

Routledge Advances in Theatre and Performance Studies

PERFORMANCE ART IN THE SECOND PUBLIC SPHERE

EVENT-BASED ART IN LATE SOCIALIST EUROPE

Edited by

Katalin Cseh-Varga and Adam Czirak



Performance Art in the Second Public Sphere

Performance Art in the Second Public Sphere is the first interdisciplinary analysis of performance art in East, Central and Southeast Europe under socialist rule. By investigating the specifics of event-based art forms in these regions, each chapter explores the particular critical roles that this work assumed under conditions of censorship.

The artistic networks of Yugoslavia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, East Germany and Czechoslovakia are discussed with a particular focus on the discourses that shaped artistic practice at the time, drawing on the methods of Performance Studies and Media Studies as well as more familiar reference points from art history and area studies.

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Performance Art in the Second Public Sphere is to be viewed as a historical phenomenon and is accessible today mostly through documents. The documents we had been dealing with were made available either by the artists themselves or by archives, collections and other institutions focusing on East European art history. Both of us are thankful to all of these parties, whom we consider to be partners in contributing to a better understanding of the second public sphere's history.

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Katalin Cseh-Varga and Adam Czihak



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Introduction

Katalin Cseh-Varga and Adam Czirak

The Hungarian visual and performance artist El Kazovszkij talks about her experience of entering the second public sphere as if it had been a *rite de passage*, an initiation that went hand in hand with the transformation of her world view, aesthetic conceptions, and social status. She experienced this transition during the first encounter with Péter Halász's famous apartment theatre in Budapest at the beginning of the 1970s:

You could only approach them with the help of a friend. The “entrance ticket” was a connection as well. I got here by chance – on one occasion, a friend of mine, who attended almost every performance, invited me to come along. Even the way we got in was exciting. It started with the invitation, and it was already underway as you entered the house and, along with others, you slowly made your way towards the door of the apartment. Your “entrance ticket” almost turned you into a conspirator.

(Kazovszkij 1991, p. 38)

The story recounts a singular event, indeed an induction, which, though not necessarily random, was by no means bestowed on each and every participant. Kazovszkij describes a spatial and cultural transition that at the same time has political and epistemological consequences. A new horizon opens up for her beyond the communication system of 1970s Hungary, which was regulated and controlled by the state and could be called the first public sphere. This public sphere was strongly influenced by socialist ideologies, in fact it was functionalized by them and therefore exclusively served the realization of the communist project. This official public sphere, the discourses of which were regimented, if not totalized, was kept under surveillance by the state and regulated by censorship, as well as bans on writing, display and performance. One could say that, with regard to its hierarchical order, the first public sphere was actually not public at all but simply a domain where the policing of discourse could exercise its power.

The official public sphere of art production

The formation of an ideologically one-dimensional public sphere in which the production and reception of art could take place in the so-called Eastern Bloc has a

long history. As part of an effort to establish socialist realism as the dominant ideology, after 1948 cultural life was strongly regulated. Thus the visual and performance artists who strove for artistic autonomy in the satellite states of the Soviet Union inevitably became adversaries of the hegemonic art system. The starting point of the all-encompassing expansion of socialist realism, which until the 1960s was the only artistic style in Eastern Europe endorsed and legitimized by the state, can be traced back to the Stalinist Soviet Union of the 1930s. Socialist realism replaced the heterogeneous artistic endeavours of the Russian avant-garde and became the dominant aesthetic theory and practice in the Soviet Union. As an artistic ideology, it called for a radical break with tradition and the existing social conditions, in full accord with the nationalisation of private property.

The fact that this demand strongly resonates with the avant-garde desire to abandon the museum and emancipate art from “art history” is a paradoxical coincidence which made the avant-garde artists’ relations to the aesthetic principles of the Bolshevik party propaganda of the 1930s highly ambivalent. Already in the avantgardistic drive to “change the world instead of representing it” we can recognise a key slogan of Stalinist artistic agitation.

Despite these similarities between propagandistic and avant-garde ideas, a clear distinction was made in the Soviet Union and its satellite states between autonomous and ideological – that is, between nonconformist and social realist art – and this was justified by their differing stylistic intentions. The latter, in accord with party guidelines, proclaimed an antiformalist politics of representation that propagated the building of socialism and the performative creation of a reality not yet existent but in the making. One could say that the first public sphere was held together by an ideological project, the creation of a socialist consciousness, and this orientation had a far-reaching impact on the forms and the interpretation of art, including painting, sculpture, film and theatre arts. The governments of these states tried to use their artists for political aims, not considering aesthetic experiments worthy of support, and had a vested interest in maintaining the “dominance of the political discourse over the aesthetic one” (Franz 2002, p. 24).

In his groundbreaking monograph *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) Jürgen Habermas points out that the historical, social and ideological constellations of a given situation necessarily shape and transform the structures of the public sphere. Focusing on Western European societies, Habermas describes the transformation from a feudalistic public sphere of representation to a rational-critical public sphere of the bourgeoisie and its negative developments in the age of mass media (Balme 2014, p. 5). Habermas focuses on a period that is historically and geopolitically very different from late socialist Eastern Europe. A few decades later, feeling the need to respond to his critics, Habermas reflected on some of his widely discussed statements and admitted that he had previously neglected the “coexistence of competing public spheres and [did not take] account of the dynamics of those processes of communication that are excluded from the dominant public sphere” (Habermas 1992, p. 425). These two aspects, which are missing from the monograph, are relevant to understanding how public spheres function in any

society, regardless of whether it is based on socialist or capitalist values. Habermas's notion of the public sphere refers to a *forum for communication* that is structured and transformed by various mechanisms, e.g., the relations of power. In the paper quoted above, Habermas also touches upon the relationship between dictatorship and communication. In the classical understanding of totalitarianism, communication channels and contents are controlled by the state and therefore no "autonomous public spheres" can emerge (p. 454). While this formulation was directly linked to the fate of certain communist dissident, Habermas does not mention the fact that even within authoritarian structures islands of limited freedom can appear.

Nancy Fraser belonged to those criticizing Habermas for his bourgeois approach and for focusing only on the public sphere of a single class. Her concept of the transnational public sphere describes the public sphere as a conflictual battlefield of many publics which is heavily politicized (Fraser 2005, n.p.). While Fraser's arguments were developed for late capitalist societies (Fraser 1994, pp. 250–251), the observation that there is a plurality of public spheres is applicable to state socialism too, even though the politicized access to the public sphere was not always possible for the (artistic) practices of an alternative culture under socialism. In a chapter of the present volume Ileana Pintilie calls it "miraculous" that under one of the most repressive dictatorships of the 20th century, Ceaușescu's Romania, performance artists managed to establish their tiny islands of communication and creation despite the comprehensive censorship and discursive control. In this sense questioning the emergence of artistic production in the second public sphere cannot be put on the same level with Fraser's concept of democratic "plurality" or Michael Warner's idea of counter-publics, since the subject of Warner's study, the question of marginalized and stigmatized social groups on the periphery of society (Warner 2002, pp. 423–425) is closer to identity politics than to the problems of underground culture under dictatorship.¹

At this point we could agree that the public sphere is a *material/immaterial platform for communication and opinion sharing*, which in reality (and throughout its history) never existed in an ideal form of unrestricted participation. On the contrary, different opinions sometimes clash with no chance for compromise.² Some scholars of the history of Eastern Europe, however, have recently recognized how important it is to look at the diverse examples of public spheres in the former Eastern Bloc, but they mostly remain on the level of statements and offer no methodology or comparative approach. In the introduction to their book *Underground Publishing and the Public Sphere*, Jan C. Behrends and Thomas Lindenberger agree on the following hypothesis:

This volume shows that a liberal public sphere of the Habermasian type is indeed only one historical model, one serving as an ideal inspiring practical struggles for practical goals during the fight for civic emancipation against the privileges of the arcane powers of late absolutism. Many others have existed and continue to exist in the modern age. They have their own rules and produce their own cultures – like those of censorship and underground

publishing – but they also fulfill specific functions for different regimes. Different notions of the public and the private shape the political cultures of Europe. (Behrends and Lindenberger 2014, p. 16)

As the summarizing quotation from Behrends and Lindenberger has shown, there is an urgent need to review canonized discourses of the public sphere if we want to find proper access to public life in the different phases and regions of actually existing socialism. Unfortunately, there is no further discourse built on these inspiring ideas, and so our volume aims to take a thorough look at the regional, political, social, cultural and artistic layers of public spheres throughout Eastern, Central and South-Eastern Europe.

As numerous case studies will show, the phenomenon of the second public sphere exists across borders and has a yet unnoticed potential for reflecting on the experimental and alternative art scene. Beáta Hock and Angelika Richter, for instance, pay particular attention to a band of women performance artists who found the possibility of new forms of collective expression in textile workshops and experiments, which seems to be a traditional and apolitical art genre only at first sight. Miško Šuvaković describes different modes of “tactical networking” between institutional and neo-avant-gardist areas of Yugoslavian performance art which undermine the strict division between the first and second public sphere. Berenika Szymanski-Düll shows the extreme expansion of art practices in Poland by examining the dependence of the demonstrations and mass protests of the 1980s on their aesthetic and even theatrical dimensions in subverting the dominant social and cultural ideologies of the time. With this volume on Theatre and Performance Studies we would like to open a new forum for interlinking a precise discourse of the second public sphere with the event-based art forms that played a central role in the Eastern European neo-avant-garde.

Second public spheres

Shortly before 1989, the emblematic year of the system change, a special issue of the magazine *Social Research* was published that presented a wide range of theoretical positions on the idea of an independent society (Benda 1988) which might appear within the sociopolitical framework of late socialism. Sociological models and opinions from within Central and Eastern Europe, inspired by Václav Benda, Ivan M. Jirous and Václav Havel, were for the first time presented in a coherent form to an international (if only “Western”) audience. Participants invited for this particular issue had to reflect on four questions:

- 1 Do you think the term “independent society” is relevant and meaningful under present conditions in your country?
- 2 If so, what would you include as being the essential features of an “independent society”?
- 3 What are the immediate purposes of the independent activities and organizations thus conceived?

- 4 What are the long-term implications and possible consequences of such an “independent society”?

(Skilling cited in Benda et al. 1988, pp. 212–213)

Turning towards his essential concept of a “parallel polis,” Czech political activist and mathematician Václav Benda argued that its main goal is “to tear down or corrode these miniature iron curtains, to break through the communications and social blockades” (ibid., p. 218). Benda also emphasized that the parallel polis exists *beside* the official sphere and totalitarian regimes cannot prevent its existence. Slovak philosopher Milan Šimečka, another contributor to this inquiry, articulated his idea about how “independent thinking/culture” is developing: as a reaction to repressive dynamics in socialist societies it is opposed to their monolithic structure, it represents plurality and sometimes it emerges spontaneously (ibid., pp. 222–226). At some point, the characteristics of this independent society begin to resemble Jirous’s “second culture,” a concept first designed to describe the music underground. The Czech poet’s notion of a second culture stands for a creative one, which is “not dependent on official channels of communication, or on the hierarchy of values of the establishment” (Jirous cited in ibid., p. 212).

If we start thinking about the notion of the second public sphere, the aspects listed above seem familiar. The second public sphere is usually perceived as a Cold War phenomenon typical in the Soviet influence zone representing unofficial activity. However, the historical situation and its explanations are far more complex than this. As the contributors of the special issue of *Social Research* showed, if one considers the sociological reflections on alternative forms of culture existing parallel to authoritarian rule, a more detailed image of sociocultural phenomena appears which is opposed to the cliché of a Cold War dichotomy. The differentiation of public spheres in actually existing socialism is important not only because it enables us to question the idea of a state regarded as a “control freak” and to understand the atmosphere in which a given artwork was produced or presented. To reconstruct the exact functional mechanisms of public spheres in the late socialist era, we need to rethink the categorical distinctions between official and unofficial or legal and illegal. As the following argumentation will demonstrate, the first and the second public sphere are both umbrella terms that are suited to describe the post-totalitarian condition³ and its art production.

Another necessary step is to get to the bottom of the phenomenon called second public sphere, which we take as the fundamental focal point of the present publication. Without presenting an in-depth genealogy of it, it is necessary to reflect on the notion as it was understood in late socialism. It is our conviction that the possibility of developing a *limited forum for autonomous communication* in Eastern, Central and South-Eastern Europe originates from the emergence of communist rule throughout the region. In order not to lose sight of a *regional perspective*, we prefer to explain the phenomenon of the second public sphere by incorporating theoretical and methodological considerations stemming from the region and the era.⁴ The specific features of the second public sphere were described by many intellectuals, philosophers of Eastern European origin who reflected on secret activities and clandestine existence.

Václav Havel is using the notion of parallel culture to describe a segment of the public sphere that avoids state-controlled media and information channels. Havel stresses the point that stereotypes and superficial knowledge about the inner dynamics of parallel cultures may result in an overestimation of this sphere (Morganová 2014, p. 27). It would be a mistake to romanticize the parallel culture and to depict it as something heroic. As Maja and Reuben Fowkes show in the closing chapter of this volume, in which they touch upon re-enactments of historical East-European performances after 1989, a contemporary perspective on the history of performance art should not be limited to “mythologizing or sacralizing” its legacy in the second public sphere, but should instead be reflected and acknowledged, even today, as a renewable critical position beyond today’s neo-liberal art market.

Relatively late in the history of actually existing communism, Elemér Hankiss developed a concept of three different social models that referred to different forums of the public sphere under oppression. These three types of society are the first, the second and the alternative society. The first one is characterized by vertical organization, top-down effects of power constitution, state property, centralisation, dominance of politics, over-ideologization, transparency and legitimacy. The second society is slightly opposed to this model. But the third type, the alternative society, is the complete opposite of the first one: horizontal organization, bottom-up effects of power constitution, autonomy of economic and social participants, balance of differentiation and integrity (Hankiss 1989, pp. 110–119). The alternative society is the ideal form of social structure into which actually existing socialism should transform or which should follow a possible collapse of the communist system. Despite its potential, it remained a utopia; but as a model it rests upon the experiences made with the second society and its public sphere: how could the in-betweenness of this temporary condition be translated into guidelines for a democratic social structure? If we take a closer look at the second society and its public sphere, it becomes clear that neither of them is separable from the first society and its public area of influence. As Hankiss himself stated, the first and the second public spheres are interconnected and there is a parasitic relationship between them; one cannot exist without the other (*ibid.*, p. 119). This observation supports our earlier argument that the different layers of the public sphere function as a whole, and this is precisely the reason why the first public sphere, dominated by a totalitarian order, generates an alternative culture, which in turn is not able to unfold its strategies without an opponent. Performance artists were able to subvert the unquestioned rituals of socialist everyday life.

In her case study, Andrea Bátorová sees in artistic interventions, like that of Lubomír Ďurček’s actions at a parade on May 1 (*Mechanical Views. May 1 [Mechanické pohledy. 1. máj]*, 1980), unconventional and confusing views on the political representation of socialism; Amy Bryzgel explains the clashes between the first and the second public sphere by analyzing Sanja Iveković’s performance *Triangle (Trokut, 1979)*, which was carried out on her balcony, a threshold between private sphere and official publicness. An even more radical intervention becomes apparent in Andrej Mirčev’s interpretation of Tomislav Gotovac’s naked walk in Zagreb called

Lying Naked on the Pavement, Kissing the Pavement (Zagreb, I Love You!) (*Lezanje Gol Na Asfaltu, Ljubljenje asfalta [Zagreb, Volim Te!]*, 1981). In this the author precisely identifies how Gotovac exposed the first public sphere's exclusion mechanisms regarding gender, labour and art.

The argument that the first and the second public spheres are interwoven is supported by further Hungarian theoreticians, such as Miklós Haraszti and György Konrád. Haraszti draws our attention to the twofold character of the second public sphere:⁵ on the one hand it has a certain unconscious quality to it, an introverted nature; on the other hand, however, it has a radical potential due to the direct contact with its audiences, which is why it is often oppressed by official politics, as in the case of counter-publics (Haraszti 1986, p. 84). Radical artworks or other cultural products might be pushed into the domain of the second public sphere because some organs of the regime are not able to decode them and fear that they could possibly have unforeseeable effects (Haraszti 1982, p. 79). This was also the case in the first Hungarian happening, which according to Kata Krasznahorkai challenged the authorities' ban strategies, since happenings were a yet unknown way of producing meaning and generating art collectives in the late 1960s. In the chapter, Krasznahorkai argues that instead of prohibiting strange art events, the censors ordered special agents, well educated in contemporary art practices, to decode them and to relate them to the emerging performative genres.

Konrád reflects on the close connection between the two spheres of publicness and also argues that the second public sphere, unlike counter-publics, *extends the possibilities of a given public system* and does not necessarily aim to change it (Konrád 1979, p. iii). The second public sphere is a "byproduct" of the socialist order. Its separation from a system of ideological rules is not helpful because the mechanisms and strategies of an alternative culture can only unfold within or parallel to but not always against the first public sphere.

The manifestations of the second public sphere are acts or experiments to create an autonomous forum for cultural production. The idea of autonomy as a central element of the second public sphere comes up in a number of significant discourses. Here we could once again mention Hankiss or Konrád, but Zsuzsa Hegedűs was also dreaming of a "self-creative society" emerging out of a parallel cultural environment with a "genuinely new capacity to *invent and realize*, and therefore to *choose*, its own *futures* in an *autonomous manner*" (Hegedűs 1989, p. 31). But at this point it is necessary to remind ourselves of Havel's warning against the mystification of the second public sphere, since the domain of alternative culture developed its own dominant figures and hierarchies.

It is not easy to find an adequate definition for a phenomenon with such a wide range as the second public sphere. As an umbrella term for various unofficial activities and strategies, its relevance and manifestations are manifold; they change according to the different stages of the late socialist era. The second public sphere is a (pseudo-)autonomous arena of communication and opinion sharing, a network and cultural production of individuals and groups, which existed in addition to a dominant public sphere, with which it was interconnected. It needs to be stressed

that the second public sphere has an extremely fluid structure which eludes institutionalization or static integration into a dogmatic system (Cseh-Varga 2018).

Plurality and fluidity, however, manifested themselves not only in the way artists communicated with each other and organized their networks but also in their aesthetics. The principles of representation imposed by the state indiscriminately excluded all alternative styles from the discourse regardless of their aesthetic vocabulary. Thus, artists that did not draw on the topics of socialist everyday life either had to be prepared for the sanctions provoked by their rebellious actions or had to flee into a sort of “inner emigration” and unite as representatives of fundamentally differing aesthetic programs, regardless of whether they were advocates of conservative or (late) modernist, conceptual or progressive movements. In this context, Hungarian sound artist Endre Székárosi talks about an ideological distance to the official art scene, a “difference determined or justified sociologically which, instead of producing an alternative, avant-garde culture, brings forth an underground or counter-culture which by no means has to be radical in aesthetic terms; there are many examples of its conservatism” (2006, p. 80). Underground artists turned away from figurative and thematic painting, the didactic narratives of fiction, and the mimetic methods of representation which propagated automatized ways of identifying with a role originating in Stanislavski’s practice, and ended up in isolation – or as Boris Groys puts it, in “the prison of time” (1992, p. 31).

However, the ontological connotation of Groys’s vividly formulated “prison of time” should not confuse us. The second public sphere ought not to be misunderstood as a fixed state of topological frames or static communities. In fact it refers to a network of human relations which generate their spaces and audiences themselves. As Christopher Balme notes, “the public sphere is almost never a real space but rather a set of rules enabling debate and discussion to occur” (Balme 2014, p. ix). Since the state-controlled cultural institutions did not provide venues where neo-avant-garde artists and their addressees could have met, it is no wonder that these outsiders tended to resort to the same kind of spaces over and over again. As Laine Kristberga, Cristian Nae, and Adam Czirak show in their case studies for the present volume, basements, private apartments or abandoned natural sites served in Latvia, Romania, and Czechoslovakia as preferred areas for performative, fleeting and hard-to-control forms of artistic articulation, as opposed to material or durable artefacts. The claim that communication and art production in the second public sphere were open is also substantiated by the usual terms used to describe the underground scene: “oppositional, dissident, alternative, differently minded, parallel, non-conformist, autonomous or independent” (Eichwede 2011, p. 20). The freedom of interpretation, the plurality of perspectives and the independence from directives of artistic ideology were the most important motivating factors for underground artists to refuse to participate in centrally managed art production and instead support themselves and their art by taking up private jobs.

One can take these restricted conditions of production as an explanation for why the protagonists of the second public sphere have developed so many creative and subversive artistic practices, and why they organized themselves in such an incomparably efficient manner. As the brief introductory remarks on our case studies

demonstrate, it is fascinating to observe what kind of artistic products popped up under “tolerant repression”, a “more liberalized, but still closely watched public sphere” (Fowkes 2015, p. 116). The art communities in Poland, Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and the GDR were connected with fellow artists in Yugoslavia, West Germany, France, North America, Latin America, and elsewhere. Dietmar Unterkofler’s paper demonstrates exactly this kind of complex international connectedness by providing insights into the participation of Yugoslavian performance and conceptual art at the Edinburgh Festival, as well as into the Bosch+Bosch Group’s event-based collaborations between internationalism and underground existence. Despite the differences in the ideological alignments, stylistic origins, and historical, social and cultural backgrounds of Eastern European artists, they thrived on international cooperation.⁶

Still, as we know, artistic freedom in the underground was ambivalent. The price one had to pay for the emancipation from an art system brought under state control was being subjected to punishments, persecution and control affecting even the private sphere. Artists had to accept that they were continually working against the background of restrictions and that they were to perceive themselves as somewhat ghostlike antagonists permanently excluded from the consolidated orders of representation. This is another reason why public spheres cannot be analyzed independently of each other and why the experiences of socialist everyday life affected artistic expression in the parallel culture too. In the performing arts, one can find a whole slew of emblematic and unique aesthetic motifs like melancholia, silence or reticence (Czirak 2012, pp. 76–111), and orality (Havasréti 2008, p. 212) as a form of invisible, undetectable art. The techniques of ironic exploitation and transforming official strategic patterns through subversive affirmation should also be mentioned here (Arns and Sasse 2006). We can conclude that different public spheres exist in relation to one another, they are intertwined – above all with regard to their antagonistic interdependence filled with conflict, but also with regard to the “double agents”, informants, and “dubious” artists that worked on the border of art scenes that were supported and art scenes that were forbidden.⁷

Performance art in the second public sphere

In a very general sense, the neo-avant-garde and thus most of the examples of event-based art discussed in this book represent a number of artistic variables of expression which, through formal and qualitative “rebellion”, turn against a dominant high modernism. Neo-avant-garde art could also be read as a re-interpretation of historical role models (such as the avant-gardes at the beginning of the twentieth century), as a direct or indirect political comment, or as an experimental, structurally built link to utopia (Cseh-Varga 2018). Just like the second public sphere, it is based on a subversive discourse with no strict compromise and represents an “uprising” against restrictive forces, including institutionalization.

As far as the visual arts are concerned, we can distinguish between two strategies of subversion in East-Central Europe. The first one can be located in institutionalized theatre art, and the second one in visual and performance art. In theatres there

emerged a politics of “double talk”: that is, a discursive practice which, despite the censored and strictly controlled repertory, enabled a separation of saying and showing, of textual reference and staged meaning. This representational tactic was a tolerated form of critique, provided it could be kept under regular supervision and control.

The second subversion strategy emerged as visual and action artists created a direct and concrete presentational method of theatrical showing outside the state-controlled forms of communication. The proliferation of happenings, performances and Fluxus actions related to an artistic effort aimed not only at opening a platform of dissent to criticize the maxims of actually existing socialism but also, and more important, at achieving the privilege of self-determination, causing radical disruptions in the social discourse and thereby creating an alternate universe of communication and sociality. In her chapter, Jasmina Tumbas argues that the very decisions artists made in Croatia and Serbia in the 1970s and 1980s, their willingness to be active individuals under a semi-totalitarian regime, resulted in critiquing socialist ideology.

But why were performative art genres forbidden? How can we explain Kristine Stiles’s diagnosis, which she made from a trans-cultural perspective? “Performance recovered the social force of art, and became one of the last and most effective modes of resistance to multiple forms of domination, a claim supported by the fact that performance artists throughout the world, from the 1960s to the present, have been the most frequently arrested and incarcerated artists.” There is certainly something of the protest, of the political, in the fact that performances ignore the imperative of realism and fictionalization, and are characterized by self-referentiality. By making their bodies the actual objects, performance artists were running the risk of having their very bodily existence itself censored and forbidden instead of their works. However, without intending to cast doubt on Kristine Stiles’s general observation, we would like to offer a few further points for consideration and investigate the question of what the specificities of Eastern European performance art are.

As we know, Western performance or body art developed in radical opposition to the principle of imitation in the theatre on the one hand, and the marketing strategies of the visual arts on the other. In Eastern and Central Europe, however, there was no art market at all. As a consequence, a heterogeneous conglomerate of artistic positions emerged which could not be defined by programmatic demarcations. Instead, event-based art connected artists that, first and foremost, found common ground through their exclusion from the first public sphere. They were led, however, by heteronomous impulses.

From a genealogical perspective, around the end of the 1960s the performative instances of creation and presentation begin to proliferate in the works of Eastern European writers and visual artists. In order to avoid censorship, they “performed” their works in the form of readings, spontaneous interventions, or in the framework of short-lived exhibitions often lasting no more than a couple of hours. The flexibility and ephemerality of these events helped them to avoid the danger of censorship. This, however, is only one of the (functional) differences from the “West”.

Another specific characteristic of the Eastern and Central European performance scene is the emergence of a trend contrary to event-like performances. Many artists dismissed the trait of *liveness* and converted their body art actions directly into formats of documentation. Performance artists such as Tibor Hajas, Orshi Drozdik, Jiří Kovanda or Mladen Stilinović – and we could easily expand the list – realized a great number of unannounced performances exclusively in front of their cameras, and then circulated the photographs as manifestations of the ability to avoid censorship.⁸ The photographs attested to the ontological fact of having executed the performance, and on this account they could not be conceived as pure documents. Their performative surplus lies in the fact that they not only authenticated the action but also made it available for an audience for the very first time. In the history of “Western” performance art, the ontology of the event, that is, the phenomenal and non-reproducible nature of the staged body, was the focal point of artistic practice, so performance documentations were for a long time generally considered unintentional remainders of Live Art and only gained recognition in the 2000s.⁹ In Eastern Europe, by contrast, performance documents functioned as media. They were primary manifestations of actions and were assigned existential relevance from the very beginning. Whether we are discussing unrealized instructions or scripts, self-published texts such as samizdat reports, or performances enacted only for the camera, we have to accept that Eastern European performance art cannot be defined on the basis of the criteria of *liveness*. In fact, *flexibility* emerged as a unique feature of the performance scenes behind the Iron Curtain and provoked the creative dissolution of borders between genres, media, egocentric artistic positions and structures of the public sphere. The transgressive and, by definition, hard-to-define practice of Eastern European performance art is intimately interwoven with the structures of public spheres, which gave the actions a political dimension and determined their aesthetics as well. Even if the performances were personal acts, they always confirmed the existence of artistic networks and demonstrated the relative freedom of communication in the niches beyond the official public sphere. Exactly this is the point Roddy Hunter makes by exploring the art practices of networked communities across Cold War borders. His interest in horizontal distribution, transmission, and his reflections on the bi-polar conditions of the 1960s and 1970s leads him to a comparative analysis of Robert Filliou’s *The Eternal Network* and György Galántai’s *Telepathic Music* (*Telepatikus Zene*, 1979), Mieko Shiomi’s *Spatial Poem* series, and Jarosław Kozłowski’s and Andrzej Kostolowski’s *NET Manifesto*.

In view of the aesthetic alterity of neo-avant-garde actions, it is no wonder that, as Kristine Stiles pointed out, throughout its entire history Eastern European performance art was continually threatened by censorship, suppression and even obliteration. Since the use of violence, in the form of actions of self-harm or the highlighting of the artist’s corporeality, was regarded as outside the narrative of economic production and, thus, anti-ideological, the authorities saw a great danger in the performative art forms of direct self-presentation. With regard to the persecution of performance artists, one could speak of the double manifestation of censorship. In addition to the actions being stigmatized as progressive and banned, the

reviews and reports of art events were also controlled and put in the service of ideological propaganda. The example of official art criticism shows that the artworks or actions critical of the system were either not reviewed at all or described only superficially, which ensured that the subversive aspect of neo-avant-garde aesthetics could never be addressed. Descriptions and analyses of performances existed mainly in the records of the state security agencies and even there in obfuscated form. In addition, there was a third level of censorship¹⁰ in Eastern Europe – namely, the complete denial of the existence of censorship itself; the activities of a discursive police were kept secret.

Second public sphere: an analytical backdrop to investigating performance art in late socialism

The aim of the following case studies is to outline the concept of the second public sphere as a foundation for a comparative and transcultural analysis that seeks to explore the centres and peripheries of the Eastern European neo-avant-garde, especially performance art. This approach proved to be productive in the contributions presented in this publication, even if the structure and historical development of the parallel cultures in the so-called Eastern Bloc were heterogeneous. The period of the late 1950s had different dynamics and rhythms in each country, the processes of liberalization took place asynchronously (if at all), the manifestos and the aesthetics of various generations of artists differed significantly. Nevertheless, the simultaneous emergence and disappearance of subcultural scenes beyond the Iron Curtain mean and meant that there is a common denominator for the analysis of the Eastern and Central European neo-avant-garde. All the contributions of this volume support the argument that the concept of the second public sphere does have analytical potential and enables us to ask questions about the significance, political nature and impact of autonomous art under ideological repression, as well as to investigate the specific conditions of production of the era from a transnational perspective. With regard to its actual publicness, performance art was a central artistic medium in the second public sphere. Through the analysis of its sociological structures and the global recognition of its aesthetic strategies it is possible to get a differentiated picture of the avant-garde art of a geopolitical area. Despite the constant examination of the area, Eastern European performance has been marginalized over the decades, at least in discussions in Theatre and Performance Studies.

The following contributions offer an overview of the geocultural circumstances of Eastern European performance and action art, and discuss examples of art production with regard to the question of what the actual constitution of the second public sphere was. How could the protagonists of the second public sphere make themselves visible in the first public sphere? As the authors situate the history of the Eastern European neo-avant-garde in the era of the Cold War, they are consistently interested in the differences and similarities that characterized the roles of parallel cultures or counter-publics in the “West”, the “East”, as well as non-aligned Yugoslavia.

We divided the book into four sections. The first section comprises contributions that have a close focus on the dilemma of how to conceptualize and analyse the geopolitical (ideological, social and cultural) conditions of art production in the former Eastern Bloc from a national and (above all) a transnational perspective. While some of the texts emphasize the importance of international constellations and scrutinize the divided world order during the Cold War, others zoom in on the national level to look for the built-in asymmetries and paradoxes of state socialism. The second section of the present volume includes papers that investigate the relationship between performance practices and spatial dimensions.

Since performance art was almost completely excluded from the first public sphere, artists practicing event-based art were forced to look for alternative or underground spaces that were open to spatial experiments in a rather hostile environment. Performing in nature with minimalist gestures and actions; provocative nudity in public spaces, in cellars, at abandoned, unconventional locations; or turning urban demonstrations into events of theatricality are only a few examples that indicate the plurality of performative venues.

The third section opens up a critical perspective on the gender structures and conditions of art production in the second public sphere. (Proto)feminist and queer strategies in live art can be considered as the most critical examples of artistic explorations oriented towards the acknowledgment of subversive or utopian states of the gendered social body. The approaches taken up in the texts range from an indirect heteronormative critique inscribed into explorations of gender in art to an opposition against monolithic (sexual) order and the absent histories of performing women artists.

Our final section is a closing chapter reflecting on the case studies of the volume while providing an outlook into post-socialist performances in the region. Re-enactments seemed to be the most adequate forum for observing the engagement with the contested legacies of socialism, for performatively challenging the political, social and cultural leftovers of the pre-1989 era as well as the transformations that followed it, and for tracing the second public sphere's historical backlog and considering its potential reimplementation under the conditions of neo-liberalism and neo-bureaucratism.

Notes

- 1 Another important side note is that the second public sphere is not identical with a counter-culture or counter-publics. According to Hungarian sociologist Anna Wessely, counter-publics, just like counter-cultures, are the product of radical denial and seek to reshape social structures. The main goal of counter-cultures is to re-form the political system, since they are not content with small structural changes. Thus the integration of counter-cultures into a social, political system is not possible. This is the reason why the almost "aggressive" attitude of counter-publics has only little in common with the more adaptive nature of the second public sphere. See Wessely cited in Veres 2002, pp. 195–196.
- 2 This definition is very close to what Chantal Mouffe called "agonism", although this particular statement is not limited to late capitalist democracy. See Mouffe 2007, pp. 30–31.

- 3 The post-totalitarian condition stands for a more subtle, not clearly recognizable form of control in late socialist Eastern and Central Europe. See Kemp-Welch 2014, pp. 5–6 and Václav Havel quoted in Piotrowski 2009, p. 287.
- 4 Klara Kemp-Welch has represented this academic attitude very prominently (2014).
- 5 Also called “public sphere between the lines” (Haraszti 1986, p. 80).
- 6 Transnational and community relations and information networks were kept alive by special forms of “extra-institutional” communication, which included systematically or randomly smuggled information and conversations with artists who had the opportunity to go abroad in order to broaden their knowledge on international tendencies in contemporary art.
- 7 The interconnectedness of the first and second public spheres in neo-avant-garde art during late socialism is to be recognized on different levels: artists as mediators between the two spheres, official decisions made about “progressive art”, the intervention of state forces in art production or the constant surveillance by the secret police within the inner circles of subcultural art communities. While the fraught relationship between the first and the second public sphere was occasionally addressed directly in art pieces, the reaction to the Big Brother rule was usually oblique. And this is why we have to be careful when describing a given art project as political (Bishop 2012, p. 139).
- 8 The expansion of performance-documentations was motivated by the artists’ attempt to save and archive their actions themselves (Petrešin-Bachelez 2010a and 2010b).
- 9 Compare Sven Lütticken’s and Philip Auslander’s writings, as well as the valorisation of performance-documents in the increasing prevalence of re-enactments nowadays (Auslander 2012; Lütticken 2005).
- 10 Another important form of censorship was individual self-censorship. For more on this see Haraszti 1986, pp. 80–84.

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Part I

Geopolitics and transnationalism of art production



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1 Beyond “East” and “West” through The Eternal Network

Networked artists’ communities as
counter-publics of Cold War Europe

Roddy Hunter

This chapter considers how “networked communities” (Findeisen and Zimmermann 2015) of post avant-garde¹ artists in the Cold War period reconceptualised frontiers of mind and territory named “East” and “West” particularly in Europe. Preceded and overlapped by events such as the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the launch of *Sputnik 1* in 1957, the Televised Moon Landing of 1969, and as illustrated by Robert Filliou’s 1968 conception of The Eternal Network, the 1960s–1970s was an expansive period for the artistic counter-culture (Roszak 1995) in both Europe and the United States of America in particular. Artists arguably resisted state-driven Cold War propaganda, on both sides, through intervening in communication systems such as postal, radio, telephonic and television transmission to develop their own horizontally distributive “distance art and activism” (Chandler and Neumark 2006, p. 4). This networked approach of “artists turning communication media into their art media” (ibid., p. 3) is also where “art, activism and media fundamentally reconfigure each other” (ibid.) as the post avant-garde aspires to become a counter-cultural experience of global, peer-to-peer communication. This also internationalised the social, cultural and political scope and function of a “second public sphere” to circumvent totalitarian colonisation of private and public realms of action, behaviour, thought and experience as particularly experienced by artists in East-Central Europe, South-Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Examples discussed will include Robert Filliou’s announcement of The Eternal Network (1968) and collaboration with György Galántai to present *Telepathic Music* (*Télepatikus Zene*, 1979) in Budapest, Mieko Shiomi’s *Spatial Poem* series of global events (1965–1975) and Jaroslaw Kozlowski and Andrzej Kostolowski’s *NET Manifesto* (1971). The chapter concludes by indicating how the art practices of these networked communities in this period facilitated horizontal distribution, transmission, and reception of concepts, images, and ideas reflecting on the emerging reality of late twentieth-century Cold War society, and as such became a medium of collaborative production as well as critical dissemination between East and West.

Sputnik, Cold War technologies and new network architectures

The launch of *Sputnik 1*, the first artificial Earth satellite, by the Soviet Union on 4 October 1957 at Baikonur, Kazakhstan, remains an important motif of the

ideological context surrounding postwar US-Soviet discourse across former “East” and “West” in Europe and signified accelerated political, military, technological, and scientific development. In her prologue to *The Human Condition* (1958/1998), in which she also goes on to outline her theory of the public sphere, Hannah Arendt observes, “this event, second in importance to no other, not even to the splitting of the atom, would have been greeted with unmitigated joy if it had not been for the uncomfortable military and political circumstances attending it” (1998, p. 1). This irony lies in humankind’s achievement in conceiving of the wholeness of life on our planet and yet signalling the possibility of “escape from men’s imprisonment” (ibid.) from within our failures in this same world. In particular, the Sputnik era ushered in exploration of planetary satellite communication – but primarily from the perspective and function of the military-industrial-technology complex from which it emerged. Kris Paulsen (2013) cites Lisa Parks’s *Cultures In Orbit* (2005) to argue that while satellite technology “enabled instantaneous, real-time audio and visual contact between distant sites, joining them in a simultaneous ‘now’”, its use also “highlighted how the fantasy of a ‘global present’ was steeped in ‘Western discourses of modernization, global unity, and planetary control’” (Paulsen 2013, p. 6). Parks talks particularly here of the first live, global satellite television programme, titled *Our World*, broadcast from the BBC in London on 25 June 1967, which emphasised “the difference between life in the various hemispheres, . . . making it clear that the ‘industrialized’ and ‘free’ North and West stood against the ‘hungry’ and ‘developing’ South and East” (ibid., p. 7). Also relevant to note here is Parks’s observation that the Soviet Union withdrew from the broadcast in protest at Western political support for Israel in the Middle East, which led to the similar withdrawal of Poland, Hungary, East Germany and Czechoslovakia (2005, p. 27). Paulsen concludes that either way:

Viewers watched the hosts of the show connect the “here” of the television studio, to the various “there” of the satellite uplink sites. The viewers were neither here nor there; they were on the outside looking onto a “global now” that did not include them. Televisual transmission may have achieved transcontinental instantaneity, but its multi-directionality did not include the audience in any of its vectors.

