

ART IN THE NETWORK OF TECHNOLOGICAL MEDIA AND MASS COMMUNICATION: NEW TENDENCIES

Ješa Denegri

Between 1961 and 1973, a series of five international exhibitions were held in Zagreb, in what was then Yugoslavia and is now Croatia, under the title *Nove Tendencije* (New Tendencies). The idea was originally suggested by Almir Mavignier, a German artist born in Brazil, and the shows were organized by Zagreb's contemporary-art museum, the Galerija suvremene umjetnosti. With theoretical elaboration by the critics Matko Meštrović and Radoslav Putar, the 1961 exhibition featured members of the international artists' groups ZERO, GRAV (*Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel*), Gruppo N, and Azimuth (Enrico Castellani and Piero Manzoni); a number of individual artists from outside Yugoslavia; and two local artists, Julije Knifer and Ivan Picelj.¹ *Nove tendencije 2* followed in 1963, *Nova tendencija 3* in 1965, *Tendencije 4* in 1968–69, and *Tendencije 5* in 1973, with dozens of artists participating from Europe and farther afield.

Both artists and organizers felt the need for a wide international network that would connect not only their artistic but their ideological positions. They were linked by their interest in experimenting with new technology and by a leftist orientation that positioned them against the domination of the art market. It is important to note that on the political stage the establishment of these exhibitions—and especially of the first, in 1961—coincided with the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement, a global group of developing nations with Yugoslavia as one of the founders. This is not to say that the *Nove Tendencije* exhibitions fell under the patronage of any “official” state politics. On the contrary, the exhibitions' artists and organizers shared a fundamental belief in international collaboration based on advanced political positions and the use of new technologies, at the same time respecting the ethical integrity of each participant. Indeed *Nova Tendencija 3*, in 1965, organized in Yugoslavia while the country was a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, included artists from both the Soviet Union (Moscow's *Dvizheniye* group) and the United States (the Anonima group, from Cleveland)—the first time such artists exhibited together on the international art scene.

An article of Meštrović's from 2010 unveils some previously unknown facts about the concept and organization of the *Nove Tendencije* exhibition of 1961. In a letter to the author that year, Manzoni wrote that he had sent three works to the exhibition: a tin can (*Merda d'artista*, 1961; fig. 1), a scroll from the *Linee* (Lines) series, and an *Achrome* painting, of

which, he said, the “line is more important than the painting.”² Manzoni also voiced apprehension about Mavignier as the creator of the exhibition concept—a well-founded worry since Mavignier, in charge of choosing the works for the 1961 show, accepted and exhibited only the painting. This history was long unknown in professional circles, but today it is clear that this decision of Mavignier's had a far-reaching influence not just on the thematic physiognomy of the first *Nove Tendencije* exhibition but on the fundamental orientation of this international art movement in all its aspects.

During both the first *Nove Tendencije* exhibition in 1961 and the second in 1963, many personal and conceptual realignments occurred among the participating artists. Meštrović writes, “In quite a short time, the new movement showed an extraordinary speed in its formal execution, but also a split in its ideology.”³ On the Italian art scene one symptom of this split was the exhibition *Arte programmata* (Programmed

Art), organized in Milan in 1962 by Bruno Munari, under the patronage of the Olivetti company, and with a catalogue essay by Umberto Eco. Displacing the romantic fervor of Manzoni's “*nuova concezione artistica*” (new artistic conception), these program-oriented artists, such as Munari and Enzo Mari, were often designers by trade. Mari would be invited to conceptualize the third exhibition in Zagreb, now with a title in the singular, *Nova Tendencija 3* (New Tendencies 3), in 1965. His concept revolved around the topic of the “divuligation of research samples.”

At the same time, the Paris GRAV group also changed its basic orientation, moving to advocate “art as spectacle, viewer engagement, instability, and programming.”⁴

The absence of some participants in the first exhibition from the show of 1965, and the large number of newcomers in that year, were signs of organizational, operative, and ideological crises within the movement that the exhibitions showcased. (These crises would be surmounted by the new thematic foci of *Tendencije 4* and *Tendencije 5*.) In the same year as the third exhibition, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, organized an exhibition titled *The Responsive Eye*, curated by William Seitz, which received a mixed response from the participants in the *Nove Tendencije* shows. While Mavignier wrote that “during the opening and the grand exhibition in New York, which can be called historical,” he “thought with gratitude of Zagreb's contribution to it,”⁵ Manfredo Massironi, a member of Gruppo N from Padua, saw in the show the unacceptable influence of the U.S.-dominated institutional and market system and pronounced it a “Pyrrhic victory” and a “first-class funeral procession.”⁶



