¹ Quoted in an interview with Petra Bakos, <https://punkt.hu/en/2019/10/25/they-expect-us-to-be-pretty/> (accessed June 28, 2022).

² The prints produced in 2016 were made from original slide positives dated 1975, for which Ladik used printed circuits serving as musical scores.

³ Ladik refers to the found circuit boards as *objets trouvés* in an excerpt from “The Liberated Voice—A Day of Performances Sound Poetry”, organized by Palais de Tokyo, Paris, on April 27, 2019, [https://palaisdetokyo.com/en/evenement/the-liberated-](https://palaisdetokyo.com/en/evenement/the-liberated-voice-a-day-of-performances-sound-poetry/)

[voice-a-day-of-performances-sound-poetry/](https://palaisdetokyo.com/en/evenement/the-liberated-voice-a-day-of-performances-sound-poetry/) (accessed June 22, 2022).

⁴ For a comprehensive account of how media archaeology focuses on the materiality of technology to forge new cultural forms, see Carolyn L. Kane, *High-Tech Trash: Glitch, Noise, and Aesthetic Failure* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).

⁵ Quoted in “The Liberated Voice,” <https://palaisdetokyo.com/en/evenement/the-liberated-voice-a-day-of-performances-sound-poetry/> (accessed June 22, 2022).

In 1975, Katalin Ladik, as part of the Bosch+Bosch artist collective, was invited to participate in the group exhibition *Aspekte – Gegenwärtige Kunst aus Jugoslawien* at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Conceived as an overview of contemporary art production from the then Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the exhibition grew out of the 1972 bilateral cultural agreement between the Republic of Austria and Yugoslavia and included works of Sanja Iveković, Marina Abramović, and the OHO group, among others. Outside, on the stairs leading into the building (the artist would later refer to these stairs as “the road to the world”),¹ Ladik staged her photo-performance *Identification, Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien*, documented in two black-and-white photographs. The first depicts the artist standing in front of a monumental Yugoslav flag mounted on the façade of the Academy of Fine Arts above the stairs; the second shows the artist standing behind it, the bottom of the flag covering her face. Creating a political space by exposing and measuring the Yugoslav body outside the socialist bloc, Ladik's appearance addresses a variety of layers of identity and representation, ranging “from the citizen's general status as a political entity” to “the politicization of the woman and her body as a biological, social entity and national property, or simply the condition of the artist as a woman in a highly patriarchal system.”² The diptych is one of few works that explicitly uses national symbols (exemplified here in the Yugoslav flag) to interrogate the notion of historical, political, and social (dis)identification against the backdrop of the economically and culturally distinct “third way” of Yugoslavia. Under president Tito's rule, nationalism was suppressed in the country, uniting Serbs, Hungarians, Slovenes, and other ethnic groups and minorities as “Yugoslavs,” which resulted in the multiethnic context that eventually led Ladik to “work supraethnically ... using the references of multiple cultures, which suited the persistently international spirit of the avantgarde.”³



Identification, Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien, 1975, black-and-white photographs, 17.8 x 12.9 cm each. Courtesy of Katalin Ladik and acb gallery, Budapest

Like most of Ladik's works, *Identification* echoes the political reality she had been experiencing as an artist, woman, and as part of a Hungarian-language minority in the Vojvodina province since she first published her poems in the Hungarian language avant-garde journal *Új Symposion* in 1962. The complexity of the unique geopolitical context Ladik was operating in is further emphasized in her ironic and slyly subversive approach to Hungarian and Balkan folklore and traditions, anchored in her insistence on the parallel existence of different languages and cultures.⁴ This principle of cultural hybridity as well as Ladik's engagement with folk music manifested in some of the artist's visual poems and scores of the 1970s. In these works, she collaged a wide range of material from magazines and other sources, often referencing nationalism and national identity, and inserting innuendos to European musical heritage. Both of these motifs are reflected in some of the titles of the collages, such as *Jugoslawisches Tastatur Lied* (1969), *Spanish Christmas* (1970), *Balkan Folksong 1–3* (1973), *Polish Folksong* (1978), and *Mondschein Sonate* (1978). Blank staff music or multicolored sheets of paper usually laid the groundwork for her collages onto which pieces of music notation, sewing patterns, and typographic fragments were glued. Expanding the rigid traditions of music notation, the collages also operated as scores, intended to be interpreted and performed as phonic pieces by the artist. Ladik thus transformed the visual poems into "a corporeal manifestation of language" through her voice and body.⁵

The collages in the series *Ausgewählte Volkslieder* (*Selected Folk Songs*, 1973–75) form a key example of Ladik's approach to visual and sonic poetry, as well as themes of national identity and folklore. The works are fashioned out of approximately 34 x 24 centimeter brightly colored paper sheets—green, blue, orange, red, and ocher—which highlight the graphic elements that the artist pasted onto each sheet. Sewing instructions and musical scores are bent and twisted, their irregular shapes and curves reminiscent of national flags, or pennants in movement. In one of the works, against a pale blue background, the syllables "SLO" and "VENIJA" are carefully pasted onto the dotted lines of a larger piece of a sewing manual functioning as a map of sorts. While the original meaning of the word "SLOVENIJA" can still be grasped, its deconstruction not only invokes the context of Yugoslavia and its shifting borders, but also asserts the artist's proclivity of dissecting language and disassociate it from conventional signification.

The sewing patterns used in the series, appropriated from the pages of popular women's magazines, traditionally denote "female" labor, yet here they introduce another concern explored by Ladik. Alluding to the "everyday life of women," the diagrams and sewing schemes signify "the modern socialist housewife"⁶ in Yugoslavia, thus manifesting prevalent representational norms and systems now torn apart by the artist through her method of collage. Here, the act of cutting serves as a technique to undo the normative systems through which subjectivities and concepts of "woman" are produced and preconditioned, and simultaneously represents a "dialogical approach" that bears the potential to "bring separate realities together in endlessly different ways."⁷ By juxtaposing and layering various material fragments—sewing patterns, music staves, cut letters and words, and so forth, each with their own associations—onto one another, Ladik's collages hold a space for fluid relationships and new associations. This plurality can also be found in the soundtracks that accompany the collages. Here, the visual templates are transposed into the world of sonic poetry through the spectrum of Ladik's voice—ranging from high-frequency tones and guttural sounds to screams and whispers. By layering soundtracks on top of

one another, some recordings also evoke a multiplicity of voices, or employ other techniques. In her vocal interpretation of *Walzer* (1973–75), from the same period, the repetition of the rhythm in question is coupled with vocalized phonemes, creating a stratified, layered composition that resembles, perhaps, “the repetitive sound of a sewing machine,” thus highlighting “the relationship between music and ‘womanhood.’”⁸

As carriers of a multitude of languages, Ladik’s scores are not only instruments to upend normative articulations of womanhood and femininity, to cut in and voice from them, but also to create a space of subjectivization in which she could raise and negotiate questions of identification and dis-identification. On the colorful paper sheets of her collages, she let worlds collide and collapse into one another—shifting between East and West, merging avant-garde and established music traditions, imploding popular culture and allusions to socialist norms and ethics.⁹ Situating herself in these worlds and questions—through her language, voice, and body—Ladik’s visual scores and (photo)performances emerge as spaces in which processes of (dis)identification unfold and static notions of identity are set in motion.

¹ Ladik’s statement alludes to the Austrian capital as the “gate of Western Europe,” mirroring the geopolitical power relations of the Cold War during that time. See Róna Kopeckzy, “On Identification as Field Exercise,” 2016, <http://www.curators-network.eu/blog-entry/on-identification-as-field-exercise> (accessed April 20, 2023).

² Ibid.

³ Katalin Ladik quoted in Emese Kürti, *Screaming Hole: Poetry, Sound and Action as Intermedia Practice in the Work of Katalin Ladik* (Budapest: acb ResearchLab, 2017), 7.

⁴ As pointed out by Miško Šuvaković, it might have been the “cultural and ethnic hybridity of Novi Sad” that led to the flourishing artistic and literary scene that Ladik would eventually belong to. See Kürti, *Screaming Hole*, 16.

⁵ Hendrik Folkerts, “Keeping Score: Notation, Embodiment, and Liveness,” *South as a State of Mind* 7 [documenta 14 no. 2], 2016, 168.