(Paulsen 2013, p. 10)

Reinhold Martin reflects further that “Sputnik and its American counterpart, Explorer, were also the very product of the medium of publicness that was the sine qua non for both (or all) sides of the Cold War impasse: the modern state” (2013, n.p.). This, taking the perspective of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000), meant the “categories of ‘public’ and ‘private,’ linked historically with state socialism or social democracy on the one hand, and liberal republicanism on the other, simply connote two different means to the same end: the reproduction of capital” (Martin 2013, n.p.). Notwithstanding the differences in the political organisation of societies in the former “East” and “West” of Europe, Sputnik signaled a moment of

technological acceleration leading to a counter-cultural realisation that “cold war technocracy itself had granted its opponents the power to see the world in which they lived as a single whole” (Turner 2006, p. 83). The United States of America in its desire to establish an “imaginary construct” or “Western fantasy” of “global presence” (Parks 2005, p. 23) had responded directly to the Soviet Union’s successful launch of *Sputnik 1* by setting up the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) whose work led to the Prototype of the Internet (ARPANET) being successfully tested in 1969. Prompted also by the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, Paul Baran’s *On Distributed Networks* was published for the United States Air Force Project RAND in 1964 and proposed a digital data communications system able to withstand a nuclear attack through identifying and reviewing three modes of network architecture: centralised, decentralised, and distributed. Each of these demonstrated how data can travel between interlinked nodes across a network. The centralised model represents a “one-to-many” network where data originates from or transits a central server, while the decentralized model is effectively a distributed network of centralized networks still reliant on central hubs connecting spoke “nodes”. The distributed model, by contrast, represents a “many-to-many” network where data flows between nodes in more unpredictable ways and as a communication system can withstand hostile interventions. The distributed network would prove essential not only for the Cold War superpowers in pursuing military supremacy through technological advancement but also for the planetary counter-culture emerging in parallel during the same period who would seek to use any available communication media and systems: postal, radio, telephonic, and television transmission.

Network consciousness, Robert Filliou and György Galántai

It would take twenty years after the launch of *Sputnik 1* for artists to explore live satellite broadcast on a planetary scale, when performances by Nam June Paik, Joseph Beuys and Douglas Davis were telecast to twenty-five different countries during documenta 6 in Kassel, former West Germany (Documenta 6 Satellite Telecast 1977; Eai.org 2017). The global reach of the broadcast matched the utopianism of Beuys’s vision (Beuys 2017 n.p.) and chimed with a growth in planetary consciousness since images of Earth shot from space had appeared more frequently over the previous decade. The first colour photograph of Earth taken from NASA’s ATS-3 satellite on 10 November 1967 signalled a paradigm shift in awareness of our planet as a homeostatic, interconnected, cybernetic feedback network system. “Network” here is, as Bruno Latour holds, “a concept, not a thing out there . . . a tool to help describe something and not what is being described” (2005, p. 131). Network consciousness was arguably a tool to describe the systems orientation of cybernetics as “a vision of a world built not around vertical hierarchies and top-down flows of power, but around looping circuits of energy and information” (Turner 2006, p. 38). This was also not only a phenomenon of the former West. Slava Gerovitch also describes “the cybernetics movement as a vehicle of de-Stalinization in Soviet

science [seeking] a new foundation of . . . a computer-based cybernetic criterion of objectivity as overtly non-ideological, non-philosophical, non-class-oriented, and non-Party-minded” (2002, p. 8). We also know that Rezső Tarján led the Research Group for Cybernetics within the Academy of Sciences (Kibernetikai Kutatócsoport, KKCS) in Budapest as early as 1957 and so conditions of knowledge of the new discipline were becoming widespread. This despite the fact that Norbert Wiener’s *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* was not available in the Soviet Union until ten years after its 1948 publication as “the political theorists of the USSR were unable to reconcile the implications of cybernetic theory with Marxist-Leninist doctrine” (Ascott and Shanken 2003, p. 163). Highlighting the weakness of “vertical hierarchies” of the modern state would also be useful to post avant-garde artists seeking to circumvent command and control power structures. From an artistic perspective, the intermingling of systems orientation, network consciousness and new directions in contemporary art were becoming as present in the former East as well as in the West through, at least, artists engaged in networked artistic activity from the 1960s onwards.

Though no scientist, and quite possibly a technophobe given his distrust of “high-tech gloom” (Thompson 2011, p. 49), Robert Filliou co-created The Eternal Network or La Fête Permanente (in its non-equivalent French) with George Brecht in 1968 as a *network-as-artwork* that could enable collaboration, exchange and dialogue across space and time in the interest of “permanent creation”.

In a lecture in 1977 Filliou explained further:

the way I see the *Network*, as a member of the *Network*, is the way it exists artistically through the collective efforts of all these artists in Europe, in North America, in Asia, in Australia, and New Zealand – everywhere. In Africa also . . . each one of us artistically functions, in the *Network*, which has replaced the concept of the avant-garde and which functions in such a way that there is no more art centres in the world. Nobody can tell us, as Terry Reid put it, where the place is – where we are is where the things are taking place and although we may need to meet at times or gather information at certain places – the network works automatically. But this artistic network itself – it may help to think of it as being part of the wider network where artistic activity just becomes one of the elements of the human network, and I would include in it all our fellow travellers, other animal and plant species. This world/earth experience is part of this wider network which you can take or leave but certainly has been important to many of us working with these concepts and ideas.

(Filliou 1995, p. 80)

More than solely a means of distribution or medium of production, for Filliou The Eternal Network became a conceptual context for spontaneous and “permanent creation”: a horizontally distributive, participatory space-time of uninterrupted creativity, which would overcome the dialectical relationship between “art” and “life”, affirm both “work” as “play” and “art” as “organised leisure” to critique

both alienated labour and alienated art. The Eternal Network is then a conceptual *artwork-as-network* through which the related concept of "permanent creation" can be experienced and understood.

Filliou's belief in these principles led to an itinerant practice lived through the dissemination of The Eternal Network geographically and conceptually. Born in Suave, France in 1926, he lived for various periods in the United States of America, South Korea, Egypt, Spain, Germany, and Canada and travelled more widely still across Europe and Asia. While living in Düsseldorf, he won a DAAD scholarship in Berlin and exhibited work in Jürgen Schweinebraden's gallery in East Berlin. His experience of former Eastern Europe was otherwise limited, however, but significant in particular to György Galántai's development of the Artpool Art Research Center in Budapest. Filliou travelled with his collaborator Joachim Pfeufer to Budapest from Berlin in 1976 to exhibit their *The Real Space-Time Poïpoidrome No. 1. (Poïpoidrome à Espace-Temps Réel No. 1.)* at the invitation of art historian, curator and networker László Beke. In being an "ambulant" structure, Filliou thought of the Poïpoidrome as an artistic environment and nomadic centre for permanent creation able to manifest itself across a range of sites, situations and, importantly, communities of artists. On the occasion of its exhibition at the Young Artists' Club, Budapest, it also produced a social space for the city's post avant-garde artists to gather. One of these was György Galántai, who although impressed by the event would only develop a correspondence with Filliou from September 1979. In March of that year, Galántai had announced the formation of Artpool by circulating a poster-catalogue of his own 1978 exhibition through the international mail art network stamped with the message "please send me information about your activity." Filliou's response was a postcard asking Galántai to make a poster to exhibit at the entrance of the Young Artists' Club, which read:

TELEPATHIC MUSIC no. YOUNG ARTISTS' CLUB
fond remembrance
warm wishes
handshakes
ROBERT FILLIOU – September 1979.
(Galántai and Klaniczay 2013, p. 36)

The postcard is part of a series that Filliou used from 1973 under the title *Telepathic Music* as another demonstration of permanent creation. The 1979 postcard was an archival and performative document simultaneously recalling the 1976 meeting, a score for an event (make a poster, write on it, hang it on the wall) and a "telepathic exchange" between artists in the East and the West. Filliou himself appears in a photograph on the reverse of the postcard and is described as "The Father of the Eternal Network". The postcard was his 1977 contribution to the Image Bank Postcard Show, an international network project by Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov aiming "to create a collaborative, process-based project in the hopes of engendering a shared creative consciousness" (Anon. 1995, n.p.). The 1979 postcard could be perceived as Filliou's recognition of Artpool as a new node emerging in

The Eternal Network, understood at that time synonymously as the international mail art community. Filliou's request inspired Galántai to launch Artpool Periodical Space (APS) as an artistic-archival-curatorial practice through which to align his activity with the spirit of permanent creation and The Eternal Network. Further activities of APS became Artpool's main curatorial-archival framework between 1979–1991 as antecedent or early manifestation of the “active archive” (Galántai and Klaniczay 2013, p. 15). The Active Archive – as an institution and open artwork – still develops through exchange and is realised in multiple formats such as exhibitions, events, publications and the web.

Mieko Shiomi: poetry as a spatial cartography of events

Robert Filliou was a participant in artists' networked practices as well as the conceptual architect of The Eternal Network. Sometime between March and May 1965 – almost 15 years before *Telepathic Music* in Budapest – he participated in Mieko Shiomi's *Spatial Poem No. 1: Word Event*, the first of which would become a series of “nine global events” in her *Spatial Poem* series (Shiomi 1976). Invited by Shiomi to “write a word or words on the enclosed card [sent by post] and place it somewhere” (ibid., p. 1). Filliou wrote “love joe shiomi” on a card sent to him by Mieko Shiomi and placed it “in his wallet [so it could be in a] random location wherever he is”, while Čestmír Janošek wrote “SHIT” (“HOVNO”) on a card at Jiří Kolář's Vinohrady address in Prague, and Kolář himself wrote “WORD” on his and placed it “on a small shed for starling” (ibid., pp. 2–9). In another part of the city, Herberta Masaryková wrote “eleven instruments” on hers and placed it “in the third pigeon-hole” of her desk at Prague 1, Maltezske 15 (ibid.). Meanwhile, in Kiev, George Drofa sat at his writing table at Pechersky pusok 18 and wrote:

cosmonaut
izba
samovar
parasha
chumak.
(Shiomi 1976, p. 9)

Working with responses such as those above but also from Spain, Scotland, England, France, Netherlands, Denmark, Austria, former West Germany, Japan, USA and elsewhere, Shiomi made a three-dimensional cartographic object and later included a mapping of these textual events in in her artist-book *Spatial Poem* of 1976 along with the eight other events in the series, namely, *Direction Event* (1965), *Falling Event* (1966), *Shadow Event* (1972), *Open Event* (1972), *Orbit Event* (1973), *Sound Event* (1974), *Wind Event* (1974), and *Disappearing Event* (1975). These events were mapped onto plan views of the northern hemisphere, with Europe on the left-hand page, North America on the right-hand page, leaving East Asia – and particularly Japan – toward the centre of the two-page spread.

Filliou, Kolář and Masaryková also participated in *Spatial Poem No. 2: Direction Event* occurring simultaneously around 10:00 pm Greenwich Mean Time (GMT)

on 15 October 1965, when Shiomi asked "what kind of direction were you facing or moving towards?" (Shiomi 1976, p. 1) Filliou "was on top of Marianne Staffeldt in Villefranche, France" (Staffeldt confirmed she "was under Robert Filliou" similarly) (ibid., p. 10). Masaryková was "fetching a cup of black coffee from her kitchenette to her desk in Prague" (ibid.), Kolář "was going back to his apartment" (ibid., p. 13) while Bohumila Grögerová was "sitting at his [sic] desk facing North-East; for a while [looking] to the right through the window toward South-East" (ibid.) also in Prague. *Spatial Poem No. 3: Falling Event*, between 24 June – 31 August 1966, featured Jindřich Chalupecký, Ladislav Novák (Czechoslovakia), Vytautas Landsbergis (Lithuania), Miroslav Miletic, Branko Vučićević (Yugoslavia) as Eastern European nodes of Shiomi's network. *Spatial Poem No. 4: Shadow Event* (1972) was significant in introducing photographic documentation of artists projecting "the shadow of the letters SHADOW" of a transparent film sent by Shiomi to participants. László Beke returned an image of his "wife making a shadow of the SHADOW [in the 'feeble sunshine' of Budapest] on the wall [which] his two-year-old daughter wanted to catch but failed" (ibid., p. 29). In Brno, on 26 December 1971, Jiří Valoch experimented with projecting the shadow onto the wall of his friend Dušan Klimeš's house between 11:36–11:40 am, on his wife's left thigh between 11:41–11:45 am and on the December 30, 1971 on his own breast for approximately 8 seconds at 11:12. Jiří Hynek Kocman also visited Dušan Klimeš's house on the same day and experimented with projecting the shadow out of the window toward the sky on a grey day for approximately 5 seconds.

With the exception of dispatches from Drofa in Ukraine and Landsbergis from Lithuania, all other former Eastern European artists responding to Shiomi's international call in these early editions were concentrated in East-Central Europe, particularly in the former Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Hungary, and to a lesser extent Poland. Many were also either concrete or visual poets, conceptual and performance artists. This is true of the rest of the *Spatial Poem* series of global events, whose other participants included Gábor Attalai, Imre Bak, Endre Tót, Péter Legédy, Géza Perneczky (all in Hungary), Jiřina Hauková (Prague), and Jarosław Kozłowski (Poznań). It is curious now to reflect that all these intimate, sometimes inconsequential, actions take place in the "private sphere" of domestic settings and also anticipate formally our present-day social media status updates. The aesthetic of simultaneity – in this case temporal proximity and spatial distance in the same instance – is important here but so is the observation that Shiomi's networked community still relied on a "one-to-many" form of call and response, despite the capacity of mail art to operate as a distributed, peer-to-peer model. Her geographical and cultural location from where she sends instructions and receives textual or visual documentation by reply becomes central, as does, arguably, her authorial voice. The spatial nature of the mapping, even though two events are intended to be simultaneous in time, also reinforces a sense of static location and distance between participants seemingly unable to develop any peer-to-peer network relationships without intermediary agency. Still, this critique notwithstanding, *Spatial Poem* is undeniably a remarkable forerunner of later networked art practices. Although it

was restricted to the Northern hemisphere, it did successfully conjoin artists in former West and East Europe.

A “Second Public Sphere”, totalitarianism, and *The NET Manifesto*

The suggestion of a “second public sphere” implies a plurality of publics and spheres. This acknowledges the social actualization of public discourse as historically and materially conditioned. It is thus subject to “structural transformation” (Habermas 2014) and “tied to particular economic changes taking place at the time” (Fultner 2013, p. 3), whenever or wherever those changes take place. The public sphere, therefore, is not as fixed and constant as its bourgeois variant might suggest or suppose. The public sphere as the location for social production of discourse has typically relied (Arendt 1998; Habermas 2014) on a notion of normative, universal and transcendent societal consensus and a distinction between “public” and “private” spaces, both of which are readily subject to critique from a range of perspectives: feminist, Marxist, postmodern, and queer critique these in turn (Fraser 1990; Negt and Kluge 1993; Hardt and Negri 2000; Villa 1992, Warner 2002). These critiques problematise, among other things, “the idea(l) of a coercion-free space of deliberation . . . the possibility of a unified consensus-based public realm . . . and a ‘nostalgia’ where ‘appearance . . . constitutes reality’” (Villa 1992, p. 712).

How any public sphere functions – and what and how it signifies – changes when considered from competing liberal or social democratic and state socialist perspectives. Most often and popularly, however, one is viewed through the other – diffracted, in a sense (Barad 2007) – through ideological prisms or spheres. Just as the private sphere is often defined and theorised in terms of not being the public sphere – that is to say, more in terms of its absent qualities than its present ones – so former “Eastern” Europe has been popularly and primarily defined from and by the former West in terms of its lack of freedom, association and expression. Artists in the “free” former West of Europe and the USA may by contrast have been dissatisfied in experiencing a blurring of “state, civil society, family and market” (The Centre for Civil Society 2006) which impacted differently on constructions of desire through the commodity economy and the emergence of the Situationist critique of the entailing *Society of the Spectacle* (Debord 1994). From whichever quarter, post avant-garde artists shared a common desire to disrupt geographically and politically bound discourse to arguably produce a subaltern counter-public, as described by Nancy Fraser: “a parallel discursive arena where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (1990, p. 67). In this sense, the suggestion of a “second public sphere” not only implies a multiplicity of registers, rhetorics, spaces, interpretations, actions and behaviors but also a range of counter-publics who themselves do not coalesce easily around any convenient oppositionality that would break down power structures into oversimplified binaries.

This is further complicated in the case of East-Central Europe as "the territory located between the Iron Curtain and the Soviet Union [and] that, due to the agreement signed between the Western powers and the Soviet Union at Yalta, found itself within the latter's sphere of influence" (Piotrowski 2009, p. 7). These territories and their societies were essentially subject to Soviet occupation and its attendant totalitarianism, leading to the production of a new set of ideologically bound public behaviors and utterances, a state colonization of society and its public sphere, and the concomitant abolition of privacy through routine domestic surveillance. In discussing the experience of artists in the Brezhnev-era Soviet Union of the 1980s, for instance, Ekaterina Degot described "an illusion of the public sphere, rather than public sphere itself, isolated communities rather than society, collapse in communication rather than fruitful communication and economic conditions which will or might make political protest difficult" (2017, n.p.). Whether they were intent on political protest or not, "artists in socialist states [were compensated for] their paralysing social and geographical immobility . . . by a huge amount of free time" (ibid.). Added to the absence of a Western-style commercial gallery-based art market, these conditions led to the development of conceptual and performance art practices in domestic apartment spaces particularly. The issue of an audience was addressed often through employing photographic documentation. The situation of artists engaging in contemporary practices in the former Soviet Union and East-Central Europe had some similarities but differences too in terms of variants of "soft communism" practiced in, for example, Kádár's Hungary and expressed through Dubček's "Prague Spring." In addition, Adam Czirak has reflected that "the development of underground networks in the state socialist countries demonstrated that no public sphere can be closed in a totalitarian way and that no communication system can be utterly regulated" (Czirak cited in Bátorová 2014, n.p.).

The development of such networks circumventing command and control communications systems in this period is already evident from regular East-Central European participation in Mieko Shiomi's *Spatial Poem* series. Significantly, also, both Robert Filliou and Jarosław Kozłowski's involvement in Shiomi's correspondence network may arguably have influenced their own later network projects, *The Eternal Network* (1968) for Filliou and *NET* (1971) for Kozłowski, in conjunction with Andrzej Kostołowski. *The NET Manifesto* is a well-established reference in the contemporary art history of East-Central Europe (Kemp-Welch 2013; Nader 2007) because of its ever-present relevance to discussions of art and ideology, network art practice and the second public sphere. Kozłowski and Kostołowski wrote the manifesto for network strategy in 1971, which was "mailed to 189 international artists who are invited to be co-curators of the proposed NET" (Chandler and Neumark 2006, 448). The Manifesto stresses, in particular, its "open and noncommercial" character, its lack of a "central point, and any coordination" and emphasizes "private homes, studios and any places where propositions are articulated" as being nodes of the network (Perkins 2006, p. 395). These three aspects are particularly prescient to the present discussion. The notion of non-commerciality in art practice is particularly interesting from the perspective of a state socialist context where

one would not expect the gallery system to dominate artistic production, a term to which Kozłowski also objects (Kozłowski and Moskalewicz 2015). Nonetheless, by doing so, Kozłowski and Kostołowski engage here in a global discourse against commercial production which, perhaps ironically again, is underpinned by Western Marxist debates around aesthetics and value. However understood, it is clear that Kozłowski and Kostołowski are trying to build an alternative and unconditional economy of exchange where artistic and philosophical discourse becomes a global currency while the artwork itself resists commercial systems of reproduction. The lack of a “central point, and any coordination” (Perkins 2006, p. 395) both relates to Baran’s critique of control and command centralization and potentially augurs the decentralized peer-to-peer networks of now ubiquitous globalization. It would also seem to be a critique of authorship, even, perhaps implicitly, the one-to-many model of communication employed by Shiomi in *Spatial Poem*, in which Kozłowski would later participate. The insistence too upon “the private home” as beyond the ideological reach of totalitarian society, even in Poland, as a node of an international counter-public exchange network, is relevant to discussions here about the social, cultural and political scope and function of a “second public sphere”.

Conclusion

I’ve wanted to demonstrate that networked communities of post avant-garde artists in the Cold War period invented what Findeisen and Zimmermann described as “methods to do things in distributed collaboration” (2015, n.p.) and that Robert Filliou’s notion of The Eternal Network is a useful conceptual context for understanding these operations. There has been a tendency at times to see the Eternal Network less “as a tool to help describe something” (Latour 2005, p. 131) and more as a thing to be described, principally in infrastructural terms given its synonymity with the mail art network of the 1960s and onwards. It may be as likely as anything that Filliou’s conception of The Eternal Network was influenced greatly by his own participation in Mieko Shiomi’s *Spatial Poem* series of global events. Writing in 1975, noted mail artist David Mayor made the explicit case for developing networked communities through the postal system. He wrote, “one alternative to the public media is the relative anonymity [sic] of the postal system,” and further that

just as “TV art”, created by, among others, Nam June Paik and Wolf Vostell (both Fluxus artists) has made use of, and commented on, the medium’s tendency to “flatten” and devalue everything, so what is now called “mail art” is creating an awareness that, with the international nature of today’s art, the postal system is potentially a very powerful vehicle for social change.

(Mayor 1975, p. 32)

This social change, however, was often from an East-Central European perspective autonomous from obvious political appearance given the continual risk of ideological scrutiny and recuperation for propaganda purposes. These artists were in the main engaged in network practices to reclaim channels of artistic and philosophical

communication, through resisting totalitarian colonisation of the private sphere. A move from centralised to decentralised and then distributed network models becomes clearer in parallel with social and cultural advances in technology at the same time. Ironically, if we were to consider the logical conclusion of our own present-day experience with big data exploitation of the internet as the apogee of decentralised network experience, we find privacy once again virtually abolished and an oversaturation of personal surveillance techniques. Interesting also, then, to hear Kozłowski remark that having discussed with South American artists "differences in our attitudes toward [Marxist] ideology" through the NET project, he was then, after 1989, "becoming Marxist . . . because I understand now much better the implications of the free market economy, how much it changes our perception of the world and how much it limits ourselves" (Kozłowski and Moskalewicz 2015). Now with the former East/West divide in Europe largely erased – although the question of cultural migrancy or nomadism dominates political discourse at the time of writing – and the impossible dream of a borderless, frictionless, deterritorialized world apparently realised by the internet, research into proto-network models of artistic practice becomes ever more important.

Note

- 1 I prefer the term "post avant-garde" to "neo-avant-garde" for two reasons. First, "post avant-garde" reflects a position whereby artists have gone beyond the transgressive and oppositional function of the "avant-garde" and do not wish to reiterate that which "neo-avant-garde" risks endorsing. Second, in Filliou's thought, there is now too much that is unknown and so "if no one person can tell us what is going on [then] the concept of the avant-garde is obsolete" (1995, p. 80).

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2 Tactical networking

Yugoslav performing and visual arts between East and West

Miško Šuvaković

My starting point in this paper is that, unlike most East European countries that were part of the Warsaw Pact, socialist Yugoslavia had no homogeneous concept of socialist-realist culture (Trotsky 2000; Groys 1992; Martin Gropius Bau and Galerie Tretyakov 2004), but a hybridised one, following the 1948 political break with the USSR. I will interpret the Yugoslavian cultural context by referring to three dynamics that, in my opinion, characterized heterogeneous Yugoslavian performance and visual art: tactical networking, relations between the first and second public spheres, and the hybridization of modernist culture and art.

By *tactical networking*, I mean intentionally derived social, cultural, and artistic practices, whereby relations of communication and exchange are established between different social, cultural, and artistic worlds. In macro-political terms, tactical networking signified relations *between* socialist Yugoslavia and the political networks established by Western powers gathered around the NATO military bloc. One can also mention connections established with the Warsaw Pact member states (Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania), and those realised by participating in the construction of the Non-Aligned Movement consisting of states from the post-colonial Third World. In micro-political terms, tactical networking meant forming relations of communication, exchange, integration, surveillance as well as censorship *within* socialist Yugoslavia's first and second public spheres. Tactical networking, as a fundamental part of strategic policy, unfolded even on the level of cultural exchange between Yugoslavia, the East, and the West (e.g., with signing international cooperation agreements). There also existed an unofficial direct cultural and artistic exchange that Belgrade-based art historian Ješa Denegri called the "the structure of direct involvement" (1977, pp. 42–43). It represented unofficial visits of Western artists in Yugoslavia, clandestine sojourns of Yugoslav artists in the West, and information transfers within the area of the Iron Curtain. In the context of the second public sphere, this was the functioning of a micro-cultural communication, the Eastern Bloc's public and private transmission of information about current trends in contemporary international art.

In socialist Yugoslavia, the first public sphere was equal to the state's sphere of influence, to the Party, and to the working class as a unified terrain of socialist and self-managed society, culture, and art. The first public sphere was not a

homogenous field, since it encompassed different national cultures and differences between urban and rural life. Various cultural and artistic traditions in Yugoslavia were oriented towards disparate individual cultures being dominant internationally. To give an example: Serbian culture was oriented towards influences coming from French art and culture, whereas Croatian and Slovenian cultures were inspired by Austrian and German art and culture. The culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina had its traditional relations with the Muslim world. In addition, this variety of influences appeared against the background of a socialist self-management that pursued a revisionist course of reform, distancing itself from Soviet cultural hegemony.

My thesis is that in Eastern Europe, in general, the second public sphere signified artistic and cultural work that lay outside of or against the first public sphere's zone of influence, and could be described as subculture, underground culture, or alternative culture. By contrast, in socialist Yugoslavia, the second public sphere was significantly more hybrid. It consisted of private spaces, non-institutional public spaces of art and culture, as well as institutions under state control (such as youth cultural centres, student cultural centres, amateur theatre and film clubs), which evoked the illusion of alternative activities' existence in art and culture. On the one hand, the state appropriated and controlled alternative and neo-avant-garde art practices; on the other hand, to Western countries it was demonstrating ostensible efforts to democratise culture and art following the Western model.

The processes described above supported the hybridisation and partial democratisation of the dominant modernist culture (above all, socialist modernism) which the state introduced after breaking with the Soviet Union in 1948 and rejecting socialist realism. Hybridisation and democratisation were realised through relativising the relation of the first and second public spheres. This relativising was the political and cultural project of turning Yugoslavia's real existing socialist society into a self-managed society.¹ The socialist state, on the one hand, permitted real or illusory cultural and artistic autonomy, though simultaneously retaining, on the other hand, financial-bureaucratic control over cultural institutions that functioned as corridors between the first and second public spheres. It is possible that this hybridisation and democratisation of Yugoslavia's society led to the international opening of the first and second public spheres.

After introducing the Yugoslavian cultural atmosphere, I will examine three characteristic examples of how the first and second public spheres related to each other in socialist Yugoslavia. I intend to focus on the performing arts: Belgrade International Theatre Festival (Beogradski internacionalni teatarski festival, BITEF), as an institution that combined performance practice of the first and second public spheres; critical modernism and the first staging of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* 1956 in Belgrade as an example of the paradoxical relationship between Yugoslavia's first and second public spheres; and the Slovenian alternative art group OHO and the para-theatre group Pupilia Ferkeverk (Pupilija Ferkeverk) around 1970 as examples of acting in the second public sphere and still functioning as an alternative to the first.

The hybridisation of socialist Yugoslavia's cultural politics

Socialist Yugoslavia's foreign cultural policy was in line with the state's new doctrines, which were consolidated between 1945 and 1948 when the dictatorship turned away from the USSR and the concept of socialist realism. The politico-cultural break with the USSR came with an elementary shift from socialist realism to modernist art. In "second" Yugoslavia, socialist realism emerged as a dynamic phenomenon, open to poetic-aesthetic modifications, a style that changed its manners of expression and form but preserved and maintained the regulative socialist narrative and symbolic functions during a post-revolutionary culture. Socialist modernism was a hybrid phenomenon, settled between a formal-political decanonisation of socialist realism and the reception of Western modernisms (Denegri 2003). One could argue that socialist realism was an expression of cultural politics and artistic creativity of the immediate revolutionary spirit, whereas socialist modernism emerged as the result of the post-revolutionary period, when culture and art of the bureaucratic and technocratic classes developed along with the beginning of industrialisation and self-management.

Neo-avant-garde artistic phenomena first emerged in the private sphere (flats and backyards), and were only later integrated into state-funded spaces of the second public sphere: amateur filmmaking clubs; student and youth cultural centres; student and youth festivals; international festivals of new, modern, and contemporary art. At the same time, the state apparatus retained a critical, rather reserved attitude toward "importing art and culture from the West" – as the phrase was back then. In general, popular culture and neo-avant-garde art enjoyed institutional support and were operating in cultural reserves (Student Centre [Studentski centar] in Zagreb, Youth centre [Dom omladine] in Belgrade, Student Cultural Centre [Studentski kulturni centar] in Belgrade), to show the Soviets that everything was under control, and to demonstrate to the West that *our* country allowed the unfolding of "new sensibilities"² related to the latest international tendencies in liberal Western art. This double game, however, was never without individual and local conflicts.³

Socialist modernism was characteristic of artistic practices that emerged out of a critique of socialist realism in the name of a pro-Western aesthetic modernism and its formal autonomies. It replaced socialist realism and became the dominant art of the first public sphere during the 1950s. In the performing arts, socialist modernism abandoned didactic and optimistic political theatre, a repertoire-based bourgeois theatre with tendencies to critical humour and the grotesque. The institutions of the state tolerated experimental para-theatre,⁴ further artistic practices that were reaching beyond theatre, such as performance art.

The complex bureaucratised and institutionalised cultural order of socialist modernism determined the first public sphere of socialist Yugoslavia's artistic life. But between 1951 and 1981 there also existed another public sphere, which developed through aesthetic and cultural practices critically and subversively relating to both the tradition of socialist realism and the art of socialist modernism. This alternative public sphere⁵ encompassed artistic practices of critical modernism⁶ and the neo-avant-garde,⁷ which constructed a parallel arena of aesthetic activity. Simultaneously,

official cultural institutions often established these alternative artistic and cultural practices, through resettling them in the cultural reserves of youth and student cultural centres or by including them in international festivals and exhibitions. One must therefore reassert that in socialist Yugoslavia, there was no clear-cut separation of the first and second public spheres. They frequently overlapped each other or were connected, generating the illusion of a plural, democratised society that exceeded the Eastern European bureaucratic conservatism of party control.

Yugoslav critical modernist and neo-avant-garde strategies even got in touch with the international (Western) system of culture and the arts. This complex web of art structures resulted from the intention of socialist Yugoslavia's leadership to position Yugoslav art and culture between East and West. The idea was to show that socialist Yugoslavia guaranteed creative freedom in culture and art, corresponding with the Western liberal model of individual freedoms, but at the same time cherished and preserved the traditions of revolutionary socialist culture. After 1955, official state politics were deeply engaged with culture and art, both in terms of financing art projects and directly or indirectly censoring works of film, theatre, and literature. The state's cultural politics rested on the following – occasionally contradictory – objectives: the preservation of socialist values and ideals of the National Liberation Struggle, i.e. that of the Yugoslav Partisans' Struggle; and furthering the socialist revolution through modernisation processes in art and culture; enabling cultural and artistic associations with the West (by offering grants to artists and students of arts to travel and access education in the West; by organising theatre tours into the West and presenting Western artistic practices in contemporary theatre and performance at domestic festivals); and creating seemingly autonomous art contexts. The most important institutional segment of the cultural scene's pluralisation, regarding neo-avant-garde and experimental art, were student and youth cultural centres.⁸ Political control was tied to financial support, generating a hybrid model of paradoxical cultural politics. Youth and student centres, like other official cultural institutions, had their regulating managers and committees appointed by the state. The double game of Yugoslavian macro-politics carried out on two fields, the West and the East, shifted the first and second public spheres into a complex and paradoxical net of autonomy, semi-independence, control, and financial reliance. It was impossible to produce neo-avant-garde experimental films or avant-gardist theatre and performances without the financial support of state institutions. Even artists who worked in the private sphere or in a non-institutional framework (such as Leonid Šejka in Belgrade, Tomislav Gotovac in Zagreb, and later Sanja Iveković, Mladen Stilinović, Željko Jerman, Vlado Martek), when presenting their works to the public, entered the system of official cultural institutions supported and controlled by the government.

The case of BITEF: between neo-avant-garde theatre and performance art

An outstanding example of Yugoslavia's socialist modernist cultural politics was certainly BITEF, founded in 1967. Like the Avignon Theatre Festival, it became a

major European festival of avant-garde and (later) postmodern theatre. The decree of Belgrade City Hall stated that BITEF was established as an independent and self-managing organisation (Latinčić 2007, p. 21). This festival is again a good example of Yugoslavia's official cultural politics, in the framework of which it was possible to consider the international Western avant-garde, the 1960s East European theatre reforms, the new East European avant-garde, Yugoslav avant-garde, along with Third World theatre. BITEF's program was a precise political construction serving the interests of Yugoslavia's foreign policy. For the purposes of keeping public order and ensuring command of Yugoslavia, the media criticised the most radical performances staged at BITEF – especially the excessive sexual liberties and nudity of the US avant-garde theatre (e.g. Living Theater, *Antigona*, 1967; Richard Schechner, *Dionysus 69*, 1969; and The Pip Simmons Theatre, *Do It!*, 1971). These media condemnations were part of a *cultural ritual* that was demonstrating loyalty to actually existing socialism and self-managing socialist anti-Western moralism. Allowing and supporting the staging of these performances in Yugoslavia were enough to demonstrate the state's strategic openness compared to the authorities' attitude in other East European countries. Socialist Yugoslavia was "sitting on the fence" separating two global political and military blocs, economic systems, and cultural superpowers. Through BITEF, theatre was a *symptom* of a different type of socialism: open to the late modernist fetishism of the new and able to express its own perspective by saying "Yes, we allow non-conformist theatre performances to exist, too, but in public discourse we're critical of them!"

The main program of BITEF usually included late modernist theatre, neo-avant-garde theatre, and para-theatre. A characteristic example was a performance of Pupilia Ferkeverk presented in private spaces and at youth theatre festivals. The inclusion of their performance *Shockheaded Peter* (*Janko Raščupanko*), directed by Tomaž Kralj, into the main program of the 1971 BITEF, demonstrates how the festival introduced a work of the second public sphere's avant-gardism in the first public sphere's theatre (Anon. 1971, pp. 28–30). The piece had been a ludic happening in which young performers chaotically danced and moved on the stage. It recalled hippie and urban rituals of young people, representing the ludic and ecstatic behaviour of rebellious youth in the world of adults. This kind of performance was close to the hippie and post-hippie performances of American groups such as La MaMa and Living Theater.

At BITEF special programs included performances by visual artists. The side-by-side appearance of theatre and performance showed that the festival was an excellent ground on which to simulate the connection between the first and second public spheres existing in Yugoslavian society. The theatrical and visual experiments of BITEF not only presented an extraordinary potential for "free" processes of creation but also expressed Yugoslavia's policy of directly joining global art tendencies.

The selection committee of BITEF based its aesthetic criteria for the festival program on principles of international multiculturalism. BITEF was described as part of Yugoslavia's tactical networking, linking different models of exploring theatre and performance in Cold War times. The aim of the festival was to reveal correlations between innovative performance practices in Western, Eastern, and non-European cultures and the hybrid and plural performing arts in Yugoslavia.

The first BITEF was very eclectic: New York-based Living Theatre performed their experimental body-centered environmental theatre, Moscow poet and performer Bulat Okudzhava performed a poetic recital, Grotowski's Poor Theatre from Wrocław presented its theatre laboratory work, and the ethnic Kathakali dancers from India performed. This diversity showed that Belgrade, and therefore Yugoslavia, was a terrain of open cultural collision without a political point of friction. This case reveals Yugoslavia's macro-politics of searching for a third way between the dogmas and canons of the political worlds of East and West.

Fascination with Beckett: *Waiting for Godot*

Parallel to creating an optimistic socialist modernism in aesthetics imbued with revolutionism, a critical, destructive, brutal, and aesthetically vacuous modernist creativity emerged. Striving for a zero-degree expression or a grotesque provocation of sublime modernism showed up in painting, theatre, literary prose, and film. A paradigmatic instance was certainly the case of *Waiting for Godot* that unfolded between 1953 and 1956.

Theatre director Vasilije Popović proposed the play to the Belgrade Drama Theatre. Following the banning of Jean Anouilh's *Thieves' Carnival* at the theatre in 1952, a politically motivated decision was made to avoid a public staging of *Godot* and to have a closed rehearsal instead. When *Waiting for Godot*'s staging in spring 1955 was excluded from the first public sphere, it shifted into the second public sphere – to be precise, into a private space: the studio of young modernist painter Mića Popović. Being part of the typical Yugoslav paradox, the private premiere of *Godot* was attended not only by artists and intellectuals but by members of the cultural bureaucracy who banned its public staging in the first place. The first official staging of *Godot* took place on 17 December 1956 in the theatre called Ateljer 212.

The first three productions of *Godot* in Yugoslavia were aesthetically interlinked. The performance that was prepared for but never performed at Belgrade Drama Theatre was reconstructed in the studio of Popović. The staging at Atelje 212 followed the dramaturgy of the previous versions. Beckett's *Godot* caused a political conflict in the cultural scene of Belgrade, because at the time a positive, apologetic, and didactic work was expected, not a radical work of absurdity. Party bureaucracy perceived this feature of *Godot* as Western decadence and nihilism that was not in line with socialist doctrines and was to be monitored and censored.

Waiting for Godot confronted its audience with the poetics of emptiness and absence that was contrary to earlier conceptions of high art, in traditional modernist, socialist realist, or socialist-modernist senses. A group of actors performed *Godot* on an empty stage with a branch. The scenery suggested an atmosphere of absence, waiting, absurdity, and existential hopelessness, almost provoking the optimism of socialist realism. When *Godot* was performed at Popović's studio the setting was different.⁹ Since the studio had no stage, a line was drawn on the floor, separating the audience from the actors. The stage was sparse, grey, austere, with only a small tree found by the river. This setting is important, because it was not performed in

the theatre but in a private painter's atelier and this way serves as an example of the second public sphere.