Fig. 1. Piero Manzoni. *Merda d'artista n. 68* (Artist's Shit no. 68). 1961. Tin can and printed paper, 4.8 × 6 × 6 cm. Fondazione Piero Manzoni, Milan

The staging of the *Nove Tendencije* exhibitions in Zagreb owes a debt to the activities of the EXAT-51 (Experimental Atelier 1951) group there a decade earlier. The group announced itself by issuing a manifesto in December of 1951; its members were Picelj, who would participate in a number of the *Nove Tendencije* exhibitions beginning in 1961, and Vlado Kristl, Vjenceslav Richter, and Aleksandar Srnec, who would variously participate beginning in 1963. The EXAT-51 manifesto argued for a synthesis of visual art, architecture, and design; its members produced paintings in the manner of postwar geometric abstraction. Another antecedent to the *Nove Tendencije* movement was Zagreb's Gorgona group (1959–66), whose members, including Knifer, Meštrović, Putar, and Josip Vaništa similarly featured among its exhibitors, organizers, and theoreticians.⁷

The Zagreb exhibitions integrated the city's art scene firmly in related events abroad, while also contributing to the wider cultural mediation of the art scenes of West and East, as well as to those of the nonaligned nations.

The *Nove Tendencije* movement was not strictly confined to a historical period and has lately been gaining attention from younger art historians and curators. Recent exhibitions devoted to it include *Die Neuen Tendenzen. Eine europäische Künstlerbewegung 1961–1973*, at the Museum für Konkrete Kunst, Ingolstadt, (2006–7),⁸ *Bit International—[Nove] tendencije. Computer und visuelle Forschung. Zagreb 1961–1973*, at the Neue Galerie, Graz (2007), and the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Karlsruhe (2008–9). This latter show generated

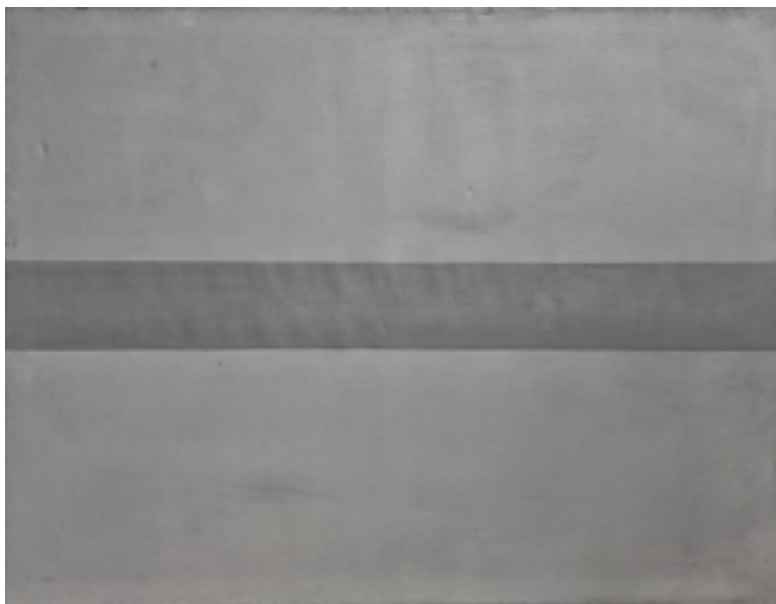


Fig. 2. Josip Vaništa. *Silver Line 1965 – III – 2*. 1965. Oil on canvas, 140 × 180 cm. Marinko Sudac Collection, Zagreb

Earlier on, in the 1920s, Zagreb had been the city of the Zenitism movement and of Ljubomir Micić's *Zenit* magazine, whose pages were graced by texts and reproductions of works by Vasily Kandinsky, Lajos Kassák, El Lissitzky, Kazimir Malevich, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Vladimir Tatlin, László Móholy-Nágy, and Karel Teige, as well as by local artists such as Josip Seissel/Jo Klek. There were also the magazines *Dada Tank* and *Dada Jazz*, published by Dragan Aleksić and featuring contributions by Richard Huelsenbeck, Kurt Schwitters, and Tristan Tzara.