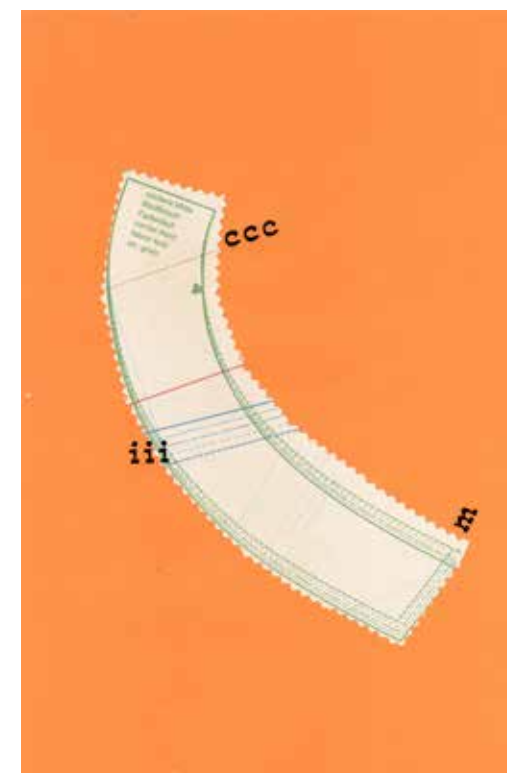
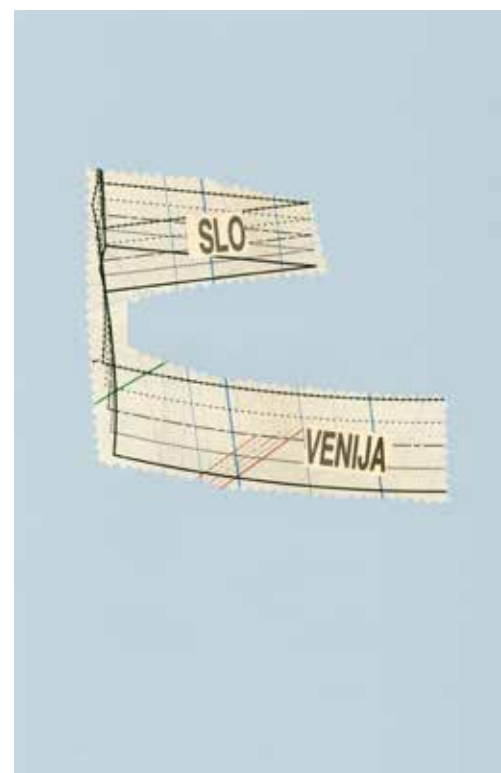
⁶ Miško Šuvaković, “Katalin Ladik. Selected Folksongs / Ausgewählte Volkslieder, 1973–1975,” in Silvia Eiblmayr, Georg Schöllhammer et al. (eds.), *Kontakt. The Art Collection of Erste Group and ERSTE Foundation* (Cologne: Walther König Verlag, 2017), 160.

⁷ Lucy Lippard, “From the Archive: No Regrets,” 2016, <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/from-the-archives-no-regrets-63252/> (accessed April 20, 2023).

⁸ Adriana Sabo, “Sound Collaborations between Katalin Ladik and Ernő Király,” in Milan Milojković, Nemanja Sovtić, Juliana Bašić (eds.), *Ernő Király. Life in Music. Collection of Papers* (Novi Sad: Academy of the Arts, 2021), 32.

⁹ Titles such as *March for a Partisan Woman* (1979) or *Pause in Revolutionary Work* (1979) reflect socialist ideas and expectations placed upon Yugoslav women to be mothers and housewives while simultaneously having a strong presence in the workplace.

Opposite and following page: *Ausgewählte Volkslieder* (Selected Folk Songs), 1973–75, collage on paper, 34 × 23.9 cm each. Courtesy of Kontakt Collection, Vienna





Skin Tissue and the Instrumental Body

Pierre Bal-Blanc

“I am sad as sad as a flag”¹

—Katalin Ladik

At the onset of adolescence, Katalin Ladik felt ashamed that she was no longer free to do what she wanted. As her body began to change, she sensed that it was less her physique that was morphing, than the way others perceived her. She mourned the loss of freedom she had hitherto enjoyed among other preteen boys and girls—their androgynous bodies, their high voices—in the chaos of war brought on by the absence of parental authority and governing rules.² She later sought to renew this state of grace, to make it her daily routine.

She initially devoted herself entirely to fiction, performing exclusively for male authors, and went on to become one of the famous voices of Radio Novi Sad plays. Socializing with authors and poets and losing no time becoming their peer, she took part in the underground cultures of Yugoslavia and Hungary (in particular, Budapest’s literary scene), alongside her budding success as an actress. Belonging to both worlds would contribute to the exotic attention she received on both sides of the Danube. Inspired by Yugoslavia’s promotion of gender equality, she defied conventions—both physically and vocally—within the male-dominated literary scene in socialist Hungary. She then broke with the egalitarian and gender-neutral principle of the Yugoslav regime’s *camaraderie* (*drugarstvo*) by posing naked as a pin-up girl in *Magazine Start* (1970), thus provoking the expectations of the male gaze placed on her. Clad in animal fur, she reenacted the primordial state that precedes the story of the biblical Fall and the birth of modesty. With *UFO Party* (1970, Novi Sad), she restaged the descent into indecency, not merely in terms of the body’s biological function, but of its involuntary movement, in a double response to the gaze: insofar as the body is provoked by and, at the same time, becomes a spectacle for the gaze.

In the performance of *UFO Party*, Ladik personified a naked erect body and in so doing undermined the male monopoly on creation. The socialist media condemned her audacity by portraying her as a stripper; while poets, mostly men, depicted her as a witch. When later she presented herself as a fully-fledged poet (and not merely as an actress), she was treated condescendingly as a naked poet. In turn, she embraced that reputation wholeheartedly in the form of a staged photograph: *Pseudo-Presence 4* (1972). The fear of shame, made apparent in her blushed complexion and sense of vulnerability, led her to use skin and the instrumental body as metaphors. As such, she developed an artistic vocabulary and an innovative form of expression that would recur throughout her work in numerous ways.

Such tropes appear in the medium and lexicon of her scores; the making of costumes for her performances such as *Blackshave Poem* (1978, Novi Sad); the use of her own skin as a surface, for instance in Attila Csernik and Ladik's *Body Poetry* (1973); or the erotic manipulation of "anthropomorphized"

Collective Exhibition
for a Single Body –
The Private Score –
Vienna 2019, 2019,
performances at
Lidl food market (former
Generali Foundation).
Courtesy of Kontakt
Collection, Vienna
Photo: Oliver
Ottenschläger



musical instruments in *Pseudo-Presence 3* (1972). She constantly played at expropriating and reappropriating her own self, for example in *Identification, Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien* (1975), in which her body and the Yugoslav flag alternate as figure and background.

The body as an instrument and the skin as a web of impulses and affects are not merely themes but in fact drive the narrative syntax of her work. The famous magazine *Burda*, which made style and fashion accessible to women in the 1950s in no less than seventeen languages and 100 countries around the world, would become a key source of inspiration for Ladik's writing and visual scores. She henceforth based her artistic vocabulary on the anatomical study of the "universal" woman—her regimented behavior, essentialized features, and servile figure—using the sewing and embroidery patterns inserted in women's magazines as source material. In the visual scores *Balkan Folksong 1–3* (1973), *Mondschein Sonate* (1978), and *Polish Folksong* (1978), the fragmented body of clothing, drawn in dotted lines,



is recomposed and placed either directly on the five conventional lines of a musical staff or on a colored background that highlights its tonality. Combined with other disparate graphic elements such as instruction manuals and typographic fragments, Ladik's visual poem-as-musical notation escapes lyrical conventions and develops new harmonics. To perform her musical scores thus calls for a reading that is, each time, renewed by the reader, based on his or her culture, profession, and sensibility.