Beckett's play was opposed entirely to ruling poetic canons. It was empty, devoid of all bourgeois and leftist meaning, a work that coolly embodies the self-presence of alienation: the void, deferral, and inability/unavailability of human contact. Theatre scholar Slobodan Selenić described the character of *Godot* as follows:

In Beckett's *Godot*, there are six instances of the following dialogue:

Estragon: Let's go.

Vladimir: We can't.

Estragon: Why not?

Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot.

(Selenić 1971, p. 65)

That they cannot leave because they are waiting for Godot, who will never come – this constitutes the source of all the tragedy in Beckett's play. However, when we hear the same dialogue for a second time, we perceive it as absurd; after the third time, it is already ridiculous, and then both ridiculous and absurd, although it most explicitly expresses the nothingness of life, the meaninglessness of man's quest to find meaning.

The polemics, critiques, and debates concerning Beckett's work were therefore driven not by recognising some adverse or inappropriate contents, but by a sense of confusion provoked by a work with no message, moral, or transparent reference to the truth of the human condition, whether in the bourgeois or in the socialist sense.

In Serbian theatre, the didactic character of socialist realism and socialist-modernist aesthetics was dismantled by consulting the *Godot* paradigm. In *Ljubinko and Desanka* (*Ljubinko i Desanka*, 1964) and *The Progress of Bora Šnajder* (*Razvojni put Bore Šnajdera*, 1967), both early works by Aleksandar Popović, and in Dušan Kovačević's *The Marathon Family* (*Maratonci trče počasni krug*, 1973) and *A Balkan Spy* (*Balkanski špijun*, 1983), the *Godot* paradigm was turned from Beckett's anti-Cartesian but still abstract gesture, into the localised slang of Belgrade's suburbs, Serbia's and Yugoslavia's small towns (Konstantinović 1969), and the closed entities of the Balkans. Beckett's emptied language was introduced as a "new signifier" into populist slang, which was transmitted into the elite discourse of modernism and vice versa.

The case of *Waiting for Godot* in Belgrade's theatre and underground art scenes was an effect of political censorship typical of 1950s socialism. It was, further, the story of critical radicalisation inside the boundaries of modernism itself; in other words, it had been an act of freedom.

Questions on the outer limits of "Freedom": OHO and Pupilia Ferkeverk

During the 1960s, manifestations of the neo-avant-garde were driven by a desire to create an alternative micro-social sphere of free interdisciplinary creativity. This

area was characterised by the emergence of an alternative public sphere beyond political control, and by the occupation of cultural and artistic reserves on the edges of official and unofficial influence zones. These reserves, such as student and youth centres or magazines, were discursive and concrete spaces where one could get in touch with the international (especially US-American) neo-avant-gardes.

The Slovenian OHO group, part of the neo-avant-garde circles in Yugoslavia, emerged as an alternative art collective outside of the first public sphere in the self-managed society of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Poznanović 1969). OHO realised projects in natural spaces as well as urban public spaces and youth and student galleries between 1966 and 1968. With this move the group became part of socialist Yugoslavia's plural public sphere. While doing these public events, they also performed projects, actions, and installations outdoors, outside of urban environments, and without the presence of any audience. Through presenting their documents and performances at international exhibitions between 1970 and 1971 (McShine 1970, pp. 98–102; Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris 1971, p. 59; Aktionsraum 1 1971, pp. 169–174.), OHO shaped international conceptual art as well. In 1971 the group stopped performing in public and withdrew from the art world to establish a commune in the Slovenian village of Šempas. The Šempas commune counted as a micro-community outside of the first public sphere. It created an alternative venue for a highly ritualized life beyond the socialist norms and demands of Yugoslavia's first public sphere. First being active in the art of the second public sphere with a tight link to official publicity, OHO completely retired from any state-structured public sphere, turning the second public sphere into an ideal social situation far from politicized hierarchies.

Yugoslavian performance art clearly profited from the emergence of OHO, just as experimental theatre developed through Pupilija Ferkeverk. OHO went through several stages in its artistic and post-artistic creativity, research, and lifestyle. Its work began at the intersection of neo-Dada, Fluxus, pop art, happening, and concrete poetry. In the period of the mid- to late 1960s, they established the doctrine of reification¹⁰ and implemented it in concrete poetry, happenings, and in their work on objects and environments. Before transforming into a commune, during the late 1960s the group explored various artistic problems related to processual art: anti-form art (Morris 1968), *arte povera*, land art, interventions in nature, body art, environment and performance art.

The experimental happenings and performances of OHO were linked to the reist ideology, working with research concerning objects. The group fulfilled the return to *things themselves* and *the body itself* between 1966 and 1968 in a radically innovative way – by turning from theatre as a dramatic stage art to para-theatre as body action or, more often, to the everyday corporeal and behavioural act of exhibiting the (mis-)placement of objects. OHO's performance works were formulated as elementary exercises, during which one or more artists (with or without an audience) executed physical actions, gestures, and behavioural situations in private, public, and exhibition spaces. One of their actions was as follows: "The right hand takes the bottle, the left hand takes the glass. The right hand lowers the bottle, the wine flows into the glass. The hands unfold the wrap. The right hand takes the

sandwich, goes up, the mouth opens up. The hands are holding the newspaper. The eyes are looking at the letters. The head nods in approval” (Poznanović 1969, pp. 5–6). This OHO ritual demonstrated work procedures similar to actions of Italian *arte povera* artists. Everyday acts were reduced to basic simplicity with no meaning other than a literal presentation of a gesture. It was a tautological¹¹ performance, using body art. With their actions, the OHO group performed happenings (partly controlled/uncontrolled events involving the audience) as open, spontaneous behavioural situations. OHO used the model of the happening to accomplish an interactive relationship with its natural, urban, and social surroundings. Their happenings were non-staged events considering chance, spontaneity, or provocation. Chance was the combination of the real, live everyday world with an artistic event, while spontaneity denoted the interference of life and art. Examples could be, say, the performances *The Pharaoh's Funeral* (*Pokop faraona*, Ljubljana, 1968) and *Triglav* (Ljubljana, 1969). OHO saw its art practice as an aesthetic, artistic, and political alternative to the existing social order, therefore representing a solid piece of action from the second public sphere.

While the OHO group was driven by their brave aspirations to change life itself within a grey and bureaucratised socialist reality, Pupilija was led by an unattained ideal of freedom in and from art. Both groups confronted a politicisation of art that entailed a critical and subversive confrontation with the “autonomy of art”, a major achievement of mature socialist modernism. OHO crossed the borders of art into life. It has been an ideological project of a constructing “new world”, which was culminating in the formation of a commune as a new or alternative form of living, whereas Pupilija understood art as the last refuge of “free living” in an atmosphere quickly becoming a totalising machinery of capital flow and politics – capital and politics in the socialist and self-managed Yugoslavia between East and West.

Pupilija Ferkeverk was founded around 1969 as a version of a hippie youth counter-culture, modelled after the hippie movement in the United States. The group advocated a new sensibility (Marcuse 1969), a community of youth and of sexual and psychedelic liberation. Pupilija Ferkeverk was engaged with film, ludic¹² poetry, happenings in private spaces, and para-theatre performances at youth and student festivals. With their participation in BITEF, the group got involved in that domain of Yugoslav neo-avant-garde theatre which was present in the first public sphere.

Pupilija Ferkeverk turned experimental ludic poetry into experimental theatre practice. Their aesthetic and political references involved American neo-avant-garde theatre, ludic practices in poetry and theatre, and the atmosphere of hippie culture during the 1960s sexual and psychedelic revolution. The ludic impulse that determined the status of Pupilija Ferkeverk originated from the poetry stage and, certainly, from Slovenian socialist culture's confrontation with the first wave of mass consumerism during the political liberalisation process of the late 1960s. Moreover, this was not a simple dramatic transfer of ludic effects into poetry on stage, but a critical and transgressive turn inside the institution of “theatre” itself: from literary or dramatic theatre towards environmental, behavioural, physical, and body-centred performance. It turned from fictional narrative to a literary event as

itself, beyond the impact of mimesis. Life itself was unfolding on the stage – a life that would have been impossible outside of theatre, because the stage is reservation, an ideal space. Instead of representation, there was only presence; literary-fictional time was replaced by real live space and time. The performance moved away from art towards *life itself*. They stopped acting, and performed their behaviour as in real life: they talked, walked, kissed, touched, passed, etc. In his essay “The pupil, the puppy pupil and pupils” (“Pupiliija, papa pupilo pa pupilčki”) Tomaž Kralj – actor and member of the collective, poet and theatre director – analysed the group’s action as follows:

For us, presenting the text is not the primary goal. The play is realised directly, by means of theatrical visualisation, which is close to theatre, not to literature. The final form and consequence of the theatrical situation is neither predictable nor known in advance; they emerge simply and totally, when the situation is theatrically visualised. The author becomes a researcher of his own theatre; research occurs in practice.

(Kralj 1970, pp. 15–16)

Pupiliija’s theatre emerged as a radical intervention in life itself to achieve the essence of the phenomenon “theatre” – the essence lying behind the illusory signifiers of a dramatic text. The situation Kralj was talking about occurred spontaneously on the stage. As a result, a self-reflexive situation of the human condition appeared. The authors also viewed their work as a provocation of the national and class society in which they acted, and further, as an even more radical destruction of the modernist world’s “canon” in art, theatre, and society.

The practice of playing with possibilities of existence was revealed as dangerous by official cultural workers, because it meant transgression and provocation. Existential childishness and literality used countless features of joy to destroy real or illusory criteria of power and domination, as well as real or illusory rationality and pragmatism, represented by every political tactic and strategy in the world of “grownup” socialist modernists. The grownup world was that of socialist cultural bureaucrats, that is, state-supported modernist artists.

Tactical networking and the second public sphere: a resume

The analysis of the BITEF festival *Waiting for Godot*, the activities of OHO, and the purpose of Pupiliija shows that the relations between public spheres were not determined in a static, hierarchic way, but were effects of tactical networking involving artists, artist groups, the macro-level of the state, and diverse stratifications of the public sphere. I argue, therefore, that the first or official public sphere, as well as the second or other public sphere, were not fixed, stable discursive fields, but adaptive ideological constructions of tactical networking consisting of intersubjective relations between artists, audiences, collaborators, cultures, institutions, society as a whole, and the state. The staging of *Godot* in Belgrade in the mid-1950s indicated

an example of socialist theatre's transformation into an international, modernist theatre of the absurd. It was tactical networking between a local socialist-realist theatre practice and international modernist theatre to create a "new mainstream" direction of socialist modernism. Beckett's *Godot* only briefly attended the Yugoslavian second public sphere, but could not prevent the political and cultural public opinion from turning their backs on socialist modernism in theatre. With that turn carried out, *Godot* was brought back into the first public sphere as a paradigmatic example of reconstructing modernism under socialist conditions.

Unlike *Godot*, BITEF was a construct of cultural politics in self-managed and non-aligned Yugoslavia, which might be identified as a form of tactical networking in the field of theatre and performance between East, West, and the Third World. BITEF represented tactical networking as cultural politics of the state, which helped to redefine socialist Yugoslavia as a mediator between different political and cultural systems within the Cold War world order. By contrast, the activities of OHO and Pupilija Ferkeverk suggested that liberalized socialist cultural conditions generated a second public sphere tightly linked to the neo-avant-garde and the alternative youth culture of the late 1960s. Both artist collectives had different relations to the first and second public spheres in Yugoslavia's self-managed socialist society. During the 1960s OHO radicalised its position in the second public sphere by transforming a group of artists into an urban countercultural movement, resulting in an alternative commune on the edge of controlled society. Pupilija Ferkeverk, basically the other way around, transformed from an alternative hippie community into a performance and (later) theatre group that entered the domain of the first public sphere by developing its theatrical experimentation toward physical and environmental theatre as well as by venturing into ludic poetry within the culture of advanced socialist modernism.

The cases investigated in this paper suggest that the relationship between the first and second public spheres in socialist Yugoslavia as a semi-liberal socialist society was relativized and hybridized, i.e. open to various performance poetics, cultural politics, and artistic innovations – open to tactical networking in the artistic and cultural complexities of late modernism.

Notes

- 1 The aim of self-management was to realize decision-making at the lowest possible level, to make social relations and decisions direct and transparent (Erjavec 2003, p. 138).
- 2 "New sensibility manifests . . . in the refusal to take art 'seriously' in the old sense, the use of art itself as a vehicle for exploding its traditional pretensions and for showing the vulnerability and tenuousness of art and language; in the rejection of the dominant academic tradition of analytic and interpretive criticism, which by reducing art to a set of intellectual abstractions tends to neutralize or domesticate its potentially liberating energies" (Graff 1973, p. 384).
- 3 The abolishing of *Perspektive*, a Slovenian magazine, the sacking of the management of the Youth Forum cultural centre in Novi Sad, the political campaign against the "black wave in film," which culminated in the arrest of a student film director (Lazar Stojanović) and dismissing several professors from the Drama Academy in Belgrade.

- 4 The term “para-theatre” was coined by Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski, to address a highly dynamic and visceral approach to performance that aimed to erase traditional divisions between spectators and performers. In general, the term stands for anti- or post-dramatic theatre, or a certain relation between live art, performance art, and theatre art.
- 5 I use the concept of “alternative public sphere” as a variation of the term “second public sphere.” The term “alternative public sphere” highlights the critical and subversive potentiality of second public sphere.
- 6 The concept of critical modernism refers to various forms of modernist art (*Black Wave* film, critical drama theatre, critical figuration in painting) that performed a formal-aesthetic or thematic-political critique of the dominant culture and social values of Yugoslavia’s self-managed socialist society. In that regard, in theatre, one could speak of the critical theatre of the playwright Aleksandar Popović in Serbia, or in Slovenia of the work of the theatre director Dušan Jovanović.
- 7 Neo-avant-garde were the experimental and artistic practices that operated in the field of post-media and interdisciplinary artistic work (performance art, new-media art, Neo-dada, Fluxus, neo-constructivism, activism, and *samizdat*) between 1950 and 1968.
- 8 For example, Belgrade’s Student Cultural Centre hosted the Festival of Extended Media, which featured numerous international performance artists: Joseph Beuys, Gina Pane, Tom Marioni, Luigi Ontani, Ulrike Rosenbach, Jürgen Klauke, et al. The most significant performance festival was *Performance Meeting*, organized at the Student Cultural Centre between May 3 and 9, 1978. All of these festivals included joint performances of international and Yugoslav artists.
- 9 The stage set was designed by Belgrade modernist painters Mario Maskareli and Mića Popović (Pašić 1992, p. 16).
- 10 Reification is a Slovenian poetic and philosophical worldview originating in existentialist philosophy. It highlights the reduction of the world and the subject to an object. The OHO group’s early period is commonly identified as “reist”.
- 11 Tautological performance and body art signify artistic acting that presents elementary non-symbolic gestures as its sole content.
- 12 Ludism is an artistic practice (poetry, theatre, performance art, happening, painting) based on play. In other words, it is based on a behaviour freed from the conventions and canons of dominant art.

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3 Connection with the world

Internationalism and new art practice in Yugoslavia

Dietmar Unterkofler

The idea of an internationalist, critical, and progressive art movement became increasingly popular in the field of the international 68ers movement. It was often the artists themselves who wanted to overcome the narrow national or regional frontiers with their works, in order to take part in global communication. Participating in international discourse presented a great challenge, above all to those artists for whom it was made very difficult, because of the political situation in their countries, to act outside the established aesthetic norms imposed on them from above. Especially in the socialist-governed countries of Eastern Europe, but also in those governed by dictators, the emancipation movements of the late 1960s, and along with them the entire transformation of the field of experimental and avant-garde art, were often branded and marginalised as subversive and destructive to the state.¹

After leaving the Kominform² on June 28, 1948 Yugoslavia turned into the “other” socialist state.³ For Western countries it became the embodiment of socialism with a human face, favourite child and example for many, above all for progressive left-wing intellectuals in Frankfurt School circles. Among real-socialist states of Eastern and Southeastern Europe, Yugoslavia represented an ideal of liberty, a country with freedom to travel and with freedom of expression.

Oriented culturally toward Western Europe and the US, and politically toward the so-called Third World, the country under Josip Broz Tito’s rule took on the role of a buffer state between the Eastern and the Western blocs. This constellation was from 1961 on manifested in the founding of the movement of “non-aligned countries”, which – with all the associated contradictions and difficulties – would characterise political and cultural understanding until the fall of the Yugoslav political union in the 1990s.

The dissatisfaction with which the post-war generation regarded the prevailing conditions, as well as the search for a *New Sensibility* (Marcuse 1969), also dominated the cultural scene in Tito’s Yugoslavia during these years. A vibrant and urban avant-garde scene developed in the cities of Ljubljana,⁴ Zagreb,⁵ Split,⁶ Belgrade,⁷ Subotica,⁸ and Novi Sad,⁹ which strove for a new perception of art as a social practice to further the destruction of predominant aesthetic and ideological norms. Between about 1966 and 1980,¹⁰ Yugoslav artists and intellectuals were linked up with their European international contemporaries. Information from cultural

centres such as New York or London reached Belgrade almost immediately; artists took part in international exhibitions and conferences. In short: Yugoslav neo-avant-garde and conceptual art were an international phenomenon.¹¹

There were several levels on which the international networking of the Yugoslav post-war avant-garde took place, both institutional (supported by public authorities), and private (self-organised collaborations that took place outside institutions). Apart from the organisation of exhibitions with international participation, there was also a vigorous exchange of ideas, as is reflected in the dissemination of gallery talks, correspondence, and theoretical papers in magazines such as *Index*, *Polja* (*Field*), *Student*, or *WOW*, which were often published by the artists themselves.

The first part of this text outlines the key role of the artist and organizer of the Edinburgh Festival, Richard Demarco, as a mediator. Working together with Yugoslav authorities, he put on two group representations of Yugoslav performance and conceptual art in the framework of the Edinburgh Festival. These semi-institutional collaborations can be compared to the artistic interventions of the Bosch+Bosch Group, who, through actions and performance works, broached asymmetries between international participation and local marginalisation. Both examples are, directly or indirectly, connected with the student cultural centres of Belgrade (from 1971), Zagreb (from 1957), and Novi Sad (from 1954), representing alternative cultural spaces at the margins of official culture, where experimental and progressive artistic practices – such as performance, body art, and conceptual art – could develop under “controlled conditions”. I will apply the complex, sometimes paradoxical notion of the “second public sphere” to these venues, as they acted from a peripheral position, reaching a limited audience and promoting an overtly antagonistic cultural model. They were, nonetheless, financed by public funds and had an official status within the (first) cultural sphere. The development of new artistic practices and experiments in Yugoslavia would be unthinkable without the existence of these centres. The reason for the relatively tolerant position of Yugoslav cultural policy in these semi-official venues was clearly to present the image of a tolerant and open cultural nation to the rest of the world, yet to follow cultural politics internally that were in line with the political reflections of the party. This ambiguous and to some extent paradoxical stance is traceable in the nature of the collaboration with Demarco and the Edinburgh Festival, where the most progressive and radical artistic experiments of the time were not only presented to an international audience, but also supported with public funding, although in Yugoslavia itself they were kept at the very margin of the cultural sphere and were hardly visible to a broader audience.

The notion of a second public sphere in the specific Yugoslav context was different from other socialist countries, where the avant-garde of the time was often overtly banned, forbidden and forced to withdraw into private or underground spaces. The student cultural centres could best be described as “reservations” at the margins of official culture, as Miško Šuvaković describes them:

The Student Cultural Centre was for many years a place of investigation for the experimental, polymediatic, interdisciplinary and the conceptual. At the

same time it was a place of the new free art, and a reserve, in which the party leaders of socialist Yugoslavia demonstrated their openness and readiness to adapt cultural politics to the new and emancipated processes of the international art scene.

(Šuvaković 2009, p. 382)

Marginal internationalism: ambivalences in Yugoslav cultural politics

In the 1960s and 1970s Yugoslavia was considered to be a relatively liberal and free country, where there was freedom to travel and a particular tolerance toward innovations and modern artistic tendencies (Lampe 2000, p. 267). Under the banner “New Art Practice”, which refers to multiple artistic forms of expression and movements of non-representational and post-object art, including forms of neo-Dada, Fluxus, happening, performance, conceptual art, land art, and *arte povera*, among others. All of these could be found in Yugoslav art during this period, and all characterised the international art scene as well.

The common denominator of these heterogeneous phenomena within a Yugoslav context lies in a critical analysis of the existing practices of art and artforms in general. In contrast to the institutional critique of West European and US-American conceptual artists, who primarily wanted to withdraw from the increasing capitalisation of the entire art field, and who recognised an apology for the capitalist system and its institutions in the object-fixation of modern art, the institutional critique of East and Southeast European conceptual and performance art is somewhat different. Apart from art institutions, the ubiquity of the institution is a problem per se. Since all state institutions pursued the same aim – the protection and propagation of the socialist idea – critique was not limited to state institutions. It represented a comprehensive rejection of the ruling powers’ influences on the scope and content of art. The strategy of dematerialising the art object may be interpreted as an internal stance of resistance. Free areas of creativity, not accessible in the external world, accumulated, either partly or completely, in their own consciousness, and were manifested in a presentable, mental, and critical stance. This laid the foundations for their own existence as well as for ethically motivated alternatives. Consequently, neither exhibitions nor presentations of this art were overburdened with serious material or logistical problems. Their informative character allowed for fast-moving organisation, performative demonstration, and bypassing of the official system of communicating and presenting.

Critiques of the ideological order of Yugoslav social and cultural models, could not, however, be directly formulated in the context of the official (first) public sphere. Rather such critique was channelled into a second area of public domain (primarily the cultural centres), the outside influence of which was limited and marginal. When, on the one hand, Marina Abramović included an insignia of the state, the five-pointed red star, in one of her early performances (*Rhythm 5*) at the April meeting of the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade in 1974, this could be seen as the expression of an individual and subjective act, and not as an attack on the

state as such – and so it wasn't sanctioned as a subversive or critical act. When, on the other hand, Slavko Bogdanović, member of the Novi Sad-based group KOD, attacked the system openly and directly in his poem “Youth Tribune Underground Song” (“Underground Pesma Tribina Mladih”), the state reacted with drastic sanctions and sentenced him to a prison for several months. The artist had refused to act within the framework of the second public sphere allotted to him, with its limited possibilities for participation and public effect, but rather had attempted to approach the primary public sphere. This represented an intolerable affront and provocation.¹²

Young experimental artists, who often formed groups within the milieu of the student cultural scene, operated on equal terms with (West European and US-American) representatives of this renewal movement and were in close contact with artists, theoreticians, and curators from different countries. It is important to emphasise the fact that the international exchange was not one-sided but mutual, as is attested by a range of collective exhibitions, initiatives and collaborations.¹³

The internationalism of the Yugoslav avant-garde was determined by formal and institutional co-operations, private collaborations, private friendships and semi-official networks. One of the prerequisites for this internationalism lies partly in the fact that there were almost no travel restrictions or limitations for the Yugoslav passport, neither to Western nor to Eastern foreign countries.

According to Ješa Denegri, who as curator of the Belgrade Museum of Contemporary Art and convinced supporter of the new art practice played a central role in transmitting its contents both inside and outside the country: “For almost the entire second half of the 20th century, roughly from 1950 to 1990, i.e. until the disintegration of the ‘second Yugoslavia’, Serbian art can and must be considered within the context of the Western, rather than the Eastern European art scene, because it is with the former that it had numerous immediate ties” (2004, n.p.).

The examples of international collaboration and international exchange this text is dealing with are primarily between West European and Yugoslav protagonists and institutions. Without going into the issue of the general dominance of the “Western” art world (as opposed to, say, Afro-Asian, Australian, South-American), the alliance of Yugoslav artists with the West did not mean that artists had not recognised this issue.¹⁴ The orientation toward the West was understood as a deliberate distancing from the cultural sphere of the Soviet Russia-dominated community of states, with which they shared, with rare exceptions, few points of reference.¹⁵

The most important series of events, organized at the SKC from 1972 until 1977, featuring crucial conceptual artists of the time and connecting Yugoslav conceptual artists to contemporary international events, are the so-called April Meetings of Expanded Media (Aprilski susret – festival proširenih medija). These events were characterized by a strong interdisciplinary artistic program, including workshops, performances, lectures, and exhibitions with local and international participants. The April Meetings suggested a general atmosphere of freedom and emancipation, with its distinctly cosmopolitan behaviour and networking of artists and critics. They are one of the most vivid examples of the Yugoslav avant-garde scene's

international character, making Belgrade and the SKC one of the hotspots on the international art map.

The best-remembered event took place in 1974, when German artist Joseph Beuys, critic Barbara Reise, and Italian art critic and curator Achille Bonito Oliva were participating. The visit from Beuys, who the participants had met in Edinburgh the previous year at the exhibition organised by Richard Demarco, and whom they had invited to Belgrade, is a key event in the history of Yugoslav post-war avant-gardes.

In his lecture-performance on April 19, 1974 with the title *Expanded Media or New Art*, Beuys introduced central elements of his evolutionary-revolutionary theory, according to which genuine social transformation can only derive from the artistic field's extension into social practice (1974, p. 48). The content of Beuys' lecture and the discussion that followed was not recorded in writing, making a retrospective analysis difficult. According to Denegri's (2003, p. 64) firsthand account, Beuys gave the short version of his signature talk, which was grounded in sociological, philosophical, and artistic questions. He drew symbols on a blackboard to help explain his thesis, identifying art and creativity as the means by which human existence reaches maximum individualization in relation to surrounding social and political structures. Insisting on the interconnectedness of man and art, he emphasized the importance of creating dialogue through art. The fact of his presence in Belgrade, where among other activities he saw Marina Abramović's *Rhythm 5* and witnessed its later declaration to a key happening in the history of the Yugoslav neo-avant-garde, serves as a proof that the local art was perceived as a global phenomenon. This enthusiasm was only slightly dampened by the critical remarks of Achille Bonito Oliva, who, at the same event, had labelled the SKC as a reservation cut off from social reality: "You are in a reservation which is completely closed and isolated from the culture in which it takes place, and the socialist bureaucracy shows by using you that it appreciates international art, but, actually, keeping its moderate modernist or social modernist practice away from you" (Šuvaković 2008, p. 53). His words, which are a poignant definition of the functioning of the second public sphere, provoked some degree of disappointment and incomprehension, although the organisers agreed that in all of Yugoslavia there was no comparable place in which the latest local artistic tendencies could meet international events on an equal footing.

Connections with Scotland: the case of Richard Demarco

A remarkable case of Yugoslav New Art getting in touch with the international art world was through a cooperation with the Richard Demarco Gallery in Edinburgh. It was founded in 1966 by Italo-British Richard Demarco and was one of the first Western European galleries to foment intensive contact with the art scene of Eastern Europe. The first exhibition dedicated to Yugoslav performance art took place there in 1973, which is one of the first examples of its international presence.

Demarco's interest and commitment was driven by the need to show an alternative to the Western-dominated perspective in Europe, and to offer East European artists a platform to present their work:

However, I saw the danger of European art all too easily defined by the Western European artists who dominated the Venice Biennale and the Documenta exhibitions of the sixties, therefore I endeavoured also to extend at the same time the Gallery's dialogue with Eastern Europe with major festival exhibitions of Romanian and Polish Art in 1971 and 1972. . . . Then Edinburgh could have provided what the Documenta had failed to do, and allowed Eastern European artists to compare their work with what they had come to respect as the New World complement to their own.

(1976, p. 1)

Between December 4 and 12, 1972, Demarco undertook a nine-day journey through five Yugoslav states, with the aim of making contacts in the contemporary art scene and to prepare a presentation of them in Edinburgh.

An interesting fact in this context is that the trip was of a highly official character and had not been brought about in a clandestine manner, in order to meet "regime-critical" artists from the second public sphere. From a ten-page report (ibid., 1972b) on this journey it follows that his aim was not only to meet representatives of the



Figure 3.1 Performances/events by Rasa Todosijević (front), Gergely Urkom (centre, left) and Marina Abramović (background, performing *Rhythm 10*) for the RDG at Melville College, Edinburgh, *Eight Yugoslav Artists*, Edinburgh Arts 1973.

Courtesy: Richard Demarco Archive.

new artistic practices – the young avant-garde – but also established artists of the older generation, who felt committed to a formal aesthetic, corresponding to the official aesthetic programme of “socialist aestheticism.”¹⁶ The apparently eclectic group of artists visited by Demarco shows the ambivalence between local tolerance and channelling of New Art at a national level and its official public support at presentations abroad, a recurrent element, and a consequence of the cultural-political orientation of Yugoslavia as country “in between”. Despite intensive exchanges and several trips inland, Demarco saw the result of this journey as only the beginning of an intensive phase of collaboration. He noted: “I realized I had merely scratched the surface of the art world in Yugoslavia, though I had been on four all-night journeys by train, one jet flight, and I had visited five cities in nine days, and had been in twenty studios and met fifty-one artists, and twenty-five art critics and gallery directors” (Demarco 1972b, p. 12).

Demarco’s journey through Yugoslavia finally resulted in one of the first collaborative presentations of Yugoslav conceptual and performance artists at the Edinburgh Festival in 1973. In a letter to Oto Denes (Demarco 1972a), deputy director of the Yugoslav Federal Institute for International Collaborations in Science, Culture Education, and Technology, from December 26, 1972, Demarco passed on a list of those artists whom he would like to invite to the Edinburgh Festival in 1973. Among these were important protagonists of conceptual and performance art (Abramović, Todosijejić, Urkom, Vlahović, Damnjanović-Damnjan), but also “traditional” artists of the older generation such as Olga Jevrić, Oto Logo, Radomir Reljić, and more, in all about seventy artists from all the Yugoslav republics.

Finally, Demarco organised *8 Yugoslav Artists* in August 1973, including a group of six artists¹⁷ from Belgrade (Abramović, Paripović, Urkom, Todosijejić, Popović), as well as Nušo and Srećo Dragan from Ljubljana and Radomir Damnjanović Damnjan.

As part of the Festival Marina Abramović carried out her first performance, *Rhythm 10*, which, in an exemplary manner, serves as a basis for her later works and contains the central motif of her oeuvre, which is the concern with the physical limits of the body, pain and memory. In *Rhythm 10* ten knives of varying sizes and a tape recorder are used. Abramović, as in the “five finger fillet” game, moves the knives progressively faster over her hand. As soon as she injures herself, she picks up another knife and starts again. An acoustic record is made with the tape recorder and the moment of the injury is thus captured. The tape registers each occasion when Abramović gets injured. After all the knives have been used, the recording is played and the artist attempts to follow the prescribed rhythm.

With *Rhythm 10* Abramović makes the definitive turn to body art and performance art, after prior experimentation with different artistic forms of expression (concrete poetry, installations, photographic interventions). Abramović’s early performance works do not follow any complex theoretical predispositions. They are, on the contrary, expressions of a direct and immediate existentialism which is concerned with questions of physicality, pain and extending boundaries, and in the last analysis naked life itself. In later investigations, these works were often imbued with symbolic meaning, an implicit political and activist background was ascribed to them, even mythological and feminist layers of meaning were found in them. While

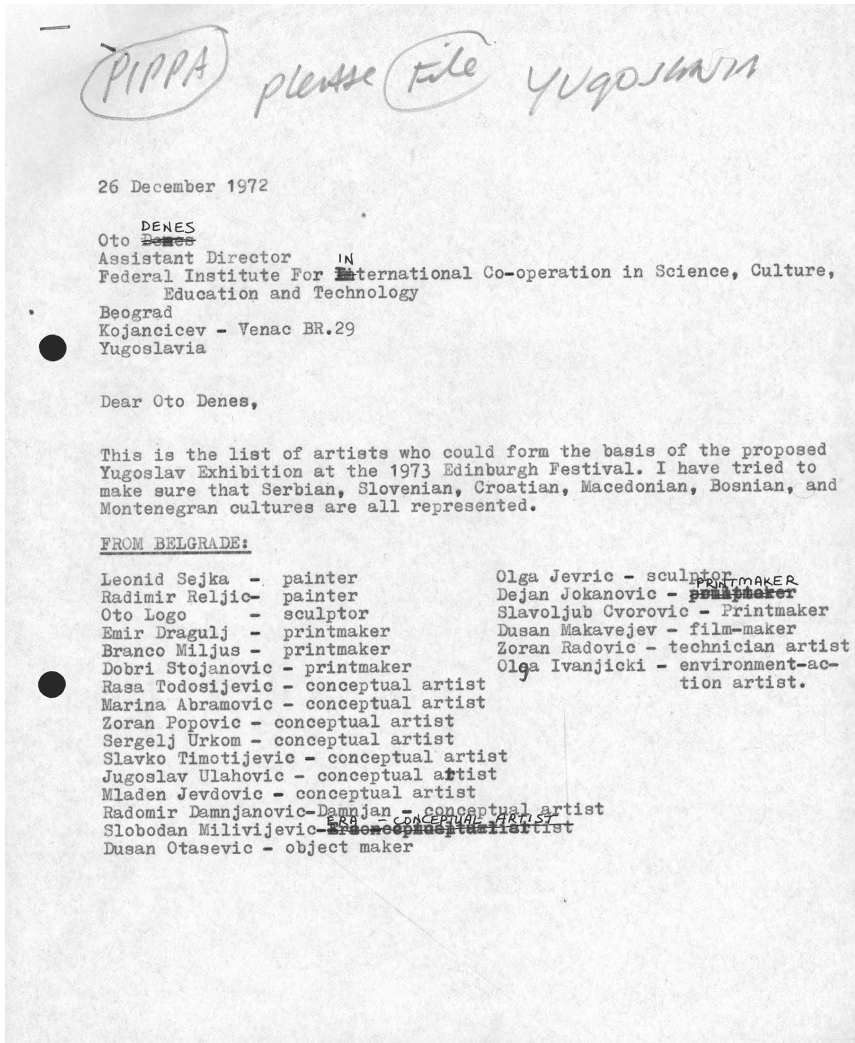


Figure 3.2 Letter (page 1 of 2) from Richard Demarco to Oto Denes, Assistant Director, Federal Institute for International Co-operation in Science, Culture, Education and Technology, Belgrade, Yugoslavia, with reference to artists selected for possible participation in a proposed exhibition of Yugoslavian artists at the RDG, 1973, 26 December 1972.

Courtesy: Richard Demarco Archive.

it is doubtless legitimate to ascribe symbolic content to some of these works, especially those from the *Rhythm* series (10, 5, 2, 4, 0), they are first and foremost radical performance experiments, which circumnavigate the complex relationship of artist-body-public realm and which sought to stretch boundaries along this axis. The

repeated use of communist state symbols (such as the five-pointed star, partisan's cap, uniform, etc.) are not to be regarded as critical remarks on a particular social order as such, but rather as deeply personal fragments of memory which have left traces in the artist's biography (Ward 2010). The fascination with discovering heroic acts of resistance against supposedly repressive state totalitarianism in these works often seems to derive from a generalised view of all the art produced behind (or away from) the Iron Curtain. It rarely holds up to a detailed and (moreover) contextual reading of these events. It neglects, as Šuvaković (2008) puts it, "the very delicate, careful, bureaucratically well performed centering" of the Yugoslav cultural model.

Following *8 Yugoslav Artists* Demarco worked on the realisation of a much bigger show, which was intended to include many of the artists who had appeared on the 1972 list (Demarco 1972b). After several trips to Yugoslavia, and others to the Croatian Motovun,¹⁸ in September and October 1975, together with Zagreb City Art Gallery, *Aspect '75* opened in Edinburgh, a large-scale exhibition in which the work of forty-nine contemporary Yugoslav artists of different genres and schools of thought were presented.¹⁹ According to curator Jon Blackwood, "*Aspect '75*, in every sense, gave as full a picture as was then possible of art practice in Yugoslavia, from Croatian naïve painting and 'socialist aestheticism' through to performance and video" (2010, p. 5). On the cover of the catalogue there was a representation of a Yugoslav passport with the pun "Passepart", a reference to the fact that in those years it was possible to travel practically anywhere in the world with a Yugoslav passport, as mentioned above. *Aspect '75* is an impressive example of the international presence of Yugoslav art in the 1970s and furthermore a highly official and paradigmatic realisation of the cultural-political orientation of the country, whereby the juxtaposition of the different artistic positions bears witness, just as much as the numerical balance from each of the eight Yugoslav republics. The curatorial concept, however, presenting radical performance and conceptual art alongside naïve painting and historical motifs, seems in this case to follow a kind of exoticization which does not consider the associated implications, the different creational contexts and political implications. The exhibition, with the subtitle *Contemporary Yugoslav Art*, showed works from artists of the most varied artistic languages. The spectrum extended from naïve painting; extensive draperies and archaic woodcuts; to the photo-documentations of Marina Abramović's Performance *Rhythm 2* (1974); Braco Dimitrijević's *Casual Passers-by* series, in which he set up large scale portraits of unknown, randomly selected people in public squares; or Raša Todosijević's *Edinburgh Statements*, a pamphlet-like text, to be read as a totalised institutional critique in which he listed all those who would financially benefit in the art world. The setting of the exhibition was aimed at equal rights for all artistic forms and expressions. It was thus clearly aimed at showing the multiplicity and openness within contemporary Yugoslav art, on which there were no limitations or sanctions (as long as the artists restrained their sphere of activity to the alternative secondary spaces created for them). The evident eclecticism of *Aspect '75* may be regarded as a representative example of Yugoslavian foreign cultural politics, with all its contradictions and ambivalences. These are best seen in the following examples by the Bosch+Bosch Group, an artist's collective active in the most northern part of Serbia, literally positioned at the (geographical and cultural) margins of the country.

Provinciality and internationalism: Bosch+Bosch

The ambivalences and difficulties accompanying the “connection with the world” (Denegri 1977), far from the successful events within the framework of student cultural centres, are shown in the works of the Bosch+Bosch group, one of the first art collectives of Yugoslav New Art, founded in 1969.

