



Miško Šuvaković

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# Neo-Aesthetic Theory

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HOLLITZER



MIŠKO ŠUVAKOVIĆ

# NEO-AESTHETIC THEORY

COMPLEXITY AND COMPLICITY MUST BE DEFENDED

HOLLITZER





This book is dedicated with love to my mother, Ljuba Šuvaković



Editor: Tatjana Marković  
Translation: Žarko Cvejić, Irena Šentevska,  
Branka Nikolić, Goran Kapetanović,  
Dragana Starčević, Sonja Bašić  
English copy-editing: Chris Prickett  
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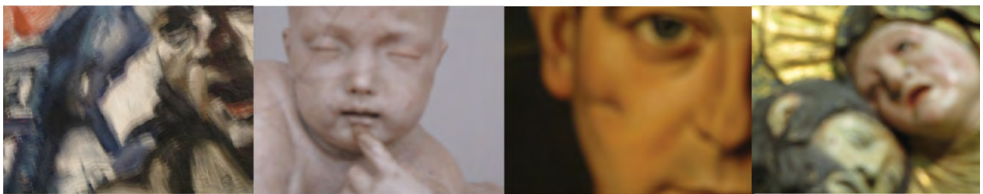
# CONTENTS

11	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>
15	<b>POLITICS OF THEORY</b>
	1
17	THEORIES OF MODERNISM
	Politics of Time and Space
	2
39	THE RETURN OF THE POLITICAL
	in Contemporary Aesthetics, Philosophy and Art
	3
49	TROUBLES WITH THE ECONOMY, GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY
	The Social Turn
	4
61	GRAY ZONES – POLITICAL ECONOMY <i>THROUGH</i> FORMS OF LIFE
	Eleven Theses on Feuerbach, Friedman, Hayek and Speculative Realism
77	<b>SOCIALISM / COLD WAR / POSTSOCIALISM</b>
	5
79	THE AESTHETICS OF DISRUPTION
	Platforms of Avant-Garde Production in Socialist Yugoslavia and Serbia
	6
93	CONCEPTUAL ART
	The Yugoslav Case
	7
115	BEYOND BORDERS
	John Cage, Cold War Politics and Artistic Experimentation in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

127	<b>MUSIC THROUGH AESTHETICS</b>
	8
129	THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE <i>SCREEN</i> (AND / OR / AS) <i>EVENT</i>
	Musical De-Ontologisation
	9
139	AESTHETICS, POLITICS AND MUSIC
	The Context of Contemporary Critical Theory
	10
151	MUSIC AND POLITICS
	The Reconstruction of Aesthetics and the Contemporary World
157	<b>CRITICAL ARCHITECTURE</b>
	11
159	GENERAL THEORY OF IDEOLOGY
	Architecture
	12
167	ARCHITECTURE AS CULTURAL PRACTICE
	The Market's Appropriation of the Social or the Ideology of the Multitude
175	<b>PERFORMANCE ART</b>
	13
177	TECHNOLOGIES OF PERFORMANCE IN PERFORMANCE ART
	Concepts and Phenomenological Research
	14
195	THE AVANT-GARDE: PERFORMANCE AND DANCE
	Ideologies, Events, Discourses
	15
209	DISCOURSES AND DANCE
	An Introduction to the Analysis of the <i>Resistance</i> of Philosophy and Theory towards Dance
	16
229	THEORETICAL PERFORMANCE
	Performative Knowledge

241	<b>POST-MEDIA ART</b>
	17
243	APPROPRIATIONS OF MUSIC
	Postmedia: Music
	18
251	BEYOND PAPER
	Postmedia and Flexible Art
	19
263	BIO ART
	The Prehuman / The Human / The Posthuman
	20
285	SIMULTANEOUSLY ALWAYS, NOW AND EVERYWHERE
	A Real Fiction
	21
293	MULTIPLE POLITICAL/SEXUAL BODIES
	Between the Public and the Intimate
	22
299	AUTO-CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISATION
	Painting as Postmedia Politics
309	<b>EXPERIMENTAL THEORY</b>
	23
311	A CLAUSTROPHOBIC EVENT
	Bare Life
	24
317	A NARRATIVE
	An Utterly Ordinary Evening – <i>PETIT a</i>
324	ABOUT THE ESSAYS
327	LITERATURE
342	ABOUT THE AUTHOR





01 Provisional Salta Ensemble: *State of Exception 1*, photo-essay, photomontage, 2011  
Courtesy Provisional Salta Ensemble





## INTRODUCTION

*Neo-Aesthetic Theory is oriented toward research and interpretation of THE unmissed encounters between Philosophical Theories and Contemporary Arts.*

This book can be read from different positions of understanding, experiences, living, events and interpretations of “contemporarity”, but there is one characteristic and visible platform from which it is written: this is the platform of a permanent *state of emergency*. The writer of these lines could say, similarly to those who have “strongly” experienced the differences and conflicts of the 20th and early 21st century: my life unwound and is unwinding between the public and private – the depicted and the undepicted – in a permanent *state of emergency*: communist revolutions, self-governed freedoms from bureaucratic communism, crises of real-socialism, transitional primary accumulations of capital, nationalistic hysterically-paranoid proscription and the establishment of global neo-liberalism and a global crisis. This is something which cannot be overcome even with good intentions or a cheery disposition. It is something which is always played out with consequences. This is why there is a recurrence, in the lines of the *letter* which follows, with the only weapons which modern man has been able to build-up in his resistance to a *permanent state of emergency*, and this is a minimum of rationality, a critical approach and radical analysis. The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live in is the norm. We have to reach a concept of history which suits this (Walter Benjamin).

It is the construct that emerges from the encounter between object and subject, between an effect and an affect, or affect and concept or meaning: “But what’s the real or more precise linkage among these texts or topics? – the constitution of a territory (is it literature, the legible, an unordered catalogue of images of life?)” (JeanLouis Schefer).

I would like to get out of the bottle just like that fly which was taught this by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Research*, but I am afraid that by coming out of ‘my’ bottle I will find myself in some other bigger or smaller bottle which will once again be mine and for me, for us and for the “lives” of others. If I am always caught in a space and time of supervision, control and regulation – the burnt ships behind me from adolescent pirate stories remain just a spectre of childish fictions and commercial prose – then, carrying out a minimum of rationality, a critical

## INTRODUCTION

approach and radical analysis remain the means which “keeps” a precarious hope in place of the broken class-based and ethnic “utopias” about God’s graciousness, the Heavenly Kingdom, the island of humanity, brotherhood, equality and freedom, about socialism, about communism, about individual freedoms and liberalism.

But, towards what are a minimum of rationality, a critical approach and radical analysis oriented? Definitely towards that which is caught – meta-physically and existentially – between the undepicted, mute life and the depicted, enunciated life. What is “that” which is in a trap? That which will maybe be recognised, i.e. named as “life”. In other words, there will be word of a *state of emergency* in which “life” is played out in all the evasions and approaches within the events of contemporarity.

This is a desire for an unfulfilled, real and direct democracy.

## INTRODUCTION

It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is  
self-evident **anymore**, not its inner  
life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist.<sup>1</sup>



It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is  
self-evident **anytime**, not its inner  
life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist.



It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is  
self-evident **anywhere**, not its inner  
life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist.

### Note:

“Generally, I hardly ever quote a text as such, but I lightly modify it in such a way as to make it ‘meld’ into my own text. This is much closer to the effect of memory in a text”.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Theodor W. Adorno: *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. London: Continuum, 2002, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Louis Schefer: in: Paul Smith “Introduction”, in *The Enigmatic Body. Essays on the Arts by Jean Louis Schefer*, ed. and trans. Paul Smith,. Cambridge GB.: Cambridge University Press, 1995, xv.

**... thought immanent to the multiple ...<sup>1</sup>**

**... life immanent to the multiple ...**

**... art immanent to the multiple ...**

**... body immanent to the multiple ...**

**... production immanent to the multiple...**

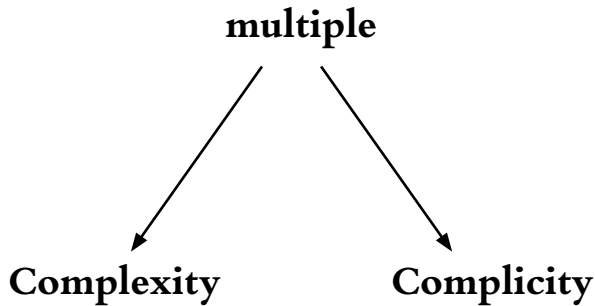
**... postproduction immanent to the multiple ...**

**... economy immanent to the multiple ...**

**... time immanent to the multiple ...**

**... politics immanent to the multiple ...**

**... space immanent to the multiple ...**



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<sup>1</sup> Alain Badiou: "So Near! So Far!", trans. Louise Burehill, in: *Deleuze. The Clamor of Being*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, 4.

# POLITICS OF THEORY

1

THEORIES OF MODERNISM

Politics of Time and Space

2

THE RETURN OF THE POLITICAL

in Contemporary Aesthetics, Philosophy and Art

3

TROUBLES WITH THE ECONOMY, GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

The Social Turn

4

GRAY ZONES – POLITICAL ECONOMY *THROUGH*

FORMS OF LIFE

Eleven Theses on Feuerbach, Friedman, Hayek  
and Speculative Realism





02 Provisional Salta Ensemble:  
Shadows - *Walking through Paul  
Chan Shadows*, photo-essay,  
photomontage, 2011  
Courtesy Provisional Salta  
Ensemble

## THEORIES OF MODERNISM

### Politics of Time and Space

#### THE MODERN, MODERNISM, AND REPETITION: NEW/ THE NEWEST

The modern and modernism are artistic, cultural, and social formations that refer to changes in art, culture, and society in historical and geographical terms. The modern and modernism are viewed as formations that *should* uncover a new “state of affairs” within contemporaneity. On the other hand, viewed ontologically, the modern and modernism are also about redefining the potentially new into a *sustainable new* or the “tradition of the new” as a permanent search for and realisation of a “different world” as “the horizon of possibility” for the newer than new. This search for and realisation of a “different world” or “new state of affairs” as the horizon of feasible possibilities for the newer than new may be identified with the concept of permanent modernisation.

The modern and modernity are interpreted as situations of a *new sensibility* of time within contemporaneity. The paradigms of the modern or modernity were established as contexts of Western society, culture, and art between the 18th and the mid-20th centuries.<sup>1</sup> The feeling of modernity signifies the possibility of identifying the current moment: the here and now as opposed to the overcoming of the past and an expected future. The modern begins in the history of the West at the moment of an artistic and aesthetic, as well as a cultural and political break with the past as a safe tradition. The modern is characterised by opposing the present or contemporary time of the past – it rejects all narratives of memory, tradition, and history. For instance, Peter Osborne views the modern and modernity as expressions of a specific politics of time:

“Modernity”, we have seen, plays a peculiar dual role as a category of historical periodisation: it designates the contemporaneity of an epoch to the time of its classification; yet it registers this contemporaneity in terms of a qualitatively new, self-transcending temporality which has the

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<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Habermas: “Modernity: An Incomplete Project”, trans. Seyla Ben-Habib, in: *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster. London: Pluto Press, 1985, 9.

simultaneous effect of distancing the present from even that most recent past with which it is thus identified.<sup>2</sup>

In the European context, the politics of time signifies procedures whereby social, cultural, and artistic phenomena are selected with regard to contemporaneity, which means regarding differences between the past, the contemporary as the new or newer, and the future.

Modernism is a developed and “accelerated” modern. Modernism emerges when the contemporary interval of being here and now is posited as a practice that is superior to all aspects of social life and when the desire for the new is posited as a source of permanent social “breaks” leading either to emancipation or to cultural *fashion*. Whereas the relatively static modern was characterised by the bourgeois national industrial capitalism of the 18th and the 19th centuries, modernism is characterised by moving from capitalism as an “industrial system of production” toward an internationalised global market system. In other words, the modern is defined by a recognised modernisation of production within national cultures, whereas modernism is determined by a global modernisation of mass consumption. Permanent modernist emancipation refers to processes of social, cultural, and artistic progress that direct human life toward ever-increasing freedom. Permanent fashion refers to the consumerist craving for the new and newer-than-new that over time starts repeating itself, directing itself toward the production, exchange, and consumption of the newest. Modernism is thus a selective political practice that enables a choice that inevitably leads toward the new and newer-than-new.

At this point, the stable model of the bourgeois proprietary modern, based on aesthetic identification by way of a culturally protected privacy and established autonomous art, is replaced by a permanent emergence of ever-newer artistic products with aesthetic or anti-aesthetic properties. Artistic products suggest novelty and consumerist enjoyment in the new, as opposed to the traditional model of identifying within one’s own class and its patriarchal structures. Terry Eagleton has emphasised the class model of the modern aesthetic:

My argument, broadly speaking, is that the category of the aesthetic assumes the importance it does in modern Europe because in speaking of art it speaks of these other matters too, which are at the heart of the middle class’s struggle for political hegemony.<sup>3</sup>

2 Peter Osborne: *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-garde*. London: Verso, 1995, 13–14.

3 Terry Eagleton: *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990, 3.

Eagleton's discussion of "the ideology of the aesthetic" and then T. J. Clark's critical identification of, say, the role of Impressionist painting in the construction of modern bourgeois life point to a transition from a static to a dynamised modernity, i.e. liberal modernism:

As the context of bourgeois sociability shifted from community, family and church to commercialised or privately improvised forms—the streets, the cafés and resorts—the resulting consciousness of individual freedom involved more and more an estrangement from older ties; and those imaginative members of the middle class who accepted the norms of freedom, but lacked the economic means to attain them, were spiritually torn by a sense of helpless isolation in an anonymous indifferent mass. By 1880 the enjoying individual becomes rare in Impressionist art; only the private spectacle of nature is left.<sup>4</sup>

The modern is viewed as the determining context of a realised, urbanised, liberal, and bourgeois contemporaneity. In *The Arcades Project*, for instance, Benjamin wrote about the analogy between capitalism and nature: "Capitalism was a natural phenomenon with which a new dream-filled sleep came over Europe, and, through it, a reactivation of mythic forces".<sup>5</sup>

In his *Philosophy of New Music*, Adorno critically characterises the realised modern as the "dialectics of loneliness".<sup>6</sup> He thereby identified bourgeois contemporaneity as an effect of alienation in the industrial and emerging market world. Fredric Jameson likewise emphasizes the capitalist character of the liberal modern, regarding modernist abstract art, positing a correspondence between the *abstraction of money* and that of *painting and sculpture*: "Modernist abstraction, I believe, is less a function of capital accumulation as such than rather of money itself in a situation of capital accumulation".<sup>7</sup>

4 T. J. Clark: *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1985, 3–4.

5 Walter Benjamin: "K (Dream City and Dream House, Dreams of the Future, Anthropological Nihilism, Jung)", in: *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland, Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002, 163.

6 Theodor W. Adorno: "Dialectic of Loneliness", in: *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, 37–40.

7 Fredric Jameson: "Culture and Finance Capital", in: *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–1998*. London and New York: Verso, 2009, 136–161.

THE ONTOLOGICAL CORE  
OF MODERNISM

There is more than one periodisation of modernism. For instance, according to Raymond Williams, modernism is periodised as art after 1950.

“Modernism” as a title for a whole cultural movement and moment has then been retrospective as a general term since the 1950s, thereby stranding the dominant version of “modern” or even “absolute modern” between, say, 1890 and 1940 [...] Determining the process which fixed the moment of Modernism is a matter, as so often, of identifying the machinery of selective tradition.<sup>8</sup>

Regarding Williams’s notion of modernism, I will use the term “high modernism”, dating it in the Western world in the post-World War II period. Unlike Williams, I will use modernism to label various phenomena in society, culture, and art that began around 1900, when there was an accelerated shift of cultural and artistic fashions: Post-Impressionism, various expressionisms, Fauvism, Cubism, Futurism, Cubo-Futurism, Suprematism, Neo-plasticism, Constructivism, Surrealism, Art Deco, *Retour à l’ordre*, New Objectivity, etc. We may understand Williams’s modernism, that is, in my modification, “high modernism”, as the highest or final stage of international modernisation as a social, cultural, and artistic project.

Historically, modernism, as the phenomenon of acceleration in the sequence of various paradigms of emancipation and types of fashions, signified technological, social, cultural, and artistic changes during the 20th century. In such a periodisation, modernism signified three characteristic phenomenological moments: (1) the break with the past, (2) the establishment of the contemporary, and (3) the anticipation of the future. Every fresh seizure of contemporaneity was signified with the demand that the feeling of confronting the new be repeated regarding the new that had become the old and regarding the future that would become potentially possible only with the next turn from the new that would grow obsolete into the new that has yet to come and be the newest. This obsessive repeatability of attaining the newer-than-new would become the ontological core of modernism.

Thus emerges the formula of permanent repetition: “Times have changed” and again, “Times have changed”, and again [...] The consequence is that

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8 Raymond Williams: “When Was Modernism?”, in: *Politics of Modernism*. London: Verso, 2007, 32.

things no longer stand in the stable traditional or usual way. It seems as though something from the past has become superfluous or impossible,<sup>9</sup> and something new from the present has emerged in a way that was erstwhile unthinkable. To its contemporaries, the new therefore always seemed unjustified, opaque, and incomprehensible, although, at the same time, fatally attractive as well. That is probably why Theodor W. Adorno at the beginning of his *Aesthetic Theory* felt compelled to call for a redefining of the self-evidence of contemporary art: “It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist”.<sup>10</sup>

With the accelerated shifts of modernist paradigms, art increasingly differed from the real or the ideologically projected ideal tradition of great Western art (Antiquity, Renaissance, Baroque). It became necessary to perform a new interpretation of art and culture simultaneously and in parallel with the emergence of new art within a changed culture. That was probably why Arthur C. Danto made his claim that interpretation was constitutive of modernist art: “My view, philosophically, is that interpretations constitute works of art, so that you do not, as it were, have the artwork on one side and the interpretation on the other”.<sup>11</sup>

This claim enables the understanding of the modernist notion of “artworld”, which Danto opposed to the tradition of understanding the *pure* and *universal* work of art within the modern and an imaginary Western tradition that linked the modern with the timelessness of the classical, i.e. that of Antiquity: “To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld”.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the art of modernism must be viewed in its variability as a complex web, intertwining the sensory and the discursive, and relating to cultural and social contexts.

The modern and modernism traversed the path from an anticipated potentiality, which would be the regime of alternative and avant-garde practice, to a realised potentiality as an attained new with all the consequences that accompany the establishment of artistic, cultural, and social hegemony in relation to other historical and geographical formations. Between anticipating a potentiality and

9 Cf. the logic of thinking about a changed state of things in: Jacques Rancière: “In What Time Do We Live?”, in: *The State of Things*. London: Office for Contemporary Art, Norway and Koening Books, 2012, 12.

10 Adorno: *Aesthetic Theory*, 1.

11 Arthur C. Danto: “The Appreciation and Interpretation of Works of Art”, in: *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, 23.

12 Arthur C. Danto: “The Artworld”, in: *Philosophy Looks at the Arts: Contemporary Readings in Aesthetics*, ed. Joseph Margolis. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986, 162.



realising it as something new, there comes the demand for something newer than what was already achieved, which leads toward transcending the realised modernity in order to reach an even more characteristic modernity. Modernism was more modern than the modern, and post-World War II modernism was more modern than interwar modernism.

### LIBERAL *DIFFÉRENCE*: MODERNIST PAINTING

The historical debates about modernism were developed on the basis of a canonical definition of the international – and this signifies hegemonic – Western modernism as a grand and totalising post-World War II *style*. This is the “Western story” of universal modernism and its realised autonomy, i.e., its emancipatory potentiality. Here we will mention Clement Greenberg’s concept of modernist painting and Charles Harrison’s critique of that concept.

Clement Greenberg interpreted the concept of “modernist painting”, as it was established after World War II, ranging from abstract expressionism to post-painterly abstraction, as an expression of a historically directed evolution of the immanent means and effects of painting. Greenberg’s aesthetics of painting is a neo-Kantian aesthetics of liberal artistic creativity with a precise experiential distinction between aesthetic judgement and aesthetic enjoyment in relation to intuitive insight.<sup>13</sup> This evolution led from illusionistic realist painting via Impressionism, Expressionism, and Cubism, to “pure abstraction”, free of direct references to literary narratives or sculptural three-dimensionality. Greenberg’s evolutionism posited modernism not as a break with the past, but as a gradual self-reflexive perfection and development of the autonomy of the artistic medium in discovering the immanent nature of painting. The medium of painting thus became the essential topic of a creative treatment of surface:

Modernist painting asks that a literary theme be translated into strictly optical, two-dimensional terms before becoming the subject of pictorial art – which means its being translated in such a way that it entirely loses its literary character [...] It should also be understood that the self-criticism of modernist art has never been carried on in any but a spontaneous and subliminal way. It has been altogether a question of practice, immanent to practice and never a topic of theory.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Clement Greenberg: “Intuition and the Esthetic Experience”, in: *Homemade Esthetics: Observations of Art and Taste*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 4–9.

<sup>14</sup> Clement Greenberg: “Modernist Painting” (1965), in: *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Francis Francina and Charles Harrison. London: Harper & Row, 1986, 8–9.

Greenberg advocated aesthetic formalism based on the transformation of the “modern tradition”:

Thus, Constructivism – in the works of Gabo and Pevsner, and most certainly in the words of Greenberg in 1958 – finally had reached the stage of the “mirage”. What had once been tactile and contingent had become “optical”, what had been rigorously anti-illusionistic in emphasizing weight, physical mass, and process, in foregrounding surface and texture, and in “baring the structural device” had turned into an “illusion of modalities”.<sup>15</sup>



03 Provisional Salta Ensemble: *Claude Monet – Jackson Pollock*, photo-essay, photomontage, 2011. Courtesy Provisional Salta Ensemble

Modernist painting might therefore be interpreted as an evolution within the “tradition of modernity”. He understood this notion of evolution, predicated on a modernisation of painting, not in the Marxist sense of “social practice”, but in terms of liberal, i.e., individual mastering of creative skills in art as a free and specialised pursuit of human “self-expression” and “self-positing”. Greenberg’s interpretative discourse recognised the painterly production of Claude Monet, Pablo Picasso,

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin H. D. Buchloh: “Cold War Constructivism”, in: *Formalism and Historicity. Models and Methods in Twentieth-Century Art*. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2015, 402.

Jackson Pollock, and the like as exceptional achievements of the modernist evolution whereby the pictorial plane witnessed pictorial inscriptions of the hand or the body of the artist. Those inscriptions could not be related verbally; they are exclusively a painterly trace and as such geared toward an optical effect that one may only indirectly and insecurely verbally present as metaphor in judging a work as such.

In Charles Harrison's view, Clement Greenberg was the critic who set up terms for periodizing and defining modernism in the sense of identifying the essential properties of a painterly work of art.<sup>16</sup> Harrison viewed Greenberg's method of defining modernism as an essentialist objectivism opposed to the theoretical relativism of the avant-gardes and popular culture. For Greenberg, painting was always a matter of *objective taste*, rather than a demonstration of a theoretical position in a work of art. Or in Harrison's words: "For example, asked for evidence that esthetic judgments are indeed involuntary and objective, rather than being governed by specific theories or individual preferences, Greenberg pointed to a 'consensus (of taste) *over time*' which has settled on the defining high point of an artistic tradition".<sup>17</sup>

Greenberg's theory is characterised by his claims that the creative transcends the critical, that artistic practice is governed by intuitions as direct expressions of emotions, and by a direct, all-encompassing experience of the work of art. Therefore, artistic creativity invariably precedes theory, i.e. art theory is merely a secondary addition to the organic wholeness and fullness of artistic expression. Greenberg wrote: "Art is a matter strictly of experience, not of principles".<sup>18</sup>

Harrison opposed Greenberg's neo-Kantianism, which excluded any kind of intellectual engagement with artistic creativity and advanced an intuitive establishment of a unitary and universal model of modernism. In Harrison's view, in contrast to Greenberg's "one-dimensional definition of modernism", the history of modernism after World War II has been determined by two mutually opposed concepts of understanding the character of artistic labour.

The first is Greenberg's concept of high modernism, based on the link between intuition and taste, which brings the values of the autonomy of abstract painting into a position of aesthetic dogma in Abstract Expressionism and in post-painterly abstraction:

<sup>16</sup> Charles Harrison: "Introduction: The Judgment of Art", in: Greenberg, *Homemade Esthetics*, xiii.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>18</sup> Clement Greenberg: "Abstract, Representational and So Forth" (1954), in: *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1961, 133.

The production of the modern artist, it is assumed, are determined by some special insight into the nature of reality – be it the reality of the natural or of the social or of the psychological world. The work of art is an assertion of the human in the context of the real. Although the values of humanity are seen as “relatively constant”, art of “quality” is a form of stimulus to spiritual change.<sup>19</sup>

The other voice, and this is Harrison’s innovation, is critical of high modernism, where intuitions, spontaneity, expression, and aesthetics are independent of the semantic and political conditions of contemporary society, culture, and art:

In the second version of the story, the first is taken as given. It is quoted in a spirit of scepticism, not as a true story, but as one typical of a certain culture and rooted in certain interests. The second voice seeks to explain what the first has said, and how it has come to be saying it.<sup>20</sup>



04 Provisional Salta Ensemble: *Robert Morris/Social Context*, photo-essay, photomontage, 2013. Courtesy Provisional Salta Ensemble

19 Charles Harrison: “A Kind of Context: Modernism in Two Voices”, in: *Essays on Art & Language*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991, 5.

20 Idem.

Harrison's thesis is that the first voice intended to show that artistic production always and by necessity intuitively preceded theory (the painting of Jackson Pollock and Kenneth Noland). By contrast, the other voice disregards this separation of the creative from the critical and shows that that distinction in artistic positions is not an effect of the nature of art or creative individualism, but a consequence of the organisation of artistic culture in society. This other voice (Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Donald Judd, Robert Morris) is determined by a critical approach that insists on a link between the conceptual and the sensual in the context of social differences and antagonisms.

### MODERNISM AND THE NEO-AVANT-GARDE: DIALECTICAL *DIFFÉRANCE*

If one transferred Harrison's "second voice" from its Anglo-American context to a European, Asian, or South-American context, the critical potential of the artistic acting against the autonomous aestheticism of high modernism could be identified with the term "neo-avant-garde". The concept of neo-avant-garde signifies a "second avant-garde" about which rather divergent interpretations exist.

For instance, the early avant-garde of the early 20th century is viewed as original pioneering artistic acting with a pronounced transgressive and innovatory potential. The post-war avant-gardes are identified as institutionalised avant-gardes, i.e. second-hand avant-gardes, remakes of the first (the "historical") avant-garde in the context of high modernism. For instance, in his retrospective defence of his thesis of the neo-avant-garde as an institutionalised avant-garde, Peter Bürger made the following suggestion:

The argument of *Theory of the Avant-garde* runs as follows: the neo-avant-gardes adopted the means by which the avant-gardists hoped to bring about the sublation of art. As these means had, in the interim, been accepted by the institution, that is to say, were deployed as internal aesthetic procedures, they could no longer legitimately be linked to a claim to transcend the sphere of art. "The neo-avant-garde institutionalizes the avant-garde as art and thus negates genuinely avant-gardiste intentions".<sup>21</sup>

21 Peter Bürger: "Avant-garde and Neo-avant-garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of Theory of the Avant-garde", trans. Bettina Brandt and Daniel Purdy, in: *New Literary History* 41 (2010), 695–715, here 707. The interpolated quotation is from Peter Bürger, "The Avant-gardiste Work of Art", in: *Theory of the Avant-garde*, trans. Michael Shaw. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, 58.

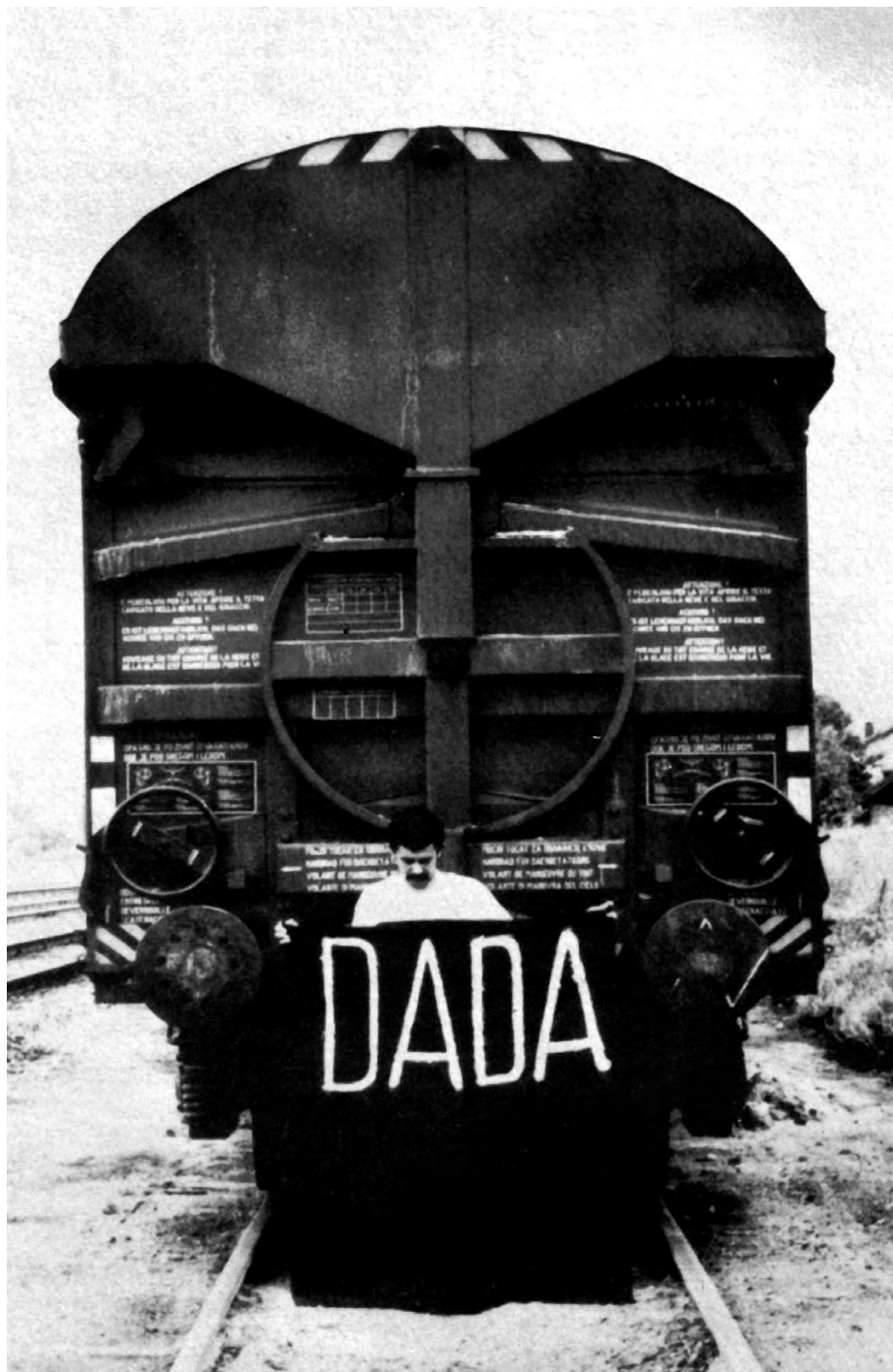
Against Bürger's conception, one could argue that after World War II the avant-garde realised and concretised those technological utopias and projects of the early avant-gardes that could not be realised before. For instance, solutions in art, design, and architecture that the Soviet avant-garde, Bauhaus, and De Stijl offered on a utopian level became part of the international style and mass market only in American high modernism.

Likewise, one might also argue that the neo-avant-garde was a specific set of movements and individual effects between 1950 and 1968 that critically provoked the unitary essentialism and universalism of high modernism. Therefore, the neo-avant-garde regime denotes a critique, subversion, or deconstruction of the realised possibilities of high modernism, or, more accurately, the artistic, social, and cultural hegemonies of the realised modern and modernisms.

The neo-avant-garde may be understood in two ways: (1) as a transgression that disrupts the newly established order of the latest hegemonic high modernism and (2) as a strategy and tactic of established modernism itself that, out of fear that otherwise it might turn into a frozen or petrified "new tradition", produces its own self-critique to destabilise, destroy, or overcome the attained state of affairs. We might compare this dynamic as it is established between the avant-garde, modernism, and the neo-avant-garde with Thomas S. Kuhn's theory of scientific revolutions. The theory of paradigm shifts in science was applied to art by Charles Harrison in his interpretations of the activities of the Art & Language group.<sup>22</sup>

In other words, my position is that the avant-garde was an artistic or aesthetic vanguard or anticipation of modernism, whereas the neo-avant-garde was a critical and excessive practice within the dominant high modernist culture. One might say that in the context of liberal Western high modernism, predicated as it was by an aesthetic and poetic fetishisation of the autonomy of the disciplines and the media of art, the neo-avant-gardes performed a trans-disciplinary critique or transgression by pointing to the potentialities of "the open work of art and acting in art", that is, to a political critique of the modernist professionalisation and institutionalisation of the production, exchange, and consumption of art (Lettrism, experimental art, happening, Neo-dada, Fluxus, New Tendencies). One might also say that the historical avant-gardes (Futurism, Dada, revolutionary constructivisms) generated alternative micro-social formations (groups, movements) that opposed the system of modern art at the time, which was still insufficiently institutionalised. On the other hand, the neo-avant-gardes became

22 Charles Harrison: "Introduction", in: *Art & Language: Text zum Phänomen Kunst und Sprache*, eds. Paul Maenz, Gerd de Vries. Cologne: Verlag M. DuMont Schauberg, 1972, 14.



05 Szalma László: *Homage to Dada*, photo, 1972.  
Courtesy Marinko Sudac Collection

active against high modernism's formally and pragmatically established system of institutions. Whereas the historical avant-gardes, with their various techniques (collage, montage, assemblage, readymade, avant-garde periodicals as collage-montage visual texts), anticipated the aesthetic nature of emerging consumer, popular, and mass culture, the neo-avant-gardes acted in historical conditions where the paradigms of elite high art modernism were explicitly opposed to those of consumer, mass, and popular culture. The aesthetic dialectic<sup>23</sup> of high taste (the autonomous values of art) and popular taste (the functions and effects of mass consumption) were thus confronted with a third party – the critical-subversive and emancipatory potential of the neo-avant-garde, which was nomadically traversing both systems—the high and the popular – of modernist art, relativising their boundaries, deemed to be unconditional and impregnable at the time.

### MODERNISM AND THE NEO-AVANT-GARDE: ARGAN'S PROJECT THEORY

The relationship of modernism and the neo-avant-garde may also be noted in Italian art historian Giulio Carlo Argan's theory of "the modern project". As a leftist intellectual writing in the European context, he recognised the emancipatory social potential of an innovative artistic practice that had traded its imaginary creative autonomy for the context of real social antagonisms. Unlike American conceptions of high modernism (Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg, Michael Fried), in Western Europe high modernism had no dominant canonical current; instead, the differences between various artistic modernisms were established in terms of political differences and their implementations in the then contemporary artworlds.

For Argan, it was important to critically re-examine the conditions of the relationship between art and society. In his view, the basic *dispositif* of modernism was established around the concept of the project of a critical and exploratory art within a neo-capitalist system that enslaved and alienated the individual. The dialectic of the individual (liberal) and the collective (social) is essential in his thinking. The modern project denotes plans, visions, projections, and anticipations of an emancipatory transformation of society and art. The "modern project" is associated with critical approaches to the notions of social, technical, and artistic progress in the name of social liberation. The project of art is characterised by

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23 Cf. the exhibition concept in: *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture*, eds. Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1990; Thomas Crow: *Modern Art in the Common Culture*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996.



participation in the social event. Therefore the artistic project is opposed to social passivity:

Just as it once discovered in the object the immobile structure of the objective world, today art is discovering in the project the mobile structure of existence. The project, which art must furnish with a methodological model, finally constitutes a manoeuvring defence of social, historical life in its perennial conflict with eventuality and chance.<sup>24</sup>

By positing art as a project, Argan takes art itself into a complex and multifaceted fight for actualising human life in the modern world. Therefore, artistic projecting is the opposite from as well as an alternative to technological projecting *qua* programming, i.e. controlling alienated living in liberal neo-capitalism. In Arganian thinking, a liberal aesthetic and artistic liberation from the non-optical in the work is insufficient; art should instead be viewed as a domain of sociality and, therefore, of the social struggle for human liberation and genuine emancipation. The target of his discourse is the technocratic and market alienation of neo-capitalist neoliberalism.

Argan developed his theoretical position by linking critical Western Marxism with an existentialist Sartrean examination of forms of life and the modernist trust in the potentiality of art as a *dispositif* of emancipation. In Argan's view, the survival of art in tomorrow's world hinges on the project, making the art of today conditioned by the art, culture, and society of tomorrow. In this respect, he is quite close to the neo-avant-garde way of thinking. Opposed to "market fashions", Argan offers the conception of a political change in art as an important factor in social emancipation. Rather than privileging the immanence of artistic form, Argan advocates anti-form (Informalism: Lucio Fontana, Alberto Burri) and art beyond the borders of artistic disciplines (post-Informalist art: Piero Manzoni, Enrico Castellani), to point to the place of the work or act of art in a web of antagonistic social relations. According to Argan, art that acquires *an exploratory character*<sup>25</sup> initiates the passage from the work into performing practices and production that provoke or even change forms of modern life amid alienated consumption.

<sup>24</sup> C. G. Argan: "Progetto e destino", in: *Progetto e destino*. Milan: Il saggiatore, 1965, 9–74.

<sup>25</sup> G. C. Argan: "Arte come ricerca", in: *Arte in Europa: scritti di storia dell'arte in onore di Edoardo Arslan*. Milano, 1966, 3–8.

## MODERNISM AND THE NEO-AVANT-GARDE: MULTIPLE MODERNITIES

Beyond the Western context, the term “neo-avant-garde” signifies complex processes of artistic subversion and a critique of locally dominant modernisms, i.e. alter-modernisms. These are manifestations of modernisation “beyond the cultural-geographic sphere” of Western Europe and the United States. Alter-modernisms may denote various geographical modernities and modernisms that occurred in the specific contexts of colonial or real-socialist societies, away from direct or profound impacts of Western liberal modernism’s hegemonies. Alter-modernisms differ from Western international modernism. In local environments, certain Alter-modernisms become hegemonic centres of artistic influences, while others become their peripheral followers. In relation to the notions of “global modernity” as a multiplicity of Alter-modernisms, Western modernity and modernism are viewed only as one possible instance of modernisation. That is why one speaks of “Multiple modernisations” or “Multiple modernisms”: “This is seen to be indicated by the move away from an idea of the singularity of modernity, based on more traditional, non-linear, historical understandings, to discussions about the multiplicity of *modernities*”.<sup>26</sup>

Destabilising “unitary” or “holistic” modernism led from asking “How to periodise unitary and universal modernism?” to asking how and why modernism took place and under what social, cultural, and artistic conditions. Furthermore, the concept of theoretical reflection on multiple modernities and multiple modernisms stems from three theoretical models that question unitary and universal Western modernism:

- (1) postcolonial studies, which project notions of modernity and modernisms in the Third World whilst “avoiding Euro-centrism”<sup>27</sup> – the colonial societies of Asia, Africa, South America, and the Pacific Islands;
- (2) socialist and post-socialist studies, that address modernity and modernisms in the real-socialist societies of Europe and beyond, highlighting asymmetries with Western modernism – the so-called Second World societies;

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26 Gurminder K. Bhambra: “Introduction: Postcolonialism, Sociology, and the Politics of Knowledge Production”, in: *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*. New York: Palgrave, 2009, 5.

27 Bhambra: “From Modernisation to Multiple Modernities: Eurocentrism *redux*”, in: *Rethinking Modernity*, 56.

- (3) the humanities and social studies, above all art-history studies,<sup>28</sup> led by concepts from the Spatial Turn.

The concept of horizontal or geographical distinctions in modernism is notable in authors working outside of the European context (China, the Arab world, South-American cultures), as well as in some European theorists of art. For instance, British art theorist Paul Wood's discussion of conceptual art may be read in terms of a horizontal distinction between Western and other modernisms:

"conceptualism" takes on a double identity. "Analytical" conceptual art gets downgraded as the art of white male rationalists, mired in the very modernism they sought to critique. The expanded history, on the other hand, begins to excavate a huge array of artists, men and women alike, deemed to have been working in a "conceptualist" manner from the 1950s onwards, on a range of emancipatory themes ranging from imperialism to personal identity in far-flung places from Latin America to Japan, from Aboriginal Australia to Russia.<sup>29</sup>

This shows that in alter-modernisms, different neo-avant-gardes are established, too. For instance, neo-avant-gardes working in alter-modernist contexts are characterised by critiques of racial, gender, and class identities, as well as Western economic or cultural imperialism (Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, Antonio Dias, M. F. Husain, Wang Jin).

## SOCIALIST MODERNISM AND NEO-AVANT-GARDES: PERMANENT TRANSITIONS

The notions of the Western capitalist, i.e. the liberal concept of modernisation, developed from modernity to modernism, were confronted by those of revolutionary communist modernisation in the countries of real socialism (i.e., the Second World). The primary communist modernisation was based on a revolutionary and anti-liberal ideology of modernisation. Above all, it concerned the urbanisation and industrialisation of the underdeveloped Russian Empire in the form of the Soviet Union.

One Leninist slogan ran as follows: "Industrialisation + Electrification = Communism". The slogan may be explained by reference to Lenin's programmatic speech about the overcoming of Russia's industrial backwardness:

28 Piotr Piotrowski: "On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History", *Umèni/Art: Journal of the Institute for Art History* 56 (2008), 378–383.

29 Paul Wood: "Approaching Conceptual Art", in: *Conceptual Art*. London: Tate Publishing, 2002, 9.

Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country. Otherwise the country will remain a small-peasant country, and we must clearly realize that [...] Only when the country has been electrified, and industry, agriculture and transport have been placed on the technical basis of modern large-scale industry, only then shall we be fully victorious.<sup>30</sup>

In the Soviet context, modernisation determined industrial and economic development, associated with realising the ideal of the “class struggle”. But in terms of aesthetics and art, modernisation ranged from radical avant-garde projects (Cubo-futurism, Suprematism, Constructivism) in the early days of the revolution to the canonisation of socialist realism as a stable expression of modern revolutionary and didactic creativity. The ideal of modern art in terms of modern realism was established as the canonised ideal. For instance, Leon Trotsky defined revolutionary realist art in the following way:

When one speaks of revolutionary art, two kinds of artistic phenomena are meant: the works whose themes reflect the Revolution, and the works which are not connected with the Revolution in theme, but are thoroughly imbued with it, and are coloured by the new consciousness arising out of the Revolution.<sup>31</sup>

Trotsky’s understanding of the revolution was in terms of “the permanent revolution”.<sup>32</sup> One might understand it as a radical and permanent modernisation, passing through constant transitions toward the universal and geographically global communist society of the future. Moving from an avant-garde to a revolutionary and then to a socialist-realist modernisation of art meant creating a specific modern expression serving the party and the state.

Then, in the 1950s and 1960s, the movement from Socialist Realism to socialist modernism marked the constitution of a hegemonic artistic pattern in Eastern Europe. Socialist modernism pointed to the potentiality of a liberal-oriented creation of abstract – *qua* Western – artistic forms and, at the same time, to a symbolic or topical interpretation of such forms, articulated by the party. The liberalisation of Socialist Realism in favour of socialist modernism enabled the

30 Vladimir Lenin: “Report on the Work of the Council of the People’s Commissars. December 22, 1920”, <http://soviethistory.macalester.edu/index.php?page=subject&SubjectID=1921electric&Year=1921>, 3.4. 2014.

31 Leon Trotsky: “Revolutionary and Socialist Art” (1924), in: *Literature and Revolution*, trans. Rose Strunsky. London: Haymarket Books 2000, 123.

32 Leon Trotsky: “What Did the Theory of the Permanent Revolution Look Like in Practice?”, in: *The Permanent Revolution, and Results and Prospects*, trans. John G. Wright. Seattle: Red Letter Press, 2010, 231–252.

establishment of Eastern European socialist modernism as a bureaucratised and institutionalised art in state socialism.

The emergence of the neo-avant-garde in Eastern Europe was a critique of the link between Socialist Realism as a revolutionary art and the phenomenon of socialist modernism<sup>33</sup> as the art of a bureaucratised post-revolutionary state. Eastern European neo-avant-garde practices<sup>34</sup> were motivated by seeking to establish an “alternative artistic space” or alternative artworlds. Alternative spaces were outside of the bureaucratically led institutions of Socialist Realism and modernism. Alternative spaces were “dark zones” within tightly controlled societies with one-dimensional state programmes of supporting and surveying culture and art.

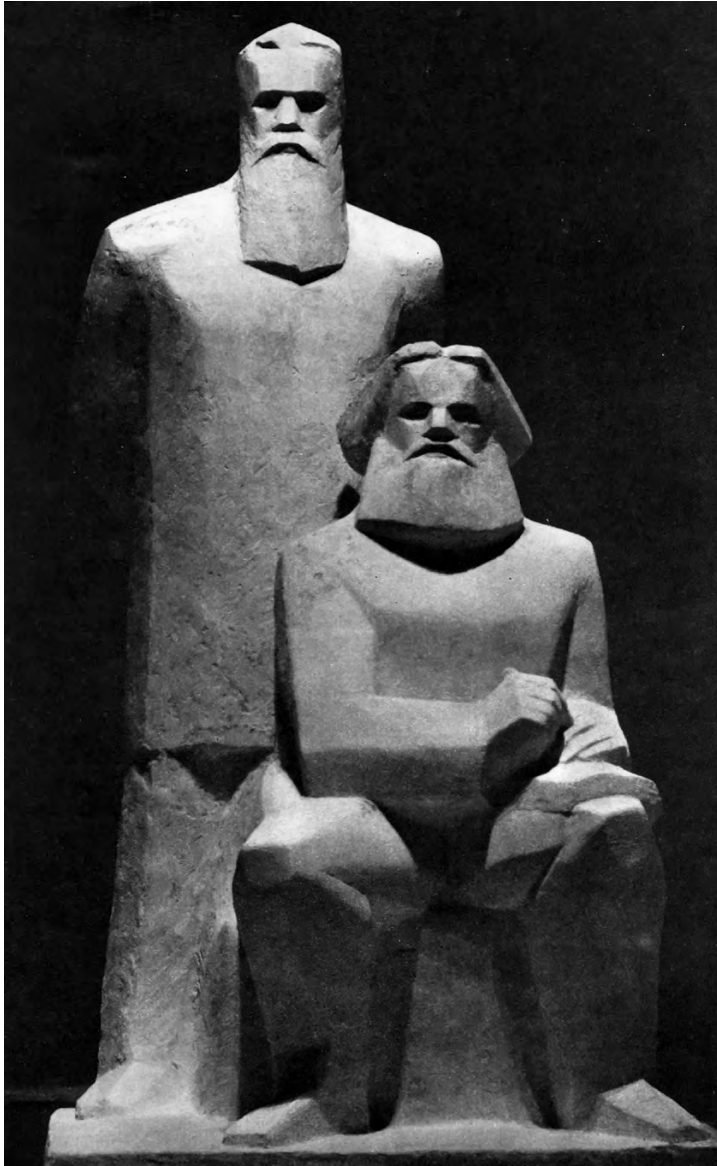
Alternative artistic space might also be termed “the second public sphere”.<sup>35</sup> In Eastern Europe, in the domain of culture, neo-avant-garde and conceptual artistic practices took place outside the official state public sphere, in spaces where privacy was territorialised as public space (from the studio to the commune). Eastern European neo-avant-garde artists created alternative institutions, such as exhibitions and theatre plays, in private apartments or studios, founded communes on the principles of self-organising and direct democracy, published so-called *samizdat* periodicals and books in small print runs. Also, Eastern European neo-avant-gardes occupied socially indeterminate spaces that were meant for youth culture, student cultural institutions, as well as amateur cultural institutions (for instance, photo and film clubs), which in socialist societies had state support as a matter of policy.

Eastern European neo-avant-garde artists built their production by moving nomadically through various art disciplines (literature, theatre, music, film, fine arts). They produced open and multimedia works of art (happenings, performances, installations, artists’ books) that represented generational, gender, and cosmopolitan identities geared toward stepping out of closed societies. In the collectivist cultural order of real and self-managed socialism in Eastern Europe

33 Ješa Denegri: “Inside or Outside *Socialist Modernism*? Radical Views on the Yugoslav Art Scene, 1950–1970”, trans. Branka Nikolić, in: *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991*, eds. Dubravka Đurić and Miško Šuvaković. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003, 170–208.

34 Piotr Piotrowski: *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*, trans. Anna Brzyski. London: Reaktion Books, 2009.

35 The term was introduced by performing arts theorists Adam Czirak and Katalin Cseh-Varga at the conference “Performing Arts in the Second Public Sphere” held at the Freie Universität Berlin, on 9–11 May 2014.



06 Vojin Bakić: *Model for the Monument to Marx and Engels*, 1953.  
Magazine *Jugoslavia*, Belgrade

and in contrast to the pronounced individualism of their Western colleagues, Eastern-European neo-avant-garde artists worked with *dialectical differences halfway* between liberal individualism and self-organised collectivism. Noteworthy examples of Eastern-European neo-avant-garde practices certainly include the theatre experiments of Polish director Tadeusz Kantor and multimedia artist Józef Rabakowski, those of Czech visual poets and performers (Milan Knižák, Jiří

Valoch, Jiří Kovanda), the Slovenian OHO group, the Croatian group Gorgona, Hungarian experimental artists Miklós Erdélyi and Tamas Szentjóby, Serbian composer Vladan Radovanović, Yugoslav novelist Bora Ćosić, Serbian painter Radomir Damnjan, Hungarian visual poet and conceptual artist Szalma Laszlo and Szombathy Balint (group Bosc+Bosch).



07 Radomir Damnjan: *In Honour of the Soviet Avant-garde*, b/w print, 1973.  
Courtesy Radomir Damnjan

## CONCLUSION: DIFFERENCE / DIALECTICS

My intent in this chapter was to point to the hybrid complexity of modern and modernist phenomena in relation to the criteria of the *politics of time* (dialectic historicisation) and *politics of space* (geographic difference). In relation to every contemporaneity that has occurred or is occurring at different times and in different places, the modern and modernism required different conceptualisations of “modernisation” and different conceptualisations of a critical response to the transition of modernisation practices from the margins of society to its hegemonic centre, both internationally and locally.



08 Bálint Szombathy: *Bauhaus*, photo, 1972.  
Courtesy Bálint Szombathy





## THE RETURN OF THE POLITICAL in Contemporary Aesthetics, Philosophy and Art

The crisis of philosophy and aesthetics certainly began during the *philosophical* century. It started when Marx highlighted the “misery of philosophy” in a world of real human misery, in the industrial society of exploitation.<sup>36</sup> It also began with Friedrich Nietzsche’s “grandiose” and immanently philosophical failure to derive yet another great totalising philosophical system of thinking about everything and for all. It was then, for the first time, that the idea of a failed philosophical project became a basis for reorganising philosophy. Finally, it also began when Dr. Sigmund Freud set up the universal discourse of the subject and subjectivity in human life, a humanistic discourse that *passed* over the empirical and pseudo-empirical fields of biomedical and socio-cultural hypotheses beyond the professional security of philosophical paradigms/styles. Then, in the first half of the 20th century, the philosophy of Martin Heidegger was an attempt to find the essential potentiality of only *yet another important step* for philosophy, there and then, in what was for him an unacceptable modernity.<sup>37</sup> That *one step for philosophy* was assumed in the conservative direction of invoking and responding to “originary” philosophical voices amidst the *nightmare* of the great Western tradition of thinking in metaphors, i.e. metaphysical figures of being, truth, and the subject. But “that one step for philosophy” was also marked with the concretely political failure of the traditionally and conservative-oriented modern philosopher with almost nihilistic misgivings regarding progress. Facing the powers and events of an all-human catastrophe, the devastating totalising *state of emergency* that Nazism produced with its anti-liberal programmes in the Third Reich,<sup>38</sup> this philosopher reconstituted his anti-modern “right to universal truth”.

Quite asymmetrically, in relation to Martin Heidegger, stood the anti-philosophical endeavour of Ludwig Wittgenstein, anti-philosophical in terms of preserving and cherishing the tradition of autonomous Western philosophy, with Wittgenstein trying to pose, in his individually manifested everyday human

36 Karl Marx: “The Metaphysics of Political Economy, vols. 1–5”, in: *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Boston: Adamant Media Corporation, 2005, 112–192. This Elibron Classics Replica Edition is an unabridged facsimile of the edition published in 1920 by Charles H. Kerr & Company, Chicago.

37 Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh. New York: State University of New York Press, 2010, 63–66.

38 Emmanuel Faye: *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy in Light of the Unpublished Seminars of 1933–1935*, trans. Michael B. Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

drama, some basic commonsensical questions – almost “dilettantish” – in the face of the security of philosophical jargon and its abstracting of the individual’s *lived activity*. Wittgenstein’s critical and analytical *philosophy of philosophy* is “dilettantish” inasmuch as he is commonsensical and, from platforms of everyday speech, asks questions about philosophy’s *internal affairs*, which learned philosophers, who *mature in philosophical discourses and jargons*, as Theodor W. Adorno, for instance, put it, do not ask.<sup>39</sup> Here, a “dilettante” in philosophy implies not a “self-taught” or “committed amateur philosopher”, but one who deliberately and self-reflexively, demonstratively violates the professional ethics of philosophising by straying from the normative/canonical jargon of Western philosophy. Such a philosopher asks “impolite questions” concerning the basic meanings of words and their impact on the lived activity of philosophers and philosophy as a social practice. He diverts from the *doxa* of philosophers who do not pose those basic questions as important questions of philosophy, but construct narratives or models for presenting thought within already established philosophical networks and methods. Those philosophies are quite close to the discourse of the philosophical hierarchy of power. This concerns the canonical acceptability of jargon and the conceptual atmosphere of stable thinking in defined social frameworks. These frameworks disable writing or thinking about something or anything related to philosophy outside of *jargon topics or objects* of debate. Wittgenstein’s reductionist transgressive solution was to translate philosophical terms from the discourse of philosophy to the language of the everyday use of words in speech, a task he saw as showing the fly out of the fly-bottle.<sup>40</sup> Finding a way out of conceptual and linguistic traps was the main task of Wittgenstein’s philosophising. In that sense, another great “anti-philosopher” was the French doctor, founder of theoretical psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan, who, unlike Wittgenstein’s analytical reductionism, resorted to a “baroque” passage through all the spaces and times of philosophy, metaphorically speaking, like “a bull in a china shop”. This metaphor bespeaks an author who sees discomfort in the order of meaning precisely as his key intervention in the materiality of speech, which is under the impact of the signification order, that is, the unconscious. Lacan’s luxurious “dilettantism” differs from Wittgenstein’s puritan analytical work on the “absurdities” of philosophy, but the point is the same: to achieve something with philosophy in a way disallowed by its traditional discourses, that is, jargon frameworks. For Lacan, this meant moving the *reality of the unconscious* in any discourse, including philosophical. In Lacan’s mind,

39 Teodor Adorno: *Filozofska terminologija: uvod u filozofiju*, trans. Slobodan Novakov. Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1986, 51 [Theodor W. Adorno: *Philosophische Terminologie: zur Einleitung*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992].

40 Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986, 103.

philosophical discourse must face its supporting web of signification that modifies webs of signified, i.e. conceptual ideas. That means having to face the structural principle of determination that eludes the philosopher's conscious intent and will to express "this and that, there and then"; that is, a psychoanalytic theorist faces the material order of speech, including philosophical speech, which shows, in its complexity, what it omits, represses, covers, or negates.

Finally, French philosopher Jacques Derrida's intervention showed that the "central world of philosophy" as much as "the margins of philosophy" constitute the problem of philosophy. He was entirely committed to philosophy, although his early concept of deconstructing European philosophical logo-centrism – the centrism of thinking as opposed to speaking and writing – offered some potential directions for thinking and presenting inter-textually the limits of the philosophy of transcendence. Those who have invoked Derrida and radicalised his offers and promises have either moved out of philosophy and into the *domain of the material practice of writing*, of which philosophy is only an instance, or, like others, who were never in philosophy in the first place, have embraced the possibility of performing the event of theorising and thereby pointed to the resistance of the materiality of theory to the illusory *esoteric quality* of philosophy. After Derrida, there occurred quite diverse inter-textual and multidirectional rearrangements of the relationship between philosophy and theory, from literary critic Paul De Man, artist and theorist of culture Victor Burgin,<sup>41</sup> to novelist and essayist Kathy Acker.<sup>42</sup> The extent of the crisis of philosophy was also enhanced by the feminist, feminine, gender, and queer theorisation of philosophy, more precisely, by asking that really singular question extending from Simone de Beauvoir via Hélène Cixous to Judith Butler and Joan Copjec: Does philosophy have a gender? Then another, even more complex and philosophical question may be posed: "How was gender in philosophy, i.e. history of philosophy, and thereby the singularity of the identity of philosophy itself as a social practice reduced to a *universal philosopher*?" But that question, as well as similar questions, despite their attractive and seductive philosophicality, were closer to the singularity of the practice of theorisation within social, humanistic, or hybrid platforms of interpretation and textual production about and against philosophy.

In the late 1960s, the notions of *theory* and theorisation gain a special meaning and thus certainly an exclusive role with regard to knowledge (discourse, thinking, writing,

41 Victor Burgin: "The End of Art Theory", in: *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity*. Atlantic Highlands NJ: Humanities Press International, 1987, 140–204.

42 Kathy Acker: "Realism for the Cause of Future Revolution", in: Kathy Acker: *Bodies of Work: Essays*. New York: Serpent's Tail, 1997, 14–26.

behaviour), culture, and society.<sup>43</sup> *Theory* and *theorisation* denote the hybrid genres or poly-genres that developed in parallel in artistic, activist, and academic circles (France, Great Britain, USA, Eastern Europe) by means of critiquing autonomous canonical models and institutions of scientific and philosophical labour in society, culture, and art. The theoretical was posited as the textual and theoretical labour as a more literal or less literal *textual production of a critical discourse*. Writings by French structuralists from the 1960s and international post-structuralists from the early 1970s advanced the critical position that philosophy should be essentially redefined. That meant transforming philosophy as general thinking about sciences into a critical theory based on reflecting the material practice of signification whereby philosophic texts are produced. The practice of philosophy was thus interpreted as material production of specific social *texts*. In his *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Richard Rorty pointed out that modernity witnessed an unprecedented “blending” of the borders of certain autonomous scientific and theoretical disciplines.<sup>44</sup> The result was a *new kind of writing*, which was neither about evaluating aspects of literary, artistic, scientific, or cultural products, nor intellectual history, nor a philosophy of good and practical acting in culture and art, nor the interpretation of society, but all of that combined in the open and variable poly-genre of writing. Theoretical writing exceeds the boundaries between individual social and humanist sciences, pointing to forms of production, presentation, and expression in contemporary plural and global mass and media culture. As a poly-generic practice, theory asks questions regarding the self-reflexive character of writing about the nature, conditions, paths, and concepts of generating theoretical texts and their effects.<sup>45</sup> Then, questions were also posed regarding the epistemological character of mediating knowledge and therefore also of institutions that establish and govern meanings, sense, and values within a culture or interrelations between different cultures. Likewise important are questions regarding the critical character of the conditions and circumstances whereby a theory emerges, is exchanged, governs a certain or uncertain *scene of writing* or *scene of presenting*, and then experiences a crisis, disappears, or transforms. Also important are questions regarding deconstructing, dislocating, or decentering the inscription of theory or its effects into a certain mass, elite, or professional public opinion, as well as traces of theory in its modifications, their erasure or accumulation on the jetties<sup>46</sup> of meaning, sense, values, and

43 Patrick Ffrench: “The Ferment”, in: *The Time of Theory: A History of Tel Quel (1960–1983)*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, 5–44.

44 Richard Rorty: “The World Well Lost”, in: *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays, 1972–1980*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982, 3–18.

45 Brian Wallis: “Telling Stories: A Fictional Approach to Artist’s Writings”, in: *Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists*, ed. Brian Wallis. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987, xi–xvii.

46 Jacques Derrida: “Some Statements and Truisms about Neo-logisms, Newisms, Postisms,

identities of culture. But there also emerge psychoanalytical questions about how the *desire for knowledge* emerges, how pleasure occurs in a theoretical text or in a process with texts (inter-textuality) in media culture. For *something* – a thought, speech, writing, or media representation – to be theory, it must contain aspects that enable or realise an identification, description, explication, and interpretation, that is, debate. This is the open and indeterminate conception of *theory*. It is open enough to encompass quite varied procedures: identifications, descriptions, explications (readings), interpretations, and debates. What distinguishes theory from all other cultural activities, disciplines, and institutions is the demand that any kind of speaking or writing aspiring to be *theoretical* must meet, and that is to ask what *theory* is, how it functions and identifies, describes, explains, and interprets itself as theory or theorisation within quite specific cultural and social practices. Therefore, theory is not the opposite of practices, but the performance of an invariably specific material social practice that is posited in such a way that it problematises – reflects, explains, interprets, produces – concepts, discourses, and representations of theory as a practice, from specific conditions and circumstances.

The crisis of postmodern liberal pluralism after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, that is, following the end of the Cold War and the establishment of “global politics” and domination of a single superpower and, more importantly, of a single economic and biotechnological political order, re-*provoked* possibilities for examining “politics” and “the political” as a significant response to the apparent weakness or absence of any kind of the political in the apparently apolitical or extra-political neoliberal technological practices of organising public and private everyday life in post-modernity.<sup>47</sup> In postmodern and then globalised neoliberal society, politics has acquired the character of a techno-managerial cultural practice, moving from fundamental social, global questions to individual cultural as well as artistic activities in the domain of identity and representation in the everyday. A cynic might conclude that in globalised times, everything – meaning culture and art – is politicised, except politics itself, which is depoliticised.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, in the 1990s and 2000s, it became important to invoke and reconstruct “politics” and “the political” in relation to politics as a form of sociality, as well as a form of organisation, governance, control, and implementation. At that moment, “politics as a practice within or across general sociality” manifested

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Parasitisms, and Other Small Seismisms”, trans. Anne Tomiche, in: *The States of “Theory”: History, Art, and Critical Discourse*, ed. David Carroll. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, 63–94.

47 Chantal Mouffe: *The Return of the Political*. London: Verso, 2005, 1.

48 Jela Krečič: “Pogovor s filozofinjo Alenko Zupančič: Vse se politizira, ker se politika depolitizira” [Interview with Philosopher Alenka Zupančič: Everything Is Politicised, Because Politics is Depoliticised], in: *Delo* 21 (June 2008), 24–25.

a need or, even, desire for meta-theory as the organisation of the singular as opposed to the particular in relation to universal political knowledge and action, and traditionally, the meta-theory of “politics” is philosophy.<sup>49</sup> As the meta-theory of big politics, philosophical universalism was “used” as an intervening sign for a critique of the anti-essentialism and social constructivism of “small politics” and “micro-ecologies” in culture and, certainly, art. Philosophical universalism thereby enabled asking questions about acting responsibly for every social intervention and risk of intervention. This kind of demand for another large-scale politicisation on the level of philosophy and intervention in global social processes after the Cold War occurred in very different ways, above all in philosophers, sometimes mutually incomparable and often confronted: Jacques Derrida and his new reading of Marx,<sup>50</sup> Chantal Mouffe and her discussion of the return of the political, Ernesto Laclau and his theory of emancipation in the epoch of post-modernity and then globalism, Alain Badiou and his Platonist-oriented metapolitics, Terry Eagleton and his leftist critique of hybrid theories, Jacques Rancière and the preservation of the traditional European Aristotelian philosophical “political”,<sup>51</sup> Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt and their critique of the current global empire, Giorgio Agamben and his reconstruction of great philosophy by means of bio-politics,<sup>52</sup> Paolo Virno and his theorisation of labour in global or post-Fordist capitalism, and Brian Massumi and his analysis of the new media on the horizon of critical sociality.

Philosophy’s invoking of “the political”, its “return to the political” emerged not out of a structuring of reality undertaken by a party or state, but of performing a *philosophical desire* for post-theoretical speculative philosophical constructions of the “crisis” character, functions, and plural, which also means arbitrary, effects of current socialities in capitalism, dominant but crisis-ridden. For example, the separation of politics and power, which characterises the neoliberal rise and, certainly, the global crisis of neo-liberalism, has had the effect of depoliticising “politics” and transferring the complex of the political and politics into the field of culture and art. Almost all of early-21st-century vital art is politicised, from a “political fictionalisation of the real” (the Irwin group with their NSK global state project) to various political or cultural activisms (the Critical Art Ensemble, Slavs and Tatars, Alfredo Jaar, Tadej Pogačar, Zoran Todorović, Artur Żmijewski).

49 Alain Badiou: *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker. London: Verso, 2006, 1.

50 Jacques Derrida: “Injunctions of Marx”, in: *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 2006, 1–60.

51 Jacques Rancière: “The Distribution of the Sensible: Politics and Aesthetics”, in: *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill. London: Continuum, 2004, 12.

52 Giorgio Agamben: “Poiesis and Praxis”, in: *The Man Without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, 68–93.



09 Irwin: *Time for a new state*, print, 2012.  
Courtesy Irwin





10 Irwin: *Time for a new state*, billboard, Leipzig, 2012.  
Courtesy Provisional Salta Ensemble

For instance, the conflict, a sort of revival of the Cold War in 2007 in 2008, between the US and Russia is not a conflict between the liberal and the communist, that is, between capitalist and social property, but between two capitalist imperial models. It is a conflict between the American neoliberal model of capitalism and Russian autocratic nationalist capitalism. Therefore, the philosophical derivation of meta- and macro-politicisation marked a critical and that means analytical reactivation of the contradictory relations of local – minority – bodies of knowledge as opposed to global – dominant, majority – bodies of knowledge in establishing and performing “universal” historical and geographical power. Moreover, this is not about opting between the local and the global, i.e. the particular and the universal; opting like that has cost dearly, with the defeats of modern projects in totalitarian regimes (the USSR, the Third Reich, fascist Italy, the Khmer Rouge Democratic Kampuchea, the Cultural Revolution in China), as well as the defeats of postmodern conceptions, i.e. in the preservation of “weak” or “soft” power and its concomitant comprehensive plurality in ethnic wars and genocides, from the former Yugoslavia to Africa in the 1990s. This concerns deriving a philosophical understanding of how *global*

*as universal* power is realised in relating – naturalising the universal with the particular and, to be sure, conversely, the particular with the universal. If one pays attention to questions regarding the character of today’s society, then one must ask about relations between global and local modes of material production and their fundamental refractions in individual and, certainly, global projections. Then one may ask, in philosophic-metaphysical terms, “who” or “what”, “when” or “where” constitutes the production of universal knowledge and thereby *global as universal* power. The relationship between the global and universal is posited as a problematic and intriguing trap. In other words, the important philosophical question is how singularity produces universality and what it is that enables surveying and regulating that production not only behaviourally, but also epistemologically and existentially? The critical question is this: can singularity produce universality?

Interpreting the complex process of integrating hybrid and anti-essentialist theorisations into the neoliberal global system of power, some philosophers have suggested, as an alternative, the potentiality of resisting global market capitalism by means of a universalistically posited philosophy. This would be a philosophical intervention stemming from:

- (1) the collapse or disorientation of the traditional Left and its theory and
- (2) the global domination of “rightwing”, “neoliberal”, and “populist” discourses, as well as the integration of “soft” or “weak”, that is, “post-philosophic” hybrid theories into the neoliberal system of a flexible technocratic regulation of power.

In theoretical terms, such an intervention would mean a philosophic/theoretical turn from the 20th-century *linguistic turn* to the early 21st-century *philosophy of the event*.



## TROUBLES WITH THE ECONOMY, GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY The Social Turn

### WHAT MAKES THESE SCULPTURES SO DIFFERENT? GRADES OF ABSTRACTION

Zygmunt Bauman made the following almost tongue-in-cheek remark: contemporary “workers” protests held in front of a MNC (multinational corporation) premises seem to be doomed to fail: protesters are confronted by a slightly dismayed official (a manager, administrator, coordinator, PR executive) who doesn’t know exactly who should be given information regarding the protest. In other words, he/she knows that the message will be conveyed through an endless, intricate maze managing a global corporation topped by no individual or coherent team, but by abstract networks of hybrid governing and executive boards or “decision-making platforms” connected to other bodies of management and funding. Indeed, this scheme of governance is incompatible with that of a personified owner and his way of running things in 19th century companies. In those times, workers protests tended to personally address the factory owner or his direct representative, who resided in his villa inside the factory grounds or somewhere nearby.

Let’s try to observe the matter from another angle. Let’s take a look at two sculptures from two different periods and two different political systems: the monument (ArcelorMittal Orbit) raised for the 2012 Olympic Games in London and Lenin’s statue at Kaluzhskaya Ploshchad in Moscow erected in 1985.

The former piece was designed by the postmodern sculptor Anish Kapoor with Cecil Balmond from the engineering group Arup and *Ushida Findlay Architects*. The latter was executed by the sculptors Lev Kerbel and *Vasiliy Dmitriyevich Fëdorov*. Both pieces came about at the peak of a crisis: the global financial crisis and the global real-socialist crisis, respectively. The former was funded by the British corporate system. The latter was funded by the Soviet state. One stands for the fluid, abstract order of neoliberal global power. The other stood for the stability and matter-of-fact Soviet tradition of representing the revolutionary

power of initiation. Both pieces are “political abstractions”, stressing their assertiveness with monumentality and affirming “the power of corporate market capitalism” and “the power of the workers’ revolution” (respectively). The economic abstraction tends to be presented as an abstraction, namely, an abstract power. On the contrary, the political abstraction tends to be presented as a non-abstraction, i.e. as concrete power expressed by single or multiple personifications (a leader, leadership, people).

### THE CRISIS OF POLITICS AND THE RETURN OF THE POLITICAL

What began with the postmodern and evolved in the times of global transition was a progression from the modern bureaucratic capitalist or socialist state which sets politics in relation to social conflicts (and even economic models of competition, domination, monopolies and global expansion of the market), towards a society wherein politics as technology of government departs from the real power. Politics becomes a mechanism of minimal corrections of the social conflicts conditioned by the real powers – which became increasingly abstract within the global systems of finance, production, exchange and consumption. For instance, the sociologist Richard Sennett asserts there has been a “divorce between power and authority”<sup>53</sup> in relation to politics. Furthermore, he concludes that “the crux of politics becomes marketing” (which seems bad for political life).<sup>54</sup>

The point of describing this rather complex scheme is to point to the *moment* following the divorce between power and politics in relation to contemporary art. In the neoliberal society of the postmodern and, subsequently, globalisation era, politics assumed the character of a techno-managerial cultural practice (policy): it is now displaced from the domain of fundamental social issues towards individualised cultural (even artistic) actions in the realms of identity and representation of the “ordinary”. A cynical conclusion might be that in times of globalisation, everything – meaning culture and art – is politicised, except politics itself which is being de-politicised.<sup>55</sup>

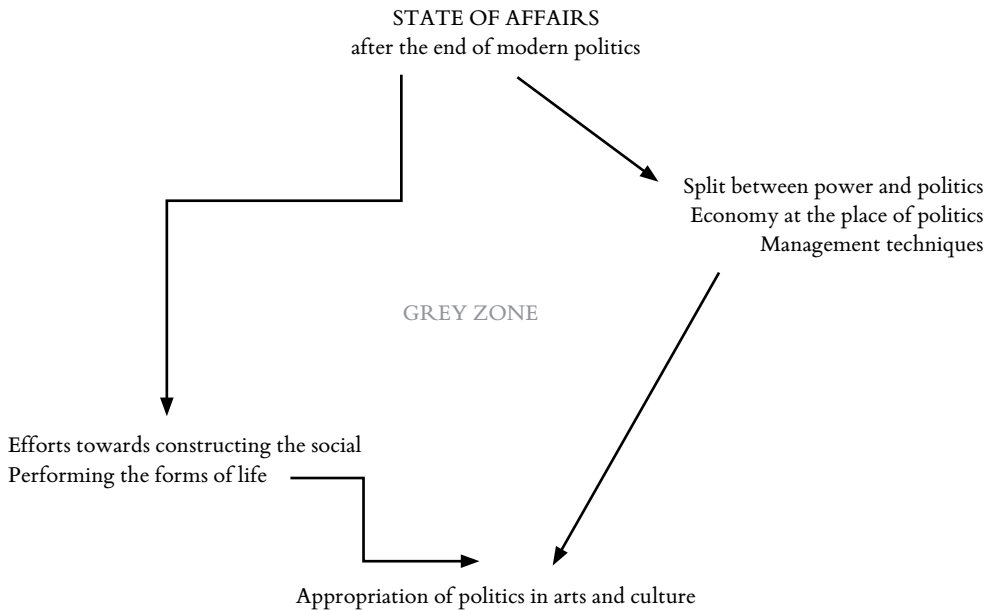
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53 Richard Sennett: *The Culture of the New Capitalism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, 62.

54 Ibid., 135.

55 Krečič: “Pogovor s filozofinjo Alenko Zupančič”, 24–25.

## POLITICS OF THEORY

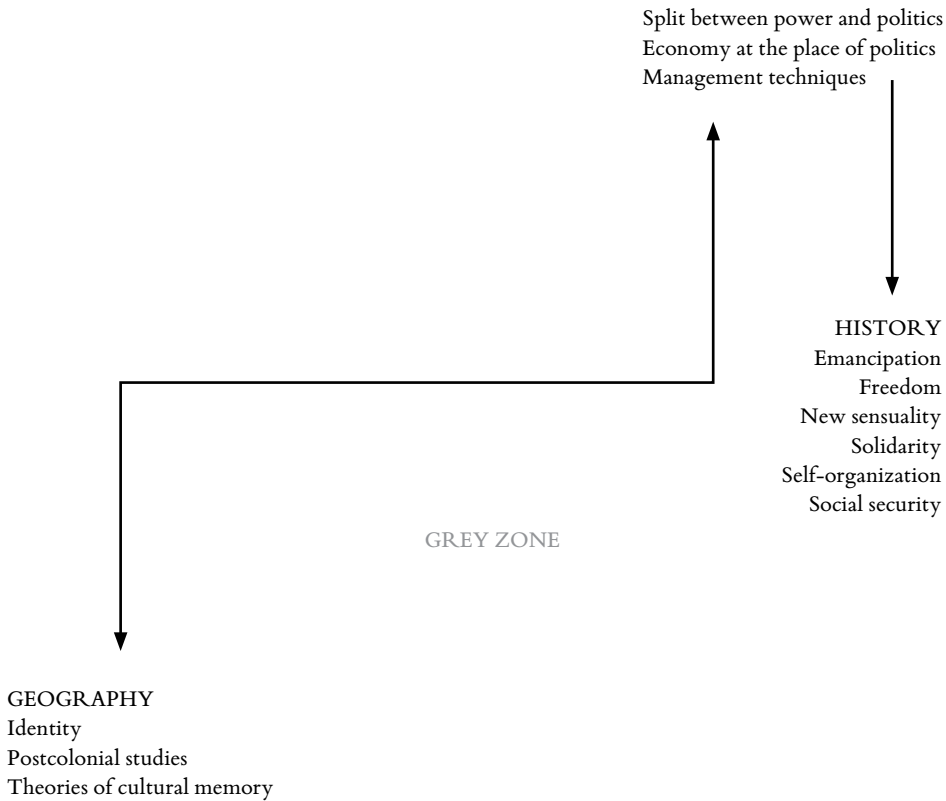


I argue that we encounter two synchronous and antagonistic claims:

- (1) The claim that there has been a transfer of the *political of politics* and *politics of the political* outside the realm of politics – meaning, into the *contexts* of culture and arts. In other words, politics and the political are put into practice in the regimes of aesthetisation of the art world and culture. Politics itself becomes a formalised technique of government (policies) in the name of the power which is no longer politics (meaning, a transparent social practice of responding to the “human condition”); and
- (2) The claim (quite opposite to the first) that social space, which no longer appears as political space (but as the space of the market), is again posited as a space of the construction of the social by means of art. This implies that the politicisation of art again brings into play the “human condition” as a specific condition of a desired sociality.

In both claims art is politicised or, more to the point, in both claims regimes of art and regimes of politics gain visibility by way of aesthetics. However, the former claim remains heavily determined by the de-politisation of politics; the latter *conceives* art and culture as “ladders” to escape from depoliticised preserves or spaces of apparent politicality to the realms of real sociality as politicality. This contradictory contemporary situation may be pictured by the following diagram:

## POLITICS OF THEORY



This model demonstrates that the split between power and politics leads to the effects of split narratives of synchronic “geography” and diachronic “history” i.e. to replacing the canonical Western historical thought on culture and arts with a new canon of geographical reflection. This train of thought was anticipated by the notions of contextualism, evolving from structuralism (partly post-structuralism) to cultural studies and their impact on “postcolonial studies” i.e. “geo-aesthetics” and “theories of cultural memory”.