The performance of the scores *Ausgewählte Volkslieder (Selected Folk Songs, 1973–75)* took place daily at the low-cost Lidl supermarket in Vienna in 2019 during *Collective Exhibition for a Single Body*,³ following an initiatory stage in which Ladik worked with the performers. The initiation consisted in opening the chest to the noises of the surrounding world to restore its organic resonance by following the score's curves and crests, tones, and touches. Each element in the scores corresponded to a translation of the (normative) vocabulary of the solfeggio into singular signs, connoted by their color, their visual character, and their origin. As such, cadence, fugue, scale, or melody were produced according to the varieties of signs and semiotic materials present in the collages, which, in turn, emerged from the universe of sewing, typography, or pictograms. In the scores themselves, Ladik revived the notion of folklore through the works' titles, the accent and rhythm of her erudite play of words. In so doing, she resisted the ideological suppression of popular cultural rituals and dialects by the elites of the socialist regime in Yugoslavia and Hungary, which sought to unify national references through a common metalanguage. If working with the skin is a means for Ladik to promote anti-racism, in the broad sense of the term, and if androgyny serves to unsettle sexual difference, even at the abstract level, then folklore allows her to undermine class relations in all its forms.

¹ Extract from Katalin Ladik's first book of poetry, *Ballada az ezüstbicikliről (Ballad of the Silver Bike, 1969)*.

² See Emese Kürti, *Screaming Hole: Poetry, Sound and Action as Intermedia Practice in the Work of Katalin Ladik* (Budapest: acb ResearchLab, 2017), 24, 177.

³ *Collective Exhibition for a Single Body – The Private Score – Vienna 2019*. A score written by Pierre Bal-Blanc. Choreographed by Manuel Pelmuș. With works from the Kontakt Collection Vienna by Milan Adamčiak, Geta Brătescu, Anna Daučíková,

VALIE EXPORT, Stano Filko, Tomislav Gotovac, Sanja Iveković, Anna Jermolaewa, Július Koller, Jiří Kovanda, Katalin Ladik, Simon Leung, Karel Miler, Paul Neagu, Manuel Pelmuș, Petr Štembera, Mladen Stilinović, Sven Stilinović, Slaven Tolj, Goran Tribuljak. Haus Wittgenstein and Lidl supermarket (former Generali Foundation), June 19–28, 2019.

Following pages:
Androgin 1–3, 1978,
gelatin silver prints,
29.5 x 20.2 cm each.
Courtesy of Katalin
Ladik and acb gallery,
Budapest





Androgin

Sarah Johanna Theurer

“I accept the destiny of my poetry, I live with it, I literally create myself in it. It is impossible to demarcate the moment when I write poetry and when it writes me.”

—Katalin Ladik¹

The first-person narrator in Katalin Ladik’s poems shifts between masculine and feminine, while sometimes speaking with the voice of the fauna. The narrator often seems to transform and reproduce itself. More than once, Ladik claimed she “... regretted [being] born as a woman and not as a bisexual being or a man. This is perhaps the result of dissatisfaction with the ungrateful and subordinate role of women in society. Of course, there was no choice.”² This desire for ambiguity is a recurring theme in her work, from her first published poem “Androgin” (1963) to the masks and mannequins that feature in her later performances. In her photo-performances of the late 1970s and 1980s, she continuously creates and recreates herself, oscillating between subject and object.

One of the most striking works from this period is *Androgin*, a series of photographic portraits shot by Ladik’s long-term collaborator Gábor Ifjú in 1978. Through the use of a double-mirror, the camera lens, and an actual mirror, the artist explores a complex form of self-presentation, as she doubles, twists, and modifies the image of herself. The multiplicity of the self, staged in these photos, is what Ladik considers “androgynous.” In a poem, she asserts: “I am an androgyne: a liar. Therefore sincere. I am an object of art, a centaur.”³ This is not to say Ladik necessarily *is* androgynous, rather, it is something that she does. Androgyny is her practice; a distortion created through an *oscillating movement*, which returns in the mirrored image.

In the first photo, Ladik holds the mirror right above her waist, doubling the image of her torso. She wears a black floral lace set and no bra, arguably evoking a sensual femininity, while her straight bob haircut, at the time, would have been read as a “practical” and less feminine styling. The lace of her dress, in line with theorist Luce Irigaray’s idea of mimicry as resistance, may be considered a camouflage.⁴ The photograph does not uncover a gender fallacy but celebrates dressing as a performance of self-creation, thus marking a female subjectivity that does not require the mask of femininity to substantiate “authenticity,” to echo the words of feminist writer Shulamith Firestone. This picture, like many of Ladik’s photo-performances, was expressly staged for the camera, in absence of an audience. As such, the images are not just a form of truth-telling and documentation, they are also an act of fiction. Just like identity itself, they are both a reality and a performance.

In the second image, Ladik balances the mirror right below her chin, letting her head float without a body. To be reduced to a body against one’s will is a violent gesture, while *becoming* a body, for example through poetry, is liberating. Ladik’s photo-performances are non-verbal poems engendered through the body. Androgyny as a practice of distortion, highlighted in the reflection of the mirror, is not primarily a subversion of the gender binary, rather it proposes the body as a site to make and unmake meaning. Now invisible in the photograph, the body becomes even more visible as a projection surface, oscillating between private and public, personal and shared; it is never just her(s). Ladik’s startling glare emphasizes that the crucial transaction—back-and-forth—of identities takes place between the viewer and the work. *Androgin* wants us to acknowledge and scrutinize the presence of our gaze. Ultimately, the work is not a self-portrait, but a mirror.

In the third photo, Ladik seems to bite the mirror. Her mouth, doubled through the reflection, casts a circle in the middle of her face. It looks as if she multiplies herself through her mouth—her parting lips form a portal that connect the physical and the virtual self in the mirror. The open mouth

evokes the voice, as if to suggest the vibration that produces another projection of and from the body, the “voice-body.”⁵ The voice as a destabilizing force stretches across twentieth-century performance histories, not in the least in Ladik’s experimental sound and poetry work. Her extreme vocal techniques, which she had been developing in her performance practice in the decade prior to the *Androgin* series, enact a continuous dis- and re-embodiment through the voice, pushing it to produce sounds that speak from a place beyond physical limits.

The *Androgin* photo series exemplifies Ladik’s approach to androgyny as an oscillating movement. The work acknowledges that there is otherness throughout our being—“sincere,” to use Ladik’s word, rather than “authentic” as true to *oneself*. Through doubling and distortion, the work unearths patriarchal expectations of gendered bodies and projects multiple ways of inhabiting a body. Ladik’s use of the double mirror casts an unsteady and exciting image of the self that puts us, as viewers, in motion; our gaze oscillates like her vocal cords. In *Androgin*, Ladik makes the poetry that makes her, revealing the ambiguity in both.