The Bosch+Bosch group demonstrates well the contradictory nature of the cultural politics of the country, located between tradition and modernity, but also the self-positioning of the new avant-garde in this context. On the one hand characterised by the need to position itself in an international, even global artistic movement, this demand was, on the other hand, an ongoing challenge. Bosch+Bosch was acting from a marginal position in two respects: politically, from the perspective of the state that defined itself as “somewhat in-between”, and artistically, because the entire experimental counter-culture was regarded as fringe – a peripheral phenomenon constantly under pressure to demonstrate its legitimacy. This twofold marginalisation led the artists – above all, the two central figures of the group, Slavko Matković and Bálint Szombathy – to make this unsatisfactory position the object of their artistic investigations. The Bosch+Bosch group is therefore a paradigmatic example for the ambiguities and constant struggles that artists acting within the second public sphere were exposed to.

The photo series *Bauhaus* from Szombathy's photo-performance²⁰ of 1972 reflects the ambivalences of the experimental and event-based art scene in the context of the second Yugoslavia in a very convincing way. In the work, a signboard with the text “Bauhaus” is popping up in different places in an obviously desolate flat in Novi Sad (Szombathy's own) being photographed – sometimes with Szombathy in the picture, sometimes without. The flat is declared as Bauhaus by the artist. The contextual shift in this subtle intervention occurs on both a temporal and a spatial level – and receives its meaning from the discrepancy of interaction. In the action of transferring the ideals of Bauhaus, the symbol of international post war modernism, into the context of real socialism. They again are addressed in an absurd-existential meaning and deliver a statement on the significance of the avant-garde in cumbersome technocratic socialism, which liked to see itself as progressive, modern and forward-looking – just as the Bauhaus-School had – but was in practice, atavistic, anti-modern and overly bureaucratic. In other words, “Szombathy confronted the ideals of modernism as the culture of progress with the quotidian environment of the great majority of members of everyday socialist reality” (Šuvaković 2003, p. 119).

While Szombathy's conceptually-motivated performance-action works could be characterised as semiotic interventions, with which he often contradicts the meaning of established visual signs to conditions in their surroundings, or rather which were contextual displacements of these symbols, the works of Matković have an existential dimension and expose the dilemma of an artistic existence trying to defy the adversities of everyday life in late socialism.

On November 26, 1974 a classified advertisement from Slavko Matković appeared in the German regional newspaper *Hartzberger Presse* (*Hartzberg Press*)

with the statement “Ich bin Künstler (I am an artist) – Slavko Matković”.²¹ The project with the title *Ich bin Künstler (Ja sam umetnik)* was to be Matković’s most important art project, as he told Bálint Szombathy in a letter from November 12 of the same year: “I want this announcement published through all leading papers worldwide! The project is in progress already – including so far Canada, West Germany, France, England” (Milenković 2005, p. 57). This intervention cannot be labelled as performative in a narrow sense, it is rather the artist’s attempt to conduce a self-verification of his own artistic existence by establishing an imaginary dialogue with an unknown partner. This relatively simple act may be characterised as paradigmatic for the poetics of Slavko Matković, who, like few others, had interwoven his existence with his self-understanding as an artist. Matković belongs, according to Miško Šuvaković, to the tradition of such artist figures as Kurt Schwitters, Lajos Kassák or also Joseph Beuys, in whom also “after a particular moment the boundaries between the biographical, the concrete life and artistic production were lost (crossed, erased)” (Šuvaković 1996, p. 123).

Conclusion

Present text was an attempt to demonstrate and analyse various aspects of the international networking of Yugoslav experimental and post-object art scene in the 1970s as well as the ambiguities characteristic to the in-between position of Yugoslavia outside the dominating logics of the Cold War era. The case studies consulted in this paper show the complexity and plurality of the cultural exchanges and the reciprocal interlacing of these phenomena further how they were challenging a homogeneous view of cultural public spheres in real existing socialism. Internationalism is not to be seen here as an effort to connect with a dominant discursive practice, that of “Western” art, but far more as an expression of an artistic matter of course to form part of an international movement which has made its task to extend the limits of art and to leave behind and deconstruct the traditional late modernism, with all its ideological implications.

By focusing on selected conceptualist and performance practices in Yugoslavia during the 1970s, the essay aimed to challenge conventional models of East-West relations, and established a non-hierarchical point of view on the development of performance and ephemeral artistic practice alongside different trajectories of exchange, transnational collaboration, cross-border activities of artists, curators, and content.

The case studies had demonstrated that the development of Yugoslav post-objective art, of performance and body art, is by no means due to a belated uptake of Western universal practices, but rather is an expression of a simultaneous spirit of change, spurred by similar needs, which set itself up in opposition to the formal language of modernist objective art and its ideological cultural policy. It is worth noting that many of the examples cited here are not readable as direct aesthetic reactions to their specific contexts of creation, on the contrary, they were first and foremost reflections of the same contents which were dominant in the Western context. Institutional critique, a break with state artistic space in favour of

ephemeral and performance forms of presentation, the transformation of one's own body into artistic object or medium, were global strategies of the neo-avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s.

The dichotomy between East and West, the acting from a "limited", often marginalized and precarious, second public sphere and the concomitant limitation on public dissemination also reveal the ambivalence of these highly innovative and internationally oriented epochs, as addressed here in the works of Szombathy and Matković. The internationalism of the Yugoslav neo-avant-garde, i.e. its unquestioned self-image of taking part in a universal emancipation movement on a par with the global centres of those years, is in retrospect to be viewed as a brief episode. Art theorist Igor Zabel, who in many of his writings has analysed East-West relations, which are usually understood as a relationship between centre and periphery, criticises that there is still only a very small number of East European artists whose status is recognised in the so-called West, and even if recognition succeeds, only those who act from within a Western context are "integrated": "... The codification of the field and the construction of its history and tradition resulted in a marginalization or total ignorance of important eastern phenomena. For example, eastern avant-garde artists of the 1960's and early 70's simply do not exist in historical surveys of art of this time, except those who have moved to the West" (Zabel 2012, p. 28).

Notes

- 1 Cf. the exhibition and its corresponding publication (Christ and Dressler 2010).
- 2 The Information Bureau of the Communist (Parties) and Workers Parties.
- 3 "The basic issue in the great quarrel of 1948 was very simple: whether Tito and his Politburo or Stalin would be dictator of Yugoslavia. What stood in Stalin's way was Tito's and hence the Yugoslav regime's autonomous strength, based on the uniqueness in Eastern Europe of Yugoslavia's do-it-yourself and armed Communist revolution and its legacy: a large Party and People's Army recruited primarily on the basis of patriotic rather than socialist slogans, and the independent source of legitimacy as well as power which came from the Partisan myth of political founding" (Rusinow 1977, p. 25).
- 4 Cf. the OHO group was founded in Slovenia in 1966, the first artistic collective of the region, dealing with happening, performance and conceptual art.
- 5 The most prominent artists are: Goran Trbuljak, Tomislav Gotovac, Braco Dimitrijević, Sanja Iveković, Group of Six Artists (Boris Demur, Željko Jerman, Vlado Martek, Sven Stilinović, Mladen Stilinović, Fedor Vučemilović).
- 6 Cf. the group Crveni peristil.
- 7 Even within the more narrow context of Belgrade only, one could list a large number of artistic groups that were active within the context of the "new artistic practice": Ekipa A³, the informal group of six artists, the Mečgroup, Signalism (Signalizam), the Zrenjanin textualists, Group 143, among others (Unterkofler 2013, p. 53).
- 8 Bosch + Bosch was founded there in 1969 by Bálint Szombathy and Slavko Matković.
- 9 The groups KOD (1970–1971); (Θ and (Θ KOD were influenced by language philosophy, the Situationist Internationale as well as by politically engaged artistic practices.
- 10 This suggested periodization is based on the founding date of the Slovenian OHO group, which marked the beginning of the neo-avant-garde in Yugoslavia and the date when the Belgrade-based Group 143 broke up, that was considered as the last coherent group of conceptual art.

- 11 On the international nature of Yugoslav conceptual art see Šuvaković 2009, pp. 373–383.
- 12 For his text *The Poem of the Underground Youth Stands Novi Sad* (*Pesma underground tribina mladih novi sad*) that should have appeared in the student magazine *Index* (this edition was banned), Bogdanović 1972 was sentenced to an 8 months imprisonment.
- 13 Denegri (1978) mentions examples such as the collaboration of Slovenian group OHO and Walter de Maria in 1971 as well as the exhibitions that Braco and Nena Dimitrijević organized: *At the Moment* (in Frankopanska 2a in Zagreb) and *In the another moment* (Gallery of Students' Cultural Centre in Belgrade), with the participation of Anselmo, Barry, Brown, Buren, Burgin, Dibbets, Flanagan, Huebler, Kirili, Kounellis, LeWitt, Weiner and Wilson. Furthermore, The Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb hosted the shows of artists like Buren, Boltanski and Messenger. The Student Cultural Centre (SKC) in Belgrade became *the* venue for international meetings held in April from 1972 with guest artists such as Michelangelo Pistoletto, Jannis Kounellis, Gina Pane, Joseph Beuys, Andrew Menard and Michael Corris from Art & Language, John Baldessari; and critics such as Germano Celant, Achille Bonito Oliva, Filiberto Menna, Klaus Honnemann, etc. The other aspect was the participation of Yugoslav artists in thematic exhibitions and big art manifestations like the Edinburgh Art Festival, the Biennial of Young Artists in Paris, Documenta in Kassel and Venice Biennial. The most notable examples are the following: group OHO in 1970 took part in the exhibition *Information* curated by Kynaston McShine in MOMA, New York; OHO and Braco Dimitrijević exhibited at *Aktionsraum 1* in Munich in 1971; Goran Trbuljak, Goran Đorđević, Marina Abramović, Raša Todosijević, Zoran Popović, Mladen Stilinović, Andraž Šalamun and Group 143 exhibited at the Biennial of Young Artists in Paris from 1973 to 1977; Braco Dimitrijević who attended postgraduate studies at St Martin's School of Art in London from 1971 to 1973, exhibited at Documenta 5 and Documenta 6 in Kassel in 1972 and 1977. Marina Abramović who in 1976 left for Amsterdam and started working with Ulay, exhibited at the Venice Biennial in 1976 and Documenta 6 in Kassel in 1977.
- 14 Between about 1972 and 1974 there was a very close collaboration between the American offshoot of the Art&Language group and the Belgrade-based conceptual and performance artist Zoran Popović and the art historian Jasna Tijardović. Both spent some time in New York between 1974 and 1975 and worked together with Art&Language. This is also where Popović's film *Struggle in New York*, which documents the conflict within Art&Language, was made. In October 1975 three Art&Language members (Michael Corris, Andrew Menard, and Jill Breakstone) came to Belgrade and took part in a roundtable discussion arguing against the "cultural imperialism" of the USA.
- 15 A noteworthy exception is the group exhibition of New Yugoslav Art, shown in 1976 in the Warsaw *Galeria współczesnej* and that was exclusively comprised of works in the spirit of New Art practice.
- 16 According to Sveta Lukić this specific Yugoslav version of modernism developed after 1955 and carried the following characteristics: "Aestheticism dulls the edges, rounds up things, smoothes a more specific, further divergence. Theoretically empty, definitely loose in practice, it forms more neutral works. It is therefore an art form that entailed elements of socialist everyday reality, but fused these elements with a modernistic and partly abstract vocabulary of form as the dismissal of socialist Soviet-influenced realism" (Lukić 1963, p. 67).
- 17 Era Milivojević did not take part in the Edinburgh exhibition.
- 18 The so-called Motovun meetings (Motovunski likovni susreti, 1972–1984) were a forum for intensive international exchange between Yugoslav and international New Art. Contacts with Italian experimental art were especially important.
- 19 The exhibition was afterwards also shown in Dublin, Belfast, Leigh and Glasgow.
- 20 "Photo performance" is a name for anonymous, private or public actions of an artist that are not intended for a set audience (only accidental viewers). They are instead planned for a photographic documentation of the performance event (Šuvaković 2005, p. 158).

- 21 The ad was handed in and paid for by Dejan and Bogdanka Poznanović, based on instruction by Matković. The Poznanovići were at that time on their way to Documenta in Kassel.

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4 Questioning the East

Artistic practices and social context on the edge

Ileana Pintilie

Talking about Eastern Europe, both before and after 1989, seems to be a rather difficult task for the brave few who decide to attend this journey. The geopolitical region was – and still is – not a homogeneous cultural space: the differences are justified by a dissimilar past as well as by a complex present, which, in my opinion, cannot be reduced to the simplifying notion of the “East”. Therefore, analysing certain layers of the public sphere, pointing out random specificities of clandestine event-based art, will draw our attention to the complexity of this large puzzle. The pieces of this puzzle can question the East as a coherent theoretical as well as historical construct. In the present investigation, I intend to shed light on a few specificities of the Romanian second public sphere through snapshot-like glimpses of event-based art, intermediality and communication that were deeply anchored into the country’s social context.

Despite the communist system’s thorough control over the public sphere, a parallel public sphere existed all over the communist bloc with significant regional differences. This second public sphere was a discursive (semi-) autonomous field for creation and communication, with a paradoxical relationship to authoritarian order and features such as elusiveness, sabotage, isolation, border-crossing, escapism and political motivation/politicization. The aspiration to control all kinds of public spheres was characteristic of dictatorships of any kind; this was especially true for Nicolae Ceaușescu’s Romania during the last decade of the socialist order. While at that time the Soviet Union was already dominated by a relative relaxation initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev and carried out in the entire bloc, Romania returned to Stalinist concepts. This was the result of Ceaușescu’s discovery of Asian communism in 1970, followed 1971 by “The July Theses”.¹ Over a couple of years, the artistic public sphere’s extension was limited, dominated by party control, causing the opening of ideologically motivated propaganda centres, such as the Council for Socialist Culture and Education and the Inspectorates for Socialist Culture and Education. Both of these “fed” the first public sphere.

If Yugoslavia represented the model of disobedient socialism, that of capitalist extraction – and became, to a large extent, an exception within the Eastern Bloc – Romania was, in the 1980s, one of the most isolated countries of the region. Despite a growing retreat from the international stage, the disaster and ruin of cultural

institutions, which were under ideological control lacking initiative, artists, as individuals or in small groups, opposed the communist regime by constantly eluding or sabotaging it with their own tools. Even if there was a huge disparity between the repression of cultural institutions, the official ideology, and Ceaușescu's one-person dictatorship,² being concerned with the control and censorship of any innovative cultural phenomenon, the presence of tiny islands of the second public sphere, created by a few artists and culture-oriented people, appear almost miraculous.

Under these circumstances in Romania there existed a second public sphere which was at times underground, at times open, in full sight of the authorities, with frequently changing members and supporters. In most cases this parallel culture had a dynamic circulation, with members only staying for short periods of time, occasionally, sometimes by accident, and with others who were participating in the official culture too, for various reasons ranging from cynicism and compromise to challenge. The second public sphere wasn't free of so-called double agents: artists or art critics being involved in the neo-avant-garde and at the same time functioning as secret police informers.³

I consider this overlapping of the official and unofficial public spheres in the arts as an important aspect of deconstructing stereotypes inscribed into a generalized view of the East. The situation of artists being actively involved both in the first and second public spheres was extremely complex. To reflect on this paradox questioning universalisations, I will consult the example of Ion Bitzan and Ion Grigorescu. Both artists exploited official art structures to achieve public attention – internationally and domestically.

Ion Bitzan (1924–1997) was a favourite of public commissioning. His studio artwork production served more elitist contexts, targeted at foreign curators because he mainly exhibited those works abroad. He is a telling example of the birth and consolidation of a double discourse, in which activities in the local cultural space and the international space collided. The double discourse was a proof of an unscrupulous, ideologically insensitive pragmatism. This contradiction becomes clearer when in 1969 Scottish art dealer Richard Demarco came to Bucharest to discover contemporary Romanian art. He was surprised to see, in Bitzan's and other artists' studios, an art perfectly in synchrony with the West. Although Bitzan was interested in Dada textual experiments, object aesthetics, socialist-realist painting, sculpture and postmodernist installations, he demonstrates a clear-cut contrast to Grigorescu, who was not involved in a double discourse.

The case of Grigorescu (b. 1945), trained as a painter but interested in mixed media, provides a different example of how public spheres overlapped. Besides performatively researching the human body under clandestine circumstances, he tried, at the same time, to display his avant-gardist art at official exhibitions. These non-canonical artworks censors regarded as provocative were the creative result of artificial "public debates". These paintings were inspired by reportage photography, like *Carrying out the Plan Resides in Team Power* (*Îndeplinirea planului stă în puterea colectivului*, 1972). Such artworks were often removed from the show because of the fear that they could generate a real debate. Grigorescu's hyperrealistic approach was also

part of a collage series entitled *The Great Demonstration of August 23 – The Festival of Liberation* (*Marea demonstrație de 23 August – Sărbătoarea Eliberării*, 1974) presented at the exhibition *Images of History* (Bucharest, Galeria Nouă, 1975) with 24 snapshots technically extracted from the television broadcast of the parade. While the material itself was based on a political event's live broadcast of the national television, the collage consisted of subjectively selected images that were charged with a doubled meaning. The initial motivation of organizing the parade was, on the collages, subverted by text on the panel.

In the 1970s Grigorescu was actively engaging in different public spheres, though contrary to Bitzan's participation in the official double discourse. Because in the following decade he was forbidden to present his aesthetic research on the body and nudity in the first public sphere, he was pushed back into the isolation of private space.

Even in the 1980s, obvious border-crossings between the first and the second public sphere were few. This was especially true for (performance) artists dealing with questions of identity from a concrete, direct, corporeal aspect, who only had rare opportunities to express themselves in the first public sphere, since relocating private intimacy into a controlled public realm wasn't welcome in Romania, neither in the 1970s nor in the 1980s. Performance art was strictly individual, not very widespread, restricted to workshop experiment or private space, with no real audience.⁴ The almost complete isolation of Romanian performers both in the 1970s and 1980s originated in the dogmatic rejection of the body, considered a taboo subject, an unartistic element, a problematic medium, not having been acknowledged because it allowed for subjective interpretations, which could escape standardisation. The artist's body was not to appear in public other than in classical self-portrait.

The fragmentation of the Romanian public sphere in late socialism becomes clear when considering the case of performance art and how it was pushed into marginal zones of creation. The dominant public sphere of the 1980s did not tolerate radical forms of aesthetic provocation, therefore an alternative art area appeared that was already consolidated in the 1970s, mainly through the individual artistic contributions of the performance artists Ion Grigorescu and Geta Brătescu. The lack of publicity and the pressure of censorship forced the two artists to record and take photographs of their event-based works in the privacy of their own studios. Grigorescu used to work alone, positioning his naked body in front of the camera that became his intimate partner and accomplice. For Grigorescu the body was the best available material on which he could act out his interest in visual experiments. This very interest was also fuelled by the discovery and study of various psychoanalytical theories, including those of Freud and Lacan. Based on the notes he had taken of his dreams, Grigorescu turned these thoughts into filmic scenarios reminding us of the inconsistency and absurdity of dreams themselves.

Through the body performances we get an insight into the private sphere, paradoxically deprived of its complete privacy. Grigorescu's restless experiments are centred around the body, and sexuality indirectly emphasizes the repression of the outside, of the system. In certain series of photographs, such as *Pyjamas* (*Pijama*,

1974) and *Indoor Body Art* (*Body Art în interiorul casei*, 1976), the images are manipulated to serve the illusion of looking through a prison cell's peephole. The artist's body becomes subject to a daily ritual. The mechanical repetition in the photo series reminds us of Foucault's "docile body" pressured by power (Foucault 1975, pp. 137–171).

Those photo-performances and films by Grigorescu focusing on the taboo subject of the body were taken in an abstractly and artificially decorated environment further alienated through the use of a life-size mirror. It magnified the body and transported it into a labyrinth-like infinite space (*Mirrors* [Oglinzi, 1975]). The lights also adapt to artificiality, the image is usually fixed, only recording the artist's contorted movements in front of the camera. There are cases when the image grows mobile, with Grigorescu detaching the camera from the tripod, moving it up and down in front of his body or raising it above his head. In this latter example, the movement becomes irregular and hasty, the image is shaking restlessly, as seen in the film *Male-Female* (*Masculin-Feminin*, 1976).

Political topics are also processed in the atmosphere of the closed space trimmed with a curtain as background. The context of these mediated performances, namely the second public sphere, was through its oppositional position to a ruling publicity heavily politicized. And so was the (indirectly) system-critical and subversive content of the event-based art pieces. In the film entitled *Dialogue with President Ceaușescu* (*Dialog cu Președintele Ceaușescu*, 1978), belonging to this category of Grigorescu's oeuvre, the artist was, in a claustrophobic setting, playing two roles at the



Figure 4.1 Ion Grigorescu, *Mirrors*, the artist's studio, 1975.

Courtesy: Ion Grigorescu.

same time: himself and the Romanian dictator. The plot is centred around the dialogue of the two characters, where Grigorescu confronts Ceaușescu with his questions and thoughts concerning the dictator's responsibility in current economic and social circumstances. Thoughts and questions were faded in as subtitles and the figures stayed mute, which shifted the atmosphere of the film into absurdity, because no conversation was actually happening – and in this moment lies the subversive nature of the piece, with its heavily politicized message. The same interpretation is true for *Bucharest, My Love* (*În Bucureștiul iubit*, 1977). Here Grigorescu gets on a tram to record images of the city, focusing on the physical demolitions and destructions caused by construction of the president's new palace, The People's House. The visual effects are blurred images and anxiety, there are long shots, the pictures are moving in a somewhat random manner (Pintilie 2013, p. 28). This form of subtle aesthetic criticism directs our retrospective attention to the harm the Romanian dictator caused on multiple levels of social, political and cultural life. In both cases, it was only possible to express politically motivated / politicized creative opinion using media that created a specific, autonomous public sphere, of a kind that only very rarely appeared in historical discourses of the East.

As an allusion to her experience of censorship, an addition to the line-up of politicized / politically motivated performances, Geta Brătescu (b. 1926) created a series of provocative photograph / collage self-portraits entitled *Censored Self-Portrait* (*Autoportret cenzurat*, 1978), with her mouth and her eyes sealed by a paper strip. With this gesture, she referred to the inability to communicate freely in the deviated first public sphere. Self-portraits appeared in Brătescu's work of the 1970s very often. A representative example is her individual show *Towards White* (*Către alb*, Galateea Gallery, Bucharest, 1976) presenting a great number of her photo-performances (Guță 1999, p. 119), in which the artist's face was reproduced obsessively. These photo-performances interlinked her studio research and the phenomenon of the second public sphere. *Self-Portrait towards White* (*Autoportret către alb*, 1975), to name an example, consists of a series of seven juxtaposed frontal portraits of Brătescu, where the lines of the face dim from photograph to photograph until the contours vanish completely, and projected film on Brătescu's face.

Brătescu produced some filmed and photographed performances in the 1970s as well, focusing on herself and her studio. The studio was a central space of her experiments that was not to be separated from her personality or imagination. Brătescu's best known performance is entitled *The Studio* (*Atelierul*, 1978), filmed by Ion Grigorescu. Inside the studio, Brătescu is constructing a mental space, by measuring the physical space with her body – walking, stretching her hands, etc. Then she draws a square in the studio having the size of her own body, where she symbolically falls asleep and then wakes up. Like Ion Grigorescu, Geta Brătescu also made efforts and sometimes even succeeded in presenting some of these mediated experiments in her exhibitions, though she never performed in front of an audience. This is the reason why the studio, as an intimate public sphere, was still Brătescu's most important production site. The theme of the studio appeared in another photo-performance, also entitled *Towards White*.

Geta Brătescu channelled her research on embedded identity into self-portrait and used the studio as a symbol of her work. The filmed actions were only meant

for a very small, unofficial public, contributing to the second public sphere and consequently consolidating the artist's authority and her recognition within the artist community.

When one is posing the question about the retrospective legitimacy of the Eastern Bloc and the functioning of the public spheres in the arts, the extension of the latter – as a source for information – becomes also a relevant issue. In the 1960s–1980s information circulation about art and culture was ensured through the contemporary art journals available in the American, French, or Italian cultural centres in Bucharest. Direct communication within the communist camp was more opaque, mostly limited to official exchange, though information on contemporary art in socialist countries was made available in journals selling in Romania. Unofficial Western exchanges continued with the help of emigrated mediators still staying in touch with Romanian acquaintances.

The most popular printed periodicals as information sources on art were the Polish *Project* and the East German *Bildende Kunst* (*Fine Arts*). *Arta* (*Fine Arts*), appearing in Bucharest since the 1950s, played an important role in transmitting filtered information suiting both official and unofficial categories. The ambiguity of published discourses, editors' policy and placing ideologically adequate articles at the beginning and those about international art at the end of each issue, was the way how a certain degree of intellectual freedom could be practiced despite control and censorship. These editorial policies of *Arta* and *Secolul 20* (*The 20th century*), a literary review informing on contemporary art, reflected the complicated situation in communist Romania, where even contrary discourses existed simultaneously. These journals can be considered as influential pillars of the second public sphere, although their circulation was very limited and they were only able to address a small community of readers with special interest. A group of art critics⁵ who desired a lively cultural discourse, constantly promoted the artists they considered interesting and encouraging for their research. They even found ways how to promote controversial artworks.

The 1980s' generation of artists, more motivated and determined to reach the public, was supporting "new" media (performance, body art, installation, experimental film, video). This was a time when, despite of pressure from institutional structures, the official movement of young artists that was protected and controlled by the communist creative unions, gained strength to formulate a separate opinion and was able to put pressure on the system.⁶ This group, known as Studio 35, was promoting new media and searched for the official legitimacy that could be provided by the artists' union. The 1980s' generation, by joining international art networks such as mail art (Röder 1996, pp. 7–318), aimed to sabotage the blockades of the official system, that throughout the decade became more and more restrictive and isolated. Like the information channels, mail art, as a form of lively exchange, further extended the second public sphere's influence.

To photographer Iosif Király out of the large scale of new media photography was the ideal tool. It offered a format for concentrated information he intended for the future and that could easily reach an anonymous audience, "traveling" via mail art. The desire to escape the dreadful isolation of the 1980s made him try to contact other artists from remote cultures. Practicing mail art was an attempt to break

the blockade imposed on all the citizens of the country during the last stage of Ceaușescu's paranoid dictatorship. Király made of autobiographical photos small-size collages, afterwards turning them into mail art works in order to exchange them with other artists. These photographs resulted of performances held in his own studio or home, expressing the artist's exasperation and frustration caused by daily life in the 1980s. Mail art became for him an escapist, albeit temporary, strategy, to fight the segregation of the communist regime, the abusive control of censorship and the threat of dictatorship. The discouragement culminating in being cut off from the international stage, resulting from the limitation of information and creation was compensated by gestures of solidarity as the case of Shimamoto will demonstrate. The exchanges of messages by mail contributed to the creation of a small nucleus of Romanian artists, who achieved a short-lived but significant solidarity despite the atomization of the local cultural environment and enabled contacts with international artists. During the 1980s, Király corresponded with Japanese artist Shozo Shimamoto, a member of the Gutai group, who even visited Timișoara to see him. Mail art helped the artist to justify his search and finding a purpose in an exasperating reality, offering him a satisfactory feedback, an opening and a novel, creative impulse. At that time, mail art became, for the isolated Romanian artists a second public sphere, a field of artistic, cultural and even human escapism. The artists' contributions in various foreign publications remained unknown to the authorities and the general public, but were accessible to a small circle of colleagues in the second public sphere.

The principle of mail art, as a possibility of outsourcing the second public sphere's potentialities, was employed by several Timișoara-based artists – Constantin Flondor, Doru Tulcan and Iosif Király – who in 1984 invited fellow artists to participate in a nation-wide survey posing the following question: "Life without art?". Visual artists were joined by writers and musicians, each having the freedom to choose the medium for how to answer the question. Of the material, collected as a result, the initiators intended to organize an exhibition,⁷ the plan of which was rejected by the authorities without any explanation. As a result, the exhibition was organized in Flondor's studio open to the public. The private sphere of the studio was, for the duration of the show, transformed into a (second) public sphere.

The temptation of implementing new media prevailed for several artists because it secured a field of (semi-)autonomous action, the chance to cross borders in the heat of experiment. Various artistic practices, like intermediality, were attractive for artists like Alexandru Antik, Teodor Gaur, Dan Mihălțianu, Wanda Mihuleac, Iosif Király and others. In order to tie these artistic practices to public space and obtain them official recognition, in 1986 Studio 35 organized the *Symposium of Young Visual Art and Art Criticism* in Sibiu, an event which lasted for several days at several locations in town. The event was attended by the above-mentioned artists, who performed in front of a selected, rather closed public, consisting of artists and art critics of the same generation. Alexandru Antik's happening *The Dream is not Dead* (*Visul nu a pierit*) represented a statement of hope in times of great national depression and was the most famous event-based piece in Romania of the 1980s. Antik performed an action with the naked body as a scene of immanent reality. The happening modelled the situation of imprisonment: the artist acted behind



Figure 4.2 *Life without Art*, Constantin Flondor's Studio, Timișoara, 1984.

Photo: Iosif Király. Courtesy: Iosif Király.

prison bars separating himself from the audience. Antik cut his hair, displayed animal organs filled with blood that were cast in plaster. László feLugossi read a neo-Dadaist text, in candle light, he was acting among objects presented in a personal micro-exhibition. The action was abruptly interrupted by the authorities, who prompted the public to leave and the organizers to clean the blood. Antik created a tension between intimate reflections about life, art, oppression and the absence of freedom – in the action the body was the immediate victim of punishment.

If Antik's performance was a failed attempt to display the second public sphere in the first one, other performances confirmed the separation of public spheres, strengthening the pseudo-institutions that functioned parallel to official ones. Such example were the 1987 and 1988 performances called *House pARTy* in the home of the Scriba artist family. The hosts accommodated Teodor Graur, Dan Mihălțianu, Iosif Király, Călin Dan and Wanda Mihuleac, Nadina and Decebal Scriba, who in the house were able to give free vent to their ideas. Some of these ideas resulted in installations, few were remaining as mere performances, but they were all recorded on video.⁸ The most interesting action was performed by Doru Graur, entitled *The Sport Centre (Complex sportive, 1987)*. With a bare chest, the artists pretended to be a

young man working out: the dumbbells were replaced with a TV screen presenting the sports news. In this action Graur ironized the communist clichés like the sheer physical force of the “new man,” who strengthens his muscles, at the same time having an inferiority complex.



Figure 4.3 Doru Graur, *The Sport Centre*, house pARTy, 1987.

Courtesy: Doru Graur.

Performance was an intermediate language of the 1980s artists' generation. Occasionally they tried to transport this artistic research into the public space of galleries. They were partially successful outside of Bucharest in important cultural centres of the country. In a politically centralized country like Romania, the capital was supposed to bring together most of the artists and was expected to have the most dynamic improvements. However, already by the end of the 1970s and especially in the 1980s, other cities in the province, became "strategical" venues in which alternative artistic events or expressions of a parallel culture could occur without the fear of immediate restrictive reactions. Timișoara, Sibiu, Oradea, Baia Mare, Cluj became spotlights on the country's cultural map, more favourable to public artistic experiments, without the problems occurring in Bucharest, where censorship was extremely prompt and efficient. Artistic exchanges supported by Studio 35 grew more intensively between various cultural centres, so that the young artists' exhibitions, which were considered less important and therefore were less controlled, could be more easily organized, moving from one city to another. Under the pretext of organizing mere exhibitions, these artists continued to favour various media – land art interventions, performances, installations, photography, and film. The first public sphere, however, constantly posed obstacles, through the filters of which each action had to be justified and approved, so artists in the 1980s still had to turn to the private space of their homes, like their predecessors in the 1970s, to create what could not be shown in first public sphere. The private space was thematised in Dan Perjovschi's performance *Red Apples (Mere roșii)*, 1988), in which the artist "dressed" the space of his apartment in white paper, on which he made narrative drawings commenting on the couple's life. He dedicated this event-based artwork to his wife. The flat, with all the furniture, vanished in white paper wrapping. On the wrapping Perjovschi drew scenes inspired by the couple's life – e.g. the TV monitor showed the drawing of two heads appearing on a screen.

This snapshot-like overview of case studies reflecting on event-based art, intermediality and information channels shows the wide range of potentials inscribed into the second public sphere of late socialist Romania the nature of which was mostly adapting to current trends in politics and social life. The variety of examples analysed in present paper, together with the following brief outlook, help us the de-mythologize the historical East as a homogeneous phenomenon.

After 1989, the parallel culture continued its existence for a while, being, though, much more visible than before, becoming "popular" and known even to the street's people. It is for this particular reason that, in Romania, underground art shifted in the early 1990s, from the background into the foreground. Forbidden during communism, performance art became a language favoured by many young artists who intended a direct and spontaneous communication with the public. As an artistic expression, it had proven suitable to comment on the social and political situation in Romania as well as in the whole of Central and Eastern Europe.

This direction in the art of the 1990s, the opening toward regional spheres first, and toward the international milieu later, reshaped and strengthened the extent

of regional and international networks. At the moment of this genuine opening, Eastern European art regained similarities to the West it had lost in isolation. The East European geopolitical area fully recovered and gained prominence in a series of important international exhibitions. The debut and recognition of several East European artists was the result of an inclusive, enthusiastic cultural reclamation. The art market developed inside the former Eastern Bloc, and some of the artists continued their career even on the global free art market. From the perspective of an international opening in the 1990s, I would like to bring out two significant examples – that of Ion Grigorescu and Dan Perjovschi: the aura of suffering and misery, supported by an impressive artistic oeuvre under the repressive conditions of communism, propelled Grigorescu into the limelight of the international stage, while the critical spirit, flexibility, and irony characteristic of Perjovschi transformed the latter into a resourceful performer and commentator of international social and political life. Thus, it seems that the second public sphere was given up forever.

Notes

- 1 This was due to Ceaușescu's enthusiastic discovery, in the 1970s, of Asian communism, while travelling to China and North Korea; as a result, he published "The July 1971 Theses". The theses were the signal of intensifying ideological pressure and control on art and culture.
- 2 Significantly, this was a time when the Ministry of Culture was called the Committee for Socialist Culture and Education.
- 3 These cases were revealed rather late, when the archives of the former secret police were opened for researchers in the 2000s. An interesting example of such a shocking "revelation" was the activity of critic Petru Comarnescu as a secret police agent, who used to be pro-American and the supporter of the 1960s neo-avant-garde. His mission was directed toward recruiting the young conceptual artist Andrei Cădere (Boia 2014, pp. 47–65).
- 4 A note-worthy exception, at least in my opinion, is Alexandru Antik's happening *The Dream is not Dead* (*Visul nu a pierit*, 1986) in the cellar of the Sibiu Museum of Pharmacy History, performed for a privileged audience consisting of artists and art critics, interrupted by the secret police.
- 5 Anca Arghir, Dan Hăulică, Mihai Drișcu, just to name a few of the editors-in-chief of *Arta* and *Secolul 20*.
- 6 The Visual Artists' Union was an officially acknowledged organization of the visual artists under the control of the state.
- 7 In the 1980s most artists applied performance art mainly as an unofficial medium but the artworks could be multiplied by means of photography and collage – this happened in the exhibition.
- 8 Video was unusual at that time, since such devices were strictly controlled and suspected, the regime being determined to avoid any possibility to have citizens document the reality of the dictatorship and perhaps offer the recordings to international television channels.

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Part II

Locating the second public sphere



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5 Basements, attics, streets and courtyards

The reinvention of marginal art spaces in Romania during socialism

Cristian Nae

Invisible gestures

An excessively large envelope lies on the wooden floor of what seems to be an artist studio. It literally wraps up three anonymous bodies that appear to be tucked in like friends in a sleeping bag. Their gestures, though hands are barely visible, are closing the envelope, suggesting that the bodies' presence inside the envelope is chosen. The envelope is marked with a proportionally enlarged stamp, showing the image of a chain and the words "contact", as well as another stamp on which one can recognize the writing "Timișoara" and the words "trans-idea". A date is also marked on the stamp: 12.10.1982. What the photograph of this human-sized envelope does not show is the exact space where the event was taking place; further, it does not provide any information on the conditions of production or the context of reception. The anonymous people tucked in the envelope are artists Constantin Flondor, Doru Tulcan and Iosif Király. The venue of the performance was an artist studio situated in an attic in Timișoara belonging to Flondor, one of the most active neo-avant-garde artists in socialist Romania and one of the main figures of the domestic mail art network too. The photograph, taken by Iosif Király, captures a performative gesture which symbolically reveals and concomitantly contests the communicational confinements and the isolation from the international art world imposed on Romanian artists in the 1980s by Nicolae Ceaușescu's dictatorial regime. While this particular performance, entitled *Contact-Trans Idea*, and its photographic documentation was produced for a mail art exhibition and was actually being communicated through this very medium, thus escaping the state-run cultural institution's restriction on the participation of Romanian artists in national and international exhibitions, the image documents, at the same time, a clandestine performance initially produced for the eye of the camera. Therefore, the resulting image is rather an example of conceptual art than the fragmentary documentation of an event-based artwork. The staged action most often communicates an idea that it supports the event to survive in the absence of a public, challenging the understanding of performance as "live art" that lives in the present (Heathfield and Jones 2012, pp. 9–38) and whose constitutive ephemerality "resists the reproductive ideology of visible representations" (Phelan 1993, p. 31). Such actions are being confined to the materiality of the photographic archive, complemented by subsequent oral testimonies (Pintilie 2014, pp. 86–87; Brașoveanu 2016, pp. 127–129).



Figure 5.1 Constantin Flondor, Iosif Király, Doru Tulcan, *Contact – Trans Idea*, Mail Art Performance, Timisoara, 1982.

Courtesy: Constantin Flondor, Iosif Király, Doru Tulcan.

The interpretation of similar performative artworks requires today further clarification on the liminal condition of spaces, neither fully private nor completely public, where ephemeral artworks were produced. Why did Romanian artists in late socialism feel compelled to construct and present their work outside the dominant, “official” institutional system, and turn to filmed and photographically documented artistic actions instead of palpable objects? What was the condition, the social status and the functionality of these spaces (Cseh-Varga 2018) before and after their transmission to artistic sites of exhibitions? If the exhibition is defined as a performative and discursive intervention in the public sphere, how did such performances contribute to challenging its constituency, facilitating the production and reproduction of alternative cultures during socialism?

Examples like the photographic action *Contact-Trans Idea* support the “underground” character of performativity in Romanian art in the Ceaușescu era. The term “underground” is used here in the sense of Ileana Pintilie, namely, to designate a regime of limited public visibility and art production in relative absence from art criticism and historical investigations (Pintilie 2014, p. 87). A brief outline of Romania’s political post-war context may explain Pintilie’s claims.