Modern history seemed complete with modern phenomenologies of emancipation, freedom, new sensuality, solidarity, self-organisation and social security.

What both diagrams show is the supposition of a *grey zone* in the split between power and politics (and, analogously, between geography and history, i.e. between space and time), which is to be restructured.

The outlined theoretical issues have their instances in artistic practices.



11 Peter Eisenman: *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, Berlin, 2005.  
Courtesy Provisional Salta Ensemble



12 Igor Grubić: *Scarves and Monuments*, 2008.  
Courtesy Igor Grubić



Cultural memory appears as a poetical model with a “distanced politicisation” in relation to *contemporaneity*. With his *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* (2005) architect Peter Eisenman simultaneously points to the “strategies of memory” (paying tribute to the victims) and cultural truce in the contemporaneity of new Europe. With the projects of The Atlas Group, Walid Raad reconstructs the memories of the traumatic Lebanon Civil War, expressing the “unspeakable of the war” through the visibility of the archives indexing the ethical and political “stains” of its witnesses and accomplices. With his project *Scarves and monuments* (2006) Igor Grubić disclosed testimonies of socialist Yugoslavia from the national contemporaneity.



13 Nika Radić: *At Home (eating)*, instalation, 2015.  
Courtesy Nika Radić



14 Nika Radić: *At Home (brushing teeth)*, instalation, 2015.  
Courtesy Nika Radić

Between the cultural memory of revolutions of modernism and the modern, homages to 1968 or expressions of yearning for a radical new “sensibility”, contemporary artistic practices referring to “revolution as an event” are played out (in, for example, *Marina Naprushkina’s* ironic installations, actions and workshops of the platform *Chto delat?*, the Iranian Islamic Revolution as featured by the group *Slavs & Tatars*, Jun Yang’s or Ai Weiwei’s parody of the relations between revolution and counter-revolution in the Chinese transition...)



15 Tadej Pogačar: *Red Umbrellas March*, performance, 2001.  
Courtesy Tadej Pogačar

Furthermore, activism and social participation (complicity, action) feature as movements from art into the realm of culture and, finally, via culture to situations of social antagonisms and conflicts, *i.e.* to the real political. As artistic practice, activism appears in quite specific situations when institutions of cultural, social or governmental work underachieve. The artist somehow becomes a social or cultural worker who operates in “micro-cultures” (of sexual workers in the case of Tadej Pogačar or cultural symptoms of transition in the case of Nikola Džafo or every day politics Nika Radić). Escape from the micro-cultures into the “restricted macro systems” is associated with the investigative work of the Critical Art Ensemble in the sphere of economic, production, market and political practices, like the global Internet or genetic engineering. The Belgrade movement *Žene u crnom* stepped out from the commonly feminist “politics of difference” into an “anti-war politics” common for critical political practice on a totalizing level.

A radical turn from micro-politics to “politicised sociality” may be entertained with political movements like Occupy Wall Street or the Egyptian revolution of 2011 and 2013 protests in Turkey. These phenomena did not come about with artistic intentions; however, aestheticisation was part of their renewal of the common, *i.e.* social political resistance. The failure of these movements testifies to the vulnerability of “self-organised resistance”, when exposed to the technologies of government which conceal the real centers of power.

One of the phenomena of the “politicisation of art”, approaching the models of modernist politicisation (for example, realist art of the 19th and 20th centuries) is artists’ reaction to terrorism and the war against terrorism in the first decade of the 21st century.<sup>56</sup> This refers to the realist propaganda or anti-propaganda art

<sup>56</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell: “War Is Over (If You Want It)”, in: *Cloning Terror/The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011, 6.

dealing with September 11 (Thomas Ruff's photos) or the war against terrorism as a form of global repression from a military superpower like the USA (Richard Serra's *Stop Bush* billboard, Abdel-Karim Khalil's sculptures or Guy Gladwell's critical painting).

## ECONOMY AND BIOPOLITICS

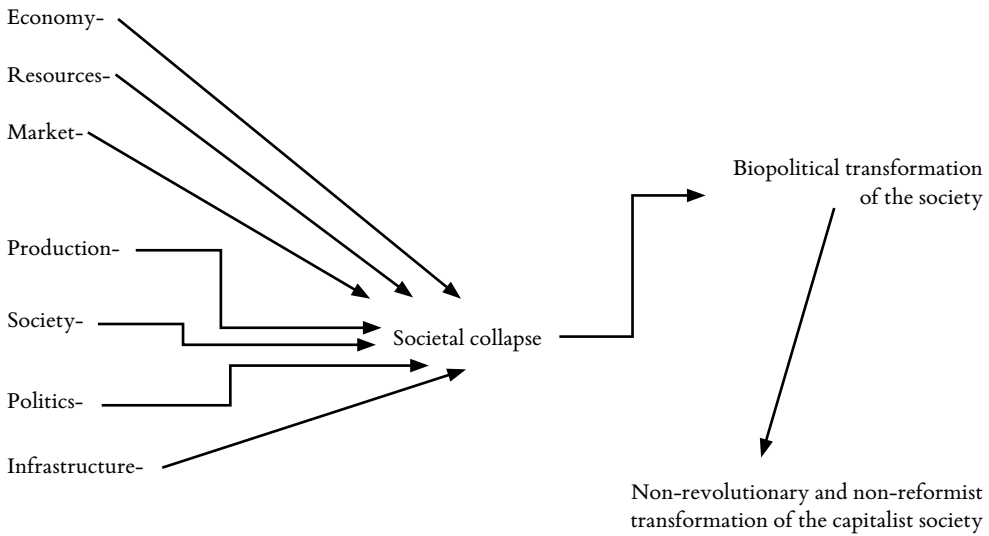
On a street book stand in Belgrade I accidentally found a book titled *Theories of Collapse*,<sup>57</sup> a selection of classical texts on the dialectics of social crises and collapses (Karl Marx, Vladimir Ilič Lenin, Heinrich Cunow, Eduard Bernstein, Karl Kautsky, Rudolf Hilferding, Rosa Luxemburg, Nikolaj Ivanovič Buharin, Fritz Sternberg, Henryk Grossman, Friedrich Pollock, Maurice Dobb, Paul Sweezy, Eugen Varga, Paul A. Baran, Paul Mattick, Samir Amin, Ernest Mandel and Joel Jacoby). The book contains elaborated typologies, analytical and polemical insights behind the causes of modern crises and fairly detailed chronologies of local and global crises from 1815 to the early 1980s when the book was published. Using additional sources, I have composed an approximate chronological sequence of major crises: 1815, 1825, 1836, 1847, 1857, 1866, 1873–1874, 1879, 1886, 1891–1895, 1899–1904, 1906–1908, 1919–1922, 1929–1932, 1973, 1981–1989, 1987, 1997, 2008–2013.

At the time, I was not interested in the reasons behind the crises, but in the frequency of their emergence. In the 19th century, crises broke out almost every ten years. The frequency of the crises did not change dramatically after World War II. Their permanence and abundance raised the question “what were all those crises about?” There may be plenty of answers to that question (the economy, resources, production, the market, society, politics) I was interested in those that could be identified as political – and not all political crises, but specifically those that establish some relation between the derived forms of life affected by the crisis. In other words, merely superficial insight into statistical data shows that each crisis resulted in changes in the forms of life, from demography (settlement, migrations) to standards of living, social security or buying power, *i.e.* to free or limited choices in the ways one lives one's everyday life. This insight stirred some vague intuitions which led me to conclude that, at all times, a crisis was an instrument or effect of the biopolitical disciplining of society. Crises I had personal experiences with – from the economic crises of self-management socialism (1960s, 1970s, 1980s) to the crises of transition in the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century – showed that “economic crises and collapses”

57 Karl Kautsky: “Teorije kriza” (Crisis theory), trans. Mirjana Pavlović, in: *Teorije sloma* (Theories of Collapse), eds. Branko Caratan, Rade Kalanj, Vjekoslav Mikecin. Zagreb: Globus, 1981, 93.

were used either by governments or government-detached bodies (secret services, banking and business corporations, tycoon alliances) in order to transform the effects of the crises (most often intentionally or randomly caused by *them*) into biopolitical instruments of surveillance and, furthermore, reshape the public and private daily lives of citizens. I propose the following scheme:

Effectuated crisis:



A crisis taking place for a possibly “objective” reason, brought about by the inner contradictions of capitalism, appears as a convenient “resource” for performing discipline. Without a crisis *i.e.* “state of emergency”, this disciplining could not be imposed legitimately. This exceptional crisis situation permits the government to reclaim a share of its impact on society, permits the market to restructure the habits of the citizen-consumers and, finally, permits production to modify itself. It allows for passing from one stage to another without perceiving the crisis as a revolution or reform followed by all the consequences of revolutions and fundamental reforms. A crisis, therefore, may be identified as a situation which claims necessary economic renewal as an excuse for a biopolitical “drill” of the population for the new conditions of consumption, exchange and production.

Examples of artistic representation (or, in recent times, the indexing) of the crisis as an instrument of biopolitics abound. The painter George Grosz witnessed the crisis of the Weimar Republic (*Grauer Tag* [Grey Day], 1921; *Die Stützen*

*der Gessellschaft* [The Pillars of Society], 1926). Joseph Beuys and, subsequently, Alfredo Jaar spotlighted the transfer of the “symbols of political economy” into the realm of art – for instance, Beuys: “Kunst = Kapital” (1979) and Jaar: “Kultur = Kapital” (2012), followed by Jota Castro (*Mortgage*, 2009) or Melanie Gilligan (*Crisis in the Credit System*, 2008).

## CONCLUSION

Politics and art are current issues at the beginning of the new century.

The relation between politics and art is traditionally assumed as didactic: it implies that art transposes politics to a level of general knowledge or abstract stances on human relations in the particularities of “real life”. The didactic function of art indeed means that the purpose of art is propaganda. In art, politics claims presence – sensually/bodily displayed as active knowledge or a *cognitively packaged* experience of desired or desirable sociality. It becomes a trace or evidence of choice for an optimal form of life surpassing the critical distance towards life itself.<sup>58</sup>

In the modern sense, the relation between politics and art is assumed as a *critical practice* – wherein art questions the didactic claims of hegemonic politics and its “normative” performance of *forms of life* which comply with the apparatuses and discourses of real and fictional power. Adorno insisted that art should be analyzed as an element of wider social processes: “It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist”.<sup>59</sup>

Politics posits art as an instrument of enframing and performing a social problem as a challenge to the normative order of power. Art posits politics as an instrument of spectacularisation (becoming visible, audible) of a social problem which is concealed behind the normative order of power, administration, and government.

In the postmodern sense, the relation between politics and art is assumed as performance or, in other words, as the representation of art and politics in the realm of cultural discourses and figures.<sup>60</sup> A Lyotardian critique of the *metanarrative*

58 Georg Lukács: *Essays on Realism*, ed. Rodney Livingstone. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1980, 37–42.

59 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 1.

60 Aleš Erjavec: “Introduction”, in: *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition. Politicised Art under*

indicates that politics is being depoliticised, and art is being *de-articised* to the level of plural cultural production, exchange and consumption of arbitrary *floating* “artifacts”. Politics and art are realms of articulation and re-articulation of the new form of depoliticised politics: that is, “cultural policies”.

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*Late Socialism*, ed. Aleš Erjavec. Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2003, 18–20.

GRAY ZONES – POLITICAL ECONOMY  
*THROUGH FORMS OF LIFE*  
 Eleven Theses on Feuerbach, Friedman,  
 Hayek and Speculative Realism

In what follows, I will point to theorisations of modern and contemporary human, cultural, and artistic practices that relate to antagonistic and certainly *turbulent* processings of production and reproduction,<sup>61</sup> political economy, real life, and forms of life in the field of contemporary non-transparent or gray sociality. In broadest terms, the field of performing sociality and its performativity is *the field of politics*, which one may trace, with its rises and falls, from Aristotle's local (*zoon politikon*) to the utterly contemporary multiple confrontation of antagonisms and the potentiality of globality. That field is not only that of a voluntary or coercive ordering of the social, but also an affect or expression of human concern as well as wish that appears in all those activities that constitute *real life* as real, true life.

My discussion rests on an analysis and application of a fragmentary statement that Engels made in a letter written long ago:

According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life [...] Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase.<sup>62</sup>

Therefore, the focus is on the following syntactic model:<sup>63</sup>

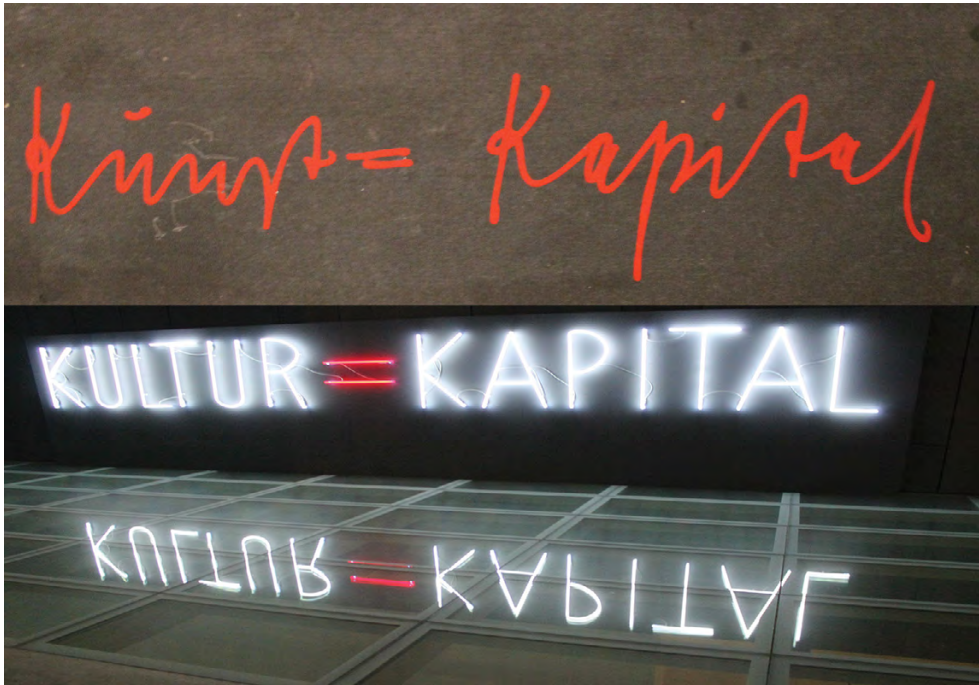
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<sup>61</sup> Hannah Arendt: "The Term Vita Activa", in: *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, 15.

<sup>62</sup> Friedrich Engels, in: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: *Selected Correspondence*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975, 396.

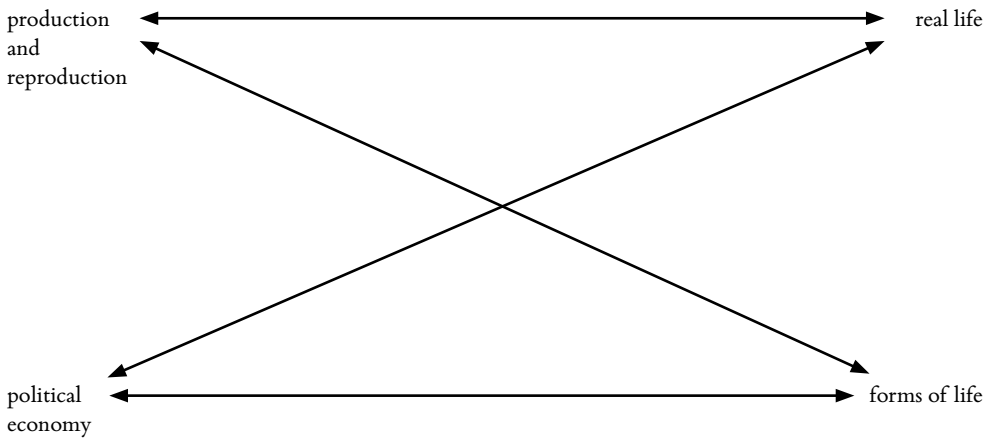
<sup>63</sup> Ronald Schleifer: "Introduction", in: A.-J. Greimas: *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, trans. Daniel McDowell, Ronald Schleifer, Alan Velie. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983, xxxv.





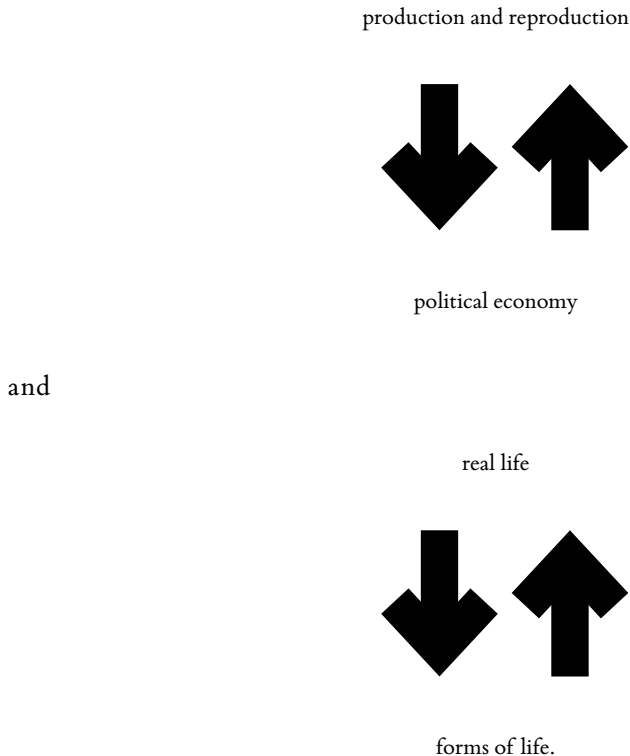
16 Provisional Salta Ensemble: *Beuys – KAPITAL – Jaar*, photo-essay, photomontage, 2014.

Courtesy Provisional Salta Ensemble

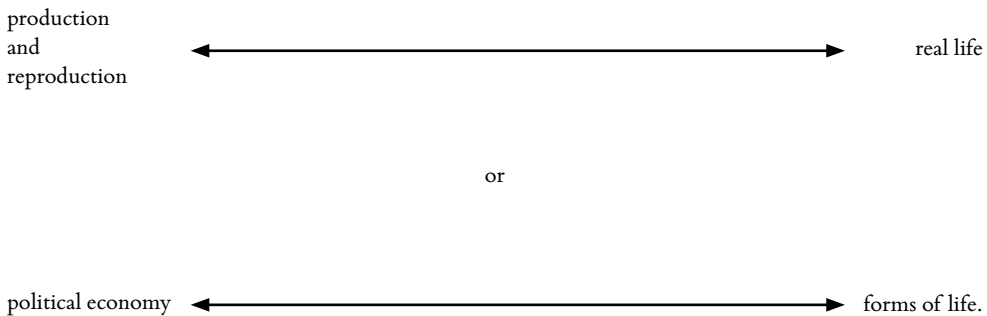


The diagram above indicates that the production and reproduction of real life form the fundamental grounding of sociality, which may be implemented by regulating and deregulating political economy, whereby ideal and non-ideal forms of life appear as a disciplinary idealisation or disciplinary regulation of real life. This concerns the disciplining, i.e. ordering, structural control, or phantasmatic projection of giving shape to the shapelessness of real life according to the demands of the ruling class; bureaucratic state apparatuses; techno-bureaucratic *actants* of the political economy of the state, union, or corporate network; as well as the will of the ruler and his “circle”; and the structural potentialities of the “world system” at present, defined by international agreements and alliances.

The diagram above shows two modular routes leading (1) from production and reproduction to political economy and from political economy to production and reproduction and (2) from real life to forms of life and from forms of life to real life. In other words, in diagrammatic terms, one may note the following relations between real and ideal events:



Therefore, the important question concerns the relationship between real life and forms of life with regards to practices of production and reproduction according to the idealisations and biopolitical functions of political economy in modern and contemporary societies. If real life “cannot be separated from its form”,<sup>64</sup> then the impact of political economy is fundamental and indisputable in giving shape to the shapelessness of real life. If real life may be isolated from its forms and those forms may be viewed as expressions of *speculative realism* or, more traditionally, idealism, then production/reproduction is aimed directly at real life, while real life, as the relationship between political economy and forms of life, persists as an *alienated* abstraction or idealisation, which is supposed to perform the function of disciplining the “world of consciousness” on the abstract level of a superior model of governing life. In other words, therefore, we have the following two schemas as two opposing solutions of “concrete reality”:



64 Following Giorgio Agamben: “A life that cannot be separated from its form is a life for which what is at stake in its way of living is living itself. What does this formulation mean? It defines a life – human life – in which the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* of life, always and above all power. Each behavior and each form of human living is never prescribed by a specific biological vocation, nor is it assigned by whatever necessity; instead, no matter how customary, repeated, and socially compulsory, it always retains the character of a possibility; that is, it always puts at stake living itself. That is why human beings – as beings of power who can do or not do, succeed or fail, lose themselves or find themselves – are the only beings for whom happiness is always at stake in their living, the only beings whose lives are irremediably and painfully assigned to happiness. But this immediately constitutes the form-of-life as political life. ‘Civitatem [...] communitatem esse institutam propter vivere et bene vivere hominum in ea’”. Cf. Marsilius of Padua: *Defensor pacis*, V, ii; “Form-of-Life”, in: *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, 151–152.

## ELEVEN THESES

### I

The main shortcoming of materialism thus far (including Feuerbach's, as well as Friedman's and Hayek's pragmatic materialism and the new ontologists' speculative realism and materialism) is that its subject, reality, sensibility is understood only in terms of dynamised objects or functional perceptions, and not as a complex human perceptual activity, a genuine material practice that is a non-subjective positing and performance, i.e. production and reproduction of real life, irreducible to a single aspect, such as the economy or, in Freud, sexuality or, in postcolonial theory, race, etc.

That is why Marx argues the following:

Hence it happened that the active side, in opposition to materialism, was developed by idealism – but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects [Objekte], differentiated from thought-objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective [gegenständliche] activity. In *The Essence of Christianity* [Das Wesen des Christenthums], he therefore regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and defined only in its dirty-Jewish form of appearance [Erscheinungsform]. Hence he does not grasp the significance of “revolutionary”, of “practical-critical”, activity.<sup>65</sup>

In pragmatic realism, Hayek and Friedman necessarily reduce practical-critical activity to a reflected economic activity that reflects and renders sustainable contemporary late-industrial or post-industrial *forms of life* without addressing the activity of the production and reproduction of life that transcends human labour, which means its real and ubiquitous problematic nature of actant being in life and becoming real life. The problem concerns economic *sustainability* – what enables sustainability? Does this concern the instrumental potentiality of the economy, which reduces the “political” in favour of the *effective* or the other way around, enables sustainability as the ideal of politicisation even when sustainability itself no longer functions on the level of sustainability, as in contemporary economic crises since 2000?

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65 Karl Marx: “Theses On Feuerbach”, in: Marx/Engels Internet Archive (marxist.org). Source: Karl Marx: “Theses On Feuerbach”, in: *Marx/Engels Selected Works*, vol. 1. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969, 13–15.

Moreover, contrary to all idealisms: abstraction or speculative re-ontologisation is an effect of real human activity, i.e. practice. There is no abstraction outside practice. That is why in traditional terms, abstraction is not an expression of idealism, that is, contemporary speculative realism, but a point of resistance to them – or is it!?

2

The question whether *objective truth* pertains to human thought is not one of theory as an alienated practice, but “only a practical” question. In practice, one must prove the veracity and power of one’s thinking, in other words, that one’s thought is both-sided as an individual and collective bodily activity. The debate concerning the reality or non-reality of thinking is a purely ‘scholastic’ debate.

But the problem today begins with the operative/instrumental projection of speculative realism as the thesis of the object-oriented mind. Is that the same schema that holds true for political economy after Friedman and Hayek as well – focused on responding to the mass and global distribution of objects for permanent consumption?

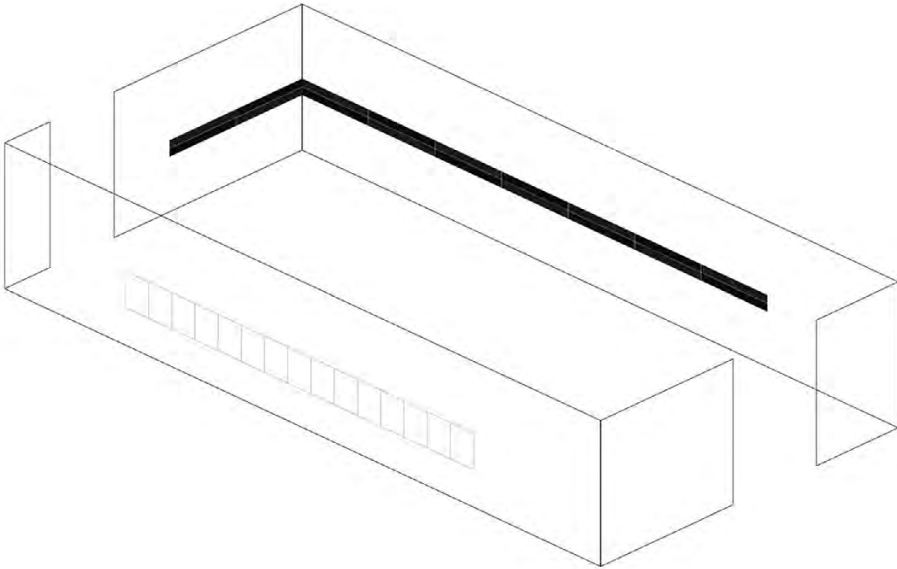
However, that is not the only possible relation, because for us, who live within social forms of life that hide real life, objects are mind-oriented. Mind-oriented objects are “designed objects” of contemporary hyper-production of objecthood in a world of universal mass and global consumption. They are oriented to the mind in the same way that affects are oriented to the body! Therefore, this concerns not the mind, but the body. In real life, the notion of the body is not just a form of life – performed to the level of a sensually distributed figure. Let us remember Barthes’s words from his essay on Schumann’s romanticist music: “Soul is merely a romantic name for ‘body’”.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore, speculative realism or new materialism point to an object-oriented mind, forgetting that in the practice of human being and becoming, the mind is nothing but a doing and labouring individual or collective body – that is, a potentially active labour of an emerging real life in the transformation of the existing state of affairs into the actual, which becomes the possibility of a future world (compare with Dragomir Ugren’s “fictional models”). Moreover, it is not just the mind, i.e. “real life” that is oriented toward objects, but equally so are objects oriented toward real life – especially if we are talking about art and culture

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66 Roland Barthes: “Rasch”, in: *The Responsibility of Forms*, ed. and trans. Richard Howard. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, 308.

as a world of objects designed by people for people, for the sake of genuine human life realised through exchange, which today inevitably becomes consumption. The matter is further complicated by the fact that neither objects nor people are homogeneous, but reside in a domain of produced differences that perform the functions of natural differences, i.e. operate in a way that creates the illusion that natural differences are at work.



17 Dragomir Ugren: *The Ugren Room - Project for Tate Modern*, London, 3D drawing, 2011. Courtesy Dragomir Ugren

### 3

Marx's demand was an optimistic one:

The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of changed circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated. Hence this doctrine is bound to divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society. The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change [Selbstveränderung] can be conceived and rationally understood only as **revolutionary practice**.<sup>67</sup>

But what will happen when the axis

<sup>67</sup> Marx: "Theses On Feuerbach", 13–15.

political economy ←————→ forms of life

“has no alternative” but only the demand for a rational realisation of the chosen operative model of a pragmatic and *self-interested* political economy? What is the meaning here of the phrase “no alternative” (Margaret Thatcher)?<sup>68</sup> Does it mean that there is really no topos or interval or topos-interval to which “revolutionary practice” might lead, or exactly the opposite, for which Hayek<sup>69</sup> and Friedman provide a potential basis in the theorisation of proto-neoliberal economy: that the phrase “no alternative” means that any alternative practice may be appropriated by the practice of economy, i.e. political economy founded on understanding the axis

production  
and  
reproduction ←————→ real life

and always and concretely implementing it as that of

political economy ←————→ forms of life

That means then that production and reproduction have been appropriated by political economy, whereas real life appears in terms of forms of life as a function of political economy and its idealisations, which have turned into the pragmatic operativity of a designed world of objects, geared toward the body of the consumer.

Then it means that “revolutionary practice” is no longer **revolutionary practice** as promised by leftist revolutionary nostalgics (Žižek,<sup>70</sup> Badiou), but appropriated *esoteric* capital that enhances indirect material talk of turning from one mode of production and reproduction to another according to the functional demands

68 Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990 and the leader of the Conservative Party from 1975 to 1990.

69 Friedrich A. Hayek: “The Political Aspects of Economic Power”, in: *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, vol. 3: *The Political Order of a Free People*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, 80–83.

70 Slavoj Žižek: “How to Begin from the Beginning”, in: *The Idea of Communism*, eds. Costas Douzinas, Slavoj Žižek. London: Verso, 2010, 219.

of the dominant political economy. The thing with real revolutionary practice within real life is the opposite: *revolutionary practice* does not initiate turning from one mode of production – and reproduction – to another; rather, revolutionary practice is itself initiated by turning from one mode of production to another. The switch must be the causal event of a collapse or crisis, with affective, economic, and political consequences enabling, by means of a risky didactic, a **revolutionary practice**. At present, there is really no revolutionary practice, since every turn from a given mode of production – and reproduction – is controlled by the dominant political economy of capitalism, whereby all real life appears as a form of life, which means an object or figure in the double game of the body directed at an object and an object directed at an individual or collective body.

4

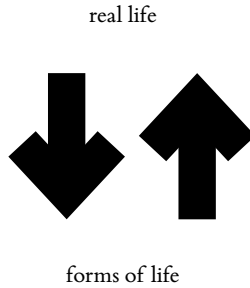
Feuerbach starts off from the fact of religious self-estrangement [Selbstentfremdung], of the duplication of the world into a religious, imaginary world, and a secular [weltliche] one. His work consists in resolving the religious world into its secular basis. He overlooks the fact that after completing this work, the chief thing still remains to be done. For the fact that the secular basis lifts off from itself and establishes itself in the clouds as an independent realm can only be explained by the inner strife and intrinsic contradictoriness of this secular basis. The latter must itself be understood in its contradiction and then, by the removal of the contradiction, revolutionised. Thus, for instance, once the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must itself be annihilated [vernichtet] theoretically and practically.<sup>71</sup>

Speculative realism begins from the fact of the software-productive-performative self-alienation and doubling of the world into a cognitive-speculative-software and secular world. These two worlds are connected in a non-transparent way. In between them, there are gray zones of contemporaneity. Both worlds are connected by means of non-vectorised performativity. Their aim is to reduce the cognitive-software-productive-performative world to a secular basis: primary objective materialism. Just as Friedman's and Hayek's economic theory reduces political economy to an algorithmic economy of operative sustainability and potential expansion, with all the negligences that the 'political' – whether singular or plural – have in the West's history of the practice of the interrelation between real life and forms of life.

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<sup>71</sup> Marx: "Theses On Feuerbach", 13–15.





5

Marx makes the claim that Feuerbach, unhappy with “abstract thinking”, prefers perception; but that he fails to see sensuality as a practical human-sensory activity.

Speculative realism seeks to resolve the subject-object relation by pointing to the “tool-being of a given object” as the reality of that object,<sup>72</sup> forgetting that the “tool-being of an object” is a practical human-sensory activity, i.e. practice that keeps connecting and disconnecting hypothetical RELATIONS OF REAL LIFE AND FORMS OF LIFE (the object and figure in relation to the subject of subjection).

Moreover, a form of life as an abstraction does not shape real life as concreteness, but real life as concreteness and, at the same time, the potentiality of possible abstractions *designs* “forms of life” as expressions of the alienation of man who is not a subject of labour but, on the contrary, a function of that labour,<sup>73</sup> for instance: of design. Design should be understood as the purposeful and planned shaping of objects within forms of life meant to attract life itself to objects that will work as “agents” of exchange, i.e. consumption, communication, or any type of serious human relation. Therefore, alienation does not equal deviation from real life or retreat from original real life, but the possibility of subjecting real life individually and/or collectively to the level of real human life sensuously perceived through interaction with forms of life. That is a place or interval with the necessity, but not also totality, of political economy.

<sup>72</sup> Graham Harman: “Elements of an Object-Oriented Philosophy”, in: *Tool-being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*. Peru, Ill: Open Court, 2002, 217–235.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Vanja Sutlić: “Urgentnost radikalno revolucionarnog mišljenja uz prevladavanje metafizičke sheme ‘stvaralaštvo – postvarenje’” [The Urgency of Radically Revolutionary Thought with Transcending the “Creativity – Reification”], in: *Praksa rada kao znanost povijesti: ogledi uz filozofijsko ustrojstvo Marxove misli* [Labour Practice as the Study of History: Essays on the Philosophical Structure of Marx’s Thought], *Edicija časopisa Kulturni radnik*, special edition, 1974, 60–81, here 80–81.

Feuerbach resolves the essence of religion into the essence of man [menschliche Wesen = “human nature”]. But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations. Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real essence is hence obliged:

- (1) To abstract from the historical process and to define the religious sentiment regarded by itself, and to presuppose an abstract – isolated – human individual.
- (2) The essence therefore can by him only be regarded as “species”, as an inner “dumb” generality which unites many individuals only in a **natural** way.<sup>74</sup>

Friedman and Hayek reduce the economic essence to the individual human essence of operative and sustainable decision-making within liberal politics, exclusively as an affect and effect of political economy.

*Economic essence* is not at all a speculative – neo-Heideggerian – abstraction found in each individual relative to the invariance of objects, as speculative realists see it. In its reality, *it* is the aggregate of variant social relations. Speculative realists, as well as Friedman and Hayek, however seemingly remote, do not undertake a critique of this **real essence**. Therefore, they are forced: (1) to make an abstraction from the historical flow and fix the economic or natural sentiment to themselves and assume an abstract – “isolated” – human individual, that is, an isolated speculative mind; (2) since essence can be understood only in terms of “genus”, as an internal, silent generality that structurally connects a large number of individuals and thereby realises the domain of real life with reproduced multiplied relations with potential and actual forms of life. The remainder of individuality as the matrix of community is, paradoxically, the populist multitude.

The nature of religion resides not in human essence but in its historically contingent function, from mysticism *qua* politics to identity *qua* politics of the homogenising multitude of a populist mass and global humanity. That is why religion has regained its importance for national post-socialist states in the global economic transitions of the last two decades. The national state is a religiously identificatory state, with its economic sovereignty suspended for the sake of

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<sup>74</sup> Marx: “Theses On Feuerbach”, 13–15.

global consumption and making profit on a non-transparent level. This is an anti-neoliberal definition of the current state of affairs in the wake of Friedman and Hayek.

7

Feuerbach consequently does not see that the “religious sentiment” is itself a **social product**, and that the abstract individual that he analyses belongs in reality to a particular social form.

Therefore, Hayek and Friedman fail to see that “the economic policy of governing” is a social product and that the abstract individual they analyse belongs to a certain form of society – community – with all the consequences of the antagonistic reality of life. When politics turns into policy, we have a serious problem – and that is the crisis of sociality.

Therefore, speculative realists fail to see that the “speculative sentiment” itself is a social – and that means external – product and that the re-ontologised abstract individual they analyse belongs to a certain social antagonism, for which they may assume an abstract and idealised form of life modelled after the “tool-being” of or from an object.

8

According to Marx, all social life is essentially **practical**. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.

A sub-thesis on Nietzsche and Badiou! Whether g/God is dead or alive really bears no relation – apart from speculative mystification – to the articulation of thinking about practice *qua* immanent multiplicity.<sup>75</sup>

As significantly practical, social life is not necessarily always pragmatic as well, or reduced, in its alienation, to the *re-ontologisation* of speculative objects in lieu of the production and reproduction – misplaced, neglected, or reduced, that is, alienated – of real life. The paradox is that real life, in order to be identified as real

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75 Peter Hallward: “Badiou’s Ontology”, in: *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, 81. Cf. Alain Badiou: “A Renewed Concept of the One”, in: *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, 10–11.

life, must be produced and reproduced as a form of life or a multitude of forms of life, and that is nothing other than the function of alienation.<sup>76</sup>

Driving theory toward mysticism, whether in new-monotheistic (Judaism – Christianity – Islam) or eclectic, trans-cultural, New Age, or speculative neo-Heideggerian or populist, integrative-consumer terms, finds its rational resolution in real human practice and its daily and continuous contradictory and antagonistic struggle. While that struggle in the context of Friedman's<sup>77</sup> and Hayek's thinking is reduced, nonetheless, to the brutality of *economic Darwinism* – whether they care to admit it or not – the answer should be sought in human practice and in conceiving that practice with all of its differences, from philosophically idealised understanding itself (*pure thinking*), the capability of judgement (*power of judgement*), and the capability of the instrumentalism of acting itself of an individual or/and collective body (*practical action*).

Practice is always more complex than our interests and their demands. Practice happens to non-idealised forms of life. In order to be a practice, acting entails multiple complexity in real life, which is open to a potentiality that suggests not only “pluggings-in” or “networkings”, but also a real break between qualitatively different world systems, in history and geography alike.

In order to be a practice, activity shows no nostalgia for things past or lost. Nostalgia is grotesque. *It* is not affectively causal, but affectively cathartic.

9

Contrary to Marx's claim that “the highest point reached by contemplative [anschauende] materialism, that is, materialism which does not comprehend sensuousness as practical activity, is the contemplation of single individuals and of civil society [bürgerlichen Gesellschaft], I”<sup>78</sup> am confronted with the *fact* that in between liberal individualism and Marxist collectivism, there is also non-transparent tension expressed in every practical activity and furthermore, that we are not able – in whatever time or space – to resolve the conflict between the individual and the collective, either on the level of the subject or that of identity.

<sup>76</sup> Speaking not as a Marxist, but as a subject coming from without: the interior is only a surface illusion. This is transparent mystification.

<sup>77</sup> Milton Friedman: “The Relation between Economic Freedom and Political Freedom”, in: *Capitalism and Freedom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, 7–21.

<sup>78</sup> Marx: “Theses On Feuerbach”, 13–15.

Therefore, mistaken are all those leftist thinkers who, in their antagonism to the liberal, turn to an anti-liberal Heideggerianism<sup>79</sup> – *hiding trees behind the forest* of the national state as the guarantee of sovereignty. Heidegger's *Rektoratsrede* clearly shows that there is nothing to be found in the exceptionality of the rescuing potential of the racial/national state – however much one opposed the International Monetary Fund and similar organisations of coercive political economy.

If there is no solution, there is at least the process or activity of solving. Solving may be replaced with constructing. All key concepts of Marx's theory are constructed and quasi-ontological, as opposed to the traditional right-wing fascination with ontological connectedness – organic coherence.

The mechanism of constructing a new identity – for example, that of a “proletarian” as opposed to those of a waged worker and owner of wage means – is important for understanding a new identity in the difference between a managing bureaucrat and a performer of services or [...] Today it is no longer the proletariat that matters, but modalities<sup>80</sup> of constructing the proletariat<sup>81</sup> [...] modalities of an identity that does not occur by means of identifying with an order that already exists in real life, but by constructing a potential subjectivity – in that regard, one should not forget the axis linking Aristotle and Marx, although, sceptically speaking, that axis is always present as a construction corresponding to the needs of turning from one mode of production – and reproduction – to another.

# IO

To reconstruct Marx's tenth thesis, which states that the “standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society or social humanity”<sup>82</sup> means to engage in a radical and revolutionary reconsideration of “human society” and “social humanity”, but that would inevitably entail a revolutionary or at least critical understanding of contemporary globalism as an internationalised social humanity, not a speculative-software global economic-communicational system of exchanging and situating a controlled surplus value (from the wealthy to the wealthier).

79 Slavoj Žižek: “The Trouble with Heidegger”, in: *In Defense of Lost Causes*. London: Verso, 2008, 117–124.

80 Sutlić: “Za razumevanje Marxovog pojma *revolucije*”, 83.

81 Jean Hyppolite: “Otudjenje društvenog i ekonomskog čovjeka u državi” [The Alienation of Social and Economic Man in the State], in: *Studije o Marxu i Hegelu* [Studies on Marx and Hegel], trans. Vjekoslav Mikecin, Rade Kalanj. Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1977, 95.

82 Marx: “Theses On Feuerbach”, 13–15.

The global movement of real life *is* the movement of social humanity, as opposed to local national plugging in to global economy and communication networks, which are a software-hardware and control-regulative metaphor for **real** human **mobility** or that of life. That is why the question of the mobility of asylum-seekers is a fundamental question of reflecting globalism as an internationalist practice as opposed to conservative racism based on stopping the “foreigners” at the always constructed borders of local national claustrophobic “treasure rooms”. The question of humanity is the serious question of constructing relations upon geographic and temporal differences of identity, which should be confronted with social humanity *qua* subjection.

II

Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways;  
the point is to change it.<sup>83</sup>

Changing the world does not mean resolving its contradictions and antagonisms once and for all! That innocent naivety always produces religious, political, even family totalitarianism in contemporary populist politics! To change the world means to conquer, actively and in practice, which may also be a theoretical practice, moments (intervals) or topoi (places) of relations of resolving contradictions and antagonisms, with all the consequences that may have for concrete individual and collective bodies.

Solutions are a mystification – solving is practice:

(A)

UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES, *LIFE* TAKES DIRECTION THE WAY A RIVER DOES.

LIFE IS NETWORKED, OFTEN UNINTENTIONALLY, BY INTERSECTING AND FLOWING BEYOND EXPECTED RELATIONS OR COMMON LOGIC.

THE BODY IS MODIFIED, MUTATED, ADJUSTED, DISAPPEARS OR SURVIVES IN BRUTAL “DARWINISM”: A WOUNDED BODY FEELS PAIN, A DISLOCATED BODY FEELS DISORIENTED, A BODY THAT LEARNS AND CORRECTS ITS MISTAKES...

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83 Marx: “Theses On Feuerbach”, 13–15.

**(B)**

THE ONTOLOGISING CHAIN OF CONTEMPORARY LIFE IS PERFORMED/ PERFORMATIVE IN NETWORKS OF DIFFERENT CHARACTERS THAT ARE NONETHELESS GLOBALISED, NOT ONLY IN ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL TERMS, BUT ALSO IN TERMS OF CARNAL SURVIVAL.

THE NATURAL NON-NATURE OF THE NETWORKED SUBJECT, OR, MORE PRECISELY, OF NETWORKED SUBJECTION, IS NO LONGER CONNECTED TO THE ONTOLOGY OF QUALITIES, BUT TO THE COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY OF NEGOTIATING THE COMPLEXITIES, MULTIPLICITIES, AND INSTANCES THAT PUSH THE BODY FROM COMPLEXITY AND MULTIPLICITY INTO THE DOMAIN OF VARIABLE DIFFERENCES.

**(C)**

CRAVING DEMOCRACY!

DEMOCRACY IS THE EXPECTATION OF THE UNEXPECTED. THE UNEXPECTED IS A CONSEQUENCE OF CONFRONTING THE COMPLEXITY AND UNEXPECTEDNESS OF DECISION-MAKING IN HUMAN FORMS OF LIFE.

THE USSR COLLAPSED WHEN REAL – POST-REVOLUTIONARY – SOCIALISM BEGAN SUPPRESSING THE FORMS OF DEVELOPING DIRECT DEMOCRACY.

(NEO)LIBERALISM ENTERED INTO A PERMANENT STATE OF CRISIS WHEN IT STOPPED DEVELOPING AND ENHANCING THE FORMS OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY.

**Although?!**

... 1845 – 1918 – 2008 – 2015 – 2016 ...

# SOCIALISM COLD WAR POSTSOCIALISM

5

## THE AESTHETICS OF DISRUPTION

Platforms of Avant-Garde Production in Socialist Yugoslavia and Serbia

6

## CONCEPTUAL ART

The Yugoslav Case

7

## BEYOND BORDERS

John Cage, Cold War Politics and Artistic Experimentation  
in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia



„ТРАЖИ СЕ ЧОВЕК“

*Prof. Šupak*  
„ON CHERCHE UN HOMME“

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**! INTERNACIONALNA REVIJA  
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**\* ИСТОК > ЗАПАД**

UREDNIK

**LJUBOMIR MICIĆ  
IVAN GOLL**

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DECEMBAR 1921



Min. S. Petrov — Beograd

Ritam

**10**

GODINA PRVA

**S. H. S.**

**ZAGREB**

**JUGOSLAVIJA**

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**ORIENT > OCCIDENT**

**3 DINARA — 3 MARK — 3 FRANC**

18 Zenit nr. 10, Zagreb, 1921

Courtesy Dubravka Đurić and Miško Šuvaković Archive

## THE AESTHETICS OF DISRUPTION

### Platforms of Avant-Garde Production in Socialist Yugoslavia and Serbia

#### ABOUT THE NEO-AVANT-GARDE: CONCEPTS AND PLATFORMS

Neo-avant-garde<sup>84</sup> are transgressive, experimental, and emancipatory artistic practices that have typically emerged as:

reconstructions, recyclings, or revitalisations of specific historical avant-garde practices, especially Dada, surrealism, and constructivism; concretely conceived, but marginally positioned projections of great modernist and avant-garde technological, emancipatory, political, and artistic *utopias*, and establishing authentic breaks, as well as critical, transgressive, experimental, and emancipatory artistic practices in the Cold War climate of the domination of high modernism in the political West and socialist modernism in the political East.

The historical avant-gardes emerged from the end of the 19th century to the late 1920s and 1930s.<sup>85</sup> They were characterised by transgressive, experimental, and innovating artistic activism in bourgeois industrial society. On the one hand, the historical avant-gardes were a precursor or driving paradigm of the establishment of modernist culture and, on the other hand, a critique of the traditionalisation of modernism in bourgeois moderate and stable art, as well as its canonised autonomy. By contrast, the neo-avant-gardes no longer enjoy the status of a vanguard or driving paradigm in relation to modernity or modernisms, but are characterised as corrective, alternative, critical, or subversive practices within the ruling high modernism or socialist modernism of advanced post-industrial

84 Miško Šuvaković: "The Yugoslav Neo-avant-garde", trans. Jelena Babšek, Stephen Agnew. *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991*, eds. Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003, 26–30; and, certainly, Hal Foster: "Who's Afraid of the Neo-avant-garde?", in: *The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996, 1–33.

85 Lev Kreft: "Avantgarda" [Avant-garde], in *Spopad na umetniški levici (med vojnama)* [Clash on the artistic left (between the wars)]. Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1989, 97–169.

societies. Therefore, one cannot simply identify the paradigms of the neo-avant-garde as a “second-hand avant-garde”,<sup>86</sup> but must interpretatively re-examine them as performances of various critical, emancipatory, creative, productive, and behavioural possibilities in the art and culture of high hegemonic modernism.

“Neo-avant-garde” thus denotes those experimental, exploratory, transgressive, and critical art practices, i.e. artistic groups, movements, and individual practices that developed an immanent critique of the ruling modernism after the Second World War. In the most general sense, “neo-avant-garde” denotes post-Informel phenomena, various neo-constructivisms, neo-Dada, Fluxus, Happening, literary explorations (letterism, concrete poetry, visual poetry, pattern textuality, phonic poetry, performance poetry, the new novel, various forms of textual production and performative actions), experimental and electronic music, experimental and anti-drama, that is, physical and site-specific theatre, experimental film (underground film, structural film, political film, extended film), structural high-tech architecture and design.

In part, the emergence and development of international neo-avant-gardes were affected by avant-garde artists or their – immediate – followers and students who continued the avant-garde movement shortly before, during, and after World War II. They included constructivists such as László Moholy-Nagy, Josef Albers, Max Bill, Nicolas Schöffer, Victor Vasarely, the Dadaist Marcel Duchamp, dancer and designer Xanti Schawinsky, and composer John Cage. The emergence and development of neo-constructivism was significantly affected by US art schools’ revivals of the Bauhaus tradition: The New Bauhaus in Chicago, 1937–1938; the School of Design in Chicago, 1939–1944; the Institute of Design, founded in 1944; and in Germany – the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm. The emergence of neo-Dada, Fluxus, and Happening was significantly affected by Black Mountain College (North Carolina, 1933–1958), which hosted German Bauhaus artists Josef and Anni Albers as well as Schawinsky, and enjoyed the collaboration of, among others, John Cage, the choreographer and dancer Merce Cunningham, architect and visionary Buckminster Fuller, and painter and performer Robert Rauschenberg. The emergence was also affected by The New School for Social Research in New York, where John Cage, starting in 1956, gave lectures to a group of painters, poets, musicians, and filmmakers: Allan Kaprow, Jackson Mac Low, George Brecht, Alfredo Hansen, and Dick Higgins, who, in the early

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86 Peter Bürger: *Theory of the Avant-garde*, trans. Michael Shaw. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, 61.

1960s, formed the core of American neo-Dadaism, Fluxus,<sup>87</sup> and Happening.<sup>88</sup> Marcel Duchamp's case is indicative inasmuch as his ready-mades from 1913–1920 strongly influenced neo-Dada, Fluxus, Happening, and early pop artists. On the other hand, in the 1950s and 1960s, under the influence of younger American neo-avant-garde artists and in line with the neo-avant-garde climate, Duchamp revised and actualised his transgressive Dadaist positions regarding postwar anti-aesthetics and anti-art.

At a certain point, the work of art ceased to be a separate, finished, and closed piece, i.e. a created, formed piece. The work of art becomes a complexly performed production, exchange, and consumption of relations between phenomena and concepts as complex multimedia texts in specific historical and cultural contexts – the worlds of art and culture. The work of art is a sort of semiologically determinable textual event that stabilises or destabilises the contextual situation, that is, the function and micro-ecology of the artwork. Therefore, the neo-avant-garde as a proto-conceptualism denotes quite heterogeneous, often indeterminate and open fields of practical and conceptual transformations of the phenomenality, status, and functions of artistic acting and ontologising the work in the paradigms of modernism during the 1950s. Various *différend*<sup>89</sup> neo-avant-garde proto-conceptualisms, from the avant-garde Duchamp, via neo-avant-garde Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, the Zero group, John Cage, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Henry Flint, the OHO movement, the Gorgona group, Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos, Vladan Radovanović, Allan Kaprow, Andy Warhol and Ad Reinhardt, to the post-minimalism of Mel Bochner and Sol LeWitt present different performing practices of treating the concept of the status and functions of artistic and cultural action. The neo-avant-garde proto-conceptualisms were the beginning of a complex and hybrid exploration of the artist-work-context-society relationship.

The emergence of the neo-avant-garde cannot be explained only as a latter-day historical revision or revival of historical avant-garde tendencies, because the social, material, and theoretical premises of its development included a series of specific moments as well. For instance, neo-constructivism introduced technologies that would have been inconceivable before World War II (cathode

87 Achille Bonito Oliva: "Ubi Fluxus ibi Motus", in *Ubi Fluxus Ibi Motus, 1990–1962*, ed. Achille Bonito Oliva, trans. Gillian Lee Hamilton, Carol Lee Rathman, Henry Martin. Milan: Mazzotta, 1990, 26–38.

88 Allan Kaprow: "A Statement", in *Happenings. An Illustrated Anthology*, ed. Michael Kirby. New York: A Dutton Paperback, 1966, 44–52.

89 Jean-François Lyotard: "Glossary of French Terms", in: *Le Différend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, 193.

ray tubes, analogue and digital technologies, computers, the laser). On the other hand, the norms of bourgeois class society were liberalised, whereby it became a consumer and mass society of a totalising media culture. But that was also a time of alternative and marginal movements, which made room for liberating sexuality, corporeality, and various forms of underground behaviour that bourgeois culture and art had previously excluded. Neo-Dada, New Realism, Fluxus, and Happening expanded the domains of artistic, political, and sexual freedoms, working to spectacularise the marginal. In part, the European neo-avant-garde<sup>90</sup> (New Tendencies, Fluxus) rests on critiquing the subjectivism and existential drama of Informel painting and is defined as a post-Informel, post-existentialist, new-left-disalienated art. In the US, neo-Dada and Happening emerged from the critique of abstract expressionism, even though they accepted its conception of action and behavioural acting in art, unencumbered by any notion of productive function, turning it toward action and performance. Certain *sources* of the neo-avant-garde were also located in extra-artistic situations: the critique of the ideological and aesthetic utilitarianism of the Cold War, the critique of socialist realism in Eastern Europe, the situationist critical theory of the spectacle,<sup>91</sup> the development of critical theory and the New Left, as well as in technocratic-oriented cybernetics, structuralism, and information theory. While artists and critics of high modernism, especially American Greenbergian modernism, strove to enclose art in the narrow professional and media-disciplinary frameworks of a highly aestheticised and artistically authentic practice proper, neo-avant-garde artists and theorists strove to open and expand art into existential/behavioural domains (city planning, design, advertising, political struggle, individual emancipation, psychotherapy), and those of spiritual activities (links to Asian mystical and religious teachings),<sup>92</sup> from Marxism via structuralism to alternative psychiatry. The neo-avant-gardes climaxed during the 1968 youth upheaval. The defeat of those alternative youth revolutionary movements was also the end of the neo-avant-garde. Paradoxically, the 1968 alternative youth culture confronted the completion of the neo-avant-garde (metaphorically, the final avant-garde) with the onset of the post-avant-garde (an anticipation of post-modernity), i.e. the discourse of first-order meta-reflection and meta-reflexive art. That is, it facilitated a direct overlapping of high, popular, and experimental art.

90 Ješa Denegri: "Nove tendencije i pojam *posljednje avangarde*", in: *Umjetnost konstruktivnog pristupa: Exat-51 i Nove tendencije* [Constructivist Art: Exat-51 and New Tendencies]. Zagreb: Horetzky, 2000, 334–339.

91 Guy Debord: *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. New York: Zone Books, 1995.

92 Zoran Belić, Dubravka Đurić, Miško Šuvaković (eds.): *Mentalni prostor*, no. 3: "Kulture Istoka – vizuelna umetnost Zapada XX veka" (Eastern Cultures – Western 20th-century Visual Art). Belgrade: Etnografski muzej, 1986.

The end of the neo-avant-garde has manifested itself in the impossibility of effecting a significant revolutionary change in the individual and society by means of art, i.e. in the collapse and disorientation of utopian and emancipatory radical modernist projects by way of establishing bureaucratic and market-institutionalised models of society, culture, and art. The bureaucratisation of society – in the political West and East alike – became a barrier for permanent artistic revolutions and developments. In the political East, the neo-avant-garde was pushed to the margins of artistic and cultural life, whereas the political West underwent a process of integrating the experimental and techno-formal achievements of neo-avant-garde artists into the ruling modernist high art and market culture.

Models of historicising the dialectical relationship between modernism and the neo-avant-garde extend from Greenbergian teleological, historicist, and essentialist modernism, via the Kuhn's and Art & Language catastrophic and revolutionary model of paradigm shifts in art,<sup>93</sup> to entirely dispersive and anarchic post-modernist conceptions of post-history, metastasising eclecticism,<sup>94</sup> multi-register archiving, media alienation through tactics of un-expression,<sup>95</sup> a-historical theories of art in cultural studies, determined through indexations of intersections between elite and popular art and culture, etc.

On the other hand, one may construct interpretative models/maps of indexed confrontations within the large and dispersed post-World War II mega-modernist paradigm. For instance:

the Cold War confrontations of the ruling Bloc cultures, i.e. engaged and Party-oriented artistic creativity in the East and the autonomous, individually, i.e. liberally and market-oriented modernist creativity, exchange, and reception of art in the West;  
distinguishing between: a) models of elite, autonomous, and artistic production in high modernism, as opposed to: b) neo-avant-garde critical, alternative, and subversive production in art and culture, and c) media production of entertainment in popular art and spectacle culture;  
the establishment of a mass totalising industry of popular entertainment in late capitalism,<sup>96</sup> which has deconstructed the tension between high

93 Charles Harrison: "Introduction", in: *Art & Language: Texte zum Phänomen Kunst und Sprache*, eds. Paul Maenz, Gerd de Vries. Cologne: DuMont, 1972, 14.

94 Achille Bonito Oliva (ed.): *Avanguardia, Transavanguardia 68–77*. Milan: Electa, 1982.

95 Germano Celant: "Unexpressionism", in: *Un-expressionism: Art beyond the Contemporary*. New York: Rizzoli, 1988, 12–18.

96 Fredric Jameson: "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", in: *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso, 1991, 1–54.

and elite culture by means of arbitrary transformations of art into popular culture and thematisations of mass culture by means of high art.

The relationship of history and actuality, more formally, of diachrony and synchrony, is posited by competing narratives addressing the relevance of this or that face-identity of art, that is, this or that face-identity of cultural identification. Therefore, the following starting point is important: there is no single coherent and integrative history of 20th-century art, but only a multitude of competing narratives of interpretation that we call histories or accept as history in relation to struggles between competing artistic, cultural, social, i.e. political platforms.

### THE NEO-AVANT-GARDE IN YUGOSLAVIA AND SERBIA: ACTING UNDER THE CONDITIONS OF REAL AND SELF-MANAGEMENT SOCIALISM

The neo-avant-garde in the Second or Socialist Yugoslavia occurred, in relative terms, between 1951 and 1973. Those dates refer to the emergence of the Zagreb-based pro- or neo-constructivist-oriented group *EXAT 51*<sup>97</sup> in 1951; the staging of *Tendencije 5* (Tendencies 5), an international exhibition of visual explorations, computer and conceptual art;<sup>98</sup> and *Rasponi 73* (Spans 73), an exhibition of Serbian neo-avant-garde and conceptual art held in Zagreb in 1973.<sup>99</sup> In the more narrow context of art in Serbia, the emergence and activity of the neo-avant-garde may be surveyed from the early experimental and multimedia artistic works of Vladan Radovanović, made after 1955,<sup>100</sup> to the exhibition-project *Drangularijum* (Knick-knackarium; Students' Cultural Centre, Belgrade, 1971), which featured Belgrade-based modernist, neo-avant-garde, and future conceptual artists exhibiting their works together for the last time.<sup>101</sup>

The Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, and Hungarian neo-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia emerged as local critiques of, or alternatives to, Yugoslavia's bureaucratised and academically softened socialist realism and then also to Socialist modernism, which

97 Ješa Denegri and Željko Koščević (eds.): *Exat 51: 1951–1956*. Zagreb: Centar za kulturnu djelatnost Saveza socijalističke omladine, 1979.

98 Božo Bek, Boris Kelemen, Marijan Susovski (eds.): *Tendencije 5* [Tendencies 5]. Zagreb: Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, 1973.

99 Biljana Tomić and Ješa Denegri (eds.): *Rasponi 73* [Spans 73]. Zagreb: Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, 1973.

100 Mirjana Veselinović: *Umetnost i izvan nje. Poetika i stvaralaštvo Vladana Radovanović* [Art and Beyond – Poetics and Creation of Vladan Radovanović]. Novi Sad: Matica srpska, Odeljenje za scenske umetnosti i muziku, 1991.

101 Biljana Tomić, Bojana Pejić, Ješa Denegri (eds.): *Drangularijum* [Knick-knackarium]. Belgrade: Galerija Studentskog kulturnog centra, 1971.

enjoyed full support in the cultural policy of the state.<sup>102</sup> Quite disparate and often mutually confronted neo-avant-garde phenomena, tendencies, and individual practices were directed, to a significant degree, both within Yugoslavia and internationally, toward post-surrealism, post-Informel art, neo-constructivism and New Tendencies, letterism, concrete and visual poetry, neo-Dada, Fluxus, Happening, experimental music, dodecaphony, aleatoric music, stepping out of music, electronic music and physical theatre, as well as performance. For instance, the 1959 exhibition of the Belgian Urvater family collection, held in Belgrade and Zagreb, featured works by surrealist and abstract artists.<sup>103</sup> Among others, the exhibition comprised works by Salvador Dalí, Giorgio de Chirico, Paul Delvaux, Max Ernst, Paul Klee, René Magritte, Joan Miró, Kurt Schwitters, Yves Tanguy, and Maria Helena Vieira da Silva.

Neo-avant-garde phenomena in Yugoslav art occupied a paradoxical status: they were both neglected and marginalised in Yugoslavia's public culture during the 1950s and officially represented in the system of socialist culture, in exhibitions (*Tendencies*, Zagreb, 1961–1973; *The Yugoslav Art Triennial*, Belgrade, 1961–1977) and international festivals, such as *Music Biennale Zagreb* (from 1961),<sup>104</sup> *BITEF* (Belgrade International Theatre Festival, Belgrade, from 1967),<sup>105</sup> the alternative film festival *GEFF* (Zagreb, 1962)<sup>106</sup> and Belgrade film festival *FEST* (1971). The neo-avant-garde's double status was a special and carefully nurtured consequence of Yugoslavia's cultural policies at the time. These policies were contradictory, probably on purpose. On the one hand, they were aimed at the artistic, cultural, and political public in the West, as a sign that Yugoslavia was accomplishing a liberal socialist social policy. Yugoslavia's official policy presented itself as a platform that respected the liberal mity of the West, its realised autonomies of art from politics and openness to international cultural co-operation. On the other hand, Yugoslavia's cultural policy was also meant for domestic political structures and the working people as a liberalised, but still Party- and institutionally controlled and didactically led policy of "democratic centralism" for the sake of accomplishing a Yugoslav self-managed socialist modernisation

102 Ješa Denegri: "Inside or Outside *Socialist Modernism*? Radical Views on the Yugoslav Art Scene, 1950–1970", in: *Impossible Histories*, eds. Djurić and Šuvaković, 170–208.

103 Anon.: *Zbirka Urvater: nadrealisti i apstraktni* [The Urvater Collection: Surrealist and Abstract Painters]. Belgrade: Beogradski grafički zavod, 1959.

104 Erika Krpan (ed.): *Muzički biennale Zagreb: 1961–1991* [The Music Biennale Zagreb: 1961–1991]. Zagreb: Muzički informativni centar Koncertne direkcije, 1991.

105 Vladimir Stamenković: *Kraljevstvo eksperimenta: dvadeset godina Bitefa* [The Kingdom of Experiment: Twenty Years of Bitef]. Belgrade: Nova knjiga, 1987.

106 Mihovil Pansini (ed.): *Knjiga GEFFA 63* [The Book of GEFF 63]. Zagreb: Organizacioni komitet GEFF-a, 1967.



and emancipation. Thirdly, Yugoslav cultural policy also directed its messages to Eastern European centres of power in the USSR and Warsaw Pact. Those messages were ambivalent, suggesting that Yugoslavia's political course was still oriented toward developing revolutionary socialism and, at the same time, that its cultural space, by virtue of its plurality, was something completely different from Eastern Europe and the rigid Soviet course of institutional surveillance, control, and punishment. Yugoslav neo-avant-gardes were therefore not dissident social, cultural, and artistic practices in the Eastern European sense, but practices relegated to the margins and interstices between Yugoslavia's cultural institutions and their agendas/interests. For example, *Tendencies*, a series of exhibitions held in Zagreb, were entirely devoted to neo-avant-garde practices, ranging from "post-Informel art", via neo-constructivism, computer art, and visual explorations, to conceptual art. By contrast, the Belgrade Triennial, as a periodical exhibition of Yugoslav art, and the Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts, as an international periodical exhibition, were geared toward the dominant artistic practices of Yugoslav and international late modernism, with some openings toward neo-avant-garde experiments.

A social history of socialist modernist and neo-avant-garde art would feature a multitude of contradictory situations, including liberalisation and opening toward "new international artistic practices" as well as numerous cases of proscriptions and administrative interventions. The latter were quite divergent in character, scope, and intensity, ranging from influencing the funding of institutional or artistic projects in culture, to appointing and removing the management of cultural institutions, censoring certain works of art, mostly those that were presented in the media (film, theatre, the press), and general political interventions and political campaigns. Public political campaigns were linked to various manifestations of socialist political life, from commemorative speeches by politicians to speeches and political platforms established and adopted at Party congresses and meetings of cultural workers' associations. There were occasional campaigns against abstract painting and "exaggerated artistic freedoms" or "artists' social irresponsibility". Thus one might cite campaigns against abstract art (1952–1963),<sup>107</sup> negative reviews of the *Fourth Yugoslav Triennial* exhibition (1971), which featured neo-avant-garde and conceptual-art phenomena, administrative pressures exerted against the political commitments of the *Susret* (1969), *Student*,<sup>108</sup> and *Vidici* magazines (1971), as well as administrative measures against the programme activities of the Novi

107 Josip Broz Tito: *Govori i članci: 4. XII 1962 – 27. XII 1963* [Speeches and Articles, 4 December 1962 – 27 December 1963], vol. 18. Zagreb: Naprijed, 1966, 68, 83, and 155.

108 Ilija Moljković (ed.): *Slučaj Student: dokumenti* [The Case of the Student: Documents]. Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2008.

Sad student centre *Tribina mladih* (Youth Forum, 1971) and the widely conceived and repressively executed Party-administrative campaign against “the black wave in culture” (1973).<sup>109</sup> Dušan Makavejev’s film *W.R.: Mysteries of the Organism* was not publicly distributed, although it was presented at international film festivals abroad. Legal action was taken against the film director Želimir Žilnik,<sup>110</sup> conceptual artists and poets Miroslav Mandić<sup>111</sup> and Slavko Bogdanović,<sup>112</sup> and film director Lazar Stojanović.

The sociologist Zagorka Golubović has pointed to the political aspects of Yugoslav society’s identity crisis, stressing that an important source of conflict and political pressure in Yugoslav socialism was the gap between proclaimed citizens’ rights – to work and self-manage, as well as basic citizens’ rights and freedoms – and their actual ability to use them.<sup>113</sup> The sociologist Nebojša Popov has interpreted the condition of political repression as an institutional expression of the crisis of the ideological monopoly of the Communist Party of Serbia and Yugoslavia, which led to a restoration of Party and state-bureaucratic monolithism.<sup>114</sup> Highlighting the political crises and conflicts in the world of fine art, from socialist realism to the collapse of real socialism, Lidija Merenik, an art historian, has pointed to the overall thesis of conflicts stemming from the contradictions of the end of modernism. In other words, one might speak of crises stemming from those of modernism as the dominant hegemonic and monolith cultural and social paradigm facing postmodern pluralities and decentrings of the field of power and influence.<sup>115</sup> In that context, various neo-avant-garde practices emerged as multifaceted

109 Bogdan Tirnanić: *Crni talas* [The Black Wave]. Belgrade: Filmski centar Srbije, 2011.

110 Bora Ćosić (ed.): *Rok*, no. 3: “Rani radovi” [Early Works]. Beograd: Bora Ćosić, 1969.

111 Miško Šuvaković: “Slučaj Slavka Bogdanovića: novosadski akcionizam ili novi koncept političke umetnosti” [The Case of Slavko Bogdanović: Novi Sad Actionism or the New Concept of Political Art], in *Evropski konteksti umetnosti XX veka u Vojvodini* [European Contexts of 20th-century Art in Vojvodina], eds. Miško Šuvaković, Dragomir Ugren. Novi Sad: Muzej savremene umetnosti Vojvodine, 2008, 268–273.

112 Miško Šuvaković: “Slučaj Miroslava Mandića: umetnost između provokacije i hodanja” [The Case of Miroslav Mandić: Art between Provocation and Walking], in *Evropski konteksti*, eds. Šuvaković and Ugren, 273–278.

113 Zagorka Golubović: “Izvori i karakter društvenih sukoba u savremenom jugoslovenskom društvu” [The Sources and Character of Social Conflicts in Contemporary Yugoslav Society], in *Savremeno jugoslovensko društvo* [Contemporary Yugoslav Society]. Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2007, 384–385.

114 Nebojša Popov: *Sukobi: društveni sukobi – izazov sociologiji* [Conflicts: Social Conflicts – A Challenge to Sociology], Belgrade: CENTARFDT, 1990; and *Društveni sukobi – izazov sociologiji: Beogradski jun 1968*. [Social Conflicts – A Challenge to Sociology: The Belgrade June of 1968]. Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2008.

115 Lidija Merenik: “Kritički model” [The Critical Model], in *Ideološki modeli: srpsko slikarstvo 1945–1968*. [Ideological Models: Serbian Painting, 1945–1968]. Belgrade: Beopolis Remont, 2001, 96–124.

evolutions or even breaks in modernist expression. Socialist modernism was largely determined by a surveyed and supported, that is, controlled autonomy of art and its developments that led toward the high modernism of universal aestheticism or toward different variants of institutionalised modernisms, from heroic and sublime modernism (Petar Lubarda), via folklore modernism (Lazar Vozarević, Lazar Vujaklija) and modern formalism (Miodrag B. Protić, Stojan Ćelić), vitalism (Olga Jančić, Ana Bešlić, Mira Jureša), to Informel (Mića Popović, Branislav Protić), radical abstraction (Olga Jevrić, Radomir Damjan, Mira Brtko), and anti-modernism (the Mediala group), etc. These different modernisms were built on notions of individual manual creativity – painting and sculpture as an expression of a complex artistic re-examination of the immanent potentiality of the artistic medium, i.e. pictoriality and sculpturality. A modernist affinity was manifested in pursuing abstraction and deriving immanent pictorial and sculptural phenomenality, which was institutionally – via museums and higher education in the arts – and canonically posited as the horizon of creativity in the fine arts. As opposed to socialist modernism, the neo-avant-garde under socialist conditions signified a multitude of completely unconnected phenomena, tendencies, or quite differentiated artistic practices that offered an alternative to canonical modernism and its public institutional presence. The Yugoslav neo-avant-gardes emerged in literature (visual poetry, textualism, experimental prose), the fine arts (post-surrealist, experimental, multimedia, synthetic, neo-Dada, Fluxus, and neo-constructivist explorations), music (late dodecaphony, aleatoric music, electronic music, music performance), and film (experimental film, underground film, political film). Many of these neo-avant-garde explorations emerged in genuine alternative spaces, from the privacy of studios/apartments to amateur movie clubs and extra-artistic spaces (the streets, dumping grounds, suburbs). A special neo-avant-garde case was BITEF (Belgrade International Theatre Festival), which emerged by presenting, with institutional, state funding, international late-modernist and neo-avant-garde theatre practice (Jerzy Grotowski, Living Theater, etc.), along with side programmes, experiments in fine art, literature, and mixed-media production.

The leading figures of socialist modernism strove for “great art”, championing the modernist notion of the immanence of a single expressive, authentic, and all-human timeless masterpiece, modelled after canonical artworks by the masters of the international “tradition of the new”, from Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, via Jackson Pollock, to Henry Moore. By contrast, the leading figures of the neo-avant-gardes abandoned the modernist specialisations of manual media in favour of mechanical reproduction and the *open work* emerging in non-psychological and thus un-expressive motivation. They searched for new media or new approaches

to the artistic and extra-artistic mediation of an idea that was not present in the world in a simple or all-human manner. Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos was among the first who perceived this complex change and civilisation break in art, highlighting the move from the manual civilisation into the industrial civilisation:

Machines  
and especially photographic ones  
initiate  
the contours  
of a new civilisation that has replaced  
the civilisation  
of manual labour  
and its matching consciousness.<sup>116</sup>

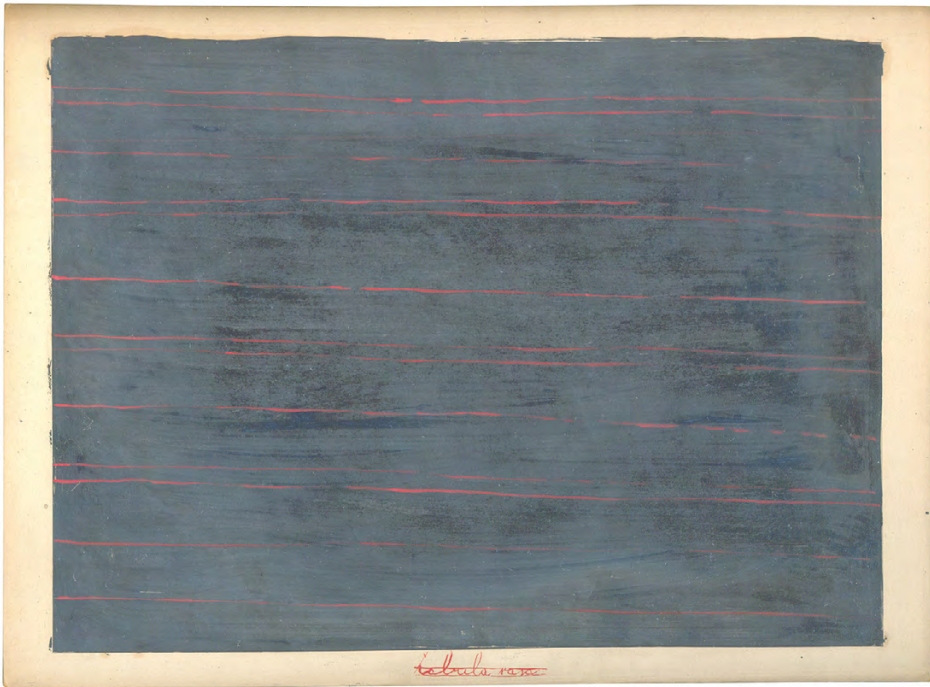
In an early text, he wrote:

An object has no attributes. But. Function.  
There are no eternal values. Not even in the arts. The claim that a work of art has eternal value is a prejudice. From the past. Another prejudice is the notion of the existence of a single work of art. There is no such thing as a lonesome and isolated work of art. There never was. It was never even made. Thus there is no need to assume that it was able. To be. Or that it could be. Made. Art may be grasped only in its closest social relations. Only as an activity. An engaged activity. By no means as a single act. A single "Picasso" does not exist. Alone. A single "Picasso" exists only in relation with others. With other "Picassos". That which represents artistic value is not an isolated work but the activity itself. With its own relations.<sup>117</sup>

This points to the indeterminate, open, and variable field of urban neo-avant-gardes, which have migrated from the domain of the incontestability of creation into that of critical re-examining and exploring the possibilities of contemporary or media and social re-examining of art. Art was no longer treated as an effect of creation but as an *exploration range*. But such an exploration range was possible only in extreme privacy (Vladan Radovanović in Belgrade, Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos in Zagreb and Šid) or alternative channels of communication, from amateur film (*Kino klub Beograd*) to auteur magazines (*Rok*). Moreover, most of

116 Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos: "Uvod u funkcionalnu kritiku" [An Introduction to Functional Critic] in: *Fotografija i umetnost* [Photography and Art], eds. Ješa Denegri, Vojin Bašičević. Novi Sad: V. Bašičević and Belgrade: Biblioteka grada, 1996, 31.

117 Mića Bašičević: "Aktuelnost funkcionalne umjetnosti" [The Currency of Functional Art], in: Anon., *Nova tendencija 3*. Zagreb: Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, 1965, 63–64.