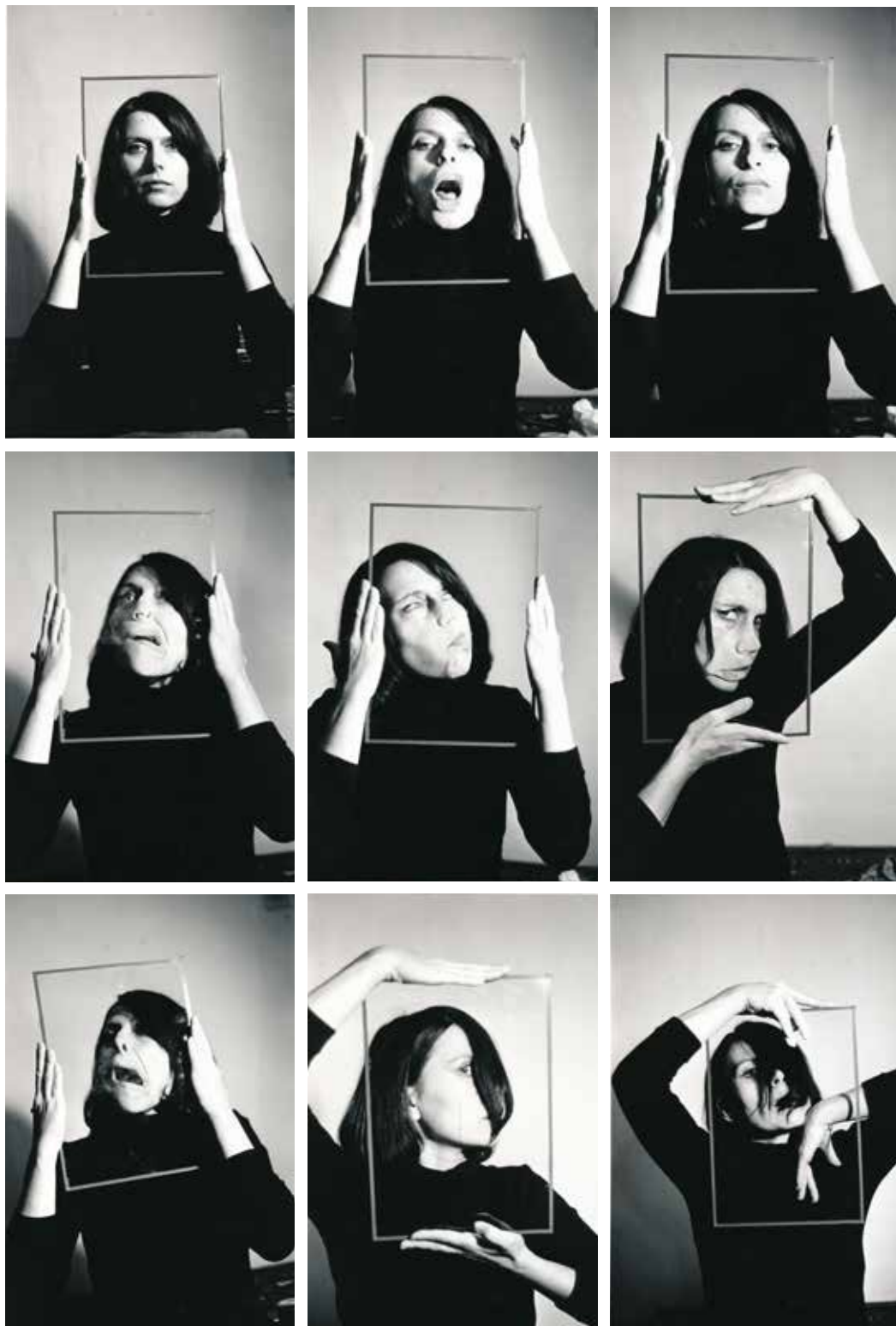
¹ Interview with Judith Šalgo, “I was obsessed with the myth of the bisexual being,” *Oba-Elle*, 14 January 1971. Author’s translation.

² Ibid.

³ Katalin Ladik, “Follow Me Into Mythology,” 1981. Translated by József Aradi. Quoted from Marta Dziewańska, *documenta 14*, 2017, <https://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/13488/katalin-ladik> (accessed April 19, 2023).

⁴ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (New York: Cornell University Press, 1981).

⁵ Steven Connor, “The Strain of the Voice,” 2004, <http://stevenconnor.com/strains.html> (accessed April 19, 2023). This essay first appeared in a German translation by Holger Wölffe, in Brigitte Felderer (ed.), *Phonorama: Eine Kulturgeschichte der Stimme als Medium* (Berlin: Matthes and Seitz, 2004), 158–72.



Poemim: Performance of the Self

Emese Kürti

In *Poemim*, first realized as a photo-performance in 1978, Katalin Ladik staged a sequence of expressions, poses, and gestures in front of the camera, in a way that excluded the public but followed a scripted logic. The piece's increasing dramatic intensity relied primarily on the focused expressive quality of the artist's face. The work revolves around the relationship between the artist's body and the art object, and abolishes the gender-neutral position of the artist, as Ladik objectifies, transforms, and destroys—through various interventions—her body-cum-art work.¹ Ladik presented various iterations of the work in different contexts and situations over the years, with or without an audience, and it ultimately took the form of an experimental video work as the result of a collaboration with Bogdanka Poznanović, a multimedia artist from Novi Sad. The work synthesizes Ladik's practice as a visual artist and her work in poetry, performance, and sound of the 1970s, while at the same time addressing the artist's interest in self-performance and self-archiving.

In the early 1960s, Ladik created her one-woman theater as a poet and actress, which abandoned and subverted the visual-ethical conventions imposed on female writers emerging from the literary field. Similar to her international generational peers, she explored the intermediary possibilities of the body, sound, and text. However, Ladik's literary, sonic, and performative deployment of language constituted such a provocation to the masculine modernist and avant-garde cultural context, that, in the absence of feminist discourses, the duality of provocation and vulnerability found little or no support in the Yugoslav and Hungarian scene of the time. Her sound-poetry public events, performed in a bear coat that barely covered her naked body, drew inspiration from folklore and contemporary theatre. As she often used concrete language, non-intentional sounds, and improvisation in her performances, Ladik's practice can be understood

Poemim, 9 black-and-white photographs, 1978/2016, 40 x 30 cm each. Courtesy of Katalin Ladik and acb gallery, Budapest

as an Eastern European offshoot of post-Cageian aesthetics. However, as David Crowley has observed, Ladik used her body and sexuality not only as a creative tool, but also as a means of consciously turning herself into a popular cultural icon who, through her presence in the mass media, could leave a zone of marginalization.² In this sense, she was one of the first artists in “third way” Yugoslavia whose art was not determined solely by the internal expectations and feedback of contemporary visual culture.³

From this point of view, *Poemim* can also be interpreted as a reassertion of control of Ladik over her own body in response to those voices that sought to attack, appropriate, or delegitimize the politicized female body. As Sven Spieker extrapolates in his discussion of the various techniques of destruction, the “explosions, crushing, compression, eradication by natural elements such as wind, fire or water—mark an elaborate archive of destruction knowledge. In some cases such insights follow the trajectories of rational negation, empowering artists to take charge of their own biography.”⁴ Ladik distorts her face with a windowpane to deconstruct expectations and media conventions regarding the body and beauty, as well as her own previous performance work and persona. The glass plate, placed between her face and the viewer, exposes the grotesque and torturous transformation of the artist’s features and highlights a sensitive transparency and an intimacy of process, while literally shielding her face from the viewer’s reaction. In revealing that precarious boundary between artist and viewer, *Poemim* constitutes a powerful gesture in Ladik’s performance practice, as she dismantles the previously constructed visual representation of the public persona—the *topos* of the so-called “naked poetess”—thus neutralizing the impact of negative responses to the eroticized female body. Behind the apparent destruction of the body, there is, in fact, a conceptual reclaiming of the body in order to liberate it from social stigmas.

As in many of her poetry texts, Ladik’s performance practice is a conscious confusion of frivolity, playfulness, provocation, naivety, and pseudo-naivety, accompanied by a controlled and directed sense of presence, emerging from her professional training as an actor. It is these components that distinguish the *Poemim* from the 1972 series *Untitled (Glass on Face)* by

Ladik’s contemporary, the Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta. The latter artist’s work demonstrates a striking formal analogy with *Poemim*, as Mendieta equally distorts her young face with a square piece of plexiglass, creating a sense of discomfort in the viewer through the brutality of the distortion. The perceivable difference in their approach manifests in the intensity of the relationship between the artist and the viewer, which is more heightened in Ladik’s case. Notwithstanding the specificity of each artist’s geopolitical context, the broader radicalism of the two practices aligns in its defiant mode of self-presentation through process, often with spiritual and ritualistic undertones. Similar to Mendieta, Ladik critically confronts discourses that question the legitimacy of the performance of the self, reasserting the universal right of self-determination over the politicized body.

Translated from Hungarian by Patrick Taylor

¹ During the Cold War era, Josip Broz Tito chose to balance between communism and capitalism, East and West, which resulted in the alternative model of the so-called “third way” politics in Yugoslavia, based on the principle of self-management and the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961.

² David Crowley, “The Future is Between your Legs: Sex, Art and Censorship in the Social Federal Republic of Yugoslavia,” in Lina Džuverović (ed.),

Monuments Should Not Be Trusted, Nottingham Contemporary (Nottingham: Nottingham Contemporary, 2016), 39.

³ “Misztérium, amit mindenki érzékel. Topor Tünde beszélgetése Ladik Katalinnal” [The Mystery that Everyone Senses. Tünde Topor’s Discussion with Katalin Ladik], *Artmagazin* 3, no. 18 (2022), 44.

⁴ Sven Spieker, *Destruction (Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art)* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 16.

Follow Me Into Mythology

Paolo Thorsen-Nagel



On May 9, 2017, Katalin Ladik staged her performance *Follow Me Into Mythology*, as part of *Listening Space: All the in-between spaces* at documenta 14 in Athens. It was one of four performances I had organized for an evening that occupied the interstitial spaces of the vast concert hall complex Megaron Mousikis. Ladik slowly moves down from a long spiral staircase that connects one of the concert halls on the top floor with the foyer below, leading all the way down to the building's basement floor. I invite you to join me here, on this descending reminiscence.