The exhibitions, then, were part of the very complex artistic atmosphere of postwar Yugoslavia, following the denunciation of the then-reigning ideology of Socialist Realism and paving the way for a unique form called "Socialist Modernism." Working in the same vein as the EXAT-51 and Gorgona groups, the local *Nove Tendencije* artists created a complex of artistic phenomena whose radicalism makes it stand out strongly from the mostly moderate local version of Socialist Modernism.

an extensive publication, *A Little-Known Story about a Movement, a Magazine, and the Computer's Arrival in Art: New Tendencies and Bit International, 1961–1973*.⁹

Bit International was a magazine published by the Galerija suvremene umjetnosti between 1968 and 1972. It produced a number of topical issues: "Theory of Information and the New Aesthetics," with texts by Max Bense and Abraham Moles; "Computers and Visual Research," with texts by Herbert W. Franke, Karl Gerstner, Leslie Mezei, Frieder Nake, Georg Nees, Michael A. Noll, Jiří Valoch, and others; "Design," with texts by Gui Bonsiepe, Tomas Maldonado, and others; "The Word Image: Poésie Concrète," edited by Vera Horvat Pintarić and others; and "Television," with texts by Eco, Renato Barilli, Gillo Dorfles, Martin Krampen, Pierre Schaeffer, and others. Especially significant were the magazine's international colloquiums, seminars, symposiums, work meetings, and less formal gatherings, arranged to discuss current

and professional problems but also establishing personal connections, successful collaborations, and close friendships.

The legacy of the Zagreb exhibitions remains fully evident today. These five shows initiated many discussions on the problematics of contemporary art practices, ranging from postwar Concrete art and Neo-Constructivism through monochrome painting, kinetic art, and the use of computers in art-making to the emergence of Conceptual art. This wide conversation enveloped a great number of participants, involving international networking, artists' groups, collaborations, and interpersonal communications that served as a platform for constructivist and activist thinking in a time of the unstoppable expansion of the mass media.

In his essay "*Die Utopie der Neuen Tendenzen*" (The Utopia of the New Tendencies) Rasmus Kleine comes to this pertinent conclusion:

The environment in which *Nove Tendencije* were created was, in essence, from the very beginning filled with optimism and hope. Although the consequences of World War II were still felt, young artists were looking ahead to what they thought would be a better future. ... Advances in technology and science were no longer considered a threat. The declared goal of *Nove Tendencije* was to answer this development and reconcile art, science, and technology. ... The works in *Nove Tendencije* aimed to make their viewers reflect on and understand the changed conditions of real life.¹⁰

The first of these exhibitions was not "a surprising case," in Mavignier's no doubt well-meant phrase. It could not have happened without an existing artistic foundation in Zagreb, a foundation of which the EXAT-51 and Gorgona groups were a part. The artists and theoreticians who initiated and participated in the *Nove Tendencije* exhibitions were aware that they were continuing a regional tradition in culture and art, a distinct "Other line" in ideological opposition to the prevailing moderate modernism. That line ran from the historical avant-gardes of the 1920s, including Zenitism and Dadaism, through EXAT-51 and Gorgona to *Nove Tendencije*. The fourth exhibition, in 1968–69, and the fifth, in 1973 opened up new topics, such as the use of computers,¹¹ visual and concrete poetry, and Conceptual art.¹² In doing so they fulfilled a far-reaching vision of the creators of the first *Nove Tendencije*. (Someone particularly to be noted here is Božo Bek, the director of the Galerija suvremene umjetnosti at the time.) That vision was to build an organizational and presentational platform in platform in the local context, although also international and with biennial continuity, and gathering innovative artists and directions from successive generations. Indeed these exhibitions became significant events in Europe, as were the retrospective shows examining them in Ingolstadt and Karlsruhe.

Translated from the Croatian by Dorotea Fotivec.