19 Mangelos: *Tabula Rasa*, painting, 1951-1956  
 Courtesy Dubravka Đurić and Miško Šuvaković Archive

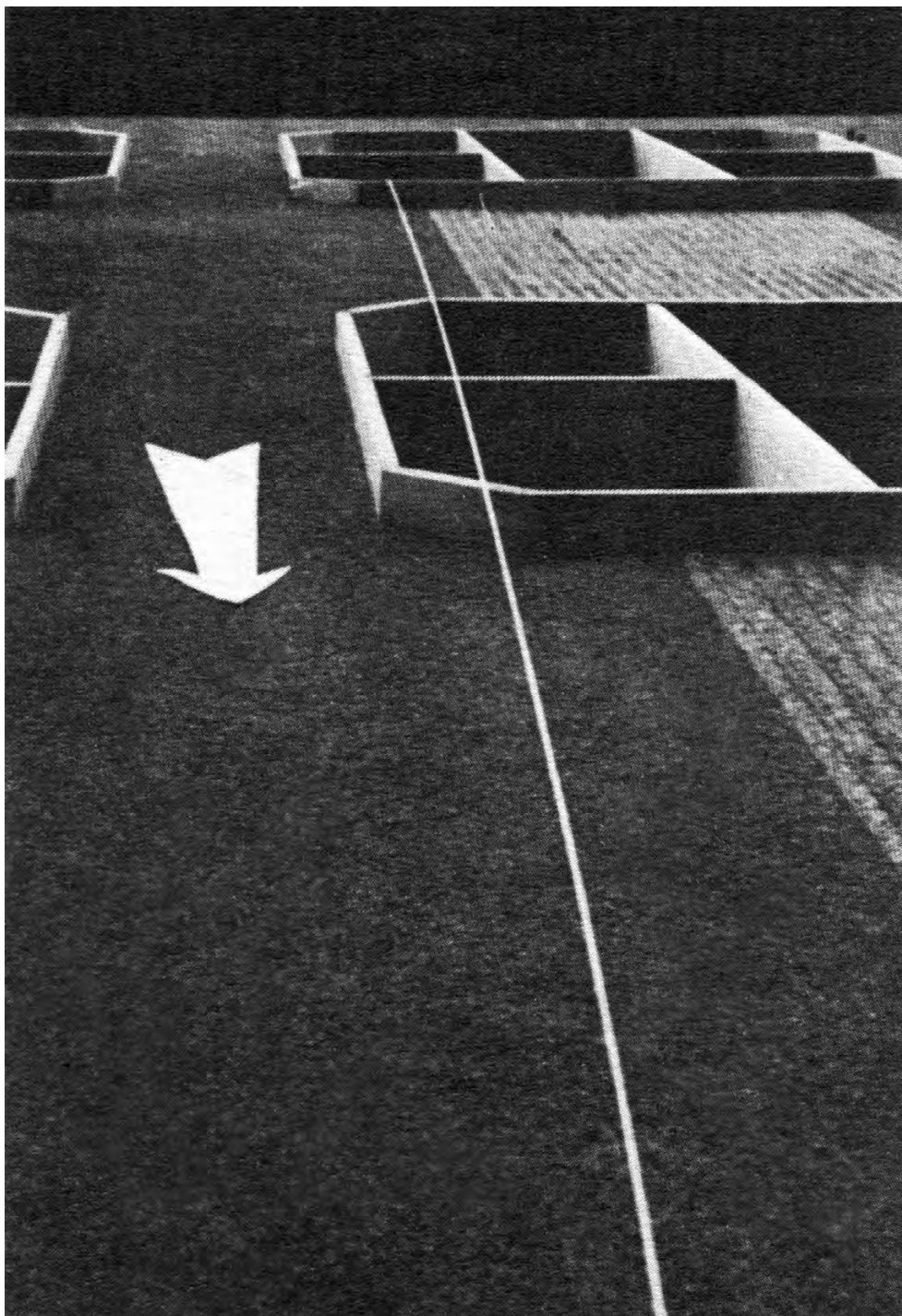
these neo-avant-garde explorations were situated in extra-political space, i.e. outside of the politicised life of Yugoslav self-managed society. Apolitical neo-avant-garde practices managed to emerge as a symptom of freedom within the utility of socialist cultural and artistic bureaucracy (Vladan Radovanović, the signalism of Miroljub Todorović, the neo-constructivism of Koloman Novak and Zoran Radović). On the other hand, certain textual production (the Vojvodina<sup>118</sup> textualists, above all Vujica Rešin Tucić, Slavko Bogdanović, Miroslav Mandić, Bálint Szombathy) and filmmakers (Dušan Makavejev, Želimir Žilnik, Lazar Stojanović) entered the field of critical political provocations that put them in conflict with the bureaucratic institutions of self-management socialism. The paradox of their conflict was that they championed radical and revolutionary leftist positions, against the bureaucratic conservatism of real-socialist cultural and social Bureaucrats.

<sup>118</sup> A semi-autonomous province of Serbia, situated in the north of the country and comprising approximately one third of its total area – translator's note.



20 Koloman Novak: *Lumino Environment - Net*, installation, 1967/2011  
 Courtesy Koloman Novak

The neo-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia and Serbia were mostly characterised by non-institutional, cultural, and social actionism that helped open the work of art to artistic action, exploring new media communications, and conceptual practice. The work of Yugoslav neo-avant-garde artists was led by notions of exploration, by searching for new sensory and inter-media relations of sensory mediations. The neo-avant-garde emerged in the atmosphere of an urban perception of contemporaneity and an attempt to provide the contemporary with a new language of artistic media and new forms of artistic behaviour. Works themselves often emerged in synchrony with similar efforts in the West (Neo-Dada, Fluxus, underground film, Happening) and the East (underground and dissident behaviour). The Yugoslav neo-avant-gardes were therefore extremely internationally oriented in their efforts to transcend timeless modernist universalism and modernist striving for creative uniqueness.



21 Slobodan Tišma: *Crna i žuta vrpca*, 1970  
Courtesy Dubravka Đurić and Miško Šuvaković Archive



## CONCEPTUAL ART

### The Yugoslav Case

#### DEFINITIONS AND HISTORY OF CONCEPTUAL ART

Conceptual art is an auto-reflexive, analytical and pro-theoretical artistic practice based on the observation of nature and the concept, worlds and institutions of art.<sup>119</sup> The works created in conceptual art are concepts and theoretical objects and their point is (a) to introduce disturbances into the traditional and usual modernist conventions of the creation, presentation, reception and consumption of art as a field of presenting autonomous and universal works of art, and (b) to undertake theoretical research in the domains of works of art and interest from which theory was once excluded (the modernistic muteness of the art of painting).

Theoretical conceptual<sup>120</sup> art is the name given to verbal debates and essays which investigate, consider and speak of nature, the concept and the point of art (works of art, reception of art, the art world, history of art, art institutions, art paradigms, the creation of art, the artist as subject, the role of the reader or viewer and the culture). Theoretical conceptual art is a critical and analytical art which developed in the Anglo-Saxon world (the group *Art & Language*, the *Society for Theoretical Art and Analysis*, Joseph Kosuth).<sup>121</sup>

Analytical art is an artistic practice based on research into the epistemological, conceptual and linguistic nature of art in the twentieth century. There are four different definitions of analytical art: (1) the definitions of analytical art given by means of analytical propositions, tautology and logical frivolity in conceptual art, (2) definitions of analytical art which explain the conditions and the reasons for applying the method of analytical philosophy and structuralism in conceptual art, (3) formalist, linguistic-semiotic definitions of analytical art in post-minimalist and post-conceptual art and, (4) a project of the analytical trend in twentieth

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<sup>119</sup> Ursula Meyer (ed.): *Conceptual Art*. New York: A Dutton paperback, 1972; or Alexander Alberto and Blake Stimson (eds.): *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1999.

<sup>120</sup> Joseph Kosuth: "1975", *The FOX* no. 2. New York, 1975, 67–96.

<sup>121</sup> Charles Harrison: "Conceptual Art and Art&Language", in: *Essays on Art & Language*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991, 47–61.



century art (from post-impressionism through analytical cubism to conceptual art and hyperrealism), which was developed by the Italian theoretician and historian of modern art, Filiberto Menna.<sup>122</sup> Art is analytical when it is defined by the concepts of logical frivolity, tautology and analytical proposition.

Mystical conceptual art (Renato Barilli) or transcendental conceptualism<sup>123</sup> (Tomaž Brejc) are the names of metaphysical concepts of conceptual art which see the reduction and dematerialisation of the work of art (a piece, an object, a form) as the focus of the artist and the people on the research and direct experiencing of spiritual powers (esoterica, magic, alchemy, ritual, telepathy). The artist does not deal with the world of objects, but only with the world of inter-subjective, psychological and spiritual relationships. Together with John Chandler, the American critic Lucy R. Lippard introduced the term dematerialisation of the art object<sup>124</sup> (1968) as a variant for the term conceptual art. The term dematerialisation of the art object implies different examples of works of art in which the character of the work of art at issue is reduced to the process with the body, or with the materials, forms of behaviour and diagrammatic or textual formulations ranging from the late neo-Dada and Fluxus through poor art, the anti-form of art and post-minimalism to theoretical conceptual art.

## CONCEPTUAL ART AND SPECIFIC CULTURES

Although conceptual art was characterised as an international<sup>125</sup> style or concept, that is to say a language of art, from 1968 to 1978, we may observe various contextual, cultural differences among individual conceptual practices. It is possible to talk about American or, even more narrowly, New York conceptual art (LeWitt, Kosuth, Weiner, Barry, Wilson, Bochner) as a post-Duchamp reaction to aesthetics and the dogmas of the Greenbergian formalist high modernism of post-art abstraction. On the other hand, English conceptual art (Art & Language, Victor Burgin) is born from art education in modernist art schools. European conceptual art (Daniel Buren, Braco Dimitrijević, Marcel Broodthaers, the Italian movement Arte Povera) emerged as a post-situationist and new-leftist critique

122 Filiberto Menna: *La Linea Analitica Dell'Arte Moderna - Le Figure e Le Icone*. Milano: Giulio Einaudi, 1997.

123 Tomaž Brejc: "OHO as an Artistic Phenomenon 1966–1971", in: *The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1966–1978*, ed. Marijan Susovski. Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1978, 13–18.

124 Lucy R. Lippard: *Six Years: The dematerialisation of the art object from 1966 to 1972*. London: Studio Vista, 1973.

125 Claude Gintz (ed.): *L'art conceptuel, une perspective*. Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989–1990.

of the art system and art institutions. German conceptual art, however, came into being in the form of research into the mystical borders of the relationship between the individual and the society (Joseph Beuys, Hana Darboven, Franz Erhard Walther). East European conceptual art was born in dramatic political conditions in which very different activities, from formal linguistic analysis of the language of art and public or private behaviour (body art, performance art), to mystical, intersubjective experiments, always have the same political consequences. Eastern European conceptual art is politicised by its own concept of inception, that is to say in its critical and decentralised positioning in the field of political control conducted by the bureaucratic structure of one-party political systems. Yugoslav conceptual art came into existence with the characteristics of Eastern European conceptual art. There was, however, one distinction. During the 1960s and 1970s, Yugoslavia was open to the West and to the influence of the artistic trends of the time.<sup>126</sup> In this sense, artists such as the members of the OHO Group, Braco Dimitrijević, Marina Abramović, Radomir Damnjan and Gergelj Urkom, took an active role in all events on the international art scene. Braco Dimitrijević and Marina Abramović built their international art during the 1970s.

Yugoslav conceptual art was created by the work and activities of groups and individuals from the particular, different cultures of Slovenia (Kranj, Ljubljana), Croatia (Split, Zagreb), Serbia (Novi Sad, Subotica, Belgrade, Ruma) and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Sarajevo). It emerged from the processes which were first called “conceptual art” or “post-object” appearances until 1971, and referred to as “new art”, “expanded media” and “new art practices” in the 1970s and early 1980s. The term “new art practices” was established to refer to various art appearances, things (in the visual arts, literature, film, theatre, music) which were art analysis, criticism and subversion of the moderate socialist modernism of the day.<sup>127</sup>

### CONCEPTUAL ART IN SLOVENIA: THE OHO GROUP, THE OHO CATALOGUE MOVEMENT AND THE FAMILY AT ŠEMPAS

The OHO Group had its roots in Kranj, a Slovenian town very close to Ljubljana. As high school students, Iztok Geister and Marko Pogačnik began making some radical cross-media experiments in poetry and the visual arts (1962 to 1966). This was to do with a neo-avant-garde atmosphere and the establishment of relations

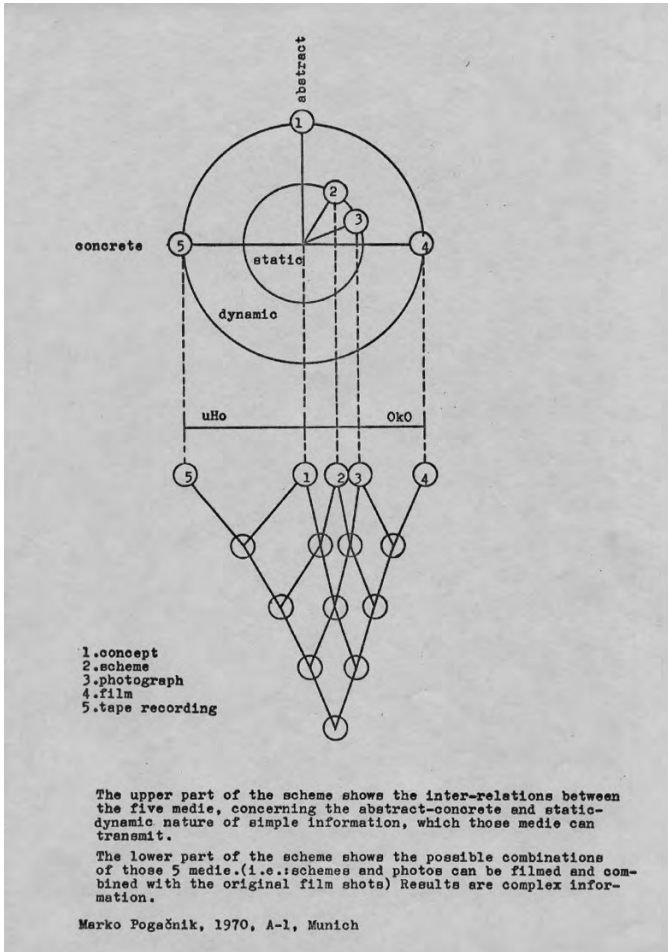
126 Ješa Denegri: “Art in the Past Decade”, in *The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1966–1978*, ed. Marijan Susovski. Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1978, 5–12.

127 Ješa Denegri and Biljana Tomić (eds.): *Examples of Conceptual Art in Yugoslavia*. Belgrade: Museum of Contemporary Art Salon, 1971.

with the historic avant-garde (Dada, the Slovenian avant-garde magazine *Tank* and surrealism), as well as being a criticism of the dominant topical existential modernism in painting, sculpture, poetry, prose and theatre. In the mid-1960s, the OHO set out the theory and practice of reism. Reism is a philosophical and art movement in Slovenian culture which refers to the return to the things themselves. This is when the works of art called artikli (objects) were created (the issue here is pop-artistic production in real socialism) as was “topographic poetry” (experiments in visual and concrete poetry). The OHO Catalogue movement emerged in Ljubljana (1967–1971), bringing together various figures from alternative culture, from the concrete poets and Ludists (I.G. Plamen, Franci Zagoričnik, Matjaž Hanžek), through experimental prose writers (Rudi Šeligo, Dimitrij Rupel), theoreticians of structuralism and post-structuralism (Taras Kermauner, Slavoj Žižek, Rastko Močnik, Braco Rotar) to the artists making up the OHO Group (Tomaž Šalamun, Andraž Šalamun, Marko Pogačnik, Milenko Matanović and David Nez).

In the second half of the 1960s, the OHO Group entered a phase of process art (arte povera, anti-form art, land art). The OHO Group became a group of five authors (Marko Pogačnik, David Nez, Milenko Matanović, Andraž Šalamun and Tomaž Šalamun). They created works which could no longer be defined as an object (“an object in the centre of the world”) but as a relationship between objects, installations or families, that is, as a visible or invisible process of objects and their mutual relationships, in other words with objects in the field of natural energies (gravitation, warmth, the flow of water). The world is presented as a dynamic order of things between the eye and the ear. The work of art comes into existence as an event or a situation in nature and then as a conceptual document and as a presentation in media of an event executed in space and time.

At the very end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s came the phase of transcendental conceptualism. The aspects of the world which are accessible to the senses are not presented or documented. They present the natural and the human world as an order of conceptually (in terms) or mentally (imaginatively) presentable relationships in the world or in the mind. The idea of dematerialising the art object appears as a framework for presenting the unrepresentable. Tomaž Brejc introduced the term “transcendental conceptualism” in order to describe the activities of the OHO Group and its aim of presenting what exists beyond what can be presented through the senses. Their works are the documentation of inter-subjective relationships between four artists or four minds (Pogačnik, Matanović, Nez and Andraž Šalamun). In other words, they worked with a designed, intersubjective “subject” which they called the “OHO man”. The OHO



22 Marko Pogačnik (Group OHO): *Concept, Scheme, Photograph, Film, Tape Recording*, diagram, 1970. Courtesy Marko Pogačnik

man existed through the roles of the relative relationships of the systematic, sensitive, rational and intuitive. This was the point at which the production of the OHO Group became part of international art practice.<sup>128</sup> They exhibited their works at important exhibitions of conceptual art and established cooperation with international artists such as Walter de Maria. In 1971, public performances were suddenly dropped. The members of the OHO group opted for the aesthetics of silence. In 1971, the OHO Group disbanded itself. Its members began living in a commune. The Commune or the Family at Šempas (Družina u Šempasu) was born from a decision by urban artists to live in the countryside. At the very outset,

<sup>128</sup> They showed in the exhibitions: *Information Show*, ed. Kynaston McShine. New York: MOMA, 1970; Anon.: *Aktionsraum 1*. München: Kunstverein, 1970; and *Concept*, eds. Nathalie Aubergé, Catherine Millet, Alfred Pacquement. Paris: Septieme Biennale de Paris, 1971.

the Commune was an “urban gesture” framed in the movements of the counter-culture or the hippy alternative of the late 1960s. At first, going to the Commune at the Šempas<sup>129</sup> was a gesture of refusal, or one of choosing the aesthetics of silence over the corruptness of the ruling post-modernist world of art and social realistic dreariness. In the next step it was also a ludistic game: a return to the ritual and to the ritual nature of the game in everyday life. Life became the substance of art and art lost its autonomy (a conceptual specific quality) from the lack of distinction in everyday life. The ideal of the avant-garde (Dada, constructivism, early surrealism) was achieved, the exclusiveness of art was lost in day-to-day human relations.

### CONCEPTUAL ART IN CROATIA

Conceptual art in Croatia<sup>130</sup> emerged in the late 1960s through criticism and subversion of high modernism (*informelle*, lyrical, abstract) as well as through the neo-avant-garde experiments of the neo-constructivist movement of the new tendency<sup>131</sup> (1961–1973). Croatian conceptual art was foreshadowed by the work and activities of the avant-garde, pro-Fluxus and pro-neo-Dadaist group Gorgona (Zagreb, 1959–1966) and the activist practices of Split artists of the Crveni Peristil Group (Split, 1966), before beginning with the work of Goran Trbuljak and Braco Dimitrijević in Zagreb in 1968.

Gorgona<sup>132</sup> was an informal art group created in the art context which followed *informel*, the Kleinian metaphysical new realism, Fluxus and neo-Dada in Zagreb from 1959 to 1966. In a lucid and critical manner, the Gorgona artists and theoreticians viewed and dealt with the relationship between the individual and manifestations of the collective, in other words the differences between the public and the private. People who socialised and collaborated within Gorgona included the painters Marijan Jevšovar, Julije Knifer, Đuro Seder and Josip Vaništa, the sculptor Ivan Kožarić, the architect Miljenko Horvat, art historians

129 Tomaž Brejc: “The Family at Šempas”, in: *The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1966–1978*, ed. Marijan Susovski. Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1978, 18–19.

130 Davor Matičević: “The Zagreb Circle”, Nena Baljković: “Braco Dimitrijević – Goran Trbuljak”, Nena Baljković: “Group of Six Artists”, Ida Biard: “The Galerie des Locataires”, in: *The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1966–1978*, ed. Marijan Susovski. Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1978, 20–37; and Marijan Susovski (ed.): *Innovations in Croatian art of the Eighties*. Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1982; and Tihomir Milovac (ed.): *The Misfits. Conceptualist Strategies in Croatian Contemporary Art*. Zagreb, Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002.

131 Ješa Denegri: *Umjetnost konstruktivnog pristupa: Exat-51 i Nove tendencije* [Constructivist Art: Exat-51 and New Tendencies]. Zagreb: Horetzky, 2000.

132 Nena Dimitrijević (ed.): *Gorgona*. Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1977.

Dimitrije Bašićević and Radoslav Putar, sociologist and cultural theoretician Marko Meštrović and later Ivo Steiner and Slobodan Vuličević. Gorgona was characterised by a sense of radical modernism, understanding of the crisis of the *informel* and existentialism, criticism of the object as a completed product-work of art, a sense of the absurd, black humour and metaphysical irony, nihilism, individual ethics as opposed to politicisation and the quest for other art forms. Gorgona and its various activities (a magazine, association, paintings and sculptures, exhibitions, concepts, actions) were very close to the work and activities of Yves Klein and Pierro Manzoni of the Zero Group. Judging by the modalities of the artists' behaviour, it is also very close to Fluxus, differing only by not being politically active and popularist but, rather, hermetical, elitist and dandified. What characterises the paintings of some of the Gorgona members is the intention of creating anti-paintings by using monotony (Knifer), monochrome (Jevšovar) and primary gestural traces and forms (Seder, Horvat, Vaništa). One particular activity of Gorgona was projects and concepts. The idea of the Gorgona projects and concepts corresponds to the textual works of Fluxus and anticipates certain textual and behaviouristic works of conceptual art. Dimitrije Bašićević Mangelos<sup>133</sup> also worked within the Gorgona group and attended Gorgona social events but did not show or exhibit his works (no stories, plates, globes). Mangelos established the proto-conceptualistic practice of producing unique works of hand-made books, objects and pictures which link together verbal and visual signs and texts.

The group *Crveni peristil* [Red Peristyle] was a moderate activist group of artists formed in Split in 1966 which was oriented towards post-object art. The group was named after a project planned by its members which was to paint the peristyle of the Split Cathedral red. The people who collaborated within this group were Pavao Pavličić, Toma Čaleta, Slaven Sumić, Nenad Đapić, Radovan Kogej, Srđan Blažević and Vladimir Dodig Trokut. The group was known for its subversive and destructive approach typical of urban post-Duchamp art of the sixties. In the course of their work they organised many activities aimed at provoking the people of Split, causing incidents, individual emancipation and anarchistic individualism. In an eclectic way they mixed into their work the tactics of underground behaviour, hippy behaviour, free sexuality, magic, beatnik behaviour, drug-taking and the Fluxus strategy of drawing attention away from the works of art and to the action and the act.

*Penzioner Tihomir Simčić* was the name of a conceptual group founded by Goran Trbuljak and Braco Dimitrijević in 1969 in Zagreb. The group was named after

133 Branka Stipančić (ed.), *Mangelos*. Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1990.



23 Goran Trbuljak: *I do not wish to show anything new and original*, print, 1971  
Courtesy Goran Trbuljak

an unknown person whom the artists had met by chance. At the end of the 1960s, Trbuljak and Dimitrijević had taken similar positions on their criticism and subversion of the art system, meaning the status of the artist, the status and function of a work of art, as well as the role, competence and power of exhibiting institutions. They worked on the concepts of the “anonymous artist”, the “accidental participant (accomplice, viewer)” and the “work of art created on the basis of an accident”. They problematised the status of the artist in a post-

Duchamp and post-situationist manner and exposed to destruction the modernist concept of a great artist who creates an original and unique work of art. Once *Penzioner Tihomir Simčić* ceased work as a group, Goran Trbuljak<sup>134</sup> worked with and on the model of an anonymous artist, surveys on the status of the artist and the issue of the relationship between the artist and the art system. Braco Dimitrijević worked with the phenomenon of an accidental passer-by, everyday places of historic importance or private places without historic significance, as well as with the identity and place of the exhibition of a work of art. In the early 1970s, Braco Dimitrijević moved to the West where he managed to build an important career as an international conceptual artist working with the paradoxes of the art system and mechanisms for assigning a status in history to the artist.

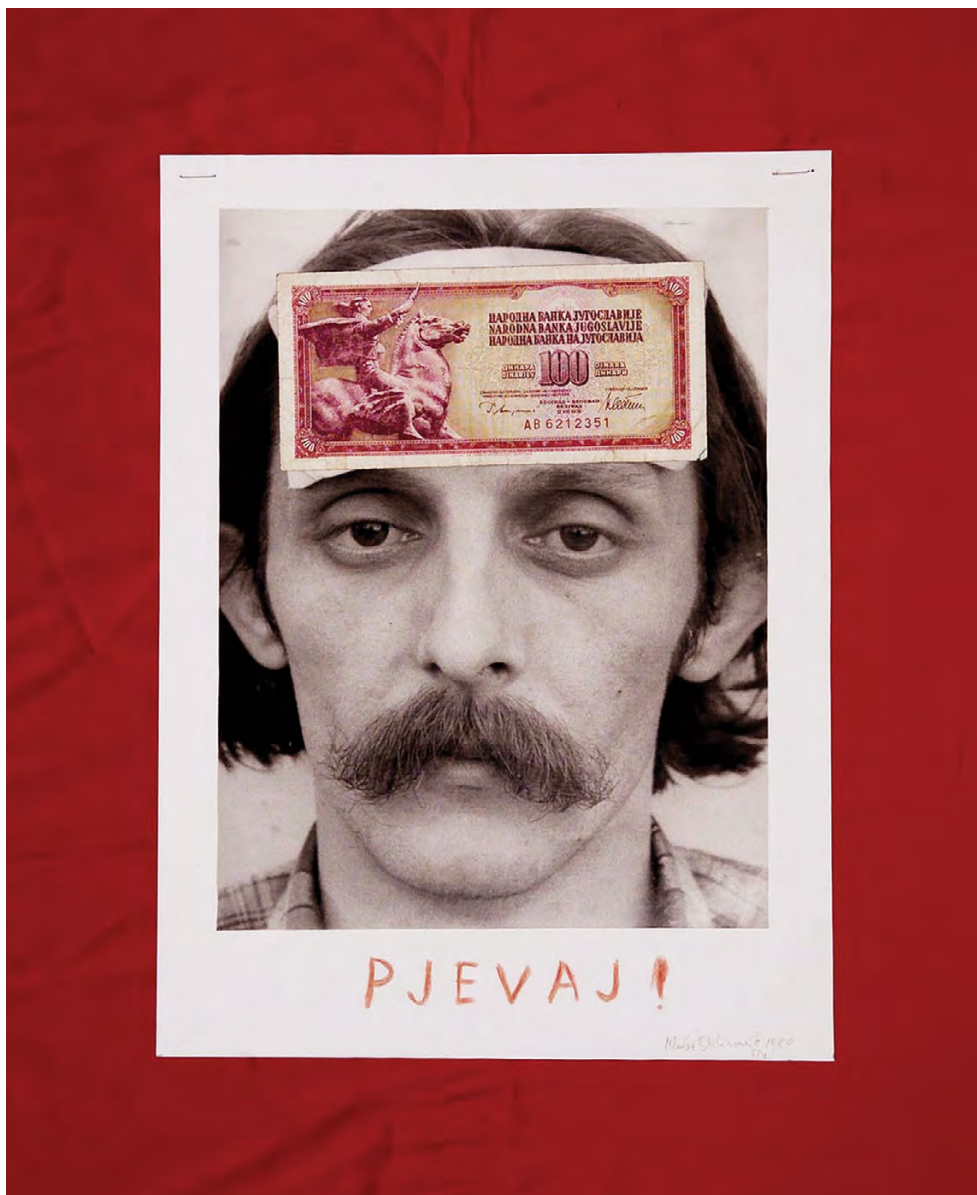
A group of six artists<sup>135</sup> worked in Zagreb from 1975 to 1980.<sup>136</sup> In the late conceptual (or post-conceptual) art espoused by the Group of Six, there is no single privileged method of the creation, production or metalingual presentation of art. Their diverse products (objects, collages, texts, drawings, actions-exhibitions, magazines, pictures, books of artists and installations) are models for provocation of the ruling national and state art and ideology, meaning the causes, symptoms or *points de capiton* which disrupt the field of normality and “regularity” of production, distribution, exchange, reception and consumption of art in the modern society of late socialism. In their work the distance between the artist and society is lost; what shows is the political sub-determination of each act of art. Mladen Stilinović defines the point of their work: “There is no art without consequences”. The aim of their art is not to present the transcendent depth of the spirit, aesthetics, art, day-to-day life and ideology. The most important part of the group’s work focused on the deconstruction of the ideology of late social realism as a horizon of social definition, ranging from great politics to the politics of everyday life. And this is how their many slogans came into existence (slogan as work of art). “Sing!” or “An attack on my art is an attack on socialism and progress”, wrote Mladen Stilinović (1977). Vlado Martek stated “Every taking of a pen into one’s hand is an act of honesty” (1976), while Željko Jerman shouted his great slogan on the street: “This is not my world” (1978).

134 Branka Stipančić (ed.): *G. Trbuljak*. Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996.

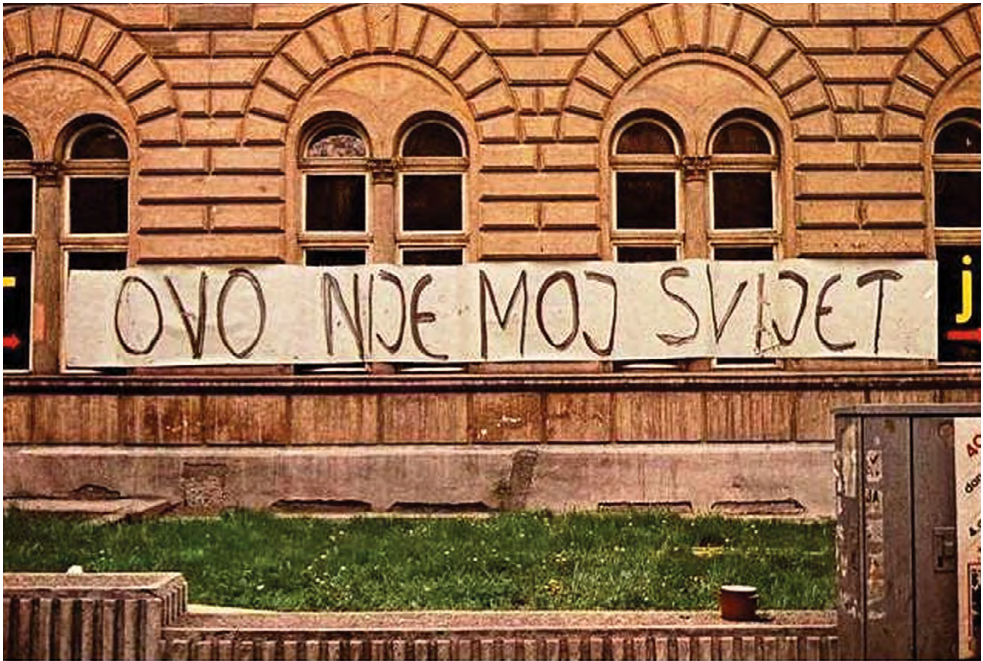
135 Members of the group were: Vlado Martek, Mladen Stilinović, Željko Jerman, Boris Demur, Sven Stilinović and Fedor Vučemilović.

136 Janka Vukmir (ed.): *Group of six authors*. Zagreb: SCCA, 1998.

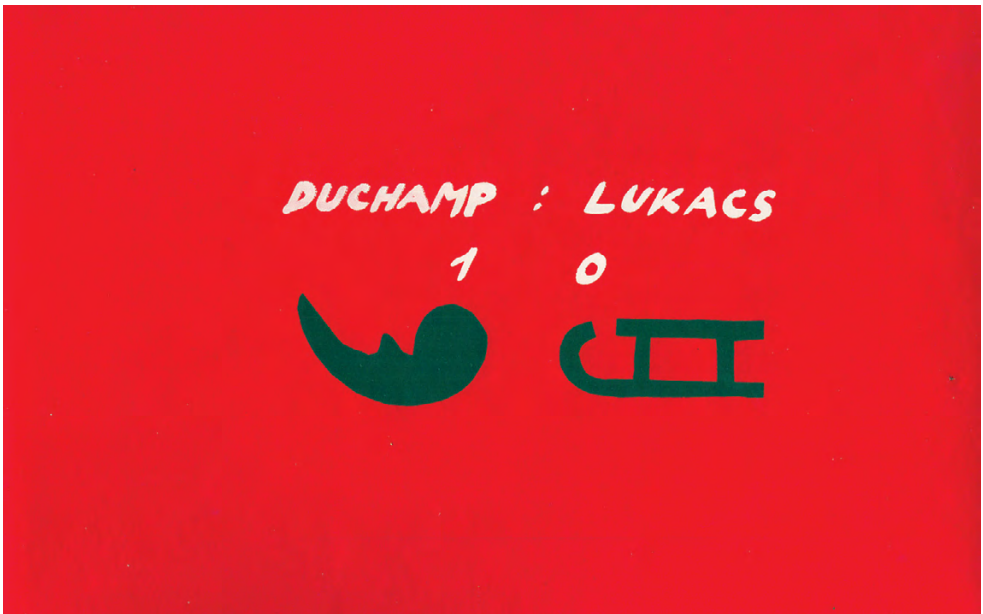




24 Mladen Stilinoić: *Sing!*, photo collage, 1980.  
Courtesy Mladen Stilinoić



25 Željko Jerman: *This is not my World*, 1976  
Courtesy Fedor Vučemilović



26 Vlado Martek: *Theoretical graphics*, print, 1995  
Courtesy Vlado Martek

## CONCEPTUAL ART IN SERBIA

Conceptual art in Serbia<sup>137</sup> began by facing the effects, anomalies and metaphysical boundaries of moderate modernism within the real socialist society. It came into existence as intellectual resistance to moderate modernist anti-intellectualism and aesthetic formalism, giving birth to several different approaches to overtaking, criticising and subverting modernism.

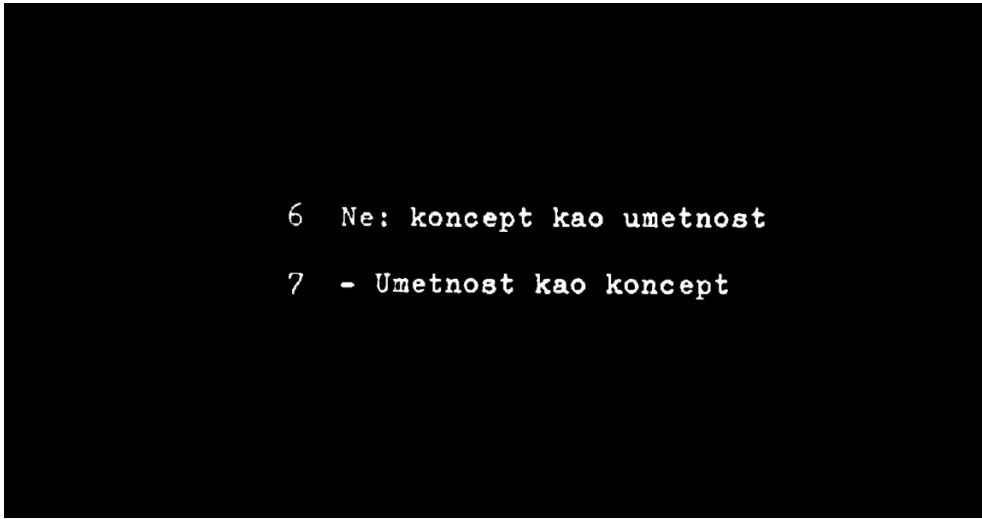
The evolution of neo-avant-garde experiments in the 1960s led to the activities of Fluxus, the neo-Dada, textualism, vocovisual and concretism. Artists began working with concepts (ideas, language) and media (the book as medium, the magazine as medium and new, unusual media). Of interest here is the work of Vladan Radovanović, who developed specific proto-conceptualist and conceptualist works from 1955 to the mid-1970s which were based on the action of the artist, on the relationship between the concept of a work of art and the carrying out and execution of the work and so on. For example, the action *Pričinjavanja* (1955–1956) translates as “art work” rather than “a work of art” because it is based on the relationship between the mental, linguistic and behavioural event rather than on a completed (manufactured, produced) piece of art.

The Belgrade painter Radomir Damnjan created an immanent criticism of the abstract high-modernist painting. Damnjan was one of the few abstract painters of high modernism in Serbian culture in the second half of the 1960s. Following his scholarship in the United States, he began to paint in a way very similar to post-art painting abstraction, to hard-edge in minimalist art. After resolving the basic painter’s issues of reductionism, literality and autonomy of pictorial composition (post-painting abstraction) he made a sudden turn to the conceptualisation of the artist’s status (the artist as a hypothesis of art) and of the work of art (the relativistic, administrative and institutional aspects of the identity, status and value of a work of art).

The Bosch+Bosch Group worked in the Hungarian border city of Subotica from 1969 to 1976. The Bosch+Bosch Group established a post-avant-garde “thematisation” of historic avant-gardes before the Second World War and of the

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137 Ješa Denegri, Jasna Tijardović, Jadranka Vinterhalter (eds.): *Nova umentost u Srbiji 1970–1980* [New Art in Serbia 1970–1980]. Belgrade: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1983; Miško Šuvaković: *Asimetrični drugi, Eseji o umenticima i konceptima* [Asymmetrical Others. Essays on Artists and Concepts]. Novi Sad: Prometej, 1996; Ješa Denegri: *Sedamdesete: teme srpske umetnosti – Nove umetničke prakse (1970–1980)* [The Seventies: The Topics of Serbian Art – New practices (1970–1980)]. Svetovi: Novi Sad, 1996.



27 Mirko Radojičić (Group KôD): *Text 2* (6 No: Concept as art; 7 Art as concept), print, 1971  
 Courtesy Mirko Radojičić

neo-avant-garde of the 1950s and 1960s. The work of the Bosch+Bosch Group (Slavko Matković, Szombathy Balint, Szalma Laszlo, Kerekes László, Ladik Katalin, Czernik Attila and Ante Vukov) was nomadic in the sense that they used various means of artistic expression in both an eclectic and an auto-reflexive way, from visual poetry, body art, performance art and land art to textual and analytical conceptual art. Balint Szombathy introduced two important artistic strategies: (1) work with the phenomena of politics in social-realist societies, for example the performance “Action: Lenin in Budapest” (1972) and (2) complex investigation of the semiology of urban and natural space. The work of the Bosch+Bosch Group was also important and influential in the exchange of information with modern Western art in the closed social-realist societies of Eastern Europe.

The KôD Group,<sup>138</sup> Group (∃<sup>139</sup> and Group (∃-KôD<sup>140</sup> worked in the domain of process and conceptual art between the 1960s and 1970s in Novi Sad, the capital of the province of Vojvodina. At the turn of the decade, Marxism (real socialism and self-governing socialism) was the outer framework of culture in Novi Sad at the time but it was also a party power mechanism and not a behavioural and creative framework for young artists. The work of the KôD Group and Group (∃ was defined as: (1) inter-textualism (behavioural, visual and linguistic languages

<sup>138</sup> Members of the group were: Slobodan Tišma, Slavko Bogdanović, Mirko Radojičić, Miroslav Mandić, Janez Kocijančič, Peđa Vranešević and others.

<sup>139</sup> Members of the group were: Vladimir Kopicl, Čeda Drča, Ana Raković, Miša Živanović.

<sup>140</sup> Miško Šuvaković (ed.): *Grupa KôD, Grupa (∃, Grupa (∃ KôD* [Group KôD, Group (∃, Group (∃ KôD – Retrospective]. Novi Sad: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1995.

confronting one another), and (2) meta-linguisticity (by creating a work of art whose function was to stimulate not an aesthetic experience but a debate on art). Group KôD and Group (∃ explicitly called into question (a) moderate modernist values of an art product, both in theory and in production, (b) bureaucratically defined boundaries between different arts as well as between art, culture and politics, and (c) the behaviour of the artist-bureaucrat, the projected new concept of the artist ranging from artist-theoretician through artist-shaman to the anarchist who seeks to destroy society's values. Group KôD, Group (∃ and Group (∃-KôD worked in the domain of performance, textual and diagrammatic analysis of the language of art and media presentations of the behaviour of the artist. Members of these groups wrote textual analyses of the term *art*, of the artist as an institution and of the status of conceptual reflection within art. Slavko Bogdanović worked with books and undertook linguistic analyses of arbitrarily selected words. Miroslav Mandić made a para-theoretical critique of the gallery system. Slobodan Tišma investigated procedures for constructing a verbal text. Mirko Radojičić analysed the term *conceptual art*. Through philosophical analyses of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Vladimir Kopicl wrote self-reflexive debates about the processes of opinion in conceptual art.

The criticism of the art system of moderate modernism in social-realist society was an important issue in the establishment of an information group of six artists<sup>141</sup> from 1971 to 1974 within the Belgrade art scene. This group established a radical critique of the taste, values and ideology of the prevailing moderate modernist art in Belgrade. These artists used outer-painting and anti-painting methods and gestures to provoke, criticise and deny the autonomy of the work of visual art and demonstrated that a work of art is a product of social and cultural determinants. From 1971 to 1973, Marina Abramović<sup>142</sup> worked on sound ambiances and body art actions. After 1973 she left Yugoslavia and began her international career with body art actions, anthropological and mystical performances. Slobodan Era Milivojević began his research of artists' behaviour using mixed media works and public happenings. Neša Paripović<sup>143</sup> focused on the photographic, on film, video and the textual documentation and analysis of the paradoxical behaviour of the artist who denounces painting in the name of everyday life as an artist. Zoran Popović created a number of works very close to analytical art and then, beginning in 1974, created in the domain of political art. For him, political art was simultaneously a criticism of social-realist institutions and an apology for the

<sup>141</sup> Members of the group were: Marina Abramović, Slobodan Era Milivojević, Neša Paripović, Zoran Popović, Dragoljub Raša Todosijević and Gergelj Urkom.

<sup>142</sup> Marina Abramović: *Artist Body*. Milan: Edizioni Charta, 1998.

<sup>143</sup> Miško Šuvaković: *Neša Paripović: Self-portraits*. Novi Sad: Prometej, 1996.

ideals of the self-governing socialist society. Dragoljub Raša Todosijević worked within the neo-Dada primary art of painting, textual practice and performance art. His work took the form of an explicit criticism of modernist painting and the institutions of modernist painting. In the second half of the 1970s he created a series of dramatic performances in Vienna entitled “Was ist Kunst” In which he simulated the atmosphere of a police interrogation or, in other words, the atmosphere of institutional violence within totalitarian societies. Gergelj Urkom worked in the field of the analytic art of painting and conceptual analyses of the process of painting and the process of picture reception. Since 1973 he has lived in London, investigating the conceptual-perceptive horizons of a painting.

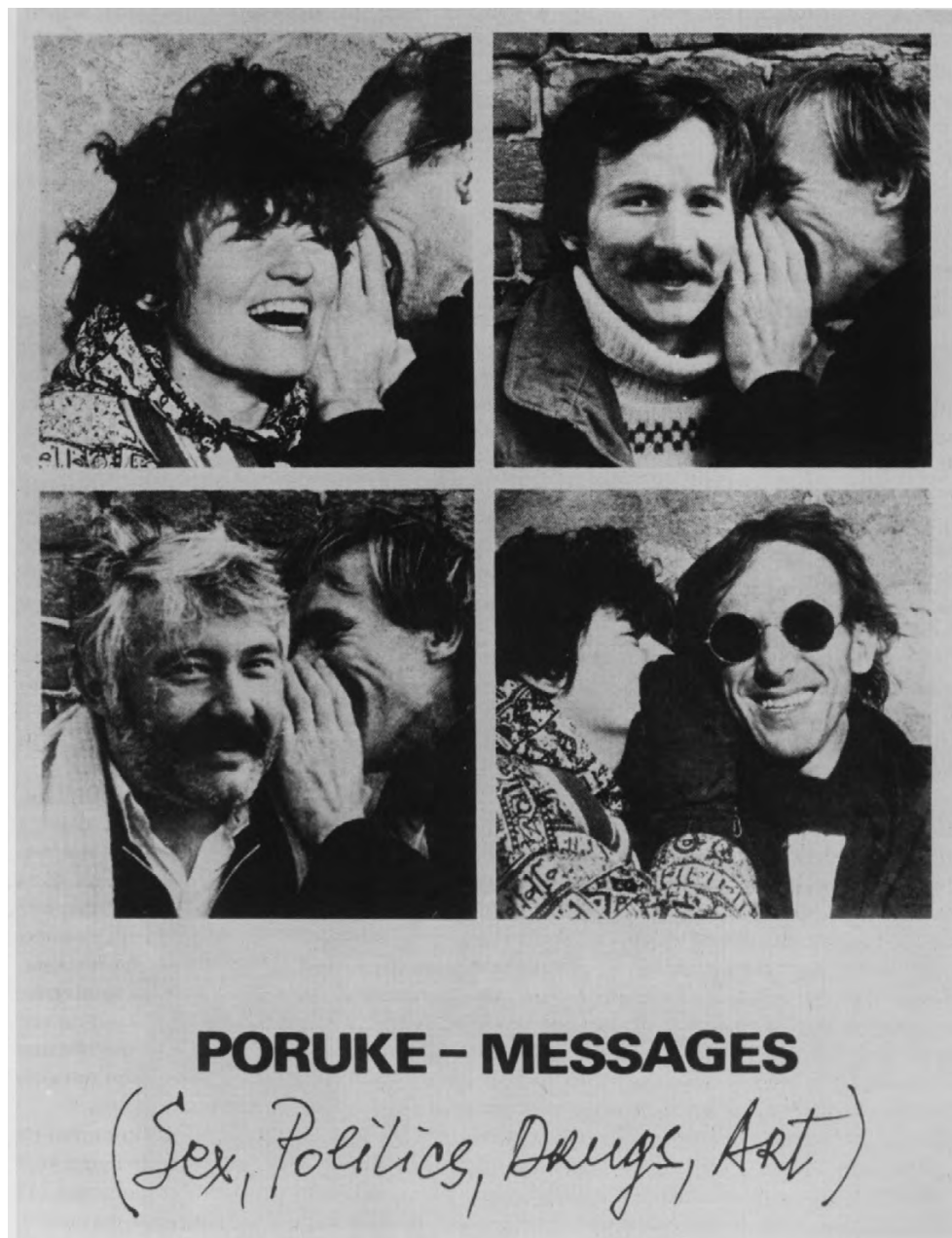
Political conceptual art was initiated through the underground strategies of the Bosch+Bosch Group (for example, Szombathy Balint’s *Lenin in Budapest* in 1972), or by means of textual para-revolutionary criticism of the politics of bureaucratic real socialism through the excesses of members of the Novi Sad groups January and February as well as the KôD Group. Slavko Bogdanović and Miroslav Mandić were both sentenced to several months in prison in the early 1970s because of their political-art texts. Political-critical conceptualism reached its peak with the establishment of an informal group-movement, October 75 (Dunja Blažević, Jasna Tijarović, Raša Todosijević, Zoran Popović, Goran Đorđević, Ješa Denegri, Bojana Pejić and Vladimir Gudac). The October 75 group, or movement, emerged from the relationship between Belgrade artists and the New York part of the Art & Language group and through the acceptance of the social realist society’s demands for an apologetic politicisation of art and culture (the insistence of art historian Dunja Blažević on self-governing art). In the course of 1974 and 1975, artist Zoran Popović and critic Jasna Tijardović spent a period of time in New York where they established cooperation with authors working on the magazine *Fox* and with the New York part of the Art & Language group. During his stay in New York, Popović filmed a documentary, “Struggle in New York” (1975) which shows political-art conflicts on the New York art scene between the Art & Language UK group, Art & Language Provisional, the authors of *Fox* magazine, the authors of the magazine *Red Hearing* and others.

Analytical art<sup>144</sup> developed in several directions through the work of members of the KôD Group and Group (3, Gergelj Urkom and Zoran Popović. Its complex and elaborated form was established through the post-scientific work of Goran Đorđević (1972–1978) and the analytical research of the art of *Group 143*.<sup>145</sup> Goran

144 Miško Šuvaković (ed.): *Examples of Analytical Works*. Belgrade: SKC Gallery; Zagreb: Galerija Nova, 1978.

145 Miško Šuvaković: “Analytical Art:Group 143”, in: *Asymmetrical Others*, 183–199.





28 Neša Paripović: *Poruke - Messages*, print, 1979  
Courtesy Neša Paripović



29 Group 143 (Jovan Čekić, Paja Stanković, Miško Šuvaković): *Theoretical Installation* (10e Paris Biennale), 1977

Courtesy Group 143

Đorđević used formal mathematical methods to analyse the problem of the visual presentation of, for example, the book in *Visual Presentation of the Process in the Square System* (1974). Group 143 introduced into art work a systematic research of the theory of art and culture, elaborating the historic term “theory of the artist” (from Bauhaus to conceptual art).

The conceptual analysis of the sensual-bodily appearance of the object was worked out through the visual and discursive speculative work of the art partnership *Verbumprogram*<sup>146</sup> (Ruma, 1975–1991). Their work began in the post-Duchamp tradition of the inter-visual confrontation of the art object, the outer-art object and the production design system. *Verbumprogram* undertook a critical analysis of the design of pop art and meta-lingual linguistic forecasting of the visual in conceptual art.<sup>147</sup>

<sup>146</sup> Ješa Denegri (ed.): *Verbumprogram*. Novi Sad: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1995.

<sup>147</sup> Members of the group were Ratimir Kulić and Vladimir Mattioni.





30 Zoran Belić Weiss: *5 Steps out of Nothing / 5 steps to Nothing or Void*, installation, 1984.  
Courtesy Zoran Belić

“Art as the Semiology of Culture” is the title of a series of art-theoretical strategies developed in the late 1970s through the ambient works and theoretical interpretations of Zoran Belić W. and Nenad Petrović. They began with the creation of ambient works of a primary reductive character (the phenomenon of an empty room, the phenomenon of cosmic emptiness, the phenomenon of floating, the phenomenon of the open and closed), to then face diverse historic or geographical cultures and the “theoretisation” of ambiances as symptoms of culture. Investigating the phenomenon of space (ambience), these artists focused on the issues of the specificity of the ambiances in the particular field of culture,

comparing, for example, the European and Asian spaces, that is to say the perceptive, rational and metaphysical spaces. The ZzIP Group (the Association for Space Research, 1983–1989) was established during the 1980s. Various conceptual artists collaborated within ZzIP (Marko Pogačnik of the OHO Group, Mirko Radojičić from Group KôD, Miško Šuvaković from Group 143, Dubravka Đurić, Zoran Belić Weiss, Nenad Petrović). Marko Pogačnik lived in Slovenia, Mirko Radojičić in Romania and France, Nenad Petrović in The Netherlands and Dubravka Đurić, Zoran Belić and Miško Šuvaković in Belgrade. These artists were interested in theoretical research into art and culture. A number of ZzIP associates and members focused on esoteric teachings (Zen Buddhism, anthroposophy, metaphysics phenomenology), while others turned to analytical philosophy and post-structuralism, that is, towards the linguistic-semiological analysis of the language of art and sign systems of modern and historic cultures. The group published a magazine, *Mentalni prostor* [Mental Space], from 1983 to 1987.

### THE END OF CONCEPTUAL ART – ECLECTIC POSTMODERN ART OF THE 1980s

Conceptual art faced a crisis at the beginning of the 1980s. The balance of power changed on the international scene, especially in Italy and Germany, and conceptual art was seen as an art form whose time had passed. Painting and sculptural projects and production became fashionable: Italian trans-avant-garde and German neo-expressionism. The 1980s were also a time when Yugoslavia faced a great economic crisis and political conflicts erupted between the leaderships of national parties. This is the point in time at which the disintegration of the second or, rather, Tito's Yugoslavia began. In this atmosphere, conceptual art disappeared from the public scene and moved into the world of private or academic research of theory and art history. Only in the late 1980s and early 1990s was conceptual art revitalised by the establishment of an artistic critique of totalitarian systems and with the birth of international neo-conceptual art.

The important centres of this new post-modernist painting in Slovenia were the coastal town of Kopar and the Slovenian capital, Ljubljana. The poetics of the new art of painting were developed by the critics Andrej Medved,<sup>148</sup> Tomaž Brejc, Jure Mikuž and Igor Zabel. Other painters were also actively working in Slovenia – Tugomir Šušnik, Andraž Šalamun, Dušan Kirbiš, Živko Marušić and Emerik Bernard. Šušnik and Bernard arrived at eclectic painting from the fundamental

<sup>148</sup> Andrej Medved: *Poetics of the Eighties Flight to Painting and Sculpture*. Koper: Edition Artes, 1991.

art of painting and analytical painting procedures. In his paintings, Šušnik reinterprets the history of modern art from Matisse to Newman and Rothke. Of interest is the example of Andraž Šalamun who, as a conceptual artist, was a member of the OHO Group during the 1960s before turning to action and Dionysian painting of monumental dimensions with abstract or iconic motifs. The post-modernist eclectic art of painting of the 1980s is an art of painting based on the enjoyment of the act of painting itself and on the rejection of the concept in the name of a post-historical evocation of sensual impressions from the history of painting and sexual fantasies. The influential practices of the Irwin Group came into existence parallel with and in opposition to the eclectic postmodernism of the art of painting which was operating and creating within the *Neue Slowenische Kunst*<sup>149</sup> movement and which developed a political retro-avant-garde art of painting based on the citatory, collage, montage and simulational presentation of the dead signs of the great postmodern political systems (real socialism, fascism, Nazism).

In Croatia, neo-expressionist eclectic painting was created by Nina Ivančić<sup>150</sup> and Edita Schubert.<sup>151</sup> The painter Željko Kipke<sup>152</sup> developed a kind of scholarly, mystical, post-historic painting in which the movements of pattern painting, motifs from the life of historic avant-gardes and mystic anagrams and formulas confront one another. Kipke also wrote poly-genre theoretical texts on painting, art and culture, reconstructing fragmentary allegoric narrations. In the 1980s, certain conceptual examples such as Mladen Stilinović,<sup>153</sup> Sven Stilinović, Vlado Martek and Željko Jerman turned to the art of painting, working with the appearances of political signs and using the picture as one element of complex narrative-political installations and performances.

Several competing postmodern styles emerged in Serbia during the 1980s.<sup>154</sup> In the early part of the decade, the conceptual artist Laszlo Kerekes developed a kind of post-naïve, eclectic and brutal-expressionist figurative painting style. The Aleterimago<sup>155</sup> group was linked to Italian trans-avant-garde painting practices. Another group of artists called “Žestoki” [The Tough Ones] (De Stijl Marković, Vlasta Mikić) followed the influence of German neo-expressionism of eclectic

149 Anon.: *Neue Slowenische Kunst*. Zagreb: GZH, 1991.

150 Anon.: *Nina Ivančić*. Belgrade: Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art, 1983.

151 Leonida Kovač: *Edita Schubert*. Zagreb: Horetzky, 2001.

152 Ješa Denegri: *Željko Kipke*. Zagreb: GZH, 1991.

153 Spomenka Nikitović: *Mladen Stilinović*. Zagreb: SCCA, 1998.

154 Ješa Denegri: *Osamdesete: teme srpske umetnosti 1980–1990* [The Eighties: Topics of Serbian Art 1980–1990]. Novi Sad: Svetovi, 1997.

155 Members of the group were: Tahir Lušić, Nada Alavanja, Vladimir Nikolić and Mileta Prodanović.

and brutal forms. Art theoretician and painter Sonja Briski developed a particular kind of scholarly post-historic painting which reinterprets motifs of architecture and the conditions of reception of a painter's interpretation, based on architectural interiors and exteriors. Conceptual artist Goran Đorđević abandoned the forms of conceptual art and began developing a procedure of copying art works and critiques of reality. He copied his childhood paintings and works from the history of modernism and especially focused on copying the mythic-modernist works of Kazimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian. Eventually he stopped making public appearances and began supporting the work of simulated (anonymous or mysteriously concealed) artists who were imitating the painting of Malevich and Mondrian. Conceptual artist Raša Todosijević redirected his political and critical conceptual practice into parodic and cynical paintings and sculptures with which he provoked the Serbian public and the dominant culture of ecstatic nationalism. His most typical works are objects and monumental sculptures bearing the caption, in German, "God loves the Serbs". The modernist painter and conceptual artist Radomir Damnjan established eclectic painting based on systems of copying masterpieces of modernism (for example, reproducing paintings by De Chirico). During the 1908s, staying very close to its conceptual analyses, the Vojvodina group Verbumprogram began investigating the phenomena of geometrical abstractionism in painting and sculpture, developing the practice of neo-geo art.

An unusual, eclectic and provocative atmosphere for making artistic experiments was created in Sarajevo<sup>156</sup> during the 1980s. Very different artistic positions here came face to face, from the world of film (Emir Kusturica), rock music (the bands Bijelo Dugme, Zabranjeno Pušenje), theatre (Sanjin Jukić) and post-conceptual experiments. Young Sarajevo artists such as Jusuf Hadžifejzović, Radoslav Tadić, Jadran Adamović and Gera Grozdanić, and artists linked with the *Zvono* (Bell) group (Hadžić, Čizmić, Hadžihasanović, Kantradžić, Gavranović, Bukvić) went through the experience of analytical tautological painting and made an about turn towards a new fictional art of painting pop-art focused allegories. Because the beginning of the 1980s also marked the birth of painting neo-styles of early eclectic postmodern art, the artists in Sarajevo did not hesitate to link the incompatible, creating in a nomadic way works of art which gave a nod to conceptual art, to neo-Dada, pop art, arte povera, neo-expressionist German painting, Italian trans-avant-garde and the neo-conceptual diminishing of borders between high and popular art. Conceptual art in Sarajevo was a late phenomenon

156 Nermina Zildžo: "The syndrome of Sarajevo's cultural circle", in: *Art and Criticism in Mid Eighties*. Sarajevo: Collegium artisticum, 1986; Radoslav Tadić and Jusuf Hadžifejzović (eds.): *Yugoslav Documents '87*. Sarajevo: Olympic Centre Skenderija, 1987; Radoslav Tadić and Jusuf Hadžifejzović (eds.): *Yugoslav Documents '89*. Sarajevo: Olympic Centre Skenderija, 1989.

within which analytical and political conceptual art was transformed into the eclectic and nomadic art of postmodernism and urban behaviour was being generated as a medium of artistic expression.

At the end of the 1980s, eclectic post-historic works were created in the Macedonian capital of Skopje<sup>157</sup> which brought together the subversion of modernist, clean and primary forms by introducing rural or ethnic elements from the mythical worlds of the Balkans. The artists working within this framework were Petre Nikoloski, Gligor Stefanov, Blagoja Manevski, Venko Cvetkov, Aneta Svetieva, Slavčo Sokolovski and Tome Acievski.

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Conceptual art in Yugoslavia was a complex series of processes which provoked, criticised and theoretically interpreted the anomalies of modernism in social realism. Paradoxically, conceptual art was both the last stage of modernism and the first wave of postmodernism.

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157 Nebojša Vilić: *States of Changes? The postmodernism & The Art of the Eighties*. Skopje: Phoenix, 1994.

# BEYOND BORDERS

## John Cage, Cold War Politics and Artistic Experimentation in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

### THE CONTEXT

In the wake of World War II, socialist Yugoslavia (SFR Yugoslavia) was characterised first by close political, military, economic, and cultural association with the Soviet Bloc (1945–1948) and then by its independent construction of self-management socialism in a complex multiethnic federal state (1950–1991). Following its break from the USSR, socialist Yugoslavia found itself between the Eastern and Western political and military bloc and, at the same time, established relations with the postcolonial Third World, founding and participating in the Non-aligned Movement.

The late 1950s and 1960s saw the forging of a network of timely and interactive international connections between Yugoslavia's cultural space, as well as those of some of Yugoslavia's constituent republics, with international art practices. The result was a series of neo-constructivist exhibitions called *Nove tendencije* (New Tendencies, Zagreb, Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1961–1973). In Ljubljana, the International Biennial of Graphic Arts was established in 1955. The Biennial became one of the major international exhibitions of graphic art. The Zagreb Music Biennale was established in 1961 and became a hub of new, i.e. avant-garde explorations in music. BITEF (Belgrade International Theatre Festival) was founded in 1967 and, alongside the Festival d'Avignon, soon became a centre of neo-avant-garde and postmodern theatre in Europe. The alternative film festival GEFF [Genre Experimental Film Festival] was established in Zagreb in 1962. GEFF was a festival of new, experimental, and amateur film. FEST, the Belgrade film festival, was established in 1971 and soon became an international festival of global stature.

## THE RECEPTION OF JOHN CAGE / MUSIC AND REFERENCES TO JOHN CAGE

A number of works by John Cage were performed at the Zagreb Music Biennale: Concerto for Orchestra (1961), *Atlas Eclipticalis*, *Winter Music*, and Variations II for Piano (1963).<sup>158</sup> Cage visited the Biennale twice: in 1963 and 1985. He conducted its instrumental ensemble, with David Tudor as the soloist. On that occasion (Saturday, 11 May 1963), works by Christian Wolff, Toshi Ichihyanagi, and Cage himself were performed. *A Collection of Rocks* was commissioned by the Biennale.<sup>159</sup> It was performed by a children's symphony orchestra at the Lisinski Concert Hall on 19 May 1985. In his lecture "How to Get Started" Cage made a reference to his visit to the Music Biennale:

I was invited to Yugoslavia and asked to make a piece for a foyer of an orchestral hall – I called the piece *A Collection of Rocks* – in which I used something between 150 and 200 high school children to copy one another with the same instrument, for instance, and take on a particular place in the foyer. There were two levels. And it was a marvelous experience, hearing these sounds come from different places and last. Ten playing on trumpets so that five would play at once and the other five would copy them. And the sound could last an Electronic length of time.<sup>160</sup>

With the New York-based troupe *Dance Co.*, choreographer Merce Cunningham performed in Belgrade at the 1972 BITEF, from 17 to 19 September. Three works were performed: *Museum Event*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, and *Event and Rain Forest – Signals – TV Rerun*, at Atelje 212, a Belgrade theatre. John Cage and the pianist David Tudor also visited Belgrade at that time.

Dubravko Detoni, a composer from Zagreb, attended György Ligeti and Karlheinz Stockhausen's Darmstadt summer courses in 1970. That year he also assisted John Cage at the Festival d'automne à Paris.

Detoni and another Croatian composer, Milko Kelemen, Slovenian composer and performer Vinko Globokar, Serbian composer Vladan Radovanović, English

<sup>158</sup> Krpan (ed.): *Muzički biennale Zagreb, 1961–1991*, 208.

<sup>159</sup> Nikša Gligo: "Kakvo glazbeno djelo predstavlja *Zbirka kamenova* Johna Cagea? Doprinos determinaciji djela u eksperimentalnoj glazbi" [What Kind of Musical Work Does John Cage's *A Collection of Rocks* Represent? A Contribution toward Defining the Work in Experimental Music], in: *Zvuk – znak – glazba: rasprava oko glazbene semiografije* [Sound – Sign – Music: Discussion on Music Semiography]. Zagreb: Muzički informativni centar, 1999, 81–103.

<sup>160</sup> John Cage: *How to Get Started. A Previously Unreleased of John Cage's 1989 Performance at Skywalker Ranch in Nicasio, California*. Philadelphia: Slought Books, 2011, 14.

composer and performer Paul Pignon, who lived in Belgrade at that time, and a Hungarian composer from Vojvodina, Ernő Király, explored the boundaries of musical creativity and music as an art, in the field of “new music”. In most of their immanently musical works, they aspired toward European avant-garde music (the summer courses in Darmstadt, IRCAM in Paris). Transcending the boundaries of music and moving toward performance art and experimental sound, their point of reference was the American experimental tradition and, first and foremost, the work of Cage.

In November 1974, Nikša Gligo, a musicologist from Zagreb, curated an exhibition entitled *Glazbena grafika iz kolekcije Erharda Karkoschke* (Works of Musical Graphic Art from the Collection of Erhard Karkoschka) at the Students' Centre Gallery in Zagreb.<sup>161</sup> The exhibition featured musical graphic art by Earle Brown, Sylvano Bussotti, John Cage, Dubravko Detoni, Milan Grygar, Roman Haubenstock-Ramati, Mauricio Kagel, Erhard Karkoschka, Milko Kelemen, Ladislav Kupković, György Ligeti, Anestis Logothetis, Josef Anton Riedl, Bogusław Schäffer, Dieter Schnebel i Karlheinz Stockhausen. The works by Cage included his Solo for Voice 1 (1958) and *59½* for a string player (1953).

The Belgrade composer and multimedia artist Vladan Radovanović offered an early discussion of Cage's music in his essay “Tendencije napuštanja oblasti zvuka” [The Tendency to Leave the Domain of Sound].<sup>162</sup> With some ambivalence, he discussed a number of instances of introducing the visual and the kinetic into music, linking them to Cage's concept of “theater”; more specifically, he discussed the status of *4'33*. On the one hand, Radovanović was close to Cage's open experimentation in art but on the other, he felt remote from Cage's artistic and theoretical anti-essentialism.

During the 1980s, Radovanović developed and extended the Cagean problematisation of the autonomy and immanence of music in his text on an anthology of pro- and post-Cagean musical and artistic practices in Serbia.<sup>163</sup> He tried to situate the current status of late avant-garde music. He developed his thesis by elaborating the concept of “leaving music”, i.e. by advancing the hypothesis that certain artists and musicians were “moving away from music” and into the fields of performance, ambient art, Fluxus and conceptual propositions or concrete poetry, the voco-visual, and musical graphic art. In his anthology, he

161 Nikša Gligo (ed.): *Glazbena grafika iz kolekcije Erharda Karkoschke* [Works of Musical Graphic Art from the Collection of Erhard Karkoschka]. Zagreb: Galerija Studentskog centra, 1974.

162 Vladan Radovanović: “Tendencije napuštanja oblasti zvuka”, in: *Zvuk* 72 (1967), 8–15.

163 Vladan Radovanović (ed.): “Posleratna srpska avangardna muzika” [Post-war Serbian Avant-garde Music], in: *Gradina* 10 (1984), 5–116.



presented works by visual artist Zoran Belić, composer and conductor Milimir Draškić, painters Vladimir Jovanović and Margita Drakulović, writer Zoran Mirković, violinist Jelena Mišević, and composers Ernő Király, Miodrag Lazarov Pashu, Miloš Petrović, Paul Pignon, Dušan Radić, Miroslav Miša Savić, Vladimir Tošić, Srđan Hofman, Miroslav Štatkić, and himself. In her book *Umetnost i izvan nje* [Art and Beyond], musicologist Mirjana Veselinović Hofman explored correspondences between Radovanović's experimentation in music and thought in criticism and theory on the one hand, and Cage's work on the other.<sup>164</sup>

In Serbian music, interest in Cage's work was concentrated in the work of the Belgrade-based composers and artists Milimir Draškić, Miodrag Lazarov Pashu, Vladimir Tošić, and Miša Savić. They began their explorations of minimal music, ambient music, musical performance art, and meta-music during the 1970s, in collaboration with the late conceptualism practised at the Students' Cultural Centre in Belgrade. The composer Miša Savić and translator Filip Filipović published a selection of works and texts by Cage.<sup>165</sup> The selected texts were taken from *Silence*, *A Year from Monday*, *M*, *Empty Words*, and other books by Cage. For these composers, Cage's work was a sign of music's emancipation and opening up, as a canonical discipline, into the domain of extended media, open work of art, and the introduction of conceptual art procedures into the domain of explorations in music.<sup>166</sup>

Nada Kolundžija explored Cage's work from the perspective of pianism. In 1981 she recorded *John Cage: Sonatas and Interludes, Music for Marcel Duchamp*.<sup>167</sup> Kolundžija redirected her pianist practice toward experimental work in pianism and the exploration of the performance of new music and new sound. During the 2000s, Branka Parlić, a pianist from Novi Sad, performed pieces by Satie, Glass, as well as Cage's *In a Landscape* and *Dream*.

On Monday, 17 May 1982, a four-day event entitled *Sedamdeset godina Johna Cagea* [Seventy Years of John Cage] was held at the Music Salon of the Students' Centre

<sup>164</sup> Mirjana Veselinović Hofman: *Umetnost i izvan nje: poetika i stvaralaštvo Vladana Radovanovića* [Art and Beyond: The Poetics and Creative Work of Vladan Radovanović]. Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1991, 25, 29, 31.

<sup>165</sup> Miša Savić and Filip Filipović (eds.): *John Cage: radovi–tekstovi 1939–1979* [John Cage: Works–Texts 1939–1979]. Belgrade: Radionica SIC, 1981.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. documents pertaining to the festival *Druga nova muzika* [Second New Music] at the Studentski kulturni centar (Students' Cultural Centre) in Belgrade, 16–17 May 1984 and Anon.: *Muzički program Studentskog kulturnog centra* [The Music Programme of the Students' Cultural Centre]. Belgrade: Sava centar, 1979.

<sup>167</sup> Nada Kolundžija: *John Cage: Sonatas and Interludes, Music for Marcel Duchamp – Prepared Piano*. Belgrade: Diskos and SKC, 1981.

in Zagreb. German pianist Herbert Henck gave an integral performance of Cage's *Music of Changes* (1952). The following day saw the public preparation of the piano for *Sonatas & Interludes* (1946–1948). The Belgrade pianist Nada Kolundžija performed the work. Željko Jerman, a visual artist from Zagreb, performed his action *Prenošenje zvuka iz prostora u prostor* [Transferring Sound from Space into Space]; 19 May 1982). The final day of the event saw the screenings of a documentary film on Cage (Greg Burton, 1977) and Nam June Paik's video work *A Tribute to John Cage* (1973).

This multitude of works of art and music did not result from any direct influence from Cage, or from applying Cage's, that is, Fluxus poetics in contemporary art. Rather, these works constituted an opening up and hybridisation of the closed and canonically determined domain of modernist music toward free experimentation, transgression, and the interdisciplinary search for new modalities of musical and extra-musical explorations.

### JOHN CAGE AND THE LITERARY NEO/POST-AVANT-GARDE

Cage's work in art was embraced and presented as a call for "new" and "open" action in the pro-Fluxus magazine *Rok* and *Mixed Media*, a book by Belgrade writer Bora Ćosić. Ćosić was one of a few Belgrade neo-avant-garde prose authors who opened up the domain of literature during the 1960s to a critical, subversive, and transgressive work in art close to neo-Dada, Fluxus, and experimental literature (concretism, visual poetry, collage poetry). Ćosić published four issues of the *Rok*: nos. 1, 2, and 3 in 1969, no. 4 as part of the *Student* magazine, edited by students of Belgrade University, and no. 4a along with the *Student* materials from 1970. *Mixed Media* was a collage-montage collection of notes, quotations, and textual-visual appropriations from various publications, which suggested the concept of "mixed media", i.e. the creation of a mixed and hybrid textual field for presenting the artist's ideas.<sup>168</sup> Ćosić made one of the first insights into the phenomenon of Fluxus. By positioning Cage against Fluxus and by pointing to Duchamp's contribution,<sup>169</sup> Ćosić anticipated the idea of "the Duchampian tradition" in the cultural space of Serbia and Yugoslavia and thereby suggested the hitherto unthinkable opening up of modern art toward extra-artistic situations, which have remained important for contemporary art since the 1960s.

168 Bora Ćosić: "‘Fluksus’ and Josip Andreis, ‘Iz historije muzike’", in: *Mixed Media*. Belgrade: B. Ćosić, 1970, 84–96.

169 Bora Ćosić: "Spisak Dišanovih zasluga" [A List of Duchamp's Contribution], in: *Rok* 1 (1969), 115.

Vladimir Kopicl, a conceptual artist and poet from Novi Sad, translated, with Cana Božičić, Cage's *Predavanje o ničemu* [Lecture on Nothing, 1959], for the journal *Polja*.<sup>170</sup> Kopicl worked in the context of experimental art practices. For neo-avant-garde and conceptual artists based in Novi Sad who worked in the domain of textual experimentation and the so-called "phenomenology of the text", Cage's written and orally delivered lectures offered a paradigmatic sample of textual innovation. Cage's texts stage confrontations between the discourses of anarchism, Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, Western (Meister Eckhart) and Eastern (Zen Buddhism) esotery, and prose experimentation (James Joyce, Stephan Mallarmé). Those and similar references were important for the KoD and (X) groups and their textual experimentation around 1970. They treated the text as a material venue for artistic action and as the confronting of an artistic position with concepts pertaining to politics, religion, philosophy, and direct human experience.

As part of *Rolywholyover*, an exhibition and set of actions organized at the Guggenheim Museum SoHo in New York to commemorate John Cage, American poet and explorer of Cage's legacy Joan Retallack performed her *Varications of Errata Suite: Memento vivere John Cage*, in collaboration with Belgrade poet Dubravka Đurić.<sup>171</sup> It was a reading of a text dedicated to Cage in two voices.

### CAGE IN THE VISUAL ARTS WORLD: EVERYTHING IS ART / EVERYTHING IS MUSIC

John Cage was certainly important for the "new artistic practices", which marked the first serious critique of modernism in Yugoslavia's cultural space, around 1970. These new practices were marked by post-media artistic production (installations, performances, interventions, activism, textual analysis), no longer concerned with the autonomy of media or disciplines of art. What follows is a brief summary of artistic explorations of "sound" and "chance".

The OHO group (Kranj and Ljubljana, 1966–1971) acted in a wide domain of post-media and post-object art, from reism via processual art to conceptual art. Milenko Matanović realised his reistic piece *Vizuelna gramofonska ploča* (A Visual Gramophone Record, 1968) in the spirit of experimental art books. Artistic actions such as *Hepening u parku Zvezda* (A Happening at the Zvezda Park; Ljubljana, 1968), *Pasija* (Passion; Bitef, Belgrade, 1968), and *Triglav* (Ljubljana, 1968) were the realisations of interactive and participatory works performed with the audience

<sup>170</sup> Džon Kejdž [John Cage]: "Predavanje o ničemu" [Lecture on Nothing], in: *Polja* 172 (1973), 13–20.

<sup>171</sup> Guggenheim Museum SoHo, New York, 24 April 1994, 1 PM.

or in specifically structured public spaces. For instance, Matanović's series of conceptual diagrams, *Interkontinentalni projekt Amerika–Evropa* (America–Europe Intercontinental Project, 1970), was based on chance. Four members of the OHO group, two in New York and two in Ljubljana, gazing at the sun, each dropped a pin on a piece of paper with a circle drawn on it. The respective positions of the pins inside the circles were then compared and interpreted as indicative of the inter-subjective relations between the four members of the group. This was a self-reflexive presentation of the role of chance in the performing of inter-subjective relations among members of the OHO group.

In 1969, Braco Dimitrijević, a conceptual artist based in Zagreb and Sarajevo, realised his *Suma 680*, an interactive installation, at the Student Centre Gallery in Zagreb. The installation featured 680 cans scattered on the floor, which the public were allowed to move, kick around, etc. The installation was therefore essentially shaped and reshaped by the visitors' reactions to the configuration of the cans in the gallery. Also, the gallery was filled with the noise of people and cans moving about. Dimitrijević also realised a cardboard model of a gramophone record, including the cover. The cover read "Njegove olovke glas" (His Pencil's Voice).<sup>172</sup> The spiral groove on the "record", that is, on the cardboard, was inscribed by a pencil, making this a non-functional record that only reflexively suggested a possible sound, which, in fact, was not there. What was actually recorded was the silence or "muteness" of writing with a wooden lead pencil. Both of these examples point to Dimitrijević's significantly anti-formalist and anti-essentialist position. For Dimitrijević, anti-formalism and anti-essentialism mean renouncing the significance and authenticity of the concept, phenomenality, and status of the work for the sake of the concept, status, and functions of art. He stated that quite clearly in his text *Kao što glasovir nije muzika, ni slika nije umjetnost* [Just as a Piano is not Music, so a Painting is not Art].<sup>173</sup> Dimitrijević argues that concentrating on the formal aspects of the work of art hinders the development of art and the possibility of permanent innovation in the world of art and culture.

In 1970, Slavko Bogdanović and Slobodan Tišma, two members of the KoD group, produced a series of drawings entitled *In No Strange Land (subjektivni notni tekst na muziku Donalda Erba)*.<sup>174</sup> The drawings belong in the tradition of automatic

172 Braco Dimitrijević: *Njegove olovke glas / His Pencil's Voice*. Zagreb: Galerija Studentskog centra and Muzički salon ITD, 1974.

173 Braco Dimitrijević: "Kao što glasovir nije muzika, ni slika nije umjetnost", in: Anon.: *Braco Dimitrijević*. Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1973.

174 Slavko Bogdanović: *In No Strange Land (subjektivni notni tekst na muziku Donalda Erba)* [A Subjective Musical Text on Music by Donald Erb], nos. 1, 2, 3, 1970; Slobodan Tišma, nos. 1, 2, in: *Retrospektiva grupe KoD*, ed. Miško Šuvaković, 44.

writing. They ostensibly begin as handwritten inscriptions (cursive script, bad handwriting), only to transform into a form of writing with no recognisable signs (a scribble, trace). What remains visible in the work is only a record of the dissipation process of a graphic sign – the trace as a document of writing and writing as an expression of consciousness or perhaps of its retreat into a psychedelic state.

Goran Trbuljak, a conceptual artist from Zagreb, exhibited a photograph of a street stairway with a metal pipe serving *in lieu* of a handrail. The photograph was captioned as follows: “Striking this pipe produces a sound different from the sounds of surrounding pipes”.<sup>175</sup> Trbuljak thereby confronted a chance sound, initiated, perhaps, by a random passerby. He selected and indexed an everyday moment independent of his intentions and artworld expectations. The border between art and non-art was thereby opened and placed beyond creative intentionality.

Katalin Ladik,<sup>176</sup> a neo-avant-garde actress, poet, conceptual artist, and performer based in Novi Sad until 1992 and then in Budapest, performed as a vocalist at the Yugoslav Music Forum in Opatija in 1969, 1970, and 1980. In 1971 she also performed at the Zagreb Music Biennale. In 1972, she performed with the Acezantez ensemble and composer Milko Kelemen at the Munich Olympic Games. With the same ensemble she also sang at the 1970 Chamber Opera and Ballet Festival in Osijek and the 1972 April Meetings in Belgrade. She participated in the performance of Dušan Radić’s *Oratorio profano* at the 1979 Belgrade Music Festival (BEMUS), in the Great Hall of the Labour Union House in Belgrade. A large part of Ladik’s artistic work has been associated with vocal and instrumental music, although she is neither a formally trained musician nor a “musical amateur”, but a kind of a musical break and “vocal wonder” unfolding between music, theatre, and poetry. She has shown how a musical performance may be derived from a literary and visual performance, and then transposed into an onstage or offstage event.