The audience is gathered on all levels of the staircase, Ladik at the top. She drops a white thread down the center of the spiral, into the dark void of the basement. One end of the string stays attached to the railing above. From there, very slowly, Ladik begins her descent as she expels a high-pitched yelp. With each utterance she describes the narrow, windy space that reverberates like an echo chamber. We are now in some communal tank, a ceremonial container. The seemingly infinite number of steps Ladik will take are matched by an equally inexhaustible catalog of vocal expressions emanating suddenly from her wildly gesticulating body. She sighs and cries as she twists her hands and throws her arms around as if she is trying to unleash some unseen part of herself.

Follow Me Into Mythology, 2017, textile with embroidery, 28.5 x 6000 cm. Courtesy of Katalin Ladik and acb gallery, Budapest

Installation view, *Katalin Ladik: Oooooooooo-pus*, Haus der Kunst, March 3 – September 10, 2023. Courtesy of Haus der Kunst, Munich
Photo: Julian Baumann

While her voice traverses the widest range of characters—cooing, panting, lamenting, and soaring; crying, groaning, bellowing, and hushing—she unfolds a red cloth during her procession. On this 60-meter-long textile, which has also been presented as an installation in subsequent iterations of the work, there are two sewn lines: one gold and solid, one white and dashed. The threads run in parallel, following the long narrow perimeter of the fabric. They extend into each other during their ebb and flow on the fabric, mimicking or interrupting one another at different points. This crossing conveys the shadowing Ladik's body translates into tangible space.

Gradually, this textile forms the visual score to the piece as it unfolds. The dashed line alludes to the trail that Cretan princess Ariadne sent her mortal lover Theseus on to escape the Minotaur's maze. The shadowing, solid line, on the other hand, embodies the mythological, spiritual being of the tale.

The score's lines bear resemblance to the run of a curve in an audio frequency spectrum graph. There, the curve's peaks and nodes indicate the frequency response, meaning the relative presence of all frequencies within the entire audible spectrum. In fact, for another common form of analytical auditory visualization, a certain pitch is depicted as a combination of many horizontal lines stacked above each other. This is because, in actuality, a single perceived pitch is composed of many different pitches sounding at once. Even though this is true for all naturally occurring sound, in order to recognize the given sonic signature, our brains filter out the under and overtones to some extent. In Megaron's echoing staircase, Ladik's fleeting, chameleon-like exclamations perform a kind of vessel. They extended into the space around her, staging a coalescence of body, sound, and space. A "voice-movement," as Ladik told me in a conversation I had with her at the beginning of 2017: "My body responds to the sound waves, it resonates like a string. Sound shapes my body motion, it choreographs the movement."

The lines of the textile score also evoke a depiction of the various stacked wavelengths that occur in overtone singing, where, along with the fundamental note, a second note is amplified at different rates above it. The singer sings two notes at once, a fundamental note and one of its harmonics. Whereas Ladik might not use this technique specifically, she embodies this inherent dualism in *Follow Me Into Mythology* and, with it, a symbiosis: her body and the sound become one through her voice, imparting a metamorphosis into a multi-dimensional being, akin to a shape-shifting figure. Even though her physicality is not clearly visible to everyone in the audience, it is evident that this morphing is two-fold: it is directed inward and outward. It is as if she is trying to break free from some part of herself—to



Follow Me Into Mythology, performance as part of *All the in-between spaces*, documenta 14, Athens, May 9, 2017
Photo: Stathis Mamalakis

get out of her body *through* her body. Even though the title of Ladik's performance, as well as its score, directly refer to the Greek mythological figure of Ariadne, there is something more elemental to her performance, to her pre-linguistic, almost primal use of the voice and body. With her continuous expression of form becoming sound—the score becoming a physical body—and vice versa, she performs a wondrous reciprocity to reach for what lies outside of her but stems from within. Following Ladik into her mythology, there is a feeling of enchantment and perception of self that lingers.

At the end of the stairs, in the subterranean, we see Ladik's silhouette as she blows and squeals into straws submerged in a water-filled vase. We hear faint pitches behind bubbling water and are left to wonder whether she has sacrificed some part of herself, bridged some gap between the mythical and the material world. Certainly—through play, through the body, through the voice—her many metamorphoses become unified in water, the very element we all share, that makes life.

Labor Poetics or, Score for Exalted Breathing for Katalin Ladik

Quinn Latimer

(Read silently, then once again out loud as poetic exaltation and antiphon.)

O poem! O body! O voice! O labor!
O technologies that wed and weave and loop them together!
O text and textile, O filmed letter, O circuit-board manufacture!
O laborious breath!
O myth of breathing!
O ancient poetic seafaring epic as gendered expert weaving!
O nocturnal unraveling!
O vocal technologies of gender and lyric and epic and performance!
O poetics of throat-like instruments!
O polyphonic poetics of her psychic apparatus!
O collective!
O Antiphons!
O Great Os!
O ancients and nascents, Ouroboros and androgynes!
O poet as artist and shaman!
O Lady Philosophy, O Virgo virginum!
O poem as song and page and algorithm!
O sonnets of lead!
O mineral score!
O expressive qualities of global communications systems!

O modernists! O post-structuralists! O makers of poetry and agricultures!
O elaborated phonemes!
O folk songs O hymns O computational circuits!
O breath of collapse of ecologies and economies!
O breath come from mouth, O sound come from there!
O pleasure! O cliché!
O ritual!
O gendered labor of mouths!
O metallic taste of metalinguistics!
O body as speaker and receiver, ground and figure, copper and silver!
O sound as bodied and disembodied drone!
O drone!
O image systems! O audience!
O poetics as the practice and living material of aesthetics!
O body as ludic instrument!
O lucidity of bodies laboring under language!
O performance of voice, O mouth's rehearsal and artifice!
O grain of voice travelling over glassy sea!
O irradiating speech!
O sardonic cry!
O silence!
O stutter, heavy syllable!
O as signifying nothing except its own sound! O memory of a voice!
O distortion!
O boredom!
O sonic disobedience! O non-narrative mediums!
O forms of representation and acts of abstraction!
O practiced and inherited O! O vocative particle!

O as poetic exclamation and O as physical punctuation both!
O Orpheus O orifice O oeuvre O orality O optics!
O literary and gendered and art-historical inheritance!
O debt!
O south O north O east O west!
O geographies and generations! O families woven and unraveling!
O theologies of patriarchy and supremacy!
O market technologies! O community! O Sapientia!
O ideologies of O!
O I, who I have not yet mentioned, no!
O binary! O familiar score!
O zeros and ones!
O language coded! O mistranslation!
O poem as guest and host!
O orality become textuality become orality again!
O neon record! O suspect recording! O song!
O noise O affective labor!
O poet!
O audible judgment!
O desperate critic!
O transposition of writer and reader!
O laboring body (tending lines like crops, seeds as syllabics) in each of them!
O egg! O seed!
O circular economies!
O gleaned field!
O loose syllable!
O essaying body making moves across pale pages!
O planting of seeds!

O breaking of eggs!
O page and screen for projecting!
O ancient and recent scrolling!
O images still and moving! O filmed poem!
O video!
O pastoral lyric O seafaring epic O poetics!
O oeuvre! O-strewn oeuvre!
O avatar! O exhausted avatar!
O fluorescent body built by language for waged labors!
O age!
O age of surveillance poetics and of bodies locked in manifold systems!
O maturity!
O morning star!
O living materials!
O tradition! O siren! O exhibition! O cosmos!
O lucidity!
O loop of editing and performing and publication and writing!
O anxiety!
O body at desk!
O body on stage!
O mouth in hand!
O breath in throat!
O sound on page!
O sound in head!
O breath in room!
O poem as room!
O fossil trace of records!
O orgasms of organisms!

O refrain! O hunger! O exhibitionary conditions!
O erotic linguistics!
O labor movements!
O body of desire! O body in labor! O primary text!
O fear of speech!
O wrong words!
O starting to speak!
O breath! O throat!
O thirst! O voice!
O *O-pus!*



Katalin Ladik's Biography

Born 1942, Novi Sad, Serbia.

Lives and works in Budapest and on the island of Hvar, Croatia.