In the late fifties and early sixties, Romanian communist leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej did not adapt to the “thaw” introduced in 1956 by Nikita Khrushchev’s break with the excessively authoritarian Stalinist government. A short “thaw” arrived with Nicolae Ceaușescu, who came to power in 1965. His famous speech against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the resulting sympathy earned in the Western world coincided with a brief period of cultural openness officially lasting until the so-called “July thesis” in 1971, which marked the subordination of art to party control.¹ The centralized system of the Union of Fine Artists favoured conservative art production, characterized by a return to socialist realism and intensified ideological content in line with the ideas expressed in the July thesis. This is the reason why most of the radical artistic actions I will discuss in this paper take place in the eighties, the decade of Ceaușescu’s most brutal economic and social impoverishment, forcing great many artists to make radical gestures of revolt and to express them in spaces where communication/articulation was possible. It is equally relevant that, according to Alexei Yurchak’s cultural analysis of the Soviet context, the eighties were a period of late socialism with an intensification of the formal, performative dimension of authoritarian discourse that replicated social norms, institutions and rituals (2005, p. 25). The gap between these kinds of unsubstantial public rituals and conditions existing in reality in the social and cultural spheres gave way to a more nuanced relation of public and private. The intensification of large-scale propagandistic, commemorative or deferential exhibitions pushed the artists towards less visible spaces of artistic communication while attempting to exploit the existing cultural infrastructure.

In this essay, I will map the limits and expansions of the art scene’s public spheres as they were being tested and contested by the artists through performative approaches in Romania of the seventies and eighties. However, I do not intend to picture the artistic non-conformism of actions based on the classical opposition of public and private, corresponding to the censored and the autonomous regimes of art. Heroic narratives of resistance created after 1989 bestowed on these ephemeral gestures new symbolic capital that is in line with the global production of capitalist commodities, often fetishizing and deforming the meaning of their documentation (Morganova 2014, p. 33). The artistic actions I will discuss here were hardly subversive: most of these actions did not openly contest the artistic system, but rather expanded and challenged dominant aesthetic norms as well as traditional visual languages, and very few “underground” actions overtly criticized social or political issues. Although they took place in private or other peripheral cultural locations, bypassing censorship and public scrutiny through a voluntary self-marginalization, their liminal status was also an opportunity for reclaiming artistic agency from a narrow scope of audience. The performative works to be discussed represent a *background* of the “official” art system rather than a completely independent underground (Brașoveanu 2016). More important, they remained solitary, spontaneous actions, occasionally forming collectives, and never took on the shape of a non-conformist art movement with coherent group programs and institutionalized alternative spaces (Graur 2016, p. 87).² Some of these almost invisible actions only recently met with art historical

interest, even one that was interrupted, suspended and parallel (Groys 2010, p. 13; Badovinac 2006), presenting valuable alternatives to the commodification of the art object, to the newly enhanced solidifying of authorship and to sociability grounded in socialist values such as solidarity and friendship. However, while many of these events appear to be spontaneous, ludic artistic games, at least some of them pursued communication with a wider (artistic) audience.³ In line with Fürst (2016, p. 7), they may also be considered examples of quiet and active disengagement from the then locally dominant aesthetic norms and artistic rituals.

I will briefly outline the relation between marginal urban spaces, the concept of exhibition, and performativity. This will serve as a relational structure facilitating the understanding of the construction of Romania's expanded public sphere during real-existing socialism. Subsequently, I will identify some of these spaces and analyse their imaginative reinventions.

The “second” public sphere

Since exhibition spaces are the main vehicles of public communication in contemporary art, the institutional particularities of the Romanian art world during late socialism are important, given the non-homogenous nature of Eastern Europe both in terms of artistic production and of political and social configurations which varied from one region to the other (Piotrowski 2009, pp. 241–248). Already in 1988, sociologist Elemér Hankiss sketched the model of an ideal “second society”, characterized by horizontal organization and predominance of non-state ownership (1988, pp. 13–42). In the case of Romania, experimental art was not tolerated, or even encouraged through self-management, and there was no organizational logic that was distinct from the network of artistic institutions operated by the Union of Fine Artists. The centralized system of art production and exhibition, with its own aesthetic norms, reception rituals and institutional networks (Bourdieu 1996), reinforced political control. All art venues were controlled by the same structures. Art spaces, ranging from the studio to the art museum and from local to national (“republican”) propagandistic exhibitions, were hierarchically positioned. Though official venues were dominant, the notion of self-organizing, important for understanding the dynamic of artistic neo-avant-gardes in Eastern Europe (Bryzgel 2017, p. 4), remains important to Romanian event-based art during socialism. Though most of these non-conformist actions were solitary events taking place discreetly, they testify to the existence of an informal network of artistic friendships and personal ties (stretching from local to international) which *virtually* and temporarily constituted the second public sphere where performances of late socialism gained meaning.⁴ While I will focus here on examples that investigated their own self-imposed cultural marginality and withdrawal from the (first) public scrutiny, the notion of an informal public sphere I will apply in this analysis is not marked by a sharp internal division of the Romanian art scene into publics and counter-publics, but stands for an immanent process of altering, transforming and expanding the existing public realm as a whole. In the case of Romania one may speak about

a formal and informal dimension (Zdravomyslova and Voronkov 2002, pp. 46–69; Braşoveanu 2016) of a *single public sphere*. This particular sphere included different ways of living and diverse organizational principles shared by the same groups of individuals participating both in “alternative” and “official” artistic events. Counter-publics were constituted discursively by a narrow circle of like-minded art professionals and did not exist as an autonomous social entity (Warner 2002, p. 67).

From exhibitions to the performative production of art spaces

Now turning to the relation between performance art and marginal social spaces, it becomes quickly obvious that experimental actions at such venues produced their own regime of publicity. As Piotr Piotrowski had shown, the exhibition is in etymological terms a gesture of placing artworks in the public sphere, instead of a material presentation or a collection of objects (2005, p. 155). Exhibitions define the scope of visibility, a forum in which an artwork acquires public existence and accessibility, and they are inextricably linked to the production of the public sphere. Unlike in the United States, for instance, where in the sixties and seventies alternative spaces were often associated with process-oriented, post-minimal and performative activities that emerged at the time as alternatives to commercial gallery shows, the event-based character of actions performed in solitude or in closed circles did not arise out of a white-cube protest, but rather as aesthetic and political necessity (Apple 2012, p. 18). Alternative cultural spaces in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union faced a certain degree of ideological censorship, reflected in a conservative art language favouring traditional media such as painting and sculpture. While performance art was certainly a preferred form of artistic communication, the studio and the street became spaces of reclusion and contestation where alternative subjectivities might have been reclaimed through a poetic use of artistic language; they were also used as spaces of experimentation that imagined a more direct, authentic and spontaneous form of sociability.

It would be misleading, however, to construct a simplistic binary description of the capitalist West versus socialist East in terms of resistant collectivism in times of dominant individualism versus desirable individualism in times of imposed collectivism, mainly because the strategic drawback from the existing public sphere is often accompanied by the imaginative reinvention of alternative artistic networks, collectives and publics. The proper framework for bridging cultural differences in understanding artistic space may be Henri Lefebvre’s theory of space (where spatiality is a social product rather than a material reality existing prior to and independent of social conditions; 1991, pp. 26–33), as well as Michel de Certeau’s understanding of space as a dynamic, practiced place (1984, pp. 117–118). Just as the public is constituted by discourse, artistic space is being produced by action rather than existing as a purely material enclosure determining what can be exhibited there. Therefore, artistic venues are socially constructed, depending on the particular social configuration in relation to which it is produced.

Concerning the marginal situation of the spaces where performances were created in Romania, many of the analyses on socialism in Eastern Europe tend to focus on imposed control over the private sphere through surveillance and the accompanying creative resistance of individual artists. Although generalized surveillance and a high degree of formal conformism in pervading ideology that dominated the public sphere accurately depict Romanian cultural life during late socialism, it should also be noted that, in the case of art practice, there existed a sphere of publicity. Namely, the private was transformed into a semi-public sphere by means of artistic events and actions. Counter-cultural performative gestures temporarily transformed private or ordinary public places into spaces of artistic encounter and experimental artistic communication. The existence of such venues shared the ephemeral nature of the performative action that coined them.

The apartment as a studio

During Ceaușescu's regime, the intimacy of the living environment became the preferred site for artistic self-examinations such as body actions and spatial interventions. The gaze of an external spectator and witness of everyday life, to be considered archival and voyeuristic, is best represented by Ion Grigorescu's films and photographs, produced in his own house in the seventies.

It would be inappropriate to state that the distinction between the private and public dimensions of existence did not influence Grigorescu. On the contrary, in the seventies, he was mainly interested in constructing an alternative subjectivity and he seems to have constantly sought a marginal social space (such as the intimacy of the house or the space of the churches painted in the eighties), from which he could react, speak and act autonomously from ideologically charged public rituals and codes. His house was used both as a photography and film studio and as an exhibition space, his experimental works being shown to a close circle of friends. As a studio, it was used mostly for introspection, a space where contradictions are exhibited, confusion is welcomed and transgressive states are experimented with, ranging from the sexually transgressive to the imaginary redoubling of his persona. The latter is the case of *Boxing* (1977) and perhaps Grigorescu's most famous film, *Dialogue with President Ceausescu* (*Dialog cu Președintele Ceaușescu*, 1978), which manifests a symptomatic state of isolation and lack of political communication. The ambiguity of this dialogue is essential for Grigorescu's incessant unsettling of stereotypes and fixed identities. Ileana Pintilie also notices the changes in the setting of Grigorescu's films that initially were shot in the real space of his apartment that was also his photo-studio. Given that a photography studio was prohibited in the seventies, the living space is forced to become the working space, only to be replaced later with the abstract background of the mirror or of a black, indeterminate space, equated by Pintilie with a symbolic interiority in relation to which Grigorescu stages his investigations (Pintilie 2013, p. 33).

Unlike nonconformist art in Russia, where apartment exhibitions were already a self-historicized and often self-ironic version of unofficial art conscious of its own peripheral condition in history (Tupytsin 1989, pp. 60–114), in Romanian

art, the apartment was less used as an exhibition location than as a secure space of performance production only visible through documentation, or to a close circle of fellow artists participating in a collective art event. Besides Ion Grigorescu, in the late eighties Dan and Lia Perjovschi also used their Oradea apartment as a performance venue that only existed virtually, circulating as photographic documentation.

In *The Test of Sleep* (*Testul somnului*), a photo-performance from 1988, the body of the artist appears as a surface for the projection of written language as graphic signs that are animated by the artist's hands and corporeal gestures fragmentarily captured by the remaining photographs. According to art historian Kristine Stiles, between 1987 and 2005, Lia Perjovschi treated the body as a physical entity that was affected by historical political circumstances and contained ephemeral will (2008, pp. 41–42). Lia interpreted the action as a discreet form of communication, associated with existential discontent, grief, pain and other emotional conditions that were left unspoken in an oppressive political climate (*ibid.*, pp. 44–45). Although the images and graphic marks remain voluntarily allusive, transmitting the impossibility of communication rather than a definite meaning, the implied reference to silenced sociocultural activities (e.g. the prohibition on traveling or reading) is supported by the performance's background setting, consisting of assembled envelopes from Perjovschi's mail art practice. Existential struggle and "muted communication" is radicalized in the 1989 performance *Annulment* (*Anulare*): Lia wrapped her body in medical gauze, then folded it in strings, so that she had to struggle to untie herself. In line with Grigorescu's virtually public use of privacy, Lia's apartment performances can be regarded as therapeutic processes, revealing suppressed communication and private anxieties as a collective state of mind. It was also an informal space for the production and distribution of uncomfortable artistic ideas.

Private spaces, collective actions

Collective actions that used private spaces simultaneously as venues for art production and exhibition were present in Romanian art of the eighties as well. Unlike in Russia, "where blood ties and friendly relations were held in higher esteem than professional roles and links" (Erofeev 2002, p. 40), the friendly but serious atmosphere found in the intimacy of private spaces also encouraged Romanian artists to exhibit unrestricted creativity and testified for the existence of similar informal artist networks. One of the most relevant "alternative" collective events in Romania was *house pARTy*, a series of artistic interventions and performances taking place in Decebal and Nadina Scriba's house located on Petru Cercel street in Bucharest between 1987 and 1988. The first event, taking place in the summer of 1987, was a spontaneous setting resulting from the necessity to find an alternative art venue to the galleries provided by the Union, the dominance of which was more and more difficult to subvert. Decebal and Nadina came up with the idea of a ludic artistic experiment in their house that subverted and expanded the socially acceptable form of a private one-night party.

The participants of the 1987 collaborative production included the artists and art critics Călin Dan, Dan Mihălțianu, Wanda Mihuleac, Andrei Oișteanu, Nadina Scriba, Decebal Scriba and Dan Stanciu. In 1988, the group grew with two more members, artists Teodor Graur and Iosif Király. Wanda Mihuleac also suggested that the performances should be recorded, so they were filmed in real time, and the results were edited minimally afterwards. The first “edition’s” performances appear to be spontaneous performative interventions connected with improvised spatial installations. Initially, *house pARTy* aimed at transforming the private space into a series of artistic installations: each participant should have chosen a space in the house and focus on redefining that space through material and performative interventions. Some artists, such as Dan Mihălțianu, only produced art installations with water pouring down on an exterior wall. Only two participants of the 1987 event actually appeared performing in the recording (Andrei Oișteanu and Dan Stanciu). For the second edition, planned one year ahead, the participants developed scenarios transforming the performances into a series of single-authored video pieces. In the second edition’s VHS, the recorded performances of all participants were separated by a clapboard and assumed a more cinematic character, while losing some of the collaborative spontaneity of the first event. The unconnected and apparently chaotic actions with surrealist and Dadaist overtones further emphasize the *house pARTy*’s non-conformist aura.

Some performances of the second edition bear clear traces of the revolt against an oppressive social system. Iosif Király constructed a claustrophobic space in the garden: a one meter cube built on a wire structure, covered with architectural drawings of typical communist buildings, on which images of houses built before 1945 were projected. In the cube (simulating an apartment space), Király, wearing pyjamas, was reading a seemingly academic text on the relationship of space and human behaviour, before everything collapses and is set on fire. The action was intended as a clear reference to Ceaușescu’s destruction of architectural heritage and built environments replaced with alienated modernist living spaces. It also suggested the desire to “burn down” the entire political system – which actually happened the next year in the December revolution.

A similar collective action taking place in private space was recorded in Târgu Mureș as early as 1982. On July 17, 1982 members of MAMŰ art collective, Károly Elekes and Árpád Nagy, celebrated their birthday as a collective art action, though it mostly comprised a single performance of Nagy. The birthday party took place at Nagy’s house in Târgu Mureș and artists from both Romania and Hungary were invited.

As art historian Mădălina Brașoveanu recalls it, invitations were sent to artists and art critics Wanda Mihuleac, Mihai Drișcu, Zoltán Szilágyi, András Butak (Bucharest), Alexandru Antik from Cluj, Ioan Bunuș and György Jovian from Oradea and Imre Báász from Sfântu Gheorghe (Brașoveanu 2014, p. 129). The invitation mentioned that an alternative soiree will take place on the occasion of the birthday. All the participants were handed badges with images of people – but Nagy’s badge depicted a fish. During the so-called *Anniversary multimedia action (Acțiune aniversară)*, Nagy had live-drawn cardboard news about the economic, political and

social achievements of the Party and its Supreme Leader. With each finished drawing, a photograph was taken out of a water bowl, on the surface of which different photographs recording everyday life scenes were floating, and stuck on the glass of the aquarium. The 25-minute performance ended when the fish was completely covered by the photographs and the television set nearby got covered by a wreath (*ibid.*, 131). The performance had a therapeutic impact on the participants, bearing obvious political and existential overtones, and suggested a profound feeling of isolation and cultural entrapment shared with many audience members. Moreover, at the unofficial level of the public sphere it commented on the discrepancy between the official discourse and its actual materialization, the projected social phantasies and the social reality failing to live up to its expectations.

Attics and basements

Attics of existing public spaces became, from time to time, favourite “homes” to artist studios, where experimental actions, only witnessed by the camera, had taken place in complete solitude. For instance, since 1979 artist Dan Mihălțianu used the attic and the rooftop of the building located in Gheorghe Dem Teodorescu street 20b in Bucharest, where he produced a series of photographic experiments with long exposition, installations and photo-actions. But attics even functioned as public event locations. In 1976 the exhibition *Designing the Signifier (Desen Contact de Semn)* opened in the attic of the so-called Engraving Studio in Bucharest, with a collective performance initiated by artist and exhibition organizer Wanda Mihuleac in collaboration with Ion Grigorescu, Matei Lăzărescu, Sergiu Dinculescu and Doru Covrig. In the action, silently documented on super-8 film, participants were stripped to the waist, sitting in a circle. The naked backs were transformed into drawing surfaces for the person sitting behind.

The most politically challenging and literally “underground” action remains probably Alexandru Antik’s *The Dream Has Not Died (Visul n-a murit)*, performed during the Symposium of Young Art Critics taking place in 1986 in Sibiu. The conference was organised by artist Ana Lupaș, following the suggestion of art critic and curator Liviana Dan to transform Sibiu into a modern city that could offer artists and art critics alike an unprecedented environment of creative freedom. More than twenty artists from diverse Youth Studios of the Union of Fine Artists took part in an art camp and the resulting exhibition hosted by the Union’s gallery in Sibiu. The “alternative” part of the event series was relocated to the basement of the Pharmacy Museum – a “safer” place, protected from the curious eyes of passers-by. Moreover, the Union of Communist Youth financing the event only provided restricted access to and the exclusive use of that basement and its lobby, not allowing the artists to enter the public area. The permitted audience of the basement performances and installations consisted only of the participating artists and art critics. This was the context of Alexandru Antik’s public performance with shamanic overtones (inspired by Joseph Beuys), at the same time reminiscent of Viennese Actionism (Guță 2015, pp. 62–65). The action, taking place in a smaller room, presented a

prison, with a small iron-barred window and a single open entrance, comprised gesture, text and soundtrack. It mixed poetry with body action and ritualistic symbols equating to Dadaist nonsense (Bryzgel 2017, p. 73). Stripped naked and having his hair cut by a female assistant, the artist recited, in a whisper and in a jerky manner, a poem by László FeLugossy. At the same time, he was wailing and blowing air into animal bowels that collaborators previously brought to him and left them on the floor. According to Adrian Guță, one of the art critics present at the performance, the whole space was dominated by a spirit of sacredness, resulting from the candles lit and placed near animal organs moulded in plaster and stuck to the walls (Guță 2015). The artist started to write the text “The Dream Has Not Died” with a gas lamp on the walls, suddenly being interrupted by the authoritarian voice of a person entering the basement and shutting down the entire event. While art historian Amy Bryzgel (2017, p. 74) presents this intervention as a previously planned element of the performance, Guță recalled it being an actual intervention of the communist authorities that censored the art piece (2015). In any case, the abrupt ending intensified the emotional overtones of a brutal existential statement publicly enacting an individual mythology, a ritual of surviving social imprisonment, also displaying a courageous form of artistic resistance against social and cultural conformism. While Antik’s performance appears to be a clearly disruptive intervention in an already confined public sphere, it is obvious that the concrete liminality of attics and basements as a materialization of counter-cultural practices was meant to restrict the mass effects of such potential disruptions and support their discretion.

The street as an art for(u)m

While the street is certainly an important landmark of urban public space, its position in the public sphere of state communism is mostly unclear and paradoxical. While in the West the street could be perceived as “a free communal domain, that was unfinished and mutable” (Apple 2012, p. 19), opposed to the increasing commodification and privatization of the conservative gallery space, it was rarely used in this way in Romania due to harsh political constraints and intense police surveillance. The rare actions taking place in the street stand, rather, for the slow dissipation of the public space as a catalyst of true sociability, increasingly withdrawn from the informal circles of friends in the background of the eighties’ social and art life as an “isolated public space” (Brașoveanu 2016, p. 131). Artist Decebal Scriba’s 1974 action *The Gift (Danul)* is remarkable in this respect. The artist walked on the streets of Bucharest, from Dacia to Eroilor Boulevard, holding in his hands an imaginary object. The series of four photographs record the lonesome walk of the artist, passing by unrecognized by others. The passers-by become an involuntary public, who do not acknowledge the artistic act and do not seem to be willing to participate in the action. The action is turning into an implicit statement of non-conformism on an ideologically predefined social space. If one may speak of resistance in Scriba’s case, it remains as a withdrawal into an autonomous mental space, which challenges the interference of political ideologies in the process of artistic conception. Scriba subtracts himself from everyday life through an imaginary recodification of



Figure 5.2 Decebal Scriba, *The Gift*, public performance, 1974.

Courtesy: Decebal Scriba.

ordinary gestures, producing transformations of outer reality while displaying constructed visual and symbolic representations of the authoritarian order. Taking the position of an external, impersonal observer is a fundamental gesture of conceptual art, allowing the artist to act both as subject and agent.

Closer to the spirit of the Moscow-based Group of Collective Actions, organized as a dialogical, self-interpretive artistic community (Jackson 2010, p. 224), in 1980 artist Ioan Bunuș used the urban public space in Oradea as a field of constructing human relations and alternative forms of sociability, resulting in the establishment of an informal group of artists. He invited some of his colleagues from the Youth Circle to a silent walk along all the city tramway lines, as an opportunity to meditate on movement and immobility. At the end of each line meetings were held in order to discuss possible artworks inspired by the walks (Brașoveanu 2016, p. 120). *Action T* (*Aciunea T*), as the event-based piece was called, was close to conceptual art, where instructions and ensuing discussions were more important than the actual production of material objects or information. Although this was not a trip out of town, as in the case of the Group of Collective Actions, but rather a psycho-geographic journey inside urban space reminiscent of French situationism, and it was not regarded as an art event at the time, *Action T* may nevertheless be interpreted as a self-referential conceptual artwork. Since the invitation was sent to a larger group of people than the actual participants, it was spontaneous to select an informal circle of young artists collaborating in an experimental production.

Conclusion

Although this short paper is not an adequate setting to explore the question of artistic autonomy, it can be stated that art performed in solitary or marginal spatial environments was not only reluctant to undertake a direct criticism of the social, political or artistic system in state-socialist Romania, it also remained isolated from the larger, official layer of the cultural public sphere. Such self-organized art events, however, constituted exceptional atmospheres for escaping isolation, inventing practices of self-empowerment and shaping an alternative micro-publicity within the existing network of artists to create an “improvised community” (Kemp Welch 2014,

p. 219). They also supported the invention of new spaces of artistic production and the emergence of alternative forms of artistic communication that transgressed the boundaries of official/traditional exhibition spaces and rituals. The political and social “reticence” of these actions may rather mean that performing artists were most often in search for aesthetic autonomy in an a-political sense, closer to what Kemp-Welch (2014, pp. 141–220) has described in the case of Czech or Hungarian neo-avant-gardes, though the Romanian ones often presented darker and more brutal, sometimes even hysterical, existential overtones. A voluntary retreat from the immediate social life is consistent with the refusal of an imposed political engagement. Performance art in Romania during socialism is merging the personal with the political, while existing in a virtual social reality, a dystopian mental space shared by artists with similar ideas and a similar language. At the same time, as one may easily notice, most of these artistic actions are to be characterized as solitary therapeutic gestures, aimed at transforming, first of all, the self, and second, the surrounding artistic community. They often witnessed overlapping feelings of entrapment, despair, the grotesque, isolation and lack of authentic communication which seem to characterize the pervading artistic sensibility of the last decade of Ceaușescu’s authoritarian regime.

Notes

- 1 On July 6, 1971 Ceaușescu delivered a speech called *Proposals for improving the politico-ideological activity and for the Marxist-Leninist education of the party members and of all working people* before the Executive Committee of the Romanian Communist Party. As a result, the entire artistic production was subjected to the newly established Council of Culture and Socialist Education.
- 2 Self-organized art collectives existed in Arad (Kinema Ikon) or Târgu Mureș (MAMŪ).
- 3 Some performances were already produced to let them circulate as mail art. See *Trans-Idea Art*, discussed above, or Lia Perjovschi’s *The Test of Sleep*, 1988, staged for a mail art exhibition in Mexico. For a similar reading of Ion Grigorescu’s works as postcards in time see Verwoert 2011, p. 43.
- 4 See for instance, the mail art network, fueled by Constantin Flondor’s connections with Robert Rehfeldt, MAMŪ group’s ties with the Hungarian art scene or Iosif Király’s acquaintance with Shozo Shimamoto in Timișoara in 1985.

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6 Performing the proletarian public sphere

Gender and labour in the art
of Tomislav Gotovac

Andrej Mirčev

On the few photos documenting the performance *Lying Naked on the Asphalt, Kissing the Asphalt* (Zagreb I love you) [*Ležanje Gol Na Asfaltu, Ljubljenje asfalta* (Zagreb, Volim Te!)], by the Croatian artist Tomislav Gotovac, we see a naked man walking through a crowded street. From time to time he prostrates himself on the asphalt and performs the action of kissing the ground. As with almost all of his performances and actions in public space, this one had happened at 12 o'clock (13 November 1981). Placed in an urban landscape, the artist displayed an "intimate, almost loving, relationship with the city" (Piotrowski 2011, p. 374), whereby his nakedness intensifies this relation, but also radicalizes the tension between the apparently "natural/authentic" (and singular) body and the other bodies, wearing autumn cloths. That such behaviour is regarded with suspicion as antisocial and that it is directed against the conventional behaviour in public space, is confirmed by the fact that only after seven minutes, Gotovac had been arrested by a police officer who dragged him away and charged him with a fine for disturbing public order. The trajectory from the doorway in Ilica Street 8, where he undressed, to the main square, where he had been taken into custody, flashes out a volatile and grotesque corporeality that is opposing the hypocrisy of the public order. "The naked body in the public space, in my town," claimed the artist, "is a blasphemy, an insult to the petit-bourgeois" (Denegri 2003, p. 273). The gesture of stripping off clothes on the town square makes forces and rules which structure the public space and public behaviour visible.

Analysing the complicated relations and dialectics between the body, the performance and the politics of public space in the oeuvre of Tomislav Gotovac, this text aims to situate his performances within the contours of a proletarian public sphere, as conceived by Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt in their book *Public Sphere and Experience. Toward an Analysis of Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* [*Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung. Zur Organisation von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit*, 1972]. As Kluge and Negt observe, the proletarian public sphere stimulates us to think of it as a *counter-public*¹ directed against the bourgeois public sphere, which is structured around the blocking of experience of the proletariat. At the same time, the "proletarian publicity" should be imagined "as a form of resistance against real subsumption under capital" and should lead to a "proletarian cultural revolution" (Negt and Kluge 1993, pp. 185–186). Following that line of reasoning, it seems plausible



Figure 6.1 Tomislav Gotovac, *Zagreb, I love you!*, 1981.

Photo: Ivan Posavec, Collection Sarah Gotovac. Courtesy: Tomislav Gotovac Institute, Zagreb.

to assert that Kluge and Negt invoke the proletarian public sphere to be able to investigate the contradictions of the bourgeois public sphere, which are grounded in the capitalist mode of production. However, since the proletarian publicity “has no existence as a ruling public sphere” (ibid., p. xliii) it needs to be reconstructed from historical fissures, marginal cases or isolated initiatives, which in the context of present text, will be the performances of Tomislav Gotovac.²

Understood as one of the modes of organizing and producing social experience, the concept of the proletarian public sphere outlines a methodological possibility to grasp the public sphere not as a unified, homogeneous and autonomous substance, but focusing on its mechanisms of exclusion. Also, in relation to the structure of production and the sexual economies, it can be stated that the bourgeois public sphere manifests itself by concealing both the process of production (labour) and the exclusion of eroticized, explicitly gendered bodies. For film historian Miriam Hansen this is precisely how the public sphere is organized:

The bourgeois public’s claim to represent a general will functions as a powerful mechanism of exclusion: the exclusion of social groups, such as workers, women, servants, as well as vital social issues, such as material conditions of production and reproduction, including sexuality and childrearing – the exclusion of any difference that cannot be assimilated, rationalized and subsumed.

(Hansen 1993, p. xxviii)

Consequently, the analytical focus on the problem of gender and labour in the performances of Tomislav Gotovac should unwrap a double argumentative procedure, which exposes the issue of exclusion in relation to the prevailing gender and labour politics.

To counteract and oppose the bourgeois public sphere to the proletarian, one should make clear that in the case of socialist Yugoslavia it is not easy to hold on to one single concept; its public sphere has to be thought dialectically: as a dynamic and at times contradictory³ process. Abandoning the system of state socialism, which had been “copied” after the Russian model, political authorities in Yugoslavia after 1950 started to experiment with a new type of socioeconomic organisation called *workers’ self-management socialism*, meaning that workers would take control over the conditions and products of their labour. In its idealism, this social model suggested the decline of state and the situation in which the proletarian sphere would become the only public sphere, just as in state socialism “the public sphere was explicitly – in official terms – the state itself” (Miles 2009, p. 133). However, instead of a progressive development towards class equality and a socially more even development, the ruling elite had embraced all characteristic elements and rituals of the Western bourgeoisie, so that the antagonism between proletarian and bourgeois public spheres, as the state was moving towards its decline after Tito’s death in 1980, became more visible. It is in the light of these historical conditions (and contradictions) that the proletarian public sphere, perhaps, can be mapped as a counter-public which had been slowly withering away as the socialist system was collapsing under unresolved tensions, both on the level of national and economical relations, as well as due to the shifting power between the “Western Bloc” and the USSR.

Another reason to analyse the performances of Tomislav Gotovac within the concept of the proletarian public space is the fact that the artist himself considered his first happening/action to be those ten years he spent working as a clerk at the National Bank and at a hospital in Zagreb. When Kluge and Negt observe that the proletarian public sphere is “none other than the form in which the interests of the working class develop themselves” (1993, p. 94), the implications are that these interests have been eroded and obscured by the bourgeois public sphere. The solution to this mutilation and repression, Kluge and Negt would argue, is to establish an alliance between the workers and the intelligentsia (understood here foremost as artists). The art of Gotovac could be regarded as establishing such an alliance.

The commitment to reconstruct the *repressed space of the proletariat* circles around the attempt to think the (urban) space relationally and dialectically, with regard to the political, economic and ideological shifts which signify the transition from socialism to present-day neoliberalism (that in the case of former Yugoslavia unfolded in a terrible warfare and total commodification). In line with this argument, it can be said that the subversive use of the body in performative and conceptual art practices of Southeastern Europe in the second half of the twentieth century confers an interpretative frame. This frame depends upon reconstructing the features of public and counter-public in socialist Yugoslavia, particularly when

the public sphere is addressed as a site of exclusion and not of equality, brotherhood, and unity as it was officially declared. If that was the case, as most Yugoslavian citizens used to believe at a time, we could ask what has been excluded, omitted or removed from the public sphere? What would have happened if these hidden things, actions, practices, themes and bodies regained their visibility and reentered “the scene”? And ultimately, how does the visibility of repressed subjectivities and themes affect and alter concepts of identity, representation and power structures?

Situated among different media – photography, experimental film, collage, ready made, happening, movie acting, public actions and performance art – the work of the Croatian artist Tomislav Gotovac serves as a model of a neo-avant-garde practice⁴ from Southeastern Europe in the second half of the twentieth century, which fundamentally changed the notion of the public sphere and its constituting private/public dichotomy. His naked body moving through public space, as an art event, radically intervened in the order of real existing socialism, whose corporeal image is best mirrored in the performance of the collective: the semi-naked athlete’s body performing during the so-called celebrations of the Days of Youth.⁵ In contrast to the uniformed and well-trained virtuoso bodies, the artist with his naked singular figure, whose stature, presence and image is seen as an interruption of (these) behavioural norms and proscribed roles, generates a fissure in the symbolic order of the public space. On the other hand, threatening to dismantle the private/public dichotomy by staging a grotesque corporeality, Gotovac moves within the neo-avant-garde logics of trespassing the clear division between art and life.

Furthermore, I will question how the public sphere, once it is examined on the backdrop of performative interventions, can be linked to issues concerning modernist ideology of the artwork as an autonomous and self-enclosed entity, cut off from social or political reality. If we agree that the demand for an autonomy of art – as it has been shaped already within the philosophy of Enlightenment and continued to be fostered in the modernist project – has also been a central element in the constitution of the bourgeois subject, it could be asked what happens once art escapes from the safe zone of institutions and (petit-bourgeois) conventions? What kind of public sphere emerges out of the act of trespassing the (volatile) border that separates artistic practice from social and political reality?

In an attempt to answer these intricate, even paradoxical questions, I will first briefly outline the concept of public sphere developed by Jürgen Habermas, later criticized by Nancy Fraser. The decision to weave my arguments around these two positions is motivated dialectically, since Fraser’s text can be seen as an antithesis to the seminal work of Habermas. Moreover, since an important part in Fraser’s argumentation is grounded in reflections on gender and the “*bourgeois masculinist* conception of the public sphere” (1990, p. 60). I want to be clear about gender relations that have fundamentally structured and determined the public sphere in Yugoslavia. These two positions will, thus, serve as a springboard to situate the naked actions in relation to the moral law which underlies the functioning of public space.⁶ The intention is to show how Gotovac’s actions confirm that the question of public space is linked to operations of evicting and policing, how the event of exposing

the naked body can potentially be regarded as subversive. The second line of my argument will revolve more specifically around the notion of a proletarian public sphere, reflected in the actions of performing colportage labour at the same site where he once staged his naked body. In interpreting the dialectics of the public sphere in socialist Yugoslavia between its bourgeois and proletarian configuration what will be mapped is the dissipation of publicity and the commodification of labour. And maybe it will be in these performed spatialities of nakedness, gender politics and labour that a proletarian public sphere will (re)gain its visibility.

Unveiled (corpo)realities

Besides the scandalous naked body, the performance *Lying Naked on the Asphalt, Kissing the Asphalt (Zagreb I love you)* had been devised as a homage to the film *Hatari* (directed by American filmmaker Howard Hawks in 1962). Identifying himself with the image of the black rhinoceros⁷ that at the beginning of the movie was chased unsuccessfully through the African wilderness, Gotovac seeks to produce an image of the artist being persecuted as well as deprived of the freedom of movement. Using his body as a “ready-made” (Denegri 2003, p. 272), the artist expresses a confrontational and anarchistic gesture which aims to confront authorities (and public morals) with a demand for freedom of behaviour. From a topological perspective it is significant to notice that one of the institutions he will pass on his way to the square is the Church of Wounded Jesus. Invoking an image of both being an animal and a priest going through the act of consecration,⁸ Gotovac amasses together a corporeal scene abundant with references and subversive meanings. In the light of these observations, it may be asked what is, or rather what could be the relationship of the naked body, with all its visible and invisible references, and the public sphere? What kind of (social) experience could such a naked body generate?

To be able to comprehend (political) implications of such an artistic action in the context of socialist Yugoslavia, I shall turn my attention to the specific organization and politics of its public space, focusing primarily on the mechanisms of police force. As it was elaborated by Jürgen Habermas, the spheres of public authority are sharply distinguished from the private realm, whereby the public sphere “is coextensive with public authority” (1989, p. 30). Thus, the public sphere is always the result of a certain constellation and distribution of power and mechanisms of control. As a maintaining force of the social order, the public sphere and the public space, the police, in Rancière’s terms, “is thus first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task” (1999, p. 29). Once a body steps out of its assigned place and starts behaving against the social order, a new political constellation happens, insofar we regard political activity to be: “what-ever shifts a body from the place assigned to it” (ibid., p. 30) which in the context of this text would mean that the naked body is not allocated anymore only in the private intimate realm, but becomes visible in public space.

In a regime like the one in Yugoslavia during the socialist era, followed by the Yugoslav national army, the police had been one of the pillars of social order.

However, unlike other countries of the former Warsaw Pact, where the secret police (Stasi, Securitate, KGB, etc.) was controlling almost every aspect of social and political life until the fall of the Berlin Wall, Yugoslav authorities started experimenting with a more liberal version of socialism that implied a gradual “opening of the country” towards the West. This tendency could have been read by notable shifts embracing cultural products from Western Europe and the US. The consequence of such liberal (economical and cultural) politics resulted in the opening of a number of student cultural centres across Yugoslavia in cities like Ljubljana, Zagreb, Belgrade or Novi Sad, where an alternative cultural scene was beginning to flourish. Having in mind artists like Mladen Stiljnović, Vlado Martek, Željko Jerman, Sanja Iveković and Tomislav Gotovac, the Serbian critic and theoretician Miško Šuvaković observes, “In fact, in the 1960s, Croatian culture became the only culture in the socialist world in which neo-avant-garde art became the dominant institutional art” (2003, p. 121).

Nevertheless, art practices, which can be labelled as radical interventions in public space, such as the performances by Gotovac or the performance *Triangle* (*Trokut*, Zagreb, 1979) by Sanja Iveković, operated on the margins of the official art system and exposed a different understanding of the public sphere and socialist society. During one of Tito’s visits to Zagreb on the 10th of May 1979, which had been followed by a usual security procedure and demanded that all the balconies and windows on Tito’s route would have to be closed, Sanja Iveković (in *Triangle*) violated the protocol and sat on her balcony. Besides drinking whiskey, she also simulated masturbation, which had been seen by a nearby secret police agent (equipped with binoculars).⁹ The performance had ended after 18 minutes with the police officer coming to Iveković’s apartment with the demand: “that all objects and persons should leave the balcony” (Marjanić 2014, p. 579). Being situated in a liminal space between the private and the public, this example, on the one hand, demonstrates that the private sphere, too, is subjected to protocols of surveillance, eviction and policing. In other words: the border between the private and the public is not a stable nor is it a given, natural order; it is a social construction, reflecting power (and gender) relations. On the other hand, the role of police, as can be witnessed in both of the examples of Gotovac and Iveković, is directly connected to the function of preserving morality. As a form of legitimized and institutionalized violence, the existence and function of police testifies that the public sphere mirrors the organization of the state, that it *re-embodies* and represents the state apparatus.