Marina Abramović, originally from Belgrade but now a global artist, began her artistic explorations by working on sound objects and environments. Her objects were boxes emitting roars and sounds of gunshots and sheep bleating. Her sound environments comprised amplified urban and indoor spaces, for instance, the chirping of birds in the tree outside the Students’ Cultural Centre in Belgrade and playing airport sounds in the foyer of the Centre (1971). Abramović explored the

<sup>175</sup> Branka Stipančić (ed.): *G. Trbuljak*. Zagreb: Galerija grada Zagreba, 1996, 12.

<sup>176</sup> Miško Šuvaković: *The Power of a Woman: Katalin Ladik / Retrospective, 1962–2010*. Novi Sad: Muzej savremene umetnosti Vojvodine, 2010.

boundaries of the work of art and conditions of the phenomenality of the sensuous, i.e. visual, ambient, and sonic in 1970s contemporary art. She performed her first series of body art works entitled *Ritam 10–0* (Rhythm 10–0) in 1973–1974. The appearance of “rhythm” in the title of the series pointed to the transferring of the “musical concept of rhythm” into existential and behavioural ritual actions. For example, *Ritam 10* (Edinburgh, 1973), the first in the series, was based on the relationship between the sound of a knife hitting a hard surface and the bodily act of stabbing a knife back and forth between her fingers. In that work, the sonic rhythm produced by the stabbing, recorded and reproduced, becomes the sonic basis of the artist’s further reactions and stabs.

Group 143 were active in the domain of analytical conceptualism, exploring concepts and phenomena of artistic practice. For instance, in *Osnovne strukture – složene strukture* (Basic Structures – Complex Structures, 1975), I, who was a member of the Group, produced a series of typewriter drawings, exploring syntactic and formulaic relations among binary visual structures (solid and perforated lines).<sup>177</sup> With its sensory phenomenality, the work is reminiscent of the *I Ching*, that is, of the diagrams that Cage used to compose, and of Walter De Maria’s structural minimalist installations. However, the intention was not to address the symbolic procedures of the Chinese divination technique, but the visualisations and tautological character of binary systems. Another characteristic example may be Paja Stanković’s project *Teorija broja u domenu vidljivo-čujnih manifestacija* [Number Theory in the Domain of Audio-visual Manifestations].<sup>178</sup> Stanković constructed a formal numeric-visual diagram and then translated it into an audio-visual schema for performing sounds, i.e. pitches. The resulting algorithm was then performed as a double piano recital on 11 December 1978. Stanković’s purpose was to link three structural systems: the mathematical construction of a numeric series, its visualisation, and translation into a musical performance protocol. With Dragana Jovanović, Stanković also realised a vocal-phonetic performance, which featured a 48-minute-long vocal performance of the word *Da* (Yes).<sup>179</sup>

Between 1979 and 1982, the Belgrade-based artist Zoran Belić Weiss realised performances and installations using spatial and live sound.<sup>180</sup> His work was linked

177 Nika Radić, Dietmar Unterkofler: *Miško Šuvaković: Umetnost kao istraživanje. Art as Research.* trans. Irena Štentevska, Emilija Mančić, Dubravka Đurić. Belgrade: Orion Art; Ljubljana: The P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Institute, 2011, 77.

178 Paja Stanković: “Teorija broja u domenu vidljivo-čujnih manifestacija”, in: *Seminar*, ed. Miško Šuvaković. Belgrade: Galerija SKC, 1978, 27.

179 Biljana Tomić (ed.): *Galerija Studentskog kulturnog centra, 1979–1980*. Belgrade: SKC, 1980.

180 Jelena Mišević: “Zvuk – ambijent” [Sound – Environment] and “Zvuk”, in: Radovanović (ed.): “Posleratna srpska avangardna muzika”, 55–59.

to the simulacra of Zen Buddhist rituals and ideas of emptiness in Western Art (from Yves Klein to John Cage). He called his works *vežbe* (exercises), emphasising the existential character of doing and acting in art and de-emphasising the notion of a finished work. He was interested in individual and collective subjectivations in performances and installations using sound or the absence of sound. Some of his most characteristic performances include *Vežba: meditacija glasom* [Exercise: Meditation Using Voice], *Vežba: gong* [Exercise: The Gong], *Vežba: ritualni zvuci* [Exercise: Ritual Sounds], *Vežba: zvučni pod* [Exercise: A Sounding Floor], *Vežba: vibracija* [Exercise: Vibration], etc. His most complex project was *Vežba: sedam dana* [Exercise: Seven Days]. For seven days, between 6 and 13 January 1980, Belić inhabited the Students' Cultural Centre Gallery. Belić ritualised the time he spent at the Gallery with exercises comprising sleeping (day one), generating the sound of water in the space (day two), closing his eyes and keeping quiet (day three), performing sounds on a gong (day four), waiting to greet people (day five), refusing to explain that day (day six), and not moving or making any sounds (day seven).

In 1980, the Belgrade-based violinist Jelena Mišević performed her project *Zvuk – Ambijent* (Sound – Environment, 1980), based on the following proposition: “I choose that an audio and visual structure constitute an ENVIRONMENT and that this environment exists as my own experience”. In her project *Zvuk* (1981), she realised the concept of the “mental construction” and “diagrammatic construction” of sound structures, using the sound of the violin.<sup>181</sup>

Belgrade artist Dragoljub Raša Todosijević produced several post-Fluxus works, in which he explored sound and different modalities of sound installations.<sup>182</sup> His work *Nevidljiva skulptura* [Invisible Sculpture, 1981] was realised by building a radio into one of the walls of the Students' Cultural Centre Gallery in Belgrade. Todosijević started from the fact that the State Security Service had used the building in the 1950s and 1960s and that, when the Students' Cultural Centre moved in, listening devices were found in some of the walls. In addition to its political connotations, the work was also based on the Fluxus tactic of concealing the source of sound and the role of Duchampian packaging. Todosijević's works with the piano were a postmodern homage to Fluxus and its iconic figures. Todosijević performed the destruction or, rather, a sculptural extension of a piano using walking sticks, in *My Second Fluxus Piano* (2002). His performance *You Will Never Play Again* (Verona, 2002) also used a piano object.

<sup>181</sup> Zoran Belić: “Vežbe 1979–1982”, in: *ibid.*, 38–41.

<sup>182</sup> Dejan Sretenović: *Thank You, Raša Todosijević*. Belgrade: Muzej savremene umetnosti, 2002, 68–69, 106–107, 122.

Neša Paripović, a Belgrade painter and conceptual artist, produced two video works associated with the idea of performing a rhythmic sound.<sup>183</sup> The first of these, *Video 1*, was realised at the Brdo art colony, organised and led by Austrian art dealer Ursula Krinzinger, from 1 to 9 October 1976.<sup>184</sup> The video was recorded inside the room where the colony's artists had their meals. Paripović used tableware to generate a rhythmic sound. In his second video work, *Ritam* (1980), Paripović applied paint onto a white surface, generating rhythmic sounds with his hands. Between 1995 and 2006, Paripović realised a series of sound installations: *Zvučna strana kvadrata* [The Sounding Side of a Square],<sup>185</sup> *Leva strana rama* [Left-hand Side of a Frame], *Između crvenog i plavog* [Between Red and Blue], and *Tangenta* [Tangent]. In these temporary installations, Paripović used architecturally situated sound, i.e. a cord spanned across the surface of a wall, in relation to the environment and its geometric structure.

Experimentation in the interdisciplinary domain between images, space, public behaviour, and sound is also associated with the *Hidrogizma Sound Theatre* (1978–1981), a Ljubljana-based group.<sup>186</sup> The group comprised Jani Osojnik, Dušan Pirih Hup, Iztok Šmajš, Jani Batista, Gregor Razpotnik, Andrej Plahuta, Iztok Osojnik, and Vesna Črnivec. Hidrogizma was posited as a water machine or sculpture, that is, a social space for generating sound. Its project was an almost utopian intervention in the realisation of quite diverse, important and marginal, tendencies in 20th-century music. It was a late music-sculptural Gesamtkunstwerk project that was meant to promise, out of a synthesis of modern and avant-garde music, the total music of a new age, after modernity.

183 Šuvaković: *Neša Paripović: Self-portraits*, 103–106.

184 Ursula Krinzinger (ed.): *Brdo 1976*. Innsbruck: Ursula Krinzinger, 1976.

185 Miško Šuvaković (ed.): *Neša Paripović: Zvučna strana kvadrata* [Neša Paripović: The Sounding Side of a Square]. Belgrade: N. Paripović, 1997.

186 Tamara Soban: "Hidrogizma", in: *7 Sins: Ljubljana – Moscow*, eds. Zdenka Badovinec, Viktor Misiano, Igor Zabel, Tamara Soban. Ljubljana: Museum of Modern Art, 2008, 89, 202.





# MUSIC THROUGH AESTHETICS

8

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF  
THE *SCREEN* (AND / OR / AS) *EVENT*  
Musical De-Ontologisation

9

AESTHETICS, POLITICS AND MUSIC  
The Context of Contemporary Critical Theory

10

MUSIC AND POLITICS  
The Reconstruction of Aesthetics and the Contemporary World



## THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE *SCREEN* (AND / OR / AS) *EVENT* Musical De-Ontologisation

### THE APPROACH

The following brief discussion will outline and problematise a set of theories that give us access to the relationship between *paper*, *screen*, and *music*. I will not speak of *music* itself, *paper* itself, or *screen* itself; instead, I will speak of those theories that generate the potential to interpret, i.e. speak about *music*, *paper*, and *screen*.

I begin with the following brief observation by Jean-François Lyotard: “For the eye ‘to recognize sound’, as Paul Claudel put it, the visible must be legible, audible, intelligible”.<sup>187</sup>

Lyotard’s assertion points to the need to bring phenomenological analysis face to face with discursive analysis in understanding the relationship between the visual and the musical. If paper (the visible, the legible), the screen (the audible, the visible, the legible), and the intelligible interrelate on the grounds of a certain or an uncertain set of meanings, then their interrelationship belongs in the domain of semiology. If paper (the visible, the legible), the sensory (the audible, the visible, the legible), and the intelligible (consciousness itself) interrelate on the grounds of a certain or an uncertain expectation of cognising the *underlying truth* (ishodišna istina), then their interrelationship belongs in the domain of hermeneutics. If paper (the legible, the visible), the screen (the audible, the visible, the legible), and the intelligible (institutional knowledge) interrelate on the grounds of a certain or an uncertain set of cultural references or mediating cultural texts, then their interrelationship belongs in the domain of discursive analysis, as well as cultural and social studies. If paper (the legible, the visible), the screen (the audible, the visible, the legible), and the intelligible interrelate on the grounds of a certain or an uncertain set of sensory

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<sup>187</sup> Jean-François Lyotard: “The Bias of the Figural”, in: *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Antont Hudek, Mary Lydon. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, 3.

conclusions and judgements, then their interrelationship belongs in the domain of aesthetics. If paper (the legible, the visible), the screen (the audible, the visible, the legible), and the intelligible interrelate on the grounds of a certain or uncertain set of beliefs regarding the autonomy of an artistic/musical sample, then their interrelationship belongs in the domain of art theory, that is, special study or theory of the arts. That is, if paper, the screen, and the intelligible interrelate on the grounds of a certain or uncertain, i.e. real or assumed *event*, then their interrelationship belongs in the domain of phenomenology.

Mapping the potentialities broached by the relationship between “paper, screen, and music” toward “paper, screen, and the intelligible” for the event of the body, I will now begin asking questions regarding the discursive analysis of phenomenology in the historical and synchronic sense.

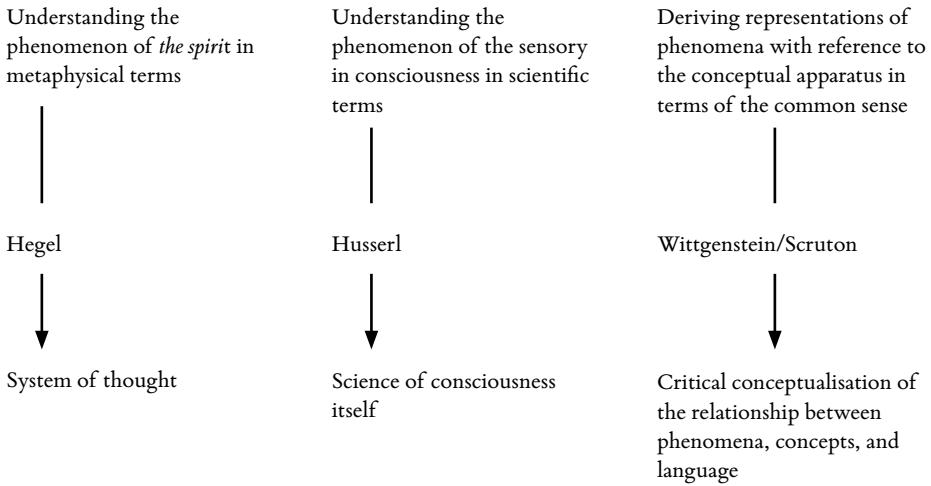
### PROBLEMS WITH DIFFERENT CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF PHENOMENOLOGY

At the very beginning there will emerge a difference among a number of potential “phenomenologies”. It points to the difference between individual understandings of a “phenomenon”. The founding of phenomenology strove for *immanent understanding*, i.e. for understanding the phenomenon in itself and for itself, which meant that understanding phenomena *qua* events and *qua* concepts was derived outside of psychological and empirocentric interpretations. It is as though an entirely new way of thinking and speaking were being sought for interpreting phenomena – a way that would break with psychologised and experiential justifications (Hegel), as well as with the psychology of knowledge paradigm (Husserl), and the speculative philosophy of Hegel’s and Husserl’s phenomenology for the sake of commonsensical thinking about phenomena (Wittgenstein and, in music aesthetics, Roger Scruton).<sup>188</sup> One may therefore set out the following starting scheme of primary phenomenologies:

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<sup>188</sup> Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein: “#341”, in: *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986, 107; Roger Scruton: “Tone”, in: *The Aesthetics of Music*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, 19.

## MUSIC THROUGH AESTHETICS



## PHENOMENOLOGY AS A PHILOSOPHICAL PARADIGM

Referring to Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the opening of his early study in the philosophy of phenomenology, Jean-François Lyotard wrote that we should look for the unity of phenomenology and its true meaning in ourselves; that is, referring to Francis Jeanson, Lyotard insisted on “the absurdity of demanding an objective definition of phenomenology”.<sup>189</sup> He thereby suggested that one could access phenomenology only from the inside, by directing at oneself those questions that are typically posed in that *style of philosophising*:

This signifies, in short, that philosophy must not only be grasped as event, and “from the outside”, but worked through as thought – that is, as problem, genesis, give-and-take movement of thought. This constitutes the genuine objectivity that Husserl wanted; for the testimony of phenomenology does not lean in favor [of] a simplistic subjectivism.<sup>190</sup>

But in order to get to the “internal questions”, let us begin with certain external indices and their positioning in the conceptual map that represents “phenomenology”.

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<sup>189</sup> Jean-François Lyotard: *Phenomenology*, trans. Brian Beakley. Albany: State University of New York, 1991, 31.

<sup>190</sup> Idem.

Phenomenology (Ger. *Phänomenologie*) is a discipline of philosophy that explores the meanings and sense of the phenomenality of the world. The word “phenomenon” stems from the Greek word *phainómenon*, which means “that which appears”. The word *phainómenon* combined with the word *lógos* constitutes the name for the philosophic study of phenomena, i.e. “phenomenology”. Therefore, a phenomenon is that which appears in the mind, something that emerges and presents itself to the mind by way of the senses, something that is discovered and conceived in that discovering. In philosophical terms, a “phenomenon” is that which shows and uncovers itself in itself. In the everyday speech and jargons of the art world, “phenomenon” denotes that which is perceived by the senses, which has a visual and figural appearance, that is, acoustic and musical sensory phenomenality and presentability – in fact, that which appears as an event in the world, that which is perceived, grasped by thought, and spoken, that is, written about.

German 18th-century philosophy anticipated the concept of phenomenology in Johann-Heinrich Lambert’s *Neues Organon*. G. W. F. Hegel signified phenomenology as the philosophical approach that begins by exploring phenomena – i.e. that which is present in conscious experience and thereby grounds our understanding of the absolute, logical, ontological, and metaphysical spirit (*Geist*), that which transcends phenomena. Phenomenology is the activity whereby one may posit phenomenal knowledge.<sup>191</sup> At the outset of the 20th century, Edmund Husserl defined the concept of phenomenology.<sup>192</sup> For Husserl, phenomenology was a reflexive study of the essence of consciousness from the position of one’s personal experience and the perspective that stems from it. Husserl viewed phenomenology as the study of the essential (eidetic phenomenology), because its object was pure essences, not real existences, i.e. things or facts. However, Husserl soon transcended phenomenology as the study of the essence of things and developed it as the study of perceiving the essence or consciousness that perceives the essence from the viewpoint of transcendental phenomenology. Husserl’s phenomenology points to the ways of knowing the world, not just to that knowledge itself. Consciousness is always directed at something and therefore intentional. Phenomenology’s task is to explore the contents of consciousness in order to discover its essence (*eidós*). One comes to know the essence by way of reduction, whereby whatever is not relevant to the object is excluded from the structure of consciousness. Reduction rids the object of consciousness of all natural (practical) stances, historical and social characterisations, and theoretical foreknowledge. This process is intuitive and intuition is a reflexion

191 G. W. F. Hegel: *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 49–53.

192 Edmund Husserl: Author’s Preface to the English Edition, in: *Ideas: General Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson. London: Routledge, 2012, xxxvi.

of the intellect, which emerges on the basis of the records of consciousness. Phenomenology is therefore the study of pure phenomena, i.e. phenomena that are presented directly to the knowing subject's perception as true, that is, absolutely true. Their value is not restricted to human cognition, because, according to Husserl, that would give rise to relativism. That cognising subject is the transcendental *I*. That is why Husserl referred to his philosophy as transcendental idealism. Husserl's phenomenology was continued by Eugen Fink and Ludwig Landgrebe. Critiques of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology were developed by Hedwig Conrad-Martius and Roman Ingarden,<sup>193</sup> as well as by the Göttingen circle of phenomenologists, including Nicolai Hartmann and Moritz Geiger. They advocated eidetic ontological phenomenology and complemented the phenomenology of acts with that of objects. Martin Heidegger developed hermeneutical phenomenology and a radical revision of Husserl's "science". Major contributors to the development of phenomenology also include Waldemar Conrad, Paul Ricœur, Mikel Dufrenne, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas, Fritz Kaufmann, Danko Grlić, Ivan Focht, Milan Damjanović, Ivan Urbančić, and Tine Hribar, among others.

## THE NEW PHENOMENOLOGY

*Event phenomenology* or *new phenomenology* covers a range of self-critiques of semiology, linguistic centrism, and the domination of the interpretation of signifiers in late structuralism. It concerns the transition from the late-structuralist critique of the subject to the materialist analysis of the relationship between the subject and the object as a phenomenal event.

*The new phenomenology* also concerns the post-Heideggerian interest in the event (*Ereignis*). For example, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari define the concept of event by means of analysing and discussing permanent but discontinuous duration, i.e. by means of analysing and discussing endless variations, continuous metamorphoses, becoming an animal, becoming a woman, constant mutation, the production of *flux*, and immanent movement.<sup>194</sup> In the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, the event is the *différance*: the event of a temporal deferral and displacement of the present by means of script/writing (*écriture*) on paper.<sup>195</sup> Lacan's interest in the event was

193 Roman Ingarden: "The Musical Work", in: *Ontology of the Work of Art: The Musical Work, the Picture, the Architectural Work, the Film*, trans. Raymond Meyer, John T. Goldthwait. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1989, 1–135.

194 Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari: "Of the Refrain", in: *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, 344.

195 Jacques Derrida: "Freud and the Scene of Writing", in: *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass. London: Routledge, 2002, 247.



determined by switching from the tactic of interpreting signifier topology that is characteristic of language to the examination of the object (for instance, the *objet petit a*) and its functionally impossible or missing place, that is, to the exploration of the subtle and complex relations between the subject and the other and to the discussion of the Real as that which evades symbolisation, but penetrates it in the form of traumatic over-determination. For Slavoj Žižek the event is that which remains outside of the text, that which emerges as an event in terms of an intervention of the material order (the quilting point [point de capiton],<sup>196</sup> the Real, castration, the object, the unconscious) in the systems of textual, that is, symbolic representation. With his thought of approaching the event as it emerges in each generic procedure, Alain Badiou has emerged as the philosopher who has renewed philosophy. Badiou emphasises that concepts and rules should be produced as events.<sup>197</sup> In Michel Foucault's late works, the event is a "biopolitical articulation" of the *mind-body*, i.e. individual in the concrete social, cultural, historical, and geographic space of Western capitalism. Groups of living beings are constituted as populations via articulations of health, hygiene, habitation, the everyday, labour, the division of social roles, and the relationship with political power.<sup>198</sup> Giorgio Agamben points to the complex idea of the event of forms of life, as life that can never be separated from its form, i.e. life in which no such thing as mere or bare life can be isolated.<sup>199</sup> Biopolitically oriented philosophers point to the critical (in terms of both critique and its critical importance) phenomenality of the event or series of events of the production of forms of life.

From this new phenomenological perspective, we may speak of positing an event that will involve *not-the-body-itself* (ne-samo-telo) or an event that is a *performance of not-the-body-itself*. The phrase *not-the-body-itself* means that the body does not appear as the *body itself* underneath layers of sedimented shadows (Plato), illusions of the everyday (Heidegger), discursive practices (Foucault), traces of culture (Deleuze), and texts from history (Kristeva). *The body* is something that conceives, begins, functions and acts, produces or behaves among many different potentialities. Potentialities are not only meanings or complex identities, but

196 Slavoj Žižek: "Od 'prošivnog boda' do nad-ja" [From the "Quilting Point" to the Super-I], in: *Birokratija i uživanje* [Bureaucracy and Enjoyment], trans. Bojan Bem. Belgrade: Radionica SIC, 1984, 29–51.

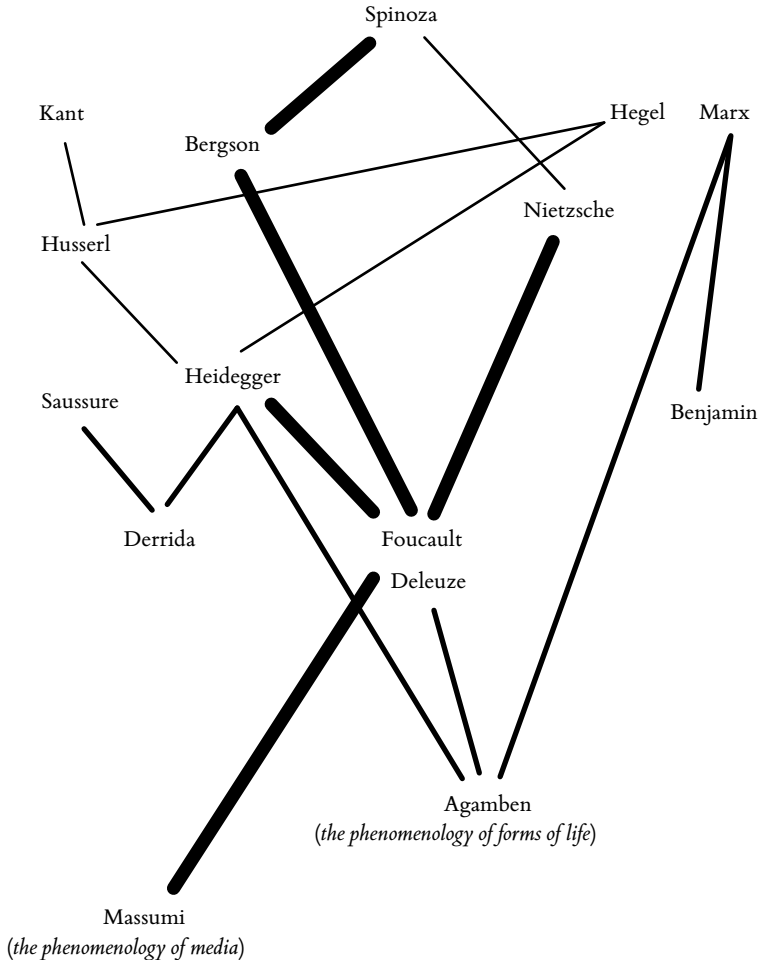
197 Alain Badiou: "Events", in: *Manifesto for Philosophy, Followed by Two Essays: "The (Re)Turn of Philosophy Itself" and "Definition of Philosophy"*, trans. Norman Madarasz. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999, 79–88.

198 Michel Foucault: "The Birth of Biopolitics", in: *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley. New York: New Press, 1997, 73–79.

199 Giorgio Agamben: "Form-of-Life", in: *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, trans. Cesare Casarino. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, 151–156.

also sensory/bodily phenomenality out of control in an open and indeterminate world of natural, human, and machine/media relations. The body is not a signifier, which means preparation for a letter on paper, a sign, a code, a word, or text – the body is not a signifier for a determinable meaning that might facilitate the reading of the body’s identity. The body is a behavioural *machine* in which *fluxes of contents and expressions* of the body’s appearing and mediating here-and-there-and-then and here-in between do not depend on the signifier. For us, bodies are typically *bodies in between* the screen and the world.

We must therefore look into the history of philosophy that generated these two different kinds of phenomenology: the traditional and new phenomenology. From our present perspective, the history of “phenomenology” has no single source and may be outlined with the following diagram:

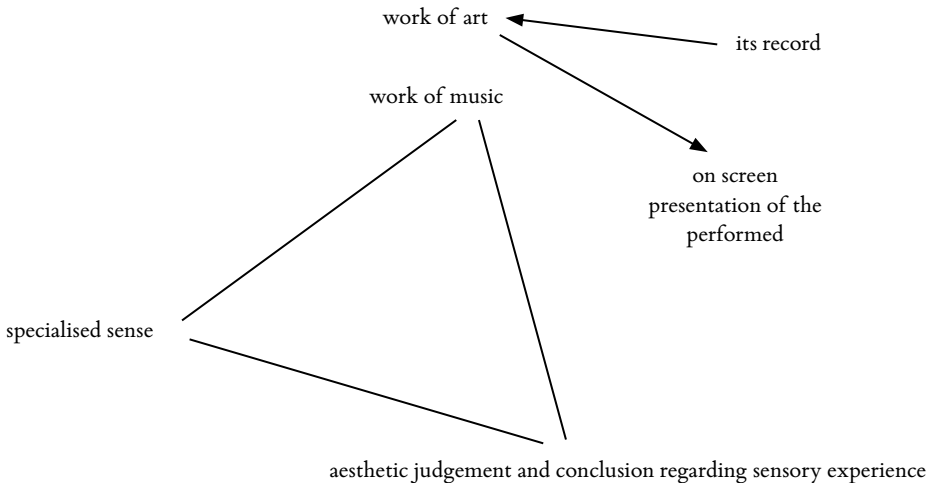


For example!

In this tree, one branch takes us from Nietzsche via Heidegger to Derrida, but Derrida is also the endpoint of the trajectories going from Hegel and Husserl, via Heidegger, to Saussure. The entangled branches of this tree point to the crisscrossing paths of deconstruction, which terminates at writing itself, as inscription and trace. The inscription and trace remain on **paper**, which is a function of the fragile membrane of writing, problematised by Derrida by building discontinuities regarding the phenomenology of thought, that is, the phenomenology of the senses (of speech).

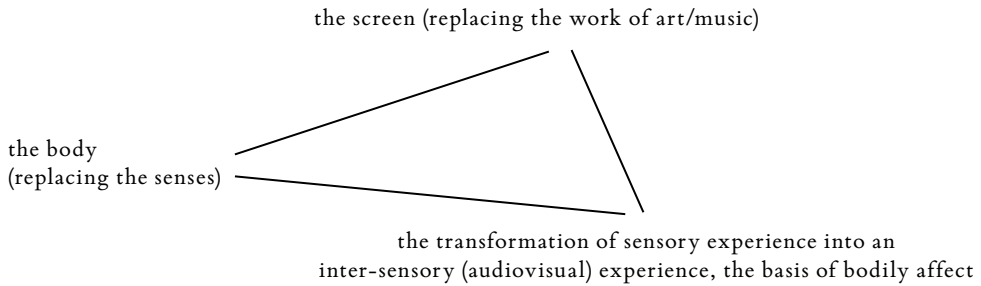
Another branch takes us from Spinoza via Bergson to Deleuze and then on to Brian Massumi,<sup>200</sup> establishing a line of identifying the **screen** as the mechanic *place* of production or *source* of sensory/bodily affect in the field of antagonisms among different social apparatuses. Following the “logic of Deleuze’s analysis”, Massumi has succeeded in establishing a discussion of ‘the phenomenology of new media’ within social antagonisms and contradictions.

In terms of “traditional phenomenology”, the essential aesthetic triangle adheres to the following scheme:

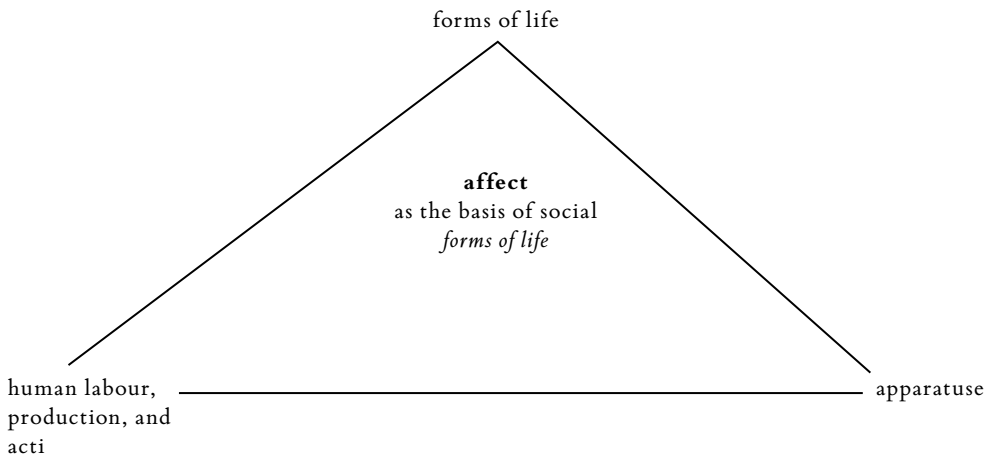


<sup>200</sup> Brian Massumi: “The Bleed. Where Body Meets Image”, in: *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002, 46–67.

In other words, when we enter the field of the “new phenomenology”, which depends on the potential promises of an altered constitution not only of the artwork, now becoming a screen event, but also of the character of the “phenomenon of the event that initiates the performance of the work” in relation to the body in the field of sociality produced by the *immaterial labour* of the new media, we arrive at the following diagram:



Finally, if we posit the diagram above as the basis for deriving a biopolitical interpretation of the shaping of the body in the field of sociality and, accordingly, posit the screen as the source of the event of “forms of life”, the body as the “apparatus”<sup>201</sup> (i.e. relation between discourse and the material order), and the “bodily affect of the body in front of the screen” and the “affect of human labour, production, and acting in society”,<sup>202</sup> then we may translate that diagram into the following graphically presentable model:



201 Giorgio Agamben: “What Is an Apparatus?”, in: *What Is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik, Stefan Pedatella. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009, 2–3.

202 Michael Hardt: “Foreword: What Affects Are Good For”, in: *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, ed. Patricia Ticineto Clough. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007, xii.



## AESTHETICS, POLITICS AND MUSIC

### The Context of Contemporary Critical Theory

#### POLITICS, THE POLITICAL, POLITISATION

The history of the usage of the term “politics” has developed heterogeneously and widely from the Greek term πολιτικός, to the medieval term *vita activa* as a translation of Aristotle’s term βίος πολιτικός,<sup>203</sup> to modern notions of politics in polysemic, often contradictory potential definitions. For example, what can be called politics is conducting the affairs of the city/state; the fulfilment of public life or public dialogue; the management, supervision and regulation of state and/or social relations; the implementation of the social/communal; the wielding of concrete or abstract power; the organizing of the bureaucracy in everyday life; the establishing of relations between individual and collective identities leading to individual and collective subjectivation; an emancipatory event; and the aspiration to preserve tradition.

In the foregoing and many other possible identifications of “politics”, two distinctive aspects stand out: community and relationship. The French philosopher Alain Badiou interpreted an event as political, emphasizing this: “An event is political if its material is collective, or if the event can only be attributed to a collective multiplicity. ‘Collective’ is not a numerical concept here. We say that the event is ontologically collective to the extent that it provides the vehicle for a virtual summoning of all”.<sup>204</sup>

From the vaguely outlined multitude of notions, one can single out two general structural moments that are expressed in the difference between the notions of “politics” and “the political”, according to the constructions of Chantal Mouffe:<sup>205</sup>

- (1) *the political* – dimension of antagonism which is constitutive of human societies;

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203 Hannah Arendt: “The term *vita activa*”, in: *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998, 12–17.

204 Alain Badiou: “Politics as Truth Procedure”, in: *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker. London: Verso, 2006, 141.

205 Chantal Mouffe: “Politics and Political”, in: *On the Political*. London: Routledge, 2005, 9.

- (2) *politics* – the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human coexistence in the context of the conflictuality by the political.

This means that the term/notion *politics*” denotes the ways in which a community and a relationship are materialised. Contrary to that, the term/notion *political* suggests the nature or character of a human community and relationship, which is antagonism. Antagonism, in that case, is the ontological prerequisite of a human relationship and the community emanating from that relationship.

The role of antagonism in the constitution of relationships, i.e. a human community, lies in the way in which personalised or abstract power turns out to be the prerequisite for overcoming an antagonism or decomposition due to an antagonism. The notion of power is flexible, as well as variable both historically and geographically. One can speak of the power of people, citizens or participants in the community, of the power of the leader, of legal and illegal power, of the power of institution(s), of the power of the bureaucracy, of the power of a political party, of the power of a parliament, of the power of faith, of the power of the economy, but also of liberation from a superior power, of a change of the power wielder, or of a change in the nature of power. The relationship between power, the community and antagonism is complex and fluctuating. For example, power in medieval societies was the personal power of the ruler legitimised by religion, or more precisely, by the structures and institutions of the religious system. Power in bourgeois societies is depersonalised in the name of representative institutions and documents (rulebooks) of political life. Power in totalitarian societies was personalised in the leader or in the party. The ideal of modern democracy is the power of the people expressed through parliamentary – representative – administration and the execution of this power in a bureaucratic way. Global neoliberalism causes a rift between politics and power, when politics as an institutional structure loses the power of decision-making, surrendering it consequently to economic interest groups.

Politisisation singles out a certain activity that uncovers, utilizes and/or demonstrates the political character of every human relation. Seeing every form of human life – a relation or a set of relations – as political suggests that antagonism has active role in every situation which appears to be independent from politics.

Thus, in the first step, politisation reveals that culture, religion or art are vague fields of politics, i.e. of the social with characteristic antagonisms. In the second step, it is shown that politics can be a means of influence on antagonisms appearing

## MUSIC THROUGH AESTHETICS

politics 1	the political 1	politics 2	the political 2	politisisation 1 theoretical	politisisation 2 activist
politics is a set of practices and institutions that effectuate a certain social system or relationship	the political is a multiplicity of antagonisms which are constitutional for a human society	politics is a set of techniques for creating a relation between power and society	the political is a set of traits that something (anything) acquires by being put in a social relation or in a relation between power and society	politisisation of art, in the theoretical sense, leads to the epistemological discovery or to the use of the political in any human activity	The politisation of any human activity, in the activist sense, leads to a phenomenological confrontation with an event of human activity as a social antagonism

in ostensibly autonomous fields of culture, religion or art. In the third step, the inverse potential appears. This means that, for example, at the moment when social antagonisms are shown to exist in art too, art can be offered as a sensibly affective sample of the fictitious or actual settling or aggravation of antagonisms.

## AESTHETICS AND POLITICS

To develop the thesis on aesthetics as the intermediary between politics and music, I must remind that there is no unique notion of “aesthetics” which would be irrevocably delimited by the concepts of “the science of the beautiful”, of “the philosophy of specialised sensibility”, of “the philosophy of art”, of “the politics of human sensibility”, of “the revolutionary or emancipatory potential of sensibility” or of “the metacritique of the aesthetics and philosophy of art”. All of these outlined identifications of aesthetics have their specific synchrony and diachrony, which means *the logic of narrative* which was developed in a particular way and set against other narratives about what aesthetics was, what it is and what it will be. Due to certain revisions of aesthetics, forgotten or completed aesthetical stories were reactualised and revised in the new conditions of human life and the political, i.e. in the antagonisms of “new” time. The aesthetic now becomes a sort of contradictory cause and effect of the phenomena of politics and the political. In other words, I shall demonstrate that the elements of politics and the political are sensible phenomena connected in a complex way with the discourses of society. But at the same time, the manifestations of the articulation of the total individual and collective sensibility of humankind are always in a political environment – within *a form of life* (state, institution, social or cultural group, modalities of subjectivation). In the process, individual and collective sensibilities remain within a multitude of affects created by antagonisms which



are overcome, provoked, evaded, surpassed or created by “that life”, while dealing with its collective and individual human sociability.

The French philosopher Jacques Rancière,<sup>206</sup> for example, foresaw the turning point in aesthetics which proceeded from the aesthetic as a specialised sensory experience judged impartially, or with a philosophical bias in the domain of the autonomy of art, to the *politics of sensibility*. In other words, this is “the politics of the distribution of sensibility” within political life. This is perceived as the transformation of politics and the political from a “non-sensible domain”<sup>207</sup> into building sensible life forms and pursuing the desire for new visible and/or audible life forms. The politisation of sensibility and the sensibilisation of politics are the outlined subjects of this aesthetical narrative.

<b>aesthetics 1</b> <i>autonomous aesthetics</i>	<b>aesthetics 2</b> <i>aesthetics of art autonomy</i>	<b>aesthetics 3</b> <i>politisation of aesthetics</i>	<b>aesthetics 4</b> <i>aesthetisation</i>	<b>aesthetics 5</b> <i>metaaesthetics</i>
judging/knowledge about a specialized sensory experience of an external (visible, audible) stimulus	philosophy and/or theory of art, including music. Ernst Bloch, <i>Princip nada 3</i> [The Principle of Hope, vol. 3] trans. H. Šarinić. Zagreb: Naprijed, 1981	knowledge about political regimes of the potential or real totality of human sensibility with respect to nature, culture, and even art	knowledge and ability to perform a sensible transformation or, more often, to identify the human world (aesthetisation)	critique of the discourses of specialised sensibility, of political regimes of human sensibility, and of art, including music

Over the history of aesthetics, such related strategies of aesthetisation and politisation can be most certainly identified in the works of Friedrich Schiller, in his ideas about the aesthetic education of man;<sup>208</sup> Ernst Bloch, in his quest for “the intensity-richest human world in music” [intensitätsreichste Menschwelt in der

206 Jacques Rancière: “The Distribution of the Sensible: Politics and Aesthetics”, in: *The Politics of Aesthetics – The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill. London: Continuum, 2004, 12–19.

207 Jacques Rancière: “Aesthetics as Politics”, in: *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran. Cambridge: Polity, 2009, 38.

208 Fridrih Šiler [Friedrich Schiller]: “Pisma o estetskom vaspitanju čoveka” [Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen], in: *O lepom* [Über die Schönheit], trans. Strahinja Kostić. Belgrade: Book & Marso, 2007, 111–202.

Musik],<sup>209</sup> Herbert Marcuse, in his projection of the idea of “new sensibility”<sup>210</sup> yearning for unlimited freedom; Wolfgang Iser, in a revisionist theory of contemporary aesthetisation which develops from the traditional notion of the aesthetic in arts towards the aesthetic in the sensuously altered world of the new media;<sup>211</sup> Thomas Docherty, who created the liberal notion of “aesthetic democracy”,<sup>212</sup> etc. These and many other examples show the importance of understanding the aesthetic as a “political agent” which plays an important role not only in the judgment or interpretation of art, but also in the complex multiplicities of the social life of humankind, which are often external with respect to art:

“Aesthetic” here will be used not as a synonym for “artistic”, but rather as its complement, extending from specifically artistic experiences to the broad, holistic domain of lived and imagined experiences, including social, political, bodily, and technological dimensions. The meaning of the “aesthetic” is related to that found in Friedrich Schiller, for whom it is linked to politics, not only to pure beauty and autonomous art, as is today often the case.<sup>213</sup>

This indicates that aesthetisation places a work of art, i.e. a work of music, into an external relationship to politics (a set of social relations, practices, institutions) and the political (constitutional social antagonisms). The aesthetic, in that case, is not seen as an essential feature of the artistic/musical, or as a distinctive intersubjective effect of a musical work. It is seen as a set of sensory events which make, for example, a single individual work of music or a work’s microstructure establish a relationship with politics and the political in a specific way. This way of establishing the relationship depends on the contextual, meaning historical and geographical circumstances of the work’s phenomenon in its artistic, cultural or social aspects.<sup>214</sup>

209 Ernst Bloch: “Prekoračivanje i čovjekov najintenzivniji svijet u muzici” [Venturing Beyond and Most Intense World of Man in Music], in: *Princip nada* 3 [The Principle of Hope, vol. 3], trans. H. Šarinić. Zagreb: Naprijed, 1981, 1248–1303.

210 Herbert Marcuse: “The New Sensibility”, in: *An Essay on Liberation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2000, 23–48.

211 Wolfgang Iser: “Aesthetics beyond Aesthetics; For a New Form to the Discipline”, in: *Undoing Aesthetics*, trans. Andrew Inkpin. London: SAGE Publications, 1997, 79.

212 Thomas Docherty: “Aesthetic Democracy”, in: *Aesthetic Democracy*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2006, 149–160.

213 Aleš Erjavec: “Introduction”, in: *Aesthetic Revolution*, ed. Aleš Erjavec. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015, 2.

214 For instance, Courtney Brown politicizes the practice of performing Beethoven’s works depending on the historical context related to the fluent geopolitical space of Germany. He points to utterly different statuses of “Beethoven practice” in Beethoven’s own time; after the re-invention of his

## MUSIC, AESTHETICS AND POLITICS

The relationship between music and politics as mediated by aesthetics can be deliberated in various ways. Here, I choose the binary structural model with the categories of (1) politisation of the aesthetic, i.e. the formal formations of a musical work, and (2) the aesthetisation of political relationships between music and its cultural-social environment. This binary structure (1–2) is based on the distinction between the internal (micro) and external (macro) approach to music. The internal (micro) approach is effectuated through the recognisability of the sensible in politics in the phenomenal or functional modalities of music in culture and society. I identify the former approach as the immanent (i.e. inherent, intrinsic, internal) politics of music. I identify the latter approach as the transcendent (i.e. non-inherent, non-intrinsic, external) politics of music.

The former approach is governed by the requirements of close/careful reading and listening to music, in order to reach and penetrate it. The latter approach is governed by the conditions of distant reading and listening to music, in order to show that it exists by everything else that is not music, which in this case means by politics. However, it transpires that this “highly dramatic division” is not, in fact, a split, but a manifestation of one and the same under the different conditions of interpretative movement between a concrete and abstract knowledge about music and its political manifestations with respect to human sensuality.

Sociological formalisms – such as those that can be found, directly or indirectly, in the works of Theodor W. Adorno,<sup>215</sup> Fredric Jameson,<sup>216</sup> Tony Bennett,<sup>217</sup> Franco Moretti and others – are based on a general hypothesis that an indisputable correspondence exists between the social processes and constitutional potentialities of a work of art, literature or music. In *Philosophy of New Music*, Adorno<sup>218</sup> quite indisputably grounded his debate about Schönberg’s modernity on the thesis of “social formalism”: “The forms of art register the history of humanity with more

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work in the Second Reich; during the Weimar Republic; in the Third Reich; and in the divided Cold-War Germany after 1945. Courtney Brown: “Beethoven”, in: *Politics in Music. Music and Political Transformation from Beethoven to Hip-Hop*. Atlanta: Farsight Press, 2008, 11–27.

215 Theodor W. Adorno: *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2006.

216 Fredric Jameson: *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.

217 Tony Bennett: *Formalism and Marxism*. London: Routledge, 2003.

218 Compare with Tyrus Miller: “The New Wave: Modernism and Modernity in the Later Frankfurt School”, in: *Modernism and The Frankfurt School*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2014, 162–163.

## MUSIC THROUGH AESTHETICS

<b>in a musical work</b>	<b>outside of a musical work</b>
internal	external
microplatform	macroplatform
immanent formalised aesthetics of music	transcendent politicised aesthetics of music
close or careful reading/listening	distant reading/listening

<b>sociological formalism</b>	<b>political interpretations</b>
politisation of a musical form	interpretations of a musical work, musical practice or music by cultural or social potentialities
immanent politics of music	transcendent politics of music

<b>immanent politics of music</b>
music and subjectivisation: presentation of <i>self</i>
music and ideology: construction of everyday life
politisation of musical form
politisation of musical technique
signifier musical practices
musical creation as productive work
institutional critique of music
political economy of music
ecstasy or participation: from style to strategy in music

<b>transcendent politics of music</b>
music and the public sphere
music and the emancipation of humankind
music and nation as an imaginary community
music and representation of power
music and revolution
music and totalitarianism
music and anarchism
music and terrorism
music and war
music and transition

justice than do historical documents. There is no hardening of form that is not to be read as the negation of the hardness of life [...] Schoenberg hit upon the social character of loneliness by cleaving to it unconditionally”<sup>219</sup> or “Though artworks have scarcely ever imitated society, and their authors need know nothing whatever about it, the gestures of artworks are objective answers to objective social constellations”.<sup>220</sup> For instance, Moretti uses the following words to present a similar hypothesis on the social potential of the form: “Forms are the abstract of social relationships: so, formal analysis is in its own modest way an analysis of power [...] [S]tudying how forms vary, you discover how symbolic *power* varies from place to place”.<sup>221</sup>

The *immanent politics of music* can be another, more general and vaguer name for “sociological formalism”. It appears as a risky attempt at reading, or sometimes ascribing – i.e. inscribing – political meanings, values or references from/into the musical work itself, or more precisely, from/into formal effects and affects of the musical material. If one accepts this, then the unity and integrity of the opacity of musical creativity and/or musical reception is broken up into potential segments. These segments, potentially open to politisation, which can be found in any work of music, are many – I will give some of them: music is the means of subjectivation; music is the referential space of the performers’ and the listeners’ bodies; music is the agent of ideology in the processes of constructing everyday life; i.e. musical form is an abstract sample of the social, but so is the musical technique of performance; musical creativity (composing, performing, media design) is productive work in the domain which can be denoted by the political economy of the production of value and, more importantly, of surplus value; but music is also a signifier practice which, upon re-orientation from a delusion of ecstasy to the domain of productive, communicational and consumer participation, becomes the transformation of a musical style into a political strategy.

For example, subjectivation by music takes place as a material social practice both from the composer’s/performer’s and the listener’s point of view. Adorno fully centralised the subjectivation of the composer in Schoenberg’s music in these words: “The subject of new music, what its deposition transcribes, is the real, emancipated, isolated subject of the late bourgeois period. This real subjectivity, and the radical material that it has integrally structured, provides Schoenberg with a canon of aesthetic objectivation”.<sup>222</sup>

<sup>219</sup> Adorno: *Philosophy of New Music*, 37–38.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>221</sup> Franco Moretti: *Distant Reading*. London: Verso, 2013, 59.

<sup>222</sup> Adorno: *Philosophy of New Music*, 48.

On the other hand, Roland Barthes, in the case of a listener to Robert Schumann's music, promotes subjectivation to a bodily event which is the basis for the potentiality of music as social subjectivation: "But, in music, a field of *signifying* and not a system of signs, the referent is unforgettable, for here the referent is the body. The Body passes into music without any relay but the signifier".<sup>223</sup> By relating music to the body it enters, Barthes necessarily promises musical space as the social space of bodily action. But this is not a literary space representing/denoting or describing a social motive, subject or narrative. This is a space directly linked to the performer's and listener's bodies, bodies that through music become subjects confronted with what can anticipate any meaning, although it is not conveying a particular or specified meaning at that moment. This is certainly a "signifier" which is a part of the *signifier practice* in music.

Adorno understood art/music as the subject's last refuge:

The work of art "reflects" society and is historical to the degree that it refuses the social, and represents the last refuge of individual subjectivity from the historical forces that threaten to crush it [...] Thus the socio-economic is inscribed in the work, but as concave to convex, as negative to positive. *Ohne Angst leben*: such is for Adorno the deepest and most fundamental promise of music itself, which it holds even at the heart of its most regressive manifestations.<sup>224</sup>

If we dramatically overemphasize this Adornian idea of refusing the social, we obtain the Althusserian-Lacanian image of relationship between the immanence of music and transcendence of politics, i.e. the censorship of the political in the artistic. From the Althusserian-Lacanian standpoint, it transpires that that which eliminates the social from the artistic/musical, and the social is constituted by that elimination, is not some pre-human chaos, an unfathomable abyss of nature, the place of the source of truth; instead, a *predetermined practice*, a *signifier practice*, is the real foundation or the *truth* of what Sigmund Freud called the "unconscious" in the relationship with sexuality, and Karl Marx "class conflict" in the relationship with society.<sup>225</sup>

The *transcendent politics of music* can be attempts at going beyond "the artistic or musical text" and to perceive the *text* in quite different referential situations with respect to the social. Discussing Western music, the philosopher Philippe Lacoue-

<sup>223</sup> Barthes: "Rasch", 308.

<sup>224</sup> Jameson: *Marxism and Form*, 34–35.

<sup>225</sup> "Art, Society/Text. A Few Remarks on the Current Relations of the Class Struggle in the Fields of Literary Production and Literary Ideologies", in: *Art Margins* 5/3 (2016), 102–114.

Labarthe underlined: “First, there is uestion of music, which, strangely, is never a question of music alone”.<sup>226</sup>

To put it crudely: the sense and meaning of music do not emanate from the musical work itself but from the work’s place in the field of social relationships. One could say that musical work or music as an event is something that is structured into specific sense and meanings by an external relationship with social institutions (politics) and social antagonisms (the political). However, a musical work also causes potential affects in a listener, which are subjectivised by music in a specific context.

If what has been previously said stands, one could say that music effectuates the potentiality of the political with respect to numerous forms of human life. These potentialities are manifold and possibly infinite, as are the situations of politics and the political in the reality of individual and collective forms of human life. There are many examples of the external or distant politisation of music, which means bringing music into a specific relationship with the social. For example: the relationship between music and the public sphere,<sup>227</sup> the function of music in the emancipation of humankind,<sup>228</sup> music in the creation of the *imaginary community* that we call nation,<sup>229</sup> music and the representation of power,<sup>230</sup> music and revolution,<sup>231</sup> music and totalitarianism,<sup>232</sup> music and anarchism,<sup>233</sup> music and terrorism,<sup>234</sup> music and war,<sup>235</sup> music and violence,<sup>236</sup> and music and transition.<sup>237</sup>

226 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe: “Preface”, in: *Musica Ficta/Figures of Wagner*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press 1994, xvi.

227 Christian Wolff: *Bread and Roses – Piano Works 1976–1983*, Sally Pinkas (piano). CD, Mode 43, 1995.

228 Philip Glass: *Satyagraha*, DVD, Arthaus Musik 100 136, 2001.

229 Krzysztof Penderecki: *A Polish Requiem*, Klosinska, Rappe, Minkiewicz, Nowacki, Warsaw National Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra, Antoni Wit, CD, Naxos 8.557386-87, 2004.

230 Arnold Schoenberg: *Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte* Op. 41 (1942), Glenn Gould (piano), The Glenn Gould Collection, CD, Sony Classical G010001016574Y, 2012.

231 Luigi Nono: *Al gran sole carico d’amore*, Staatsoper Stuttgart, Lothar Zagrosek, CD, SWR 8573-81059-2, 1999.

232 Larry Weinstein: *Shostakovich against Stalin – The War Symphonies*, Nederland Radio Philharmonic, Kirov Orchestra, Valery Gergiev, DVD, Decca 074 3117, 2005.

233 John Cage: *Anarchy – New York City – January 1988*. Middletown, Con: Wesleyan University Press, 1988. Cf. John Cage: *Roaratorio. An Irish Circus on Finnegans Wake* (1982), CD, Wergo WER 6303-2, 1994.

234 John Adams: *The Death of Klinghoffer*, London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by John Adams, directed by Penny Woolcock, DVD, Decca 074 1898-9, 2003.

235 Stefan Wolpe: *Lieder; Battle Piece* (1943–1947), CD, Neos 10719, 2007.

236 Susan Fast and Kip Pegley (eds.): *Music, Politics, and Violence*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2012.

237 Laibach: *Rekapitulacija 1980–1984*, NSK Records & Nika d.o.o., EFA 13670-2, 2002.

All these examples, and many more, show that the “external politics of music” is carried out by the aesthetic which is vague and variable, i.e. by sensory techniques of placing music in discursive and affective political contexts as a possible acoustic *embodiment* of politics and the political. This does not mean that music “transcends” from the immanently musical (music as music itself) to the musical as politics and the political, but that music is understood as a political situation. For example, while theorizing about music and politics, John Street puts forward the following position:

I would like to persuade readers that music *embodies* political values and experiences, and *organizes* our response to society as political thought and action. Music does not just provide a vehicle of political expression, it is that expression. And, furthermore, states organize us through their management of music and sound more generally. The boundaries between the two realms of music and politics, I will try to suggest, are largely illusionary.<sup>238</sup>

The placement of the relationship between music and politics is carried out by the contextuality of music (culture, state, nation, race, gender, class); by programme actions (verbal denoting of a musical work as a political notional meaning); by functional institutional employments of music (assigning political, social and cultural functions to the musical work); by compositional politisations, identifications, but also obsessing over political *ideas*, myths and ideals; by performance actions (adding various social roles while presenting the musical work); or by motivational guidance of the performers’ and listeners’ attention (generating complex networks within discursive and affective apparatuses related to usual or exceptional forms of everyday life).

The relationship between discourse and affect enables music to become the means of the articulation and subjectivation of the human intelligible and sensible presence in the social world of antagonisms and institutions which provide or disturb various functions of society. In other words, music is not only the representative of politics and the political, but also an aesthetic – meaning sensible at the individual and collective level – potential of generating society and the social. Therefore, the external politics of music are aimed at showing that no music exists which is not politics within the political, i.e. antagonistic situations in society.

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238 John Street: “Introduction: making Connections”, in: *Music and Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2012, 1.





## MUSIC AND POLITICS

### The Reconstruction of Aesthetics and the Contemporary World

#### THREE THESES ABOUT MUSIC AND POLITICS

##### THESIS 1:

Western art music is a *model* of the multiplicity of social experiments that have real consequences for forms of human life; therefore, it is argued that all music is political.

##### THESIS 2:

Such a *model* of the multiplicity of social experiments is always a singular event that may be called a musical affect that is politically geared toward individual and collective forms of human life, that is, toward the listener's body itself or the collective body of multiple listeners (the audience).

##### THESIS 3:

Art music is posited into the world so that always and everywhere one may speak about two different ontologies of music: the immanent ontology of a musical event in the world of art and the transcendent or political ontology of music in the world beyond the worlds of art. There is an important relation between the concepts of transcendent, beyond, and political. This text concerns the second ontology, that is, the political, which is identified as transcendental and external *vis-à-vis* the immanent phenomenality of an individual work of music.

#### MUSIC AND POLITICS: DISPOSITIVES AND POLITICS

To recognise and thereby translate a given experience of music into customs and bodies of knowledge that identify music as a social relation or cultural identity, one must generate or modify a sensory-conceptual set of available apparatuses based on *our* bodily-aural intuitions and instincts, individual and collective values, as

well as the musical and above all non-musical potentialities of the world in which we grow up, which we inhabit, and with which we identify in the everyday.<sup>239</sup>

The starting thesis stated above rests on two theoretical constructions:

- (1) The construction of a sensory-conceptual regime of music that manifests itself in relation to the individuality and collectivity of performers and/or listeners, as well as on
- (2) The construction of bodily-aural intuitions and instinct in specific differential contexts of the *world of music*, above all, technical skill, technical perfectionism, and technical virtuosity.

The relationship between a sensory-conceptual regime and bodily-aural intuitions and instincts is always in a relation or web of relations that I would call the apparatus of music. Such a relational apparatus of music is essentially political, because it relates to quite disparate potentialities of establishing, performing, or maintaining a specific sociality – for instance, communality, belonging or non-belonging – in and through music. The relation between a sensory-conceptual regime and bodily-aural intuitions and instincts is political in the terms in which Jacques Rancière discusses the “distribution of the sensible”: “This means that an aesthetic politics always defines itself by a certain recasting of the distribution of the sensible, a reconfiguration of the given perceptual forms”.<sup>240</sup>

But remember, the distribution of the sensible of music concerns not only the technically accomplished acoustic quality of an event, but also a complex social, productive, and receptive relation between individuals and collectives, in which there is a part to play not only for the bodily-sensorial preparations, but also for the settings of the coming together of sensory and conceptual potentialities in relation to the uncertain *vectors* of the intuitions and instincts that fit into musical, artistic, cultural, or social apparatuses, that is, in the most primary sense, into the aesthetic canons and everyday clichés of performing and listening to music. Therefore, the politics of music or the *aesthetic politics of music* is not only a composed and performed musical event that results in a sensory-corporeal affect of music in listening. The affect of intensity is the sensory impact of music directed at listening, which is posited in the discursive maps of interpreting the reasons for that particular music within such and such social antagonisms and

239 David Harvey: “Freedom’s Just Another Word”, in: *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 5.

240 Jacques Rancière: “Politicized Art”, in: *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill. London: Continuum, 2004, 63.

differences. Through the process of subjectifying the performers and listeners, the regime of political concepts and meanings, that is, more specifically, discursive formations, appropriates sensory affects, reconstructing them in the field of politics, i.e. confronting social antagonisms. Music as an apparatus is an aspect of the political as the active in human life.

The conceptual construction of *music as an apparatus* refers to music as a subjectified technology that generates specific types of bodily perception and appropriation of artificial sound, as well as institutionalised forms of the production, exchange, reception, and consumption of music as a cultural property (cultural surplus value), with which specific forms of its direct and indirect audiences' bodily and cultural behavior are organised. The starting definition of apparatus may be found in a Michel Foucault interview:

What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements. Thus, a particular discourse can figure at one time as the programme of an institution, and at another, it can function as a means of justifying or masking a practice which itself remains silent, or as a secondary re-interpretation of this practice, opening out for it a new field of rationality. In short, between these elements, whether discursive or non-discursive, there is a sort of interplay of shifts of positions or modifications of function which can also vary widely. Thirdly, I understand by the term “apparatus” a sort of – shall we say – formation which has as major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an *urgent need*. The apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function.<sup>241</sup>

If one applies Foucault's concept of apparatus to music, the following construction may be derived. The apparatus of music is a heterogeneous *set*, which comprises acoustic events; musical instruments; musical literature; musical knowledge in composition and performance; the audio-technology of amplifying, recording, and reproducing music; various discourses of the world of music, art, culture,

241 Michel Foucault: “The Confession of the Flesh”, in: *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980, 194–195.

and society; modalities of contextualising music; architectural forms and urban-planning positions of spaces designated for performing and listening to music; the behavioral bodies of performers and listeners, that is, technical staff; decisions regarding performance times and venues; the administrative characteristics and modes of acting of musical institutions; relations between musical and non-musical institutions; formal and informal institutions; statements about music, from philosophical to everyday slang; moral and aesthetic propositions; business and economic propositions, etc. – in short, whatever is said or left unsaid regarding individual works of music, a body of work, or a musical practice. All of these are elements of the apparatus and one could list many other elements, linked to concrete historical and geographical practices of music.

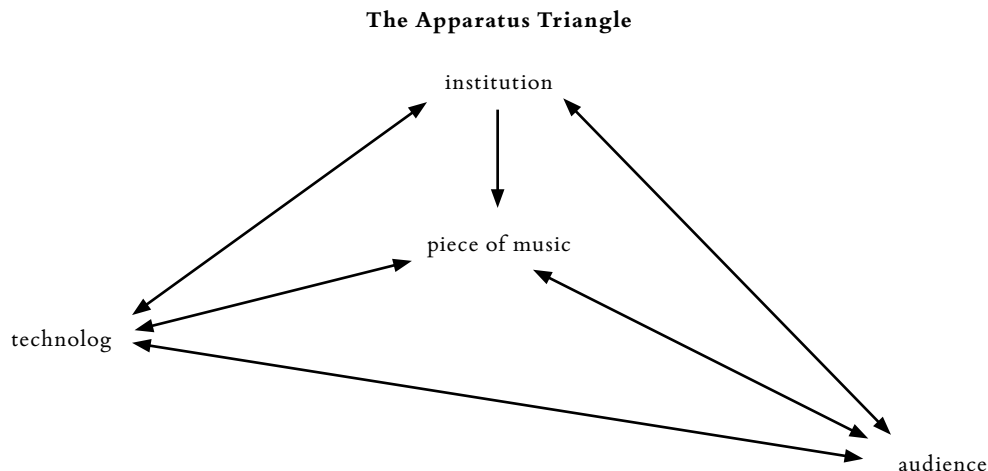
Nevertheless, the apparatus is above all a system of relations that may be established between the many elements listed above, as well as other, potential or unspecified elements.

What is identified is every apparatus of music is a set of direct and indirect relations that may exist among these heterogeneous elements in the establishment of a particular music, in historical and geographical terms. An individual apparatus may thus figure, in a given context, as the program of an institution, while in a different context, it may function as a means of justifying or masking a practice that, by itself, remains inaudible or invisible, or as a secondary reinterpretation of this practice, opening to it a new field of rationality. In short, between these elements, whether discursive or non-discursive, there is a multitude of dynamic interrelations of moving positions and modifying functions that may vary depending on the context (the geographical and historical loci).

The term “apparatus” denotes different kinds of formations that perform the function of answering to an *unexpected* or *expected challenge* in the musical and extra-musical public and private sphere, at a given historical juncture and geographic location. The apparatus has its dominant strategic as well as numerous tactical functions in the social construction of reality.

Music as an apparatus signifies a threefold relation between technology, the institutions, and the audience, which emerges in a product that may be called a *work of music* in an artistic sense or a *piece of music* in the cultural sense.

In the diagram above, technology denotes a heterogeneous or closed set of techniques, technical means, and modes of behavior linked with using or performing a technique and the rules or customs of using a technique in relation



to specific individual or collective forms of behavior linked to the production, exchange, reception, and consumption of music. In that sense, the technology of music signifies not only the performance of music on a musical instrument or on multiple musical instruments, but also the sum of relations linked with creating, performing, reproducing, and presenting music in artistic, cultural, and social institutions. In this instance, the institution signifies any formalised social relation that has a professional or administrative platform, assumed or specified protocols or work and operation, and expected procedures of realising its platform, posited by its protocols in relation to itself and society at large. An institution is the social “framework” that enables the realisation of an open or closed social relation that is constructed or mediated by music.

Finally, one may draw the following three conclusions:

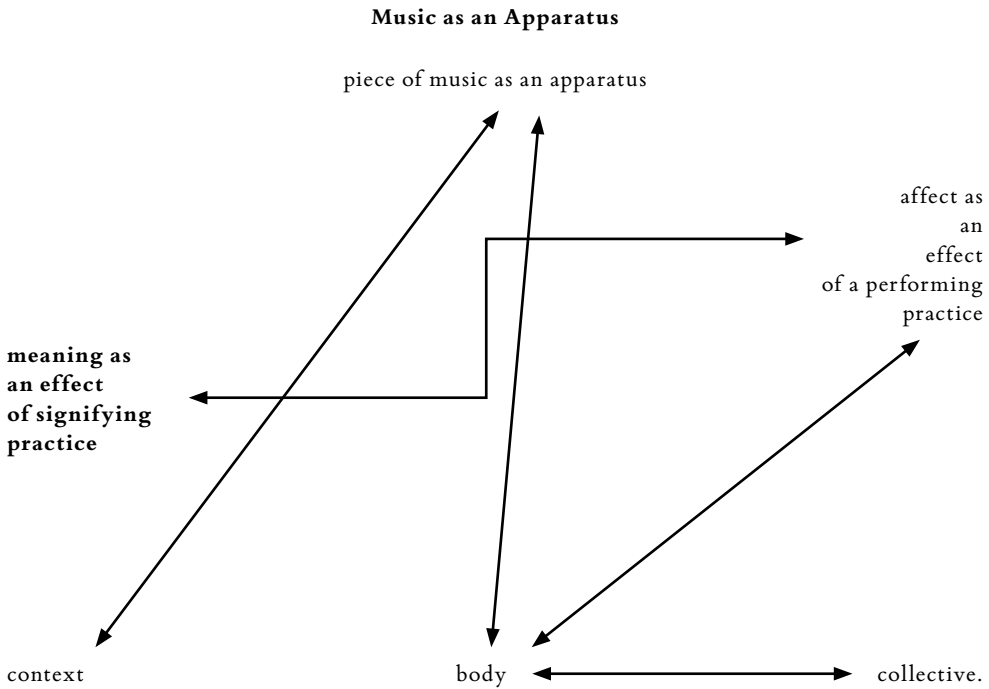
- (1) that music is an exceptional field wherein the transparency of the functions of art in a concrete society and culture is ideologically subverted and
- (2) that music is in metaphysical terms an artistic and cultural practice whereby concrete references of a musical work and society are reduced in an interpretive way, i.e., its function emerges as that which has been removed to the level of having no function at all;
- (3) Adorno’s middle-way solution suggests that there is a historical society<sup>242</sup> – the bourgeois society of the modern West – that established the function of reducing music’s social functionality; by not having, in absolute terms,

<sup>242</sup> Mladen Dolar: “Strel sredi koncerta”, in: *Uvod v sociologijo glasbe by Theodor Adorno*. Ljubljana: DZS, 1985, 302–303.

a social function, music thereby realizes its social function in a given society.

Adorno's solution may be a juncture taking us toward claiming that music is in any case determined by the character of its apparatus, which shifts in different cultural and social conditions, with time and space – history and geography. In other words, I posit the following two theses:

- (1) music has the character of an apparatus,
- (2) music as an apparatus is not invariant but a social practice in the transition of context.



# CRITICAL ARCHITECTURE

11

GENERAL THEORY OF IDEOLOGY  
Architecture

12

ARCHITECTURE AS CULTURAL PRACTICE  
The Market's Appropriation of the Social or the Ideology of the Multitude





31 Provisional Salta Ensemble: *State of Exception 11*, photo-essay, photomontage, 2014  
Courtesy Provisional Salta Ensemble

## GENERAL THEORY OF IDEOLOGY

### Architecture

#### APPROACHING THE CONCEPT OF IDEOLOGY

I will begin with the completely simple distinction between politics and ideology. In the most general sense, politics may be defined as the sum of all pragmatic social practices and institutions whereby a social relationship or order is realised. Some theorists distinguish between politics and the political.<sup>243</sup> The political is then defined as the multiplicity of all the antagonisms that constitute human society. Politics denotes social confrontation and attempting to resolve those social antagonisms, i.e. attempting to resolve the political, which constitutes society.

In political and cultural terms, an ideology is a relatively coherent and determined set of ideas, symbolic conceptions, values, beliefs and forms of thought, behaviours, expressions, presentations, and actions, shared by the members of a particular social group, political party, state institution, ethnic or gender group, or class of society. Therefore, ideology has the character of identificatory representation and perception. The ideology of an individual is the way s/he perceives her/himself as a singular subject in the context of her/his society, a subject in a community, the community as a subject, and therefore life *itself*, nature, and the world as phenomena for the subject.

In social studies and the humanities, the concept of ideology is defined in different, sometimes equivalent and variant, but sometimes also contradictory ways: (1) ideology is the sum of all positive and pragmatic beliefs, values, modes of behaviour and acting shared by a group of theorists or agents, that is, members of culture or a *specific* distinguished formation within the framework of culture; (2) ideology is the sum of all the misconceptions, false beliefs, and effects of illusions shared by the members of a social stratum, class, nation, political party, a specific culture or world of art, which projects a possible, actual, and current world of existence; (3) ideology is the sum of all the symbolic and imaginary, arbitrary and artificial effects produced by the media system in places of expected reality and posits *us* as objects among objects of consumption, seduction, and ecstasy, that

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<sup>243</sup> Chantal Mouffe: "Politics and the Political", in: *On the Political*. London: Routledge, 2005, 9.

is, ideology becomes, by means of its media realisation, a techno-multiplied new reality (hyperreality); (4) in its essence, ideology is a phantasmatic construction serving to prop up our *reality*, in other words, it is an *illusion* that structures effective social relations and hides traumatic social *divisions* or *confrontations* that cannot be symbolised, and therefore its function is to provide us with a bearable social reality; (5) ideology is the surrounding field of phenomena that emerges before our bodies and the conceptuality that accompanies that emergence, thereby constituting the subject, society, culture, and art; (6) ideology is the multiplicity of meanings, representations, and forms of the production of knowledge and representations that determine a culture, either necessarily or out of historical motivation, turning it from a *non-regulated* (or *under-regulated*) *system* into a *regulated* (or over-regulated) system of the production, exchange, consumption and enjoyment of sense, commodities, production, exchange, consumption, information, power, and the representing of representations; (7) ideology is the hidden (tacit, invisible, underlying) order that determines a given society or social formation, whether or not that society or social formation *acknowledges* it as its ideology; (8) ideology is a rational verification (legitimisation) of the *status quo*; (9) ideology is not reality itself, but a *regulative relation* or system of representations realised or offered by the state apparatus and institutions of everyday life; (10) ideology is the present experience of the human and the world; (11) ideology denotes the meanings, sense, and values of the power structure practised or aspired to by a specific social formation or society as a whole and (12) ideology is a system of signs and signifiers whereby a society posits itself vis-à-vis any other system of signs and signifiers, thus positing itself vis-à-vis any other society, even itself as a society, culture, or the world.

Following Marx, Louis Althusser redefined “ideology” as a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. A specific ideology has its material existence because it is a socially active representation. From this materialistic ground, Althusser derived the following conclusions: (1) every practice is enabled by ideology and unfolds via ideology and (2) ideology exists only from the subject and for the subject. In that sense, ideology is a system of representations that carries out the interpellation of individuals as subjects vis-à-vis their real social conditions:

Ideology is a “Representation” of the Imaginary Relationship of Individuals to their Real Conditions of Existence.<sup>244</sup>

<sup>244</sup> Louis Althusser: “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)”, in: *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971, 162.

Lacanian theoretical psychoanalysis, a step further from Althusser, has pointed out that the role of ideology is not to offer the subject an escape point from her/his reality, but to offer her/him social reality itself as an escape from a real traumatic kernel in the midst of human life. For, according to Lacan, a phantasm is not something that opposes reality, but the last support for that which is called reality. For instance, according to Slavoj Žižek:

Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our “reality” itself: an “illusion” which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel (conceptualised by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe as “antagonism”: a traumatic social division which cannot be symbolized).<sup>245</sup>

The ideological web of signifiers supports the subject by hiding the pre-ideological kernel that is enjoyment. In other words, there is something that precedes ideology and that is enjoyment. Ideology exists by hiding that which precedes, i.e. enjoyment. In ideology, not everything is ideology, i.e. ideological meaning; rather, that surplus is the last support of ideology. According to Žižek, there are two complementary procedures of ideology critique: (1) discursive ideology critique rests on demonstrating that the ideological field results from a montage of heterogeneous floating signifiers, their totalisation by means of entangling specific nodal points; (2) the other procedure of ideology critique targets the kernel of enjoyment, the ways in which ideology articulates, implies, manipulates, and produces pre-ideological enjoyment structured in a phantasm.

Late modernist and postmodernist social and cultural theories define ideology not as a natural, self-evidently human system, but as a form of social, symbolic, and imaginary production of ideas, values, and beliefs. An ideological system comprises: (1) symbolic and imaginary representations of ideas, values, beliefs, and samples of identification; (2) a subject who is socially produced for those symbolic and imaginary representations; (3) a social activity in which the subject of ideology expresses, presents, and conducts ideas, values, and beliefs in order to identify with her/himself, her/his community, etc. For instance, cultural studies define the concept of ideology, borrowed from Althusserian and Lacanian polemics, with the following schema:

The attempt to fix meanings and world views in support of the powerful. Maps of meaning that, while they purport to be universal truths, are

<sup>245</sup> Slavoj Žižek: “How Did Marx Invent the Symptom?”, in: *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek. London: Verso, 1994, 323.

historically specific understandings which obscure and maintain the power of social groups (e.g. class, gender, race).<sup>246</sup>

This casual sketch of ideology theorisations suggests that ideology is an important situation of human existence<sup>247</sup> as a social and cultural phenomenon. Ideology constitutes the recognisability of the human situation in relation to its social and cultural reality, whereby the individual, culture, and society are transformed into subjects. But reality itself, reality for the subject, i.e. society, is not beyond ideology, but is essentially mediated by ideology as a constitutive human fiction. This “embarrassing knot” constitutes the fateful dependence of the individual and the collective on the experience, identification, and understanding of human life.



32 Provisional Salta Ensemble: Ankara, 2007  
Courtesy Provisional Salta Ensemble

<sup>246</sup> Chris Baker: “Glossary”, in: *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. London: Sage, 2000, 386.

<sup>247</sup> Rastko Močnik: “Althusserjeva teza” [Althusser’s thesis], in *3 teorije. Ideologija, nacija, institucija* [3 theories. Ideology, Nation, Institution]. Ljubljana: ★cf., 1999, 7–17.





33 Provisional Salta Ensemble: London, 2013  
Courtesy Provisional Salta Ensemble



34 Provisional Salta Ensemble: Vienna, 2013  
Courtesy Provisional Salta Ensemble

## IDEOLOGY AND ARCHITECTURE

My argument is that architecture is *essentially* a political and ideological practice that uses its techno-aesthetic and techno-artistic strategies to participate in the organisation of individual and collective human life, as well as in representing the symbolic and imaginary field of visibility of a society for itself and other. Except in rare instances of totalitarian political practices,<sup>248</sup> the techno-aesthetic and techno-artistic modalities of architecture typically hide its political and ideological character. The fact that techno-aesthetic and techno-artistic aspects of architecture hide its political and ideological character shows that the practice of “hiding” is essentially an ideological practice that posits architecture, especially modern and postmodern architecture, as a non-ideological or post-ideological state apparatus.<sup>249</sup> That is why techno-aesthetic and techno-artistic modalities of architecture are ideological constructs that realise the symbolic and imaginary presentation of architecture as an autonomous field of human creativity or pre-, that is, post-political organisation of human life as a place of dwelling. With much precision, Martin Heidegger depoliticised and de-ideologised architecture by pointing to a fundamental dimension of human existence, i.e. to the character of habitation as a metaphysical event of human existence.<sup>250</sup> In a similar way, techno-aesthetic and techno-artistic fetishism, posited as the concrete pragmatism of modern and postmodern architecture, likewise hides its ideological and political functions.<sup>251</sup>

Therefore, analysing the political and ideological in architecture cannot be restricted to questions about architecture’s pragmatic functions, which are then embodied in a free creative act that transcends architecture’s techno-aesthetic and techno-artistic modalities to produce a “work of architecture”, analogous to the “work of art”. The political (executive) and the ideological (representative) must be studied by pointing out that architecture’s techno-aesthetic and techno-artistic modalities are instruments of censoring the political and the ideological in the architectural product. In other words, the political and the ideological are not “functions” or “meta-functions” imposed on architecture, but ideological and political “contradictions and antagonisms of the very function and phenomenality”

248 Albert Speer: *Neue deutsche Baukunst*, ed. Rudolf Wolters. Berlin: Volk und Reich Verlag, 1941; Alexei Tarkhanov and Sergei Kavtaradze: *Architecture of the Stalin Era*. New York: Rizzoli, 1992.

249 Manfredo Tafuri: “Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology”, in: *Architecture Theory Since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hays. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT, 2000, 2–5.

250 Martin Heidegger: “Building Dwelling Thinking”, in: *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. David Farrell Krell, London: Kegan Paul, 1977, 319–339.

251 Udo Kultermann: *New Architecture in the World*, trans. Ernst Flesch. New York: Universe Books, 1966.

of specific historical architecture. Therefore, *the practice of architecture* is in its character a *signifier practice* and that means a material practice, in which the social and the human are produced in the struggle to structure the visible, i.e. presentable order of power, rule, governance, and existence there and then.

If we accept all of the foregoing, the history of architecture is no longer a history of remembering the architectural works of the past, or a history of the traces of positing architectural works as traces of techno-aesthetic and techno-artistic *ideas*. The history of architecture then becomes a critical history of the social relations of production, exchange, and consumption of “architectural products” in their singular situatedness via politics and presentedness via ideology. In other words, paradoxically, architecture is something other than that which appears as direct affective experience before the body and the eye. That *other* must be explored.