Selected poetry volumes and novels

- 2022 *Béranya versek (Surrogacy Poems)*, poems, Hungarian, Tipp-Cult Kft, Parnasszus Könyvek, P-Art, Budapest, Hungary
Idővitorla (Time Sailing), selected poems, Hungarian, Forum, Novi Sad, Serbia
Raspjevane žeravice. Izabrane pjesme 1962-1982 (Singing Embers. Selected poems 1962–82), selected poems, Croatian, DAF, Zagreb, Croatia
- 2021 *Poems*, selected poems, English, Cultural Center of Vojvodina “Miloš Crnjanski,” Novi Sad, Serbia
- 2016 *A víz emlékezete (The Memory of Water)*, poems, Hungarian, Kalligram, Budapest, Hungary
- 2007 *Élhetek az arcodon? (Can I Live on Your Face?)*, novel, Hungarian, Nyitott Könyvműhely, Budapest, Hungary
- 1998 *A négydimenziós ablak (The Four-Dimensional Window)*, poems, Hungarian, Fekete Sas, Budapest, Hungary
- 1988 *Kiűzetés (Exile)*, poems, Hungarian, Magvető, Budapest, Hungary
- 1984 *A parázna söprű / Bludna metla (The Promiscuous Broom)*, poems, Hungarian–Serbian, Forum, Novi Sad, Serbia
- 1981 *Ikarosz a metrón (Icarus on the Subway)*, poems, Hungarian, Forum, Novi Sad, Serbia
- 1978 *Mesék a hétfejű varrógépről (Stories of the Seven-Headed Sewing Machine)*, poems, Hungarian, Forum, Novi Sad, Serbia
- 1971 *Elindultak a kis piros bulldózerek (The Small, Red Bulldozers Have Taken Off)*, poems, Hungarian, Forum, Novi Sad, Serbia
- 1969 *Ballada az ezüstbicikliről (Ballad of the Silver Bike)*, poems with gramophone recording, Hungarian, Forum, Novi Sad, Serbia

Katalin Ladik, Budapest,
2007
Photo: Attila Glázer

Sound poetry

- 2021 *Water Angels*, LP, producer: E.Carcano, co-producer: acb gallery, Budapest, Hungary, released by Alga Marghen
- 2019 *Phonopoeitics*, LP, producer: E.Carcano, released by Alga Marghen
- 2011 *Vodeni anđeo / Water Angel*, CD, Nova Misao, Novi Sad, Serbia
- 2003 Spiritus Noister and Kurt Schwitters, *Ursonate for 2 Voices and Musical Environment*, CD, voice by Katalin Ladik, Hungaroton, Budapest, Hungary
- 1998 *Vajdasági Magyar Zenei Esték / Vojvodina Hungarian Music Evenings 1988*, CD, JMMT, Novi Sad, Serbia
- 1996 Spiritus Noister, *Nemzeti zajzárványok (National Noise Inclusions)*, audio cassette, Bahia Music, Budapest, Hungary
- 1988 *Aki darazsakról álmodik (Who is Dreaming about Wasps)*, LP, recording of the radio play *Furcsa, aki darazsakról álmodik (Strange Is the One Who Is Dreaming About Wasps)*, Radio Novi Sad, Serbia
- 1987 *Hangár / Hangar*, audio cassette, anthology of sound poetry, Amsterdam, The Netherlands and Budapest, Hungary
- Yugoslavian Sound Poetry*, audio cassette, anthology of sound poetry
- 1982 *Adriano Spatola: Baobab Femme*, audio cassette, anthology for sound poetry magazine, Publiart Bazar, Reggio Emilia, Italy
- 1980 *La Nouvelle Revue d'art moderne. Special 2*, audio cassette, Rencontres internationales de poésie sonore, Paris, France
- 1979 *Poésie sonore internationale*, audio cassette, anthology of sound poetry, Paris, France
- 1976 *Phonopoeitica*, SP, Galerija Studentskog kulturnog centra, Belgrade, Serbia
- 1969 *Ballada az ezüstbicikliről (Ballad of the Silver Bike)*, SP, supplement for eponymous book, Forum, Novi Sad, Serbia

Selected solo exhibitions

- 2024 *Katalin Ladik: Oooooooooo-pus*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2023 *Katalin Ladik: Oooooooooo-pus*, Ludwig Forum, Aachen, Germany
Katalin Ladik: Oooooooooo-pus, Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany
- 2021 *Sewn Sounds*, acb Attachment, Budapest, Hungary
- 2019 *O-PUS*, Elba Benitez Gallery, Madrid, Spain
Hommage à Ernő Király, acb NA, Budapest, Hungary
- 2018 *Singing Chests*, acb NA, Budapest, Hungary
- 2017 *Genesis. Works from documenta 14 in Athens*, acb NA, Budapest, Hungary
Screaming Hole, Skuc Gallery, Ljubljana, Slovenia
- 2016 *The Voice of a Woman*, acb gallery, Budapest, Hungary,
- 2015 *Why are you waiting?*, with Zsófi Szemző, Labor Gallery, Budapest, Hungary
- 2011 *Retrospective Exhibition of Katalin Ladik 1962–2010: Roots and Wings*, Volksbank Gallery, Székesfehérvár, Hungary
- 2010 *Retrospective Exhibition 1962–2010. The Power of a Woman: Katalin Ladik*, Museum of Contemporary Art in Vojvodina, Novi Sad, Serbia
- 1979 *Katalin Ladik*, Fiala Művészek Klubja, Budapest, Hungary
- 1977 *Katalin Ladik*, Centar za Kulturu i Informacije, Zagreb, Croatia, then Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
Katalin Ladik, Kulturni Centar, Zrenjanin, Serbia, then Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
- 1976 *Katalin Ladik*, Centar za fotografiju, film i televiziju, Zagreb, Croatia, then Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Selected group exhibitions

- 2023 *Multiple Realities*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, USA
Body and Territory, Kunsthaus Graz, Austria
- 2022 *Name June Paik in the Groove*, MSU Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia
- 2021 *Poetry & Performance. The Eastern European Perspective*, Kassak Museum, Budapest, Hungary
- 2020 *Sedimentations: Brushing History Against the Grain*, Martin Janda Gallery, Vienna, Austria
- 2019 *Unexpected Subject: 1978 Art and Feminism in Italy*, FM Center for Contemporary Art, Milan, Italy
The End of the 20th Century, IVAM, Valencia, Spain
The Liberated Voice. Sound Poetry, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France
Poetry & Performance. The Eastern European Perspective, Motorenhalle, Dresden, Germany 2018 *Bookmarks – Revisiting Hungarian Art of the 1960s and 1970s*, The Vinyl Factory Soho, London, United Kingdom
Poetry & Performance. The Eastern European Perspective, Shedhalle, Zurich, Switzerland
Left Performance Histories, nGbK, Berlin, Germany
The Medea Insurrection: Radical Women Artists Behind the Iron Curtain, Kunsthalle im Lipsiusbau, Dresden, Germany
Feministische Avantgarde der 1970er-Jahre aus der Sammlung Verbund, ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany
- 2017 *documenta 14*, Neue Galerie, Kassel, Germany; EMST, Athens, Greece
Identification – Field exercises after Ladik Katalin, acb gallery, Budapest, Hungary
Feministische Avantgarde der 1970er-Jahre aus der Sammlung Verbund, MUMOK, Vienna, Austria
With the Eyes of Others: Hungarian Artists of the Sixties and Seventies, Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York, USA
Disobedient, +MSUM, Ljubljana, Slovenia
- 2016 *Feministische Avantgarde (Verbund Collection)*, Photographers' Gallery, London, United Kingdom