What is debated in these two examples is the dichotomous organization of public space, where the private realm is cut off from the public. The naked and eroticized body, thus, had a threatening effect and its presence in public space had been charged with political consequences that were expanding the notion of art and – by displacing the borders between the private and the public – were questioning the idea of public itself, as well as the idea of the autonomy of art. At this point, it must be noticed that the idea of the public “in this narrower sense was synonymous with ‘state-related’; the attribute no longer referred to the representative ‘court’ of a person endowed with authority but instead to the functioning of an apparatus with regulated spheres of jurisdiction and endowed with a monopoly over the

legitimate use of coercion” (Habermas 1989, p. 18). For Habermas the substance of the public is generated through the process of private people addressing public authority, which transformed the manorial lord’s feudal authority “into the authority to ‘police’” (ibid.). So far, the role of the police is to protect and watch over the constituting public/private dichotomy, making sure that every threat to the existing order is immediately suppressed, that everybody is assigned to his or her proper place and behaves within the framework of (petit-bourgeois) morality.

In this scenario the contours of a counter-public will occur in moments when structures of the official public sphere are unmasked, unveiled and demystified.

Any performative action, provocation and intervention in public space that radically sets in motion its (libidinal and sexual) organization necessarily operates with(in) political signifiers and can contribute to a critical reflection on the structures of publicity. In her text, which conceives a critique of the bourgeois vision of the public sphere, Nancy Fraser focuses on mechanisms of exclusion grounded in gender differences. She writes: “This process of distinction, moreover, helps to explain the exacerbation of sexism characteristic of the liberal public sphere; new gender norms enjoining feminine domesticity and a sharp separation of public and private spheres functioned as key signifiers of bourgeois difference from both higher and lower social strata” (1990, p. 60). Even though it might be said that this concerns primarily the *invisibility* of women in public space, i.e. their assigned position to the private realm of domestic interior or their semi-naked, allusive appearance as a desirable decoration of public exterior, the nude performance of Gotovac and the masturbating action of Sanja Iveković¹⁰ challenge this separation, foregrounding *disobeying bodies* that have displaced the borders and have proven that morality is the instrument of police and one of the essential features of publicness.

When art historian Bojana Pejić in her study on the performance *Triangle* proposed that *Triangle* “announces an emergence of the democratic public space” (2006, p. 18), one is tempted to ask whether the same could also be applied to the performances of Tomislav Gotovac? Whether both Iveković and Gotovac anticipate the transition, metamorphosis and structural changes of the public sphere: from its proletarian form to its bourgeois, democratic model? Can the second public sphere be reconstructed from the dissensual and antagonistic activity of the performances and their potential to expose a reflective space about the organization and politics of the altering publicness in Socialism? Are we, perhaps, confronted with a paradox, that the birth of democratic public space is structurally the moment of the dying away of the proletarian public sphere? Finally, would it be plausible to locate the counter-public sphere within that paradox?

Towards a vanishing (proletarian?) public sphere

Between 1981 and 1984 Gotovac had performed a series of performances in which the action consisted in selling newspapers, which, among other things, contained images of his nude performances. After the first action in 1981, where he would stand on the main square (at that time called Square of the Republic) and would sell

the student newspapers *Studentski list* and *Polet*, in 1984 he would change costumes on a weekly basis, altering his identity as follows: The Mask of Death, Mummy, Street Cleaner, Sickie, Hammer and the Red Star, Santa Claus, Chimney-Sweep. Performing on the same site where he had performed *Zagreb I love you*, Gotovac focused on the relation between the individual body and the accidental passer-by, who became the witness of a spontaneous and contingent street theatre of fictionalized labour. The artistic strategy of changing, challenging and appropriating identities targets the notion of fixed identities and entails a conscious deconstruction of the politics of representation. In that regard, these performances of masquerade might be seen as a statement about the theatricality of the public sphere. What I would like to focus on here is the visibility of labour in public space and the figure of the news-vendor or the sandwich-man, perhaps being “the last incarnation of the flâneur” (Buck-Morss 2006, p. 41).

In an exhibition with the title *Newspaper Art by Tomislav Gotovac*, in Zagreb 2014 curated by Darko Šimičić, this aspect of his work gained visibility, since the audience could see newspapers in which the documentation of the performances and actions had been published. Besides the samples of the actual newspapers, showcased were also photos from the 1981–1984 performances, which made it clear that Gotovac had a conscious approach to the medium of newspapers, using it to mediatize and archive his otherwise ephemeral actions. Analytically, the colportage-performances can be used to focus on the notion of the public sphere from the perspective of



Figure 6.2 Tomislav Gotovac, *Newspaper Vending action*, 1981, Collection Sarah Gotovac. Courtesy: Tomislav Gotovac Institute, Zagreb.

masquerade, fiction and (in)visibility of labour. If the contours of a second public sphere (as a counter-sphere opposing the hegemonic and homogenous aspects of the public sphere) can be redrawn on behalf of the queer corporeality, made visible by the performance of the naked body, my second example shifts the attention to issues of labour and the way Gotovac was (mis)using the apparatus of mass media in order to collapse the dichotomy of art and life, turning performance into a social instrument with political and ideological implications.

In both cases the emphasis is on the suppressed and excluded: while the naked body refers to issues of explicit sexuality, the unconcealed presence of labour performed in the public space brings forth the possibility of reflection on the position of the working class. In this context, it might also be reminded that the artist considered his first performance to be the work he had been doing from 1956–67, when he was employed as a clerk. As if following the task of the intelligentsia to “destroy the eroded capitalist basis for legitimation” (Kluge and Negt 1993, p. 94) of bourgeois society, which can only be achieved if the intelligentsia and the working class form “an alliance” (for Kluge and Negt this is the fundamental prerequisite of the proletarian public sphere), Gotovac is not only trespassing the borders between art and life, but also the one considering the division between manual, artistic and intellectual labour.

Being the “*institutions and instruments of the public sphere*” (Habermas 1989, p. 83) the development of the press¹¹ and the distribution of newspapers is an important element in the shaping of the (bourgeois) public sphere. So far the colportage performances seem to underline not only that the public sphere is determined by circulation of newspapers and the existence of a public opinion created through them, but that it has also been the birthplace of the stratum of bourgeois people and of the capitalist mode of production. Even if it might sound paradoxical that in times of socialism we could identify something as the *stratum of bourgeois people*, simply because the whole project officially aimed at affirming working class values and the working class ideology, the bourgeoisie¹² did not cease to exist. The public sphere of socialist Yugoslavia can be viewed as an expression of the class interest¹³ of the *Bürger* and as such it depends upon the reproduction of private ownership.

As a historical counter-concept to the bourgeois public sphere, the proletarian public sphere – following Negt and Kluge – is modelled on suppression of the interests of workers, who are surviving “as living labour power” (1993, p. 57). Other elements that determine the experience of the proletarian public sphere in contrast to the bourgeois counterpart are “the bourgeois as character mask” and the “public sphere as a product”, in which the process of production is subjected to disintegration and devaluation (ibid., p. 56). If the performance of the naked body made manifest the gender politics of the public sphere, the colportage performances seem to foreground the suppression and exclusion of (living) labour under the risk of commodification, the division of labour (manual and intellectual), the demise of public property and the appropriation of public good. When Gotovac performs his newspaper vending, changing masks and costumes, what this act brings to our attention is not only the mask and the costume character of the public sphere,

but a complicated notion of labour, undergoing drastic alterations, especially when reflected today, in the age of deregulated economy of Postfordism.¹⁴ The image of a masked worker, I argue, unleashes signifiers of *alienated labour*, which is turning into commodity,¹⁵ blocking experience of belonging to society and moving further away from the idea of workers' self-management. Hence, embodying the role of a fictional worker, Gotovac is addressing the illusion of Yugoslavian socialism, whose ideological premises were formulated around the notion of self-management and the belief that the working class will win (or has already won) the class struggle.

To be able to circumvent what such a performative procedure might entail in terms of a social/class dynamics, I shall draw upon one last theoretical position, which situates the figure of the worker in the economically changing urban landscape. When analysing the concept of the *flâneur* in Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* (*Passagen-Werk*) and in relation to the sandwich-man and the prostitute,¹⁶ Susan Buck-Morss notes that all these figures revolve around the dialectical image of the proletariat, associated with poverty and debasement. Although Buck-Morss writes about Paris in the 1930s, Zagreb (at the beginning of the 1980s) seems to offer a similar scene of consumer goods overflowing the public space and workers without jobs: "The sandwich-man was a denigrated, yet familiar figure in Paris in the 1930s, one which would have entered the perceptive range of most city dwellers. Human billboards, they advertised and publicized the products and events (cinemas, store sales) of bourgeois consumer culture" (2006, p. 42). As the female alter ego of the *flâneur* and the sandwich-man, the prostitute signifies the commodification of desire, the transformation of erotic life and the advent of a type of labour in which commodity coincides with the act of selling, meaning that in times of increased unemployment, the worker has to make him/herself "attractive to the firm" (*ibid.*, p. 51). In all of these cases (the *flâneur*, the sandwich-man and the prostitute), we are faced with a *vanishing sphere of living labour*, whose protagonists are exposed to coercion and eviction: "For the politically oppressed (a term which this century has learned is not limited to class) existence in public space is more likely to be synonymous with state surveillance, public censure and political constraint" (*ibid.*, p. 48).

In the light of the above-examined thesis one final problem that needs to be resolved is how to read the colportage performances in the context of the economic crisis, which Yugoslavia was facing at that time? Are they (the performances) to be regarded as symptoms of the decaying public (bourgeois) sphere or is it plausible to read them as an attempt to create a counter-sphere, which calls forth the utopia of erased division of labour and gender/class equality? If Gotovac did succeed in exposing the exclusionary mechanisms of the public sphere both with regard to gender politics and the embodiment of labour power as commodity, can we consider his performances as calling upon a proletarian sphere? As Kluge and Negt make very clear, the function of the proletarian public sphere "is to protect individuals from the direct influence of bourgeois interests and ideologies" (1993, p. 61). However, the authors also insist that a proletarian public sphere is something *yet* to be created, that it exists only in the form of *potentiality* and that it foremost has to be thought as a horizon of experience not subsumed to the public sphere of the bourgeoisie.

Within the logic of this argument, Kluge and Negt argue that the fragmented division of labour is one of the first issues that needs to be transformed and what is at stake is “the liberation of the imaginative faculty, of sociological reality” (ibid., p. 128). Applying these demands to the colportage performances, we might come to a conclusion that Gotovac is perhaps also aiming at this: to set in motion a labour of fantasy (and fiction), which reveals hidden social antagonism and demystifies modes of production, grounded in alienated experience of hyper-production of commodities and the commodification of public space. At the same time, what is happening is also a process, which can best be described as “commodification of fantasy” (Jameson 1993, p. 67). Through the use of masks and costumes, Gotovac not only operates within a procedure of estrangement, he also reduces labour to fiction and signs that recall the realm of popular¹⁷ culture and mythical figures. What emerge before our eyes are, thus, *dream images* of reified, fragmented and alienated labour, which block experience and the fulfilment of the proletarian sphere. At the same time, the performances are foreshadowing the collapse of the socialist system and the death of Yugoslavia.

In a trajectory from the naked body to its costumed, fictionalized and masked double, Gotovac expands the space of artistic practice, crossing the border between art and life, whereby the consequences are overtly political, touching upon issues of gender representations and the commodification of labour in socialist Yugoslavia. The issue of art being a depoliticized and autonomous activity, as it had been conceived within the aesthetic regime of enlightenment,¹⁸ needs to be questioned radically, since it operates against the set of dichotomies which kept the sphere of art separated from social and political reality. A similar binary structure may also be identified regarding the constitution of the public sphere, whence the concept of autonomy, as Habermas compellingly shows, is reserved for private people and property owners. Thus, the demand for an autonomous art can only be formulated within the logic of private ownership and within the ideology of the bourgeois class, whose public sphere is carefully policed and fragmented. On the other hand, the approach towards a proletarian public sphere, although it is not yet to be located, might be mirrored in Gotovac’s performances of labour, which not only prefigure the reification (and commercialization) of vital human labour and art, but demonstrate how the public sphere will be *devoured* and colonized by images and consumer goods imported from the West. Yet both the performances of the naked body and newspaper vending manoeuvre within ambivalent signifiers, which announce the vanishing of the public sphere and the displacement and deferral of the proletarian publicity. And, perhaps, it is in this *dialectical in-between* of the proletarian and the bourgeois public sphere that a space of critical reflexivity emerges, a space in which we can, retroactively, read and decode the dream images of a *collapsing publicity*.

Notes

- 1 In the context of the present volume, the idea of the “second public sphere” is tested in relation to the “proletarian public sphere”, which for Negt and Kluge is synonymous with the notion of a “counter-public” (*Gegenöffentlichkeit*). As a conceptual framework,

the discursive development of a counter-public serves the purpose of emphasizing a “critical and oppositional public sphere”, that “might project an alternative organization of the public sphere” (Hansen 1993, p. XVI). In the case of former Yugoslavia, however, the problem resides in the fact that in comparison to other countries beyond the Iron Curtain, one cannot easily detect or reconstruct a second public sphere oppositional to the first public sphere. Also, having in mind the fact that at the times when Gotovac was conceiving his performances, the Yugoslav political, economic and social sphere had been organized around the concept of the so-called worker’s self management, emphasizing the proactive role of workers in terms of ownership and decision making, I thought it would be plausible to approach the problem manoeuvring with the ideas of Negt and Kluge.

- 2 Since Kluge and Negt do not provide a particular example of the proletarian public sphere, but discursively circle around various problems, social and media constellations, leaving it to the reader to imagine and conclude how a proletarian publicity would look like, it seemed to me that the performances (such as the one described above) might set down a situation (and provide examples), which can be used to test their otherwise vague and abstract thesis. In contrast to the way the public sphere has been understood and scrutinized in the works of Jürgen Habermas and later on criticized by e.g. Nancy Fraser and Bruce Robbins, Kluge and Negt seem to offer a more speculative framework, which – because of its conceptual openness and interpretative potentiality – is suitable to address the dialectics of the public sphere with regard to the performances of Tomislav Gotovac.
- 3 Such a dialectical approach seems even more suitable having in mind the context of the present publication and the question about the second public sphere in Eastern Europe under socialism it aims to grasp. In the case of socialist Yugoslavia, one encounters a difficulty of a sharp distinction between the official culture (public sphere) and subversive art practices (second public sphere), simply because most of the art practices in Yugoslavia since the 70s had been supported by state (art) institutions.
- 4 The neo-avant-garde practice refers to a number of artworks and artistic strategies that have gained significance in the 70s and 80s and which can be seen as following the models established already by the avant-garde movement of the 20s and 30s.
- 5 The *Day of the Youth* was a collective mass choreography in former Yugoslavia, which was held every year on the 25 May, on the occasion of Tito’s birthday. As such, the event can be seen as an example of something the dance theoretician Andrew Hewitt labelled “social choreography” which “ascribes a fundamental role of the aesthetics in its formulation of the political.” (Hewitt 2005, p. 3).
- 6 Risking the danger of being reductionist, not surveying the difference between “public sphere” and “public space” in its totality, it might still be important to define the terms public sphere and public space. In the first case, the term public sphere denotes a whole set of practices, discourses, technological, political means and media, which constitute one society, particularly in its communicative aspect. As such, the public sphere can be seen as a more abstract and general term, which does not necessarily evolve in a real existing spatiality. In the latter case, public space, as it will be used in the text refers to a physical, material and spatial setting: the central square in Zagreb. Thinking this difference further with Jacques Rancière, who will be important for the analysis of the relation between police and the public space, it can be speculated that politics is to be conjoined with the public sphere, whereas police is the regulatory mechanism of public space.
- 7 Writing about the performance, ethnologist and performance art scholar Suzana Marjanić observes that Gotovac evoked the image of the rhinoceros as a “symbol of the artist running away from the police state” (Marjanić 2014, p. 463).
- 8 The artist himself said several times that with the act of lying down horizontal on the pavement, he actually paraphrased the gesture of the priest during consecration (Marjanić 2014, p. 463).

- 9 What this example clearly foregrounds in terms of the conditions of the emergence of public space, is the power of visual control, which is embodied in the male gaze.
- 10 The critic Bojana Pejić claims that with the image of the “woman at the balcony”, Sanja Iveković establishes a topography of outside/inside, private/public as well as the border of watching/being watched: “The woman at the balcony is the *mise en scène*, that induces gender that it is written in the dialectics of the private and public” (Marjanić 2014, p. 579).
- 11 For Habermas the development of the press is a key event within the public sphere’s emergence: “Because, on the one hand, the society now confronting the state clearly separated a private domain from public authority and because, on the other hand, it turned the reproduction of life into something transcending the confines of private domestic authority and becoming a subject of public interest, that zone of continuous administrative contact became ‘critical’ also in the sense that it provoked the critical judgment of a public making use of its reason. The public could take on this challenge all the better as it required merely a change in the function of the instrument with whose help the state administration had already turned society into a public affair in a specific sense – the press” (Habermas 1989, p. 24).
- 12 While the working class people (in Zagreb and Belgrade) were living mainly on the outskirts of towns in big grey building blocks, the intellectuals and elite of the ruling party lived in luxurious villas and private houses on the hillside. This example of the difference in the housing politics/environment makes evident that the social antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat can also be identified and read spatially.
- 13 Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge make this very clear when they write about “[t]he public sphere as the organizational form of the bourgeoisie” (1993, p. 54).
- 14 A thorough analysis of the condition of labour in Postfordism, especially in relation to the concept of bio-politics, is given in Virno 2007.
- 15 From a historical and economical point of view, it is important to have in mind that the period between 1981 and 1984 in which the colportage performances took place, is the moment when Yugoslavia entered a continuous crisis, which resulted in the growth of unemployment and increase of foreign debt. Not being able to find a successful economic formula and with unresolved national conflicts, enhanced by the downfall of the Soviet Bloc, Yugoslavia was slowly collapsing under the double pressure of capitalism and nationalism.
- 16 Similar to a prostitute that is selling her own body (work), the artist is selling newspapers with his own work/body.
- 17 It should be underlined that the invasion of images of American cultural products and products from the so-called Capitalist West, which started in the mid-sixties, had an everlasting influence on altering the public space.
- 18 It is interesting to see how the request for an autonomy of art had happened simultaneously with the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere in the late eighteenth century.

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7 Outside by being inside

Unofficial artistic strategies in the former Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s

Andrea Bátorová

“For us, appearance – something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves – constitutes reality” (Arendt 1958, p. 50). This was written by Hannah Arendt on the topic of the public sphere in 1958. In my essay, I am going to investigate the question of what public space meant in the era of centralized supervision of the cultural field and social life during former Czechoslovakia’s “normalisation”. In what way did unofficial artistic interventions in the public space constitute reality? Can we speak of a public space at all?

Before answering this latter question, it is important to sketch the context of the invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies on August 21, 1968 in Czechoslovakia, which deeply affected cultural life and led to a renewed dominance of the doctrine of socialist realism. In December 1970, a book entitled *Learning from Crises Developments in the Party and in Society after the 13th Communist Party Congress* (*Počenie z krízového vývoja strany a spoločnosti od XIII. Zjazdu KSC*) was published and became the ideological reference point for activities in the entire cultural field. According to Milan Šimečka, Czechoslovakia turned into a planet which lost its trajectory, and which, through the process of consolidation, had to be led back to it (1984, p. 7). In November 1972, another important and even more directive document was published, a resolution of the Congress of the Slovak Visual Artists’ Association. It condemned and labelled as destructive the development of the disassembling tendencies in the art scene, which meant all alternative artistic forms of expression other than socialist realism; the process of normalisation began. It was considered by Šimečka a “restoration of the order”, achieved through focusing all attention on centralizing the ruling principles of the communist party. A small circle of people, that is the political elite, took on the role of rulers, while the party base functioned purely as a receiver of instructions, ideological directives, so that the centre of power could create the illusion of a mass foundation (ibid., p. 34). The centralisation of power was implemented through inspections directed against “enemies” of the regime who were to be expelled from the party. In his book of essays *Restoration of Order (Nastolení pořádku)*, (1978) Šimečka analysed the mechanisms of inspection on all levels of society with a special focus on the exclusion of certain types of people – people who were active, had a conceptual way of thinking and were able to think independently (ibid., p. 39). By restoring order, the ruling

party of really existing socialism became an avant-garde of mediocrity, obedience and fear (*ibid.*, p. 42).

In his essay “Story and totality” (1987) Václav Havel reflects on this situation and describes the first half of the 1970s in Czechoslovakia as the time when “history stopped” because the “story was destroyed”, which refers to a logical interruption in a storyline, the lack of the plurality of truth and the betrayal of existing attitudes, ideas and traditions. Havel argued that the basic pillar of the totalitarian system in Czechoslovakia is the existence of one central and monopolist subject which incorporates all truth and power and which becomes the only subject of social events. Havel claims that in such a social system everything is calculable: “the property of the complex truth means that we know everything in advance. And when you know everything in advance, no story can emerge” (Havel 1987, n.p.). This predictability and uniformity curtailed citizens’ engagement and led to mass apathy. After visiting Czechoslovakia in 1983, Timothy Garton Ash wrote that he had never been to a country where politics and public life were the object of such complete disinterest: “Czechoslovakia nowadays could be compared to a lake, which is permanently covered by a strong layer of ice. On the surface does not move anything. But under the ice among philosophers-workers, journalists-window cleaners and members of order-night watchmen, everything is in motion” (1992, p. 59). The paradox of a steady water surface and an “underground” in motion turns our attention towards the complexity of public spheres as well as the question of how political circumstances shaped the cultural field. For the present essay, the most important aspect is the question of what consequences these two issues had for artistic freedom of expression in the so-called second public sphere.

As a result of the political and cultural constraints, an unofficial art scene emerged “under the surface” in the 1970s. The common denominator of unofficial activities was a deviation from the mainstream of socialist realism (Rusinová 2014, p. 100), while social normalization and consolidation amounted to establishing political (post-)totalitarianism.¹ But what was it that had to become normal again? The political repression of art rejecting the ideas of socialist realism turned out to be impossible, especially after the liberalization of the 1960s, as it would inevitably have caused resistance among certain circles of artists who did not comply with the changes and transgressed the boundaries violently and artificially. The ascendant culture of socialist realism appeared to be fully absurd. As Miroslav Kusý argues, it was obvious to both the representatives of power and the powerless that the process of normalisation had no future (e.g. within the “Chartist movement”) (1985, p. 152). Both non-conformism as it related to the ruling ideology of totalitarian socialism and the functional mechanisms of official state-sponsored art were highly problematic, as they generated resistance even among artists who were not very popular or even recognized officially. The whole socialist society became schizophrenic (*ibid.*, p. 158). The “as-if ideology” (*ibid.*, p. 163), a term coined by Kusý to describe a specific set of social conditions, created a parallel and alternative existence of a so-called as-if loyalty, with the result that few people really identified with the ideals of socialist realism.

One of the consequences of the cultural shift in former Czechoslovakia at the beginning of the 1970s was that many alternative artists were excluded from the Association of Slovak Visual Artists and gained unofficial status unwillingly. Some of them retained their membership in the Association but kept their alternative activities secret, living the schizophrenic life described by Kusý. The unofficial activities took place either in privacy (studios, homes, nature), that is, outside the view of the cultural apparatus, or on some alternative platforms within the system. The limited popularity of such places, their gallery-like character and their position on the margins of the official cultural field or beyond the spaces defined by artistic institutions set the framework for several unofficial artists exhibiting semi-officially during that decade. The underground could appear above the ground because ruptures and cracks in the system made its existence possible.

I attempt to analyse three performative strategies of confrontation in public spaces. In order to understand their essence, it is important to link them to the phenomena of ritual and panorama. These terms are taken from Havel's famous essay "The power of the powerless". In this paper, Havel referred to the idea of "parallel structures" (in line with Václav Benda's "parallel polis") and Ivan Jirous's idea of the so-called "second culture". As Havel argued, culture is the field in which it is possible to find parallel structures at their highest level of development (1980, p. 71). For him they represent the most articulated level of "living in truth".³ Havel explains the phenomena of ritual and panorama by telling the story of the greengrocer who hangs out the slogan "Workers of the world, unite!" in his shop window (Havel 1985, pp. 27–29). This slogan is a symbol of an opinion the greengrocer did not truly identify with. He only put it in the window of his shop to demonstrate his silent acceptance of the ruling regime (ibid., p. 31). In this case, ideology functioned as the main instrument of ritualized communication within the authoritarian system.⁴ The slogan captures what Havel calls the "panorama of everyday life". It is not only the greengrocer who takes the slogan to be an empty decoration, but also the passers-by, who while looking at the window, may not have any deeper thoughts about the true meaning of the slogan. And it is quite possible that they overlook it entirely (ibid., p. 35).

The spheres of the official and unofficial culture in 1970s Czechoslovakia were overlapping. Havel says that no matter how developed a lifestyle within the parallel structures is and whether it is the ripest stage of the "parallel polis", in the post-totalitarian condition they only *co-exist* with the official (or first) public sphere.

When considering the public space, the fact that it is publicly accessible is of course a key aspect. But even more importantly, within it a certain social order is being constituted which represents a specific system of functioning – in our case, this is the order of the late socialist state. By public space I mean the domain that society considered an "as-if-public". The latter emerged through self-censorship in public life. Self-censorship meant that citizens acted as if they were free while knowing that they were expected to behave in a specific way. A real public space, understood as a discursive field of free dialogue, as defined by Jürgen Habermas, was non-existent. Unofficial and alternative artists frequently positioned their

activities in socialist everyday life, though their participation often remained invisible or did not seem obviously “deviant”. Artists engaged with traditional, habituated social practices, everyday situations and actively shaped what Havel calls the “panorama of everyday life” by using its surroundings as a backdrop, a platform or a springboard for their individual activities (Lefebvre 2008, p. 29).⁵ Through their ideas and projects, they explored the prevailing social structures, the ruling conventions, the standards and codes of the dominant public sphere.

This raises the following questions: What kind of public spaces were used by unofficial artists for their activities? Which strategies and tactics did they apply to behave “a-normally” within the process of “normalization”? How did unofficial activities relate to the surrounding space and to the prevailing social and political order? In what follows, I will focus on performances of unofficial Slovak artists who confronted the surrounding reality by 1) maintaining, 2) partially disturbing, and 3) disrupting the prescribed ritual and the panorama. These three categories are not meant to suggest a strict differentiation between private and public, but to help us understand the relationship between official and unofficial scenes and, above all, to grasp the status of unofficial activity in an official context and a pseudo-public space.

Affirmative practices: maintaining the prescribed ritual and the panorama

The strategies I describe in this section include mimicry, camouflage and the creation of situations open to ambiguous interpretation. Their most important aspect is the combination of one space, one activity and one process with multiple possible layers of meaning. Michel de Certeau argued that our everyday actions can multiply space and add meaning to them (2009, p. 120). How can one interpret the artistic strategies in the first public sphere that are seemingly identical with the dominant and expected actions, but are simultaneously confronting the ruling system?

As Inke Arns and Sylvia Sasse claimed, since the early 1970s affirmative elements have been present in all areas of unofficial art in the former Eastern Bloc. These strategies, which initially emerged out of necessity but were later chosen voluntarily, led to a special “art of critique” (Arns and Sasse 2006, pp. 444–455), the so-called subversive affirmation: “Subversive affirmation is an artistic/political tactic that allows artists/activists to take part in certain social, or economic discourses and to affirm, appropriate, or consume them while simultaneously undermining them” (ibid.).⁶

Theoretically, we could identify the maintenance of the prescribed ritual and panorama with the phenomenon of subversive affirmation. The ideal manifestations of active participation in the creation of ritual and panorama were state holidays and ceremonies. As Kusý argues, in real-existing socialism nobody relied on spontaneous expressions of socialist consciousness, because these events were regimented by tight monitoring and strict legal sanctions (1985, p. 12). Holidays and ceremonies as the primary expressions of the citizen’s political engagement were

the testing ground for their conviction and loyalty. In a society ruled by ideology and controlled by the state apparatus, the May Day parade, for instance, was seen as *the* major opportunity for a mass demonstration of common values, shared ideals and happy life in the socialist state. The commitment to the communist party was to be shown publicly, but also the consensus of the nation expressing its collective homage to the representatives of political power sitting on the tribunal. Against this historical background, it is hardly a surprise that these kinds of mass activities opened the stage for artists and their subversive interventions in public space.

In 1980 Vladimír Kordoš realized his performance *Jánošík* by participating in the May Day parade as an incarnation of Juraj Jánošík, the Slovak national hero of the 17th century. Photographs of the performance show the artist in traditional costume with a hat and a typical weapon called “valaška” engaged in interaction with other (mostly unknown) participants of the parade. The people are singing, drinking, making photos with the attraction “Jánošík”, posing in front of a bank and the tribunal full of banners containing the famous communist slogan “Workers of the world, unite!”.⁷ Kordoš’ participation in the parade appears to be ironic because he embodies a historical person known to the masses, while simultaneously being an alienating element in the crowd subverting the official occasion for his own ludic purposes.

Another strategy of subverting the May Day parade was Lubomír Ďurček’s project *Mechanical Views. May 1st (Mechanické pohľady. 1. máj, 1980)*. As art historian Richard Gregor writes, this project addressed marginal matters, hidden issues of everyday life, and things that cannot be captured in any statistics (Gregor 2014). Ďurček participated in the parade “as if” being like every other citizen, but at the same time he fixed a camera to his hand and walked through the crowd for an hour taking random photos in regular intervals. The collection of 28 images is completely free of any directed gaze, they are instead “directed” by the movement of a human arm. The views range from photos of legs and of the asphalt shot from a child’s perspective to images of an old wall. The photos of the project were mixed after production and presented as a slide show. By using it as a platform for an impersonal, mechanical act of creation, Ďurček broke with the logic of regulated demonstration: he contrasted the dynamics of controlled behaviour with uncontrolled creative production.

Partially disturbing the prescribed ritual and panorama

A series of other performative practices partially disturbed the prescribed ritual and the panorama of everyday life through their ambiguity and by simultaneously affirming and undermining the mechanisms of the state apparatus. This included the creation of extraordinary events, experiences and situations under the cover of official, institutionalized activities. In contrast with the activities aimed at maintaining the panorama, these actions were significant because they had a surplus of activities, forms of expression or their appearance.

Eva’s Marriage (Evina svadba), organized by Alex Mlynárčik in Žilina in September 1972, belongs to the most spectacular happenings in the country. It was built upon a real wedding with hundreds of participants which Mlynárčik turned into

an art action. After the wedding in the City Hall there was a procession through the streets of the city centre that stopped to perform folkloristic Old Slavic customs and rituals. Thus, many passers-by participated in the happening accidentally, too (Euringer-Bátorová 2012). The last stop of the whole cavalcade was a restaurant situated outside the town where the celebration went on.⁸

Paradoxically, despite the prevailing censorship the whole happening was authorized after Mlynárčik had managed to get different permissions from the town hall. The artist had to ensure that the procession would follow traffic rules and that no interruption and misuse occurred beyond Mlynárčik's planned procedure. Police officers accompanied the celebrating mass and made sure that only invited guests could attend the ceremony. Ironically police officers functioned as assistants of the happening securing its course of action. The representatives of the socialist state took on the double role of harassers and constitutive participants.

A similar tactic was adapted by Lubomír Ďurček in his performance *Visitor (Five visits)* (*Návštevník [Päť návštev]*, 1980) which took place in Bratislava. The artist rang at the doorbell of his friends, stayed in front of the door for about twenty seconds with his mouth open but saying nothing. In his mouth, he had scrunched a copy of the newspaper *Pravda (Truth)* (Keratová 2013, p. 51). Providing a sensitive critique of the fact that it was the leading newspaper of the Communist Party with a highly ideological content, he pointed out the relativity of everyday propaganda. In his analysis of the socialist state, Jozef Vohryzek indicated a total vacuum of



Figure 7.1 Alex Mlynárčik, *Eva's Wedding*, photo-documentation of the happening, Žilina, 1972.

Photo: Miloš Vančo. Courtesy: Slovak National Gallery.



Figure 7.2 Alex Mlynárčik, *Eva's Wedding*, photo-documentation of the happening, Žilina, 1972.

Photo: Miloš Vančo. Courtesy: Slovak National Gallery.

civic will, a *perpetuum silentium*, passivity and quiescence: the silence stood for “a quiet agreement – one of the pillars of totalitarian power” (Vohryzek 1985, p. 200) that secured the smooth existence of social resignation. In this sense, it is not only the articulation of the relativity of truth with the above-mentioned connotations that appears to be important in Ďurček’s performance, but also the fact that he remained silent during the action. The materialization of a “quiet agreement” with the enforced opinion was put into the mouth of someone who was completely silent. For we should remember that any citizen, who opens their mouth to talk had to adjust their speech to the “truth” of the Party. Another interesting fact is that the artist did not enter people’s homes intentionally, that is he realized the event in a semi-public space located on the border to the private sphere where, perhaps, he could have acted or talked more freely (Bartošová 2011, p. 214).

Disrupting the prescribed ritual and panorama

The third group of artistic interventions in the public space represents the activities which were obviously and directly confronting common reality by inserting unusual situations directly into the heart of society, masking them as street events in the centre of Bratislava. The confrontation was direct, obvious, open and intentionally “different”, atypical, combative and therefore dangerous to the totalitarian regime. Young artists like the members of The Temporary Society of Intensive Experience (Dočasná spoločnosť intenzívneho prežívania – DSIP) did not aim to act like harassers but, as Ján Budaj argues, they did not want to live with compromises and wished to experience individual freedom (Budaj [no date]). Their attitude had its roots in the desire for intellectual autonomy as described by writer and journalist Miklós Haraszti: “They seem to be heretics against the new consensus; however, their place is defined less by their political ideals than by their refusal to relinquish their intellectual autonomy. . . . This attitude automatically excludes them from the new culture and is the negation of the ethos that informs and sustains state socialism” (Haraszti 1988, p. 10).⁹ The positioning of these kinds of activities was clearly beyond the regime’s limits of acceptance. Miroslav Kusý points to the same direction when stating that “anyone who is atypical, and yet exists, is ‘evil’ reality and has no place in real socialism. Anyone who is not a socialist man, therefore, can only be a residuum of the past, an agent of imperialism, a dissident. In any case, he or she is a foreign element” (Kusý 1985, p. 158).

The DSIP was a group of young people who were not satisfied with life in a socialist state and therefore turned into “foreign elements”. They created actions, events and situations to be experienced “authentically”, aimed at individual transformation. Their program was reminiscent of the Manifesto of the Situationist International: “moments constructed into ‘situations’ might be thought of as moments of rupture, of acceleration, revolutions in individual everyday life” (Situationist International 1960, pp. 10–11).¹⁰ The DSIP created several interventions in which passers-by were confronted with unusual situations. An example of their significant projects was building a living barrier in one of the narrow streets in Bratislava’s

old town during the *Street Theatre Week* (1979). The participants belonging to the theatre companies Labyrint, Faust, Pegasník and Pomimo lay down on the pavement blocking the way for passers-by so that they were forced to interact with the “actors” (Straus 1990, p. 21) in this unusual situation. According to Tomáš Štrauss, the purpose of the activities of DSIP was not to present a ready-made art piece produced in the past, but to evoke a new quality – “an action as creative act or even the sense of the creation on itself” (ibid., p. 20). The intention of DSIP was to reveal the routine and habituated manners of the citizens by acting directly in the public space, getting the attention of passers-by randomly and in the environment of everyday life.

In December 1979, the citizens of the housing estate Kútiky in Bratislava could witness the following scene: a group of young people sat down around a small table in front of one of the buildings, ate lunch and invited passers-by to join and enjoy their meal. Ján Budaj, one of the initiators, described the action entitled *Lunch II (Obed II, 1979)* as follows: “On a small place surrounded by buildings a ‘Sunday lunch’ took place. The same situation happening simultaneously in all the flats around us, became the topic of a performance in the street. Viewers could look at it from their windows or balconies during, before or after their own lunch. An electric amplifier broadcasted sounds that were familiar to them: the jingle of the cutlery, the serving of the soup, common conversations. The microphones transferred also a Sunday radio program, which was broadcasted from a radio placed near the table and which could be heard simultaneously from many windows and opened balcony doors” (Budaj [no date], n.p.).

Lunch II represented a typical strategy of intervening in the public space employed by DSIP: the creation of a certain situation out of a usual activity while at the same time breaking the convention by adapting it with a slight difference. Placing the privacy of the family lunch in front of the house and showing it directly to the public created an unconventional moment: on the one hand it was an unusual situation for both viewers and participants, and on the other hand it functioned as a starting point for a dialogue between observers and participants. In a socialist state, any unconventional activity, any free expression was automatically suspicious. In this context a common lunch, relocated into the public space, could acquire a political dimension.

The action was the continuation of a similar event called *Lunch I (Obed I)*, taking place a year earlier in November 1978. DSIP transferred it directly to the street at one of Bratislava’s central spots. In contrast to the first lunch event, the second one was working with anonymity: the passers-by were not neighbours, but nameless citizens. One of the main differences between these two events is the way in which the participants interacted in and with space. In *Lunch I* they situated the table on the street without any physical demarcation, whereas in *Lunch II* they rolled paper around the place, visually separating the “scene” of the event from the rest of the environment and thus generating a stage situation. However, the events had something in common too: they both broke with the classical rules and limits of the (first) public sphere. They occupied an area through an estranging activity that reappropriated and privatized the public space.

Conclusion

In the present paper, I described and analysed various artistic strategies that confronted the social reality of state socialism in creative ways, seeking for a position both outside and inside of Czechoslovak society. As far as the questions of public spheres and the public space are concerned, which I posted at the beginning of the essay, it is important to emphasize that the meaning of these phenomena shifts depending on the political regime and its social practices.

It is highly relevant to point out that in former Czechoslovakia, just like in other socialist countries, there was no public space in the sense in which Jürgen Habermas or Bruce Ackerman (Benhabib 1992) use the term, since that concept belongs to the liberal tradition of Western capitalism (Hohendahl 1992, p. 105). Therefore, we have to be aware of the fact that in the era of Czechoslovakia's normalisation, there existed no publics as a sphere of discourse and free dialogue. For this reason, it would make more sense to talk about *pseudo-publics* in this particular context. In my understanding, the notion of pseudo-publics refers to the non-existent space of free decisions and actions in communist rhetoric. Officially, there was a public sphere, but practically it did not exist. Real publicness as a space of freedom existed in more or less invisible forms; invisible in the small, private circles of like-minded friends, and a little more visible in the actions in the domain of a pseudo-public, the performative strategies that ranged from unremarkable actions to subversive, indirect confrontation with the system.