35 Stojan Maksimović: Cultural centre „Sava Centar“, Novi Beograd, postcard, 1979  
Courtesy Dubravka Đurić and Miško Šuvaković Archive

## ARCHITECTURE AS CULTURAL PRACTICE

### The Market's Appropriation of the Social or the Ideology of Multitude

In this text, architecture is discussed as a “symptom” of shifts in the visibility of social relations in the transitional society of Serbia from the fall of Slobodan Milošević’s regime, via globalised transitional expansive practices in the economy, to the onset of the global financial crisis of neo-liberalism during the late 2000s. Here, architecture is interpreted not as a collection of “characteristic or great works” in a given state, national culture, or a set of national cultures, but as a “symptom” – a *sliding signifier* – showing the way and modes whereby a society visualises and spatially presents itself, seeking to organise its public and private life. Architecture then becomes a sort of “spectacle”, where social relations become visible. In contrast to, for instance, Charles Jencks’s conception of ‘the new paradigm in architecture’,<sup>252</sup> in transitional societies one may not speak so much of great architectural masterpieces or expensive spectacular expositions of ‘cultural policy’ by means of museums, opera houses, theatres, cultural centres, shopping malls, business centres, etc., but of an architectural-visual-spatial theatricalisation of political, ideological, and economic structural changes in the identity of a contemporary citizen.

In Serbian and Yugoslav architecture, during the era of socialist self-management, architecture rendered visible the social relation of the “self-managed” and “techno-bureaucratic” sociality of real socialism, for instance, through the construction of residential blocks and neighbourhoods and public spaces as part of raising the living standards of the working class, to present the accomplishments and power of socialist cultural and social policy.<sup>253</sup> During the 1990s, despite some individually important works, architecture and city planning were an expression of social entropy and the collapse of “real socialism” and its social apparatuses.<sup>254</sup> This was

<sup>252</sup> Charles Jencks: *The New Paradigm in Architecture: The Language of Post-modernism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

<sup>253</sup> Ljiljana Blagojević: “Materijalizacija: modernizam upotrebne vrednosti, 1948–1965” [Materialisation: Use-value Modernism, 1948–1965] and “Ideologija: moguća tumačenja” [Ideology: Possible Interpretations], in: *Novi Beograd: osporeni modernizam* [New Belgrade: Negated Modernism]. Belgrade: Zavod za Udžbenike, Arhitektonski fakultet and Zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture grada Beograda, 2007, 120–193, 242–251.

<sup>254</sup> Ljiljana Miletić Abramović: “Arhitektura kontradiktornosti konfliktnog, haotičnog društva u tranziciji” [The Architecture of the Contradictions of a Conflict, Chaotic Society in Transition],

the entropy of the “policy of rational city planning and architecture” as well as the inability to identify the character of sociality without invoking the populist and chaotic socialist-nationalist discourse. The planning and architectural chaos of the 1990s was certainly a symbol of the contradictions of a society unable to resolve its conflicts and inherent contradictions in a rational or pragmatic way. In post-2000 Serbia, architecture has been *performed* as a discursive, ideological, political, and historically and geographically determined practice in its transitional society. It rests on the development, syntheses, and contradictory confrontations of the socialist, global neoliberal, and nationalist-bourgeois free-market production and reproduction of individual and collective living situations. The architecture of globalising transition is spectacular precisely the way Guy Debord defines spectacle as *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image.<sup>255</sup> Capital as architectural image has been significantly determined and guided by its most characteristic architectural achievements since 2000, which include shopping malls, business centres, business-residential centres, and small-scale industrial architecture.

Architecture as a discursive practice is “visual-spatial speech” or a manifestation of the special social institutions of articulating, producing, controlling, and consuming living space, that is, life in an articulated, delimited, and derived space. Architectural work or its effects are performed under the auspices of social institutions that establish, present, and control characteristic historical and geographical social formations of life forms, bodies of knowledge, identities, meanings, and values in the realisation and consumption of living space and time. Architecture as an institution, discipline, practice, or object is a discourse because it constructs visual-spatial and existential individual and collective interpellations and identifications of society in historical and geographic terms, that is, of social subjects. That is why today’s architecture may be discussed in terms of architecture in global and transitional post-Fordism alike.

According to contemporary Italian political theorist Paolo Virno, the important characteristics of contemporary society are the multitude, labour, post-Fordism, and power.<sup>256</sup> Virno has supplied a critical analysis of the fundamental changes in the character of capitalism during the 1980s and 1990s. He identified in those changes a significant role of the multitude and the “socialist” character of post-

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in *Paralele i kontrasti: srpska arhitektura 1980–2005* [Parallels and Contrasts: Serbian Architecture 1980–2005], Belgrade: Muzej primenjene umetnosti, 2007, 66–85.

255 Guy Debord: “Separation Perfected”, in: *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone Books, 1995, 24.

256 Paolo Virno: *A Grammar of the Multitude*. Cambridge, MA and London: Semiotext(e), 2003, 55.

Fordism: “post-Fordism is the communism of capital”. Unlike a people or nation, the multitude is a plurality that rejects political unity and does not turn rights into sovereignty, opposing obedience and representative democracy. In Virno’s view, “the multitude” differs from the “mass” of popular mass culture, although that distinction does not seem so clear today. The change in the character of labour has generated new forms and relations of production, exchange, and consumption – turning away from the industrial production of “objects” to providing services, as well as new forms of decision-making concerning a relation determined by blurring the boundaries between politics and labour. That is why the industry of communication, i.e. spectacle (cultural industry) is an industry like any other. What is new is that the industry of communication is also becoming an industry of the production of the means of production. The traditional Marxist division between the basis and superstructure thereby acquires a new character, that of “innovating” the modes of communication, perception, and event in social reality. In such a context, “city planning” and “architecture” are not national superstructures on the bases of everyday life, but forms of cultural services and thereby the realisation of cultural policy, which is no longer a representative of “the higher values” but an *agent* of expansive capital itself and its economic demands in mastering the multitude, i.e. turning it into a mass.

Architecture is an ideological practice, because architectural production and consumption are material instrumental and functional factors in the social and cultural, that is, political and state-legal, i.e. economic “reality” of the everyday life of any historical and geographical society, including the contemporary transitional society of Serbia. Therefore, architecture is not a mimesis of social reality but an important instrument of constituting and performing social “reality” in its concreteness and universality here and now. For instance, the socialist-realist architecture of the late 1940s and 1950s was not the mimesis of a realised socialist society, an existing and present space in a revolutionary real-socialist society, but a way for real-socialist societies to assume, perform, and publicly and privately inhabit, through their institutions, a potential or ideal architecturally articulated space whereby the real-socialist identity of the ruling working class and its vanguard, the communist party, that is, its techno-bureaucracy, could be identified with all of its optimal projections and projects.

The paradox of socialist realism and its performance of “socialist aestheticism” was its removal of “social public space”, the central place of sociality and social decision-making, from everyday life into the “closed protocol spaces” of bureaucratic institutions – for instance, the Labour Union House in Belgrade, the building of the Federal Executive Council, and the Social-political Organisations

Building (the Central Committee building). These buildings constructed the closed indoor spaces of a bureaucratic representation of the working class that was somehow deferred from the actual performance of politics, although regularly referred to, mentioned, and invoked. The humanisation of socialist realism – implementing the policy of “Marxism with a human face” – a political turn from real socialism to self-management socialism, enabled a “controlled opening of the institutions to the people” (for instance, the Belgrade Fair complex, the Passenger Terminal at Belgrade Airport, the department stores in all major cities and especially their pinnacle, Beograđanka department store in Belgrade, Sava Centre, etc.) and a “humanised” and “modern” everyday life in urbanised residential areas and blocks (e.g. New Belgrade and satellite towns around Belgrade).

By contrast, the ideologies of transitional globalism are geared toward open but economically controlled, surveyed, and guided spaces, above all: business centres and shopping malls<sup>257</sup> (e.g. Ušće shopping and business centre – formerly the Central Committee building, etc.). Ušće commercial centre emerged through a symbolic transformation of the Social-political Organisations building (CK), ruined in the NATO bombing of 1999. The building was reconstructed by the *European Construction* team in 2005. This almost symbolically shows how capitalism during the transition period “absorbed” and transformed the architectural symbols of the era of real- and self-management socialism.

Each one of these potential possibilities of performing an architectural context of living in Serbia concerned an explicit ideology of performing the positing of an individual as a social subject, in real socialism, self-managed socialism, and transitional global society. An individual becoming a subject<sup>258</sup> of socialism or transitional globalism, i.e. neoliberal capitalism is guided by her subjection to the *Master-subject*. In socialism, the *Master-subject* was the party and its leader/ leadership, whereas in contemporary capitalism, the *Master-subject* is the depersonalised topology of power-capital. Therefore, the *Master-subject* is not a direct “real-life character”, but a *Subject* mediated by bureaucratic and technocratic apparatuses, practices, and representatives-agents of performing life itself in given conditions and circumstances.

Architecture, for example that of shopping malls (e.g. Mercator, Tempo, Ušće, Delta City, Rodić), effects a confrontation and mutual recognition between an individual becoming a subject and the *Master-subject*, who supplies the emerging

257 Anon.: “conQUEST: Arhitektura kupovine”, in: *DaNS* 60 (2007), 4–19.

258 Louis Althusser: “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”, in: *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books, 1971, 168.



36 Social-political Organisations building (CK): Belgrade, postcard, 1960s  
Courtesy Dubravka Đurić and Miško Šuvaković Archive



37 Provisonal Salta Ensemble: Ušće business centre, Belgrade, 2014  
Courtesy Provisonal Salta Ensemble

subject with protocols of conduct. For instance, a labour union deputy would come to the Labour Union building as a representative of her work and labour-union unit, whereas a consumer or “spectator” comes to the mall as a potential and realised consumer in the circulation of commodities, information, and money, i.e. “digitised values”. In such a framework, ideology is a set of representations, images, meanings, and symbolic values. Those *images* guarantee that the individual will, in such a space, behave appropriately and perform his becoming a subject of socialism or capitalism in an expected and “regular way” and thus affirm the function and meaning of the “architectural space” he comes to visit. Ideology is not explicitly pronounced, but designed by the institution’s external visual appearance, which means its architecture, which motivates the realisation of the individual as a subject in relation to the *Master-subject*. Architecture is an instrumental part of this motivating process and its *objectifications into the reality* of human life. A good example is a comparison between the Avala TV tower (1965) and the building of Pink TV (2000) – which shows the difference between real-socialist construction undertaken by the state and private, neoliberal construction and the marking of “social identity”.

The architecture of neo-liberalism is an open and often contradictory architectural-political platform that spectacularises the conception and horizon of the activity and affectivity of economic liberalism. Economic liberalism rests on instruments of fostering permanent and expansive economic development, as well as securing political and individual human freedoms in a market system as a basically social system. The architecture of neo-liberalism is doubly market-oriented: it is an expression of a *free-market general intellect* and its spaces are those of free-market protocols. The language game of differentiating a “social-housing” building of the socialist era from an “apartment” building in the era of transitional global capitalism suggests two entirely different modes of ownership: in socialism, an apartment was social property and one could only gain the right to use it for a limited time, whereas in neoliberal capitalism, an apartment is private property that is owned or rented. If we sharpen this idea to its pragmatic extreme, one might say that “an apartment in socialism was occupied by a family”, including a certificate of a generational occupation of an *abode*, whereas in neo-liberal capitalism, an apartment is rented by an individual for a limited time period in her professional life. Neoliberal architecture therefore posits a “doctrine” quite different from the modernist utopianism of working-class housing, for instance, that of Walter Gropius or Le Corbusier, that architecture’s market activity and characterisation are an “ethical value *per se* and *in se*”, which makes “business ethics” the dominant paradigmatic determinant of other human activities and forms of life in society.

In terms of *Realpolitik*, neo-liberalism is the *political protocol* of reconstituting and limiting the competencies and powers of the state in line with the economic demands of permanent and expansive free-market development, which is implemented through the privatisation of finance and the globalisation of the market. This concept, which began to be introduced in Serbia during the 1990s at first “modestly” and then, after 2000, expansively, experienced a “global crisis” during the late 2000s. In Serbia, the context of the rise of neo-liberalism and its global crisis is more complex than in Western societies. Regarding architecture, one should note the following:

- (1) traces of architectural socialism and its emancipations by way of modernism and postmodernism;
- (2) the production of *Volkisch* populism and striving toward traditional national architecture;
- (3) arbitrary non-architectural and non-planned developments of new peripheral neighbourhoods with individual construction;
- (4) production and postproduction of neoliberal globalist expansive architectural and planning developments of public and private spaces with references to the global market.

One may therefore argue that the overall picture of transitional architecture in Serbia, primarily in cities such as Belgrade, Niš, Novi Sad, Kragujevac, etc., rests on a hybrid confrontation of stylistically/iconographically divergent systems of the “visibility of construction” and the “spectacularisation” of human life, from ghettos (Roma neighbourhoods) via individual development (neighbourhoods populated by refugees from the warzones of the 1990s) to the distribution of private capital into individual edifices (postmodern residences with regionalist or traditionalist symbolic characteristics) to public business and commercial spaces self-referentially identified as “neoliberal” or “capitalist” or “market” (business and shopping centres). The visibility of an architectural edifice becomes a hybridised and individualised “code” of the user’s identification and “social micro-ecology”, whereby the user identifies as a subject of contemporary society. As a style, “postmodernism” came to an end precisely with the demand to globalise and abandon all eclectic and eccentric expression. The final examples of postmodern architectural works are the petrol station called *Dejton* (designed by Mario Jobst and built 1992–1995) and the building of the Yugoslav Drama Theatre (designed by Zoran Radojičić and Dejan Miljković, built 1997–2003). As a “style characteristic”, transitional globalism began and developed with numerous buildings, such as that of Pink TV in Belgrade (designed by Aleksandar Spajić, completed in 2000), the Belgrade Arena (designed by Vlada Slavica, built



1992–2001), the business and manufacturing centre NIMAX (designed by Vladan Nikolić and Mladen Nikolić, built 2003–2005), Delta City shopping centre in New Belgrade (designed by Disraeli Moore Yaski Sivan Architects, completed in 2006), the Idea supermarket in Subotica (designed by Jasna M. Živković, built in 2007), the Mercator centre in Novi Sad (designed by Vladimir Koželj, built 2006–2007), the business and service centre Porsche Beograd Sever (designed by Goran Vojvodić, built 2006–2007), Belgrade, the business facility of Putevi Požega (designed by Vladan Drndarević, built 2007–2008), the Holiday Inn hotel and Expo XXI hall in New Belgrade (designed by Vladimir Lojanica, built 2005–2007), Albon Avena company's business and the manufacturing complex in Šimanovci (designed by Zoran Bulajić and Katarina Bosnić, built 2006–2008).

# PERFORMANCE ART

13

TECHNOLOGIES OF PERFORMANCE  
IN PERFORMANCE ART  
Concepts and Phenomenological Research

14

THE AVANT-GARDE:  
PERFORMANCE AND DANCE  
Ideologies, Events, Discourses

15

DISCOURSES AND DANCE  
An Introduction to the Analysis of the *Resistance* of Philosophy  
and Theory Towards Dance

16

THEORETICAL PERFORMANCE  
Performative Knowledge



38 Miško Šuvaković: *Organisation of Sculpture*, photo performance, 1974  
Courtesy Dubravka Đurić and Miško Šuvaković Archive

## TECHNOLOGIES OF PERFORMANCE IN PERFORMANCE ART Conceptual and Phenomenological Research

### APPROACH TO THE APPREHENSION AND THE CONCEPT OF *PERFORMANCE ART*

The apprehension and conceptualisations of *performance art* are multi-signifying and ill-defined in their numerous current or retrospective uses, applications and *performance* in different theories and histories of art in the 20th century. The apprehension and the term *performance art* was conceptualised in the late 1960s and early 1970s in neo-avant-garde tactics, less frequently in strategies, transformations and the overcoming of closed boundaries of defining the visual<sup>259</sup> – most importantly, high modernist – works of art, and visual arts in general as arts based on creating, making or producing authentic, self-inferential, self-contained, and all-accomplished pictures and sculptures as *pieces*. Afterwards, in the late neo-avant-garde, the idea of performance art was, in theoretical interpretative and historicist terms, retrospectively applied to different open, experimental, processual and action art works, conceived and performed as events. However, the late neo-avant-garde concept of performance art was in interpretative, anticipatory and programmatic, i.e. hegemonic terms, applied to quite different postmodernist art works which have been performed and based on the concept of the realisation of events. The idea of performance art was applied in music,<sup>260</sup> literature, radiophony,<sup>261</sup> film, theatre, dance,<sup>262</sup> opera,<sup>263</sup> art practices aimed at cultural work, in electronic mass media. At this point, it is necessary to stress that the conceptualisation of performance art was not created in synthesis

259 Here we foremostly refer to the “creation” of painting or sculpture transformed from *piece* to *work*. Cf. Arthur C. Danto: “Artworks and Real Things”, in: *Art and Philosophy – Readings in Aesthetics*, ed. W.E. Kennick. New York: St. Martin Press, 1979, 98–110.

260 Michael Nyman: *Experimental Music – Cage and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

261 *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde*, eds. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1992.

262 “Nove teorije plesa” [New Theories in Dance], thematic issue, *TkH* 4 (2002), 9–135.

263 Herbert Lindenberger: *Opera in History: From Monteverdi to Cage*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1998; Rose Lee Goldberg: “Theater, music, opera”, in: *Performance. Live Art Since the 60s*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1998, 62–93.

of different proceduralities, from individual arts into a new multi-disciplinary integrative “super-discipline” of new art. The apprehension and concept of performance art are applied to often incomparable art practices from different diachronic and synchronic contexts, which identify the act of realisation of the work or the event of the actualisation of the work as an *event-as-art work*. The attention is shifted from the finished/static object- or piece- as a finished product, to *performance* as a *process* within the realm of art and culture. The history of performance art is constructed as a narrative of comparative maps of strategies and tactics of identification and interpretation of different constructed or random procedures of authors’ *nomadic performance* of the art work as an event. The art work of *performance art* is, most frequently, a heterogeneous event situated in quite subjective, social and historical moments of late capitalism and its hegemonies imposed on the second-postsocialist and the third-postcolonial world.

In observing different examples of use or just recalling various models of performance art in contemporary theatre, we could put forward a thesis that the examples of performance art in historical avant-gardes<sup>264</sup> were external, “beyond-theatrical” nomadic attacks on the institutions of theatre. In the avant-gardes, performance is based as the anticipatory, innovative and excessive action out of the context, meaning the specified world and localised theatre institutions and environments. The art experiment was enacted in the intermediary space of different autonomously situated arts. In the neo-avant-gardes<sup>265</sup> of the late 1950s and 1960s the most radical examples of theatre were transformed towards the *happening*, i.e. they “asymptotically gravitated” towards performance art. Examples can be found in the examination of the instrumentality of the actor’s “body” out of the context of dramatic motivation in Grotowski’s theatre laboratories, in the practice of political activism as theatre or paratheatre or beyond-theatre actionism in the production of *Living Theatre*,<sup>266</sup> and in the founding of the complex multi-variant ethno-, ritual- or therapy-oriented practices and theories through the *existentialised* and anthropologised practice of performance, as described by Schechner.<sup>267</sup> A certain affinity was perceived for transgression as a trespass, that is, a formal egress outside of the canonised modernist autonomously situated limits of theatre. As opposed to that, with the postmodern theatre, for example, since Wilson’s work *Einstein on the Beach*, a third possibility also emerged

264 For example, the dadaist performance in Zurich’s *Cabaret Voltaire* (1916), the cubist-dadaist production of the *Parade* (1917) in Paris or Picabia’s complex multimedia stage piece *Relâche* (1924).

265 On the atmosphere and tactics of neo-avant-garde theatre, cf. the catalogue Anon.: *Bitef 5*. Belgrade: Bitef, 1971.

266 Carlo Silvestro, ed. *The Living Book of the Living Theatre*. New York, Greenwich CT: New York Graphic Society, 1971; *The Living Theatre, Paradise Now*. New York: Random House, 1971.

267 Richard Schechner: *Performance Theory*. London and New York: Methuen Drama, 1988.

– and that was the introduction of “beyond-theatre” experiments, models and tactics into elaborated and hegemonic systems of work in theatre. Thus the concepts and phenomena of performance art appear as procedures of concurring deconstruction of stable characteristics of theatre within its canonic institutions and also as the recycling and implanting of *performing* into the theatrical, within the realm of the hegemonies of theatre as a dominant practice in performing arts. Certain theatre, dance, opera and music-performance works were created under indeterminate influences or applications of concepts and phenomena of *performance* from *performance art*. The problematic, marginal, auto-reflexive, deconstructionist or transgressive procedurality of *performance* from *performance art* is applied to *performing* the work as a whole or the *performing* of fragments within more complex modernist or postmodernist realisations in theatre, dance, opera and music. On the one hand, the context of theatre as a performing arts discipline was thus opened and expanded, but on the other, the anti-aesthetical, pro-conceptual and para-technical procedurality of *performance art* was re-aestheticised and technically canonised. The early theatre works of Robert Wilson, *A Letter for Queen Victoria* (1974) or *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), were created through the transfer of *performer*’ arbitrariness, alienation and the director’s constructivism into the deconstruction of drama theatre and its evolutions. For example, *Einstein on the Beach* features the deconstructing of drama theatre into a theatre of architectural or visual images, where the relatively autonomous authors’ writing (*écriture*) of the composer (Philip Glass), choreographer (Lucinda Childs) and director (Robert Wilson) are programatically opposed. The opera cycle<sup>268</sup> of John Cage *Européras 1&2* and *3&4* (1987, 1990) would almost seem to be an ordinary opera cycle had there not been the *performing* of intervention and the destruction of the formal-aesthetic-as-technical *character* of the opera by introducing the role of chance into the writing of the libretto, the composing of the music and the treatment of set and costume.

John Cage tried to break all the typical institutional-poetic canons in opera art by anarchistic annulment of the authorial first-degree-authentic creative act. He set the opera’s *multigender text* as a simultaneous *performing* of eclectic, randomly chosen samples from various historical opera works. The theatre piece *De macht der theaterlijke dwaasheden* [The Power Of Theatrical Madness, 1984] by Jan Fabre was performed in an accelerated and metastatic *recycling* of the concepts of trans-avantgarde practice in painting. The trans-avantgarde practice in painting is the post-historical, arbitrary, eclectic and collage/montage production of the literal and the fictional in the realm of the concrete image. When the concept of trans-avantgarde is transferred and set into the theatre work, a performed theatre event

<sup>268</sup> Lindenberger, “Regulated Anarchy: John Cage’s *Européras 1&2* and the Aesthetics of Opera”, in: *Opera in History: From Monteverdi to Cage*, 240–264.

becomes a system of confronted and discontinual post-dramatic visual-stage-scenes. Fabre worked with two characteristic levels of performance: (1) with first-degree performance on stage, which deconstructs the important phenomenal aspects of the director's interpretation of the dramatic, in the name of the visual theatre and (2) with second-degree performance of the institutional transfer of concepts, procedures or paradigms of one art like painting into another art, like theatre. In so doing, he renders these two levels as performance in the realm of marked erotisations of representational phenomena. In a psychoanalytic<sup>269</sup> sense he underlines that performance is, actually, *passage à l'acte*, inciting of the reality of the unconscious for the purposes of theatre's post-aesthetic ecstatic bliss (*jouissance*). Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker,<sup>270</sup> in a series of neatly conceived and highly aestheticised pieces, like *Just Before* (1997), *Drumming* (1999), *I said I* (1999) or *In Real Time* (2000), introduces elements which do not belong to the integrating and time-set aestheticism of high-elitism in late post-modern dance. Those unexpected *rough* elements belong to the margins of dance life. In addition, these performances are set on the loose and largely arbitrary formal open structures of connecting dance parts. Loose, arbitrary and open structure is what recalls or suggests the atmosphere of performance art. Thus, Keersmaeker's accomplishment is that highly-aestheticised dance becomes de-ontologised or relativised by displaying unstable and arbitrary relations between the dominant-exceptional and marginal-trivial aspects of dance technique as a "machine" of microsocial behaviour. On the other hand, she aestheticizes the elements which potentially belong to performance art, by bringing them to the level of centered dance technique or the stylised production of dynamic relations of dance figures. As a choreographer, she simultaneously positions the performer's body as a *literal body* from performance art and as a *non-literal body* or a *figure* from dance. In contrast, Jérôme Bel,<sup>271</sup> in a series of conceptual choreographic performances like *The Show Must Go On!* (2000) or *Jérôme Bel* (2001), appropriates the conceptual and phenomenal character of *performance art* to problematize the status of dance as an art which is centered and canonised around the *self-understood* functions of dance technique. Bel's dance performance is not a performance of canonised stage dance behaviour determined by the tradition of the evolution of dance techniques in modernism and post-modernism. His realisation of dance is characteristically a *performer's work*, because he as an author, with his co-performers, performs a "piece", but also because the stage behaviour of his performers is not determined

269 Jacques-Alain Miller: "Jacques Lacan: remarques sur son concept de passage à l'acte", in: *Mental* 17 (Avril 2006), 17–28.

270 Anne De Keersmaeker et al.: *Rosas – Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker*. Tournai: La Renaissance du Livre, 2002.

271 "Dosije Jérôme Bel, Xavier Le Roy", in: "Novi ples/Nove teorije" [New Dance/New Theories], thematic issue *TkH* 4 (2002), 94–101.

by intentionally anticipated aesthetic results, but by the concept of the autoreflexive examining of the different multi-registered identities of the author, the performers and the audience. He performs and suggests the uncoded behaviour of the choreographer, dancers and spectators in the context of dance and in so doing, through quite practical body acts, he raises the questions of the status of dance as a historical and current art practice, respectively. When the apprehension and the concept of performance art were established in art histories and theories, it was possible to apply the concept of performance in interpretative, theoretical and poetical terms, to those works which are not events. The idea of performance art was applied to those works which come out of a creative or productive act, which, in a way, advocates or interventionally anticipates and, of course, defers the process of performance. The object, text, image in a painting, photography, screen image, poster, advertisement, environment/installation, media construction etc. are all interpreted as *traces* which advocate and demonstrate already finished *processes of performing*. In that sense, the abstract paintings of Jackson Pollock, Jasper Johns or Marc Devade; the feminist films of Yvonne Rainer or the gay movies of Derek Jarman; the video installations of Bill Viola; the deconstructivist and pornographic fiction of Kathy Acker; the pop-rock spectacles of Laurie Anderson; the para-theoretical texts of John Cage; and the photographs of Joel-Peter Witkin, Cindy Sherman or William Wegman are all interpreted as works of performance art or as works with certain/uncertain aspects of performance art. However, these works are not 'events' in front of an audience, but rather their phenomenal appearance and semantic function are interpreted as *traces* of the painter's, director's, writer's, composer's, sculptor's or photographer's behavioural act of accomplishment of the work as an intervention on the work itself or an intervention through this work within the context of the presentation. The act of the interventionist accomplishment of the work is what the work apparently displays and advocates, and that is, in this perspective, more important than the story told, the image presented or the written symbolic order itself. For example, the work of Cindy Sherman *Untitled Film Still # 21-23* (1978) is a series of photographs which presents stills from acts of a masked actress, but they are not documents of public or private performance. These are directed sequences or shots prepared and performed for the photographic shoot.<sup>272</sup> The photos are intentionally shot so that, most often, they look like stills from well-known movies from the 1950s. She scenically designs images for photography and filming and thus produces visual photographic and film *representations* of fictional spaces, situations and events for the gaze, that is, the act of watching, recognition and identification. Her photographic images produce a socially situated visual

272 Rosalind Krauss: "Cindy Sherman: Untitled", in: *Bachelors*. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1999, 101-159.



surplus of meaning, value and sensuality. That visual surplus of meaning is beyond one's grasp, it is non-centered, slipping and shifting, often metastatic and therefore destructive. The work of Cindy Sherman is *American* in its performance of confrontation with the system of urban and media production, exchange and uncontrolled consumption of goods, values, meanings and visuality. Her works reconstruct the material system of the performance of production, exchange and consumption of fictionality through anticipations of entropy in the visual image, because her photographic images render uncertain representation, which escapes clear recognition and identification. Her work in its phenomenal and semiologically representable structure does not only exhibit what in direct, that is, first-degree terms it speaks about. It is as if her work *speaks* that the artist exploits those "subjects" or any of the media she uses as an *interventionist performing practice* in the complex existential *world* of the social conflicts of late capitalism.

### CONCEPTUAL POTENTIALITY AGAINST THE POTENTIALITY OF PHENOMENA IN THE HETEROGENEOUS REALM OF DISCURSIVITY

The interpretation of any work of performance art, for example, leads through the development of complex relations of exchange and effects of the individual-actual events and the universal potential of the concepts. In that sense, philosophically-phenomenologically speaking, Stelarc's or Nauman's *idea* is something that stems from *themselves* through an event that has to be mediated and translated into a thought, understanding and experience of the Other. The idea is then a kind of a *vehicle* for the conceptual translation of the state of mind, the conscious-subconscious-unconscious, the life activity or experience into a project. Stelarc's pierced skin and hanging body emerge from his power to conceptualize, for example, his life activity as an intentional provocation and endurance of pain. He conceptually envisages and phenomenally *performs* his life activity, through formal potentialities of a *behavioural text*. That behavioural text potentially connects his life activity as an instrumental text, with various other texts of culture, which are also traces or *traces of traces* of other *life activities* and their conceptualisations from which certain works of art and theory were conceived. For example, at this point we are speaking about the potentiality of the concept of pain which *can/potere/* also be the deferred pain of the betrayed Christ in Carravaggio's painting *The Betrayal of Christ* (1602) or the "pain" of the *dead* Christ in the painting *The Entombment of Christ* (1602-04)<sup>273</sup> or the pain of the agony/as/erotic-pleasure of

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273 Leo Bersani, Ulysse Dutoit: *Caravaggio's Secrets*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998, 54–59, 36–38.

the hero who speaks in first person in the Sacher-Masoch's novel *Venus in Furs* (1870) or the autoreflexive pain rendered as the voice of the man dying of AIDS in Derek Jarman's film *Blue* (1993).<sup>274</sup> Roughly speaking, if we accept this dynamic scheme, then the *life activity* of the performer, supported by the concept, is driven to a potential form, to be performed *by the body* in the behavioural process as a phenomenon. Phenomenon is what sensually/corporeally appears to other bodies, i.e., to the bodies of the observers/audience which translate it into the concept of the life activity which perceives or comprehends the externalised life activity of the performer's body. On the other hand, Nauman's neutral instrumentalisation of his own body comes from his power to conceptualize, for instance, his life activity as a deliberate de-aesthetising and annulment of anticipated expressivity in the context of modernist identifications of the artist as the origin of authentic and true emotions. He situates his act and behaviour, demonstrating that the presence of the body is not centering of *live* and *vital* presence. The *presence* is an effect of the indexing of the phenomenon as the trace, as the trace of the erasure of the trace. That is, Nauman points to the shift from the position of the strong subject as the *hot* spring, the origin of the phenomenon-work in a painting, as in the examples of Pollock or Rothko, to the position of the neutral subject as the *cold* cavity of the *spring*, the origin of the act in the work. Through Stelarc's or Nauman's performance art works I perceive and comprehend their life activities or at least their conceptual notions of those life activities. I perceive them through the dynamics of the event which *confronts our bodies* as punctuations in the actual perceptive, which means interactive, time and space of actuality. The complex intersubjective and interactive relation between "him" as performer and "me" as observer stands on the conviction that the event really happened. And then, through conceptual understanding, the plan of the presentation of the notion of "pain" or the plan of the presentation of the notion of "infantility" become comparable and usable to establish some *universal* philosophical knowledge about the human subject as the subject of pain or the subject of infantility. Stelarc's pain and Nauman's infantility are introduced in the game of potential notions, which are the instruments of universality. Because, I *alone* can not experience Stelarc's pain *alone* – for me, his pain becomes *pain* only through the potentiality of conceptual relations, relations with numerous concepts of the pain of Christ, Sacher-Masoch, Jarman and others. Only through potentiality of conceptual relations does the coldness and neutrality of Nauman's work become *coldness* and *neutrality* for me.

274 Marina Gržinić: "Hysteria: Physical Presence and Juridical Absence & AIDS: Physical Absence and Juridical Presence", in: "The Seen – Le Vu", thematic issue, *Filozofski vestnik*, ed. Aleš Erjavec, 2 (1996), 45–63, here 51.

Against thus postulated, logocentric model, from the “origin” to the “hiatus” of thought, it is also possible to postulate a pro-deconstructivist position, which leads from the philosophical to the theoretical mapping of interpretations of performance art. According to the pro-deconstructivist position, the *concept* is not understood as the *origin* of thought from the life activity that constitutively precedes the text as a material, sensually accessible order of signs. The concept is, on the contrary, interpreted from the pro-deconstructivist and later elaborated theoretical perspective, as a *material text of the project* by which the plan is postulated. The plan brings the art work into relations with other art works or their textual projects, which are entangled in complex and ambiguous relations with other texts of culture at the anticipated *place* of thought. It is possible to make quite a “hard” statement: *I will never know what Stelarc or Nauman authentically or truly feels and thinks through the presentation of a body exposed to painful actions or a body lead by infantile drives. I can not know any of these artists’ intentions, desires, feelings or constructions, i.e. lives. Their behaviour is not a faithful image or an apparent expression of their feelings and thoughts. On the contrary, it can be assumed that their thoughts and feelings are potential images of overwhelming, shifting or humming texts of culture. We can ascribe to Stelarc’s gestures of pain or Nauman’s acts of infantility any arbitrary meaning through the conceptual apprehensive potentialities of indexing: sadomasochism, alienation, autoaggressiveness, para-Christian or dervishesque ecstasies, the ironical or cynical behaviour of the artist, the dematerialisation of the art work, transgressiveness in relation to the canons of art and culture, violation. The behaviour of the artist is a kind of a behavioural text, which builds up at the material limit (membrane, skin) of Stelarc’s body the potentialities of the concepts. At this point, the artist’s behaviour is also a kind of text of deference of what sensually cannot be perceived and verbally cannot be expressed. The behaviour of the artist as a behavioural text addressess our intelligibility, which exists as a machine for the comparison of texts and which connects a “text” with a text into a sequence which creates the potential for the understanding of established meanings of pain. The pain does not exist for me, as a spectator, without the textual comparisons with behavioural texts of other artists. Those texts imply that his body is in a state of pain only when they are in comparison with other behavioural texts about the body under pain and with verbal texts which locate or describe or interpret “the depth of pain”; or, with my learned and acquired identifications of pain. For me, as I watch the body in pain, the pain is not the effect of some authentic induction or aura (sic!) which passes from him to me. We identify ourselves with the text of pain or the text of the absence of pain in a designed moment of a body made up and stage set, so that the body can be seen as a body displaying pain, a body displaying the endurance of pain, a body displaying the control of pain or a body displaying the absence of pain.*

This is not about setting a stage for the relationship between texts which relate to the *performing* of phenomena. Nauman's performance, i.e. his performances in the 1960s<sup>275</sup> are identified as a *performance* of the infantile behaviour of the artist (walking along a given geometric pattern, monotonously playing one tone on the violin, repeating one body action, making faces, touching or playing with testicles, smearing the body with shining oil or glaring paint) in textual surroundings which are aroused and brought under suspicion. His behaviour is a text-symptom: a text on which the slipping of the meaning of the totality of potentiality is enacted. Nauman's *performance* is not identified as an *authentic* or *true human* acting from the self, through the self and for the self. It is a provocative and behaviourally post-Duchampian positioning. Nauman's performance is a tactical intervention within the defined meanings, values and individual existential and social horizons of modern art and its sublime, aesthetic and ethical criteria which float in the atmosphere of the Western dominant culture. His walking appears as an individual, quite localised and fragmented act which can not be universalised. The artist replaces his universally aimed *creative act* with the "cold" and "neutral" phenomenality of his behaviour, which, in absence of any dramatic expressivity, points to his behavioral "politics". His work is about the politics of behaviour, and not about the expressive power of behaviour. Therefore, in the terms of post-deconstructivist theory, one can talk about performance art as a textual production in which the "textual" samples of behaviour, speech or documentation are performed – samples which the artist enacts and inscribes in place of the anticipated "idea". The role of the text is paradoxical: it opens the body to the concept and separates the concept from the body, deferring it textually into the fictional space of narration and knowledge about performance art. Performance art appears as a mapping of heterogeneous behavioural practices, pointing to the marginality and secundariness of pain or infantility as traces among traces, and not as a *live* or *life-giving* ingredient among ingredients, in relation to established dominant canons of *mimesis* and *expression* within Western art and culture.

## PHENOMENOLOGIC POTENTIALITY AND ONTOLOGY OF MULTIPLICITY IN RELATION TO PERFORMANCE ART WITHIN THE DISCOURSIVE FIELD OF THE POTENTIALITY OF INDEXING

Phenomenological potentialities are based on the conceptual demonstration of how the individual body *performances in performance art* are performed and enacted,

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<sup>275</sup> Bruce Nauman: *Pinch Neck* (1968), in: Anon.: *Bruce Nauman – Werke 1965 bis 1972*. Düsseldorf: Städtische Kunsthalle, 1973, 83.

i.e., how they happen for the body or before the body in real or fictional or VR space and time. *The body situation* is a static relation, or arrangement of bodies or objects in space and time. The situation can be interpreted as a frozen event, a selected and extracted still from the *flux* of events, a suggested absence of the process, a motionless event or, perhaps, a terminated event, etc. The Event (Ereignis) is conception, growth, endurance, work, action, termination, endless repeating, monotonous repeating, continual metamorphosis, discontinual shifting, accelerated action, deference in time and space, focusing on the object of desire, loss of an object of identification etc.<sup>276</sup> The potentialities of the phenomena of *performance art* establish a relation between the sheer experience of the event and the conceptual rendering of events and experiences of the events. The human body is, for the most part, a carrier or a medium of the action in performance art. In addition, the human body is also involved in the process of the reception of an *event*. However, the body is never *just a body*, even when the artist tends to display just a body in the play of the transformation of metaphoric figural mediations in the matter-of-factness of presence. When Dennis Oppenheim (*Reading Position for a Second Degree Burn*, 1970) exhibits his everyday body as a “place” or when Franko B. (*I Miss You*, 2002) puts forward only his white, bloody non-referential body on the catwalk, reducing the multitude of potentialities of meaning in the body, they do not reach the *body itself*. Oppenheim and Franko B. use the body as an *instrument* or a *machine* of sensual display, a machine for production of potential relations between the body and the object, the body and space, the body and time, the body and body. The body is just an anticipated *figure* which helps us focus on the *body itself*, which is never simply present here and now as just a body.

From the semiologic perspective, the *presence of the body* is a potential relationship, a signifying relationship, an anticipation of the meaning of the body and a deference of the body as the carrier of the sign in the exchange for the meaning of the text. Every body is in the field of transformation of the discursive realm and, therefore, is a *figure*. For instance, when in performance one shoots a gun and Chris Burden gets wounded (*Shoot*, 1971), he becomes a kind of a textual knit for all potential meanings: autodestructivity, masochism, fatalism, the immediate facing of the pain in the here-and-now, senseless urban violence, the mediation of universal pain through individual pain, the challenge of the permitted or forbidden, the facing of danger, the American obsession with guns etc. His behavioural text is introduced into the *performing machine* of the multiplication of potential textual identifications within culture. Every performance is a textual potentiality of intertextual confrontation, exchange, in fact, the *promiscuity* of

276 Françoise Proust: “Kaj je dogodek?”, trans. Jelica Šumič-Riha, in: “Filozofija i njeni pogoji – Ob filozofiji Alaina Badiouja” (thematic issue), *Filozofski vestnik*, 1 (1998), 9–19.

meaning that circulates or flows around the corporal-behavioural, which escapes each or any statement. The semiologic perspective subsumes sensual impressions under the interpretative multiplications of meanings within the directed event and the uncontrolled webbing of *information* in culture. The semiologic perspective helps or inhibits communication and understanding in the radical censorship of the phenomena or, more precisely, in the translation of phenomena to a message or a multiplicity of referring messages.

From the traditional phenomenological perspective, the presence of the body is an initiation for a special kind of encounter in which *something* displays itself by its own self. The behavioural human body, *which is, in semiologic terms, always something else*, prepares itself to be displayed as *only a body by itself*. The body, however it might be obscured by the webs of potential accidents, should enable the sheer body *here-and-now* to appear before us and for us. It is anticipated that *the sheer body* appears as a *house of the being* as in the naked sexual body of Carolee Schneemann (*Meat Joy*, 1964), the artificial cynical bureaucratic masked/demasked bodies set as sculptures of Gilbert and George (*The Singing Sculpture*, 1970), the travestying multireferential body of multiplying visualisations of Yasumasa Morimura (*Doublemage /Marcel/,* 1988), the castrated body of Bob Flanagan (*Auto-Erotic SM*, 1989), the surgery-operated and corrected body/face of Orlan (*Omnipresence*, 1993), Ron Athey's body possessed by the virus (*4 Scenes in a Harsh Life*, 1994), the para-mythic and para-ritual body of Marina Abramović (*Balkan Baroque*, 1997), and Valentina Čabro's body of an ordinary pregnant woman as a *house of the Other* (*Ultra-Intro*, 2002) and others. The traditional phenomenology searches for *just a body* as a phenomenon out of the relativity and illusions of everyday appearances: as something which is a display-of-self-by-one's-self, and relates to a special kind of encounter with Something. That encounter, as a real exceptional encounter, is anticipated and expected as the ultimate meaning of the artistic and aesthetic act within *performance art*. From the relatively new phenomenological perspective, the *presence of the body* is determined by a shift from the semiotic representation of the body as a signifying anticipation of figures to a representation of the effects of individual bodies. At this point, we talk about the representation of an event which contains *not-only-body* or an event which is a *performance of not-only-body*. The syntagm *not-only-body* means that the "body" does not appear as *just a body* behind the layers of apparitions, in the Platonic sense or as apparitions of daily occurrences in Heideggerian terms, discursive practices (Foucault), traces of culture (Derrida) or the textual experience of history (Kristeva). The body is "something" conceiving, commencing, it works and acts, producing or behaving between many potentialities. The potentialities are not only meanings, nor just complex identities, but also sensual/corporal appearances, out of control

in an open and ambiguous world. The body is not a signifier,<sup>277</sup> which means an initiation for one letter, one sign, one code, one word or one text – the body is not a signifier for a determinable meaning which will be used to read the identity of that body. The body is a behavioural *machine* in which *fluxes of content and expression* of appearance and mediation of the body here-and-there-and-then, here-and-now or here-in-between, do not depend on the signifier. The bodies are for us, most often, *bodies-in-between*. They are caught in the event of experience, communication and physical/sensual/corporal confrontation of fluxes intersected by potentialities that exist and lead to different incomparable registers of recognition and identification of the body. Each individual body is in multiple<sup>278</sup> intersection of different fluxes: flows of emerging and unfolding. There is no body of one and exactly *that* centered identity. The individual body belongs at the same time to different identities: racial, ethnic, class, age, professional, etc. Applied in traditional phenomenological terminology, the flux would be a “produced phenomenon in progress” which is transformed or, actually, deterred, potentially ceaselessly. In that sense, Laurie Anderson’s performance *Stories from the Nerve Bible* (1992–1993) represents a complex multimedial machine of the production of corporal-audio-visual images on the concert-screen floor.<sup>279</sup> Here we do not meet, for example, *one body*: Laurie Anderson’s body. Here we meet a multitude of simultaneous multiplications. We meet the light, neon, fleshy, gendered, political, private, public, economic, entropic, expansionist, illusionist or literal as well as the rock-and-roll performer’s, arty-designed or lost-in-the-world, decentered in human presence and media-deferred; in other words, the alienated body. The stage machine produces the body fluxes. Laurie Anderson is not a painter/sculptor who comes out on stage and awards her audience with her artistic painting-sculptural act as a public stage event. She seemingly or, perhaps, really abandons the profession of a visual artist as a producer of objects and enters the context of the stage and media *performance* of popular music. She becomes a performance artist, composer, performer, singer, and director.<sup>280</sup> Laurie Anderson takes over and embraces the competencies of a *rock super star*, realising herself in that domain through concerts, spectacles, video clips, single and LP records, CDs,

277 Guattari in an interview to Catherine Backes-Clément: “Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on Anti-Oedipus”, trans. Martin Joughin, in: Gilles Deleuze: *Negotiations 1972–1990*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, 13–24, here 21–22.

278 Peter Hallward: “Creatural Confinement”, in: *Out of This World. Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*. London: Verso, 2006, 61.

279 Johannes Biringer: “Returning to the Body with Memories and Screen Lives”, in: *Media & Performance: Along The Border*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, 63–72.

280 Cf. the statement in William Duckworth’s interview with Laurie Anderson: “I see myself more as a director, and occasionally a performer and composer, than as a performance artist”, in: *Talking Music*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1999, 384.

and interviews. She designs the *androgynous* artificial figure of a singer-performer on stage and in media representations. She is a rock star, reflecting certain intellectual and artistic references from visual arts and befitting institutions of the art world, as she exhibits documents from concerts, produces works, publishes private diaries, writes pro- or para- or auto-referential theoretical writings, and conceives complex interdisciplinary performances.<sup>281</sup> In fact, she appears in the similar realm of the construction of identity of multimedia artists like Yoko Ono, David Bowie, Brian Eno, even Joseph Beuys. On the other hand, she became a rock star emerging from the environment of elite and experimental visual art. Anderson has abandoned the context of visual arts at a certain historical moment. This was a moment when the relationship between the world of high art and the world of popular art and culture became relative, when the borders of high art and popular art became very permeable for the mutual exchange of constructed identities, forms of representation and the production-exchange-consumption of aestheticised cultural environments. Working with relative relationships of elite and popular art, Anderson found herself taking a post-situationist position of *being-in-between*. And *being-in-between* means being in between the world of autonomous art and the entertainment industry, American art as popular and European art as elitist, American art as a production aesthetics and European art as a creative aesthetics, the artist and the entertainer, the male and the female figure in the representation of gender identity, the natural and the artificial *being/organism*, the stage and screen figure/body and so forth. As a rock singer, Anderson carefully develops the identity of an intellectual and *arty-rock* star who expects from her audience a certain intellectual and critical attitude. She stimulates their intellectual attitude with multimedia *images* and multimedia conveyed *narratives* which are amplified and aimed at verbal performance, the artificial stage design as the setting for the behaviour of the performer, the modification of the sound of the human voice and musical instruments, the construction of scenes by lighting and the setting up of spatial audio-visual images. She speaks about herself, or more precisely, about her body as a *vehicle*,<sup>282</sup> showing herself as a stage-media setting of micro-multitudes in motion, micro-machines, desiring machines, molecular formations in flux, intersections of fluxes and so on. Her work would be just one in many cases in the history of *performance art* if observed merely as a crossover or transition from the elite realm of *performance* into another realm, the realm of popular *performing* art. However, there is also a potential for a multi-register interpretation of her work. It is possible to approach any of her concert-

281 Laurie Anderson: "For Instants", in: *Individuals: Post-Movement Art in America*, ed. Alan Sondheim. New York: Dutton Paperback, 1977, 69–83.

282 Laurie Anderson: *Empty Places: A Performance*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1991.



spectacles<sup>283</sup> from a consumer, pop-rock-identification or arty-fancy or intellectually pro- or para- critical-theoretical perspective. These options stand on comparative simultaneous levels of performed multimedia-event, as an art work in between high and popular culture. But, if her artistic work is observed in accordance with the criteria of the Duchampesque tradition of work with *readymade* phenomena, then it might be claimed that every concert-spectacle performed by Laurie Anderson with a big-name co-performer and technical crew before a huge audience has two incomparable levels by which to structure the phenomena: (1) the first level is the level of a concert-spectacle, typical of any super-rock concert with its particular audience, its ecstatic behaviour and behavioural participation; and (2) the second level is the level of the *relationship* of the visual performance artist, which sets her existential, behavioural and professional life as a simulacrum of a rock-star within the actual system of pop-rock music as part of the entertainment industry. If this second level is accepted, then it is possible to see that her work “exists” through the *performing* of complex interventions on the institutional system of the entertainment industry. The institutional system of entertainment cannot be directly perceived by watching/ listening to the concert-spectacle, but through the intelligible-critical interpretative mapping of relationships between different events of concerts-spectacles within the broader cultural framework, i.e. the effects of the entertainment industry. One level is the level of the phenomena of body performance in a concrete space and time, in the framework of the social institutions of popular culture, and the second level is the discursive *performance* of a macro-project or macro-politics within the institutions, statuses and functions of popular culture. In a single work, Laurie Anderson works synchronically and interventionally with two different phenomenologies of *performance*. She works with the multimedia phenomenologies of a stage performance and with potential phenomenologies of the political-institutional performance. Her work is an *ontology of multitude*, because it simultaneously exists in different, almost incomparable registers of reception: the actual indulging in music, light or images at the concert and the intelligible critical and reflexive understanding of the entertainment industry as a production of political objects. For example, the status of the audience in her work is multi-signifying. The audience is the target group which she addresses seductively, offering enjoyment. Laurie Anderson addresses them through a multimedia concert-spectacle. At the same time she serves as an entertainer to that audience and she uses the audience as an object or a symptom in testing the system of institutions of popular culture. But, she also rewards the audience with a conceptual and meta-critical potentiality of

283 E.g. performances: *United States* (1979–1983), *Wired for Light and Sound* (1983) or *Stories from the Nerve Bible* (1992–1993).

understanding the simulacrum which she performs through the institutions of popular culture. Thus the postulated phenomenology of multiplicity in the analysis of performance art is the interpretative quest for the way in which something that acts and resists the immediate coding or fixed meaning is established in performance art. The resistance to coding or performing of the message acts like a complex multi-register *atmosphere* which, quite carelessly, I could call *existence*.

## THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL AND/OR DISCOURSIVE ASPECTS OF PERFORMANCE ART: ONTOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

The idea of performing can be observed neither as a direct, certain, homogenous *unit*, *tool*, *drive*, nor as a *vehicle* for establishing a work of performance art. The idea of *performance* cannot be described exclusively through its performative functions. The performance is a way of giving reference related to the statement, but also something beyond speech, image, body or appearance. Additionally, performance is a system/practice of interpretations, established between the concretisation of each individual act in progress and its surrounding meaning, opening to the potentialities of cultural identifications as a discourse or through the discourse. However, the interpretation is not a clear or unambiguous verbal statement about the orientation of the phenomena in the field of discursive potentialities. Quite the contrary, it is the opening of heterogeneous potentialities which sometimes act through feasible meanings (text-sign-meaning) and, most often, act as performed atmosphere of potential meanings around the body in the event. Discursive potentialities are based on the effects of the utterability, i.e. the advocating of the work of performance art as a textual/intertextual material within the surrounding order of cultural contexts. Therefore, *performance* exists as a fissure and hiatus, but also a nexus and linkage between phenomena which unfold through the body and a discourse which moves the body in the whirlpool of potentiality from one cultural register of identifications to another.

My concluding remark is that performance is not a sum total of morphological, *by their own nature* differentiated acts, processes, gestures, behaviours, i.e., actions, procedures or even methods of the performing of behaviour in art and culture. The definition of performance as morphologically different procedures of representation, expression, construction, simulation or performativity describes and explains performing as a field of heterogeneous and incomparable *onthologies* or concrete *morphologies*. For example, in the history of modernism, *representation* and *expression* are interpreted as completely opposed strategies and tactics in

producing an art work. The modernist revolution in redefining the status of the art work is with certain artists (Kandinsky, Artaud, Barba) and theoreticians (Croce, Greenberg, Barba, Danto) interpreted as a consequence of the shift from the strategy and tactics of representation to the strategies and tactics of expression. In contrast, postmodern theory demonstrates (Oliva, Owens, Biringer) that expression is a specified tactics of *representation* within complex historical, posthistorical or transhistorical tactics of representation or mimesis of mimesis, as a *whole* or *non-whole* metaphysical horizon. The causes of this are numerous argumentations which aim at demonstrating that between the “inner determination” (e.g. according to Kandinsky) and external-material order of the work, a causal directing and connecting relationship of the expressive leaving of traces does not exist. The behaviour of the artist in performance art is not an externalizing of the internal into the external world of traces from the depths. The behaviour of the artist in a performance is a behavioural representation, which always points at and refers to the anticipated potentialities of the traumatic, demonic or mental, through always-external interpretative textual focusing. And, therefore, my concluding remarks read as follows: performance is a name for the tactics of the regulation and deregulation of the orientation of primarily behavioural acting as representative, as expressive, as constructive, as simulationist or as performative. What matters are not the different morphologies of the performance, but the ways of focusing the function of any procedure of performing in the realm of phenomena and in the realm of discourse. In other words, a specific performance, which is recognised as representative, as expressive, constructive, simulationist or performative is not determined by the attributes of representation, expression, construction, simulation or performativity, but by the functions of representation, expression, construction, simulation or performativity. And orientation is a procedure of the regulation and deregulation of the potentiality of behavioural phenomena and textual potentialities as fluxes in a chosen, inferior or superior discursive realm. For example, Gina Pane in her work *Death Control* (1974) displays to the gaze her body/flesh crawling with worms.<sup>284</sup> Her performance thereby expresses the anxiety, morbidity, fear of death or invocation of death, but she also works with the complex systems/practices of advocating the body in painful, lethal, arousing or critical situations of human existence. The discursive orientation of behaviour grasps her work and situates it or moves, regardless of the fact that I feel her/my own repulsion/anxiety/fear. My own repulsion/anxiety/fear is suggested in my observation of her face covered with worms and in my identifications with her

284 Gina Pane: “I was living in posthumous time. Covered with maggots, my flesh detached by maggots: flesh of my flesh, two fleshs living together, one nourishing itself from the other: the process of life in a continuum of time” – quote in: Tracey Warr and Amelia Jones (eds.): *The Artist's Body*. London: Phaidon, 2000, 101.

face as a face of potential death. The effect of her work is not an effect of the opening of her depth through a corporal interactive act, but a phenomenal and discursive focusing of the functions of performance on the situating of a corporal phenomenon in relation to the certain and uncertain potentialities of discourse. Her behaviourality is, therefore, a *screen* of projecting hypothetical “depths”, which is nothing less than a carefully regulated/deregulated effect of the focused functions of performance in redirecting the intersected fluxes in motion.



39 Lončarević: Maga Magazinović, photo, 1932  
Courtesy Dubravka Đurić and Miško Šuvaković Archive

## THE AVANT-GARDE: PERFORMANCE AND DANCE Ideologies, Events, Discourses

### INTRODUCTORY PROBLEMS: MODERNISM AND THE AVANT-GARDE

Discussion of the status, functions, and effects of any avant-garde art, dance included, does not concern itself merely with phenomenal or conceptual features characteristic for avantgarde artworks, behavior on the part of avant-garde artists, or their private and public life. To the contrary, what is of growing importance are the questions of instrumental potentialities or realisations of an avant-garde as an intervening material practice of art, confronting or opposing both the dominant and marginal paradigms pertaining to the historical or contemporary cultures. In other words, from a historical perspective, avant-garde art practices are viewed as specific transformations of artistic, cultural, and social resistances, constraints, and discontinuities within the dominant, homogeneous or hegemonic artistic, cultural, and social environments. The theory of the avant-gardes therefore *must* shift from ontological or phenomenological questions of existence or the phenomenality of an artwork to instrumental questions of the functions, performance, and effects of artistic practices in a given, historical and geographic social set-up.

The late 18th and 19th centuries, modern art was largely determined by the constitutive chain of events establishing Western bourgeois society as a society of class-structured hierarchies and hybrid realms pertaining to socially productive work. According to Jürgen Habermas,

The project of modernity formulated in the 18th century by the philosophers of the Enlightenment consisted in their efforts to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic. At the same time, this project intended to release the cognitive potentials of each of these domains from their esoteric forms. The Enlightenment philosophers wanted to utilize this

accumulation of specialized culture for the enrichment of everyday life – this is to say, for the rational organization of everyday social life.<sup>285</sup>

Class structuring of Western societies led to a “vertical” distinction between the practices pertaining to *high* and *low* art/culture, according to the criteria of conceiving *art* as an identificational practice for the high classes, featuring in the field of cultural and social functions of the everyday as a practice of consumption or entertainment for the lower classes. *High art* was conceived as an autonomous aesthetical practice presenting trans-historical and trans-geographical artistic work – superseding and outdoing the everyday. On the other hand, *low art* was conceived as instrumental and, therefore, utilitarian production of the trivial atmosphere of entertainment and consumption as forms of the regulation of everyday life. Construction of the hybrid realm of socially productive work had led to new distinctions between the useful and beautiful effects of work and, consequently, to distinctions between work as the articulation of time dedicated to *production* and time of *leisure and consumption*. Certain professions were therefore constituted as working practices of realisation and articulation of leisure time for consumption, additionally comprising art as an “instrument of articulation” of *exceptional* free time for the high classes and *trivial* free time for the lower ones. The notion of a *masterpiece* was not conceived merely in terms of *techne* or *poiesis* pertaining to an executed painting, sculpture, theatre, dance, opera, or musical *piece*, but in terms of the function of the *piece* for a particular purpose of engaging in exceptional aesthetic enjoyment and experience, as opposed to (or beyond) trivial everyday pleasures and consumption. In that sense, modernist art was instrumental in the production of that “beyond-the-real” in creating the very reality as an exceptionality of a new identity: the identity of the citizen. The fictionality of modern art was an instrument of conceiving the identity of reality as the actuality of class, implying the hierarchies of the bourgeois society. This functionality of modernism as an exceptional and autonomous realm of free or authentic creation concealed that *slippage* leading to the concept and practices of the avant-gardes. Namely, *high* and *low* art were structured as oppositions, sometimes distant, sometimes close, but they nevertheless supported each other in the construction of the *rigid hierarchies of differences within* the class society and its material social practices. The avant-garde was created within the confines of high modernism, mostly in the following terms:

- (1) as induction of crisis within high modernism,
- (2) as experimental development within high modernism,

<sup>285</sup> Jürgen Habermas: “The Project of Enlightenment”, trans. Seyla Ben-Habib in: “Modernity – An Incomplete Project”, in: *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster. London: Pluto Press, 1983, 9.

- (3) as critique, provocation, subversion, destruction, and transgression of the modernist canons, i.e. as reaction against the canonic version of modernism as the dominant culture of hegemony.

The 20th-century's modernisms and their material practices may be rendered through various interpretative modes of historicisation. The modes of historicisation range from Greenberg's medium-specific, historicist, and essentialist modernism<sup>286</sup> via the Kuhnian Art & Language's revolutionary model<sup>287</sup> pertaining to the shift of artistic paradigms, to loose and anarchic postmodernist concepts of the domination of the synchronic over the diachronic, post-history, metastases of eclecticism, multi-register archiving, unexpressionist tactics of alienation, and ahistorical art theory conceived within culture studies, determined as the indexing of intersections between elite and popular art and culture. Interpretative model-maps of confrontation within the dispersed mega-modernist paradigm before and after World War II may be additionally conceived:

- (1) bohemianism and the avant-garde as realms of purposeless work/life within the instrumental and productive bourgeois society of the European cultures prior to World War I;
- (2) historical avant-gardes as antecedents of new stages of development of modernist bourgeois societies of the late 19th / early 20th century;
- (3) historical avant-gardes as forms of provocation and resistance to the dominant bourgeois society and its hegemonist universalism in the first decades of the twentieth century;
- (4) historical avant-gardes as an "engine", processing high bourgeois modernism into the emerging mass media culture in France and Weimar Germany of the 1920s;
- (5) historical avant-gardes as idealistic projects, carried out in rigid social circumstances<sup>288</sup> of the 1920s' and 1930s' totalitarian regimes, and (at the same time) avant-gardes as transgressive projects of the modern bourgeois society in crisis, themselves becoming symbolical victims of the totalitarian regimes;

<sup>286</sup> Clement Greenberg: "Modernist Painting", in: *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Charles Harrison, Francis Frascina. London: Harper & Row, 1986, 5–10.

<sup>287</sup> Charles Harrison: "Introduction", in: *Art & Language: Texte zum Phänomen Kunst und Sprache*, Köln: DuMont International, 1972, 14.

<sup>288</sup> Boris Groys: "The Russian Avant-Garde: The Leap Over Progress", in: *The Total Art of Stalinism. Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992, 20.



- (6) Cold-War confrontations of the politically aligned cultures, between engaged and Party-dictated artistic production in the East and autonomous individualistic modernist creation of art in the West;
- (7) distinction between the modes of elite and autonomous artistic production pertaining to high modernism, as opposed to the neo-avant-garde critical, alternative and subversive production of art/culture and the media output of mass entertainment pertaining to popular art/culture;
- (8) new theory of crisis of the hegemonic functions of modernist art, conceived to claim the space reserved for anticipated production of autonomous artworks;
- (9) critical simulations of a retro-avantgarde<sup>289</sup> conceived as interventions into the public realm of the post-totalitarian, post-socialist society;
- (10) deconstruction of the tensions of high and elite culture by arbitrary transformation of art into pop culture and engagement with mass culture within high art as part of the totalizing industry of post-capitalist mass entertainment;
- (11) integration of techniques of the historical avant-gardes (collage, montage), neo-avant-gardes (performance), and post-avantgardes (simulation) into production systems of popular or critically subversive digital art practices,
- (12) integration of the avant-garde utopian projects into the political setup of mass consumer society, from *branding* to *entertainment*, from political-economic regulation and deregulation of the *everyday*, to identity strategies and tactics for the late-capitalist globalized and mass-mediated world.

The relation between history and actuality, diachrony and synchrony,<sup>290</sup> applies to opposing narratives of *importance* of this or that *facet-identity* of art, or this or that *facet-identity* of theory. What matters is, therefore, the initial claim: that there is no such thing as a unique coherent and integrative history of the 20th century, but rather a multiplicity of competing interpretative narratives we call history and recognize as such. The essential problem of historical analysis and interpretation today is not construction of a consistent integrative *representation* of historical sequences of events, but conception, deconstruction, identification, and interpretation of the multiplicity of competitive historical narratives and ways of conceiving references, from narratives to events of art/dance, and from events to narratives of cultural theory.

289 Marina Gržinić: "Retro-Avant-Garde, or Mapping Post-Socialism", in: *Fiction Reconstructed: Eastern Europe, Post-socialism & The Retro-avant-garde*. Vienna: Springerin, 2000, 43.

290 Alexandra Carte: "Destabilising the Discipline. Critical Debates about History and their Impact on the Study of Dance", in: *Rethinking Dance History. A Reader*, ed. Alexandra Carter. London: Routledge, 2004, 11–13.

## CRISIS OF MIMESIS AND RHETORICAL LOGIC: TOWARDS AVANT-GARDE DANCE

Emerging “avant-garde dance” was primarily aligned with subverting the canon of the white ballet. The 20th century’s long development of “avant-garde dance” was in turn aligned with interdisciplinarity – the critique and subversion of the autonomy<sup>291</sup> of ballet and dance as artistic disciplines based on a “technical canon”, but also with notable excursions from dance into other arts: necessary turns of “dance conceived as dance technique” into “dance as performance art”, and “performance art” into “media post-production practice”. Such transfiguration of dance as autonomous art would not pass without the necessary conceptualisation of choreographers’ and performers’ work (*labour*), namely, without critical assessment of the institutions of ballet, dance, and theatre.

The white ballet was established and developed as a complex technical-and-rhetorical system of representation of real and fictional bodies and human behavior throughout the seventeenth, 18th and 19th centuries in Europe. It was structured as a complex semiotic and figurative system pertaining to the body and its behavior, on the respective canonic assumptions of representation – the representation-enactment of stories through constructed, artificial, and stylised bodily behavior (the demonstrative visual narration of events of the real and/or fictional worlds). It may be claimed that all the relevant concepts and practices of rhetoric and techniques of the white ballet were eventually developed and established (in academic terms) by the end of the 19th century. They were academised to the point when ballet, in analogy with the concepts of absolute music, no longer possessed a single necessary or anticipated reference to mimesis which (as it were) had been an *archi-trace*<sup>292</sup> of purpose in dance, erased through the rationalised coding of aesthetic figures of disinterested pleasure, reclaiming the anticipation of an ideal body (ballet figure compositions). The ballet became an “art without a function”: ballet for ballet’s sake – aesthetic enjoyment in technical skill of performing a rhetorical game of abstract figures. However, ballet’s function was precisely to be relieved of function in constitution of an ideal and abstract realm of pleasure in alienated bodies of the subjects of a puritan bourgeois society.

291 Miško Šuvaković: “Around Althusserian-Lacanian Critique of Autonomy of Art: Class and the Unconscious”, trans. Nada Harbaš, ed. Polona Tratnik, in: *Monitor ZSA* 31–32 (2009), 35.

292 Jacques Derrida: “The Outside is the Inside”, in: *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, 44–64.

## GENRES OR “PARADIGMS” OF AVANT-GARDE DANCE

Responses to the technically and rhetorically elitist academism of the white ballet were conceived in the early decades of the 20th century through several entirely different *approaches* to subverting the white ballet. Those, tentatively speaking, genres and definite “paradigms” of dance were: popular dance, exotic dance, utilitarian (gymnastic) dance, and expressionist dance.

The world of entertainment (populist spectacle: popular peasant and urban dances – in music halls and cabarets) were a populist alternative to the class-transcending white ballet performed in the theatre. Cabaret was a venue of the transformation of dance into popular public charade, but also of the conception



40 Lončarević: Maga  
Magazinović, photo, 1932  
Courtesy Dubravka Đurić and  
Miško Šuvaković Archive

of an open *live* (in terms of daily existence) artistic character of dance as opposed to the academic aesthetic-technical features of the white ballet perceived as high art. Influences of the cabaret in the early 20th century may be detected in French cubism and dadaism (production of *Parade* and *Relâche*) through the influence of the composer Eric Satie, in Italian futurism, German expressionism, and the emerging popular dance art in the United States e.g. in the para-cabaret experiments of Loïe Fuller.

White ballet was additionally confronted with the concepts and practices of exotic dance (dance of the Other – other cultures). Two essential points of innovation were of consequence: (1) renouncing the technique of the white ballet in the name of skill in performing dances of the Others, non-canonical dances for the European



41Lončarević: Maga  
Magazinović, photo, 1932  
Courtesy Dubravka Đurić and  
Miško Šuvaković Archive

culture, which in practical terms also implied (2) a confrontation of the traditional-art notions of “disinterestedness of the ideally beautiful” in white ballet with the modern art notions of the extraordinary, new, other, shocking, or exotic. On the other hand, the European bourgeois society of the early 20th century began to stratify, through the establishment of a middle class of managers and consumers, as opposed to the binary division into high and low classes, prevailing from the eighteenth to the late 19th century. The early 20th century saw the European middle classes experiencing the colonised cultures of Asia, Africa, and South America obliquely, their experience being mediated by the colonizing discourse (*orientalisation* of the East), and not through the notions of property.

Acknowledging the *fact* that white ballet implied annulling (abstraction, approximation, discharging) of the everyday behavioral body in the name of the artificial rhetorical body-as-figure, a group of choreographers, dancers, and “cultural workers” emphasised the need for developing a “body culture” as a form of aesthetisation of life and revitalisation of the everyday human body. This effected the characteristic modernist focus on the emancipation of the everyday by undermining high art’s elitist borders. Gymnastics, nudism/naturism, recreational dance, return to nature, struggle for the right to free sexuality, feminism, liberation, and aesthetisation of ordinary bodily motion etc. were different tactics of the shift from ballet as a high art to dance as the “everyday life activity of emancipation”. The choreographer Émile Jaques-Dalcroze developed a system of gymnastic dance education called “eurythmics”. The anthroposophical teacher and thinker Rudolf Steiner conceived a form of meditative dance also termed “eurythmics”. Rudolf Laban developed his techniques of free dance associated with gymnastic emancipation of the human body.<sup>293</sup> Hedi Kalmeier conceived gymnastics as one of the fundamentals of sustaining feminine beauty and health. Maga Magazinović elaborated in practical and theoretical terms the role of “body culture” (gymnastics, plastics, rhythmic) in education and the arts.

Expressionist dance emerged almost on the fringes of the main currents of expressionist art (poetry, painting, music, drama theatre, and film) in the first decades of the 20th century. On the one hand, expressionist dance synthesised the experience of romanticism’s white ballet and its crises with cabaret music, in its turn to non-Western dances, body culture, and its shift from the poetics and concepts of mimesis and evolution pertaining to white ballet to the fetishised techniques of body representation in rhetorical figures. From the early pre-expressionist or late-romanticist emancipatory ballet of Isadora Duncan, the

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293 Rudolf von Laban: *Laban’s Principles of Dance and Movement Notation, with 114 Basic Movement Graphs and Their Explanation*. Boston: Plays Inc., 1975.

eclectic choreographies of Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn or the over-stylised symbolist dance of Vaslav Nijinsky, *expressionist dance* was established as the new dance featuring expression in the choreographies and production of Rudolf Laban, Mary Wigman, Harold Kreuzberg, Valeska Gert, Dorothea Alba, Gret Palucca, and Kurt Jooss. Expressionism is characterised by the drive to liberate the body from the mimetic and rhetorical technical constraints associated with the white ballet. Instead of the mediatory role of technique, what is at stake is a straightforward gesture and bodily motion liberated from hindrance (costume, ballet slippers, including technical conventions). Expressionism allowed for a form of *dilettante work* in dance, previously unconceivable.

### NEO-AVANT-GARDE DANCE: FROM TRANSGRESSION TO EXPERIMENT

Modernist dance associated the disciplinary autonomy and media essentialism in conceiving and performing dance with the determining deep-seated human experience of each individual gesture or form of behavior in relation to the universal truth and essence of human, cosmic, or planetary existence. Such demands for the association of the individual and universal during the late 1940s and 1950s brought about a radical breach within dance, opened by the American choreographer Merce Cunningham and composer John Cage. Probably intending to render the modernist notions of objectivity of *dance* in more radical terms – dance as dance and dance for dance’s sake – they broke from the modernist focus on the autonomy of dance technique and indexed the metaphysical expression employed by dance to represent the individual in the universal and *vice versa*. Indeed, they terminated the need on the part of high modernist choreographers and dancers to verify their formal-aesthetic or formal-artistic research by metaphysical (mythical, symbolical, archetypal) notions, confronting ideals of human exceptionality and expressive power communicated by dance with their poetics of indifference.<sup>294</sup> Cunningham accomplished a shift from symbolic bodily behavior to an intentional focus on details or localised sequences of bodily movements. In conceptual terms the shift implied a turn from dance as a symbolic<sup>295</sup> practice (Martha Graham) to dance as a syntactic<sup>296</sup> and pragmatic<sup>297</sup> practice (Merce Cunningham). In his

294 Moira Roth: “The Aesthetic of Indifference”, in: Moira Roth, Jonthan D. Katz: *Difference/Indifference: Musings on Postmodernism, Marcel Duchamp and John Cage*. Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 1998, 39.

295 Dance as practice of production of meaning.

296 Dance as practice of production of formal relations.

297 Compare with “Social Coewography”, in: Bojana Cvejić and Ana Vujanović: *Public Sphere by Performance*. Berlin: b\_books, 2012, 55–75.

dance pieces Cunningham paradoxically associated the notion of the *ready made* (reclaiming the non-artistic as artistic) with relieving his dance technique from metaphorical anticipations.

# MINIMAL DANCE: THE LIMITS OF DANCE – CHOREOGRAPHER AS PERFORMER AND PERFORMER AS CONCEPTUAL ARTIST

Minimal dance emerged from various disciplinary experiments within the neo-avant-garde movements of the late 1950s and early 1960s, out of the sharp radicalisation of Cunningham's research of 'literal dance techniques' and his turn to *anti-technique* or *anti-dance*: "NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe no to glamour and transcendency of the star image no to the heroic no to the anti-heroic no to trash imagery no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved".<sup>298</sup>

Of additional importance is the Duchampian influence on the American modernist art of Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Robert Morris. It should be noted that both Rauschenberg and Morris took part in dance performances or conceived dance events. Art happenings also had a certain impact on minimal dance conceived through association of artistic experiments with non-artistic, e.g. therapeutic exercise – as featured in the works by Anna Halprin.<sup>299</sup> Certainly, in the 1960s the socio-cultural tendencies of sexual emancipation and politisation of everyday life claimed great importance. Minimal dance aligned with a broader contemporary critique of modernism in literature (beat poetry, objectivism), sculpture and painting (minimal art), and (minimal) music. Minimal art, in more general terms, features the paradoxical attitude towards high aesthetical modernism, indeed a critique of modernism, modernist essentialism and the metaphysics of art autonomy, as well as the over-emphasis of modernist procedures of reduction, in its shift from reduction resulting in an ideal sensuous token into reduction leading beyond the sensuous – into conceptual, mental, cerebral, intelligible, political. Minimal art was also informed by the aspiration to reach the literal<sup>300</sup> non-metaphorical and non-symbolical, pertaining to the artist's body and bodily enjoyment. Minimal dance claimed reference to minimal post-sculptural and

298 Yvonne Rainer: "NO Manifesto", in: Yvonne Rainer: *Work 1961–1973*. Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and New York: New York University Press, 1974, 51.

299 Anna Halprin: "Initiations and Transformations", in: *The Painted Bride Quarterly* 4 (1975), 68–75.

300 Cf. Michael Fried: "Art and Objecthood", in: *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1968, 116–147.

post-painterly practices, as well as minimal music. On the other hand, minimal dance featured the relation between choreographers' and dancers', namely, dancer-choreographers' (as performers') notions of the body, its motion, and interaction of bodies and objects in a non-fictional time and space. Minimal dance liberated the art of dance from the "traditional mimetic and expressive technique" in emphasizing and elaborating body motion and modes of typical and untypical behavior pertaining to dance phenomena, the concept of dance and the modernist dance tradition. Dance embraced new movements and motions, processes and conditions of the body coming from various forms of individual or collective behavior. Accordingly, the dance artist was no longer disciplinarily designated as a dancer, but as a performer. In those terms, minimal dance comprised a shift from dance art to the artistic practice of performing conceptualised bodily processes and conditions – indeed a form of performance art. It emerged in the context of the New York experimental venue Judson Dance Theater<sup>301</sup> and soon became an internationally acknowledged phenomenon of experimental or conceptual dance. The historical framework identified with minimal dance included, in various phases, the following choreographers and dancers: Yvonne Rainer, Robert Morris, Simone Forti, Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton, Alex Hay, Deborah Hay, Judith Dunn, Laura Dean, Joan Jonas, Lucinda Childs and Meredith Monk.

### MEDIA + TECHNOLOGY AND DANCE: A NARRATIVE OF DEVELOPMENT

During the modernist times experiments with the "alternative body", "artificial body", or "body-medium" referred to the Futurist<sup>302</sup> designs for mechanical theatre, dance and music. For instance, Fortunato Depero designed costumes made from plastic in 1916–1917, and those resembling machine bodies for the mechanical ballet *Macchina del 3000* featuring music by Franco Casavola in 1924. Futurism associated the utopian concept of a machine-constructed body with the entertainer's body in the cabaret. Cubism and Dadaism searched for an "object" as the centerpiece of a stage event. A series of production conceived in-between theatre, dance, parody musical and performance art – Raymond Roussel's *Impressions of Africa* (1911); Eric Satie, Pablo Picasso, Jean Cocteau and Léonide Massine's *Parade* (1917); and Satie and Francis Picabia's piece *Relâche* (1924),<sup>303</sup> including Fernand

301 Sally Banes: *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962–1964*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.

302 Giovanni Lista: *Théâtre Futuriste Italien*, vols. 1, 2. Lausanne: La Cité-L'Age d'Homme, 1976.

303 Rose Lee Goldberg: "Surrealist Performance: The Construction of Ruins", in: *Performance – Live Art 1909 to the Present*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1979, 49–62.



Léger's film *Ballet mécanique* (1924),<sup>304</sup> indicated new possibilities of conceiving ballet/dance and employing such concepts in different media (e.g. film). The Russian and later Soviet constructivist avant-garde<sup>305</sup> displayed a considerable interest in implementing constructivist principles in building the stage, fashioning the stage figure and performing the stage event. The utopian notion of a constructed world appeared in *Mikhail Matyushin*, *Alexei Kruchonykh*, and *Kazimir Malevich's* opera *Pobeda nad Solncem* (*Victory over the Sun*, 1913). Nikolai Foregger staged his *Mechanical Dance* (1923) featuring a number based on an imitation of "machine transmission". The system of Meyerhold's exercises termed "biomechanics" also conceived artificial and regulated theatre bodies. In Germany, the new constructivist ballet developed at the Bauhaus<sup>306</sup> as part of the choreography, stage design, and dance curricula of Oskar Schlemmer and his ideas on the synthesis of dance, architecture and machine through mathematical design and the revitalisation of popular dance festivities. Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack experimented with "coloured lightplays" or choreographed events in the Bauhaus laboratory for theatre of light.<sup>307</sup>

The relation between dance and technology<sup>308</sup> presently develops in the context of postindustrial societies of mass production and communication (exchange and consumption) of art in the following terms:

- (1) technology (computers, cybernetics) is employed in terms of subsidiary instrumentaria for the realization of concrete dance production – from technical production and stage design, to articulation of the performance (dance) and its content (stage action),
- (2) dance is conceived and directed i.e. programmed as a media product, namely, the "original" dance performance does not take place on stage – it is recorded (film, video) or simulated (computer, Internet), screened or interactively performed as a computer product (CD, Net), and
- (3) dance is realised in terms of the interaction between the performer and his/her audience via computer multimedia technology and VR (virtual reality) – entering the realm of the phenomenology of "screens" and "terminals" i.e. cyber technology.<sup>309</sup>

304 Malcolm Turvey: "The Avant-Garde and the 'New Spirit': The Case of *Ballet mécanique*", in: *October* 102 (2002), 35–86.