- Poetics and Politics – Artistic Strategies in the Hungarian Neo-Avantgarde*, Espavisor Gallery, Valencia, Spain
Bosch+Bosch Group: Conceptual Practices from the Former Yugoslavia, acb NA Gallery, Budapest, Hungary
- 2015 *BOOKMARKS – Hungarian Neo-Avant-garde and Post-Conceptual Art from the Late 1960s to the Present*, Art Cologne, Cologne, Germany
Last Year's Snow, Austin Desmond Fine Arts, London, United Kingdom
- 2014 *Anarchy. Utopia. Revolution*, Ludwig Museum, Budapest, Hungary
- 2012 *Re.Act.Feminism – A Performing Archive*, Instytut Sztuki Wyspa, Gdańsk, Poland
Kolekcija Trajković: Lična svita, Muzej istorije Jugoslavije, Belgrade, Serbia
Re.Act.Feminism – A Performing Archive, Galerija Miroslav Kraljević, Zagreb, Croatia
Sounding the Body Electric. Experiments in Art and Music in Eastern Europe 1957-1984, MS2 – Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, Łódź, Poland
Re.Act.Feminism – A Performing Archive, Museet for Samtidskunst, Roskilde, Denmark
The Hero, the Heroine and the Author, Ludwig Museum, Budapest, Hungary
Re.Act.Feminism – A Performing Archive, Tallinna Kunstihoone, Tallinn, Estonia
- 2011 *Branimir Donat i vizualna poezija*, Gliptoteka HAZU, Zagreb, Croatia
Kontakt: Conceptual Art from Ex-Yugoslavia, Audain Gallery SFU Woodward's, Vancouver, Canada
Re.Act.Feminism – A Performing Archive, Centro Cultural Montehermoso, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain
Parobrod: Kolekcija Trajković: Konceptualna umetnost u regionu, Ustanova Kulture, Belgrade, Serbia

- 2010 *Płeć? Sprawdzam! Kobiecość i męskość w sztuce Europy Wschodniej*, Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, Warsaw
- 2009 *Time as Matter*, MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain
Gender Check – Rollenbilder in der Kunst Osteuropas, MUMOK Museum Moderner Kunst – Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna, Austria
- 2008 *Why Here Is Always Somewhere Else*, Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, Germany
Mapping of Social and Art History of Novi Sad, Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis, United States
- 2007 *Kontakt Beograd*, Muzej Savremene Umetnosti, Belgrade, Serbia
A Brief History of Hungarian Performance Art, Szentendrei Képtár, Szentendre, Hungary
- 2006 *Living Art on the Edge of Europe, Bosch+Bosch group*, Kröller Müller Museum, Otterlo, The Netherlands
Masterpieces of Serbian Contemporary Art Since 1968, Museum of Contemporary Art in Vojvodina, Novi Sad, Serbia
- 2005 *On Difference 1 – Local Contexts - Hybrid Spaces*, Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, Germany
- 1987 *Segunda Bienal Internacional de Poesía Visual y Alternativa en México*, Galeria Ramón, Alva de la Canal, Xalapa, Mexico
- 1985 *Međunarodna likovna zbirka Junij*, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, Slovenia
- 1984 *Vokovizuelno*, Galerija Doma Omladine, Belgrade, Serbia
Likovno stvaralaštvo 1944-1984, Yugoslavia: Likovni susret, Subotica, Serbia
- 1983 *Nova umetnost u Srbiji 1970-1980*, Muzej Savremene Umetnosti, Belgrade, Serbia
Nova umetnost u Srbiji 1970-1980, Galerija Suvremene Umjetnosti, Zagreb, Croatia
Nova umetnost u Srbiji 1970-1980, Galerija Umetnosti, Prishtina, Kosovo
Figura partitura, Lavatoio Contumaciale, Rome, Italy

- Figura partitura*, Centro socioculturale di Mompiano, Brescia, Italy
- Yugoslav Movimientos de Vanguardia*, Mexico City, Mexico
- westeast*, Galerija Studentskog Kulturnog Centra, Belgrade, Serbia
- 1982 *Verbo-voko-vizuelno u Jugoslaviji 1950-1980*, Muzej Savremene Umetnosti, Belgrade, Serbia
Figura partitura, Laboratorio di poesia, Novoli, Italy
- 1980 *Rencontres Internationales de poésie sonore*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
Rencontres Internationales de poésie sonore, Maison de la Culture, Rennes, France
Rencontres Internationales de poésie sonore, Maison de la Culture, Le Havre, France
westeast, Galerija Studentskog Kulturnog Centra, Belgrade, Serbia
- 1979 *Mail Art Exhibition*, Stuttgart, Germany
Art Core Meltdown, Wentworth Building, University of Sydney, Australia
Trans-P-Art, Galleria d'Arte Nuova, Alessandria, Italy
Mail Art, Montreal, Canada
Unicap-Mail-Art Exhibition, Recife, Brazil
westeast, Galerija Studentskog Kulturnog Centra, Belgrade
- 1978 *Subject – Art – Artificial*, Der Magistrat der Stadt Kassel, Germany
Materializzazione del linguaggio, Venice Biennale 1978, Venice, Italy
Nova umjetnička praksa 1966-1978, Galerija Suvremene Umjetnosti, Zagreb, Croatia
6. Biennale Internazionale della Grafica d'Arte, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, Italy
Rubber, Rubberplatz, Amsterdam
Kunstrand-Randkunst, Handpresse Galerie, Würzburg, Germany
Mantua Mail, Casa del Mantegna, Mantua, Italy

- 1977 *Tekst in Geluid*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
Visual Poetry – Music Scores, Academie van Beeldende Kunsten, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
westeast, Galerija v Prešernovi hiši, Kranj, Slovenia
- 1976 *Grupa Bosch+Bosch*, Likovni Salon Tribine Mladih, Novi Sad, Serbia
Visuele Poëzie, Rijkscentrum Hoger Kunstonderwijs Internationale, Brussels, Belgium
Grupa Bosch+Bosch, Galerija Suvremene Umjetnosti, Zagreb, Croatia
Mask Show, The Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura, Australia
Nowoczesna Sztuka Jugoslawii, Galeria Współczesna, Warsaw, Poland
- 1975 *Eksperimenti u modernoj jugoslovenskoj umjetnosti Galerija*, Studentskog Centra, Zagreb, Croatia
Festival Expanded Media, Studentski Kulturni Centar, Belgrade, Serbia
Aspekte – Gegenwärtige Kunst aus Jugoslawien, Bosch+Bosch group, Akademie der bildenden Künste, Vienna, Austria
Internationale visuele poëzie, Galerie 'T Hoogt, Utrecht, The Netherlands
Visuele poëzie, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- 1974 *Bosch+Bosch group*, Műszaki Egyetem, Pécs, Hungary
- 1973 *Festival Expanded Media*, Galerija Studentskog Kulturnog Centra, Belgrade, Serbia

Authors' Biographies

Pierre Bal-Blanc

Pierre Bal-Blanc is an independent curator and essayist based in Athens and Paris. His latest projects include *When I State That I Am an Anarchist* (2022) at Plato, Ostrava; *I GOT UP* (2021–22) at Echo, Cologne (travelled to gb agency, Paris, and Hot Wheels, Athens); *Une musique intérieure* (2022) at Tabakalera, San Sebastián; *The Non-Canonical Gospel According to Tomislav Gotovac* (2021) at the National Gallery, Tirana; *Le Salon Turc* (2021), for de Appel arts centre at Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; *All Criteria This Position Any Moment* (2020) at Haus N, Athens; *Das Ökonomieballet* (2020) at Erste Campus, Vienna; and *Collective Exhibition for a Single Body* (2017–20), in Athens, Kassel, Vienna, Leuven, Paris, Lisbon, and forthcoming in Bucharest in 2023. He is part of the Advisory Board of *Flash Art* magazine where he has published the column “The Curatorial Gaze” in 2020–21. He was curator for documenta 14 (2015–17) in Athens and Kassel under the artistic directorship of Adam Szymczyk. Prior to this, he was director of CAC Brétigny (Contemporary Art Centre of Brétigny-sur-Orge, Greater Paris in France) from 2003 to 2014.

Diedrich Diedrichsen

Diedrich Diedrichsen was editor and later publisher of music magazines (*Sounds*, Hamburg; *Spex*, Cologne) in the 1980s. In the 1990s, he was a lecturer and visiting professor at universities in Pasadena, Offenbach, Munich, Weimar, Gießen, Gainesville, St. Louis, and Los Angeles. From 1998 to 2007, he was Professor of Theory of Art & Design at Merz-Academy, Stuttgart, and since 2006, Professor of Theory and Communication of Contemporary Art at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna.

He is the author of *Aesthetics of Pop Music* (London–New York: Polity Press 2023); *(Over)production and Value* (Bern–Berlin: Kunsthalle Bern and Sternberg Press, 2018); *Körpertreffers. Zur Ästhetik der nachpopulären Künste* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2017); *Über Pop-Musik* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2014); and *The Sopranos* (Zurich: diaphanes-booklet, 2012).