1 The *Nove Tendencije* exhibition, 1961, is listed as one of the significant exhibitions of that year in Jürgen Harten, Benjamin Buchloh, Rudi Fuchs, Konrad Fischer, John Matheson, and Hans Strelow, eds., *Prospekt/Retrospect: Europa 1946–1976* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1976). The catalogue also lists *Bewogen bewegung* (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam), *À 40° au-dessus de Dada* (Galerie J, Paris), *Le Nouveau Réalisme à Paris et à New York* (Galerie Rive Droite, Paris), *Avantgarde 61* (Städtisches Museum, Trier) as notable shows of that year. Participating artists were Marc Adrian, Alberto Biasi, Enrico Castellani, Ennio Chiggio, Andreas Christen, Toni Costa, Piero Dorazio, Karl Gerstner, Gerard von Graevenitz, Rudolf Kämmer, Julije Knifer, Edoardo Landi, Julio Le Parc, Heinz Mack, Piero Manzoni, Manfredo Massironi, Almir Mavignier, François Morellet, Gotthart Müller, Herbert Oehm, Ivan Picelj, Otto Piene, Uli Pohl, Dieter Rot, Joël Stein, Paul Talman, Günther Uecker, Marcel Wyss, and Walter Zehringer. The participants in *Nove Tendencije 2*, in 1963, were Marc Adrian, Getulio Alviani, Giovanni Anceschi, Vojin Bakić, Davide Boriani, Martha Boto, Enrico Castellani, Andreas Christen, Gianni Colombo, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Ugo Rodolfo Demarco, Gabriele De Vecchi, Piero Dorazio, Equipo 57, Héctor Garcia-Miranda, Karl Gerstner, Gruppo N, Dieter Hacker, Julije Knifer, Vlado Kristl, Enzo Mari, Julio Le Parc, Heinz Mack, Almir Mavignier, François Morellet, Gotthart Müller, Henk Peeters, Ivan Picelj, Uli Pohl, Karl Reinhartz, Vjenceslav Richter, Francisco Sobrino, Helge Sommerrock, Aleksandar Srnc, Klaus Staudt, Joël Stein, Miroslav Šutej, Paul Talman, Luis Tomasello, Günther Uecker, Grazia Varisco, Gerhard von Graevenitz, Ludwig Wilding, Jean-Pierre Yvaral, and Walter Zehringer.

2 See Matko Meštrović, "Nepoznate podrobnosti," *Fantom slobode* 3 (2010): 207–15.

3 Meštrović, "Razlozi i mogućnosti povijesnog osvješćivanja," *Nove Tendencije* 3 (Zagreb: Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, 1965), pp. 13–15.

4 Luciano Caramel, *GRAV: Groupe de recherche d'art visuel 1960–1968* (Milan: Electa Editrice, 1975), n.p.

5 Mavignier, "Nove tendencije 1—slučaj koji iznenaduje," in *Tendencije* 4 (Zagreb: Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, 1968–69), n.p.

6 See Massironi, "Appunti critici sugli apporti teorici all'interno della Nuova tendenza dal 1959 al 1964," *Nova tendenzia* 3 (Zagreb: Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, 1965), pp. 23–31, and "Ricerche visuali," *Situazioni dell'arte contemporanea* (Rome: Edizioni Librarte, 1976), pp. 50–63.

7 Meštrović also wrote the key theoretical texts "Nove spoznaje u likovnoj umjetnosti" (1962), "Ideologija Novih tendencija" (1963), "Metodologija i utopija" (1963), "Scijentifikacija kao uvjet humanizacije" (1963), and "Razlozi i mogućnosti povijesnog osvješćivanja" (1965). Gorgona members also organized exhibitions by two participants in the first *Nove Tendencije* exhibition at Studio G in Zagreb: Morellet in 1962 and Dorazio in 1963.

8 See *Die Neuen Tendenzen. Eine europäische Künstlerbewegung 1961–1973*, ed. Tobias Hoffman and Rasmus Kleine (Ingolstadt: Museum für Konkrete Kunst, 2006)

9 *A Little-Known Story about a Movement, a Magazine, and the Computer's Arrival in Art: New Tendencies and Bit International, 1961–1973*, ed. Margit Rosen in collaboration with Peter Weibel, Darko Fritz, and Marija Gattin (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2011).

10 Kleine, "Die Utopie der Neuen Tendenzen," *Die Neuen Tendenzen*, ed. Hoffman and Kleine, pp. 38–46.

11 *Tendencije* 5 had a "Computers and Visual Research" section, including the artists Vladimir Bonačić, Waldemar Cordeiro, Herbert Franke, Miljenko Horvat, Auro Lecci, Manfred Mohr, Georg Nees, John Whitney, Edward Zajec, Vilko Žiljak, and others.

12 *Tendencije* 5's "Conceptual Art" section included Giovanni Anselmo, John Baldessari, Daniel Buren, Radomir Damjanović-Damjan, Braco Dimitrijević, Douglas Huebler, Jannis Kounellis, On Kawara, Sol LeWitt, Giulio Paolini, Giuseppe Penone, Bálint Szombathy, Ilija Šoškić, Goran Trbuljak, and others.

1941 1942 1943 1944 1945 1946 1947 1948 1949 1950 1951
1952 1953 1954 1955 1956 1957 1958 1959 1960 1961 1962
1963 1964 1965

ART BETWEEN THE PACIFIC AND THE ATLANTIC

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Hermann Nitsch's first *Aktion* ('Action') takes place on December 19 at the flat of Otto Mühl, Vienna, 1963.

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Lygia Clark's first major European exhibition takes place at Signals, London, 1965.

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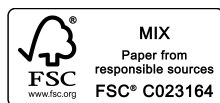
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