305 Béatrice Picon-Vallin: *Théâtre juif soviétique*. Lausanne: *La Cité-L'Age d'Homme*, 1973.

306 RoseLee Goldberg: "Bauhaus Performance: Art and Technology: a New Unity", in: *Performance – Live Art 1909 to the Present*, 63–78.

307 Andreas Hapkemeyer, Peter Stasney (eds.): *Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack. Bauhäusler und Visionär*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2000.

308 Johannes Birringer: "Dancing with Technologies", in: *Media & Performance: Along the Border*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, 25–101.

309 Emil Hrvatin: "Terminal spectator", in: *It takes place when it doesn't. On dance and performance*

CONCEPTUAL DANCE:  
AVANT-GARDE STRIVINGS  
AND THEIR REALISATIONS

Conceptual dance or conceptual dance choreography terms the critical insights into the deconstructionist practice and simulationist production of institutions, discourses, phenomena, concepts, and procedures of choreography and dance/ballet pertaining to the Western art of the 1990s and 2000s. The concept of *think-dance* refers to the works of European choreographers, dancers, and performers Jérôme Bel, Boris Charmatz, Xavier Le Roy, Thomas Lehmen, Thomas Plischke, Tino Sehgal, Magali Desbazeille, Meg Stuart, Gilles Touyard, among others

Choreographers and performers Jérôme Bel, Boris Charmatz, or Xavier Le Roy reflect on the age after poststructuralism and cultural studies. The focus of their work shifts from immanent questions concerning dance as art, to superficial political, i.e. discursive questions concerning dance as an institution of art.

Jérôme Bel performed the decisive *attack* on the institution of art, changing the status of dance technique *deduced* from the binary opposition: technique (modernism) – anti-technique (avant-garde, neo-avant-garde). The conceptual choreographic and dance positions of Bel's works (*Nom donné par l'auteur, Jérôme Bel, Le Dernier Spectacle, Shirtology, The Show Must Go On*, all conceived in the 1990s) are primarily discursive. The material event of dance draws from the representation of concepts (of the author – choreographer, dancer, artist), dance objects as works of art, the signification of performers' behavior, contextualisations of popular culture and the dramaturgy of mass exchange and consumption of stage spectacles. In Jérôme Bel's choreographies the institution of dance is rendered as an elusive and dynamic contextual frame of exploration – from creation to observation.<sup>310</sup> Le Roy's choreographic preoccupations are research and analysis-based in phenomenological terms. They depart from the theoretical and conceptual completeness of Bel's spectacles, devoid of the cynical self-referentiality of body gesturing proclaimed in institutional frameworks as dance. Le Roy's positions imply an open field of representation and designation of the body. His bodies disclosed to audiences' gaze are intent on escaping the rational logocentric and holistic structure of the body as an organism in the Cartesian mind-body opposition. They lend themselves to the gaze of the other bodies, as objects, as machines, as

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since 1989, eds. Martina Hochmuth, Krassimira Kruschkova, Georg Schöllhammer. Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2006, 16–26.

310 Jérôme Bel and Jan Ritsema, "Their Job is Not to Dance, But to Watch Other People Dancing - if They Dance", in: *ibid.*, 29–38.

*bodies without organs* and as subjects, self-conceptualised and deferred in the course of the performance.

Conceptual works by dance choreographers and performers in the 1990s featured functions different from those assumed by visual conceptual artists during the 1960s and 1970s. Choreographers and dancers dissolved the strata of existentialist prejudice on what should be a *good object* of dance in order to disclose new possibilities of open concepts in dance, indicating a split between the dancing body conceived as an image (framed gaze), and as live motion (behavior-performing body). The focus is located on the surface or, figuratively, the *skin*, as the divide between the movement and its body. Movement is conceived and emphasised as a sequence of actualised possibilities inscribed into a *dance archaeology* of the body. The audience is incited to watch its own observation. The new conceptually oriented dance art came out in a transition from dance as art into the realm of representation and research in visual media. New dance choreographies may rather be expected in a gallery space than in the venue of a designated box-like theatre stage. For instance, Tino Sehgal's *Untitled* (2001) features not merely as a dance performance, but as an imaginary museum of dance. *Sand table* by Magali Desbazeille and Meg Stuart/Damaged Goods (2000) reduces the movement to touching an image of a body. In *Programme court avec essorage* by Gilles Touyard and Boris Charmatz (2001) the body is literally manipulated by the work cycles of a washing machine. Such choreographic tactics aim at proclaiming the departure from essentialism, technicism, and aestheticism in dance, towards the conceptual critical and deconstructionist textual maneuvering with historical and contemporary discourses of dance as art in the age of culture.

## DISCOURSES AND DANCE

### An Introduction to the Analysis of the *Resistance* of Philosophy and Theory towards Dance

*There is no greater enemy to the human body than being.*  
Antonin Artaud (1947)

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to show that the practices, histories, and currencies of dance in relation to culture, society, and politics must be open<sup>311</sup> to critical and analytical debate. And that debate must be free from the “traps of anecdotal narratives” and thereby theorised as a critical and analytical discourse with enough abstraction to be applied to the “epistemological critique” of the knowledge of contemporary dance. That means that, under the specific conditions of a transitional culture and sociality, under which I speak and write, I am trying to derive a theorisation of dance, art, culture, society, and politics as Althusserian material *theoretical practices*:

So a practice of theory does exist; theory is a specific practice which acts upon its own object and ends in its own *product*: a *knowledge*. Considered in itself, any theoretical work presupposes a given raw material and some “means of production” (the concepts of the ‘theory’ and the way they are used: the method).<sup>312</sup>

The derivation of a “hardcore theorisation” described above is contingent on realising that in the transitional society of contemporary Serbia, discourse is open to discussion in the hybrid interpretative fields of conceptualising the production, exchange, and consumption of dance.

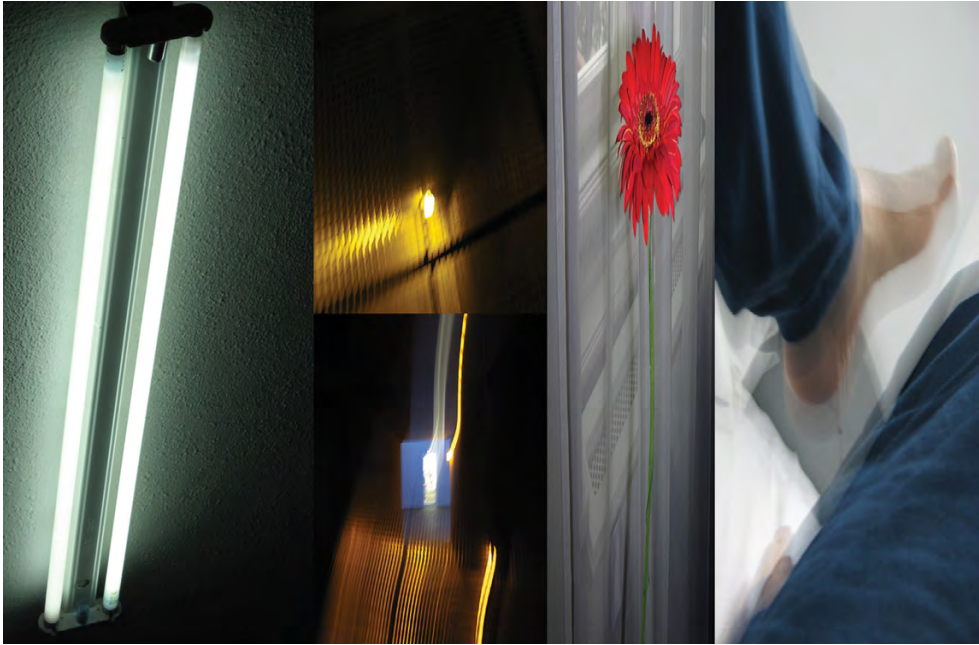
When I speak and write of dance, a number of parallel but rival points of departure are there for me:

- (1) Dance is a performing art;
- (2) as a performing art, dance is not necessarily posited today only as autonomous *live performing*, but also as media and post-media performing;

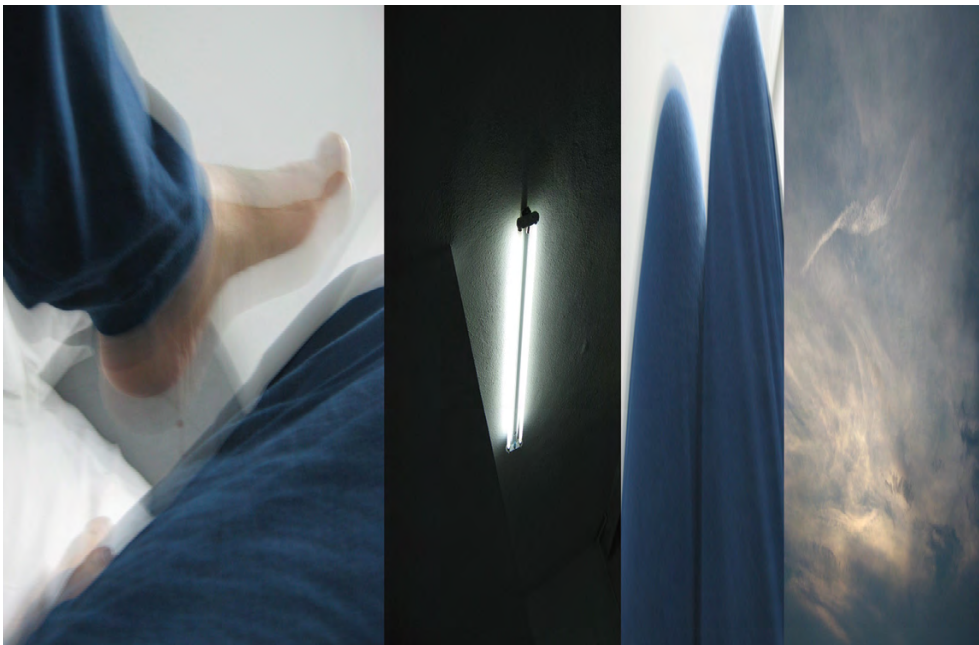
<sup>311</sup> Michael Baldwin, Charles Harrison and Mel Ramsden: “Art History, Art Criticism and Explanation”, in: *Art History* 4/4 (December 1981), 432–456.

<sup>312</sup> Louis Althusser: “On the Materialist Dialectic”, in: *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster. London: Verso, 1996, 173.

PERFORMANCE ART



42 Provisional Salta Ensemble: *Coreography 1*, photo dance, 2015  
Courtesy Provisional Salta Ensemble



43 Provisional Salta Ensemble: *Coreography 2*, photo dance, 2015  
Courtesy Provisional Salta Ensemble

- (3) as a performance art, dance is often no longer a function of ‘dance as art’, but of dance as a culturally intervening, that is, activist practice.

Furthermore, saying that dance is a performing art means that what is at stake is an art practice based on the structural and phenomenal articulation, de-articulation, or the appropriation of the event in the ideal “space” of theatre, that is, in the un-ideal spaces of cultural and social relations, i.e. in contradictory and conflicting contexts.

As a performing art, dance may be identified as live art whenever it is set, presented, or performed by living, behavioural, mobile bodies in the contexts of art, culture, and society. As a media performance, dance signifies a live art mediated through mechanical, electronic, or digital media, as well as a “live” intervening on the articulation, that is, on the choreography of movement within the media practice and system of communication and mediation (film, television, digital systems, communication networks). As a post-media practice, dance signifies an important change that leads from choreography and dance as the creating of “sensuous aesthetic value” to the conceptual field of reconsidering and researching the status of dance as an art or a material cultural practice.<sup>313</sup> It is about transforming art from creating in the traditional or new media into a field of exploring new production and postproduction relations with media or phenomena within social contradictions, conflicts, and paradoxes. The post-media and post-production character of contemporary dance makes it “ontologically” free from the modernist conceptions of the radicalisation of the aesthetic evolution of live performance (Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown), as well as from the postmodernist conceptions of plural media work with dance and representation, that is, the recreation of the performance of dance by performing media models (Pina Bausch, Anne Terese de Keersmaecker). Dance thereby becomes a practice, similar to any other practice of *art in the age of culture*<sup>314</sup> – which is not bound to the phenomenalisation of its own

<sup>313</sup> Conceptual or choreographic dance is an open term for the critical examinations, deconstructive practices, and simulational production of institutions, discourses, phenomena, concepts, and procedures of choreography and dance in the Western art of the 1990s and 2000s. The idea of conceptual dance (*think-dance*) concerns the work of European choreographers, dancers, and performers, such as Jérôme Bel, Boris Charmatz, Xavier le Roy, Thomas Lehmen, Tom Plischke, Tino Sehgal, Magali Deshazaille, Meg Stuart, and Gilles Touyard.

<sup>314</sup> Art in the age of culture is an indeterminate indexical identification for art after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reversal from the *specific symptom retro-practices* in the art of the 1980s and the early 1990s towards the establishment of the art of the new global epoch. The new art in the age of culture resides in its emerging from the centred autonomies of the macro-political order into an art with conspicuous cultural functions in the new reconfiguration of media and actuality. Art in the age of culture emerges with the production of global empires, from the USA to the EU, in a post-Cold War age.

medium or disciplinary identity, but to the function of performance in relation to the history of dance, the cultural paradigm of dance, that is, social contradiction in the altered world of the transitional globalisms of the 21st century's first decade. On the one hand, this is about work that assumes the demand that the dancer intervene "apologetically" or "critically" in a given cultural or multicultural *milieu*, whereby dance is posited as a field of the appropriation of culture (for instance, Akram Khan's multicultural dance and Lisa Bufano's dance of the handicapped). By contrast, activist dance tends towards a mutation of dance as an art into a field of everyday cultural and social contradictions. Dance itself then cancels itself as an art practice and becomes an instrumental practice, which makes only limited references to the history or cultures of dance.

## DANCE AND THEORY: DISCOURSES AND APPARATUSES

Like any other art, dance is entirely within the domain of theory, even when choreographers and dancers "believe" that they are outside of theory, outside of discourse, in the pure domain of technique, affect, or communication. This is not just about a body set in motion opposite to and outside of writing, but a body that is always covered or implicated, that is, mediated by the traces of writing about dance, body, space, movement, time, performance, theatre, indirect gestural narration, mediation of sense, meaning, sign, value, the object of enjoyment, a body that is a surplus of value, meaning, and sense in relation to the everyday body. The stimulating tension between body and writing: body-text and *écriture-as-text* are, again, always already *écriture* within the writing that grants something (a certain bodily movement) the status of dance as art within the culture.

In addition, by *écriture* or writing I do not mean the act of writing itself – leaving a graphic trace that refers to language or worlds beyond language – but a genesis or only relocating the performance of that which is on the other side of language, which at once consists of bodies that construct figures on the stage or screen. But bodies also make all the possible geographically situated histories and our choices in them. That still means that the effects of language or the effects of the body relate to the language of linguistics, which is merged with the affects in the infrastructures of society, that is, with its apparatuses. Dance is therefore not any *movement* of and by the body, although any *movement* of and by the body may become dance in relation to an apparatus and our positions in it (or in them), regardless of the "morphology (and its techniques) of that *movement*". An apparatus then is a heterogeneous set that includes virtually anything, non-linguistic, bodily, kinetic, linguistic, behavioural phenomena and their "solid"

contexts: discourses, buildings, institutions, contracts, customs, habits, and even theoretical and philosophical propositions. The apparatuses, in which the identification of movement as dance and of dance as a social practice occurs, have concrete strategic and tactical functions, which are situated in relation to powers and the knowledge of powers.

One may derive two characteristics, directing but confronting *claims* about the relationship between dance and theory:

- (1) dance precedes theory, and
- (2) theory precedes dance.

The first *claim*. This means that beyond the verbal, dance is determined by a significantly, characteristically, and predominantly bodily movement. The body is in an artificial and specifically constructed motion in relation to the music (as basis / *ground*/, accompaniment /*guard*/, or adornment /*ornament*/) on a defined and restricted, that is, framing stage in a defined duration—for instance: Nijinsky, *L'Après-midi d'un faune* (1912) or Martha Graham, *Primitive Mysteries* (1931). Moreover, bodily movement *emerges* from the choreographer or dancer's intuitions – her feel for the music, space, and time in relation to the movements of her own body. The concept of “emergence” is linked to the polyvalent terms of intuition and the truth of being (Mary Wigman, Martha Graham). In dance, the bodily act (motion, gesture, movement, behaviour) emerges from its performance out of the dancer's intuitions regarding the given space, time, and music, or other bodies (Merce Cunningham, *The Septet*, 1953). Any of those factors may be sidelined, or stressed to the degree of a rhetorical figure. In such an understanding of dance, theory comes after the fact, as a conceptualisation of technique and then it is a matter of a poetics of dance. The poetics of dance may be a stricter or a softer, descriptive or normative, pro-theoretical articulation of the techniques of the performance of dance and the mode of being of dance as an artwork (the writings of Isadora Duncan, Rudolf von Laban, Mary Wigman). The critical theory of dance arises – still later – as description, explication, interpretation, or discussion of the dance work and its historic and geographic, or stylistic identifications, or the possibilities of interpreting the dance work in the framework of the disciplines and theories of the humanities – it is an “epistemological break” that plays out in the application of poststructuralist, feminist, and cultural-studies theories to contemporary dance. The writings of Sally Banes, Johannes Biringer, Cynthia J. Novack and others are a case in point.

The second *claim*. This means that dance is always-already within a discursive grasp of bodily movement, that it is a part of the most complex possibilities of



its apparatuses. Dance is born in the midst of a “language” or an “atmosphere of language”, as well as of a language that pledges the unverbalisability and unsayability of the dancing body regarding verbal language. The body is in an artificial and constructed movement in relation to the music (as the basis */ground/*, accompaniment */guard/*, adornment */ornament/* or as proposition */suggest/*)<sup>315</sup> on a defined and circumscribed – framing – stage (space) for a defined duration, which is established, performed, and received in the specific institution of dance. There is no dance or music without the “framing” institution and its constituent discourses, through which every individual dance begins to relate to other individual texts of culture or meta-texts of culture. Dance and music are separate today—for instance, the practices developed by Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Robert Morris, or Bruce Nauman in the 1960s, or Meg Stuart, Jérôme Bel, Boris Charmatz or Xavier Le Roy, Iztok Kovač from the late 1990s. They do not necessarily relate to each other. Still, the non-relationship of music and dance represents an important identity of the contemporary choreographic creating of “dance as an art of bodily movement”. Moreover, bodily movement does not *spring* from the choreographer or dancer’s intuitions – her unverbalised “immediate” feel for the music, space, and time, or movement without music, but from the conceptual, poetic, and ideological horizon in which she is found, formed, through which she developed, or which she critiques, destroys, deconstructs, or restores and appropriates anew – Mårten Spångberg has developed an example of such a strategy. The discursive practices of the institutions, through which the world of the dancer, choreographer, composer, but also spectator/listener is constructed, is a certain conceptual, poetic, and ideological horizon. That “world” is not an image of the real world, but an instance of an apparatus: a case of a complex situational relationship for the event. Furthermore, “discursive practices” connotes the extraction of a field of objects by defining a perspective for the object of cognition, through determining the form for the development of concepts and theories. Discursive practices are not simply ways of producing discourses for or through the apparatuses. They are shaped in technical meetings, in institutions, in patterns of behaviour, in various types of transmission and diffusion, in various pedagogic forms that at once impose and maintain them. In such a context of thinking, intuition labels the “tacit knowledge” that practitioners, theorists, and spectators of dance adopt, share, and accept as self-evident. In such an understanding of dance, theory proceeds, or is at least synchronous with, the conceptualisation of technique and in that case it is a matter of a discursive and then also a theoretical framework for a poetics and practice of dance. The critical theory of dance as

315 For the representational aspects of music cf. Jenifer Robinson: “Music as Representation Art”, in: *What is Music? An Introduction to the Philosophy of Music*, ed. Philip Alperson. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987, 165–192.

description, explication, interpretation, analysis, deconstruction, or discussion of a dance work and its historic and geographic identifications is a nexus of discourses that surround the dance work and its affective interactions with other theories of the world of art and culture. The theory and practice of dance are a *jagged* knot that is hard to untangle because apparatuses are not just the “esoterics of discourses” or “intensity of discourses”, but also an array, mixture, multitude that fundamentally alter the real relationship of the one to the other regarding dance.

Two cases of dance practice are discussed below:

- (1) From the standpoint of the “work/life”—the theoretic-anthropological position, and
- (2) from the standpoint of the “representation in culture” / “representation of culture” – the theoretic-textological position.

POLITICS AND BALLET/DANCE:  
THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE *BIOS POLITIKOS* AND  
*VITA ACTIVA* (AN ANALYSIS OF MODERN AND  
POSTMODERN DANCE FORMATS)

According to Hannah Arendt,<sup>316</sup> the difference between the Greek term *bios politikos* and its medieval rendition into *vita activa* is that *bios politikos* explicitly signified the domain of human relations, emphasising the action, *praxis*, needed for its realisation, whereas *vita activa* signifies all three basic human activities: work, production, and action. If one applies this “formula” to the understanding of the relations of politics, society, and the arts, in this case dance, one may then arrive at the following scheme:

BASIC ANTHROPOLOGICAL SCHEME ONE

<i>Bios politikos</i>	<i>Vita activa</i>
The order of the social relation	labor work/production practice

This scheme is “anthropological” because it begins with the term *life* as the basic – ontologically assumed – condition of the “human”. The human and life are linked in *that* which may be called the *form of life*. Furthermore, according to Giorgio Agamben, the *form of life* denotes a *life* that cannot be separated from its forms, in

<sup>316</sup> Hannah Arendt: “The Term Vita Activa”, in: *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, 12–17.

other words, a life that cannot be *bare life*.<sup>317</sup> Following Arendt, “labor” in scheme one above denotes the activities that pertain to the biological potential and process of the human body, which spontaneously grows, which is in metabolic processes, and which, ultimately, disappears. The basic condition of life is labor. “Work” or “production” denotes the activities that belong in the domain of the *unnaturalness of human existence*, which is not built into life itself in the biological sense. Production enables and secures the “artificial world” of objects, different from the natural environment and life processes in the biological sense. Hannah Arendt stresses that every individual life is circumscribed by its own biological limitations. The world in which life, as well as production, unfolds outlives and transcends every individual human life. The basic condition of production is the existence of the world and, it may be added, the attainment of the alienation in the worldly. “Practice” is the activity/performance that directly plays out among people, without the mediation of the life of objects. Practice is possible as practice by virtue of the fact that a certain life form on this planet emerges as the life of the human being among other people. In other words, practice is the activity whereby human interrelations are established, which means “society”. That is why practice is an essential feature of the political, but also of art.

In the next step of understanding the “political”, one may introduce a rather specific relation between “dance as art” and “politics”. Dance is then viewed as an *event* in relation to the events of the order of human-social relations, the work of the body (the creative animatedness of the body), production of the object (work of art, dance), and action as an intervention in a singular social relation (the primary functions and meaning of dance work).

#### DERIVED STRUCTURAL SOCIAL SCHEME TWO

The order of the social relation	Work	Production	Action in the social relation
Function of dance in society	The mode of bodily creation and perception of the dance work	The relation between the dominant production of material value in society and the mode of creating and performing the dance work in society	The potential of the intervention or engagement of dance in society

317 Giorgio Agamben: “Form-of-Life”, in: *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, trans. Cesare Casarino. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, 151.

In relation to the order of the social relation, that is, politics, arises the question as to whether dance as an art has any functions and how those functions may be demanded, received, and executed. If human life is understood as a significant separation of *bios* from *zoé*, it follows that dance always has a specific function in separating “human life” from “life in general”. On the other hand, the long process of the development of positing and therefore also interpreting ballet/dance<sup>318</sup> as a unified, social, and aesthetically situated practice – for instance, the tradition of white ballet: George Balanchine, Mikhail Baryshnikov – has been establishing itself since modernity towards the “modern age”. Those practices are devoid of any obvious function, in the field of a sensuous perception that must be without any specific practical interest if it is indeed to be an aesthetic appreciation of art, that is, ballet. As an aesthetic practice, dance *is not supposed to have* a practical function. But is this really so? In the history of Western dance, one may recognise four instances of the ‘functions’ of dance:

DERIVED STRUCTURAL SCHEME THREE: SOCIETY – DANCE

The function of representing, that is, presenting the societal	The function of presenting the individual/singular versus societal totality	The function of performing micro- or macro-identification	The autonomy of dance or its lack of function as the function of dance
Mimesis	Catharsis and/or expression	Performance (performativity)	The immanence of singularity
Philosophic and aesthetic Platonism	Philosophic and aesthetic Aristotelianism	Cultural studies	Philosophic and aesthetic Kantianism
The political plane	The plane of the individual	The micro-political plane	The aesthetic plane

In the first instance, ballet/dance has the obvious function of representing/presenting society. In that case, *presenting society* is given as a “generality” (a political *idea*, *concept*, or *stance*) that may be presented and represented with a singular dance sample, that is, a dance work. In the discourse of traditional Western aesthetics, one might say that singularity renders generality sensuously presentable. Sensuous presentability therefore emerges as *mimesis* (mimicking, imitation) of the perceivable or real world. In this case, ballet/dance is viewed as a function of the political, which means that the truth of ballet/dance, in the Platonic sense, is the truth of a general or abstract political idea: the royalist (the dancing of Louis XIV’s France, court dances and ballet as an effect of court performance practices),

<sup>318</sup> In this section I am addressing ballet and dance. I am using the concept of dance as a synchronic term that comprises ballet as type, species, or genre. At the same time, I view ballet diachronically, as the art of the canonically formalised staged dancing in the modern tradition, and dance as a development or revolution in regards to ballet of the long 20th century.

the bourgeois (the late 19th-century Paris opera dance school), the proletarian (the 1920s working-class and theatre associations of Weimar Germany), and the consumerist *idea* (the appropriation and reconstruction of avant-garde and neo-avant-garde dancing that Mikhail Baryshnikov has performed since the 1990s).

In the second instance, ballet/dance is a function of presenting the individual as the *singular event* of the human body's movement against societal totality, that is, the generality or universality of society. In that case, universality appears as the effect of an "empty signifier" that may represent entirely different singular events with their distinguishing signifieds, towards an always absent generality. A singular event that is established against sociality is a sort of *break* or *rupture* in sociality, which transpires identify in the choreographer/dancer's creative act or the spectator/listener's receptive absorption into the singularity and immanence of the dance work. That break or rupture, which pertains to a singular individual or, less often, to a micro-collective group of individuals, is traditionally labelled in the Aristotelian fashion as "catharsis" and/or, in more modern parlance, *expression*.<sup>319</sup> It is an interactive event with a ballet/dance work that results in a singular individual event of perception that is not subject to the social order (custom, law, symbolical order, cliché). The breach of the custom/law in the self-realisation of perception is the fulfilment of the truth of catharsis/expression of the dance or ballet work (Rudolf von Laban, Mary Wigman, Martha Graham).

In the third instance, ballet/dance has the wholly determinate function of performing the micro- or macro-identification of the choreographer/dancer or spectator/listener with social and cultural *clichés*, that is, the accepted models of community and self-recognition. In the first instance, pertaining to the representation of society, it is a case of political idealities (ideas, abstractions, general stances, values). In the third instance, these are pragmatic representations of community or self-recognition in specific cultures and cultural practices, within historical society. Roughly speaking, one may point out that self-recognition in sensuously presentable representations of community (race, gender, class, generation) is a specific practice of performing identity in dance. The performance of identity occurs—for instance, according to cultural studies – in relation to culturally assumed or posited, sensuously presentable clichés. In certain historical periods or specific geographic and cultural localities, what we call "the art of dance" has performed the function of the identification of the subject, recognition, self-declaration, and demonstrative show of belonging to a real or fictional community. There are many examples, ranging from the

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319 Nelson Goodman: "Expression", in: *Languages of Art*. London: Oxford University Press, 1969, 85–95.

early 20th-century Russian ballet to Martha Graham's Wild West dances and the multicultural practices of today (Pina Bausch, Akram Khan and others).

In the fourth instance, dance is based in the concept of its autonomy as an art. The modern concept of art, formed in the 18th century era of the Enlightenment, was based in a profound reconfiguration of social life, in other words, in the radical specialisations of human labour, production, and activity, under the pragmatic and utilitarian conditions of the advance of capitalism. A new field, "ostensibly free from society", was posited in the domain of professional distinctions and labelled with the newly coined term – "the fine arts" – in contrast to the Greek concept "techné" (skill, craft). Dance, that is, ballet, was understood as a "fine art". It emerged that an important quality of ballet/dance was the *aesthetic*, that is, "in a post-Kantian wording": an autonomy that is disinterested with regards to utilitarian, productive, or social work. The problems inherent to the conceptions of autonomy were already observed by Adorno, for instance, in his discussions of absolute music, when he pointed out that *the function of music is to be without function*.<sup>320</sup> If an important modern feature of art is to be autonomous, that means that in a specific society – the bourgeois capitalist society – it does have the social function of not having a function in the pragmatic social sense. But if art has at least a single function, and if that function is not to have a social function in the everyday, then it is not autonomous. How to solve this paradox? A response that might be advanced regarding the paradox of the autonomy of art is that the function of the autonomy of ballet/dance regarding society and politics is feasible only as a political decision to grant autonomy within the social practices of interest. For anything to be autonomous art or, to put it more specifically, for ballet/dance to be autonomous regarding society and politics, "it" must be politically derived as an autonomous field of action in society. Besides, the autonomy of ballet/dance in relation to culture is not the same kind of autonomy that culture has in relation to society. The autonomy of dance/ballet in relation to culture, therefore also to society, is idealised to the incontrovertible. The autonomy of culture in relation to society is relative and contingent, that is, controvertible and problematic in every respect.

Scheme four presents a conception by which the relation between the autonomous and political "dance" is presented and interpreted as a binary opposition of obvious opposites.<sup>321</sup> The dance work is either a *subset of the domain of* autonomous

320 Theodor W. Adorno: "Function", in: *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E.B. Ashron. New York: Continuum, 1989, 41.

321 Charles Harrison, Fred Orton: "Introduction: Modernism, Explanation and Knowledge", in: *Modernism, Criticism, Realism: Alternative Contexts for Art*, eds. Charles Harrison and Fred Orton. London: Harper and Row, 1984, xi–xxviii.

art, or a *subset of the domain of* dance as political art (e.g. ballets from the Chinese Cultural Revolution). The opposition of the dance-political and the politico-dance is posited as fundamental for the modernist development of the distinction between the status of the high, autonomous and that of the “low”, political art of dancing.

THE DERIVED DISTINCTION BETWEEN AUTONOMOUS AND POLITICAL ART:

SCHEME FOUR

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The hypothetical refocus from the dancer and spectator's body to the dance-choreographic artwork “itself”	
Dance as autonomous art	Dance as political art

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By contrast, scheme four points to the “hegemonic” modernist view that all art is autonomous with regards to society and politics. Such “absolutely autonomous dance art” develops by its respective genres, that is, by different thematisations or presentations of references. The genres differ. Besides, one of the substantive demands that are imposed on dance is to perform a dance, whose extra-artistic reference or theme is: *politics and sociality*. In other words, a formalist assumption is posited, whereby certain dance works created within the context of the autonomy of art may present the “theme of politics” or the “theme of sociality”. In terms of their “behavioural content”, which represents their “verbal content”, they fulfil their political function, whereas in terms of their formal compositional features they realise their autonomous artistic and aesthetic values.

The analysis and discussion above reveal that the conceptions of the “autonomy of the aesthetic” and the “autonomy of dance as art” show and confirm some important features of the art of dance. For anything to qualify as dance art, it must be an autonomous, singular presence and phenomenality of an artwork aimed at the aesthetic distribution of sensuous perception. But this arrangement has a rather limited history, which spans across from the late 18th century to the mid 1960s. During that short history, the conception of the autonomy of, for instance, the art of dance, was universalised in the appropriation of different cultural “dance artefacts” from the history of Western civilisation, ranging from antiquity to the renaissance, and from different geographic localities (Africa, Asia, South America). The renaming of ancient Greek or African dance artefacts into ‘the art of dance’ was a consequence of the hegemony of the European culture of the Enlightenment, which transpired not only in the extraordinary development of philosophic and theoretic thought, but also in the colonialist, economic-political

domination of European culture. It may be pointed out, then, that Immanuel Kant's conception of "the disinterestedness of the aesthetic judgement" became the anticipatory foundation of the modern thinking of art not only with its philosophic "forcefulness", but also with the military, political, and economic domination of the West and its culture. It is as if it were an impact that might be metaphorically named with the expression "the mutual action of Kant and cannon" on the modern world.

## CULTURAL STUDIES AND DANCE DANCE AND CULTURAL TEXTS: ISSUES OF IDENTITY

Cultural studies are being posited today in a number of interpretative and perspective directions regarding the strategies and tactics of contemporary dance:

- (1) Towards opening the Western paradigm of dance to the effects and practices of non-European dance traditions – extending to the exotic and then intercultural, multicultural, transcultural, and nomadic dance,
- (2) Towards a theory of complex (heterogeneous, poly- or multi-centred/decentred) systems of bodily expression and presentation; in other words, the world today is viewed as a global system (an integrating, but not yet integrated system) that is plurally determined by mutually incomparable and un-coexistent geographic and historic cultures,
- (3) Towards a constructivist and critical theory of identities (racial, ethnic, gender, generational, political, professional, cultural, etc.) – identity is viewed not as a given necessity, but as a constructed or produced order of ideas (representations),
- (4) Towards a dominant discourse of the world after the collapse of the Cold War division of the world, which means, in common parlance, towards the ruling globalist *ideology* of the world after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and-or
- (5) Towards developing specific studies or theories of specific systems and practices of the contemporary world (women's, queer, postcolonial studies), which would offer interpretations or discussions of gender identities in dance.

In the following lines I will be relying on the assumptions of the constructivist and critical cultural studies that have been developed through the deconstruction of the sociological studies of ballet and dance.



“The soul”, “feeling”, “the heart” are Romanticism’s names for the body.<sup>322</sup> But the body is not simply present here and now; it is always-already a manifold, multiplied figure (heterogeneous, polymorphic, plural, metastasised) that hides (or only promises to reveal) its corporeality in different, culturally determined identities. *I would like to see, touch, hear, smell, taste, feel THIS body itself – but every time [...] every time, instead of the “body itself” of my expectations, there is a body constructed through the workings of the mechanisms and powers of culture – in fact, I am always confronted by figures that conceal the body.* The working of culture is revealed precisely in the deferral of the body by means of the mechanisms of symbolic and imaginary mediation (concealment, censorship, suppression). I can therefore think contemporary dance as a material, productive, *figurative model* and a model of *figures-texts* that are offered within complex multimedia discourses of culture (of the dynamism and tension of the global-local, marginal-central-dominant, public-private). Only in some radical cases does the body burst through the figure’s membrane (for instance, in Yvonne Rainer and Jérôme Bel, or in Iztok Kovač and Janez Janša project *Falcon!*).

The dancing body is introduced into the rhetorical (mediating and reinforcing) namings or symbolically redirecting situatings of the body in and from culture. Contemporary dance shows that there is no body outside of culture, that is, outside of the constitutive procedures of the construction of identity, although there are ideological (political, poetic) mechanisms that select, name, and identify certain bodies as the precisely and uniquely ideal-bodies-themselves or as universal-abstract-bodies. Those are constructions of specific Western hegemonic cultures (of antiquity, the renaissance, bourgeois realism and modernism). The dancing body is not an image of a body identity in culture, but one of the mechanisms of the constitution and performance of identity in culture, therefore also of culture itself. In other words, it is not as though the body were in culture (*as a potato might be in a pot*), but rather that the body and culture construct and constitute each other through their mutual relations. I can therefore think dance as an effect of strategy and tactics, that is, as a way to *represent* the body between “entertainment” (the consumption of free time: Jérôme Bel), “enjoyment” (*jouissance*) (the economy of desire/longing: Keersmaecker), and “the construction of different identities” (ranging from Rainer, Keersmaecker, and Forsythe, to Bel, Charmatz, and Le Roy), in the one and-or any, but always determinate social order of communication, expression, presentation, constitution, exchange, and change of corporeal-behavioural sense and meaning. The body’s representative is the *figure*: a symbolic or imaginary, but always material gap between the idealised, metaphysically centred un-literality of the relationship between the meaning and expression of the body

<sup>322</sup> Barthes: “Rasch”, 308.



44 Janez Janša & Iztok Kovač: *Falcon!*, dance, 2013

Photo: Nada Zgank

Courtesy Janez Janša, Iztok Kovač, Nada Zgank



45 Janez Janša & Iztok Kovač: *Falcon!*, dance, 2013

Photo: Nada Zgank

Courtesy Janez Janša, Iztok Kovač, Nada Zgank

## PERFORMANCE ART



46 Janez Janša & Iztok Kovač: *Falcon!*, dance, 2013

Photo: Miha Fras

Courtesy Janez Janša, Iztok Kovač, Miha Fras



47 Janez Janša & Iztok Kovač: *Falcon!*, dance, 2013

Photo: Miha Fras

Courtesy Janez Janša, Iztok Kovač, Miha Fras

in a specific context. The dancing figure materialises the gap between the ideal and phenomenal behaviour of the dancer. Dance in contemporary culture arises as a plural order of *figures-in-motion* that disclose the heterogeneous and plural evidence of their passing through different cultural identities. Every figure of contemporary dance (for instance, in Pina Bausch's *Two Cigarettes in the Dark* from 1994, or William Forsythe's *The Loss of Small Detail* from 1991, or Jérôme Bel's *The Show Must Go On!* from 2000) is, to use Jameson's terminology, a "cognitive mapping"<sup>323</sup> of the crossing and confronting of "images" from the surrounding emergent social reality. Outside of behavioural performance, social reality does not exist. Cognitive mapping is a mapping that must be *unpacked* through a series of concepts that link the physical and the social in articulating the complex relations between the global and the local (the universal and the particular or marginal, which penetrates the universal, thus turning it into the specific). Pina Bausch's world is a "model" of European late capitalism and an eclectic, quotation-collage-composite post-historical or parahistorical postmodernism. It is an eclectic post-historicism, in which dance and theatre are linked in a multilayer narrative text of incomplete behavioural stories. Forsythe's world is a "model" of unstable and nomadic "cynical pictures" of identity within the synchrony of ballet/dance, in the penetration of mass culture demands into the elite high-culture institutions of white ballet or the autonomous dance of modernism. Forsythe's cynicism is a slip out of the ballet fetishisation of the ballet/dance technique, in the name of a body politics and a politics of a behaviourality caught in the jaws of exceptionality and the everyday. Bel's world is a "model" of a culture that pertains to the nomadic trans-tactics of subverting global liberalism and the high-art aesthetics of modernism and postmodernism. Bel works on conceptualising the performance of technique and thereby refocuses away from the poetic logic of the disinterested techniques of performing ballet/dance to the politics and the interestedness of every technique of performative behaviour. All these worlds are part of the map of late capitalism after the fall of the Berlin Wall, although they are, with their specific differences, an index of a different/dissolved position within the actuality of a great (Western) macro-paradigm of production, exchange, reception, and consumption of cultural identity. Dance conceptualism (that of Bel, Le Roy, Charmatz) stems not from conceptualisations of the aesthetic reductions of dance behaviourality (as in early Rainer, or Brown, or early Keersmaecker), but from the deconstruction of ballet/dance technique<sup>324</sup> through a reversal from "technique",

323 Colin McCabe: "Preface" and Fredric Jameson: "Introduction", in: *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, xiv–xvi, 3.

324 What I mean is that in any discipline, including dance, behind technique there stands a certain conceptual (poetical, ideological, theoretical) apparatus. I am adopting this conclusion from theoretical psychoanalysis (Lacan: "As far as I am concerned, I would assert that the technique cannot be understood, nor therefore correctly applied, if the concepts on which it is based are

as a disinterested creative activity, to a para- or quasi-technique-politics or technique-as-economimesis, that is, as a sign of a conceptualised behaviourality in an open-media and culturally circumscribed world, in which the tactics of the design and organisation of behaviour as a symptom of social representations supplant the techniques of creativity. In other words, the realisations of Bel, Xavier, and Charmatz emerge as poetically centred within ideology and its discourses of “art in the age of culture”. By contrast, the works of Anne Terese de Keersmaecker are conceived in the doubleness of an eclectic postmodernism’s elitist hyper-aestheticism (it is all in perfect technical-technological performing order) and the locating of sub-textual references towards issues of cultural identity (gender, macro-culture, production, exchange, consumption of values). In *Rosas danst Rosas*, behind a perfectly centred “discourse” of hyper-aestheticism, there are certain stakes of identity construction: (1) body speech (the construction of the dance figure/s), which are figures after the “death of the subject” – we are watching and listening to alienated figures outside of the domain of psychological motivations; in fact, these are figures of late capitalism’s mass-culture media images and (2) body speech (the construction of the dance figure/s), which are figures of the construction of an inter-figurative relation (seduction, attraction, proposal, rejection, elusion, approach, expectation) among female identities (the relation of two women, the relation within a world of women, the possibility of centring female behaviour as the “core” of desire/longing). In other words, the dancers of *Rosas danst Rosas* do not represent the Juliets, Ophelias, Swans, Kareninas and the like, nor any ideal ballet or dance bodies; rather, they are bodies found in the figurative contextualising of specific behaviourality, and that is dance. It is no longer about expressing identity, but constructing identity and its differentiations, nuances. Both identities (the late-capitalist and the female) are material constructions based on the procedures of performing the figure in the position of the subject (late capitalism) and of performing female behaviourality in the position of existential or psychological motivation (the female identity at the moment when the critical mass of women’s labour achieves domination on the artistic and other public stages of Western cultures). *Rosas danst Rosas* is a dance construct of female identity in late capitalism, close to the construct of female identity in the novel and the sitcom *Sex and the City*. Both cases are about pointing to the establishment of the relation between the public and the private in female behaviourality of late-capitalist (mass-media, consumerist, alienated) society.

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ignored”) and take it into dance theory. Cf. Jacques Lacan: “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis”, in: Jacques Lacan: *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan. London and New York: Routledge, 1977, 43.

## CONCLUSION: EPISTEMOLOGICAL BREAK OR THE SPECTACULARISATION OF THE INVISIBLE

The earlier discussion has pointed to the status and functions of dance from the standpoint of “labour/life” (the theoretic-anthropological position) and that of “representation in culture” / “representation of culture” (the theoretic-textological position). However different and indeed competing on the *battle* or *market fields* of contemporary theory, aesthetics, and philosophy of art and culture, these two positions point to a significant symptom, which is that the meaning and value of ballet, i.e. dance, has essentially changed. The epistemological break of the potentiality of the meaning and value of dance is no longer found in “technical skill itself”, or in “virtuosity”, that is, in the immediate, spontaneous – “sincere” – expressivity of the body set in motion on- or offstage, nor is it found in the desire for the “exclusively novel” in the dance or performance experiment. The epistemological potential of the “break” is revealed, choreographically set, and performatively executed in the political confrontations of the *liberally individualised*, *democratically assumed*, or *totalitarianly collectivised* body, as well as in apologetic, critical, or subversive contemporary myths that are indeterminately functional in terms of political correctness or cultural fascinations and obsessions: uncontrolled powers, economic crises, environmental disasters, institutional conspiracies, real or fictional human rights, open/closed markets, globalised life, cloned life, disalienated humanity, market-situated lives, as well as critical self-consciousness.

The art of dance-performance, aimed at subverting power, thus can be issued as a singular event within a social relation, as a critical, engaged, activist, action practice. The art of performing is aimed at destroying or derealising the event inside sociality, whether that event concerns elite practices in high art or alternative practices in popular culture. Action practice is founded on performing a personal and direct, most often ethically, politically, existentially, or behaviourally provocative act, gesture, or form of behaviour in any micro- or macro-social relation whatsoever. Engaged practice entails the significant decision on the artist’s part to take, with her art work or existence, an uncertain and critical role in social conflicts and confrontations with repressive power, i.e. with politics imposed from above. Activist<sup>325</sup> practice in and/or with art signifies a practice-oriented conceptualised operative project, that is, an artistic intervention in culture and society that bears political, which also means social or cultural, consequences. Engaged, activist, or action practice as subversion of social power starts bottom-up (from the people, from the margin, from self-organised sociality, etc.), as a singular event. Those practices

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325 Aldo Milohnić: “Artivism”, trans. Olga Vuković, in: *Maska* 1–2/90–91 (2005), 15–25.

are aimed at hierarchical structures of power in society, at provoking, destroying, or derealising them. Provoking means a relatively “safe” violating or challenging (taunting, problematising) of symbolic norms and discourses of political power, for instance, in a dance act and choreographic-performative stance. Destruction means a singular event – rupture – that demolishes a symbolic or concrete order of relations in society. Destruction is an activity that is established and developed in the *tradition* of historical avant-gardes and neo-avant-gardes – whereas in contemporaneity it has to be looked for. Derealisation signifies more complex sets of dance or cultural activities that are aimed at taking away sense/reason, legitimacy, or significance of effect in certain social practices, first and foremost in the practices of didactics and repression, that is, practices of performing everyday life in the manifestations of social power. Artistic subversions of power emerge as an exit – one might say: transcendence – of the artistic *itself* into the domain of the political. Therefore, these artistic practices strive for immanence in a political sense, and that means to working with sociality.

## THEORETICAL PERFORMANCE

### Performative Knowledge

One of the great and dramatic confrontations in the art of the 20th century was the struggle between the anti-theoretical and the pro-theoretical principles in the approach to modern art and culture.

Anti-theoretical modernism in painting, theatre, dance, poetry, prose, or film was the foundation of the modernist *mainstream*. Anti-theoretical modernism or high modernism was based on the canonical ideas of the autonomy of art within society, the intuitive creation and reaching super- or pre- verbal existential experiences and aesthetic values. In high modernism, the knowledge of art was as a rule treated like synthetic (or experiential) knowledge of the appearance of a work of art. As far as high modernism is concerned, the theory always followed the creation as the critical and poetical interpretation of a work of art that came into being from non-transparent creative intuitions, which meant that the criticism and theory of art possessed subsequent representational functions in the processes of understanding, archiving and valuing the unattainable creative act and its effect, or in other words, its product. Anti-theoretical modernism saw *theory* as more or less useful, but certainly not as an unavoidable *surplus* of social value.

The pro-theoretical approach within modernism was connected with the interdisciplinary tactics of the avant-garde (Artaud<sup>326</sup>, Brecht) and neo-avant-garde (Richard Schnechener) phenomena, which were the result of the critical or subversive resistance to the high modernist *mainstream*. The pro-theoretical approach was based on anti-canonical notions that the autonomy of art is relative and functionally determined by the political organisation of the public and the private domain, that is to say, of free time and working hours, or of the controlled and uncontrolled institutionalised creative context. Therefore, the creation is seen as something coming from conceptually envisaged or theoretically determined starting points, while the notion of the non-transparency of intuitions in high modernism is critically seen as important and determining, but a tacit conceptual or theoretical construction. In this sense, the theory of art is not the superstructure of receptive and aesthetical experience but a constitutive and constructive practice

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<sup>326</sup> Christopher Innes: "Anton Artaud and Theatre of Cruelty", in: *Avant Garde Theatre 1892–1992*. London: Routledge, 1993, 59–69.



of every artistic creation, even when it presents itself as anti-theoretical. From this point of view, *the anti-theoretical nature of high modernism* is shown as a developed theoretical system of the horizon of the identification of the impossibility of artistic expression and articulation. The pro-theoretical approach is in principle developed as:

- (1) a self-reflexive approach, when the artistic work becomes the research of a specific process of artistic creation and the function of art in the world of art, culture, and society;
- (2) a conceptual approach, when the artist plans, executes and offers the work for reception on the basis of exhibiting concepts (ideas, notions, mental representations) leading to the problematic provocation of the artistic practice, although the concept itself does not necessarily acquires theoretical interpretation or verbal utterance, and
- (3) a theoretical approach, when the work of art or the artistic practice are executed within theoretical intentions, theoretical networks of interpretation, theoretical objects as examples of art or theoretical practices.

The pro-theoretical approach in art most often becomes *performance* practice because it is based on the tactics (concepts and procedures) of *performing* the self-reflexive, the conceptual or the theoretical within the artistic practice itself. The history of pro-theoretical approaches leading to *performance art*,<sup>327</sup> results from two areas of action of artistic avant-gardes and neo-avant-gardes: (1) from experimental work in the theatre, and (2) from performing procedures within art (painting, sculpture, poetry, film).

*Performance art* in the theatre designates such theatrical practice that moves from the concept of the theatre as a representational art to the theatre as a researching performance practice. For example, the idea of the theatre as a laboratory, as artistically institutionalised space where theatrical art is experimentally and theoretically researched (acting, dance, direction, choreography, scenography, ritualisation of everyday life, theory of theatre or theory of culture and society) is typical of modernism and the avant-garde: the research of psychological aspects of acting introduced by Constantin Stanislavsky, the biomechanical experiments

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327 Robert C. Morgan: "Conceptual Performance and Language Notations", in: *Conceptual Art. An American Perspective*. Jefferson NC: McFerland & Company, Inc., 1994, 79–100; Thomas McEvilly: "Anti-Art as Ethics. Themes and Strategies", in: *The Triumph of Anti-Art. Conceptual and Performance Art in the Formation of Post-Modernism*. New York: McPherson & Company, 2005, 231.

by Vsevolod Meyerhold, mechanical/mathematical ballet by Oscar Schlemmer in the Bauhaus, and the dance school by Rudolph von Laban. modernist and avant-garde theatrical laboratories are characterised by (a) a utopian project of the transformation of the theatre into an all-encompassing work of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), and (b) the poetical and pedagogical function of the laboratory as a domain of theoretical and practical preparation for public appearance. In the neo-avant-garde and post-avant-garde sense, the notion of the theatrical laboratory was introduced and developed by Polish artist Jerzy Grotowski from the early 1950s until the early 1970s (Teatar Laboratorijum – Wrocław, and his later work in the USA). Grotowski's work went through the formative period of critical examination of the *avant-garde tradition*, of the formulation of *poor theatre* (pure theatre), in the late 1960s, giving up the *normal* theatrical practice for the *total* experiment and the research of borderline areas of ritual and spiritual micro-relations (spiritual and existentialist education) of a group of associates at the beginning of the 1970s. Theatrical/performance work is understood as an incentive for researching and verifying both the spiritual and physical existence of the individuals involved in the process of the theatre as art. The idea, the spiritual condition, or the interpersonal relations among the individuals transposed into the scenic, the scenic-like, or as proper to laboratory or extra-theatrical space become a model for the factual, fictional, and spiritual learning of the accomplices. In other words, the institutions of the writer, dramatist, director, scenographer, costume designer, merge in an open and critical institution of the accomplices/performers.

The movement away from the neo-avant-garde<sup>328</sup> (the examination of the *avant-garde tradition* and the immanent criticism of modern theatre) and subsequently away from Grotowski's post-avant-garde laboratory (post historical evocation of the theatrical, artistic and cultural traces) to postmodern theatrical laboratory-school-workshop was led by Peter Brook, Julian Beck from *Living theatre*, Richard Schechner and Richard Foreman from *Performance group*, Eugenio Barba's *Odin Theatre*, Robert Wilson, the school of the group *The Thing: Theatre of Mistakes* (London). The development of post-laboratory work, that is, the performance work, leads to the conception of post-theatrical practice as the meta-research of theatrical concepts such as art and social practice (metatheatre) in the following ways: (1) to formal physical, spatial, and temporal research of discursive and non-discursive theatre as well as to the examination of avant-garde tradition; (2) to the theoretical and political formulation of the nature of theatrical experiment

328 Paul Schimmel: "Leap Into the Void: Performance and the Object", in: *Out of Actions. Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979*. ed. Paul Schimmel. London: Thames and Hudson, 1998, 1–119.

(the post-avant-garde phase of the late 1960s and early 1970s) with its typical politisation of *Living Theatre* and the equalising of the domain of theatrical action with the domain of political action in the physical and environmental event; (3) to the criticism and deconstruction of an exclusive and autonomous modernism – returning to the ritual shamanist break of the fundamental theatrical relationship between the actor and the audience (Grotowski), to the research of cultural post-theatrical relationships (Schechner) and extra-European rituals, dancing and theatrical rituals and magical systems (Barba), so that it was possible to establish a multi-genre, pluralist and eclectic theatre of ritual typical of postmodernist nomadic or trans-movement from metatheatre to pararitual archetypal act. Schechner developed a complex field of *performance* studies that steps out of the domain of the theatre as art and enters a field of *performance* as the instrument of exhibiting cultural and societal practices in articulating the public and the private, or, micro and macro space. Richard Foreman, Richard Schechner or Herbert Blau worked from the late 1960s on the research of a theoretically oriented theatre and *performance*. Robert Wilson, while a director in the field of theatre-spectacle, developed systems of pedagogical or exhibiting workshops where he used *performance art* to show through self-reflexion or pedagogy the poetic aspects of his creation.

Another significant area of execution of *theoretical performance* is one that comes out of the theatre in the field of other arts.<sup>329</sup> The artistic work of Marcel Duchamps led from the sensual to the conceptual. In his *ready-made* works he avoided the didacticism of theory, remaining in the sphere of subtle and sophisticated conceptual provocations of the canon or the functions of the modernist world of art. A younger generation of artists, who might still be termed *neoDadaists* because of their debt to Duchamp, turn away from Duchamp's critical conceptualism and towards theoretical didacticism.<sup>330</sup> That is how John Cage's *theoretical performances* were born. In John Cage's work, from the 1940s to the 1990s, we can see *theory in action*.<sup>331</sup> The development of Cage's work led out of music, in other words to the establishment of music as a *widened activity* that can be in the intertextual or interbehavioural relationship with the music of the Other, other arts or forms of discursive expression and representation. What with Cage appears as theoretical discourse simultaneously with his artistic work or through it can be identified as:

329 Richard Kostelanetz: *The Theatre of Mixed-Means. An Introduction to Happenings, Kinetic Environments, and Other Mixed-Means Performances*. New York: Dial Press, 1968.

330 Cf. Tyrus Miller: "Example 10. Didactic Drifts. One or More Conclusions", in: *Singular Examples. Artistic Politics and the Neo-Avant-Garde*. Northwestern University Press, Evanston Ill, 2009, 215–225.

331 John Cage: "Lecture on Nothing", in: *Silence*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1961, 108–127.

(a) the principles of metamusic – dealing with the relocation of the ontology of music entry (intentional expression using sounds) into the theoretically-textual discourse on music which is brought into being in places and in conditions where the execution of a musical work (intentional creation or execution of structured sounds) is expected; (b) *lecture poetry* – dealing with the relocation of one artistic discipline (music) into other artistic disciplines (poetry, rhetoric, political canvassing, *performance art*), and (c) *textual production* – dealing with a text that is not poetry or music but textual productivity in art. Cage in fact developed, with his verbal or lecture *performances*, the first obvious model of *theoretical performance*.<sup>332</sup> Characteristic verbal *performances* are *45' for a Speaker* (1954), *Composition as Process* (1958), *Lecture on Nothing* (1959), *Mureau* (1962), *John Cage Talking to Hans G. Helms on Music & Politics* (1972), *Composition in Retrospect* (1981), *Diary: How to Improve the World* (1965- until death) or I-VI (1988-89). Within experimental poetry, post Fluxus artists like David Antin and Jerome Rothenberg gave pro-theoretical performances during the 1960s and 1970s. After Cage, Henry Flynt based his pro-theoretical work in Fluxus and developed *concept art*. He called *concept art* the artistic practice based on the artistic intervention of *ideas*. Flynt gave lectures-as-performance on art, politics, mathematics, and economics (Lecture, 1963). Pro-theoretical or conceptual, but also ironical and satirical *performances* were given by Georg Brecht (*Drip music*, 1963), George Maciunas (*In Memoriam Adriano Olivetti*, 1964) or Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles (*Solo for Voice no. 2*, 1962). German artist Joseph Beuys, who was close to Fluxus<sup>333</sup> and conceptual art, developed a practice of lecture performances in order to prepare and perform his *social sculpture*. *Social sculpture* is a utopian project, which defines society (the social system) as an area of artistic acts and the shaping of a new stage of civilisation. Joseph Beuys has given a certain number of political and initiation lectures (in New York, Chicago, London, Oxford, Belgrade) since 1973. On the occasion of the exhibition called *Document 6*, he also organised one hundred days of work of *Free International University in Kassel* in 1977. These public lectures enabled him to lay the foundation for a form of work with individual and social creativity as well as the evolution of society. Beuys expressed his theoretical positions in *The Theory of Sculpture* and *The Energy Plan for the Western Man*<sup>334</sup> (1973–1974). His artistic anthropology is based on: (1) the emancipating activity of Fluxus; (2) the theoretical analysis of society as established in Europe's critically oriented

332 Marjorie Perloff: "No More Margins: John Cage, David Antin, and the Poetry of Performance", in: *The Poetic of Indeterminacy. Rimbaud to Cage*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1983, 288–339.

333 Henry Flynt: "Essay. Concept Art (Provisional version, 1963)", in: *Ubi Fluxus ibi motus 1990–1962*, ed. Achille Bonito Oliva. Milan: Mazzotta, 1990, 109–111.

334 Caroline Tisdall: "Energy Plan for Western Man", in: *Joseph Beuys*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1979, 207–213.

conceptual art; (3) the social, economical, and spiritual theory of the *spiritual* evolution of mankind by Rudolph Steiner, the founder of anthroposophy; (4) the critical new-leftist practice of the German neoanarchism from the 1960s and 1970s; (5) the ideas of alternative ecological movements (the Greens, feminists). Beuys's purpose was to create a total work of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) by the evolutionist and revolutionist transformations of materialistic bureaucratic societies of Western private capitalism and Eastern state capitalism. Because only the human power of thought can create a new cause in the world and in this way determine the future course of history.

Within the situational movement, critical and materialistic theory and the practice of subverting the mass and popular culture of the late capitalist society was developed. The Situational International<sup>335</sup> was established in 1957 as an international European group (movement), consisting of artists and theoreticians. Present at the founding conventions were members of Lettrist International, the International Union of Bauhaus Picturalists, architects Guy Debord and Constant Nieuwenhuis, as well as Danish painter Asgern Jom, a member of the COBRA group. The headquarters of the situational movement were in France, and situational groups were active in Sweden, Germany, and Italy. The activity of the Situational International was theoretical and propagandist, guided by analyses and discussions concerning the change of modern society, culture, and art. The situationalists dealt with writing manifestos, statements, and resolutions; they gave lectures and exerted influence at the University of Strasbourg where in 1966 the students under their influence organised a revolt that started with a physical attack on Abraham Moles, the professor of cybernetics. They experienced the students' demonstrations in May 1968, as the realisation of their theories of spontaneous revolution so that they took part in practical political action. For situationalists, political action was a form of *performance art*. Situationalists developed open pro-marxist analysis and the exhibiting of *performance practice* criticism of everyday consumer society. Their credo was: "We want ideas to become dangerous",<sup>336</sup> expressing the strategic ambition of intellectually and theoretically based terrorism. Avoiding the interpretative speculative truths, they tended to discover individual and fragmentary truths in everyday behaviour itself, which they called anarcho-marxist truths. They oriented the initial discussions towards criticism of the historical left, claiming that the real-communism in the Soviet Union had created a new form of exploitation that they called state bureaucrat capitalism. The main subject of their discussions was

335 Tom McDonough: "Introduction: Ideology and the Situationist Utopia", in: *Guy Debord and the Situationist international: Texts and Documents*. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2002, ix–xx.

336 Ibid., 272.

capitalist consumer society. The purpose of their criticism was to expose the logic of commercial or commodity production, which in modernist capitalist society prevents individual freedom and emancipation. In order to attack the totalitarian consumer society of spectacle, it is not enough to revolt against its structures and institutions but also against its values. First of all, it is necessary to produce the criticism of work. The abolishment of work, according to them, is not a utopian concept but the first pre-condition for overpowering the society of commodity. The abolishment of work is the condition for overpowering the imposed division between free time and working hours. In order to be free, human activity should be artistic and based on play. Art and play are the only activities that can bring back the rational and the concrete to everyday life. They were preoccupied with the intention to reshape the lives of people into art by spontaneous revolt of the masses. They were against the idea that life should be transformed into art. The ideal situationist was an amateur expert and an anti-specialist.

In conceptual art<sup>337</sup> the idea of artistic execution is connected with theoretical work in the area of non-theoretical expectations in the world of art. Theoretical *performance* does not exist as a separate genre or stream in conceptual art, but certain activities of destruction and theoretisation of artistic practice are established in the way of *performance art*. Belgian proto-conceptual artist Marcel Broodthaers organised his life and work as a deconstruction of *cultural industry*, for example, the performance of museum situations with an audience (*Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des Figures*, 1972). A conversation between two persons, the announcement of theoretical conversation, or the documentation originating from theoretical or everyday life, Ian Wilson proclaimed for a work of art: "Ian Wilson came to Paris in 1970 and discussed the idea of oral communication as artistic form". Bernard Venet organised public lectures given by scientists (mathematicians, physicists, chemists, and anthropologists) during the early 1970s as works of art. However, these public *performances* were not a synthesis of science and art or the aesthetisation of science but genuine scientific lectures relocated and performed within the institutionalised system of arts. Venet wanted to show that it was possible to execute a scientific lecture as such in the system of arts, by a meta-language action on the conventions and regulations of the institutions in the world of art. Douglas Houbler, Lawrence Weiner, and Robert Barry worked with meta-*performances*, creating verbal expressions that can be executed materially or behaviourally but which are not executed and remain ideal analytical *propositions of art*. The Art & Language group based its work as a conversation and learning

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337 Claude Gintz (ed.): *L'art conceptuel, une perspective*. Paris: ARC Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989.

among the members of the group<sup>338</sup> (“if X is a member of the A & L group, then there is a certain Y from whom X can learn, while X and Y are different from each other”). In this sense Art & Language did not realise *theoretical performances* as events before an audience but as a complex behavioural situation of research (conversation and learning) in the world of art. Their complex, but cognitively feasible work is an installation for the theoretical *performance of the audience* (*Index 01*, 1972) at the exhibition of *Document5*.

In the age of eclectic postmodernism, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was a strong anti-theoretical impulse, led by the change from *comprehending the text* towards *enjoying the text*. But, the essential thing for postmodernism was the shift from the interest in theoretical explication to relying and acting through the theoretical or discursive atmosphere of history, culture, and society. Certain authors (Beuys, Victor Burgin, Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman, and even Robert Wilson or Jan Fabre) do not base their performances as rational or pragmatic theoretical criticism of the world of art but as the manipulation or simulation of the artistic act in a theoretical, political, cultural, or everyday atmosphere which stands in referential relationship towards uncertain theories, above all, those of post structuralism.<sup>339</sup>

In the epoch that certain theoreticians call *art in the age of culture* at the most recent turn of the century, there appears to be an interest in some areas for *theoretical performance*. *Theoretical performance* becomes an instrument in the critical practice of those artists who work with cultural identities—referring to theories of race, nation, gender, or generation. Female or male artists give private or public *performances*, most often behavioural events, in order to provoke, simulate, deconstruct or satirise a specific identity and its supportive discourses or normative ideologies. For example, Adrian Piper works with behavioural, theoretical, and socially normative discourses of the interaction between gender (bisexual), race (of mixed blood), and class (working and middle class), while Holly Hughes works with lesbian, Marina Abramović with heterosexual, and Tim Miller with queer identity. For these authors, the theoretical is one of the instruments for the explication of critical, traumatic or repressive policies of identity in contemporary geographical and historical societies. Within the techno-performance practices that have established themselves as *net* theatre, *cyber* art, the art of systems or relational art

338 Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin: “The Index”, in: *The New Art*, ed. Anne Seymour. London: Hayward Gallery, 1972, 16–19.

339 Mary Jane Jacob: “Art in the Age of Reagan: 1980–1988”, in: *A Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation*, eds. Ann Goldstein, Mary Jane Jacob, Catherine Gudis. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1989, 15–64.

(Orlan, Stelarc, Marko Košnik, Igor Štromajer, Marko Peljhan) the theory has the necessary function of the instrumental discourse used to form a new artistic field of media practices. It is possible to differentiate between theories belonging to the corpus of media or techno-theories and the theories of culture, and specific art or self-poetic theories. For example, Orlan works with the indexing of biomedical cultural theories in relation to gender theories. Marko Peljhan intervenes within the determined scope of applied arts (cybernetics, ecology, meteorology), using scientific infrastructure for the execution of his works. Marko Kosnik puts into effect the aesthetisation of the scientific, that is, of cybernetic systems, while Stelarc, on the contrary, uses theoretical references, technological knowledge, and cultural ends to exert a de-aesthetisation of the behavioural body of everyday life. Certain former East European artists (Oleg Kulik, Irwin, Dragan Živadinov, Petar Mlakar, Mike Hentz) put their work in the field of *political problems* or *ideological cracks* in macro- and micro-policies of the late socialist societies or those in transition. For example, the Irwin group's performances called *NSK guard* from the 1990s are not explicitly theoretical performances but they cannot be understood without a conceptual and theoretical problematisation of the ideological and political role of the army in socialist and societies in transition. The case of theoretical and theoretical/practical problematisation of the status of the theory of art on the universal level and on the level of claustrophobic and theory-phobic societies in transition is the subject of research by a series of authors linked to the TkH-centre (*Walking Theory*) in Belgrade. Laurie Anderson with her *rock performances* executes the spectacle as theoretical symptom of borders or confrontations between mass and popular culture. The examples of pro-theoretical deconstructions of the theatre towards the exhibiting theatre can be found in completely different works such as those by Emil Hrvatin or Coco Fusco. The experiments with dance were, in their long 20th century history, anti-theoretical and if the role of theory appeared it had pedagogical or poetical functions (Rudolf von Laban, Mary Wigman, Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown); one of the rare examples was Yvonna Rainer who in the early 1960s *executed* exhibiting performances (*Trio A*) in order to test the theoretical premises of the new or minimal dance. The generation of choreographers and dancers, which appeared during the late 1990s, conducted an unusual change towards the theoretisation of choreographical and dance work. This new dance coming after postmodernism, and called choreographical or conceptual dance appeared as a practice resulting from critical/theoretical research and deconstruction of dance paradigms (the institution of dance, dance techniques, the status of constitutive relations within the dance as art). These choreographers and performers (Jérôme Bel, Xavier Le Roy, Matrten Spangberg, Tina Sehgal) are interested in the introduction of the conceptually or theoretically constructed positioning into the



*rhetorical systems* of modernist and postmodernist dance, but also in the execution of theoretical performances (verbally determined dances, *performances*, workshops, lectures). The role of *theoretical performance* in dance is dramatically obvious since the theory represents the means of attack on technical fetishism of dance as well as on choreographical rhetorical aestheticism.

There is a metaphorical, almost allegorical use of the notion of *theoretical performance* in the sense of the *theatralisation of philosophy* or of *philosophical performance*. Theatralisation of philosophy, according to Peter Sloterdijk, occurs with Friedrich Nietzsche and denotes the end of philosophical metaphysics, becoming *rhetoric* (from Martin Heidegger through Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida to Jean Baudrillard and Peter Sloterdijk) or *language game* (Ludwig Wittgenstein). Ludwig Wittgenstein turned his lectures on philosophy of everyday language into demonstrations of *thinking experiments* which he conducted using his speech or behaviour. There are stories about how old Heidegger walked along the Alpine paths singing philosophical sentences on *being*, in order to achieve the longing of the ancient Greeks towards the truth itself. At the end of modernism, Lacan organised his lectures on theoretical psychoanalysis as *psychoanalytic sessions* or *shamanist rituals of initiation*, establishing his learning as a process of initialising the transfer and counter-transfer between the subject, object, and the Other. The philosophers and theoreticians belonging to the epoch of postmodernism or the epoch of culture like Lyotard, Baudrillard, Derrida, or Sloterdijk take their discourses out to the scenes/screens of mass culture, creating mass spectacles. Philosophical or theoretical constructions become the instruments of mass media performances. Philosophy ceases to be only a discourse of analysis, discussion, and hermeneutical speculation but also becomes its own demonstration or intervention on the scene/screen. Philosophy is increasingly a demonstration of the media breakthrough of the signifier into the ideal, smooth, and sexless body of traditional philosophy, in other words, into metalanguage which in this way starts to present its illegitimacy. Sloterdijk developed in his work the idea of theatralisation,<sup>340</sup> effacing the borders between the philosopher as a thinking figure and the philosopher as the scenic figure. Speaking about the denial of power, Sloterdijk at one point exclaims: "Better a cynical dog than an integrated swine!"<sup>341</sup> He would like Marx to speak the language of Kierkegaard, and Kierkegaard to speak of Marx's topics. The denial of power can be seen in the rejection and in *evaporation* of the hypotheses of subjectivity. The evaporation of the subject

340 Peter Sloterdijk: *Thinker on Stage: Nietzsche's Materialism*, trans. Jamie Owen Daniel. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, 17–18.

341 Peter Sloterdijk: *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Andreas Huyssen. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, 261.

of instrumental repression, the subject resulting from repressive limitations of consecrated social autonomies and institutions, represents for Sloterdijk the basic philosophical problem. In such context, philosophy becomes softer, rhythmical, devoid of its polemical combativeness. However, it is paradoxically critical (cynical) and post critical (soft in the postmodernist manner). It is fickle, seductive, theatrical, paradoxical, and dilutingly all encompassing. Sloterdijk initiates the theatralisation of philosophy, bringing *the thinker onto the stage*. His discourse is soft, literary-didactic and subversive, speculative, aestheticised, and devoid of feeling for sentimentality and respect: he talked in the clothes of a Buddhist monk and preached his philosophy from the pulpit of a Christian church. His discourse is simultaneously placed: (1) behind the end of modern philosophy, and (2) in order to thematise modernity, and (3) to theatralise the philosophical points of departure (to be a dog on the philosophical scene means to be a philosopher after Nietzsche). Slavoj Žižek, on the contrary, and in contrast to Sloterdijk, is not a philosopher of postmodernist spectacle but a critically minded philosopher of the epoch of globalisation, which means that Žižek's *performance* is not an aesthetisation of philosophy as in the postmodern period but a dramatic face-to-face between the area of transfer/counter-transfer of philosophers or theoreticians with the media-multifold *other*.<sup>342</sup> Žižek inscribes himself as a critical materialist philosopher into a structural position of mass media *other* (for example, in numerous polemics about 11 September 2002). He presents *himself as the one* who with the help of discourse interprets media horizons of the dominant ideologies and policies, but who also, simultaneously, is subjected to transfiguration by the powers or potentials of the discourse performed by mass media. The appearance of the philosopher in the media transfigures his interpretation into the massive and global spectacle of consumption/enjoyment of meaning. The theatralisation of philosophy nowadays is not, as in the postmodern period a hybrid and dispersed aesthetisation of philosophy, but the media performance of global representatives of particular framing, editing, and the presentation of the contextualised or decontextualised discourse of the philosopher. Even though we had at the end of 19th century a philosopher who showed the *dirty hands* of philosophy (Nietzsche) at the heart of universality, we have at the beginning of the 20th century a philosopher who in the global production of the media becomes a hybrid field to the media of distributed philosophical *organs* without a *body* in a struggle for the regulation or deregulation of the dominant and marginal knowledge of the contemporary world (Žižek). Later, Martin Jay in the text entitled "The Academic Woman as Performance Artist"<sup>343</sup> offers a provoking theoretical thesis that some

342 Slavoj Žižek: *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, DVD, Cinedigm, 2013.

343 Martin Jay: "The Academic Woman as Performance Artist", in: *Cultural Semantics: Keywords of Our Time*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998, 138–143.

of the leading women theoreticians of cultural, and especially gender studies (Judith Butler, Jane Gallop, Avital Ronell, Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick or Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) have become certain kinds of *women performers*. Having said that, it does not mean that they have really become women performers in the world of art but that their behaviour in the academic world is manifested in a particular, atypical way in relation to academic norms in that through their behaviour they demonstrate, execute and re-construct their theories. The theory becomes possible by moving the body in its relational and interactive micro- or macro-cultural space. In this way, the traditionally modern distinction between the *body* and *soul* is deconstructed to the opinion, which is the manifestation of the body in its interaction with environmental potentials and current events. If *thought is body*, then it is part of the theoretical, part of the cultural, the political, and part of the existential *performance*. In this way, the theory ceases to be an area of reflection (the mimesis of the world by the process of thinking) and becomes the time and space of the performing body through which the world manifests itself.

# POST-MEDIA ART

17

## APPROPRIATIONS OF MUSIC

Postmedia: Music

18

## BEYOND PAPER

Postmedia and Flexible Art

19

## BIO ART

The Prehuman / The Human / The Posthuman

20

## SIMULTANEOUSLY ALWAYS, NOW, AND EVERYWHERE

A Real Fiction

21

## MULTIPLE POLITICAL/SEXUAL BODIES

Between the Public and the Intimate

22

## AUTO-CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISATION

Painting as Postmedia Politics



## APPROPRIATIONS OF MUSIC

### Postmedia: music

As a vocal performer Katalin Ladik<sup>344</sup> took part in the production of *Jugoslovenska muzička tribina* (Opatija) in 1969, 1970, and 1980, and in *Muzički biennale* in Zagreb in 1971. With *Acezantez Ensemble* and the composer Milko Kelemen she performed during the Munich Olympic Games in 1972. With this ensemble she performed as a vocalist at the festivals *Annale komorne opere i baleta* in Osijek in 1970 and 1972, and *Aprilski susreti* in Belgrade in 1972. She was a performer in Dušan Radić's music piece *Oratorio Profano* at the festival *Beogradske muzičke svečanosti* (Dom sindikata, Belgrade, 1979).

A major part of Ladik's work was associated with vocal and instrumental music, although she had no particular musical qualifications. Neither was she an "amateur musician", but a phenomenon of musical excesses and vocal miracles, combining music, theatre, and poetry. Her music essentially addressed the relations between sound and a woman's body. It was the music of a female body and its motion, transformation, action and expression whether she produced sounds with her body as a musical instrument – playing with a bow on the strands of her hair, playing folk or art instruments nude, voiced poetry or transformed her voice into linguistically inarticulate sounds of phonic poetry or when her voice turned into a scream transforming poetry into an acoustic event of music, or when she loaned her transgressive voice to experimental musicians.

Ladik's relationship with music may be observed from quite a peculiar perspective. An extreme, chaotic and controversial, "synthetic" approach to the question of meaning in music may start from a discussion of similarities or, simply, relations between "music" and "women". Those are, certainly, metaphoric constructions.

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344 Katalin Ladik (Novi Sad, 1942) is a Hungarian and Yugoslav performer and visual artist, poet and actress. She entered the realm of performance art in 1968 with her first action/happening UFO in Budapest with the Hungarian neo-avant-garde artists Tamás Szentjóbý and Miklós Erdély. Unlike the majority of "new artistic practice" protagonists who entered the realm of experimental art either from literature or from visual arts, Katalin Ladik's background was radio and theatre acting. She was an actress-turned-poet, and subsequently performer of music, happenings, body and performance art. However, she also transformed from a performer into a conceptual artist, and from a conceptual artist into a producer of postmodern performance as spectacle. Her work and opening of artistic practices indicate a dense human action confronting multiplicity i.e. poly-, inter-, mixed- artistic strategies.

The suggested complexity of relations between “the woman” and “the music” is central to Ladik’s approach. She is not a musician, she is not the music, but she is a woman, Woman or *Woman*,<sup>345</sup> the source of the music, extending, expanding, spreading, diffusing her body in the human space. Her voice is a revolution in language, possible only as a transgressive event of music which is not merely music, but *becoming a woman*.

Katalin Ladik struggles for body and music to speak. The body and music have a voice, but they are deprived of speech (Fr. *parole*). The codes of knowledge, knowledge related to the body, can be transposed to music “easily”. The voice comes *from* the body. There is indeed a third approach – to articulate the music, relying on the *body born in language* with the productivity of the text. Connections between music, text and body clearly relate to knowledge. The place of knowledge is in the *love triangle music-text-body*: is this not the structure of performance and the place of *fiction*, as well? The work precedes the fact, the tone precedes the scream, the language precedes the music and the body. There is no music in itself – there is no body in itself. The text in itself is not *in itself*, but in references to other cultural texts. The music and the body – in order to be music and body – have to relate to a text which is already in relation to other texts. Katalin Ladik’s body defies the *Law*, it opposes the order established by the super-ego. What is at stake is the transgression of music and the body in relation to a text striving to be the text of the Law or an expression of the super-ego.