Recent publications as editor include: *Cybernetics of the Poor*, co-edited with Oier Etxeberria (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020); *Liebe und Ethnologie. Die kolonialen Dialektik der Empfindlichkeit (nach Hubert Fichte)*, co-edited with Anselm Franke (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019); *The Whole Earth. California and the Disappearance of the Outside*, co-edited with Anselm Franke (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013).

Hendrik Folkerts

Hendrik Folkerts is Curator of International Contemporary Art and Head of Exhibitions at Moderna Museet in Stockholm. Prior to this, he was Dittmer Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at The Art Institute of Chicago (2017–22); Curator of documenta 14, Athens–Kassel (2014–17); and Curator of Performance, Film, and Discursive Programs at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (2010–15). Folkerts is the editor of this publication as well as various other monographs and exhibition catalogues, including, most recently: *Ulrike Rosenbach: Witness* (Karlsruhe: ZKM Karlsruhe, 2023), *Alexandra Bachzetsis: SHOW TIME BOOK | BOOK TIME SHOW* (Amsterdam: Roma Publications, 2023), *Igshaan Adams: Desire Lines* (Chicago–London: Art Institute of Chicago and Yale University Press, 2022), and *Mounira Al Solh: I Strongly Believe in Our Right to Be Frivolous*, co-edited with Laura Barlow (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2019).

Irena Haiduk

Irena Haiduk saw Ladik's scores in person for the first time while installing her own work at the National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST) in Athens for documenta 14. Ladik's writing and performances modeled the stakes of the epic for Haiduk and helped her embrace oral traditions and technologies with comfort. Haiduk's essay is a product of a meeting in Novi Sad on May 19, 2022. It was unseasonably hot and sunny that day. They sat in the café of Hotel Veliki on Nikole Pašića St. The floor of the café was faux oak laminate, light gray in color, very popular in the Balkans at the moment. They ordered two bottles of cold Knjaz Miloš mineral water, and talked for two hours in Serbian. The courage, humor, and play that art harbors can save the life of a fellow artist. Irena Haiduk is continuously saved by the likes of Mladen Stiljnović, Dušan Makavejev, Daniil Kharms, and Katalin Ladik.

Fanny Hauser

Fanny Hauser is an art historian and curator. Since 2022, she has been a deputy director at Ludwig Forum Aachen in Germany. Previously, she worked for documenta 14 in Kassel and Athens, the Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary in Vienna, and the Gebert Stiftung für Kultur in Rapperswil, Switzerland. She is the co-founder and co-director of Kunstverein Kevin Space, a Vienna-based exhibition space founded in 2016. She studied art history and comparative literature in Vienna and Paris and has been a guest mentor, lecturer, and curator at the Academy of Fine Arts and the University of Applied Arts in Vienna as well as the Zürcher Hochschule der Künste (ZHdK) and the F+F Schule für Kunst und Design in Zurich.

Ana Janevski

Ana Janevski is a curator and writer. She has been working on the performance program at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, since 2011, in the Department of Media and Performance. At MoMA, she co-organized with Thomas Lax the

exhibition *Judson Dance Theater: The Work Is Never Done* (2018–19), among many other exhibitions and projects. Janevski is currently working on Joan Jonas' retrospective, which will open at MoMA in 2024. From 2007 to 2011, she was curator at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, where she organized, among many other projects, the large-scale exhibition and accompanying publication *As Soon as I Open My Eyes I See a Film* (2011) on Yugoslav experimental film and art from the 1960s and 1970s. She regularly contributes to and co-edits publications on performance, the body, and the histories of art in Yugoslavia.

Emese Kürti

Emese Kürti is an art historian and researcher based in Budapest. Since 2021, she has been a deputy director at the Central European Research Institute for Art History (KEMKI). Previously, she was a researcher at Artpool Art Research Center, a lecturer at the Central European University (CEU), and an art historian at Ludwig Museum. She is a member of the Hungarian Section of AICA and the NEP4Dissent international research network. Her research focuses include transregional discourses of the neo-avant-garde in Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia, the concepts of minority, and women's positions in experimental art (see *Screaming Hole: Poetry, Sound and Action as Intermedia Practice in the Work of Katalin Ladik*, 2017). She holds a Ph.D. in Film, Media and Cultural Theory from Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), and her dissertation was published by L'Harmattan, Budapest, in 2018. Her recent book *What Will Be Already Exists: Temporalities of Cold War Archives in East-Central Europe and Beyond*, co-edited with Zsuzsa László, was published by Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, in 2021.

Bhavisha Panchia

Bhavisha Panchia is a curator and researcher of visual and audio culture. Her works engage with artistic and cultural practices under shifting global conditions, focusing on anti/postcolonial discourses and imperial histories. A significant part of her practice

centers on auditory media's relationship to geopolitical paradigms, particularly with respect to the social and ideological signification of sound and music in contemporary culture. She is the founder of Nothing to Commit Records, a label and publishing platform committed to the production and expansion of knowledge related to the intersection of contemporary art, literature and music within and across the Global South.

Dieter Roelstraete

Dieter Roelstraete is curator of the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society at the University of Chicago, where he has organized exhibitions of Ida Applebroog, Anna Daučíková, Jason Dodge, Arnold J. Kemp, Rick Lowe, Pope.L, Martha Rosler, Slavs and Tatars, and Cecilia Vicuña. Previous to that, he worked as a curator for documenta 14 in Kassel and Athens in 2017. From 2012 to 2015, he served as Manilow Senior Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, and from 2003 to 2011 he worked at the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen. Recent freelance curatorial projects include exhibitions at the Schinkel Pavilion in Berlin; Fondazione Prada in Venice; and museums in Warsaw, Moscow, and São Paulo. He has published extensively on contemporary art and related philosophical issues in numerous catalogues and journals.

Gloria Sutton

Gloria Sutton is Associate Professor of Contemporary Art History and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Northeastern University, Boston. A research affiliate in the Art, Culture, Technology Program at MIT, she publishes widely on the intersection of art, computation, and feminism, and serves on the board of Voices in Contemporary Art, a Mellon-funded initiative for the preservation of time-based media art.

Sarah Johanna Theurer

In her curatorial practice, Sarah Johanna Theurer focuses on time-based art practices and techno-social entanglements. She currently works as curator at Haus der Kunst in

München, where she co-curated the survey exhibition *Katalin Ladik: Oooooooooo-pus* (2023) with Hendrik Folkerts. She co-curated the retrospective *Fujiko Nakaya. Nebel Leben* (2022); spearheaded new commissions by artists including Carsten Nicolai, Christelle Oyiri, and Wang Shui; and initiated the live exhibition *Echoes* as well as various symposia on art and technology. Previously, she worked at the 9th Berlin Biennale and transmediale Berlin, and acted as a dramaturg with performance groups such as OMSK Social Club and The Agency. She publishes regularly in catalogs and magazines.

Paolo Thorsen-Nagel

Paolo Thorsen-Nagel is a German-American sound artist and musician based in Berlin. His work is concerned with the act of listening as a way of relaying sound's physical, social, and therapeutic capacities. In 2017, he was Sound and Music Advisor for documenta 14 in Athens, for which he curated the *Listening Space* program of events and co-curated the concert series at Megaron Mousikis.

Mónica de la Torre

Mónica de la Torre is the author of six books of poetry, of which the most recent, *Repetition Nineteen*, centers on experimental translation. Other collections include *The Happy End/All Welcome*, a riff on a riff on Kafka's *Amerika*, and *Public Domain*. Several of her books have been published in Mexico, among them *Acúfenos* and *Taller de Taquimecanografía*, written jointly with the eponymous women artists' collective she co-founded. Recent art writing has focused on Cecilia Vicuña's *Palabrarmas* series, Felix Gonzalez-Torres's *Photostats*, Katherine Hubbard's photo-based performances, and Ulises Carrión's bookworks. With Alex Balgiu, she co-edited *Women in Concrete Poetry 1959–79*. She is the recipient of the 2022 Foundation for Contemporary Arts C.D. Wright Award for Poetry and a 2022 Creative Capital grant.

Opposite and following pages:
UFO Happening, 1968,
written and photographic
documentation. Courtesy of
Katalin Ladik and acb gallery,
Budapest
Photo: Antal Dúl