The Communist Party in the CSSR wanted to be considered democratic from the outside, and the official rhetoric emphasized this appearance. At the same time, there were less obvious directives about what kind of social and cultural behaviour the authorities expected from the people. The establishment of soft power mechanisms for influencing people without direct orders and prohibitions led to fear and self-censorship (Šimečka 1984, p. 93). The space of the pseudo-public was constructed by a formal order expressed through an extensive system of visible political slogans and people in real existing socialism knew how to "read" them (*ibid.*, p. 16). Basically, what Šimečka describes can be seen as an equivalent to Havel's panorama of everyday life.

Non-official art activities emerged and unfolded in an "alternative public sphere" which existed within and parallel to the system of late socialism, sometimes even occupying official venues. Such art popped up also in private houses of a closed circle of people meeting regularly for readings and discussions. The visibility of these activities was dependent on the form of presentation and was relative to the degree of confrontation with the prevailing system.

The parallel polis did indeed have potential to undercut totalitarianism. The performative projects discussed in the present paper had one thing in common: they emerged out of the pseudo-public of the parallel polis and disappeared into it. In his analysis of parallel structures, Havel argues that those who decided to "live in truth" began to create the "independent life of the society" and begun to structure and to expand this "second" life. Its agents created elementary organisations, like samizdat editions and magazines, private theatre performances, concerts, etc. (Havel

1985, p. 70). However, Havel assumed that this second life, too, would need a kind of institutionalism resulting in the rise of a parallel political life, potentially leading to the end of post-totalitarian monopoly (ibid. p. 71).

T. G. Ash argues that the history of Central and Eastern Europe in the 1970s is to be characterized as the history of the fight for a citizens' society (1992, p. 19). In his essay "Does Central Europe exist?" he analysed the writings of Václav Havel, György Konrád and Adam Michnik. Ash pointed out that all three authors agree that moral changes could influence politics, that consciousness determines being and that the key to the future does not lie in external conditions, but in the internal conditions of an individual (1992, p. 18). Staying outside of state and party structures, people who "live in truth" could unite by constituting a "society of citizens" ("občanská společnost"). The aim is not the reformation of the state, but the reconstruction and revitalization of society and culture through the independent activities of citizens beyond the official structures. Havel, Konrád and Michnik optimistically believed that if this strategy was successful, the party and state would be forced to adapt to these new circumstances.¹¹

In this sense, the parallel culture of Czechoslovakia was similar to the understanding of public space in the Arendtian sense, an "associational space" that emerges whenever and wherever "men act in concert" (Benhabib 1992, p. 78). This model of public space is the one "where freedom can appear". As political scientist Seyla Benhabib argued, it is not a topographical or institutional space: "But a private dining room in which people gather to hear a *samizdat* or in which dissidents meet with foreigners become public spaces; just as a field or a forest can also become public space if it is the object and location of an action in concert . . . These diverse topographical locations become public spaces in that they become the sites of power, of common action coordinated through speech and persuasion" (ibid.). The parallel polis had a dynamic character and was moving from one geopolitical place to another. The case studies of the present paper were sites of the parallel polis, the articulations of portable "islands of positive deviation" emerging from and disappearing into real existing socialism's sea of social and cultural life.

Notes

- 1 In Havel's words: "Between the aims of the post-totalitarian system and the aims of life there is a yawning abyss: while life, in its essence, moves towards plurality, diversity, independent self-constitution and self-organisation, in short, towards the fulfilment of its own freedom, the post-totalitarian system demands conformity, uniformity, and discipline. While life ever strives to create new and 'improbable' structures, the post-totalitarian system contrives to force life into its most probable states. . . . this system serves people only to the extent necessary to ensure that people will serve it. Anything beyond this, that is to say, anything which leads people to overstep their predetermined roles is regarded by the system as an attack upon itself" (Havel 1985, p. 30).
- 2 By chartist movement, Kusý means the Charter 77 (*Charta 77*) – an informal civic initiative fighting for human rights in communist Czechoslovakia from 1976 to 1992, named after the document Charter 77 from January 1977.
- 3 Havel's term "living in truth" refers to an individual within the post-totalitarian state who does not hide what he or she really believes or desires. In communist Czechoslovakia,

an individual had to live a lie. The “living in truth” is, according to Havel, the best way to resist oppression by the regime. The power of the state functions so far as people are willing to submit to it. Basically, in “living in truth” Havel sees the potential to overcome the ruling post-totalitarian system by creating an independent social life.

- 4 “It begins (ideology, A.B.) to function as the principal instrument of ritual communication *within* the system of power” (Havel 1985, p. 31).
- 5 “It surrounds us, it besieges us, on all sides and from all directions. We are inside it and outside it” (Lefebvre 2008, p. 29.).
- 6 I. Arns and S. Sasse describe the term in the context of Moscow conceptualism and especially the texts of Vladimír Sorokin.
- 7 It is important to mention that during the political celebration folklore played quite an important role, so wearing a traditional costume was not exceptional at all.
- 8 An interesting thing was also that art theoreticians like Pierre Restany or Jindřich Chalupský participated on the happening as well.
- 9 “Naturally, under totalitarian socialism, as in any ascendant culture, anachronistic characters can be found. They rebel against prevalent values, or they look for a nook in the institutional shadows where they can indulge their ideals. Only when the state criticizes or punishes them do they achieve a certain fame. But even that recognition cannot be seized; it is only awarded. Publicity given to resistance is usually decided by those in power, for pedagogical purposes. If we get to know these people, it is not because our controlled culture is too weak to digest them thoroughly. They can be born, survive, and be known to us because there are two civilisations – one of the West and one of the East. . . .” (Haraszti 1988, p. 10.)
- 10 “Moments constructed into ‘situations’ might be thought of as moments of rupture, of acceleration, *revolutions in individual everyday life*” (Situationist International 1960, p. 11)
- 11 Ash reminds us also of the fact that a dissident acts like a “thinking root”, and his attempt to live in a truth is worthwhile on its own merits regardless of whether it has any effect on the social or political sphere.

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8 From a local to a national to a transnational public sphere

The emergence of solidarity in Poland from a theatrical perspective

Berenika Szymanski-Düll

If we recall Hannah Arendt's famous statement that power "begins where the public sphere ends" (Arendt 1955, p. 639) and link her words with the generally accepted view that the term "public sphere" is of great importance for the development and the functioning of modern civil societies, it at first seems paradoxical to talk of the public sphere in a state socialist dictatorship like that which had predominated in Poland since the end of the Second World War. In the first years following the end of the war, the mass media had already been gradually organized along the lines of the existing system in the USSR of directed and controlled media and were subject to party control.¹ It was their job, among other things, to broker harmony between the rulers and the general public, to extol the successes of the system and to emphasize the satisfaction and the optimism of the citizens of the People's Republic. At the same time, any information that could even slightly interfere with this image was eliminated (Pepliński 2004, p. 15).² Any attempts to express dissent in the official mass media were quickly suppressed in these structures. However, this does not mean that only public spheres created by the regime existed. If one understands the public sphere – in state socialist societies as well – not as a monolithic dimension, but instead as a dynamic sphere that allows a multitude of different approaches, one can detect within these regimented structures partial areas of freedom, against which the state certainly took restrictive steps. Examples are illegal publications in the "drugi obiegi" (second circulation), pamphlets and performance art, but also strikes and demonstrations which enabled unheard content to be given a hearing in official discourse.

According to Nancy Fraser, these forms of public communication can be called subaltern counter-publics³: Based on their experience that they cannot express their concerns in the ruling public sphere, the protagonists of excluded groups attempt to establish discursive counter-public spaces in order to formulate counter-attitudes and thus to give expression to that which is not heard in the prevalent public sphere. Fraser thus points out that mechanisms of exclusion and the resulting conflicts must be seen as motivation for the creation of public spheres (Fraser 1992).

Thus, as regards the situation in the Polish People's Republic, one can discern an area of conflict which is reflected in a permanent debate about and negotiation

of what can be public and what cannot. I want to address this dynamic in my essay and focus on the historical strike at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk in August 1980. This strike is of considerable importance because the protests in Poland only took on a political dimension with the strike.⁴ In addition to demanding the reinstatement of the crane driver Anna Walentynowicz, who had been fired shortly beforehand because she campaigned for better working conditions at the shipyard, and demanding pay rises due to rising food prices, those striking in Gdańsk now also made political demands. They drew up twenty-one postulates, which included improvement of working and living conditions, the demand for free and independent unions, and the right to strike and the freedom of expression. Within a few days more and more workers joined the strike in solidarity with the Lenin Shipyard and on 17 August an inter-factory and Poland-wide strike was declared. This collective revolt of the workers and the support for their undertaking by the majority of the population forced the Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (Polish United Workers' Party, PZPR) into negotiations with the Międzyzakładowy Komitet Strajkowy (Inter-Factory Strike Committee, MKS), which was founded at this time, and ultimately led to the establishment of the trade union *Solidarność* (Solidarity). Thus, for the first time in the history of real socialism, the ability of opposing groups to negotiate was recognized and a process was initiated that was to gradually bring political change to Poland and other satellite states of the Soviet Union and in 1989 led to peaceful revolution.⁵

In the following I will therefore investigate how the strikers succeeded – despite the regimented access to mass media – in finding a public sphere for their concerns. In doing so, I will focus on the theatrical dimension of the Gdańsk strike, which I consider to be one of the constitutive strategies, and I will show how this, at first, local public sphere expanded nationally and transnationally.

The sociologists Jürgen Gerhards and Friedhelm Neidhardt have developed a differentiated model of the creation of public spheres, which can be transferred to the creation of counter-publics. They differentiate among three levels of interaction on which public spheres can be constituted (Gerhards and Neidhardt 1991): They consider the most elementary form to be encounters, in which people meet each other on a variety of occasions and communicate with each other, for example, in conversations at work, at the bus stop or in a bar. Encounters on this level occur more or less by chance, are thematically fluctuating and relatively unstructured. The next level is the level of gatherings, which are thematically focused interactions, such as discussion meetings or talks, which are planned by specific organizers (people, groups or organizations); participation in these interactions assumes an interest in the subject. Here, as on the encounter level, interaction takes place between people who are physically present, i.e. the protagonists and the audience are in the same place and can react directly to each other. The number of those taking part in the communication is thus restricted to a specific group of people who are present, meaning that the chance to influence public opinion is relatively small in comparison to communication on the level of the mass media. And it's this mass media level which Gerhards and Neidhardt state to be the most effective level of

the constitution of the public sphere because the technical infrastructure allows it to reach a large audience. Thus, they emphasize: "The subjects and opinions that are articulated on other levels only then also reach the perception of the general public when they are taken up, reported and intensified by the mass media" (Gerhards and Neidhardt 1991, p. 55). Since the audience does not have to be physically present, it becomes more abstract; instead of face-to-face communication, communication conveyed via the media dominates here.

Although all of these three forms of public sphere creation have the inherent potential to articulate dissent, when we consider the process of revolution in Poland it can be seen that here it is precisely the first two levels identified by Gerhards and Neidhardt that played an important role. The encounter level represents the beginning of the process of autonomization and thus the process of creation of a counter-public. Discussions between those in opposition to the government here took place first in private homes, at secret meetings, before they moved on to the next level, the level of public organized events, the gathering level, in the form of protests such as strikes, demonstrations, rallies, etc. If the two sociologists consider protests as a special form of public sphere creation, we can thus state for the Polish case that it was their activation that enabled opposition powers to carve out their own public sphere as an alternative to the official one and thus to receive attention for their concerns and their protest.

What's special about this level of public sphere creation is the direct and compressed articulation that takes place between people who are physically present. Their specific form of action is direct and collective action in which explicit opinions about a subject can be expressed, whereby a person or a group who were previously not identifiable in a public sphere can consciously and without the aid of mass media achieve visibility with their own voice and their own body. For this reason, this level can be ascribed a theatrical character, because theatrical character consists of the performance potential which is characterized by the fact that an acting person or group deliberately presents itself to others and – in the process – produces signs which it uses to evoke meanings and direct effects.⁶ This situation can also be observed in the practice of protesting, because those who stand up to express a protest become – in the form of deliberately exhibited actions, which they produce directly using their own body, their own voice and their own creativity, in the eyes of the people that are watching – political subjects and thus protagonists who are consciously acting in front of an audience (Szymanski 2012, p. 23–31; p. 39–51). During the strike in Gdańsk the strikers and their helpers established deliberate actions to inscribe themselves into the public sphere. In the following this aesthetic inscription will therefore be considered in more detail.

The organizers of the strike in Gdańsk sensed from their knowledge of Polish media that their concerns would not find an ear in the state-owned media. At the same time, they also knew from their experience that the reporting – if it took place at all – would be based not on facts, but on news which served the party apparatus and was thus falsified. (Interview with Krzysztof Wyszowski in March 2009) And they were right. In *Trybuna Ludu* (*People's Tribune*) from 16/17 August 1980 there is

only a short comment that there had been walkouts in Gdańsk. One looks in vain in this and the following issues for background information, such as the reason for the strike, the demands, who was behind the strike etc. It was not until the issue dated 20 August that the demands were mentioned briefly and perfunctorily in a single sentence: "The majority of the demands presented concern salary problems, the increasing costs of taking care of family, difficulties concerning day-to-day family life and an inadequate supply of food." A similar approach to the strike can also be seen in the other mass media, where overall it can be seen that the term "strike" is avoided and instead the term "walkouts" is used.⁷ It is striking that in all the articles in the mass media there are recurring patterns that refer to hostile powers, which are willing to inflict damage on the Polish People's Republic, or to large financial losses due to the walkouts. It is suggested again and again that the Polish people are tired of the strikes. For example, in the edition dated 30/31 August, i.e. shortly before the Gdańsk Agreement, *Trybuna Ludu* printed negative opinions on the walkouts, such as that of a worker from Opole: "We are all longing for a normalization of the situation and an orderly working rhythm in the whole country. The extension of the strike will not lead to any good." In addition to the presentation of such arguments, the willingness of the government to talk to the strikers and the efforts to respond to the demands of the working class were emphasized.

Thus, in the reporting of the mass media only the voice of the government was heard, only the speeches of the party officials and the opinions dictated from on high were conveyed to the public sphere. The strikers themselves did not get to have their say, their postulates were only reported very perfunctorily and thus the general public was prevented from perceiving them. It is thus understandable that the strikers developed their own strategies to convey their demands to the public; this included establishing various stages and the aesthetic inscription of their demands.

One of the first stages during the strike in Gdańsk was a digger that the initiators of the strike chose as a stage on which to announce the course of the strike to the workers and to select the strike representatives. This stage was also used by the shipyard director, Klemens Gniech, who asked the strikers to return to work and promised them that he would take care of the negotiations between the management and the representatives of the workers. He had almost convinced the majority of them, when "Lech Wałęsa appeared . . . behind the manager" – as Jerzy Borowczak, a Gdańsk shipyard worker remembers – and said: "Do you still recognize me? I toiled here in the shipyard for ten years and I still feel like a shipyard worker because I have the trust of the workforce. I have now been unemployed for four years." (Wałęsa 1987, p. 120) Wałęsa, who lost his job as an electrician at the shipyard because of his oppositional behavior, used a megaphone to appeal to the workers gathered there to continue the strike. His appearance on this digger prompted thunderous applause amongst the audience and saved, as Timothy Garton Ash notes, the strike from collapse. (Ash 2002, p. 43)

The digger-stage mentioned here conforms to the spatial arrangement of the classical idea of a stage that we are familiar with from the theatre: a raised place on which the protagonist acts while the audience below him watches. Lech Wałęsa

and Klemens Gniech stood on the digger during their discussion and were thus in a raised position. The spectators, the striking workers, surrounded these two protagonists and looked up to them. This type of stage creation using large or high objects can be seen all over the shipyard throughout the whole course of the strike. Thus, not only diggers, but also electric trucks, tables, chairs and even the shoulders of comrades served as stages. Nevertheless, the establishment of these stages only reached a limited public sphere, the public sphere of those who were in front of the particular stage in the shipyard. Thus, for example, Wałęsa's discussion with Gniech on the digger only reached those people who were on site and who attended the discussion. In order to reach a larger counter-public, to inform the people about the real reasons for the strike and the real demands, and thus to break through the lies of the mass media, it was necessary to use other tactics.

One obvious course would have been to go on a protest march through the town, drawing attention to themselves and using banners and shouted slogans to proclaim the reasons for the strike. However, they decided to dispense with such a course due to bad experiences in the past: On 14 December 1970, there were spontaneous strikes and demonstrations in the coastal towns of Gdańsk, Szczecin, Gdynia and Elbląg because of dramatic increases in the price of staple foods. The strikers asked the government in vain to enter into negotiations with them and finally took to the streets of their towns to put pressure on the government. On 16/17 December, the protests escalated and there were bloody skirmishes between the army and militia units and the strikers, in the course of which people died.⁸ Therefore, leaving the shipyard did not seem an appropriate strategy to the strikers in 1980. It was thus necessary to use a different tactic to conquer the public sphere outside the shipyard. Two types of stage creation can be identified as particularly successful here: One functioned visually and the other, in contrast, aurally.

The shipyard compound was separated from the world outside the factory by walls and fences. What was originally constructed as a demarcation element to separate the interior of the workspace from the outside space of the city played a connecting role in the days of the August strike. The walls and fences were used as a stage to make public what was happening inside. They permitted the protagonists to make contact with the outside world using the simplest methods. Thus, for example, the strikers wrote their twenty-one postulates on large boards and fixed them to the outside of the factory walls and fences. In this way, all those passing by the shipyard could learn the aims of the strike, which had been concealed or only perfunctorily reported by the mass media. The journalist Irena Dryll remembers: "I was there when they were hung up. The postulates themselves were on large wooden boards. Young people hung them up . . . and in such a way that they were visible from afar. It was a moving occasion because everyone could sign their name under the postulates" (Miller 2005, p. 75). As can be seen from this quotation, the boards did not just have an informative function, but were also performative, as per John L. Austin's definition, because they were capable of prompting actions (Austin 1962). They encouraged passersby to place their signature under the demands, thus demonstrating their support. In this way, a community was also formed by the act of signing and was presented outwards in the form of solidarity.

Since the state observed all actions and registered all acts of opposition, it goes without saying that such an action was not without danger. And yet the number of signatures grew daily and with them the publicizing of the postulates. In addition, the strikers also wrote various slogans on the walls, such as “The strike is under way!” (“Strajk trwa!”), “Long live free and independent trade unions and peace all over the world!” (“Niech żyją Wolne i Niezależne Związki Zawodowe i Pokój na całym świecie!”) or “Only with solidarity and patience is our victory guaranteed!” (“Tylko solidarność i cierpliwość zapewni nam zwycięstwo!”).⁹ In this way the strikers were reacting to false reports that they had allegedly ended the strike and also it allowed them to communicate with the world outside the shipyard.

But it was not only pedestrians passing directly by the walls and fences who could be reached by this kind of public sphere creation and obtain information about the strike. Since part of the walls and fences were located near railway tracks, all travelers coming to or leaving Gdańsk could likewise see all this information. In this way, despite the capping of the telephone connections which had been ordered by the party leadership to prevent communication between Gdańsk and other cities, it was possible to convey news about the strike and the postulates of the strikers to train passengers, thus guaranteeing that they were disseminated throughout the whole of Poland. In this way the direct and, initially, local public sphere could be expanded to a national one. This kind of transmission of information proved to be



Figure 8.1 Strikers on a wall of the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk in August 1980, photographer unknown, Fot. Ośrodek KARTA, Warsaw.

very successful, as the contemporary witness Zenon Kwoka confirms, in particular because by this means other factories outside Tricity¹⁰ heard of the events, whereupon they sent delegates to Gdańsk and thus joined those striking there. (Interview with Zenon Kwoka in March 2009) Zbigniew Gach, who was one of the train passengers, describes his view of the situation as the train approached the shipyard:

We approached the Gdańsk Shipyard station. Nearly all the passengers in the train compartment looked towards the shipyard. They craned their necks to soak up every detail. The train was also going slower. On the concrete screen that separated the shipyard from the Polish Navy street, small groups of men with helmets and berets were sitting on the roofs of the shipyard sheds. They gesticulated, waved to the train passengers and made the letter “V” with their fingers. On the walls . . . there blazed painted slogans: “We are with the people, the people with us, we shipyard workers will not give up! Long live justice!”
(Miller 2005, p. 45f.)

This statement clearly shows that not only the slogans acted as players on the wall and fence stages, but that the strikers themselves also acted on them and on the roofs of shipyard sheds and the walls. Using their bodies and their voices they were able to draw the attention of those outside. In addition to appearances in small groups, individual players also used these stages to communicate with those gathered outside the gates and to inform them in detail about the course of the strike. In this context, we might mention Lech Wałęsa, for example, who – as Krzysztof Wyszowski points out – displayed a special performative talent during the days of the strike and appeared again and again in different contexts (Interview with Krzysztof Wyszowski in March 2009). It is evident from the observation logs of the state security service on the strike that Wałęsa, who was recorded here under the pseudonym “Wół” (ox), spoke to those gathered outside the gates several times a day and reported the news about the strike to them. His appearance on 20 August is recorded as follows:

In his short appearance, the supporting actor with the pseudonym “Wół” informed the people that there were around 270 delegates from different factories in the shipyard. And that there was no disagreement within the Inter-Factory Strike Committee. In addition, he issued the information that the delegate conference, in which the delegates would report on the current situation in their factories, would begin at 9 o’clock.

(IPN GD 0046/364 t. 1, k. 111)

It is clear from this report that Wałęsa not only conveyed news about the strike, such as when something would take place or what had taken place, but that he also attempted to correct the lies spread by the mass media, such as the rumor about an alleged dispute within the Committee. In addition, Wałęsa used his appearances to encourage the audience in crisis situations: As when, for example, the strikers and their supporters outside the shipyard no longer believed that victory was possible or

when fear of a military attack threatened to break their will, he was able to use song to bring about a reversal. Then he climbed on to the stage – the aforementioned wall, a digger or an electric truck or a table – and began, amplified by a megaphone or a microphone, depending on what he had to hand, to sing a well-known song. Sometimes it was the Polish national anthem, sometimes an old, patriotic hymn, such as *God Save Poland*. The crowd suddenly quieted down, looked up at Wałęsa, stood up and sang along with him.¹¹ Timothy Garton Ash describes one of Wałęsa's appearances as follows:

Yet as he sings he is transformed: no longer is he the feisty little electrician in ill-fitting trousers, the sharp talker with many human weaknesses; . . . now he stands up straight, head thrown back, arms to his sides, strangely rigid and pink in the face, like a wooden figure by one of the naive sculptors from the Land of Dobrzyń where he was born.

(Ash 2002, p. 64)

All these acts increased the general public's interest in the strike. While at the beginning only a few people came to the shipyard, over the course of the strike the numbers increased, as can be seen in the observation logs of the Polish state security service. The observing officials estimated that there were approximately 150 people at the shipyard on the morning of 15 August (IPN GD 0046/364 t. 1, k. 93); at 10 pm on the same day there were already twice as many (IPN GD 0046/364 t. 1, k. 94). In contrast, during the negotiations with the government representatives, the officials recorded – depending on the day – between 1000 and 3000 people (IPN GD 0046/364 t. 1, k. 117 and k. 139). In particular during the masses held at the shipyard crowds of people streamed to the shipyard to take part and thus to demonstrate their solidarity with the strikers.¹² Ewa Juńczyk explains this phenomenon by the fact that going to the shipyard, at that time, represented something like the primary civic duty (*Tage der Solidarität* 2005, p. 91). And, during those days, this civic duty acquired the name “solidarity”.

In addition to this visual creation of a counter-public using people's own bodies, a public sphere was also produced with aural means, because the transparency of the events in the shipyard and the resulting opportunity for as many people as possible to participate was important to the leaders of the strike. (Interview with Krzysztof Wyszowski in March 2009.) This was of particular significance in the negotiations with the representatives of the government. The room that had been selected by the Gdańsk strike leaders for the discussion with the party officials in August 1980 was quite small with space for only a limited number of people. And although it was not in a raised position and did not draw attention by means of any other exposed feature, it acted as a stage.

Its distinctiveness can be described by means of two features: the first of these was visual. The whole wall that separated this room from the lobby was made of glass, and thus permitted all those who were in the lobby to be able to directly see what was happening in the room: Every movement, every facial expression of the

participating actors could thus be followed live. Those in the lobby were mainly foreign journalists, but the discussions could be observed not just from the lobby, but also through the few windows of the negotiation room that faced the shipyard compound. Although the windows were very small, they permitted some of the strikers to follow the negotiations visually. Bogusław Turek describes this as follows: "I will never forget the faces of the workers who were glued to the windows of the negotiation room. Exhausted, unshaven and filthy they watched the events, full of hope that it would all turn out in their favor" (Miller 2005, p. 138).

Behind these strikers were hundreds more of their colleagues, and every day more and more people stood outside the gates – all of them also eager to follow the negotiations. It was here that the second characteristic of the room proved to be useful: its connection to the factory's radio communication system and the microphones that the strikers had finally won the right to have after negotiations with the shipyard manager. Thus, every word that was spoken in the negotiation room could be transmitted live by means of loudspeakers out of the negotiation room, and not just as far as the lobby, but to the whole premises of the Lenin Shipyard, and even beyond the factory gates. Lech Wałęsa observed this as follows:

In one of its first resolutions, the strike committee demanded access to the shipyard's radio communication system. We knew that it was in our interest to make public all the discussions and negotiations. . . . The shipyard's loudspeaker system included all departments and production halls.

(Wałęsa 1987, p. 166)

Thus, everyone who was on the shipyard premises had the chance to be present at the negotiations – to follow the events on the stage, if not visually, then aurally. For this reason, we can speak of a threefold audience for the negotiations: 1. the journalists present in the lobby, 2. the workers on the premises of the shipyard and 3. those who were patiently waiting outside the factory gates. The dialogues, i.e. the speeches and responses of the groups of protagonists involved were followed by the whole audience, as is documented in the film *Robotnicy '80*. Here one can see the absolute attention that accompanied the negotiations, the concentrating faces of the workers all over the shipyard who did not want to miss a single word, because what the government negotiators said, any concession that they made, was of great importance to everyone. Thus, we can agree with Wałęsa's statement that "Our strike took place with the curtains open" (Miller 2005, p. 167). This theatrical strategy ultimately also allowed the strikers to exert pressure on the government, because the transparency of the negotiations, the fact that every resolution could be heard live by a large crowd of people and thus could no longer be retracted, distorted or denied without obviously appearing to be a lie was able to stop the party officials' tactics of deception – at least for the period of the Gdańsk negotiations at the Lenin Shipyard.

Foreign reporters¹³ in particular proved to be a valuable support here, enabling the events to be made public across local and national borders. Despite the difficult

conditions, because the telecommunications with the town were disrupted and the transmission of their observations to their home countries now and then required a great degree of creativity, they reported to the whole world without the restrictions of censorship and thus, by means of the creation of a transnational public sphere, they were able to help to exert pressure on the Polish government. For example, the reporter for ARD was Peter Gater, who, according to *Der Spiegel* (*The Mirror*), provided “German television with strike reports of a rare intensity” (Anon. 1980, p. 99). His uncensored reports and interviews were broadcast by many European and US television stations. While the faces of Lech Wałęsa or Anna Walentynowicz were not well-known in Poland at this time, nearly everyone outside the Iron Curtain knew them (Anon. 1980, p. 99).

In summary, it can be noted that during the Gdańsk strike in August 1980 the public sphere in the People’s Republic of Poland, which was dominated by the Communist regime, was able to be penetrated with the aid of visual and aural stage creation and thus a counter-public could be constituted. In this way, it was possible for the strikers to bring themselves, the reasons for their strike and their demands into the public sphere, to inform their fellow citizens and to expose the deficits in the reporting of the official mass media. This began a process which could expand from a direct and local public sphere to a national one and finally – with the help of foreign journalists – to a transnational public sphere.

Notes

- 1 The Central Office for Control of the Press, Publications and Public Events (Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk, GUKPPiW) was already established in 1946 to censor and homogenize the media landscape. It formulated the directives of the PZPR as guidelines for the sectors, which were under its jurisdiction. In the beginning, the GUKPPiW was primarily responsible for legitimizing the accession to power of the Communist Party; it was later more focused on the field of propaganda (Pepliński 2004, p. 15).
- 2 It should, however, be kept in mind that the performance of the censorship was dependent on the stability of the central organization of the PZPR: In times in which there was unity and stability within the party, the control of the mass media was implemented effectively. In contrast, in times of crisis, the system began to falter (Paczkowski 1997, pp. 33–34).
- 3 Nancy Fraser developed her concept in a critical discussion with the bourgeois conception of public sphere by Jürgen Habermas.
- 4 The first large strikes and demonstrations in Poland took place in 1956; there was further large-scale unrest in 1968, 1970 and 1976. For the history of strikes and demonstrations in Poland, see Paczkowski 2003.
- 5 For more on the upheaval in Poland in 1989 see, for example, Ash 2002; Kühn 1999. A comparative overview is offered by Schelényi and Schelényi 1994.
- 6 For more on the concept of theatricality to which I refer, see e.g. Fischer-Lichte 2004 and Szymanski-Düll 2016.
- 7 This is connected to the fact that, for Marx and Engels, strikes served as a means for the assertion of the working class and its interests in capitalism and were seen as preparation for the emancipation of the working class. In a socialist state, in which emancipation was theoretically available to the worker, it was thus not appropriate for the rulers to speak of a strike because that would mean admitting that there were flaws in the system. For the term “strike” see Lösche 2008, pp. 558–559.

- 8 For more on the unrest in 1970, see, among others, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej 2009; Danowska 2000.
- 9 See the relevant photographs in the illustrated book by Trybek 2000, pp. 40–43.
- 10 Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot are called Tricity.
- 11 The songs and their effects are recorded in precise detail in the observation logs of the state security service (IPN Gd 0046/364/1 Sierpień '80).
- 12 On the theatricality of religious acts and the significance of Catholicism during the Gdańsk strike in August 1980, see Szymanski 2012, pp. 103–155.
- 13 Polish journalists were also present during the strike. However, they were in a difficult situation because their attempts to report on the strike failed due to censorship regulations or targeted technical faults, such as switching off fax machines and telephones. In this context, some of the journalists published a declaration in which they took a stand against the system and distanced themselves from it, revealing its manipulation of the public sphere of the media. The declaration states “We Polish journalists who are present in the Gdańsk coastal region during the strike declare that much of the information printed so far, and especially the commentary, does not correspond to the actual events. This situation promotes disinformation. The current blocking of the telephones and the lack of possibilities to publish material that portrays an accurate picture of the situation are deeply painful to us and do not allow us to properly fulfill our professional obligations” (KARTA 2005, p. 67).

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9 Surveilling the public sphere

The first Hungarian happening in secret agents' reports¹

Kata Krasznahorkai

“Subordination to the logic of a chaotic world; in other words, the participants abandon their illusory right to have influence over chance events, and acknowledge their total vulnerability to the point of physical annihilation” (Anon. 1968, p. 103).² This poetic quote – allegedly said by Allen Ginsberg – could appear in any literary or philosophical text, but no one would expect to read it in a Hungarian secret agent's report dated May 11, 1968. The officer used this quote in an attempt to describe the origins of a “dangerous” American artistic genre – the happening – that, according to the report, was menacingly spreading and “threatening” the Hungarian culture. The officer in question asserts that

the philosophical background of the happening lies in nihilism, in spreading darkness and irrationalism and in denying healthy human activities. Its religion is violence and hysteria. Its practical outcome is baffling the citizens . . . In the final stadium of its American version it leads to a flood of violent acts, multitudinous drug abuse and open confrontation with the police.

(Anon. 1968, p. 104)

Reporting to the Ministry of Inner Affairs, this officer gathered quotes from different agents' reports – agents who, for the most part, didn't know that they were working for the same organization. These reports were weighed against each other, evaluated and resulted in these “summary reports,” which became the documents that legitimized the tracking and banning of happenings in all public and private spheres. The aim of these reports was to highlight the characteristics and specificities of the happening, a new genre that was difficult to define and therefore hard to identify.

The happening, as a new artistic form, demonstrated the permeability and porosity of the actions, interactions and reactions between the surveilling state and the surveilled artists. In this paper, I will trace this permeability by analysing reports of the first Hungarian happening, as well as the heavy surveillance of Tamás Szentjóby, in order to shed light on the artistic and state security strategies that ran parallel to each other, but on two completely different paths. Both operated in a fragmented, diverse public sphere and in secret, but for different reasons: the surveilled happening artists' actions were forbidden from the outset and so they were forced to

operate – for the most part – covertly. The state intervened by sending its agents into this secret, public sphere.

But what made a Secret Service officer quote Ginsberg? Understanding the nature of the happening and having a clear-cut definition with distinct, common characteristics was strikingly important to the Hungarian Secret Service in order to track these activities, which were taking part mostly in a grey area between legality and illegality. The State Security was operating on a legal basis, but used illegal methods of searching for evidence that the happenings were illegal. The happenings' participants were operating legally, until the evidence gathered against them – some of which was made up – allowed the state to make happenings illegal and ban them from public spaces.

It is relevant to consider the historical context of this period, in which the opposition is not between “progressive” and “official” artists, but instead is a much more complex tension among the operational strategies of cultural activities taking place across multiple public spheres – both those under state-driven surveillance and those that were not being observed. This differentiation could provide a more distinctive and multifaceted view of artists' interactions with the state, allowing for new interpretations that go beyond the established narrative of the post-Cold-War era having the so-called neo-avant-garde, underground, progressive, avant-garde artists suppressed by state violence on the one hand, and the so-called official, traditional artists on the other, who are considered blind servants of state propaganda. In these multiple public spheres, the radius of surveilled areas clearly shows where the state suspected possible structural and operational dangers to the socialist society³ and to what extent the state's paranoid fear of culture and the arts triggered repressive strategies against artists. To highlight the complexity of these multiple spheres, it is worth noting that the top-secret order 0022/1970 – which was issued by the Ministry of Inner Affairs and concerned the regulation and prevention of hostile activities in the cultural sphere⁴ – stated that the term “second public sphere” was integrated into the narratives of official state cultural politics.⁵ A further symptom of this complexity was the fact that despite the heavy surveillance used to gather information as a means to legally forbid these activities, happenings could still take place in public spaces such as universities, cultural houses or clubs⁶ – all public spheres regulated by the state.

As the happening was based on presence and ephemerality, with a seemingly improvised, chaotic dramaturgy, an uncertain outcome and an unforeseeable effect on the public, it soon became like a red cloth to a bull for the police and the Secret Service. As one of the officers heard from a person affiliated with the happening scene: “By simply hearing the word ‘happening’ the police get very angry, so in the future they should use op art, pop art or some other word instead. Since policemen are idiots who understand nothing about art, they wouldn't even notice” (Balogh 1968, pp. 58–59). In this instance, the officer observes how the so-called “underground” scene reflects on the intellectual capacities of his “overground” administration, ultimately turning to “term-camouflage” to hide their activities and keep the officials busy. Thus, in order to forego the danger of an eventual direct

confrontation and destabilization of the political system, it very quickly became clear to the Secret Service that they needed agents who had the intellectual ability to reflect, define and most importantly become part of these events in order to detect and identify these activities.

The Lunch (In memoriam Batu Khan) (*Az ebéd [In memoriam Batu Kán]*, June 25, 1966) was the first happening in Hungary. The initiators, Gábor Altorjay and Tamás Szentjóbby, declared their concept as a “taking over of power” (Altorjay 1998, p. 14). Szentjóbby also stated that “an *event* (as such) takes place through anyone, anywhere and anytime,” (2011, p. 45)⁷ and that “the *happening* (as such) takes place through the participants in an environment until complete exhaustion sets in” (ibid.). Therefore, the happening created a scenario that the state viewed as threatening because it involved the public and destabilized the public sphere.

The resulting field of artistic practices could not be controlled by State Security because it had no roots in the nation’s art history nor could it be identified as a historical development. This detachment from known forms of art, as well as claims that the happening was not an art form at all, made it even more complicated to categorize and rendered it almost unrecognizable. As Szentjóbby described in 1966, the happening was “non-art art” (ibid., p. 46) that “does not represent anything” (ibid.). He asserts that the “happening doesn’t look Cubist or Surrealist because there is nothing artistic about it” (ibid., p. 47).

The aforementioned summary report attempts to trace the historical origins of the genre, with the officer describing how happenings – in his interpretation – grew primarily out of literary movements of the 1920s and 1930s, such as Dada and Futurism. He identified “the Italian Marinetti, the French Salvador Dalí and the German Schwitters” (Anon. 1968, p. 103) as the protagonists of happenings and illustrated his arguments by explaining how, for Schwitters, “every object, from tram-tickets to postcards, from bent nails . . . to any rubbish on the streets had a documentary value. He even saw someone’s garbage as a useable, expressive object, as a symbol” (ibid.).

The Secret Service consciously chose the code name “Schwitters” to refer to Szentjóbby, who was originally a poet and wrote his last poem at the age of 21. By the time he was 31, Szentjóbby was arrested and banned from Hungary. His dossier in the State Security archive documents State Security strategies extensively. Surveilling Szentjóbby and his radius of activity meant that the activity of similarly minded artists was concomitantly observed and that the range of surveillance of this group continuously widened, after the domino principle. Popular bars and cafés were the incubators of numerous ideas, theories and strategies, as these were the places where new tendencies and concepts in art were widely discussed and analysed. But these were also the places where State Security undertook secret operations in the public sphere in order to feed this system of oppression with information.

The Secret Service opened their “Schwitters” file on Szentjóbby after the first happening, which was surveilled even though it was organised and carried out in secret. The main motivation for Szentjóbby and the catalyst of this first happening⁸ came from the media: a magazine article by Mária Ember entitled “Happening and

Anti-Happening” (1966, p. 18). As Szentjóby recalled: “a stupid and deprecating article appeared in the May 1966 issue of *Film, Theatre and Music* that mentioned some US and West European happenings. Despite the author’s ill-will, the happening’s extreme importance as such was apparent . . . Energized, we carried on” (2011, p. 52).