The signified of painting or literature obscures the signifiers and their rough bonding in order to represent (images, figures, narratives, atmospheres). In music, as it were, that concealing or repressing effect of the signified, the revoking (abstrusing), and the matter of music is absent. Signifiers appear in an elusive openness towards the possible, or all the possible, anticipations of meaning and animated unstable sense. What is at stake is the sense of the performer’s body. What mediates the body in music are not significations (their fictional rendering shaped by verbal or pictorial images and narration), but signifiers addressing the body and promising a relationship between the body and the music. Roland Barthes quite specifically wrote that body penetrated music without any devices of mediation – merely with the signifier. Music, unlike a novel or a painting, does not represent the body – it invokes the body penetrating the music – the body in the ambiance of sounds. The body is surrounded by the music, concretizing space and time; the body informs the music with a voice departing from the body and

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345 Suzanne Barnard: “Tongues of Angels: Feminine Structure and Other Jouissance”, in: *Reading Seminar XX. Lacan’s Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, eds. Suzanne Barnard, Bruce Fink. New York: State University of New York Press, 2002, 171–185, here 177.



48 Katalin Ladik: *Incantation*, performance, 1970  
Courtesy Katalin Ladik

entering the space. The body can be the one and only essential meaning of music. This is the realm of Katalin Ladik's music/vocal transgressions. This entrance – this transgression – makes the music truly mad:<sup>346</sup> the animated body defies the Law invoking the text and destroying the voice in the body.

<sup>346</sup> Barthes: "Rasch", 308.



Katalin Ladik pursued her interest in music with her collaboration and relationship with the composer, musicologist and ethnomusicologist Ernő Király, while working for the Radio Novi Sad. Király developed his unconventional style in a synthesis of Hungarian folklore and free modes of music performance based on the composer-performer relationship. Interest in the oldest layers of Hungarian musical heritage stimulated Ladik's fascination with the latent power of voice to overcome the cultural patterns of ethnic or tribal identification. On the other hand, Ladik adopted from Király a tendency to subjectify vocal expression and search for the expressive uniqueness of a vocal event. An important issue for Ladik was how a woman attained subjectivity – a unique feeling of the world – with a voice distinguishing her body as feminine. She also collaborated with Király on his record Ernő Király (Udruženje kompozitora Vojvodine, Novi Sad, 1978).

The other important context of Ladik's involvement in music was the contact with the Ensemble Acezantez or Ansambl centra za nove tendencije Zagreb and the composers Dubravko Detoni, Branimir Sakač and Milko Kelemen. The ensemble was founded in 1971 and led by Dubravko Detoni. It comprised exceptional performers of new music: pianist Fred Došek, clarinetist Giovanni Cavallini, violist Daniel Thune, and actress Veronika Durbešić Kovačić. The Ensemble focused on combinations of tone and noise, movement, light, acting and pantomime. Katalin Ladik performed with them in 1972 and 1973.

According to Dubravko Detoni's notes, the Multimedia stage fantasy *La Voix du silence* had been, for instance, conceived in the following terms:

- (1) Darkness. Katalin lies *numb* in the middle of the room, hidden from view. No one must notice her presence. With a barely visible glow, the Ensemble mysteriously and slowly walks in, approaching the piano from all sides. The game with the instrument and around it starts. It becomes faster, increasingly nervous, but absolutely *silent*. At its climax, with a hand cue, everything declines. Finally, everything calms down. Everybody goes to their instruments and resumes the echo of the decelerated game. Easier and easier... In the end, a long silence. Listening to one's thoughts. Listening to one's nervous system, by electronic means.
- (2) Monos III. Extremely slow tempo. Huge pauses. Quite peculiar sounds, electronically filtered, as it were. Barely any music is involved. Instead of music phrases one may use gestures, voices... Like in underwater music.
- (3) A hammer signals Katalin to wake up. She gets up slowly, suggestively. Her appearance and motion must produce a small shock. A pantomime

commences, considerably more diverse in contrasts, slightly more dynamic, faster, but longer. It straightforwardly blends into a gestural monologue (story). The intensity is growing. Katalin becomes agitated, her hysterical gesturing becomes mechanical – very fast, brief, but rapid. She ascends higher and higher on an invisible crane (?) Noise from the soundtrack appears at her climax (psychological and physical), stunning Katalin for a while. At the same time the Ensemble is initiated, and they respond to each noise. *Grafika IV* has already begun.

(4) *Grafika IV*. Occasionally, the soundtrack interferes. Insist on motionlessness in the pauses. Invisible cues for beginnings. The given patterns may be realised in following modes:

- a) baroque,
- b) serial,
- c) cluster,
- d) noise – electronic,
- e) speech – singing,
- f) gestural.

(5) All the time, Katalin, invisibly present, descends from the top. When on ground, she cues a:

a) grand, silent music scene. Perhaps romantic, perhaps expressionist, perhaps serial music... What remains is the movements, suggestive gestures, signals, use of devices, rapid changes of instruments, the zest of music;

b) such *playing* gradually diffuses into a series of absurd, superfluous gestures, with no meaning or purpose – abandoning the instruments, restlessness, psychological anarchy. *Without a single sound or noise*;

c) gestures of an individual who wants to give some kind of a cue for a new start gradually emerge from that chaos. Everyone begins to notice him, follow him and wait for his cue. The actions calm down, the waiting is anxious, the hand is up, but there is no cue. The Ensemble is again consumed by anarchy of superfluous actions. This is repeated (always with a different soloist) several times. In the end, there is a longer pause – nothing happens any more, but the concentration is gone as well (after the pauses in *Grafika IV*);

d) suddenly, without a cue, there is an enormous, hysterical (perhaps even detached) acceleration of all previous actions, swiftly following one another, but lasting only for a moment. Pause;

e) a three times slower reprise of the act d). Aphasia of movement, intentions, gestures. Everything is touched, and everything moves somewhere, without an aim or purpose. The motion gradually becomes slower. For the Ensemble, there are two possibilities of exit from that space:

e.1) the musicians finally fall to the ground and, crawling on their knees and elbows, remove themselves from the scene under a great strain;

e.2) the musicians slowly get up and apparently stay still. However, this is an illusion, after all: they are moving invisibly, very slowly, depart for a long time, and finally disappear. The lights are off.

Throughout the act 5 Katalin responds to certain changes in action, at the same time, very slowly, approaching the place where she was at the beginning; calmly and indifferently she digs in and, immediately before the dark, disappears – forever.

Zagreb, 1972<sup>347</sup>

This was an intricate conceptual set of propositions for a multimedia stage music piece. Katalin Ladik featured as a performer in this “open work”, conceived in a rough mode where every performer assumed a role, along with responsibility for the performance – down to the singular details.

The second characteristic piece is Milko Kelemen’s 1972 composition *Yebell*. The piece was dedicated to Dubravko Detoni and Ensemble Acezantez, and premiered at the festival Slatina-Radenci. It comprised an improvised process of turning words – mostly curses and vulgarities in various languages – into sounds. The most obscene expressions gradually turned into expressions of tenderness and those, in turn, again into vulgarities.<sup>348</sup> *Yebell action for soloists* – singers, dancers, mimes, the chamber ensemble Peters and Acezantez, was performed on the occasion of the 20th Olympic Games in Munich on September 1, 1972. The libretto was conceived by Katalin Ladik and Attila Csernik with Ladik joining the other vocal performers.

Ladik also performed at the premiere of Dušan Radić’s *Oratorio Profano – homage to Fluxus* at the festival *Beogradske muzičke svečanosti* (Dom sindikata, Belgrade, 1979). The oratorio was a *play* for three speakers, featuring texts by the neo-avant-garde author Bora Ćosić (from his work *Mixed Media*),<sup>349</sup> followed by Kurt Schwitters’ *Ursonate*, with three chamber sets of instruments, four orchestras, four tympanums, organs and a tape conceived in collaboration with the composer Vladan Radovanović. The performance was conducted by Oskar Danon. Katalin Ladik was one of the speakers. This extraordinary, hybrid piece of late music avant-garde was based on samples of ethnic and popular music, notions of

347 Dubravko Detoni: “Multimedijalna scenska fantazija *La voix du silence*”, in: *ACEZANTEZ*, eds. Raul Knežević and Dalibor Davidović. Zagreb: Muzički informativni centar Koncertne direkcije, 1999, 144–145.

348 [http://mbz\\_hr/upload/umjetnici/287.pdf](http://mbz_hr/upload/umjetnici/287.pdf).

349 Bora Ćosić: *Mixed Media*. Belgrade: B. Ćosić, 1970.

aleatoricism, sound poetry, action performance, and electronic music with neo-classical references to Scriabin and Stravinsky.<sup>350</sup>

Katalin Ladik responds to music ambiguously. On the one hand, in a traditional relationship: the performer (musician or actress) – the musical piece and its reproduction. However, Ladik conceives and conducts a very personal interpretation of the piece and the “role” assigned to her in the dramaturgy of the performance. On the other hand, her position of “not-musician-but-a-performer-of-phonetic-poetry” approximates music performance in revocation of articulated speech and sexuation of her voice. This token of the body-woman identifies the realm of elusive hybridity, metaphorically associating (one may claim – reflecting) the woman and the music. She additionally worked with the possibilities of departure from “music” – with a hermeneutically motivated interpretation of the score as the trace of the composer/author’s ideas. In her shift towards performance art, she opened music performance to entirely different strategies for conceiving the artist’s behavior. In a trans-disciplinary and trans-genre manner Ladik explored, questioned, transgressed, or merely tested the borders of her existential phenomenality in music. In this sense, with her performance in a music ensemble, Katalin Ladik stood for disruption of “music as a stable discipline”. Her role as a “performative disruptor” in the music ensemble was an essential contribution to the neo-avant-garde’s challenging of the stable and stratified order of modern music conceived as art. Finally, the effects of her voice were a form of norm-free archaic affectation – penetration of the “signifiers” into the systems of communication in music. This affectation was a necessary condition for the anticipated effects, not only acoustically and conceptually determined – but notably corporeal.

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350 Vesna Mikić: “Neoklasične tendencije”, in: *Istorija srpske muzike. Srpska muzika i evropsko muzičko nasleđe* [The History of Serbian Music. Serbian Music and European Musical Heritage], ed. Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman. Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 2007, 208.



49 I. G. Plamen, Marko Pogačnik: *Pegam in Lambergar*, OHO books, 1968  
Courtesy Marko Pogačnik

## BEYOND PAPER

### Postmedia and Flexible Art

#### THE EXPERIMENT AND THE *NEW*: CONTEXTS

The concept of research emerged in modern art when it seemed as if the poetic platforms of creativity as a technical craft had been exhausted. In art, research is viewed as an *open activity* that characterises working in art:

The important difference between research and non-research art therefore seems predicated on the fact that non-research art sets out from established values, whereas research art seeks to establish those values and its own self as a value. Indeed, the first aesthetics that dealt with the very problem of art and its place among the activities of the spirit were born when art was first posited as research and when it first undertook to explore itself.<sup>351</sup>

Artists act, the bounds of their activities consciously marked, although not every step in their activities, i.e. research, can be envisioned and they face discovering and choosing new domains of action. Research in art is often posited as a heuristic procedure. Heuristic research is a self-motivated type of research that, in the absence of a precise programme or algorithm of research, proceeds from one instance to another, using the method of trial and error. Therefore it denotes the principle of researching/exploring, in the sense of a creative programme. Heuristic research/exploration treats the totality of reflecting and the procedures of seeking and finding new, i.e. authentic realisations or possibilities of producing a work of art. Heuristic research accepts in advance the possibilities of failure, error, fallacy, illusion, and mistake. Its procedure does not rest on a system of rules, but on discovering, confirming, and rejecting what has been accomplished. Art is thereby reoriented, away from “creating works of art” (Heidegger’s *Ge-Stell*) into the world and toward an uncertain *quest* or *research* leading toward the unknown and unexpected – authentic and new – in both traditional and new media, as well as in human relations, which are established in art.<sup>352</sup> Research highlights the retreat from creating *works of art* (*techne* + *poiesis*) toward the concepts of *artistic projects*.

<sup>351</sup> G. C. Argan: “Arte come ricerca”, in: *Arte in Europa: scritti di storia dell’arte in onore di Edoardo Arslan*. Milano, 1966, 3–8.

<sup>352</sup> Martin Heidegger: *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. David Farrell Krell. London: Kegan Paul, 1978, 302.

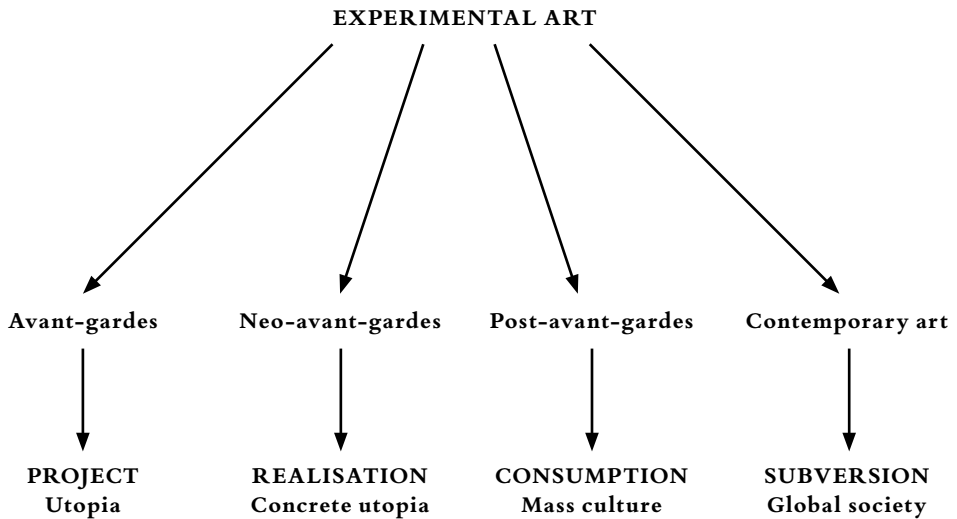
The concept of research emerged as the basis for the establishment of the concept of experimental art, i.e. art that supplants creating artworks with the “process of research”, leading toward new perceptions, experiences, knowledge, and statuses of art in the field of the aesthetic, cultural, and social. Experimental art thus emerges as a planned and organised research situation leading toward “the artistically new”.

In principle, the concept of experimental art is historicised in two ways.

Experimental art is an aspect of the avant-gardes. In that sense, one might say that *avant-garde* (or vanguard, in English) denotes any super-style, radical, excessive, critical, experimental, projective, programmatic, and inter-disciplinary practice in art. These terms determine the character of the avant-garde and complement one another. For instance, the radicalism of avant-garde artists appears in their rejection of traditional art, bourgeois culture and society. Excessive practices are those whose phenomenality, appearance, sense, and meanings provoke and shock bourgeois society. Those excesses may be aesthetic, moral, or political. Excess has often been an artist’s ideologically inarticulate gesture that determined her/him as an exotic social individual to whom anything was allowed (the artist as a bohemian). By assuming a critical and political status, excess has become a thoroughly planned procedure meant to provoke and destroy the autonomy of modernist art and bourgeois culture. The experimental status of avant-garde art suggests that the object of artistic work is not the creativity of an artisan or the production of an artwork, but to explore and change the nature of art. Avant-garde art strives for a complete transformation of art, culture, and society, and therefore has a projective character. The notion of the project determines the sense of avant-garde activism, in terms of ideology, values, and meanings. The concept of optimal projection was developed by literature historian Aleksandar Flaker.<sup>353</sup> Optimal projection denotes moving and choosing the optimal variant of one’s artistic work in overcoming social reality. The avant-garde is inter-disciplinary, because avant-garde artworks are not made within the confines of determined and autonomous media and disciplines. Rather, they are made by transgressing, critiquing, and destroying the boundaries of media, disciplines, and genres of art. Avant-garde work in art either pinpoints the boundaries of media (from impressionism to abstract art), or transgresses them, producing citational, collage, assemblage, and readymade objects, situations, events, and textual structures (Dada, constructivism).

353 Aleksandar Flaker: “Optimalna projekcija” [Optimal Projection], in: *Pojmovnik ruske avangarde* [Conceptual Dictionary of the Russian Avant-Garde]. Zagreb: Grafički zavod Hrvatske, 1984, 107–113.

Otherwise, the concept of experimental art is also posited as a more general concept than the avant-garde, in which case it signifies various artistic practices from the twentieth and early 21st century that pursue research and critical work in the virtually infinite domain of the hybrid and flexible possibilities of contemporary art, culture, and society. The diagram below may serve to demonstrate this complex construct:



In other words, the concept of “experimental art”, as a more general concept of the practice of artistic research, refers to various research, critical, and interdisciplinary practices, which I classify in four potential formations.

Avant-gardes or, more precisely, historical or early avant-gardes (*c.* 1900–1933) are characterised by explorations leading toward a project (utopian draft) of a future or ideally imagined modern art, culture, or society. The avant-garde is thus almost literally the vanguard or reconnaissance patrol of modernism, that is, avant-gardes are an expression of a radical modernisation. They perceive the new (the novel, novelty) as genuinely new, anticipated and craved.

The neo-avant-gardes (*c.* 1949–1968) which may be conceptualised as a critique and overcoming of the Cold War, established high modernism, by means of multimedia, pro-science, and political explorations of its antagonisms and limitations. The neo-avant-gardes already belong to “the tradition of the new”. They were an expression of the intent to realise the new there and then – for instance, the concrete utopianism of neo-constructivism. That is, the neo-avant-gardes subvert the “canonisation of the new”. The new, losing its novel character



due to its modernist canonisation, becomes subject to subversive and critical work on the part of artists (Neo-Dada, Fluxus).

The concept of “post-avant-garde” (after 1980) points to postmodern, that is, postmodernist artistic practices, which recycle or simulate strategies of experimentation, transgression, and critical provocation under the conditions of the post-modern mass market and popular culture. In addition to “post-avant-garde”, one also encounters the terms “retro-avant-garde” and “post-pop”. Retro-avant-garde signifies a variety of retro approaches that signify, under “post-modern plural conditions”, the recycling of clichés or *stylistic patterns* of the avant-gardes and neo-avant-gardes, as well as, certainly, various modernist samples, ranging from *Fin-de-siècle* clichés to those of the roaring 1920s and the gloomy 1930s to the cliché of the Cold War 1950s. Post-pop signifies tactics of appropriating and simulating popular and/or mass culture in experimental art and its orientation toward the contemporary everyday. The new emerges against the backdrop of the “tradition of the new”, which has become one of the old or completed traditions of modernity and modernism.

The term “contemporary art” signifies post-media, critical, subversive, and politicised artistic practices in the age of global transitions, so to speak, after post-modernity. These practices unfolded in the antagonisms of the 1990s global transition societies and continue to unfold under the conditions of the economic crisis characteristic of post-2000 neoliberal capitalism. These practices are closer to the flexible, production technologies of mass media culture than they are to traditional artistic or literary mediums. The term “contemporary” signifies that which is taking place in the present and reflecting and problematising the actuality of geographic areas. Experimentality no longer denotes the diachronic moving of borders from the mastered toward the new, but a synchronic re-examination of the conditions and circumstances of geographical and global contemporaneity itself, in relation to the media, political, cultural, aesthetic, and, although quite rarely, the traditionally artistic. Furthermore, today’s totalising economy and its corresponding global culture have posited the “new” as a temporary market quality. Quite quickly, the plurality of the new is replaced by the plurality of the newer still. This generates a staggering hyper-production of the new and its totalising, almost instantaneous global supply. Contemporary art, dealing with contemporaneity, is at the same time the new mainstream (the undisputed style or cliché of the actualisation of time and space) that affirms the neoliberal conditions and circumstances of social reproduction and subversions of the dominant representations of the market’s power. But paradoxically, if successful, every rebellion transforms into a market value of mainstream culture.

## MEDIUM, MEDIA AND POSTMEDIUM

The contexts described above (the avant-garde, neo-avant-garde, post-avant-garde, contemporary art) enable locating the widest possible array of conditions for extremely varied experimental artistic practices that all stem from the visual arts, performing arts, new-media arts, and, certainly, literature. This concerns the hybridisation of the traditional and homogeneous disciplines of art and their expansion into the open field of experimentation, inter-disciplinary, and inter-media crossing between various domains of art and culture. For instance, letterist, concrete, and visual poetry stepped out of literature and into the field of the visual, performing, and media arts. This was a move out of the verbal, literary text, toward the visual poetic text (for instance, Jiří Valoch, *Optical Poem*, 1966). Conceptual art abandoned the stable boundaries of painting and sculpture as mediums. Visual artists moved into the field of the theoretical competence of the humanities, the philosophy of language and society, and, often, literature (poetry, prose, essay writing). A famous example is an essay by the Art&Language group,<sup>354</sup> which discusses the situation of mounting an essay on essay writing on a museum or gallery wall. An entirely indeterminate and expansive field of textual-visual production may be surveyed from dada (Schwitters, Picabia) and surrealism (René Magritte, *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, 1929), via Neo-Dada and Fluxus, to conceptual art and post-modern and contemporary practices (Joseph Kosuth, Robert Barry, Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer). Most of these works inhabit the extra-disciplinary domain of visual-textual experimental or critical exchanges and constructions.<sup>355</sup>

Turning now to the work of art in poetry, we may introduce certain conceptual delineations. I will outline those delineations by progressing from the written record of the poetic text (in phenomenological terms, from the paper bearing the inscription of the poetic text) and from collecting poetic texts (written records or imprints on paper). Such a move takes one toward the body of the book (in phenomenological terms, from the zero body of paper to the full body of the book) and then on to the transformation of the poetic text into an object, situation, or event. Let us look at the table below:

354 Art & Language (Baldwin, Atkinson): "Print (2 section A and B) (1966)", in: *Art as Thought Process: Works Bought for the Arts Council*, ed. Michael Compton. London: Arts Council, 1974, 31.

355 Aimee Selby (ed.): *Art and Text*. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2009.

## POST-MEDIA ART

From technical support via medium to media	Paper
From technical support via medium to media	Book
Media	Book <i>qua</i> object, installation, event
Media	Object
Postmedia	Installation
Medium	Sound
Postmedia	Event
Postmedia	Text and Image
Media	Screen
Postmedia	Web/Network

The left column introduces the general conceptual identifications of different technical mediators: technical support, medium, media and postmedia. Each of those terms has a multitude of meanings and conditions of use; therefore, I will redefine them with specific uses in the context of the present discussion and connect them to the terms in the right column. The right column represents very specific and concrete tools in artistic communication, for example: paper, book, object, instalation, sound, event, text, image, screen, web-network.

Technical support denotes various means of creation, production, communication, and presentation, which are used to make, present, communicate, and exchange works of art/literature. Those means do not constitute the character of an artwork, but make it accessible in the conventional sense of reception. In other words, a “technical means” is not an integral part of the work, but only its necessary agent, whose phenomenal characteristics do not constitute the work’s aesthetic, poetic, or artistic character. In yet other words, we may read a poem by Petrarch or Haroldo de Campos from a small or large book, a luxurious volume using 120-gsm paper, or a cheap volume using 60-gsm paper. The only thing that matters is that the imprint has to be technically adequate, legible, but legibility is not part of the intent of Petrarch’s or de Campos’s poetry. Legibility goes without saying, as a necessary technical prerequisite for communicating a poetic text that is not equivalent to the imprint itself.

“Medium” is a problematic term. Entirely joking, I might say that it denotes people endowed with extraordinary supersensory abilities that enable them to communicate with beings beyond our world of experience. In the present context,

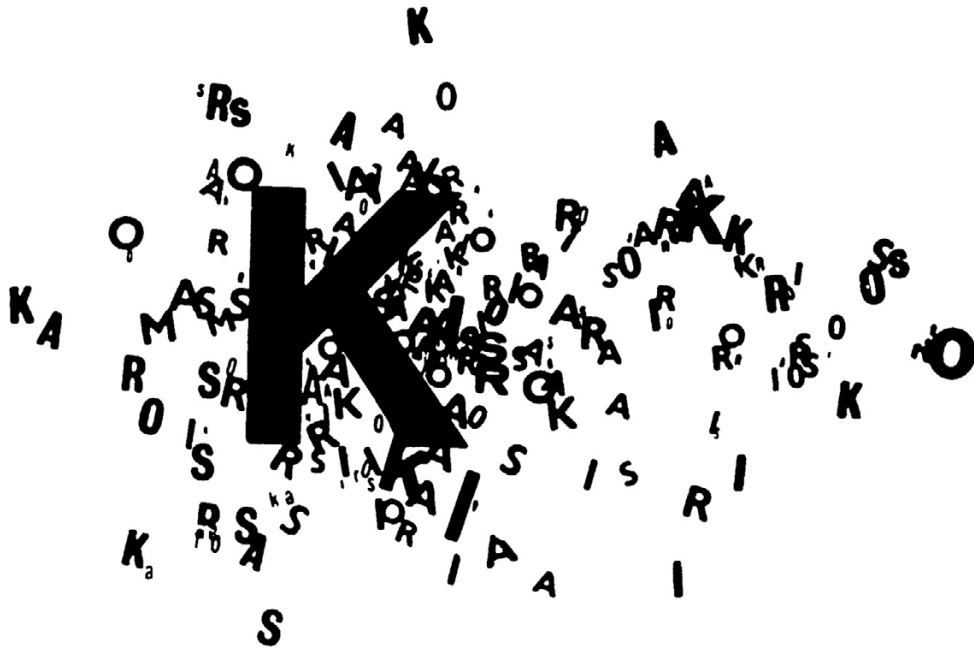
however, that is not the meaning of “medium” I have in mind. In the context of this discussion, the term signifies the totality of all material conditions and aspects, i.e. things that are required in the production, emergence, exchange, and communication of a work of art as such in the artworld, culture, and society. A medium is much more than technical support, because it includes a complex poetic and aesthetic relationship with technical support. For example, the medium of Petrarch’s poetry comprises his internal life, the Latin language, the spoken and written language of renaissance Florence, as well as the multiplicity of possible modes of reciting his poetry out loud and to oneself, and writing his poetry by hand on a suitable surface or printing it mechanically, or, nowadays, presenting it using any means of presentation whatsoever (ranging from printed to onscreen and audiovisual images). All of this is further complicated by adding possible techniques of translation from one language into another that are built into the medium characteristic of his poetry. By contrast, a concrete poem by de Campos (for instance, *fala / prate / cala / ouro*), in addition to all the aspects of medium that Petrarch’s poetry has, also bears certain characteristics of the visual. Its visuality is a constitutive aspect of its medium, as poetically relevant as is the role of linguistic language. In Petrarch’s poetry, the visual has no such import, that is, it is only a necessary condition for the legibility of an inscription whose messages and aesthetic characteristics are not an effect of that legibility. By contrast, de Campos’s poetry “works” with the relationship of legibility and visibility as constitutive aspects of a work of poetry. It may be noted that the concept of medium also includes the conditions wherein a work comes into being, those of communicating, i.e. exchanging the work, as well as those of its reception. In literature, the medium of poetry often also includes aspects that are not in the work itself, but relate to the receiver (reader, listener), who memorises the work, with her/his potential abilities to reproduce it in her/his memories, writing, or oral communication.

“Media” are technical means built in and presented as a constitutive poetic and aesthetic aspect of a work of art. A “technical means” is not auxiliary support, as in the literal usage of the term, but an important demonstrative aesthetic and poetic aspect of a work of poetry, which means that it is constituent of the work, which also shows and problematizes it. Marshall McLuhan’s well-known phrase, “The medium is the message”,<sup>356</sup> states that the medium is embodied in the message. In other words, the totality of all material conditions and circumstances is embodied, i.e. demonstratively materialised in the message (a work of poetry). If the totality of all material conditions is reduced to “technical means” and “technical support”, then one may say that the media of art is an applied technical means problematised

<sup>356</sup> Marshall McLuhan: *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: Mentor, 1964, 7.

and thematised by means of a poetic work of art. For instance, the Russian avant-garde (e.g. Alexei Kruchonykh, Olga Rozanova, *Vselenskaja vojna* (Universal War, 1916), Slovenian reism (e.g. I. G. Plamen, *Embrionalna knjiga* [The Embryonic Book], 1968), and German conceptual art (Franz Erhard Walther, *Large Cloth Book*, 1963–1969) treated artistic poetry books as a medium to be explored in artistic research and used to present that research. Russian avant-garde books explored the relationship between verbal and visual technical means (means of support), which constitute the expressive (sensory/aesthetic) properties of a book. A book is not an “agent”, but the content of communication. In Slovenian reism and especially in *Embrionalna knjiga*, the poetry book itself was the object of a phenomenologically motivated exploration of the “character of the book as a medium” and the “boundaries of the book as a medium”. As for Franz Erhard Walther, his *Large Cloth Book* is a sizable object, produced in the form of a book comprising 68 pages. It is used as an unexpected space for putting performing bodies into specific relations. The book as a medium of research is thereby brought to the performing “condition of a postmedium”.

The postmedia artistic or poetry practice may be interpreted as a hybrid linking of various artistic, poetic, and extra-artistic phenomena in the presentation of political, aesthetic, ethical, and poetic/artistic ideas. Postmedia works are poetic/



50 Biljana Tomić: *Typoetry*, letraset, 1968  
Courtesy Biljana Tomić

artistic or aesthetic events realised as objects, installations, or performances that are appropriations of extra-artistic objects, situations, events, institutions, and modes of behaviour, that is, data aesthetics or documentary practices. My preferred term, “postmedia artistic practice”, is indebted to the term “the post-medium condition”, developed by American theorist and art historian Rosalind Krauss.<sup>357</sup> The difference between her usage of the term “the post-medium condition”, itself indebted to Lyotard’s “postmodern condition” (*la condition postmoderne*), and my own construct is that my construct does not engage in a comparative polemic concerning the importance and value that the medium and media may have as opposed to the postmedium and postmedia in the phenomenological-aesthetic sense, but merely describes the condition of the contemporary hybrid artistic and poetic practice, no longer predicated on the traditional modern mediums and media of poetry, the fine and the visual arts. These are hybrid artistic practices that traverse various formats of performing poetic, artistic, and aesthetic concepts, stances, discourses, and apparatuses. The traditional and modern poet or artist was determined by a “specialised poetic ontology”, which was essentially determined by the *nature* of her/his preferred medium or media (painting, poetry, prose, photography, theatre, film, etc.). The contemporary artist and/or poet addresses the *format* whereby her/his ideas (concepts, stances, discourses, and apparatuses) are realised. In other words, before, one was an artist or poet by virtue of using a certain medium or media in a canonical or individual way. Today, by contrast, artists or poets are identified as such regardless of the medium or media they employ. They select the best suited format for realising their ideas and introducing them into the field of social or cultural contexts. The concept of format refers not to a “poetic ontology” that determines an artist, but to her/his strategy of acting in art, culture, and society. In contemporary art and poetry, strategy takes us from “style” toward a “political platform”. Therefore, the *format* is not a necessary way of creating or expressing, but a disciplinary or inter-disciplinary set of modalities for realising artistic and poetic ideas, selected from one instance to the next. Such a set of modalities may rest on the medium or media of a particular discipline of art, or on inter-disciplinary moving between various disciplines of art, as well as on media from other cultural and social practices (bureaucracy, politics, social work, creative industries, mass media, everyday forms of life, etc.). A format is not an artist’s or poet’s choice of a specific poetics of art/poetry, but a real or ostensible choice of performing a politics of art/poetry.

357 Rosalind E. Krauss: *‘A Voyage on the North Sea’: Art in the Age of the Post-medium Condition*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1999, 32, 45; Rosalind E. Krauss: *Perpetual Inventory*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010, xii, 89.



51 Csernik Attila: *Telopis*, performance, 1971  
 Courtesy Csernik Attila

There are many examples of postmedia artistic and poetic practices – here are some of them! Bálint Szombathy has realised “found poetry” (*Found Visual Poems: Rock Letters*, 1976). These are works of poetry realised in the format of land art. Szombathy looked for rocks in the ground and used them to produce letters in it. The resulting work is located outdoors (Pico del Teide, Tenerife). In the world of art, Szombathy’s work of poetry is present by means of photo-documents.

In 1970, the Bosch + Bosch group performed *Art*, an interventional poetry action. They used cardboard to make the letters A, R, and T, and installed them outdoors, on the ground or in water.

Visual artist Josip Stošić worked with the format of the poetic installation of objects (*Verbalno preparirani predmeti* [Verbally Prepared Objects], 1970) and behavioural interactive action (*Premetaljka* [Anagram], 1971) in gallery spaces and other types of interior. His installation *HA-HA* (1964–84) was realised as a simulacrum of a theatre melodrama. For instance, when the curtain rises, the improvised stage features the letters HA...HA, cut out of paper. The letters constitute the actors of the play, its décor, and poetic text, all at once.

The performance format was developed in various situations, for instance, in the context of the poetic voice as the medium and/or media of poetry (Kurt Schwitters, *Ursonate*, 1922–1932) and in the experimental hybrid poetic practice of “oral, audio, or verbal poetry” (Henry Chopin, Katalin Ladik, John Cage).

In this context, one might also mention complex theatricalised poetic performances, such as *More* (The Sea), a 1969 action by the OHO group and Tomaž Šalamun; Katalin Ladik’s *Vabljenje* (1968); Carolee Schneemann’s feminist poetry performance *Interior Scroll* (1975); Attila Csernik’s body poetry from the 1970s; and Charles Bernstein’s language poetry performances (*Futurist Manifestos*, 2009).

An example of postmedia poetry practice based on digital interactive visual-textual models was presented at the Vienna Airport in 2012 (*ZeitRaum*, a project realised by Ars Electronica Futurelab, in collaboration with Jussi Ängeslevä, Yugo Nakamura, and Robert Huber). Digital poetry, for instance, has developed from media (computer poetry, hyper-textual poetry) to postmedia poetry (internet or net poetry, interactive poetry, digital performance) – characteristic artists include Eduardo Kac and Catherine Davinio. Today, new media, i.e. digital technologies have globalised the field of postmedia artistic practices and brought it to the dominant “flexible possibility” of practising as well as applying experimental poetry/art.



In the contemporary world, the ideas of postmedia working with hybridised and flexible artistic, poetic, and literary formats have emerged in two antagonistic roles:

- (1) that of art suited to the de-territorialised and flexible corporate and market demands of mass consumption (the advertising industry, political propaganda, cultural creative activism, the construction of the public social sphere, mass consumption), and
- (2) that of art suited to the demands for permanent emancipation and critique of contemporary structures of political and economic power (activist politicised art).

These two roles are not unconnected; on the contrary, they are connected in the antagonism that we recognise as the constitutive conflict of contemporaneity.

## BIO ART

### The Prehuman / The Human / The Posthuman

Bio Art denotes those art practices that are based on a spectacularising working with biological and biopolitical systems and practices. Biotechnopolitical conceptions may be identified in the performances of Hanna Wilke (*Intra-Venus*, her medically spectacularised work from 1993), Stelarc (his *Third Hand*, 1976–1980, a cybernetic hand), Orlan (*Omnipresence*, plastic-surgery procedures conducted on the artist's body in 1993), in the performances and video works by Matthew Barney (regulating the body and an electronic system in *Blind Perineum*, a 1991 work of his), in the performances of Zoran Todorović (the use of the human body for food, 1998), the organic, living tapestry and sculpture of Oron Catts, Ionat Zurr, and Guy Ben-Ary (performing sculptures with fibrillar microorganisms that reproduce, develop, and spread, 1990), the installations of Eduardo Kac (*Genza*, his work with a fluorescent rabbit from 2000), as well as in works by Heli Rekula, Lucy Orta, Egle Rakauskaitė, Ron Athey, Polona Tratnik, Andreja Kulunčić, and others.

Live art is primarily the practice of performing an artwork, i.e. a live event, in the presence of an audience. The concept of “live art” is synonymous with the concepts of performance art and body art. The idea of synthesising life and art was first given in the project of the *total work of art* (*Gesamtkunstwerk*). The notion of performing an interactive relation between “life” and art signifies procedures, processes, situations, and events of presenting an artistic concept live before an audience, or in collaboration with the audience. This primarily concerns all forms of “the performing arts” and, more narrowly, “performance art” and its 20th-century modifications. Those modifications led from avant-garde artists’ private and public actions to German and Austrian actionism, social sculpture, masculine and feminist body art, conceptual performance, photo- and video performance, as well as cultural activism, techno-performance, cyber-performance, bio-performance, radical body art, and “device art”. Performing live is determined by distinguishing the event of presenting an artistic concept from a produced piece of art. At a time of transition and globalism, live performance poses some obvious questions about the relation between “life” and the “functioning of machines” in complex interactions between organic and machinic, inorganic acting.

However, live art is also an expression of the spectacularisation of relations between forms of life and contemporary art practices. It concerns relations at a time of transition and globalisation, whereby the conception of “live art” is entirely modified. According to Yves Michaud: “Here it is a new field of acts and works that employ the materials and processes of life”.<sup>358</sup>

Relations between life and art are founded on the position that forms of life may be spectacularised as qualitatively new phenomena in art and culture. Analysing relations between art and life leads toward modes of representing, i.e. spectacularising life through art. In addition, forms of life thereby become a kind of post-media in artistic acting. Forms of life become tactical media for exploring the fields of visibility of those forms of life themselves.

Human culture is a specific form of life. Forms of life are spectacularised in cultural formations. For instance, the commune in Šempas, Slovenia,<sup>359</sup> emerged through a critique of modernist and urban alienation. It posited itself as a symptom, or even as an experimental ground for exploring “natural”, i.e. non-urban forms of life. Non-urban forms of life are spectacularised there through models of rites, rituals, and ceremonies in everyday living in nature.

Another important position in live-art practices lies in distinguishing between the human body as a biological organism and the behavioural body. For instance, American body artist Dennis Oppenheim worked with his double-action body. In *Parallel Stress* (1970), he used his body as an instrument to measure physical urban and natural space. In that project, the human body was used as a behavioural measuring instrument. By means of his own behaviour, the artist determines the situation of his body and the environment in which it acts. In *Stills from Gingerbread Man* (1970–1971) and *The Residue (Waste Products) Becomes the Finished Work Micro-Projection-Feces* (1970), Oppenheim worked with two different types of his body’s phenomenality: with a behavioural body in the process of consuming gingerbread in which a photo shows the artist eating and with a body in the process of digesting the consumed gingerbread. The work also comprises a graphic medical representation of the cake being processed inside the artist’s digestive system. These two levels of presenting the artist’s relating to the cake point to two divergent understandings of “live art” – as behavioural and as biological.

358 Yves Michaud: “Art and Biotechnology”, in: *Signs of Life. Bio Art and Beyond*, ed. Eduardo Kac. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2007, 387.

359 The Šempas commune grew out of the OHO group in 1971. Cf. Taras Kermauner and Marko Pogačnik: “OHO – Šempas 1963–1985”, in: *Zmajeve črte, ekologija in umetnost*, ed. Marko Pogačnik. Maribor: Založba Obzorja, 1986, 109–123.

Models of representing human or animal bodies as biological organisms are likewise characteristic of live art. That is, performances are characteristic of biological metaphors for the human body. Representations of the body *qua* biological have a long tradition in the West, from Dürer and Leonardo's scientific/artistic work in the Renaissance, to Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632), through the natural-history museums of the late Baroque and Enlightenment – for instance, Florence's *La Specola* museum. *La Specola* features anatomical wax figures, which display the human body and its biological structures. In one of his studies, French art historian Georges Didi-Huberman offered a Foucaultian historicisation of medical photography. He has developed an elaborate discussion of photographic representations of the diseased body in French 19th-century medical journals. The role of medical photography was to visualise illness:

This text makes a surreptitious leap: the experience of the clinic comes to be identified with something like a “fine sensibility”. It was a “concrete” sensibility, or, if you prefer, “sensory” knowledge — but an aesthetic, in any case, a scholarly aesthetic (the beautiful soul mentioned above).<sup>360</sup>

American performance artist Carolee Schneemann has spectacularised her body in menstrual cycle (*Interior Scroll*, 1975), whereas British artist Franko B has mounted performances in which he spilled blood from his own veins (*Oh Lover Boy*, 2001).

On the more dramatic end of the scale, artists of different epochs have attempted to represent “death” as the limit of life or as *that* condition after life. Death itself could never be represented. Instead, artists developed different iconographies to represent dying (e.g. Jacques-Louis David, *The Death of Joseph Bara*, 1794), the dead body (e.g. Marlene Dumas, *Waiting (for Meaning)*, 1988 and Gerhard Richter, *Dead*, 1988), and metaphorical or allegorical representations of death as a humanoid figure (e.g. Dürer, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, 1498; Damien Hirst, *For the Love of God*, 2007). Death was always able to elude entirely different aspects of its spectacularisation and attempts to achieve it. Similarly to love, death does not yield to literal visual representations – even in such cases as photographs of Friedrich Nietzsche's dying body (25 August 1900) or that of painter Olga Rozanova on her deathbed (7 November 1918). Death is the limit of all forms of life and may be spectacularised only through the signifying practices of the unliteral and fictional mediation of signs, texts, or images of death. In 1993, Derek Jarman made *Blue*, a film that shows a blue screen for the entire 75 minutes of its duration. This is accompanied by a voice that speaks of living with AIDS, dying, and death: “My retina is a distant planet. I played this scenario for the last six

<sup>360</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman: *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003, 26.

years [...] My vision will never come back [...] The virus rages, I have no friends now. I lost my sight [...] I shall not win the battle with the virus".<sup>361</sup>

In contemporary art, live art has become conceivable by politicising forms of life, which means all those forms that show "life" in its social contingency and spectacularisation. Life is viewed here not as a prehuman event, but as an event that is determined by the limits of performing human relations, i.e. sociality. Initially, politicising forms of life was associated with environmentalist and feminist art activism and later, in the 1990s and 2000s, it spread to other fields of art activism. For instance, bio-activists have focused on critiquing and subverting the political power of corporate genetic engineering. In *Free Range Grain* (2000–2004), the Critical Art Ensemble sought to spectacularise, i.e. face the public with the production of genetically modified food:

What CAE / da Costa / Shyu see in this particular example of GM good distribution is a means to visualize the material reality of theories of global trade. On the one hand, there is the global economy of smooth space, where the commodity moves relatively freely. On the other hand, there is a belief that markets can be locked down by using traditional forms of blockage typically used to preserve or strengthen nation-state economies. The EU is often perceived both as open (a major architect in the development of open markets and free trade as well as producers of global consensus) and yet locked down (Fortress Europe). Our belief, however impressionistic, is that the EU tends toward the global (smooth space). Since processed corn and soy products are being imported into Europe in large quantities, we are quite skeptical that the EU will be able to maintain its borders against such contaminated commodities.<sup>362</sup>

The CAE thereby opened the field of biological production and politics to social critique, by means of spectacularisation through artistic tactical media. For them, the problem is not "biological technology" itself, but the profit that comes out of it and the grounds for the political strategies of dominating and controlling forms of life.<sup>363</sup>

To call certain art practices "medical" or "pharmaceutical" means to point out that concepts that developed out of artistic representations toward bio-activism

<sup>361</sup> Derek Jarman (dir.): *Blue*, DVD, 1993.

<sup>362</sup> Critical Art Ensemble, Beatriz da Costa, Shyh-shiun Shyu: *Free Range Grain* (2000–2004), <http://www.critical-art.net/FRG.html>, 18.07.2011.

<sup>363</sup> Critical Art Ensemble: "Introduction / Contestational Biology", in: *The Molecular Invasion*. New York: Autonomedia, 2002, 3–4.

developed in the direction of medical and pharmaceutical science, institutions, and their political discourses that participate in the construction of individual and social reality. Such art practices become a “symptom” of the conditions and circumstances in which medical and pharmaceutical industries establish their bio-power, control the difference between health and disease, survey and regulate forms of life, and set out to do business and presuppose economic interests to human health. Controlling the difference between disease and good health has given rise to the genre potentialities of spectacularising reactions to medicines, of using medicines to modify forms of life, and of treating and surveying the living body, maintaining and ending its life, as well as problematising pharmaceutical production.

A symptom is a construct of signification that, unlike a phantasm, can be analysed. The artist *qua* symptom addresses an uncrossed and consistently large Other (the medical and pharmaceutical bio-power) that will retroactively assign the artist a certain meaning and role in the individual and social organisation of everyday reality. For instance, Hannah Wilke performed her private *rituals* for photographer Donald Goddard in her hospital bed. She had cancer and posited her “medically treated body” as a symptom of the relations between disease, medicine, and art. Lacanian psychoanalysis treats the symptom as a defect of symbolisation, i.e. as the centre of opacity and the unverballed in the subject.<sup>364</sup> The symptom is an element where the concealed appears, the repressed truth of a field, of a totality. The symptom is a *point* where totality necessarily *slides*. Symptoms are resolved in interpretation by assigning them meanings, by situating them in a symbolic network and thereby *depriving* them of their absurd and traumatic contents. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic treatment ends when the subject identifies with his symptom. The subject identifies with the place where the symptom used to be and recognises the element that lends it consistency. Medical and pharmaceutical discourse must be brought to symbolisation in all its opacity – which is not only a matter of “semantics” but also of “visibility”. Confronting the visibility of medical and pharmaceutical mechanisms occurs on a spectrum between “subjective feeling” and social institutionalisations of bio-power, which directly or indirectly decides about the status of the healthy and the status of the diseased, that is, about life and death.

The notion of the visibility of illness, for instance, of mental illness, was an obsession among romantic and later expressionist painters. Géricault’s portraits of

364 Jacques-Alain Miller: “Two Critical Dimensions: Symptom and Fantasm”, 2009, <http://pablobenavides2.blogspot.com/2010/09/two-clinical-dimensions-symptom-and.html>, 18. 07. 2011.

mental patients (1818–1824) spectacularised human mental life by showing visible behaviourality (facial expressions and contortions, positions of the body, etc.). Individual behaviouralities were posited as different types of human pathology. Spectacularising inner life was a constructive act of locating and positing identification matrices in French modern culture.

A different example of an artist's engagement with medical and pharmaceutical subjectification is Marina Abramović's performance *Ritam 2* (Rhythm 2) from 1974. The artist used her body exclusively as a means to manifest psychophysical reactions to acute schizophrenia medication. The working of these medicines brought her body into unpredictable conditions. The work recorded the changes on her body caused by the medication. Her body was spectacularising the effects of the medication.

The General Idea group – two of whose members died as a result of AIDS – produced a series of projects to follow the syndrome's emergence. The emergence of AIDS constituted not only the emergence of a new disease, but also of a pathology complex that carried social and political effects, first and foremost in the US.<sup>365</sup> The associations of homophobic campaigns in the late 1980s and 1990s turned an issue of an epidemic and medical intervention to contain it into a political issue, one of labelling specific gender identities as suitable or unsuitable. The cultural climate around AIDS showed how medical policies turn into social policies. In that context the General Idea group started a series of "symptom" projects (*The Imagevirus Series*, 1989–1991; *Blue (Cobalt) Placebo*, 1991; *Pharmacopia*, 1992; *Infections*, 1994). With these projects, they confronted the experience with the understanding of individual and collective attitudes on AIDS.

Genetics was then anticipated as a scientific – empirical and theoretical – discipline founded on observing and generalising rules regarding living organisms' hereditary features. As a scientific discipline, genetics traversed a number of stages over the course of the 20th century, which shaped its political history.<sup>366</sup> In philosophical terms, during modernism genetics was characterised by an essentialist and universalist stance on the hereditary predetermination of all living organisms. It was posited in opposition to the Darwinist *qua* theory of living organisms' adaptation to their environment and struggle to survive. It had empirical and pragmatic characteristics in selecting and modifying different

365 Tyrus Miller: "AIDS and Artistic Politics", in: *Congress Book. Panels, Plenaries, Artists' Presentations. 17th International Congress of Aesthetics*, ed. Jale Nejdert Erzen. Ankara: SANART, 2008, 83–90.

366 Raphael Falk: *Genetic Analysis: A History of Genetic Thinking*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

species of plant and animal life used in human diet. In political terms, genetic metaphorisation formed the ground of many racial theories, racist politics, and, especially, eugenics as the study of “pure” racial species.

Later, genetics became a discipline of molecular biology. It was defined as the study of communicating inside “living material”. Genes were theoretically posited as carriers of information or informational constructs that participate in the construction of every organism’s living cells. The communicational character of genes guided the subsequent development of genetics as a theoretical, experimental, and technological discipline. Its extraordinary development began during the final third of the 20th century.<sup>367</sup> What essentially changed the status of genetics in the field of sociality was its entry into the field of commercial engineering. On the neoliberal market, genetic engineering opens up to those areas that are not only pragmatic activities, e.g. developing new types of healthy and cheap foods or treating hereditary diseases, but also those of predicting and constructing new or modifying existing forms of life, as well as integrating genetic engineering and genetic narratives into contemporary cultural and artistic practices.

Genetic art begins as a laboratory research art of new forms of life. The ideal of shaping life has forged a tight bond between genetic engineering and artistic explorations of genetic technologies. It concerns obsessing and fancying that art may open up to new post-media, i.e. genetic technologies, which modify forms of life, such as formation principles that ground the derivation of new forms of life. On the other hand, it concerns extending human perception, which is brought into a relation with the visibility of forms of life and their modifications. For instance, Joe Davis has pointed to the following change in art and its potentiality regarding forms of life:

In a relatively short period of time, artists have moved from the traditions of naturalism as mimetic representation to the direct manipulation of life itself. To date, the extent of these artistic manipulations has been work with single genes (or sets of genes) and their expression or disposition within the cells of host organisms.<sup>368</sup>

There are many works that make use of strategies and tactics of genetic transformations in metaphorical ways, such as “Dolly”, Act III of Steve Reich and Beryl Korot’s video opera *Three Tales* (1997) and Eduardo Kac’s post-production project *GFP Bunny* from 2000. The following works also use strategies and tactics

<sup>367</sup> Joe Davis: “Cases for Genetic Art”, in: *Signs of Life*, 249.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 262.



of genetic engineering with living materials in an interventional way: *Hybrid: Streptocarpus Hybrid* (2002) by George Gessert, Marta de Menezes's *Heliconius Butterfly* (1999), Eduardo Kac's *The Eighth Day* (2001), and Al Wunderlich's *Living Paintings*, among others. Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr have likewise realised projects involving "semi-living sculptures", which are inanimate objects colonised by living cells.<sup>369</sup>

Over time, genetic art expanded to cover not only the firm and idealised, often also a fascinating "science-technology-art" collusion, including the cultural fields, as well as the political analysis of the discourse, institutions, and certainly the effects and affects of "genetic products" in contemporary society. The Critical Art Ensemble's activist production, such as *The Flesh Machine* (1997–98) are characteristic of this strand in genetic art. Politicising genetics by means of genetic art and cultural activism has been established as a practice of cultural analysis and also often of subverting genetics as a science and technological engineering in the service of bio-power and the neoliberal totalising market. This no longer concerned being fascinated about intervening in the field of primary forms of life, but also about politicising different contexts of genetics as a science, technology, and art. The issues that genetic art raises today address not only new or modified forms of life, but also re-examine those statuses and functions of genetics that relate to the field of sociality: artistic work with the platforms, protocols, and procedures, i.e. institutional potentialities and limits of medical genetics, as well as with the market in genetics, which is determined by the commercialisation of genetic engineering on the global market. Genetic engineering or genetic technology are therefore treated as artistic or tactical post-media and used to realise concepts and projects in literal working with forms of life. Spectacularising the politicisation of "genetic engineering" exposes its constructs and systems of control as instruments in the ongoing performance of today's hyper-technologised reality, i.e. the ideology of life control.

The respective jargons of cybernetics, cultural studies, and art theory distinguish between three different structural concepts of an "artificial organism". A *robot* is an autonomous artificial body directed by algorithms, which enable it to simulate the bodily behaviour – working and acting – of a human being. A *cyborg* is an artificial "organism", made by articulating the hardware of a machine linked with a biological organism. In a general sense, an android is an artificially derived organism that reminds one of a human being by its corporeality. Copies of men

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369 Oron Catts, Ionat Zurr: "An Emergence of the Semi-Living", in: *The Aesthetics of Care?*, ed. Oron Catts. Perth, Australia: Symbiotica, 2002, 63–68.

are called androids, whereas copies of women are called genoids. More narrowly, a genoid/android is an artificial technobiologically generated being, the appearance and behaviour of which remind one of a female or male human.

Metaphorically, a cyborg is any artificial, i.e. machinic body that features a regulative hardware connection with a biological organism: this would include such concoctions as video-bio-computer installations, bio-mechanical dolls, prosthetically extended biological bodies, cybernetic products (biologised robotics), and various science-fiction *projections* of para-mythological creatures. Cyborgs are metaphorical creatures endowed with unlimited possibilities of *transvesting*, i.e. of a regulating kind of *cross-dressing* and disguising in the world of bio-electronic simulated realities.

Philosophically, a cyborg is a creature made by synthesising a *creature* with a *non-creature* (the metaphysics of machines, the metaphysics of bodies *other* than biological bodies and of life *other* than biological life). This anticipates the basic metaphysical question of natural and unnatural forms of life – i.e. of forms and anti-forms of life. A cyborg may also be defined as an *analytical creature* that is the result, i.e. the consequence of a biological-hardware realisation of analytical technological propositions. Phenomenologically, a cyborg is *that* which shows the interactive links between the presence (ontology), appearance (morphology), and phenomenality (of labour, production, acting, reception, exchange, and consumption) of every spatio-temporal event in the world.

In cyber-technologies, relations between cause and consequence, that is, destinies and fatalities in the regulative relation between biological and mechanic organisms are subject to change. Establishing (*Her-stellen*) and representing (*Dar-stellen*) overlap on a screen that shows how the *prosthetic* conjunction of the biological and the electronic simultaneously occurs in real and machine time. Not only is the paradigm of positing, i.e. performing presence thereby cancelled, but so also is that of presenting, i.e. deferring, which constitutes the situation of absence. The issue of the border between the organism and the machine is thereby reduced to that where the biological organism ends and the machine begins. All borders are thus relativised and the *human being* no longer feels like a finished (complete, i.e. organically accomplished and unified) body, but as an extended body, as well as one that grows out of a machine. It is an event between a body and a machine. That something “in between” is the founding epistemological difference that grounds not only the ontology, but also the sociology of cyborgs.

The history of cyber-art is linked with 1960s neo-constructivism.<sup>370</sup> Enrique Castro-Cid, of Chile, organised the first exhibition of robots in 1965. The pioneers of robotic, cybernetic, regulative ecological, and cyber-art include Nam June Paik (*Robot-K56 with 20-Channel Radio Control and 10-Channel Data Recorder*, 1965), Charles Mattox (*Act of Love*, 1965), Thomas Shannon (*Squat*, 1966), David von Schlegell (*Radio-Controlled Sculpture*, 1966), and Hans Haacke (*Grass Cube*, 1967). A number of artists also worked in association with the Californian *Art and Technology* movement, which during the late sixties and seventies brought together pro-scientific tendencies toward analysing and synthesising science, technology, and art: visual explorations, kinetic, computer, and cybernetic art, robotic art, ecological art, etc. Edward Ihnatowicz was the first “robotic artist” in the full sense of the term. He worked with interactive situations between robots, the audience, and the environment. One of his works is *The Senster* (1969–70) – a hydraulic robot that responded to the voices and movements of people walking around it. *The Senster* was the first robotic sculpture controlled by a computer. Notable robotic artists today include Stelarc, Julie Wilson, Eduardo Kac, Kevin Warwick, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Juan Ybarra, and the Electronic Defence Theater group, among others.

In feminist theory, cyber-technologies have become an important critical metaphor, because they facilitate the deconstruction of gender *qua* sexual, i.e. biological essentialism. Feminist theory/philosophy views the cyborg as an ontological sample that enables the hybridisation of the biological human body, that is, of human forms of life. Biologically standardised and identified, the human body is thereby modified in a functional, sensorial, and spatio-temporal sense. This means that the completeness and tightness of the human body that is present there and then is thereby relativised and brought to a degree of bio-machinic processed-ness that turns the fiction of a different body into an event and the event into a new human experience. To experience oneself as a bio-machine is a novel subversive identification that destabilises universal humanoidity and the humanistically situated division of gender roles:

The Cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the *oikos*, the household. Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the

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<sup>370</sup> Jack Burnham: “Robot and Cyborg Art”, in: *Beyond Modern Sculpture: The Effects of Science and Technology on the Sculpture of This Century*. New York: George Braziller, 1975, 312–376.

other. The relationships for forming wholes from parts, including those of polarity and hierarchical domination, are at issue in the cyborg work.<sup>371</sup>

Feminist-oriented cyborg theory has introduced gender transgressivity in utopian idealisations of different, relativised, and transitional bio-technologically produced bodies. This transgressivity has led to a relativisation of gender identity, as well as to a restructuring of the affectivity of drive and desire. Drive and desire thereby turn into affect (enjoyment, abjection, or horror) in relation to the machine and the biological organism.

A separate problem in understanding and performing biotechnopolitical art or, more succinctly, Bio-Art, concerns the metaphysical, technological, scientific, and political relations between the prehuman, human, and posthuman. This is not about a simple line of transformation from the prehuman via human to posthuman, but an uncertain “tangle” of lines of performing the prehuman, human, and posthuman.

The “pre” in “prehuman” signifies primarily that there are forms of life that precede the human form of life. It suggests, in the spirit of evolutionism, that human forms of life stem, perhaps, from prehuman forms of life. Darwin’s theory of evolution points to such a chronology of development, from *lower* forms of life to the human form of life. However, using “prehuman” might also signify all those simpler forms of life that are independent and unaffiliated with human forms of life. The entire living world that surrounds humans, even those segments of it that are subject to technological interventions by humans, comprises a plurality of forms of life that may be called pre- or extra-human. Hence the definition that prehuman and/or extra-human forms of life are those that are outside human forms of life. Some of those external forms of life comprise a constituent part of human forms of life, for instance, bacteria, which inhabit the human organism and participate in its *operation*, or viruses, which inhabit and “colonise” it in order to attack it. Finally, all those teachings that precede the philosophy, politics, and ideology of humanism may also be considered “prehuman” in a philosophical sense. As one of the fundamental pre- or para-human philosophies, politics, and ideologies in the West, Christianity is in its essence – with one God the Creator – driven by prehuman motives. The Christian concept of man who is a work of God is s/he whose appearance resembles God’s, but God’s essence does not resemble man’s. Man is determined by a prehuman – i.e. God’s work. Also, an irresolvable aporia in Christian philosophy is its narrative of the Son of God who is both God

371 Dona J. Haraway: “A Cyborg Manifesto”, in: *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991, 151.

and man.<sup>372</sup> That means that the identity of the Son – Jesus Christ – is determined by prehuman and human attributes both at once. The philosophical concept of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, thereby emerges as a transitional concept that moves us away from God as principle to man as principle and that means away from Christian theology as the basis of Christian ideology to humanist philosophy as the basis of modern ideology.

The human is literally the property of being human, that is, the phenomenality and presence of being human in the world. In a derived sense, the human is an expression or construct of the ideology of humanism. The human is a construct of an epistemology that posits the human and humanity as the basis of any understanding of man, culture, society, and even the world itself. Man is imagined as the source of all thinking and intentional acting in the world. Humanism is therefore posited as the universal code, language, and linguistic system that enables *us* to communicate at all.<sup>373</sup> As an ideology, political theory, and philosophic dogma, humanism constitutes itself between the Renaissance, of course, the late Baroque, and finally the Enlightenment, in which this explicit-differential “I” of the liberal, modern human is constructed and performed. Humanism is an ideology because it offers material conditions and circumstances to identification, whereby a creature by means of an event manages to recognise and determine itself as “human” (a child, woman, man, gay, lesbian, transsexual, queer, etc.). Human is viewed as the agent of the world – the world is identified as such, i.e. as the real inasmuch as human appears in it as the agent who reflects and brings it from concrete to abstract knowledge. Humanism is also a political theory because it theorises the ontological basis of every existing world as a “human world” based on performing entirely different social relations. It is also a philosophical dogma that centres human knowledge – the power of producing and deriving concepts – at the core of every knowledge. The source as well as the abyss of knowledge is human. Human is he who thinks, i.e. knows, and knowledge is estranged from him by being written down or mediated through various means, ranging from speech and writing to mechanical, electronic, and digital systems of acting. The notion of estrangement occupies an important position in humanism. It occurs when the “human” is relayed or transformed by extra-human means, i.e. technologies, which are still human – since they are manmade. And yet, they are less human than human acting itself, because they

372 Jean-Luc Nancy: “Atheism and Monotheism”, in: *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant and Michael B. Smith. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008, 23–24.

373 Dušan Pirjevec: “Svijet u svjetlosti kraja humanizma” [The World in Light of the End of Humanism], in *Smrt i niština: odabrani spisi* [Death and Nothingness: Selected Writings], ed. Mario Kojić. Zagreb: Demetra, 2009, 7.

detach themselves from human. In his critique of humanism, Slovenian scholar and thinker Dušan Pirjevec noticed a link between humanism and technocratism in their common desire to rule to world:

What does it mean that human rules nature by means of technique? To rule nature is the goal of the subject that was long ago determined by Europe's first thinker on the subject, René Descartes, saying "se rendre comme maitres et possesseurs de la nature" (to make oneself ruler and proprietor of nature). To be lord, to rule, is *kratein* in Greek, so one must say that a man who uses technique to rule nature is a technocrat. The technocrat is the complete man-subject. The man-subject forms the foundation of humanism, therefore humanism, victorious and realised as subjectivism, is in fact technocratism.<sup>374</sup>

Re-examining the subject, which is an essential effect of humanist ideology, politics, and philosophy, brings about a reversal: by re-examining itself, the subject becomes an object. The border between subject and object, which resides at the centre of humanist discourse, is re-examined, and that brings humanism into question. Heidegger questioned humanism by means of the traditional doubt regarding the "originality" or "primacy" of the subject: Man is never first and foremost man on the hither side of the world, as a "subject", whether this is taken as "I" or "We".<sup>375</sup>

By contrast, structuralist theory advanced its own critique of humanism from the standpoint of an ideological critique and conceptualisation of the subject inside the structure. The ideological critique of humanism strives to show that humanism is not a "commonsensical" or "self-evident" view of the world or of itself as the source of the world/worldliness. If humanism is not self-evident, if it is structured as a discourse, then it is a complex and complicit way of deriving an image, i.e. a fictional representative that suggests that it is a self-evident reality. If humanism is a fictional mediating representative between the individuum and collectivity in the world, then it is an ideology. From Claude Lévi-Strauss to Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, the structuralist claim emphasised that the subject was not the source of or in itself, but instead, that the individuum *qua* subject became possible only by positioning itself in the order of a structure that is given in the same way as language is. The claim is that the subject results from a structural relation within culture or society, not that structural relations result from the subject.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>375</sup> Heidegger: "Letter on Humanism", in: Martin Heidegger: *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. David Farrell Krell. London: Kegan Paul, 1977, 229.

Re-examining the borders of humanism, that is, treating the subject as an object of epistemological work, leads to conceptions of transhumanism. Transhumanism is established around issues concerning the limits of human forms of life, that is, it explores those limits as concrete and abstract knowledges. Transhumanism seeks to explore and develop concrete knowledge of human forms of life, which usually means technical knowledge and skill, in order to enhance the mental and physical capabilities of humans. A range of different techniques, such as bioscience (genetics, neurology), medicine (electronic orthopaedics, nanotechnologies), pharmacology, and cybernetics (artificial reality, artificial intelligence), are used to enhance human forms of life. In a utopian sense, transhumanism may also be understood as using technology to transfer one form of life into another, hoping not only to extend human life, but to preserve it and eventually bring it to “immortality”. As an epistemology of abstract knowledge, transhumanism offers two roughly varying approaches: utopian fiction, and a philosophically motivated discussion of potential ways out of the “catastrophe of natural evolution”, therefore also of life the forms of which can be technologically “preserved”.<sup>376</sup>

The posthuman comes out of theorisations and predictions that may be labelled as effects of posthumanism.<sup>377</sup> The concept of “posthumanism” may not be strictly determined. Posthumanism may be discussed as a collection of theoretical platforms of advance structuralism and post-structuralism that question the “concept of the subject” and the “discourse of the subject”, that is, the ideology of modern humanism. Those theorisations that aim at materialist naturalism and biologism, that is, at discussions of non-intentional forms of life, may also be considered posthumanist. Posthumanism labels predictions, that is, speculations about life after death or the forms of life that may be identified after death. Finally, posthumanism labels those technologies whereby the “posthuman world” of robots, cyborgs, artificial intelligence, genetically constructed forms of life as well as their roles in extending, enhancing, and immortalising human forms of life are realised. It concerns transferring or simulating or generating human forms or life in artificially constructed and derived digital, biological, and digital-biological systems. Artificial forms of life independent of human existence at the same time pose fictional, philosophic, predictive, and technological questions, which are raised in the context of posthumanist thought.

When the concepts of the prehuman, human, and posthuman are identified in contemporary art, especially with regards to biotechnopolitically oriented art, three characteristic concepts may be distinguished:

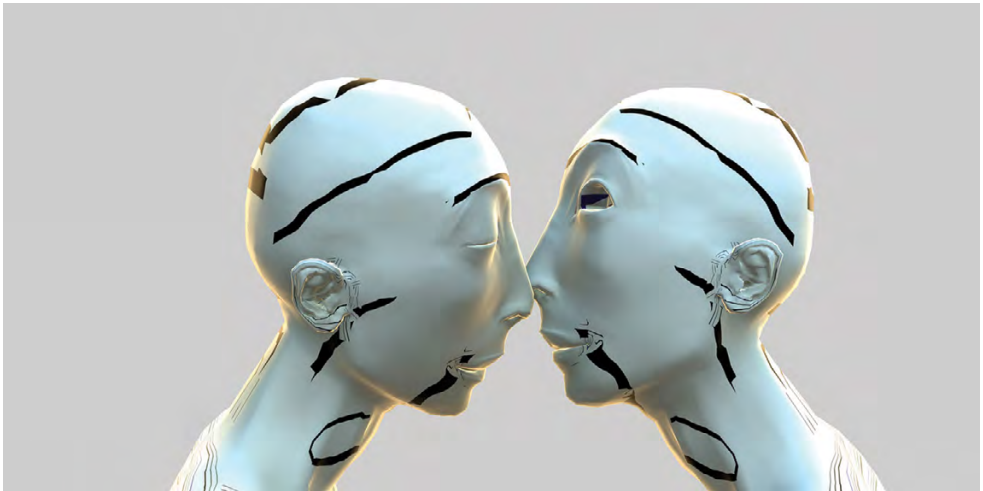
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<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 518.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 512–516.

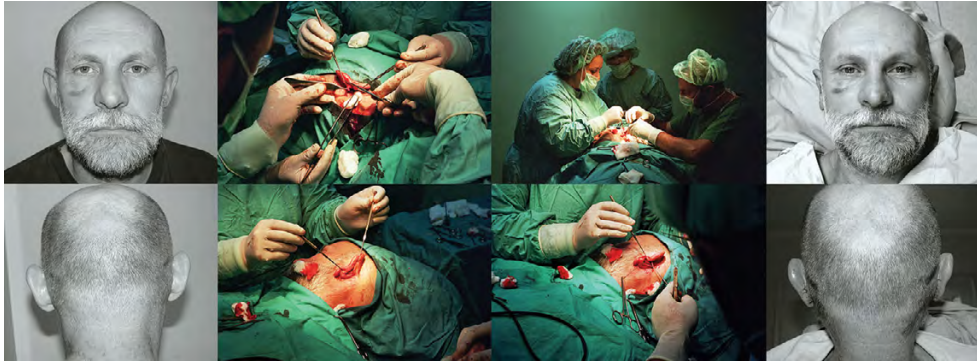
- (1) The *prehuman* signifies those art practices that are based on working with “non-human”, i.e. organic or living materials, organisms, creatures, or phenomena as with post-media or tactical media of art,
- (2) the *human* signifies those art practices that are based on working with “human” creatures in the biological, psychobiological, cultural-biological, or socio-biological sense as with post-media or tactical media, and
- (3) the *posthuman* signifies those art practices that are based on working with what comes after the human (death, life after death, eternal life, machine analogies or metaphors of life, robotics, digital simulacra, cybernetics, virtual art, cyber systems, artificial intelligence, biological computers, genetic engineering, cloning, etc.) as with post-media or tactical media.

Certain artworks have been realised through the mediation of literal or metaphoric exemplifications of the prehuman, human, and posthuman, that is, through different combinations of them. These three models were then posited as realisations of concepts derived by artists in relation to forms of life. These works’ respective forms of life at the same time formed the “contents of the work” and the “post-media”, that is the tactical-media set of apparatuses, by which the work was realised.



52 Nataša Teofilović: *S.H.E.*, digital print, 2006  
Courtesy Nataša Teofilović





53 Zoran Todorović: *Correction/Portrait*, 2004  
 Courtesy Zoran Todorović

On one occasion,<sup>378</sup> I applied the scheme outlined above to the works of three artists: the *posthuman* in relation to the human and the *prehuman* in the work of Nataša Teofilović,<sup>379</sup> the *human* in relation to the prehuman and the posthuman in the works of Zoran Todorović,<sup>380</sup> and the *prehuman* in relation to the human and posthuman in the projects of Polona Tratnik.<sup>381</sup> Their respective art projects are linked by their shared fascination with life as a singular event that should be explored in its finitude, individuality, relativist stance on truth or construction, that is, on the relative formations of life, and with life that is finite and mortal at every moment, in fact, with life that may not be determined as true or false but only as constantly changing in the world. This points to the contemporary transitional relation to the conceptualising of life, conceived in an entirely different fashion from the *ideal forms of life* grounded in the tradition of Western philosophy from Hegel through Derrida: “But the absolute Idea in its infinite truth is still determined as Life, true life, absolute life, life without death, imperishable life, the life of truth”.<sup>382</sup> Life as an individual event in changing, i.e. “life as transition” has become a kind of post-media and tactical art practice. Artists perform practices

378 The exhibition *Europa<sup>N</sup> – Scenario 1*, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst (Museum of Contemporary Art in Leipzig), 9 September 2011.

379 Nataša Teofilović: *Umetnost pokreta u prostoru praznine (tehnologija i praksa virtuelnih karaktera)* [The Art of Moving in Empty Space (the Technology and Practice of Virtual Characters)], manuscript.

380 Miško Šuvaković: *Intensity of Affect: Performances, Actions, Instalations; A Retrospective of Zoran Todorović*. Novi Sad: The Museum of Contemporary Art of Vojvodina, 2009.

381 Polona Tratnik: *In vitro. Živo onostran telesa in umetnosti* [In Vitro. Live Beyond Body and Art]. Ljubljana: Horizonti (Transars, 1), 2010.

382 Jacques Derrida: *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey Jr. and Richard Rand. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986, 82; John Schad: “Epilogue”, in: *Life after Theory*, eds. Michael Payne and John Schad. London: Continuum, 2003, 172.

constructed around incommensurable singularities, which are realised around a “core” that is projected as a random form of life.

Nataša Teofilović has been acting in the context of digital art and screen installations. She has realised two characteristic works: *s.h.e.* (2007) and *1:1* (2010). Her works are software-generated representations of artificial humanoid bodies. They are 3D digital animations, followed by screen presentations of humanoid figures in motion. Whereas *s.h.e.* is projected onto five monitors, *1:1* consists of a single projection of a 3D animation from the ceiling onto the gallery floor. In her works, Nataša Teofilović spectacularises the relation between the physical and the space onscreen, enabling a “physical” confrontation between human beings (spectators present at the gallery) and the digital figure generated onscreen (a posthumanly conceived body). This spectacularised confrontation establishes the respective situations of the observer and the observed. *1:1* performs the *event* of the crossing of one body over, that is, through another. The principle of the “post-human” is posited in such a way that it generates a figure that looks like a living body (it moves and emulates human behaviour), but its abstractness at the same time thwarts any illusion of the “human”. A metaphysical suggestion is thereby made that the generated figure reminds one of a human body, but is not a human body. This is about constructing a fiction in motion and action. What is seen is a figure and a figure is an object. The object assumes the role of the visual phenomenality, that is, behaviourality of the human form of life. The generated and animated figure’s assumption of human functions opens its potentiality to suggest the post-human metaphorically.

Zoran Todorović is an artist who uses new media or performance platforms as apparatuses for exploring critical and border human situations – forms of life and their limits in the biological, social, cultural, technological, and political sense. He is not *fascinated* with the capabilities of new technologies and their effects in art. Rather, Todorović is an introverted *user* or *consumer* of new-media or *socio-technological* practices in performing critical and singular behavioural events, the intensity and affect of which are presented live or documented and mediated in the systems of communicating and presenting in the worlds of art. For him, tactical media appear as products of mass social technologies, that is, as performances of hypnosis, serum injections, taking medicines, processing plastic-surgery waste, performing plastic surgery on human bodies, dieting, as well as behavioural relations on the street or in private and confrontations with racial contradictions, indexing sexual user work, and so forth. For instance, *Zurenje* (Staring, 1998) confronts the inverting of gazing – gazing at the genitals and gazing out from the genitals. A project of many years, *Asimilacija 1–3* (Assimilation 1–3, 1998–2009)

is a series of events based on offering dishes made of human tissues discarded as waste in plastic surgery. *Agama 1–3* (2003–2005) is based on washing with soap made of human fat. The video installation *Cigani i psi* (Gypsies and Dogs, 2007) presents footage made by cameras strapped around the necks of dogs in a Belgrade park and the Roma boys cleaning car windshields at a busy junction in Belgrade. *Toplina* (Warmth, 2009) was realised as a complex collaborative practice of producing and marketing blankets made of discarded human hair. Todorović posits his work in art as “performing live”, which introduces biotechnologies into specific performance situations that correspond to real affective life situations. He posits performance situations either as interventions on other people’s bodies (authorial experimentation with *interventional otherness*) or on his own body (the model of the artist’s body as an object and subject of art). The performance event appears in “private”. Then, it receives its public presentation in the media. The performance event then appears in “public”, where it involves interacting with the biotechnological limits of standardising the human body, i.e. the bodies of collaborators involved in the same art project or of the audience present, who are brought to reflect on their own *intimacy* in public. The relation between private and public – intimate and shared – is explicitly elaborated as the constitutive atmosphere of performing forms of life as events in an art project. The aspects and models of Todorović’s work in art described above are significantly biopolitical in terms of biopolitics as the social technology of shaping human life for real, social life. Human life is not something that a living creature carries “by itself” or “for itself”; rather, it is the inscription of – more precisely, a singular event of inscribing – that creature into a situation or form of life, i.e. into its lifespan as well as living space *qua* something unrepeatable: ever different and malleable amidst the world, i.e. the conflict of nature as living matter and society as organising the behaviour of developed and culturally elaborate forms of life.

Polona Tratnik explores the “models of forms of life” that are sub-human, that precede or are traces of human forms of life, that is, that are independent of them. In co-operation with biotechnicians and other medical staff, she brings “biological samples” to visibility. Spectacularising prehuman or post-human samples is possible by exemplifying microscopic biological organisms in the system of cultural presentation. In a number of projects, Tratnik has explored presentations of the microscopic organic world in the field of visibility, which is provided by the potentiality of artworks. In *37° C* (Kapelica gallery, 2001–2002), Tratnik produced an installation realised as a breeding ground of human skin cells. In *Intimacy under Threat* (2005), she exhibited bacteria that inhabit objects used in everyday life: washbasins, eyeglasses, etc. For instance, in being spectacularised, bacteria that inhabit washbasins become a sample of affectation – feelings of

unease, confronting everyday life, which is seldom noticed or taken into account. Regarding *Hair*, a project she realised in 2005, Tratnik wrote:

The present Installation encourages the visitor to establish intimate contact with the life that he or she can sense behind the walls of an incubator. In a Petri dish, the artist's hair sprouts in agar nutrient based on serum from the artist's blood. The visitor can catch only glimpses of the fragile life in a carefully isolated container that simulates the conditions inside the body.<sup>383</sup>

This is a tactical act whereby the microscopic world of human cells, i.e. forms of life are transferred into a simulated situation, or, a micro-ecological situation, in which the sampled form of life is developed and spectacularised to perform the affective relation between the observer and the living world. A similar procedure was performed in *Unique* (2006), which visualised the microscopic plant and animal life of the human body:

The observer's intimacy is examined with an intrusively piercing eye. The observer is also positioned into an artificial environment for cultivating life. It contains numerous living species. A human being becomes merely one of them.<sup>384</sup>



54 Polona Tratnik: *Hair in Vitro*, 2010  
Courtesy Polona Tratnik

*Hair in Vitro* (2006–2010) is a complex interdisciplinary research project, realised in co-operation with artists, scientists/technicians, and spectators. The term *in*

383 Anon.: Polona Tratnik: *Lasje / Hair*, Ljubljana: Moderna galerija Ljubljana, Galerija Kapelica and Ribnica: Galerija Miklova hiša, 2005, 9.

384 Polona Tratnik: "Unique", *In Vivo – In Vitro* exhibition held in February, 2006, in Athens, Greece, supported by Kapelica Gallery, Ljubljana, 2006, manuscript.

*vitro*<sup>385</sup> (Latin: within glass) refers to studies in experimental biology based on isolating *living matter* from a single organism. The isolated *component* is excised from its usual biological context to be subjected to analysis and examination. In *Hair in Vitro*, living human matter (skin, tissues, hair) is isolated by means of plastic surgery and keeping the sample alive in laboratory conditions. Tratnik examines and spectacularises living materials in real time, for instance, the growth of hair in laboratory conditions. Here is how Tratnik interprets her project:

The project is rhizomatically structured at several levels and connects technoscience with heterogeneous artistic strategies and with humanistic research in tissue engineering and immunology as socially especially actual fields of biotechnology that promise revolutionary consequences, especially in medicine and aesthetics surgery. The project as well reflects the hybridization of art, humanities and technoscience, which is today at slope. The team of authors-executors is focused on the research process and on consistently connecting fields, harmonizing the heterogeneous interests. The work is not oriented to producing finished products, artifacts for observer's contemplation, but to opening of the research process and the whole discourse to the public at diverse occasions. The aims of the project are the communication of biotechnological potentials with the wider public, the realization of specific goals, which are interesting from the biotechnological, artistic and other aspects, and discussing the related issues, which are extremely important for the contemporary individual and society.<sup>386</sup>

These micro-processes were spectacularised by means of different tactical media. A surgical procedure was performed. An installation was realised under simulated laboratory conditions. Hairs were kept "alive" *in vitro*. Tratnik then documented, that is, in this case, photographed the samples' behaviour in laboratory conditions. She made three video works that present the operation of taking a human sample (*The Operation*), the laboratory work on the sample (*The Laboratory*), and the sampled hairs' growth (*The Hairs' Growth*). This is an example of using practices of post-production to multiply and spread the effects of spectacularisation in the field of visual culture.

The procedures of post-production spectacularisation described above are essentially changing the world of human sensory experience. These changes

385 The term *in vivo* signifies studying living organisms in their "normal" environments, whereas *ex vivo* signifies studying still functioning organs excised from their original organisms.

386 Polona Tratnik: "Las in vitro" (2010), [http://www.horizonti.net/index\\_e.html](http://www.horizonti.net/index_e.html), 20. 07. 2011. Cf. Tratnik: *In vitro. Živo onostran telesa in umetnosti*, 168.

are determined by relocating, i.e. transferring scientific biological and medical microbiological laboratory experiments into the exhibiting contexts of art and culture. A double effect is thereby achieved:

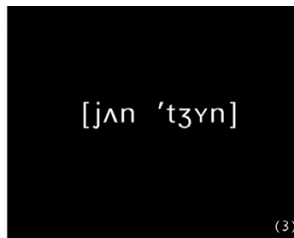
- (1) the sealed and culturally/socially invisible world of practices and apparatuses developed in scientific institutions is thereby opened up to individual and collective public “experience” (the aesthetic plane) and “cognition” (the epistemological plane), and to cultural exchange in society (the political plane),
- (2) the opening up of science to culture through the “tactical media” of art was realised as a political act of rearticulating the spectators’ experiential contexts and thereby also of changing their stance on the visible and invisible forms of everyday life, which constitute the world that surrounds us.

In modern society, it was customary to keep the world of science separate from the world of everyday human experience. Scientific knowledge, packages of forms of life and everyday human experience of everyday forms of life were never brought to bear on one another, except in such critical situations as epidemics and actions to contain them, wars and the use of biological weapons, and similar situations. By contrast, globalism led to an important turn. The turning of the scientific into everyday knowledge has transformed the character of human experience. Art practices are the cultural instruments of the spectacularisation of scientific work. As tactical media of spectacularisation, certain art practices bring packages of specialised scientific knowledge up to the level of a sensory and bodily event. The field of cultural human experience is thereby extended and reshaped. The respective fields of science and everyday life lose their institutional and sensory-experiential autonomies. They become a complex and complicit hybrid field of culture. Therefore, we are talking about art and science in a time of culture.

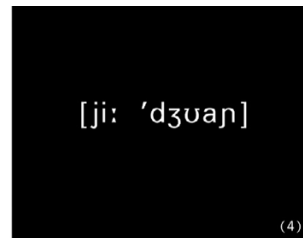
## POST-MEDIA ART



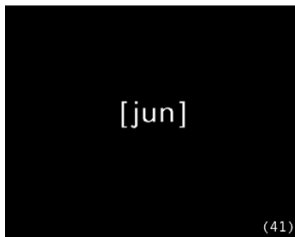
My name is (2) "Jun Yang"  
"Jun" is the first name  
"Yang" the family name...



...in chinese - in mandarin  
chinese - it is pronounced (3)  
- family name first...



...my parents on the other hand  
are from a region with a  
different dialect...  
...they would say (4),,



...Jun (41) was also  
pronounced (42)...



...(42) which I thought sounded  
more eloquent...



...or later June when I attended  
to an english high school - which  
is why I sometimes receive mail  
for a certain Miss (43)...

55 Jun Yang: *Jun Yang and Soldier Woods*, 2002  
Courtesy Jun Yang

SIMULTANEOUSLY ALWAYS, NOW  
AND EVERYWHERE  
A Real Fiction

THE PROLETARIAT AND COGNITARIAT:  
(E)MIGRATING AND THE GLOBALISATION OF LIFE

Jun Yang was born in China in 1975. His family emigrated from China to Austria in 1979. He was raised and first educated in Austria. He studied art at the Gerrit Rietveld Akademie in Amsterdam, in 1994–1995, and at the Akademie der bildende Künste in Vienna, between 1996 and 2000. Today, he lives between Vienna, Taipei (Taiwan), and Yokohama (Japan). His work is represented by galleries in Vienna, Beijing and Tokyo. He teaches at the Art and Design Department of Yuanzhe University in Taiwan and at Universität für Künstlerische und industrielle Gestaltung in Linz, Austria.

Jun Yang *acts* as a “contemporary mobile subject” vis-à-vis private and public global intercontinental life. The relationship between the private and the public is an essential parameter in his artistic production and presentations. Jun Yang performs his “I” (his voice) and “identity” (image of belonging) not only by moving between two countries or two continents, but also by moving between two transitional civilisational orders of producing life. In his projects, he shows how producing life produces experience. His reference societies – Chinese and European – are not invariant models of established and fixed, realised civilisations; rather, they are societies and socialities that keep changing independently from one another. These are uncertain, variable, i.e. transitional horizons, with and toward which sociality is performed. His affiliation with Chinese and European social and cultural horizons is extremely complex. It is growing more complex, as the *Chinese horizon* is distancing itself and multiplying by virtue of the acceleration of China’s socialist market as a globally expansive market. That is, it is growing more complex as the diverse *European horizons* are coming together and grouping around the stable *idea* of the Union and, simultaneously, dispersing around the archaeological sediments of schismatic European identities – those of singularised cities, regions, large and small religious sects, remote provinces, obscure valleys,



fragmented cultivated fields, synchronously present ethnic groups, as well as market monopolies and border mountain ranges.

Presenting experience emerges in the form of uncertain indexing and mapping of temporal and spatial changes of *forms of life* that are provisionally and ephemerally situated between the global *points* of Jun Yang's movements. He moves between his family *formats*, provisional abodes and family *enclaves*, professional strongholds, and potential places for performing and presenting his artistic work, which carries an autobiographic potential. His sociality is more complex than anyone outside of migrant and emigrant narratives might imagine. The mechanism of migration is built into his everyday life – a mobile life, a life on the move.

Jun's sociality is ambivalent. It may be presented as an open field of variable and provisional human relations, characterised by a subjectionally relative relationship between the inner and the outer or the immanent and the transcendental. His social and cultural *inside*, that is, *outside*, i.e. immanence and transcendence of cultural and social experience is paradoxically open in its dynamism toward its referential communities, which it treats in terms of identity and interpellation. His "artistic identity" is posited, *gestellt*, between appropriation and expropriation, in such a way that he rearticulates it, from real opacity into a potential autobiographical and self-reflexive presentation of himself as a "probe" in a world that keeps changing as a result of his movements and the immanent movements of others within those worlds.

Jun Yang's initial artistic practice is appropriative in an utterly contemporary sense. He appropriates names, signs, images, events, and narratives from global, i.e. European and Chinese cultural contemporaneity, positing them interpretatively, as *documents* of assumed cultural models – transitional China and transitional Europe. Jun Yang derives model-samples of transitional Europe in cultural clichés of everyday contemporary China and, vice versa, of course, he derives sample-models of transitional China in cultural clichés and political epistemologies of contemporary Europe. He is thereby likewise appropriated and integrated in that Sino-European game. His expropriation *qua* Jun Yang takes place by virtue of his becoming Chinese, under certain conditions, or European, that is, Chinese-European and European-who-is-Chinese. In other words, in an uncertain and risky way, Jun simultaneously becomes the *subject* and *object* of his own appropriations of the reference cultures that are *absorbing* him. Those reference cultures take him into a process of expropriation – cultural and social appropriation of him as an object of identification, i.e. situating the subject "Jun Yang" into the experiential context of the culture and civilisation in which he acts, which he inhabits, and

from which he emigrates, which he leaves or occupies and appropriates as a “conquered living space”. Appropriation here means individually appropriating something or anything from collective property, that is, the identity of a given culture. Expropriation means appropriating an individual form of life or an individual experience or identity from “society” as a *collective*. In his projects, micro- and macro-cultures play an important role: the family, marital union, business partnership, lateral kinship, ethnic, and civil bonds and their branching out.

Jun Yang is a participant in the global “artistic proletariat”, which has transformed, over the past decade, from a *proletariat* into a *cognitariat*.<sup>387</sup> That means that he no longer belongs to the traditional modernist artistic working class, who sell and surrender, that is, let their *bodily labour* that is built into their objects, i.e. works of art. He has become a subject in the global transitional “working class”, who perform and sell their “intellectual” or “projective” labour, built into performative and media effects/affects and abstract documents, which distribute the potentialities of the global “artworlds”. He has become a representative subject of the *cognitariat*, who work on actualising (appropriating, expropriating) a hybrid and complex reality within “modalities” of contemporary art as hybrid, projective, simulative, and performative worlds.

The production of “aesthetic regimes”, i.e. “artworlds”, has become the basic mode of productive artistic contemporaneity. When Arthur Danto introduced the concept of *artworld*, he conceptualised it as the epistemologically motivated context hosting the emergence and survival of an “artwork” created for a spectator/spectatorship.<sup>388</sup> When political philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato pointed out that a major difference between industrial capitalism and entrepreneurial capitalism lies in *its* endless global expansion in time, he was referring to an essential, ontologically motivated change of character of the contemporary social product. In modern industrial capitalism, the produced thing/object results from a process and sense of producing for the market, whereas in contemporary global-transitional capitalism “generating a possible world” is the end-product, given both as effect and affect.<sup>389</sup> For Jun Yang, what matters is stepping away from the artwork to a produced and market-mediated sample or *probe of the artworld*. For

387 Suely Rolnik: “Politics of Flexible Subjectivity: The Event Work of Lygia Clark”, in: *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, eds. Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Condee. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2008, 103.

388 Arthur Danto: “The Artworld”, in: *Philosophy Looks at the Arts: Contemporary Readings in Aesthetics*, ed. Joseph Margolis. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987, 162.

389 Rolnik: “Politics of Flexible Subjectivity”, 103.

him, *the artworld* is not just Danto's "epistemologically determining context of a completed work of art", but an affective, semantic, and epistemological "probe" of confronting culture and society with *art-generated* critical, subversive, inverted, and flexible alternatives to existing clichés of forms of life in the everyday of transitional new China (for instance, see his video work *Paris Syndrome*, 2007–2008) and transitional and alienated Europe (e.g. 16mm film *Norwegian Woods*, 2008).



56 Jun Yang: *Paris Syndrome*, video, 2007–2008  
 Courtesy Jun Yang

“Paris Syndrome” is a psychological disorder typically diagnosed in Japanese workers and tourists visiting or working in Paris. It emerges when a Japanese worker or tourist is confronted, for the first time, with the reality of Paris and cannot reconcile his fantasies about “the city of light, love, and fun” with the metropolis’s brutal concrete reality. It is a negative cultural shock. In his video work *Paris Syndrome*, Jun Yang explores and presents simulations of cultural clichés and mediators of the visual presentation of dreams, the simulation of a desired reality, the realisation of one’s life ambitions, and so on. The video work was shot in the new residential districts of Guangzhou, which imitate the iconography, form, and atmosphere of European upper-middleclass neighbourhoods. The film shows couples, “lost” and “absent” amidst an affluent fantasy come true.

The film *Norwegian Woods* speaks of memories and modalities of keeping and archiving memories. The film is about Lena, who returns to a Norwegian island to take care of her mother’s house, after her passing. The film’s narrative focuses on Lena’s inner dialogue with herself about deciding what to keep and what to discard of her mother’s possessions. The film talks about a personal experience of the transience of life, Lena’s emotional relationship with her highly intimate past, and ways of coding and archiving one’s memories and belongings in constructing one’s private memory. The film might also be a metaphor of European museum and archival practices.

In both of these works, Jun Yang problematises different aspects of the “visibility” of personal experience, dilemmas, and reactions to the cliché of the *new* in China and that of the *past* in Europe. He uses China and Europe as background “cultural texts” of sorts, which enables him to show, visualise, and perform the characteristic traumatic subjectivity of the modern human in the field of growing alienated from one’s space, objects, and human presence in the actuality of life.

## STRATEGIES AND TACTICS OF TRANSLATING

In his video work *Jun Yang and Soldier Woods* (2002), Jun Yang performs a para-theoretical and humorously motivated discussion of the use, performance, and meaning of his name in different functional and experiential contexts. He suggestively exhibits misreadings of his first and last name in different socio-cultural contexts, that is, the semantic confusions that typically arose around his name during his childhood in Vienna. As the video’s screenplay points out:

*my name is*

*Jun Yang /'d | u:n i^n/*

*Jun is the first name*

*Yang the family name*

*in Chinese – to be precise in Mandarin Chinese – it is pronounced*

*Jan Chuen /i^n 't | u:n/*

*family name first*

*my parents on the other hand*

*are from a region with a different dialect*

*so when they named me they had a different pronunciation in mind*

*they would say*

*Ji Chuan /ji: 't | u-an/*

*again family name first*

...

*we left the country when I was 4*

*and therefore – in some ways we also left this language.<sup>390</sup>*

The film shows how socio-cultural constructs shape one's real cultural subjectivity. On the other hand, in his artistic work, Jun Yang performs constructive procedures whereby he reconstructs relations with the outer world. An artist's practice thereby becomes a *demonstration*, with which s/he wittily and superficially examines the conditions of shaping one's social self and moves it from the role of the "subject as object" of cultural formation into the role of a narrator who reveals and exposes him/herself as a produced effect of cultural practice. The film also presents a characteristic difference between its own subjectivised Jun Yang and Jun Yang in real life. Jun Yang posits his real as well as fictional *life* as a *paragraph* from a "travel guide",<sup>391</sup> which points to the complexity of cultural discourses as obvious for pursuing the "human condition" as a problem of *translating*.

For Jun Yang, the problem of translating is applicable and important for any *dissimination*<sup>392</sup> of human experience caused by differences between close and

390 Hu Fang: "For the Forgetting of Memory, and the Separation of Arrival", [http://www.art-it-asia/u/admin\\_ed\\_contri6/mfAZhbou1XQleaHiKVUp/?lang=en#note1](http://www.art-it-asia/u/admin_ed_contri6/mfAZhbou1XQleaHiKVUp/?lang=en#note1), 26. 11. 2012.

391 The opposition between the concept of "the travel guide" and the discourse on method in Bruno Latour's discussion "Menjati društvo, obnoviti sociologiju" [Change Society, Reconstruct Sociology], in: *Treći program Radio Beograda*: "Nova francuska sociologija", 146 (2010), 85.

392 In a derived sense, "dissimination" denotes the event of meaning dissipating in language, which

comparable, as well as remote and incomparable cultural contexts. Strategies and tactics of successful and unsuccessful, functional and de-functionalised translating, i.e. cultural identification, are built into his works, comprising a wide variety of media: installations, video works, films, and textual presentations. For him, translating is not so much about decoding and recoding the literal meanings of verbal or visual texts; rather, it is about losing and gaining a “spot” in a certain cultural experience. That is why writer Hu Fang made this note about Jun Yang:

Chinese restaurants were integral to Jun Yang’s development, as he grew up in the same building as the restaurant run by his parents in Vienna, always in sight of the signboard with the restaurant name, Tianjin, done in white Chinese characters in classic Songti script against a blue background – just like the way that was common in 1930s and ’40s China – in a kind of distortion of time and space.<sup>393</sup>

The affective atmosphere of cultural translation, instead of decoding and recoding the literal meanings of visual and verbal messages, conditions his video and film works, such as *From Salaryman to Superman* (video), *Coming Home – Daily Structures of Life, Camouflage / Look like Them* (video, 2002–2004), *A Short Story on Forgetting and Remembering* (16mm film, 2007), *Seoul Fiction* (16mm film, 2010), etc. Using images, Jun Yang tries to capture and keep visible all the relations that contemporaneity, dense and accelerated, establishes between individuals and the collective, i.e. individual expression and social cliché, in the midst of differences between local and global contextualisations of behaviour, acting, and relating to oneself and others. It is as if this mode of self-reexamining could neutralise the traditional oppositions between the rational and irrational, public and private, the West and the East.<sup>394</sup> From that dramatised and rhetorically and ostensibly “frozen” neutralisation of oppositions, it is as if a possibility were emerging to redirect our attention away from the demand of identification and toward locating the dynamic of meaning and that of affects in those visual, verbal, and written *texts* that imitate and transmit “artificially generated cultural syndromes” into the field of cultural fiction, which, perhaps, grounds the everyday reality of life itself.

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leads to an indication of destruction or to the destruction of cultural experience vis-à-vis identity, i.e. belonging.

393 Fang: “For the Forgetting of Memory”.

394 Fredric Jameson: *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–1998*. London and New York: Verso, 1998, 64.

Jun Yang's artistic production is not an artistic practice based on realistic references of reality as an *object* of desire, fear, or interest; on the contrary, his practice transparently shows how a constructed *fictional syndrome* affects a real trauma, in the midst of its material phenomenality as concreteness and abstraction both at once.

## MULTIPLE POLITICAL/SEXUAL BODIES. Between the Public and the Intimate

Tomislav Gotovac<sup>395</sup> studied architecture at Zagreb University. He was an employee in the administration of the *Mladen Stojanović Hospital* in Zagreb from 1962 to 1967. He studied at the *Academy of Theatre, Film, Radio and Television* in Belgrade. 1967. He was exposed to political repression for his participation in the film *Plastic Jesus* in the early 1970s. He graduated with film *The Verdict*.

Gotovac was one of the leading filmmakers<sup>396</sup> in experimental anti-film and structural film of the 1960s and 1970s. Among his significant films are *Straight Line (Stevens – Duke)* (1964), *T* (1969), *Tomislav Gotovac* (1996), *Feeling 7* (2000), and the feature film *Plastic Jesus* (1972), in cooperation with the film director Lazar Stojanović. Tom Gotovac was active in various artistic practices, from films and happenings, to photography, performance and conceptual art. Regardless of the medium he used, in his projects Gotovac developed the strategy and tactics of presenting and expressing “subjectivity in film”. He said on one occasion: “*It’s all a Movie!*” and this phrase remained the programmatic concept of his life.

Among the neo-avant-garde experiments he chose *artistic behaviourism*. Researching the art of performance, Gotovac established his specific “politics of the body” and “politics of the everyday”, stressing the intimate subject of a man and male, in the public ideological sphere.

*Heads* (1960) was an early project – a series of photographs creating an alienated documentary or overstressed fictionalised procedure of framing one’s own face. The photo series *Breathing the Air* (1962) makes us think of infantile behaviourism: a half-naked man standing in the snow in the act of heartily inhaling the fresh air. In *Suitcase* (1964) he documents the quite ordinary situation of carrying a suitcase in a city. This series of photographs is a visual tale about a trivial daily activity: just breathing or carrying a suitcase. The transformation of the trivial into the exceptional is the fascination mechanism with which the film industry creates the

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395 Ješa Denegri: “The Individual Mythology of Tomislav Gotovac”, in: *Tomislav Gotovac*, eds. Aleksandar Battista Ilić, Diana Nenadić. Zagreb: Croatian Film Clubs’ Association and Museum of Contemporary Art, 2003, 268–276.

396 Hrvoje Turković: “Tomislav Gotovac: Observation as Participation”, in: *Tomislav Gotovac*, 277–279.



exceptional place and function of film stars. When the mechanism of constructing and presenting a “film star” is found in the *empty* context of everyday life in Yugoslav so-called socialism, man can suffer an existential breakdown and reject such a life. Gotovac took pains to present and index absurd behaviourism. For example, his *collages* are “annotated” and “collected” testimonials, or documents, about man’s existence in a trivial world of objects, and of documents of used- up objects, images, words and information. Gotovac used *collage* to draw attention to this potential scattering of the consistency of images, entering a world where experience has been fragmented and left without any coordinates and any means of orientation.

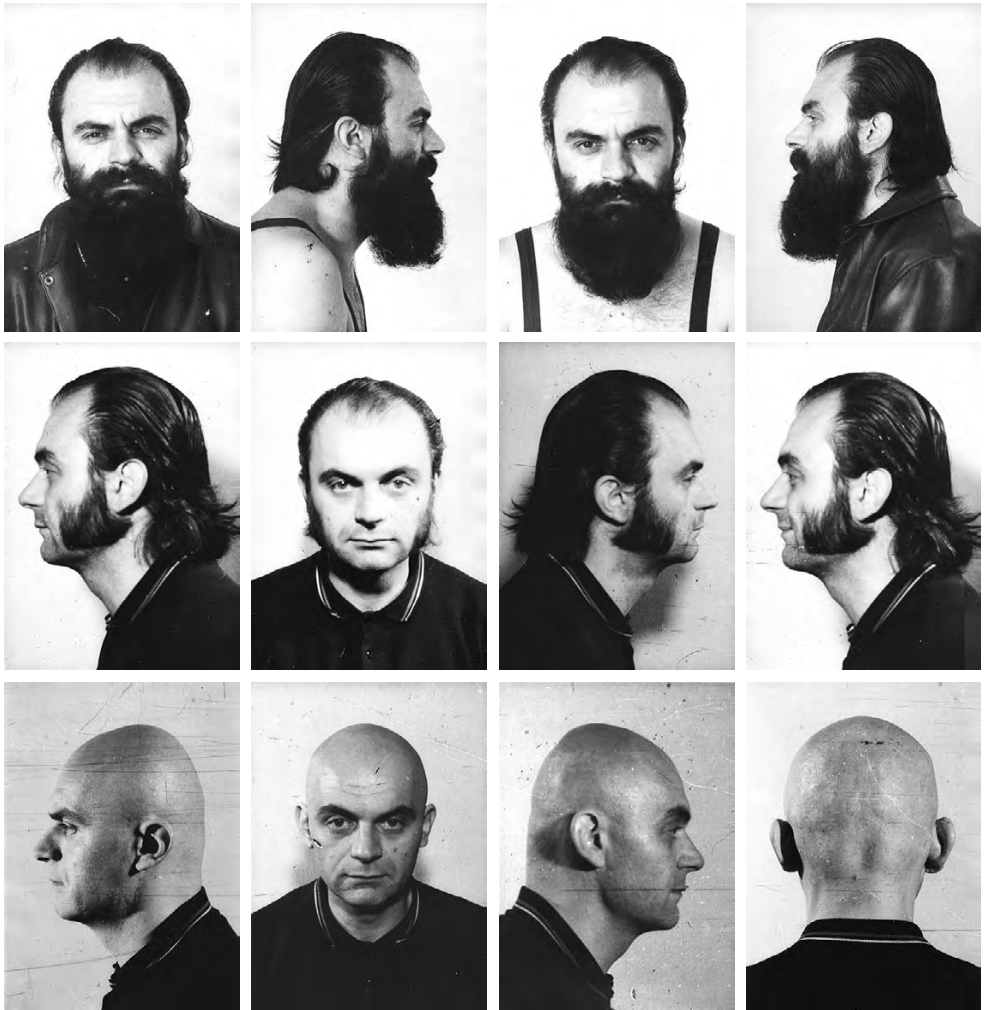
For example, in the photo series *Hands* (1964), he presents the act of positioning hands (on the pavement edge, a corner by the door, the garbage can) by isolating and overstressing it. Think about scenes in crime movies - of the hero shoving his hand into a garbage can in the street, the viewers expecting him to extract a gun, a bag of money or a package of heroin. But Gotovac only lays and arranges his hands in a trivial place. A literal gesture. A promise of something coexisting with its denial.

His behavioural performances are no emancipating acts of searching for a life of freedom, or of man reborn, in the spirit of the optimistic and ludic neo-avant-garde of the 1960s. His body language consists of desperate, limited and emptied gestures of provocation in the closed and claustrophobic, grey world of so-called “Socialism” which, with exalted rhetoric, offered its people an optimistic chance to build “a socialist society”. Gotovac reacted to this with excesses meant to produce a sense of unease and helpless fury in the viewers and in the bureaucrats of the dominant culture.

Gotovac’s performances were drastic, not because he undressed in public or put on masks, or exhibited his genitalia, but because he offered these performances as socially unmotivated acts, absolutely erasing the borderlines between the public and intimate spheres. His genitals are shown without any special reason. He has no direct motive for showing them to the accidental passer-by. The aroused anatomy is literally there and can confuse us because it is both ordinary and sublime.

The artistic production of Gotovac had no utopian projects characteristic of the idealism of the 1960s and 1970s. He offered transgression and shock as an unmotivated and arbitrary exhibitionist act right at the middle of everyday “socialist” existence, in which positive motivation was expected, along with hard work, obedience, loyalty, a readiness to represent the publicly declared

social ideals and deny one's intimate preoccupations. His lack of motive and the arbitrariness of his body and behaviour, may seem violent, although they are actually just minimal, very localised, and often even tender gestures of self-representation in the public or private context. Gotovac shows the discomfort a man can feel inhabiting his own body, or forcing his body to function in a strictly controlled micro-social context. The atmosphere of Gotovac's artistic life is similar to the atmosphere created in the Yugoslav *film noir* of the epoch or the American *underground movies*, expressing a new sensibility about living at the margins of society which was characteristic of the counter-culture of the 1960s.



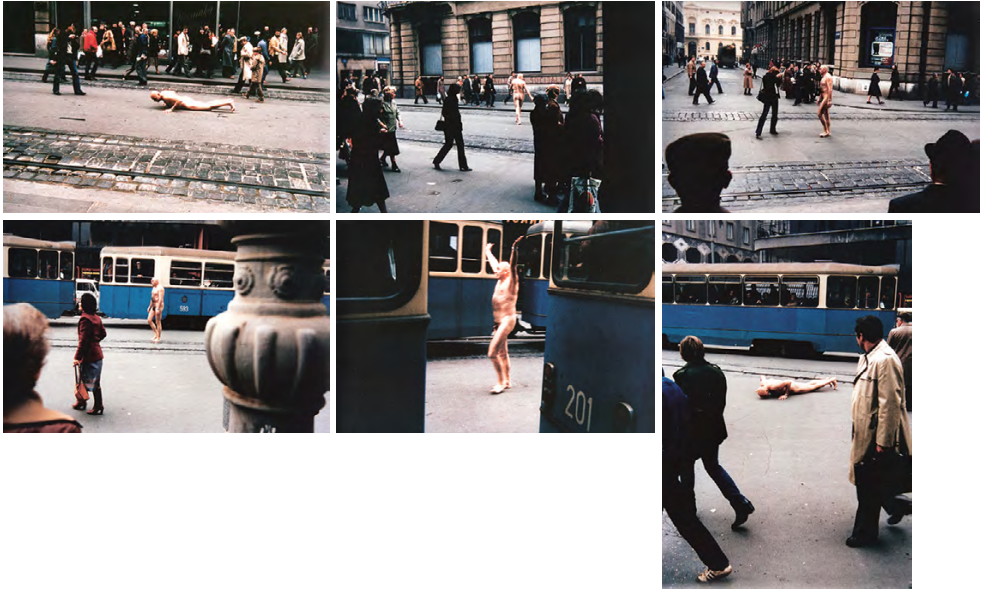
57 Tomislav Gotovac: *Heads*, 12 photos/performance, 1970  
 Courtesy Tomislav Gotovac Institute

In the transforming photo serials, for example in *Heads* (1970), we are shown the process of the artist's shaving and trimming his hair. You also see him with long hair and a beard, as well as with a clean-shaven face and hair shaved at the back of the head. These photographs, which function as documents of a performance, can be interpreted as: (1) an expression of narcissistic play (one individual in his own field of sight identified with the centre of the universe; (2) as an expression of a structuring-processing-photographing act (a careful sequential photographic process of trimming one's hair), and (3) as an expression of an auto-erotic symbolic self-presentation (the transformation of a head into a *phallus*; the body becoming an idealised and symbolic sexual organ). These ambiguities are intentional and characteristic of the artist's belief that by destroying privacy it is possible to provoke public conditions and values. Gotovac wished to achieve a provocative relation between intimate sexual trauma and the political manipulation of human behaviour.

In the 1970s Gotovac Undertook Many Completely Different Actions.

He ran naked in the city streets (performance *Streaking*, Belgrade 1971; or the performance *Zagreb, I Love You!*, Zagreb 1981). He documented his private life in the intimate moments of his morning hygiene (photos from the series *Rovinj, Summer* 1975). He was photographed naked, in erotic positions (*Integral*, 1978), also in a family striptease session with a female partner (*Striptease*, 1976), in a private location. For the 10th Music Biennale in Zagreb he did *Action 100* (1976), where, again naked, he performed a variant of hopscotch in the street. He also offered performances of some of his private pursuits *Telephoning*, *Watching Television*, *Begging*, *Cleaning Public Spaces* (Zagreb 1980). He walked naked in the city talking about a feature film (*Talking – Rio Bravo*, Osijek 1982). The performances and the photographs of performances should be seen as film narratives. He created a film without using any filming gear.

Gotovac's key *queer* work is his late photo-performance entitled *Foxy Mister* (2002), made at the age of 64. It rests on the simple idea of an exchange of identity, during an erotic and pornographic photo session. Gotovac played the role of the naked female porno-star from the magazine *Foxy Lady*. He took erotic and pornographic positions imitating the woman model from *Foxy Lady*: an old man imitating a young female model. His work should be seen as a direct deconstruction of the presumed horizon of expectation of the viewers, subverting the expected erotic gratification meant to be produced by an attractive female body. Gotovac uses a *queer* performance of *queer* behaviour/exposing himself, not as a *queer* activist wishing to visualize the sexual identities of the *Other*, but to shatter brutally the



58 Tomislav Gotovac: *Zagreb, I Love You!*, performance/photos, 1981  
 Courtesy Tomislav Gotovac Institute

conventions of expected visual gratification required from the entertainment industry. Doing this, Gotovac has also brought up the question of *ageism* and the right of old people to find pleasure in sexuality and eroticism.

At first sight, none of these works seem to be political, and yet each of these performances was an act subverting the presumed normality of the socialist and post-socialist period of transition in which Gotovac lived. His works were the *signifiers* which the artist smuggled into the public field of the art and culture of the time. He used his body as an instrument creating a micropolitical event with which the intimate world of the artist as exhibitionist was projected into the public sphere. In these performances Gotovac came very close to the American body artists Vito Acconcia or Dennis Oppenheim, and the Czech artists Karel Miler, Petr Štembera or Jan Mlčoch.



59 Susan Bee: *Behind Bars*, 2009  
Courtesy Susan Bee

## AUTO-CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISATION

### Painting as Postmedia Politics

The public sphere in the US changed after September 11. The period of the Bush presidential administration resulted in the externalisation of the economic and social crises in the country. In these times of crisis, the critical protocols of the artwork gained in importance. Art emerged as an instrument to examine the borderlines of reality and the fiction in the American way of life. Within that context, some artists entered the realm of reconstruction of “painterly defiance” to the domination of the totally mediated production, communication and consumption characteristic for the flexible potentialities of global neo-liberalism. Painting appeared as a practice of material resistance and critique of the public social and cultural sphere with procedures of subjectivation – of gender, privacy, cultural positioning. Susan Bee and Mira Schor established a radicalised leftist, feminist and auto-critical process of re-examining the contradictory relations between the public and the private.

Susan Bee and Mira Schor’s contemporary painting follows the advanced and elaborate tradition of American critical social painting<sup>397</sup> and relates to the feminist context of *new image painting*.<sup>398</sup> Their works, however different in terms of personal inscriptions and character of the pictorial image, i.e. links between the inner insight and outer appearances of the forms of life, respond to the concept of painting as a *critical text*. Such painting refers to individual and collective subjectivations within the structures of power and constellations of identity of the late, above all, American capitalism and its ideological and political expansions and crises, as part of the global transition. Their painting is American insofar as it confronts and opposes the market value which is nowadays the prime determinant of media images produced on a daily basis. Their work is a critique of the representation and appearance of the media in everyday life, in a confrontation of privacy, memory and feminine biology with pictorial expression and pictorial symbols. Instances include the work of Mira Schor *Portrait of my Brain* (2007) or Susan Bee’s *Human or Inhuman?* (2003). These paintings open a subjectivised

397 Pam Meecham: “Realism and Modernism”, in: *Varieties of Modernism*, ed. Paul Wood. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004, 75–115.

398 Anon.: *New Image Painting*, ed. Richard Marshall. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1979.

perspective of representation i.e. visibility of the forms of life in a pictorial form (Schor) or pictorial narrative (Bee).

Contrary to the great masters of American social painting (*Ben Shahn, Philip Evergood*) with whom they share political interests, Schor and Bee embraced the legacy of expressive engagement i.e. existentialist painting (early Pollock, Clyfford Still, Philip Guston, *Karel Appel*), adding a distinct feminist notion of deconstructing the machismo and patriarchy of the abstract expressionists and lyrical abstractionists. This marked an essential break within the politics of painting as a political practice of confronting the public and private in the realm of gendered body which has a capacity of gazing (Mira Schor, *Sexual Pleasure*, 1998), remembering and surviving contemporary life. Traditional modernist critical painting put forward the *idea* of the power of painting to represent and communicate the “truth” of human individual and collective life. In the case of Mira Schor and Susan Bee, such claim is, true to feminism, removed from the model of the individual communication of the experience of universality as was the case with the painters of social art, into the realm of demarcation of singular painterly acts indexing the potentialities of the universal. This difference is essentially marked with a feminist stance which in an anti-transcendental way suggests that the universality of the human (Susan Bee, *Drive She Said*, 2011) *is an effect of singular processes within or beyond the social, cultural and artistic structures.*

Susan Bee’s painting<sup>399</sup> took shape from the 1970s to 2000s as she raised questions about the nature of critical feminine painting and deconstruction of the codes, clichés and iconic representations of the hybrid American vernacular inside the mass culture of modernism. She demonstrated how one *signifier* from the history of painting and/or design for advertising in the 1950s and 1960s would be introduced into the order of contemporary painting, thus becoming the *new sign* or *structure of signs* in the processes of cultural, feminine and political subjectivation. Subjectivation refers to events of becoming a subject in specific artistic, cultural or social contexts. The visual jargon of graphic design was introduced into the pictorial genre of figurative painting. Bee’s paintings are “other” in relation to the history of modernism, albeit made up of signifiers-as-markings of modernist representations of everyday life or the exceptional ruptures in its routines. Susan Bee works in the domain of the book as an artwork together with the poet Charles Bernstein. With Mira Schor she edited the journal *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, including an anthology of contributions to the

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399 Miško Šuvaković: “Painting After Painting: The Painting of Susan Bee”, in: *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* 18 (1995), 46–53.

journal which accompanied its editions.<sup>400</sup> She is involved in projects of cultural activism at the New York art scene.

Mira Schor<sup>401</sup> is a New York-based artist who explores and advocates the role of painting in a post-media culture. She exhibited at the New York galleries Momenta Art, the Edward Thorp Gallery, the gallery CB1 in Los Angeles, and took part in group exhibitions at the Santa Monica Museum of Art, Armand Hammer Museum, MoMA PS1, among others. She engages in practical, activist and theoretical<sup>402</sup> work in the realms of feminism and its history. Her research and activities span formalist and material fascinations with human, cultural and social symbolisations, i.e. affective events. Her painting and artistic work in general is focused on the realms of representation of the body and realms of exploration of the relation between the painting and verbal scripture. Representing the body and conceiving the relation between scripture and painting are associated with re-examining and questioning gender identities, including the artistic, cultural and historical constructions of gender. Schor has a strong interest in the borderlines between meaning and affect, in terms of pictorial representation and conceptual assumptions of self-knowledge and self-representability as the knowledge of the individual and collective “other”. In her work the border lines between the envisaged knowledge of the self and the other are shown – in expressive and narrative terms – in relation to the ruptures of political identity and political awareness in the contemporary crisis of American society.

*Critical painting* refers to practices of manual pictorial work which conceive images and “throw” them into the world as provocative and disturbing tokens of difference and departure from fixed constellations, social norms, unspoken rules, matrices of identification within the public *doxa* and accepted horizons of expectations. Today, in the “time of the media”, critical painting is understood as a precarious subversion of the dominant production and imposition of the mass-media meaning, i.e. of the *ideological sphere* of the media. Mira Schor and Susan Bee’s painting suggests that precarious subversion of the dominant production and imposition of the mass-media meaning stands for the *politicisation of the visible* as the construct of subjectivation in the realm of social powers, but also in the

400 Susan Bee and Mira Schor (eds.): *M/E/A/N/I/N/G. An Anthology of Artists’ Writings, Theory, and Criticism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000; Susan Bee and Mira Schor (eds.): *M/E/A/N/I/N/G 25th Anniversary Edition*, online edition, 2011.

401 <http://www.miraschor.com/>

402 Mira Schor: *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997; Mira Schor: *A Decade of Negative Thinking: Essays on Art, Politics, and Daily Life and Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2010.



realm of resistance to the recognition of gender, notably feminine identity and the antagonisms between private and public contemporaneity.

Deriving political meaning in the history of Western art has a long record of transformations from apologetic painting in the service of the sovereign and the Church to the critical realist painting conceived as “weapon” in a struggle for class, race or gender identity, as opposed to a concrete or abstract social order of power relations. In relation to the modernist paradigms of high and dominant abstraction, political painting is identified as instrumental, i.e. as painting in the service of the revolution, leftist politics, critical conflicts with the conditions and circumstances of the visibility of social antagonisms (Susan Bee, *Behind Bars*, 2009, and *Arrested*,<sup>403</sup> 2011).



60 Susan Bee: *Arrested*, painting, 2011  
Courtesy Susan Bee

<sup>403</sup> “I imagine you know the story of the image? Here it is. It has an interesting personal connection. *Arrested*, 2011, which is based on a black and white news photo of my high school friend, Emily Socolov’s mother being arrested as a spy in the McCarthy era of the 1950s. I only found out about this history when I read the obituary of Judith Coplon Socolov in the NY Times: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/02/us/02coplon.html> I used the painting tropes of the 1950s for framing this painting. From Wikipedia: Judith Coplon Socolov was an alleged KGB spy whose trials, convictions and successful appeals had a profound influence on espionage prosecutions during the McCarthy era. Judith Coplon married one of her lawyers, my friend’s father, Albert Socolov”; from an email written to me by Susan Bee.

To the contrary, contemporary political painting embraces deliberate attempts at waking the potentials of “difference” (feminism) and “antagonism” (The Left) according to the given, individually and collectively, representable conjunctures – in relation to the dominant forms of life which exclude every attempt at conceptual and pictorial resistance. This is a struggle for the right to the political – and that means for the individual engagement in the constellations of neo-liberal depoliticisation of the forms of life and conditions for perceiving the forms of life as a non-political economy or behavior in ordinary life. The right to the political is, in fact, the right to subjective confrontation with the social in all complexities of life. The right to critical understanding of the subjectivation of the social within the conflicts of contemporary America is accomplished by means of marked subjectivation of the pictorial composition of images and expressive inscriptions of traces.

The political is not perceived as a platform for a critical meta-language that should replace some other political meta-language in the conflict of different powers – it emerges as a practice of subjectivization. Subjectivization – performance of singular selfhood – refers to affective events of establishing the self in the world. On one occasion Susan Bee quite clearly traced that complex horizon of humanity seeking its pictorial expression:

I’ve found, in making my art, solace from both private grief and public trauma. So our first question for this M/E/A/N/I/N/G forum has great resonance for me. Still, I find my motivation for making a painting or artist’s book is not necessarily apparent to a viewer. I would say that my artworks are a kind of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past). This term has been used by postwar Germans to describe their attempt to confront their recent history, yet, perhaps oddly, I find it suits my search to find an emotional and intellectual balance through art. My parents came out of the cauldron of Berlin and Nazi Germany and Palestine to find their way as Jewish artists in America. As the child of immigrants, I inherited their fears and insecurities as well their pride and optimism in their new country. The sudden death of my father Sigmund Laufer in 2007 was followed by the unimaginable suicide of my 23-year-old daughter Emma Bee Bernstein in 2008. I found that I had to regain my footing in the world and that through the imaginary narrative of painting I was able to embody my pain and transform it. But transform it into what? Perhaps I can just say an altered world.<sup>404</sup>

404 Susan Bee, in: Bee and Schor (eds.), *M/E/A/N/I/N/G 25th Anniversary Edition*, 8–9.

Susan Bee is involved in an intricate pictorial practice of confessions, self-criticism and construction of a possible world of images, conduits and potentialities relating to the brutality of the real. In her painterly *discourse*, self-criticism is not some strictly internal occurrence: it comes as a consequence of a quite different external “logic” – logic of micro- and macro-political events which frame the transient forms of life.

As painters, Mira Schor and Susan Bee problematize the non-transparent meta-languages of power and criticism of power in the contemporary world, represented as the “post-political truth of the society”. They come to be politicised with the *pictorial auto-criticism* of one’s selfhood seeking for sensual regimes of expression, conducting the auto-criticism of the self as memory, as experience of actuality and as projection of figures of the future. Politicisation means an open, painterly representable conflict between the individual and the collective against the social in relation to one’s own history of identifications, memories, projections, decisions, traumas, portended chasms or escapes from inner conflicts. In their work, the individual is experienced as a self-critical provocation of the “liberal aspiration” to solitary heroic conquests of the West or as a provocation of the individual struggle for survival on the market – namely, as visualisation of survival in the antagonistic quotidian life. The collective is recognised either (1) as a hybrid and flexible “plurality” on the market of mediated identifications – clichés – related to the mass consumption of late capitalism, (2) as an articulated set of individualities that seek a common platform in a flexible field of plurality, or (3) as a search for community inside the memories, actualisations of contemporary life and projections of an immediate future. In such a context, the social should mean a discovery of “new qualities” pertaining to the individual and the collective. In other words, the social should mean an attempt at critical and self-critical articulation of human relations which exceed the “isolated individual” or the “mechanical sum of isolated individuals” on the global market. The social is a quality. “The new sociality” is *the thing* that redirects the political engagement of the painters from the pictorial as a “realistic” comment of the contemporary world towards the active subject who appears as a subject of social transformation – of the class, nation or gender, i.e. class-nation-and-gender, into the complicit, solidary and mutually supported community of individuals who search for their place self-critically in relation to the given and imposed structures between the phantasm and the reality.

Representation is advocacy. In an ancient sense, “representation” even means *paying in cash* or establishing *equivalence in value* within the life itself. Accordingly, representation means establishing the relation of advocacy between *objects* which

are mutually different, but through this relation they become associated in terms of sense, meaning and value. In the process of representing, *represented* and *representation* find themselves in a relation that is, most often, either *interpretative relation* or *relation of anticipation* of the human itself: feminine (Mira Schor, *Implant*, 1992) or family-related (Susan Bee, *Pieta*, 2011).

These questions are important in methodological terms: “What does it mean to represent something?” or “What does it mean to describe the painted surface of the canvas?” i.e. “How can they understand the meanings that determine the pictorial composition?” – in relation with human life itself, in relation with the concrete lives of Susan Bee and Mira Schor in contemporary America, within their private worlds and their complex escapes from privacy into the public life.

Mira Schor constructs the political space of privacy. Privacy is a space – an illusion of inner space – which should be brought to political situation by means of self-criticism. Schor describes a space of limited privacy within the global transition. Mira Schor indexes the positions of a woman – painter, writer, theorist and/or activist in a transitional world:

My relation to privacy is inflected. No, it is completely dual. I’m like the British comedian Pete Cook who once dressed up as Greta Garbo and had himself driven around in an open-top car yelling at the top of his lungs, “I want to be alone”. I have a drive for communication — I love to teach, I’m a politician, preacher, actress manqué, I love conversation, and I’m a huge consumer of news, information, gossip, a hard copy newspaper/TV & webholic, an email&Facebook addict — but I cannot function without immense amounts of privacy (according to some of my friends, more privacy than most people). My home is the opposite of Kryptonite for me and it takes hours for me to recover a productive train of thought after I’ve been out of the house. I usually can’t work if anyone is near me. I can’t screen out other people. I have to be alone to sleep and even then the presence of my own body breathing and thinking can be an impediment. My mind comes alive late at night when the city lets go of me, although unfortunately the need for sleep so that I won’t be a jet-lagged zombie the next day interferes with the sudden clarity of mind of that quiet moment within the urban noise and I struggle to fall asleep while scribbling notes into a notebook after I’ve already turned out the lights.<sup>405</sup>

What is exceptional in this confession or, better yet, auto-criticism, is the connection between private selfhood and artistic practice, and metaphors of

405 Mira Schor, in: *ibid.*, 147–148.

textual production in the contemporary urban world. Mira Schor builds up the myth about herself as a notion of resistance to the clichés and expectations of ordinary “civil life”, between the authority of the private identity and the horizons of public clichés. She develops a similar logic of thinking in her painting – establishing a connection between the authority of the visible and the horizon of female subjectivity in relation to the “consumer society” and its quotidian implications:

As a painter with a strong interest in political activism, who has worked with sometimes overt, always subtextual political content, I think painting and other traditional art objects can provide experience that is more than just a passive relation to commodity: a private engagement with an art work even if it's not illustrationally political can transmit a renewed sense of the value of interiority that too has political meaning. Painting has a material presence that can awaken the viewer to her own embodiment, bring her to her senses. Painting is a time-based medium, not just in the doing but in the viewing and in the afterthought; it has a dimension of time that can slow the speed of commodified time. (That some painting operates at the speed and disposability of commodified time is another story for another day).<sup>406</sup>

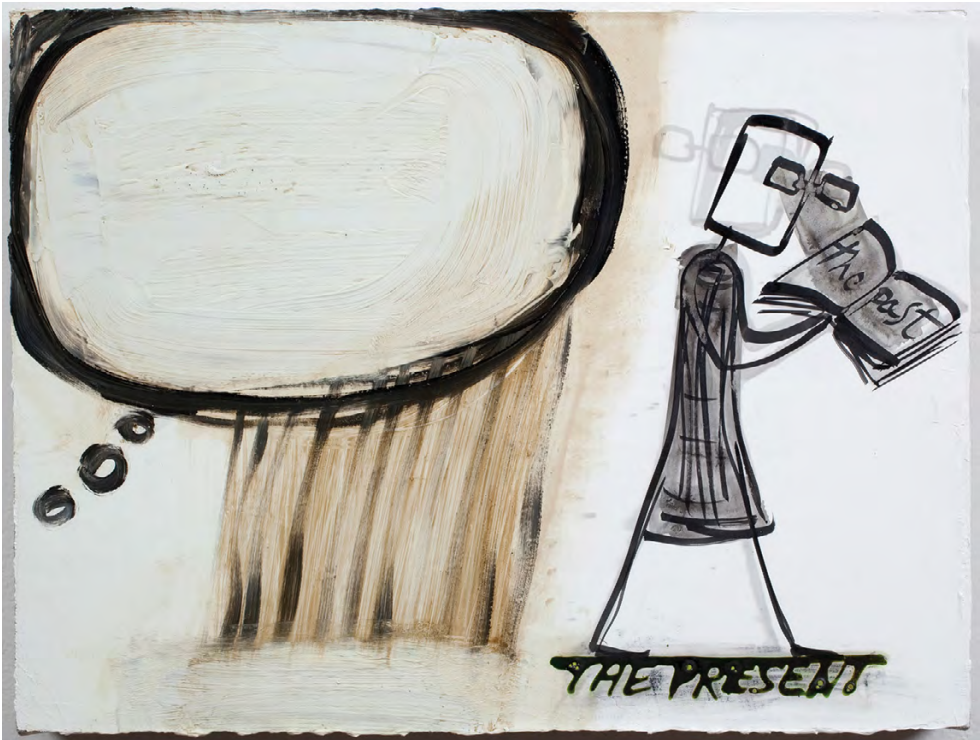
Accordingly, watching and seeing a picture as representation – and this means as a visual advocate – is not merely a question of the picture in itself and by itself, but a question of the “picture of painting” set in specific social, cultural and artistic contexts. The question is of painting (*Past, Present, And*, 2009 and *The Past, The Present, The Future*, 2009) in the *process* of production, exchange and consumption i.e. reception by someone and for someone. That process is a *social practice*: the manner of transformation of the pictorial matter in a specific social context resulting in a product which, in its singularity, resists the products of mass production and consumption. If that is the case, then painting is an activity of *social material practice of representation* which transforms the *matter of painting* into *painterly representations of the sensual world*. In this process performance and representation constitute the subject of painting i.e. the subject of culture where painting *plays* one of the possible roles. The meaning of the painting is *that* verbal or conceptual knowledge created through interpretations of the painting as a painting, as a work of art or a product of historically and geographically specific cultural practices. The functions of meaning may be entirely different.

Susan Bee and Mira Schor's painting is a critical repetition of open-ended symbolic self-identifications, self-criticism and confrontations with the self as the self-of-

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid., 149–150.

infracution of sociality within the materiality of painting. It refers to a dialectical recognition of the situation wherein human forms of life “under threat” are being questioned and confronted with the self-of-antagonism – whether in terms of the political relations of power and its repression, or in terms of private tragedies; whether it is about being a woman, or about one’s anxiety, insecurity, resistance to repression or drowning in mass clichés. The open-ended referential circulation between the painted and the social have been established as a recognition of the difference between the singular and the universal.



61 Mira Schor: *Past, Present, and....*, painting, 2009  
 Courtesy Mira Schor



# EXPERIMENTAL THEORY

23

A CLAUSTROPHOBIC EVENT

Bare Life

24

A NARRATIVE

An Utterly Ordinary Evening – *PETIT a*



**2000 Manifesta 3, Modern Gallery, Ljubljana**

One of the walls invisibly moves and fills in the space.

**Tomo Savić Gecan**

62 Tomo Savić Gecan: *Untitled*, Manifesta, Modern Gallery, Ljubljana, 2000  
Courtesy Tomo Savić Gecan

## A CLAUSTROPHOBIC EVENT

### Bare Life

In the basement of the *Moderna galerija* in Ljubljana, as part of *Manifesta 3* (2000), Tomo Savić Gecan<sup>407</sup> exhibited an empty room painted in white. One of the walls almost imperceptibly slid towards the inside, gradually diminishing the space.

This work differed considerably from most of the *Manifesta 3* exhibits.<sup>408</sup> They mainly comprised “art works” conceived as documents or media presentations of cultural situations of urban life at the turn of the century. Those typical<sup>409</sup> works for *Manifesta 3* carried a media message as a particular intervention in specific cultures and cultural situations.

By contrast, Tomo Savić Gecan addressed a situation generating primary and immediate experience on the part of the visitors. They came and passed through his ambience. While entering Gecan’s room, a visitor would not notice anything. He could not notice anything. The situation in the room seemed quite static, void and invariant. Only on the second or third, mostly accidental entry, might a visitor perceive the space as smaller than before. The “inner drama” of recognizing the event of loss of space, of the shrinking room, would then begin to unfold. This was no longer an invariant space, but *space of loss*. The visitor would become insecure, and doubly so:

- (1) insecure about his/her perception of space, and
- (2) insecure about his/her position in an architecture changing – losing – a dimension.

But, how to perceive what Tomo Savić Gecan had presented? How to perceive this slow and inevitable disappearance of space, the shrinking of the space when confronted with the observer’s body? Gecan’s work demands interpretation.

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407 Tomo Savić Gecan (Zagreb, 1967) is a Croatian visual artist who works in Holland. His researches are connected with conceptual, sculptural and environmental research practices.

408 Anon.: *Manifesta 3 – European Biennial for contemporary art* (Borderline Syndrome. Energies of Defence), Ljubljana, 2000.

409 *Schie 2.0* group, Marjetica Potrč, Ene-Liis Semper, Škart.

Perhaps the allusion of a fairly constructed narrative can be used. What would Tomo Savić Gecan's work be like if translated into a fabricated, existentially motivated narrative on space shrinking as opposed to a human body in an indefinite life situation?

For instance: A girl woke up. She stretched, yawned and looked around the room. She woke up in her student dormitory, say, in Berlin. She lay on a large bed with dark red sheets. She was fully dressed. She wore white sneakers with thick black laces. She was in hyper-tight light blue jeans. She wore a white roll collar sports shirt without sleeves. She woke up and twitched. She never lay in bed in her clothes, especially not with shoes on. The light in the room was strangely phosphorescent white. The room was fully illuminated. She preferred natural light. She had no such lighting in her flat. She frowned. She liked nature. Always, even in winter, she would keep a window open. And, then, she started to consider how she had found herself there in the first place. The last thing she remembered was taking a train to Palermo. She sat in the first-class, smoking compartment. She lit a cigarette, though she normally did not smoke. She wondered where she had got it from. She stretched out in the seat, tried to cross her legs, but the jeans were too tight. She stretched her legs. She touched something with the tips of her sneakers... and then – cut – nothing... Total darkness. The next thing she could remember was waking up in her Berlin apartment, in her favourite red linen. She lay on a shining royal purple sheet in her sooty sneakers, with traces of yellowish Sicilian dust and dirt. Why was she in Berlin in the first place? How did she get there? “Bugger, what day is it anyway?” – she muttered angrily. And sat down. She slipped into her sneakers on the floor. That wasn't her floor. Her floor had wooden planks: it creaked. This was a silent hard plastic floor, but the same colour as the wooden floor in her Berlin apartment. She was confused and overwhelmed by fear. She was in some 3D photo-material space resembling her Berlin room. She swore. She “had to go”. She was thirsty. Didn't know where to go first. She panicked. Said to herself: “Get a grip, girl!” But she could not calm down, she walked from wall to wall. The walls were photos of her Berlin room. Even framed photos were shot again and mounted on the wall. She was beating a wall with her fist but could not produce a sound. She felt the blunt stroke of her fist against the solid surface. She felt uncomfortable in her own body. Everything was squeezing, scratching and pinching. She had to take a leak. Wondered if she was under surveillance. Said: “Never mind”. Went to the corner. Undid a button, unzipped, took off her trousers and panties. Squatted and took a pee. For quite a long time. She smelled the urine. Got up, got dressed. Pulled up her panties and trousers. Zipped and left the top button of her jeans undone. She needed more air. She wanted to breathe. She reckoned: “If I had a pee, I'm

not dead!" Then she went to her bed, untied the laces on her sneakers and took them off. Her feet were swollen, revealing that she'd had them on for a long time. She took off her red socks with little yellow flowers. Her feet stank. She frowned. She put the socks away with her sneakers and climbed onto the bed. She slanted against the wall, bent her knees and leaned her chin against them. This posture was relaxing for a moment. She tried to contemplate what had happened. She had to work on her memory. She said: "Recycling memory". She fell asleep. She woke up. She didn't remember how she had found herself on that bed. She slept again, for a while. She woke up. She realised: "I was awoken by silence!" You couldn't hear anything in this room. In her real room in Berlin you could always hear noise coming through the open window. You could hear silence. Her headache stopped. The silence was overwhelming. She wondered why she had always pictured silence as white. White. She felt the stink of urine. She stretched. But, now, the room looked smaller than it had been before she fell asleep. She had her doubts about it. Then she started to look around carefully. Everything seemed closer, though... She doubted herself. She knew that she could not trust her senses. She felt she was under threat. She got up and walked from the bed to a photograph on the wall showing the bathroom door. She counted seven steps. Now she could start checking. She forged a plan. When she falls asleep again and when she wakes up again she will measure the distance between the bed and the photograph showing the bathroom door. Somehow she felt safer. She was active. She had a goal. However, the thought of a shrinking room provoked insecurity. She did not know what to do. She panicked. Her *bare life* was under threat. What is the bottom line of life? She was scared of suffocating. She was scared of pressure, of walls squeezing her body, and making a pile of raw meat out of her. In the room that looked like hers, but was not hers, that was the image of her room... The room was nevertheless shrinking: yes or no? She was scared. She looked at the walls and, then, at the ceiling. Everything was smaller, the world was becoming smaller and smaller. She felt pressure. As if the ceiling was falling upon her. She was drinking water. She was pissing. She slept. She was irritated by the stink of her urine. She was sleeping. She was waking up. She had headaches. She slept again. She woke up. She stretched. She got up and tried to walk around the room. She measured the distance from the bed to the photograph of the door. It was six steps exactly. She repeated the measuring: one, two, five times. It was always six steps exactly. However, she was convinced that the room was shrinking. The room got smaller and smaller. She sat upon the bed. She was completely calm. She could not tell the time of day and what day it was. She measured the distance from the bed to the photograph on the wall. It was now slightly less than five steps. The opposite wall was approaching the bed. The light in the room was more intense. The breathing was more difficult. As if air was running out. She was hungry. She

had constipation. She wanted to run, but she had no strength left. She was out of space, as well. She walked, then sat down. She was hungry. Her lips were dry. Now she was starving, exhausted, scared, appalled. A blend of fear and euphoria. Hunger. She twitched. The light in the room was phosphorescent white. The room was fully illuminated. As if emanating whiteness. She frowned. The room was small almost like a box. She breathed heavily. She felt that her pants were wet. She did not know whether she had spent an hour, a week or most of her life here. She felt the space compressing. She became aware of loss of life. She was in a shrinking box. She had been packaged. She screamed. She moved her hands mutely. There was no one there but her. She was wondering about the engines moving the wall. No, she could not think about that. She was hungry, thirsty, in pain, wet, half-naked, trembling, scared, alone. "Yes", she muttered, "I am no longer related". She bit her hands. She bit the flesh of her hands. She felt the pain. She screamed: "I am in pain". She got up. The room was so small that she could not get up. With her fists she struck the wall, which was now quite close to her. She struck the wall as hard as she could to feel the pain. Only that pain justified her *bare life* and made it a life.

Tomo Savić Gecan has displayed a completely empty white room with phosphorescent lighting. A room with a sliding wall. The narrative on the "captured girl in a shrinking room" indicates the "feeling" of *bare life*, indeed, a *form of life* expiring in space which, for unknown reasons, almost imperceptibly runs out. What is the relationship between Gecan's work and the narrative of the girl in the shrinking room?

At first sight, Tomo Savić Gecan's installation and the story of the girl do not have much in common except for one detail: the room is shrinking. Loss of space in both situations appears as a danger to the basic "form of life". In the case of the girl – this form of life is obviously under threat. In the case of Gecan's work, the form of life is merely potentially, merely in allusions, merely under scrutiny... The narrative of the girl discloses a behavioural, real or fictional event. Tomo Savić Gecan lacks the narrative in his ambient work. He works with the zero degree experience. He works with non-space, to be attributed to any narrative, even the story of a girl in a shrinking room. And that is the universal and basic element informing possibilities that a *zero degree* event anticipates various crisis "form of life" situations. For *zero degree* as performed by Tomo Savić Gecan, its features always anticipate sense, to a certain degree disclosing its scale in advance.<sup>410</sup>

410 Jacques Lacan: "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud", in: *Écrits: A Selection*, 232.

*Form of life*, nevertheless, poses a problem here. Use of the concepts “life” and “form of life” owes much to analyses and discussions of differences and contradictions between the non-representable/mute life of nature and the representable/effable life of a society/culture, which can even be claimed as “art”. According to Giorgio Agamben,<sup>411</sup> the ancient Greeks lacked an integral term to refer to what we perceive as *life*. They used two terms, semantically and morphologically different: *zōē*, referring to the sheer fact of common life of all living creatures (animals, people, or gods) and *bios*, referring to the form, or a particular way of life on the part of an individual or a group. In contemporary languages, wherein the distinction has gradually disappeared from the vocabulary, and where preserved, in terms like *biology* or *zoology*, it no longer marks a considerable difference. A single term – “life” – has been in use, its opaqueness proportionally growing with the sacralisation of its referent. “Alive” refers to a sheer common proposition, nearly always possible to isolate in any of the numerous forms of life. The term *form-of-life*, however, pertains to life which can never be separated from its form, a life wherein it is impossible to isolate anything as *bare* or *sheer* life. At this point, there is a fundamental difference between the theorizing of “life” as conceived within cultural studies and philosophical interpretations of “life” as evoked in biopolitical philosophy. Cultural studies propose a post post-structuralist statement that there is no such thing as *bare life* – merely the textual representations and presentations as part of the closed circuits of culture. Life appears in textual terms or as “un-bare life”. Biopolitical philosophy advocates an analytical-critical distinction between “natural” and human, political and intellectual life. Life appears as an event with consequences. It also demonstrates that “sheer” or “bare” life is, so to speak, a derivative of the relationship between *zōē* and *bios* – in fact, an event produced by operations of power: man is thereby an engine and product of this process, and Agamben points to the increasingly substantial contradiction that *man must become a machine* to be able to produce a man within.

With his installation at the *Manifesta 3* exhibition – the room that loses space, its emptiness and utter absence of life – Tomo Savić Gecan points to potential dangers leading every “form of life” to “bare life”. This is the hub of his work → its hidden effect to be disclosed in one’s fear before loss of ‘life’ in an almost imperceptible event (the sliding of a wall).

411 Giorgio Agamben: “Form-of-Life”, in: *Radical Thought in Italy. A Potential Politics*, eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, trans. Cesare Casarino Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, 151–156; Giorgio Agamben: *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1998, 4, 6.



63 Provisional Salta Ensemble: *Broken Story-Telling: An Utterly Ordinary Evening* – PETIT a,  
photo-essay, photomontage, 2014  
Courtesy Provisional Salta Ensemble

## A NARRATIVE

### An Utterly Ordinary Evening – *PETIT a*

*He was wonderful, abstract, a well-loved human creature.*

*He was horrible, concrete, a brutal human creature.*

Who is this about? Riddles of identity. The eluding of identification. Is this about Marcel Duchamp or Živko Grozdanić?<sup>412</sup>

Elaborating contradictions. Could he be presented in another way as well? Could he be wonderful, abstract, in fact, an entirely loved human creature free of adrenalin crises, brutality, concrete particularism, or... What would he (Gera Grozdanić) look like as HE (Marcel Duchamp). Let us proceed to produce an asymmetric narrative about him, or *to/for him*.

#### SCENE ONE

He opened the door. He stepped out of the cab. He observed the number 47. He started walking toward the building. He was in no hurry at all. He went up a few steps and found himself at the front door. There were bells sounding from inside: *jing-jang*. He went in. A tall woman wearing a black tuxedo, white shirt, and long, broad trousers approached him. She asked him if there was anything she could do for him. He answered faintly. His voice reminded one of the noise one produces when creasing silk: "I informed you this morning that I wanted a partner to go out with tonight. I would like to take a look. Yes, I hope that's OK with you?!" She nodded, with her curly hair. She took him, theatrically, into a large room, where there were about a dozen fully dressed, half-naked, and entirely naked girls.

#### SCENE TWO

They are riding in a cab. She is in the backseat, next to him. She's nervous. Her sandal is banging against the seat in front of her. She asks him, a bit frightened: "Where are you taking me?" He answers, lightly: "We're going to Nordstrom's! You need some clothes. You cannot go among people like that!" She looks at him suspiciously: "Who is paying for all this? Is this an experiment or something? I am

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<sup>412</sup> Živko Grozdanić (Vršac, 1957) is a postconceptual visual artist from Vojvodina (Serbia). He is an active producer of artworlds (environmental art works, directing museum, political ecology).



not a guinea pig, am I?" He: "Of course not. It is simple. Tonight I do not want to have dinner by myself. I need company. I've selected you and paid for your time. Your screwing time has been *given*<sup>413</sup> to me for this dinner".

### SCENE THREE

She was in a large fitting room. A square room with a table and a chair. Antique furniture, like her great-grandmother's. She could hardly remember. A hat stand with coat hangers on it. A large mirror on each wall. Through the curtain, someone handed her a dress. She held the dress in her hand. Obviously, it was his choice. She felt cornered. It was as if she had got caught in a small-game trap. Hunted down. An animal put in a zoo.

### SCENE FOUR

They were sitting at the *Club*. They had their own private booth. A couple of tall and slender stemmed glasses were resting on the table. There were candles burning. One could sense the mild and intoxicating smell of smoke. Oriental smoke. Fake oriental smell of candles. *New Age*. He was leisurely sipping his wine. She was munching on peanuts or something like peanuts. She noticed he was actually chewing his wine.

He said: *This will be a long and, I hope, pleasant dinner.*

She said: *Is there a specific reason for that?*

*No, there isn't.*

*Why are we here, then?*

*I come here for dinner from time to time.*

*Often?*

*Not really often.*

*What does 'not really often' mean?*

*A couple of times a year.*

*And why tonight?*

*I was in the area today.*

*You were in the area today? But it took us an hour to get here from the House!*

*I mean in the area, in this city.*

*For you this is 'this city', what does that mean?*

*I'm not sure. I come here, to this city, from time to time, and when I do, I usually come 'here' for dinner.*

*Do you hire a whore every time?*

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<sup>413</sup> Jacques Derrida: "Given Time: The Time of the King", trans. by Peggy Kamuf, in: *Critical Inquiry* 18/2 (1992), 161-187.

*No, of course not. Tonight I didn't want to be alone. And besides, you're my date. I don't like the word 'whore'.*

*You don't like the word! You're crazy. But I am a... You're crazy!*

*Perhaps, although – I'm perfectly functional. This evening, I was alone in this city.*

*You're really bizarre! I don't understand, what are you trying to say?*

*You think? Well, sometimes I'm not entirely clear even to myself.*

*You've got issues or something?*

*Mostly I don't. This wine is enjoyed only in small sips. Another glass?*

*Yes! What kind of wine rules are those? You do everything according to the rules. Are you SM?*

*I use rules, yes, yes. SM, if you mean that kind of SM – no, I don't like physical violence.*

*Neither do I! Finally a point in your favour.*

*Do you think I deserve it?*

*What do you do? You know what I do. And you?*

*Me, hmm: I observe, combine, appropriate, sell, move, and observe.*

*That's not a profession, is it?*

*It could be, couldn't it?! I'm good at what I do. Though, I'm best at observing.*

*What is that? What are you trying to pull? Is it a game or something?*

*Something like that. Actually, it's my job. The Americans would call it 'what you do for a living'.*

*Couldn't you be more specific?*

*I'm trying! But I can't seem to get there.*

*But you're not specific!*

*I'm not?*

*What you do, is it like chess?*

*You're a chess player?*

*Not really. I'm more like the guy who's observing and stimulating that which he's observing while others are playing, whereas I keep the score and transmit it.*

*Man! You're really complicated. What are you observing? Me? But your gaze is impossible to pin down! You observe without focus. You're looking everywhere at once.*

*That's rather insightful of you. It's a skill. Observing like that is not easy to achieve.*

*Sometimes I can't understand your every word.*

*Yes, I'm complicated.*

*Do you expect me to confess to you? To tell you the truth. Or are you confessing to me?*

*No! We're just having a conversation. A conversation and nothing else.*

*A conversation about what?*

*About this and that, here and there, there and then. Entirely indifferently.*

*That word, I couldn't remember it, I didn't understand!*

*Indifferently?*

*Yes, indifferently!*

*There, another word in your vocabulary. Maybe...*  
*What does it mean?*  
*It depends on how you use it in the language.<sup>414</sup>*  
*I don't understand.*  
*Try to say it.*  
*Indifferently.*  
*It's an important word for me.*  
*Why?*  
*Because!*  
*When are you not indifferent?*  
*I'm almost always indifferent.*  
*But when do you happen to not be indifferent?*  
*When I'm having a migraine attack. When I stay home and spend all day in bed with*  
*sunglasses on my eyes and plugs in my ears.*  
*You're fucking with me?*  
*I'm sorry, but one must speak politely in this restaurant.*  
*Still, you're not indifferent?*  
*Still, I am.*  
*You're not!*  
*I am – though sometimes I like to laugh.*  
*Why?*  
*I like it when people laugh, I don't like it when they cry.*  
*I don't like tears either, though I cry often. I feel better after a good cry. You?*  
*No, I haven't cried in a long, long time, maybe since childhood.*  
*Why did you cry that last time?*  
*I had to do something really ugly, which I didn't want to do.*  
*What was it?*  
*Stop pushing me! It was long ago. I don't remember. Actually, I only remember one tear,*  
*one hot tear streaming down my face. I swallowed a tear then. It was brackish. After that I*  
*never cried again.*  
*And I cried last night.*  
*You? Why?*  
*They beat me up.*  
*They beat you up? Who beat you up? She did? He did? At the House?*  
*No, no, no, a couple of morons who paid to beat me. She brought them into the room. They*  
*had leather jackets on and she gave them a whip. One of them started hitting me and then the*  
*other. Then... I still feel like crying.*  
*For a long time he kept looking somewhere around her, occasionally through*

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<sup>414</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein: §43, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986, 20.

her. They kept quiet. He was entirely calm. She was rather nervous. She was trembling. He offered her a cigarette.

*You don't know what to say? You're embarrassed. I've ruined your mood. They don't beat women in your world, do they?! Or, they don't beat their own women, but then they go the House to beat me.*

*I don't know. It is something like that, I suppose?*

*Hmm!*

*You're avoiding answering.*

*Yes, it's part of the strategy of being indifferent.*

*What's that supposed to mean now? Come on, tell me!*

*A strategy is a master plan of one's conduct over a period in one's life.*

*That sounds very serious.*

*Yes, pretty serious. So serious that it frightens me sometimes. I've always had a strategy.*

*Me, I make no plans. With me, it's all random. Although, they do have some kind of plan...*

*Who are they?*

*Well, she and the rest of them, at the House where you rented me. They control all of my time and life.*

*They own you?*

*In a way, yes. I'm paying something off. But I can't talk about that, not even with you.*

*Don't. I'll talk.*

*Really?!*

*They eat. They remain quiet for awhile. They take wine in small sips.*

*It's quite good. Enjoy it.*

*I've never enjoyed eating. You? You're obviously enjoying it.*

*I enjoy observing, combining, appropriating, selling, moving, and observing.*

*Again, I can't understand what you're talking about, but you remind of someone?!*

*Of whom?*

*I don't know. But you definitely remind me of someone.*

*Could be. I'm entirely transparent and sometimes resemble other people. But even then, I'm still indifferent, whereas they – most often – are not.*

*For sure.*

*I would prefer not to...<sup>415</sup>*

*Who are you?*

*Me? Quite indifferently 'me'?*

*You're a fag, aren't you?*

*Hmm.*

*I've offended you. So you've got a girlfriend, wife, mistress, whore?*

*No, as you know, I am...*

<sup>415</sup> Gilles Deleuze: "Bartleby; or, The Formula", in: *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 68–90.

## EXPERIMENTAL THEORY

*Come on,... indifferent, total anaesthesia... I've learnt my lesson. I'm not that stupid.*  
*Bravo.*  
*I asked you, are you an artist?*  
*You know, I... there's nothing special inside or around me. Although some people love me.*  
*But there's no big passion in that.*  
*I know, you say "I observe, combine, appropriate, sell, move, and observe".*  
*Yeah, I say that!*  
*Bollocks. Still, you haven't answered my question? Who are you? Whom are you 'sleeping' with (ha ha)!*  
*Right now I'm not sleeping but having dinner.*  
*You're kidding?*  
*No, I'm serious. But what do you think?*  
*I think that you like playing chess with people, rather than with wooden pieces on a marble board.*  
*You think?*  
*Yes, that hurts and you couldn't care less for others and their pain. You don't care for other people.*  
*You think that I don't care because I'm indifferent? Or, because I am another?*  
*Yes... although now you're speculating again. You're a speculator.*  
*Would you like a some sweets?*  
*You're beating about the bush, pouring ash over yourself. You're miserable.*  
*Come on, let's get something sweet. I'm miserable when there's nothing sweet around me.*  
*I don't want anything sweet. God, you're awful!*  
*Please... why are you nervous? They've got great cakes here, and ice-cream, if you'd prefer.*  
*You should try some.*  
*But this is not about ice-cream, it's about you.*  
*About me? But you're the one who's evading action???*  
*Yes, it's about you!!!*

## SCENE FIVE

He is sitting in a cab. He is alone. He is riding to Y. He is slumped back in his seat. He is dozing. It was a long and difficult night. Hardly different, though, from so many other long nights over the years. He's observing, combining, appropriating, selling, moving, and observing. He is utterly indifferent. He resembles M.<sup>416</sup> Just as he was looking at objects, he is now looking at the space in between. He is

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416 This story was built around my memories of the Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) "character". I used the description of M. D. provided by Beatrice Wood (1893–1998) in her memoir *I Shock Myself: The Autobiography of Beatrice Wood*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006, 24–25. But this is not a story about M. D. either, but, in a way, about Duchampian contradictions, which come to Živko Grozdanić too, as well as to every other post-Duchampian artist.

## EXPERIMENTAL THEORY

motionless. Total anaesthesia. It is all unfolding in his head. He is enjoying his “autism”, although he is not quite sure of himself.

### SCENE SIX

She is sitting on the bus. The bus is going to X. She is wearing a black dress with a single long sleeve. Her left shoulder and arm are bare. She is looking good, half-lit like that. She has taken off her sandals with high heels. Her feet are bare. She can feel pain in her legs and back. The bus is completely empty. She is wondering when she will get to X. It is not certain whether she made the right choice. She is afraid. It is all unfolding somewhere beyond her. The fact that none of it depends on her terrifies her. She is scared.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Miodrag Šuvaković publishes under the name Miško Šuvaković. He received his PhD from the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Art in Belgrade in 1993. He has been professor of applied aesthetics, Faculty of Music in Belgrade (1996-2015). Šuvaković is professor of applied aesthetics & theory of art and media, Faculty for Media and Communications, Belgrade, and dean of Faculty for Media and Communications, Belgrade. He is member of Slovenian Society of Aesthetics, president of the Society for Aesthetics of Architecture and Visual Arts Serbia, as well as Second Vice-President of the International Association for Aesthetics.

Šuvaković was a member of the conceptualist Group 143 (1975-1980), a member of the informal theoretical community "The Community for Researching Space" (1982-1989) and member of the theoretical-performing organisation "Walking Theory" (2000-to the present), as well as a follower of the new media and performance artistic and designer platform PSE (Provisonal Salta Ensemble, 2008-to the present).

He edited the magazine "Katalog 143" [Catalogue 143, 1976-1978] and the independent theoretical magazine "Mentalni prostor" [Mental Space, Belgrade, 1982-1987]. He was a member of the editorial staffs of "TransKatalog" [TransCatalogue, Novi Sad, 1995-1998], the magazine "Teorija koja hoda" [Walking Theory, Belgrade, from 2001], "Razlika" [Difference, Tuzla, 2002], "Sarajevske sveske" [Sarajevo Notebook, Sarajevo, 2005] and AM [Art Media, Belgrade, 2012].

He has published or edited 50 books in Serbian, Slovenian, Croatian and English, among them: *PAS TOUT – Fragments on art, culture, politics, poetics and art theory 1994-1974*, Buffalo: Meow Press, 1994; *Prolegomena za analitičku estetiku* [Prolegomenon for analytical aesthetics], Novi Sad: Četvrti talas, 1995; *Estetika apstraktnog slikarstva. Apstraktna umetnost i teorija umetnika 20-ih godina*, [The Aesthetics of Abstract Painting. Abstract Art and Theory of Artists in the 1920's], Beograd: Narodna knjiga / Alfa, 1998; *Paragrami tela/figure: Predavanja i rasprave o strategijama i taktikama teorijskog izvođenja u modernom i postmodernom performance artu, teatru, operi, muzici, filmu i tehnoumetnosti*, [Paragrams of the Body/Figure : Lectures and Discussions about Strategies and Tactics of Theoretical Execution in Modern and Post-modern Performance Art, Theatre, Opera, Music, Film and Techno-Art], Beograd: CENPI, 2001; *Impossible Histories – Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991*, co-editor with Dubravka Đurić, Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2003, 2006; *Pojmovnik suvremene*

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