There was one major obstacle to carrying out a happening: finding a venue. One of the sources of the summary report, the agent “Hajdú,” reports on August 4, 1966 (1966, p. 19) – although he did not attend the happening itself – on the complications of finding a venue. According to Hajdú, the organisers sought to host it in the home of the chief editor of the Catholic magazine *Vigilia*, Károly Dorombay, who was at first enthusiastic; however, after his daughter went to the police to obtain information he refused to cooperate further. László Gyémánt, who filmed the event, also refused to host it. It was apparent by then that even the hosting of such an event carried serious risks. Thus, Miklós Erdély⁹ refused to allow it to happen in his garden and instead recommended his brother-in-law, István Szenes, who owned a cellar and a garden, which he placed at their disposal. Erdély also did not attend the event personally. He was warned that as he was a father he should not take such a high risk. And he did not. As Szentjóby wrote in the reviewing process of this article, none of the information in these reports can be correct. He claims that the circumstances of how this information was gathered and documented make it *ab ovo* impossible, that they can provide reliable facts. This opinion is also reflected in the thesis of Tibor Takács, one of the historians of the State Security Archive in Budapest who also claims that most historians are not reflecting on the fact that these documents are infiltrated with the written and oral “State-Security” diction (2014, p. 110). If historians use these documents today, they shouldn’t fall into the trap of reproducing these State Security notions and lines of thought, which would provide a strange continuity. But in the mentioned case of the emphasis on the difficulties of finding a venue, the interrelation of the fragmented public and private spheres is used as an argument for the legality/illegality of events. And as such, from this report we know that the issue of the venue – the use of the public sphere – was of great importance to the Secret Service, as it might serve as a clue regarding how to track and ban happenings as illegal events. These reporting documents, in an archive of an archive, can only be read today as historical artefacts of an oppressive system, the operating strategy of the State Security against artists.

Beyond the problem of finding a venue, the reports also provide an insight into how agents were trying to describe and understand what they saw. According to the 1968 summary report (Anon. 1968, pp. 104–105), the audience had to cross a garden where Szentjóby was sitting, half-buried in the earth, using a typewriter to write on a newspaper. Next to him was a spade, wired to a construction on which a living rooster was sitting in a pot. On the other side, a wheelchair with some puppets in it was burning. The audience had to cross this scenery and descend “underground” into a cellar in complete darkness – and, after fifteen minutes of inconvenient silence, a mixed and cut version of *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima* by Krzysztof Penderecki¹⁰ and the *Ode to Joy* by Beethoven suddenly filled the room at full volume. Then a rose was set on fire, after which Szentjóby and

Altörjay – impeccably dressed in white shirts and black suits – started to eat. The rooster in the pot was next to their dining table. Szentjóbý tried to feed it, but of course the bird resisted, bursting into an incredibly painful shriek.¹¹ Further systematic reconstruction of the events is blurred, as the happening became more intense, loaded with several actions that ran on parallel lanes. Altörjay could only randomly recall some details of the cacophonous events: offering the audience a woman's hand-bag filled with mice, vomiting the food (amplified), fixing a helmet on Jankovics' face, greasing him with toothpaste and soap, slitting a pillow open and throwing the feathers on Jankovics and everywhere in the room, bashing the rooster on the head, spreading red paint, filling a condom with plaster, wrecking the whole room and finishing the whole chaotic scene by destroying the light source with a thermos flask. The audience was so deeply under the influence of the events that for many long minutes nobody could say a word. The attendees simply left quietly after the end – as the agent had also written.

Shortly after, in 1966, the illegal happening appeared in an extended article by László Kamondy, with three photographs by Gyula Zaránd, published in the magazine *Tükör* (1966, pp. 10–12).¹² This was only possible because the reporting agents' information was not assimilated fast enough for the Secret Service to devise a decisive strategy against the initiators and participants of the happenings. In 1968, Altörjay himself published an article in which he described the event in detail – without asking for the obligatory publication permission from the Hungarian authorities – in a Yugoslav, Hungarian-language magazine (2011, pp. 42–44).

Two weeks after the first happening, on July 1, 1966, the agent “Mészáros” typed his report about the event. According to Mészáros, the first Hungarian happening was organised for a strictly private audience. Before going into detail, he claims the need to elaborate on the event's historical roots, which he detects in the avant-garde movements of the 1930s – naming Salvador Dalí explicitly as someone organizing these out of “financial interest” (“Mészáros” 1966, p. 15) and for propaganda purposes; this is the part that was included in the compiled summary report quoted above. He claims that the happening “became institutionalised in the US, Los Angeles, Greenwich Village and other beatnik and hipster centres” (ibid.) – and then the Ginsberg quote follows. He identifies – as did Hajdú – the venue as the property of István Szenes, and then he describes the whole event from his perspective. Mészáros reports that during the happening Dr. László Végh appeared with a few others and tried to get involved in the course of the events, burning sparklers and paper rubbish, “but because they could not gain enough attention they left. Végh declared before leaving that he is going to organise an anti-happening, as he does not like if somebody wants to get order into anarchy” (ibid., p. 17).

Dr. Végh was a doctor and an expert in concrete and electronic music. The gatherings at his home were meeting points for artists, during which Dr. Végh acquainted them with works by John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen and other composers. Szentjóbý said that he considered “Dr. Végh as [his] godfather” (2006, p. 4) and thought him to be the starting point of the neo-avant-garde activities in Hungary.¹³ At that time, Szentjóbý could not possibly know that even Dr. Végh himself worked for the State Security as an agent under the codename “Orvos [doctor].”¹⁴

Although the activities of Dr. Végh as an agent ended in 1962, the gatherings in his flat attracted the attention of the State Security and turned the space into a surveilled sphere as well. After this report, the officer wrote an evaluation: “the report is valuable from an operative standpoint as it gives us a new hint, namely that this [the happening] is spreading among the youth in Hungary due to Western influence” (“Mészáros” 1966, p. 17).

Altorjay himself sarcastically recalls that this was a cooperative project between them (the artists) and the Secret Service, without which they would never have been desperate, eager and radical enough to organise such an event – particularly if they had not been under such strong surveillance and control. He himself says that the reports are the best – and most objective – descriptions of what happened. But this is exactly what these reports cannot be used to do: objectively reconstruct what happened. What they can offer, instead, is the opportunity to explore the strategic operations that were considered necessary to get rid of the happenings. These operations resulted in a two-way relationship between the artists and the State Security. The artists, knowing that the happening was a red flag that stood for counter-culture against official artistic tendencies, camouflaged the notion of the happening, tricked the authorities and always tried to be one step ahead concerning, for example, venues and media coverage. The State Security, looking for clear markers that would make it possible to make the happening illegal and ban it, eagerly sought to recruit “expert-agents,” historicize the form, define it and try to detect its philosophical background.

This interrelation between the state and artists on the issue of the happening is all the more controversial because, on the one hand, the genre was a supposedly massive threat for the State Security (enough to motivate the state to employ at least six agents to report on the happening events, independently from each other, over several years). On the other hand, a summary report from 1967 points out the effects of the state’s destabilizing strategies, which were intended to deconstruct the happening scene. It asserts that the aim of these interrogations and the surveillance was to detect the ambitions of the happening. It was therefore already on record in 1967 that the State Security was aware that the happening posed no political threat: “the happening had no explicit political message whatsoever” (Anon. 1967a, p. 37). And yet, the state continued to monitor the happening with increasing intensity, even though “we could reassuringly convince ourselves that the happening had no political message or hostile indications whatsoever” (ibid., p. 37).

This means that although the State Security noted that the happening posed no real political threat to the established system of state socialism, they still maintained the intensity of their activities and even amplified them in the following years. One of the possible explanations why they kept this phenomenon under surveillance could be because it was intervening with the public sphere in an uncontrollable and ephemeral way – by virtue of its spontaneous actions and unforeseeable reactions from the public. It is also possible that it continued because the agents had to gather more and more information to legitimize their own sphere of action.

During this time, the artists also tried to protect themselves and their actions by supplying arguments for why their actions were legal. In a record of his interrogation

on February 14, 1967, Szentjóbý recalls that the officials asked him why he did not consider organising these happenings legally in official public spaces. Szentjóbý answered that he was trying to do so, but the directors of such institutions told him that the genre – which was already three years old at that point – was nothing new and not progressive anymore, and so they declined (Anon. 1967b, p. 28). In the course of another interrogation three years later, on June 4, 1970, Szentjóbý was still insisting on and stressing the fact that – except for the first happening – he organised all five following happenings upon request or at least with the knowledge of the programme directors and representatives of the hosting institutions, and thus, did so legally (Szentjóbý and Anon. 1970, p. 138).

The confrontation between the artists and the State Security was mainly a series of hidden, illegal operations, such as the surveillance or phone tapping done by the agents. How these strategies were used for further actions can be traced in the operational plan of the aforementioned summary report on the happenings of 1968. In the second part of this report, concrete suggestions are made on how Szentjóbý and this whole happening issue could be stopped, controlled and disintegrated, as it is “contrary to the political and moral development of the youth, *against progress* [emphasis added] and helps the imperialistic circles destabilise the communist system” (Anon. 1968, p. 108).

The instructions include two methods: external and internal approaches. The external would be, for example, “dialogue” with the directors of youth organisations in the frame of which these events took place, denial of authorisation by the Ministry of Culture and alerting the passport department. More dangerous were the internal approaches, which included intensification of the supposed conflict between Szentjóbý and Tibor Hajas, another major protagonist of what was later called the performance art scene, and the synchronisation of six agents, many of them Szentjóbý’s close friends. Furthermore, the dramatic possibility of committing Szentjóbý to a psychiatric hospital was strongly recommended, as it was a widely practiced method against dissidents in the Soviet Union.

The agent “László,” who was identified as the writer Gyula Lugossy in the 1990s, was later sent to Poland and Czechoslovakia to detect further centres of the happening scene and reported extensively on it, writing a report on “The Effects of the Happening on Society” in 1969 (“László” 1969, pp. 85–95), which marked the peak intensity of the happening scene’s surveillance.¹⁵ After 1969, happenings were still part of the controlled operational strategies of the state, but one of its key figures, Szentjóbý, was forced to emigrate and left for Switzerland in 1975. Thereafter, the state’s paranoid fear began to calm down.

The decreasing intensity of surveillance of the public sphere regarding performances and happenings was marked by a striking fact from the history of the art academy in Budapest. On October 5, 1979, a course with the title *Contemporary European and US American Art after World War II*, proposed by Hedvig Dvorszky, was accepted by the university council. The course programme included four lectures spread out over two semesters. The topic of the second semester was “The Image of Man in the New World (abstract expressionism, pop art, happening).”¹⁶ This means that the official art academy accepted the happening’s inclusion in the official art

historical canon of the time – although we don't know whether the happening was used as a “negative” example or as a neutral historical phenomenon. The questions that were extensively discussed and analysed in the secret agents' reports – namely, what the happening was and what its identifying characteristics were, so it could be recognized in the public sphere – were moved partly into a field of official discourse when they entered the academic sphere of artist education.

State Security surveillance played a controversial role in the happening scene; on the one hand, it repressed the happening as a genre, while on the other, it amplified its radicalism and its mode of communication and expression. Identifying what the state defined as “the public sphere,” in surveilled and non-surveilled areas of cultural activities, serves as a tool for shedding new light on interactions between the happening scene and the state. The summary reports from the archive are historical documents for tracking the strategies and methods of state-driven control. The importance of agent reports lies not in the precise reconstruction of events (as the descriptions are often mutually misleading, manipulated or distorted), but in the valuable information they provide on the interrelation of State Security and artistic actions. Later, when the archives of the Secret Service got partially publicly accessible (in Hungary after 1996), the records also became invaluable to the historical position of the archive as well.

With regard to the history of the happening in Hungary and Eastern Europe in the late 1960s and 1970s, these reports offer valuable information for the reconstruction of how, by whom, under what circumstances and with what methods the State Security Service tried to hinder the dissemination of the happening, which was transformed in the socialist states into an act of unhindered freedom of behaviour and speech in public. Not only were the borders between the private and the public spheres reshaped by these surveillance networks, but the link between art and life became a core issue of artistic genres – not only in Eastern Europe. Dissipating the border between art and life also meant dissipating the border between the public and private spheres, which continues to be a core issue of individual human rights today, in the face of surveillance by the state or by private companies.

Notes

- 1 This essay is a completely revised and rewritten version of a lecture presented at the *SocialEast Forum on the Art and Visual Culture of Eastern Europe*, Seminar No. 7: *Art and Espionage*, on February 27, 2009 at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London. I am grateful to Tamás Szentjóby for his invaluable help and comments, and for providing documents and photographs for the lecture and this article. I would like to thank Gábor Altorjay for giving me insight into the files and dossiers in his archives, as well as for our discussion of his perspective of them. This essay, in its revised form, is part of the research project *Performance Art in Eastern Europe 1950–1990: History and Theory* at the University of Zurich. I am grateful to my colleagues for inspiring debates and discussions concerning the reframing of performance history in Eastern Europe. I would like to thank Tamás Szőnyi for his deep and precise insights and for his invaluable help in the jungle of the Historical Archive of the State Security in Budapest, as well as for providing me with one of the last issues of his seminal publication on the role of agents around Hungarian rock music. I would like to extend my gratitude to Edit Sasvári, who gave me hints and

ideas on how these facts could gain proper interpretation and on how many traps one can fall into during the course of this research.

- 2 The original Hungarian quote is as follows: "a zavaros világ logikájának való alávettség, vagyis a résztvevők lemondanak arról az illuzórikus jogukról, hogy a véletlen felett befolyást gyakoroljanak, és beismerik tökéletes kiszolgáltatottságuk tényét egészen a fizikai megsemmisülésig." This quote, which the reporting officer attributed to Allen Ginsberg, is imprecise and even in its Hungarian version is grammatically and semantically incorrect and unclear. The original of the Ginsberg quote could not be identified, but the translation appears in the anonymized 1968 document, *Summary Report and Operation Plan* (Schwitters dossier), Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security (Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára, ÁBTL), (V-156455, p. 103). The dossier "Schwitters" is not available for research, but excerpts from it are accessible online through the Center for Culture and Communication's website at www.c3.hu/collection/tilos/docs.html (Accessed June 29, 2017). All translations in this text – if not indicated otherwise – are by the author.
- 3 Concerning the supposedly serious threat coming from the happening scene, see also Kürti 2015, n.p.
- 4 *A Magyar Népköztársaság belügyminiszterének 0022. számú parancsa* (dossier), ÁBTL, reproduced in Szőnyi 2005, p. 111. About the consequences of the order 0022, see also Sasvári 2003, pp. 11–13 and Szőnyi 2005, pp. 89–115.
- 5 In the course of multifaceted evaluations of the effectiveness of the order 0022/1970 on cultural politics in a third evaluation in 1986, the cultural protagonists of different wings of the opposition attested that their aim was to try to develop their lines and to unite in order to "become a political factor, a power which has a defining role in society. Until today they have not decided for good whether they would like to realise this integration into society or to opt for 'staying outside.'" They announced the need for a "new culture," a "counter-culture," and they organised the framework of the so-called "second public" with this aim in mind and attempted to establish a "second structure" Szőnyi 2005, p. 107. It is also notable in this context that these spheres of the second public and that of the second structure were extended in this evaluation beyond *samizdat* activities and magazines to foundations supporting the poor, independent peace organizations and economical activists.
- 6 The GANZ-MÁVAG Cultural House, the University Stage and the Young Artists' Club in Budapest were also venues for happenings – all of which were official institutions run by the Hungarian state.
- 7 The first happening in Hungary took place on June 25, 1966 in Budapest at Hegyalja Street 20/b. It was conducted by Gábor Altorjay and Tamás Szentjóbby, with the cooperation of Miklós Jankovics and István Varannai, with the help of Enikő Balla, Miklós Erdély and Csaba Koncz.
- 8 For further sources and information about the origins of the first Hungarian happening, see Kürti 2015; Müllner 2004.
- 9 Miklós Erdély (1928–1986) was an architect, artist, filmmaker and writer, and was a reference point for the Hungarian neo-avant-garde. For Erdély's connection to Szentjóbby, see also Kóhalmi 2012.
- 10 "Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima" is an 8-minute piece composed in 1960 by the Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki, originally entitled "8'37'" as a reference to John Cage. About the importance of experimental music in the first happening, see also Kürti 2013.
- 11 The following sources were used for reconstructing what took place in this grey zone of surveilled spheres: an 8-minute film shot by László Gyémánt (the only film material taken during the event, unfortunately without sound) and photographs stored by Szentjóbby and Altorjay, taken by Gyula Zaránd.
- 12 This article was covered in a report entitled "Hepaj vagy happening?" by László Bernáth in the files of the State Security, ÁBTL V-156455, p. 7.

- 13 Regarding the role of Dr.Végh in the Hungarian neo-avant-garde, see also Kürti 2015; Tábor 2004; Iványi-Bitter 2008.
- 14 Regarding the role of Dr.Végh in the State Security, see also Bódi 2011.
- 15 On the effects of the happening on society, see also “László” 1969, pp. 84–95. Two pages of the report are online on the website of the Center for Culture and Communication: www.c3.hu/collection/tilos/docs.html (Accessed June 29, 2017).
- 16 I am grateful to Noémi Flórián Szabó for this invaluable information. Szabó is doing extensive research in the archives of the Hungarian Art Academy and drew my attention to this fact.

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10 Performance art in Latvia as intermedial appropriation

Laine Kristberga

In the present article, I will examine performance art in Latvia in the 1970s through the concepts of appropriation and intermediality. I propose that the acts of appropriation resulted, first of all, from the restrictions imposed by the political regime on the upcoming genre of performance art, and, second, from collective actions and participation in joint, hybrid projects. Due to the sociopolitical circumstances, which demanded unconditional conformity to the Soviet regime, performance artists in Latvia operated in a free-thinking community uniting all members in non-hierarchical creative expression and democratic participation. This micro-environment and networking in the cultural periphery ensured certain creative freedom and an opportunity to avoid the internalization of Soviet values best illustrated with two synthetic, ideological constructions – the New Soviet Man and the Homo Sovieticus. This interpretative framework is to be supported with two case studies, the event-based art projects of Andris Grinbergs (b. 1946) and those of Imants Lancmanis (b. 1941) organized in the second public sphere.

The word “appropriation” derives from the Latin *appropriare* meaning “to make one’s own”. In the arts, appropriation can be unconscious and is almost inevitable, because “almost all artists engage in some sort of appropriation in that they borrow ideas, motifs, plots, technical devices, and so forth from other artists” (Young 2008, p. 4). Appropriation can also be deliberate, because artists can intentionally borrow, copy or alter pre-existing images and objects. A number of artists were intending to question the nature or definition of art itself, as well as rebel against “the modernist notion of originality and its taboo on imitation” (Ambrose et al. 2012, p. 179).

In the 1970s, the agency to re-contextualise an existing artwork, this way giving it a new meaning, was especially pursued by American artists such as Richard Prince, Sherrie Levine, Barbara Kruger and Jeff Koons – their artwork was even termed appropriation art. In this context, appropriation as a gesture of copying and quoting deconstructs the notion of the original, emanates a sense of *déjà vu* and is considered a postmodern practice (Krauss 1986, p. 19). The appropriation artists in the West were influenced by several pivotal theoretical texts: the 1934 essay by the German philosopher Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, the 1967 essay by the French theorist Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”, as well as the 1985 book *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other*

Modernist Myths by the American art critic Rosalind Krauss. The ideas expressed in these texts supported the argument “that there was no such thing as authorship and originality, only unoriginal, endless copying” (Kuspit 2011, p. 240). Consequently, deliberate borrowing and copying were the artistic tools in the West to address such issues as agency, power, creativity and the myth of origin.

However, the appropriation in art in Soviet Latvia in the 1970s was different from the one in the West, and performance art has an especially rich history of the occasions when the works of art or their motives migrated from one author or medium to another. Yet, although the act of borrowing was deliberate, this choice was not rooted in postmodern critical thinking. Rather, the acts of appropriation resulted, first of all, from the restrictions imposed by the political regime on performance art. In a system of ideological commitment and strict art hierarchies, only “traditional” art disciplines, such as painting and sculpture, were considered politically correct and serious, suitable to serve the ideological purpose of the Soviet ideologues. According to Latvian art historian Vilnis Vējš, the Soviet system discriminated against not only specific individuals but entire artistic forms by denying them the status of a professional art or ranking them low in the cultural hierarchy (2010, p. 25). Performance art belonged to these genres and, consequently, existed as a hybrid “in-between” of diverse media, such as photographs, silkscreen prints,¹ and paintings. This intermediality was a result of a process of change that performance art underwent in order to adapt to external political factors. All these media were not mere forms of documentation, but intermedia – a “combinatory structure of syntactical elements that [came] from more than one medium but [were] combined into one and [were] thereby transformed into a new entity” (Ox 2011, p. 47). They existed in parallel, echoing and reemploying each other, hybridizing and growing “into forms that [became] effective and convincing media in their own right” (Friedman 2005, p. 61).

Appropriation in Soviet Latvia occurred as a result of community actions and participation in joint, hybrid projects. Due to the sociopolitical circumstances, which demanded unconditional conformity to the social system, artists in Latvia sought ways to escape the political indoctrination and apathy resulting from the suppression of creative agency. A freethinking community consisting of close acquaintances, friends, and family members was one of the solutions. This micro-environment ensured that through networking in the cultural periphery it was possible to implement certain creative freedoms and avoid the ideological pressure and censorship – and thus to be innovative, inventive, spontaneous and experimental. Performance art particularly attracted many creative individuals of diverse and interdisciplinary backgrounds – fashion designers, theatre actors, film students, painters, writers, poets, musicians, photographers, etc. The process of generating performance was often implemented as “collaborative creation” (Heddon and Milling 2006), uniting all members in non-hierarchical creative expression and democratic participation – something that the political regime undermined. Among these circles of friends, the issues of authorship were not perceived as the violation of copyright; it was the possibility for alternative, autonomous and uncensored action that mattered most.²

A useful theoretical framework to examine Latvian performance art against the choices that the artists had made to create a pseudo-reality, where they did not need to conform to the Soviet ideals, were the synthetic constructions of the New Soviet Man and Homo Sovieticus. These ideological conceptions epitomized the contradictions that performance artists in Latvia had to cope with in every sphere of life: education, work, personal relationships, lifestyle, etc. In the first public sphere, one was expected to be a patriotic Soviet citizen conforming to the ideology and the regime. It implied that one could not obtain information from the sources published in the West, not be engaged in the discipline of performance art or to take photographs of the streets in broad daylight or of naked people in groups. Latvian artists could not dress too provocatively and they could not have any other form of relationship but heterosexual. These and other restrictions of basic human rights and freedoms were crucial reasons why performance artists created a second public sphere, where they sought means and ways to escape repressions, indoctrination and homogenization and to implement their creative agency. From this perspective, performance artists were failures of the Soviet ideologues, because Soviet values were never internalized and the Latvian performance artists never took on the roles of a Homo Sovieticus.

As indicated by Russian sociologist Lev Gudkov, “the concept ‘New Man’ or ‘Soviet Man’ appeared in the 1920s and 1930s as a postromantic version of the subject of historical changes” (2008, p. 13). The socialist society had to be built as an optimistic, classless society by the new human species – Homo Sovieticus. This new man was a significant model for mass orientations and identities. He was the carrier of certain values, qualities, and properties, and, accordingly, of a better future. The Soviet ideologues postulated that the man of the future should place the social and public interest first, and should share the aims and principles of the communist ideology by demonstrating his willingness to sacrifice himself for the sake of “the future of the country,” “the Motherland,” “the Party,” and “the people”. In 1932, Maxim Gorky wrote:

A new type of person is being created in the Soviet Union, his character traits can be determined with no doubt . . . He feels himself as the creator of the new world, his goals depend on his mind and willpower, and therefore he has no reason for pessimism. He is young not only in terms of his biological age, but also historically. He is a power that has just realized his path [of life], his historical significance. He . . . is led by a simple and clear doctrine.

(Gorky 1953, p. 289)

In Latvia, too, this ideological plan was implemented, first from 1940 to 1941 and, later, from the end of World War II through the years of the Soviet occupation until 1991, when state independence was restored. As noted by Latvian art historian Elita Ansone, socialism and communism were dogmatic systems with their own mythology based on the hierarchy of signs and symbols, for which, similarly to religion, it was very difficult to find affirmation in real life, therefore literature,

cinematography and fine arts were regarded as ideal tools to make the Soviet myths, among them the one concerning a new type of individual, seem believable, fascinating and inspirational (2008, pp. 6–8). The new human type, the positive hero, that the Soviet system was supposed to produce as a result of indoctrination, collectivization, repression and social control had to be healthy, athletic, heterosexual, optimistic, selfless, diligent and patriotic (having a Soviet, rather than a national identity). An article entitled “The New Soviet Man” published in the daily newspaper in Latvia in 1940 praised the New Soviet Man, stating that “conscientiousness, cordiality, excitement and modesty are the main traits that characterize the young Soviet patriots. From their perspective, domesticity, work and heroism are firmly and clearly defined. Each person is included in the collective of all Soviet nations” (Anon. 1940, p. 4). The positive hero was also propagandized by socialist realism in fine arts, leaving behind numerous portraits of cultural workers, excellent labourers, war veterans, athletes, militiamen and representatives of other professions in public service (Ansone 2009, p. 74).

However, it must be noted that the construction of Homo Sovieticus has not remained constant throughout the period reaching from the 1920s until today. Gudkov writes that the first attempts to provide evidence of the empirical – rather than the ideological – existence of the individual of a fundamentally different type than the ideologues postulated appeared at the end of the 1950s (2008, p. 14). Other interpretations followed in the 1970s and the 1980s, offering parodies or transfigurations of the idea of Soviet Man. Important studies on the existence of the Soviet Man as a sociological phenomenon were carried out in the late 1980s under the supervision of Russian sociologist and political scientist Iurii Levada (2003). This contemporary perspective provides a more critical approach to examine the (de)construction of the Homo Sovieticus.

According to Gudkov, Levada, and other contemporary Russian researchers, the Soviet system did shape a new category of human being, but this new human type was not a strong and convincing role model. On the contrary, it possessed the following features: he was a mass, very average type, someone who had passively adapted to the existing social order by lowering the threshold or his level of needs and demands; the Homo Sovieticus was the “ordinary” man with (intellectual, ethical and symbolic) limitations, who knew no other models and ways of life, because he had to live under conditions of an isolated and repressed society (Gudkov 2010, p. 61). The Homo Sovieticus was not allowed to differ, show initiative, or strive for innovation – he was morally and intellectually paralyzed. According to Gudkov, he did not exercise any control over ruling authority or his own leadership, he was a “supervised man” – supervised by the ruling authorities on all levels of life (*ibid.*, p. 52).

To avoid the adaptation to such a grim model of existence and social reality requiring homogenization, collectivization and intellectual paralysis, artists and creative individuals in Soviet Latvia of the 1970s invented their own “survival strategies”. These personalities intended to escape the regulated atmosphere of Soviet(ized) life, even with the minor gestures of adapting to fashion and having

a provocative look, or gatherings in cafes. They established their own micro-environment, immersed in alternative reality (a second public sphere) created out of books, film, music and philosophical conversations: “Reading saved us from the dull reality behind the doors of *Kaza*,³ [from] the Soviet everyday life – fight for peace, meetings of trade unions, festive demonstrations of May 1st and the October Revolution” (Zvirgzdiņš 2004, n.p.).

Such gatherings, communication and socializing within the community of family, friends or subculture (e.g. hippies) established networks, often leading to nonconformist art activities in the cultural periphery. One example is the Office Group (Biroja grupa, 1971–1974), which was an interdisciplinary artists’ collective founded by the graduates of the National Film Actors Studio.⁴ The Group did not have any institutional status, formal membership or structural hierarchy. Art, film and theatre enthusiasts with various backgrounds gathered three times a week in an informal atmosphere to collaboratively stage improvisational scenes aiming for alternative and experimental techniques in theatre, mostly focusing on performing without any verbal communication. The corporeal activities were accompanied by poetry readings, painting, discussions on art and semiotics,⁵ as well as shared passion for Antonioni films. The group had only one public performance – a ritual-like mini-drama without any text or words – at the students’ gathering of the Tartu University in November 1971.⁶

In the genealogy of performance art in Latvia, the Office Group stands out as one of the first artistic attempts to create a hybrid, interdisciplinary project, where creative individuals from various backgrounds could cooperate to generate a performance as collaborative creation. The element of improvisation and spontaneity was crucial in order to experiment with the narrative structure and acting techniques, whereas the non-hierarchical networking and the notion of democratic participation offered an alternative space for implementing one’s creative agency and practicing the freedom of non-regulated decisions. The Group is also important because it appropriated motives and patterns from various visual arts disciplines and theatre, as well as supporting the idea that there were no strict categories among these trajectories. Consequently, such an approach resonated with the idea of intermediality proposed by Fluxus artist Dick Higgins, who in 1966 described intermedia as art that falls “between media” and proposed that the separation of artistic media into rigid categories is “absolutely irrelevant” (2003, p. 38). To Higgins the happening was the ultimate “intermedium”, “an uncharted land that lies between collage, music and the theater” (ibid., p. 42).

The Office Group was also a very influential and crucial factor in the career of Grinbergs as a performance artist, because it inspired and encouraged him to work in an interdisciplinary direction, exploring the trajectories of alternative lifestyle and broadening the traditional boundaries of arts. It was during the Office Group period (August 1972) when his first happening *The Wedding of Jesus Christ* (*Jēzus Kristus kāzas*) took place.⁷ Grinbergs, his wife, friends and photographers went to Carnikava Beach where they engaged in an improvised wedding ritual that lasted for two days. There were a lot of organisational and preparatory works before the happening, as attested by various props such as antique crockery, wine, candles, a

metal bed, as well as costumes and various accessories such as crowns of roses and necklaces of rowans made in advance.

The title *The Wedding of Jesus Christ* was borrowed or appropriated from the famous rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973) that Grinbergs managed to watch before it was being prohibited in Latvia. According to Grinbergs, the title did not have any religious implications, because he was against religion, considering it to be a violation of self-determined human spirit – the iconic figure of Christ served as a mere decoration (Grinbergs cited in Kļaviņa 2011, p. 255). As American art historian Mark Allen Svede points out, the act of appropriation was manifested in the allegorical application of the religious figure. The denigration of the symbolic value could possibly be, on the one hand, decoded as blasphemous in the Christian context, and on the other hand, as anti-ideological in atheist contexts: “*The Wedding of Jesus Christ* was successful on a number of levels: religion turned into a modern aesthetic spectacle . . . and religion was made apocryphal through joyful eroticization” (Svede 1994, n.p.). Moreover, this performance and the resulting accompanying images also place Grinbergs in the history of mediatized performance art, since the image of Christ was appropriated as early as 1898, when American photographer Fred Holland Day presented himself as Christ in a photographed performance



Figure 10.1 No title. This photograph documents Andris Grinbergs's happening *The Green Wedding – Summertime* (*Zaļās kāzas – Summertime*), 1973, Atis Ieviņš' Private Archive.

Courtesy: Atis Ieviņš.

The Seven Words. Such games of representation within the photographic medium acknowledge the symbiotic relationship between photography and performance resulting in intermediality, as well as emphasizing the subversion, re-invention and innovation that are integral components of appropriation in the artistic discourse.

Furthermore, it was not only the figure of Christ perceived as anti-ideological in the Soviet context. Nudity, a self-evident norm and a form of liberation in all happenings of Grinbergs, was a prominent element of creation, too, since the totalitarian body of Homo Sovieticus needed to be freed from all restrictions and ideological burdens. To the artist the body was “the only zone of freedom” (Grinbergs cited in Kļaviņa 2011, p. 257). Nudity, inspired by the hippie movement’s alternative lifestyle, was also a form of protest against prevailing puritanical attitudes: “Sexual revolution . . . was a protest against the system. If you didn’t belong to yourself, all your thoughts were regulated, and the only [thing] that you had was your body – with it you could do anything you wanted” (Grinbergs cited in Landorfa 1999, pp. 22–23). Consequently, the combination of collective actions involving “indecent”, irrational behaviour and nudity, explorations of shifting and changing identity in hybrid non-ideological projects, as well as references to the Bible and Western culture was something that could only be implemented in the second public sphere – uncontrolled by the KGB’s panoptic sight and uninhabited by the Homo Sovieticus.

To Grinbergs the body-focused anthropocentric art eventually became an instrument to explore his own identity, especially in terms of sexuality, which was always floating between heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual trajectories. With this liminal identity – a state of in-between-ness and ambiguity – Grinbergs risked violating the criteria of Homo Sovieticus. Therefore, his performance venues had to be transferred to a depoliticized space distanced from the Soviet reality: on Carnikava beach, in Mazirbe boat junkyard, in his own apartment. These geographically and culturally peripheral locations were partly necessary to avoid legal repercussions, because in the Latvian SSR homosexuality was criminalized, with a penalty of up to five years in prison. Moreover, the power structures could use the evidence of homosexuality to force the respective individuals to cooperate with the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR’s Committee for State Security (the KGB) (Lipša 2017).

Since Grinbergs was married,⁸ had a son and worked as an arts teacher for children with learning difficulties, he probably did not cause any suspicions in terms of his open sexual orientation. However, it can be questioned whether the legitimate form of kinship associated with a heterosexual marriage was for Grinbergs not a form of gender performance, in order to adapt to the homophobic Soviet rule.⁹ This phenomenon of double life is well characterized by the artist himself: “Of course, I have often thought that the entire life is a theatre and all that we get depends on how good we play our roles. Where is that place one can be real? This double life continues endlessly” (Grinbergs cited in Meistere 1992, p. 2). Thus, it can be suggested that for Grinbergs the second public sphere provided a certain asylum, which allowed him to avoid the distortion of his personality and identity, or even to prevent legal consequences and imprisonment for not meeting the discriminatory

ideals of the Homo Sovieticus. Performance art provided time and space, where Grinbergs could feel “authentic” and “autonomous” as an artist. He has repeatedly emphasised that he has always preferred the life of an outsider as opposed to being part of the Soviet art system, creating commissioned and conformist artwork and exhibiting it in the official museum or gallery space. This strategy also helped him to avoid the internalization of Soviet values, which were epitomised by the ideological construction of Homo Sovieticus.

Another example of intermediality and appropriation that resulted in a collaborative performance project involved the artist Imants Lancmanis, his family and friends. Lancmanis was a graduate of the Department of Painting at the State Art Academy of the Latvian SSR. In 1972 he began to work as a Deputy Director of the Rundāle Palace, a baroque palace built in 1736 and suffering serious damage in 1919 during the Latvian War of Independence, as well as through the Soviet period. The restoration of the venue became the lifetime project and passion of Lancmanis. However, the palace was not only a place of work, it was also a playground to implement immersive site-specific and “total” art¹⁰ projects, where experimental and carnivalesque collaborative creations could be organised.

Between 1971 and 1984 Lancmanis and his friends organised 12 themed balls and carnivals, devoted to different topics, such as the Roman Empire, Rococo period, the UFO, the 1905 Revolution, etc. These events required that different motives and styles were appropriated either from a certain culture, aesthetics or historical events and personae. The fact that even historically accurate crockery was made to ensure as authentic aesthetic experience as possible illustrates that the slightest detail was carefully calculated in these balls. Being a combination of so many mutually related elements, these process-based events were properly choreographed multimedial works of art, hybrid environments with staged ceremonies and rituals, costumes, props, scenography, lighting, and music, which were aimed at entangling spectators in multi-sensory experiences and creating a surreal, alternative reality made as a stark contrast to the dull and obedient world of Homo Sovieticus.

By creating such a large-scale interdisciplinary and site-specific work involving research and preparation as well as improvisation, Lancmanis performatively re-invented and de-contextualized an architectural structure:

Rundāle interested me as an opportunity to “re-create” a world which no longer exists, actually this is what I wish to do in my paintings as well: to conjure up a world that either is no longer there or has never existed, except in my mind; to make it so tangible and detailed that people would believe such a world could exist. Rundāle gives you a chance to “re-create” the palace, the environment and park in total; every room you enter takes you to a different era. That’s what I like about Rundāle – the huge installation that it has become. That is indeed the right word. It is a large, but very consistent and conceptually directed installation. That is at the foundation of what I like about it, that people say that Rundāle is a living palace.

(Lancmanis cited in Lindenbauma 2011, pp. 176–177)

As a director of an institution, Lancmanis was responsible for the restoration works of the Palace, but as an artist, he used the site as environment to create a parallel world, where, by wearing masks and costumes of different historical personae and periods, he, his family and friends could, paradoxically, drop the masks of *Homo Sovieticus*. Grinbergs had a very similar approach: “I dressed my models and created an environment, where they could express themselves and which could to some degree ‘rip’ them out of their masks, turn them into live human beings, containing more than you see on an everyday basis” (Grinbergs cited in Meistere 1992, p. 2). It shows that the regime was unable to paralyze artistic agency, and that through the art in the second public sphere the artists sought ways to pursue autonomous, uncensored action on the fringes of the official culture. In doing so, both artists, unknowingly and intuitively, displayed the main features of performance art: the body of the artist as the material, form and content interplay, blurred boundaries between art and life, experiential immediacy and the dematerialization of the artwork, prevalence of process and human subject over product, as well as the presentational modes of action in real time over representational, commodified objects.

As regards the definitions of appropriation, Iain Boyd Whyte’s interpretation of appropriation from the perspective of translation theory offers a useful approach to the phenomenon, even in the arts:

Translation can be interlingual – from one language to another; intermedial – from one medium to another; and intercultural – from one culture to another. In every case, when the object signified moves across language, medium, or culture, original meanings and restraints are loosened or shed entirely and the motif is emancipated, allowing it to take on whatever role it might fancy in the new context.

(Ambrose et al. 2012, p. 185)

Intermedial appropriation is the feature that characterizes performance art in Latvia in the late Soviet period, too. Not only did artists appropriate different motifs and styles based on aesthetics, but performance art itself underwent a process of change and turned into a hybrid consisting of different media in order to emerge in the first public sphere – although in “camouflaged” forms, such as exhibition catalogues, book covers, photographs, paintings or interior design objects. The character of intermedia can be seen in the case of Grinbergs, who always had his performances documented via photography. Among the participants in his artistic actions there were always professional photographers, capturing events with snapshot-like aesthetics. For Grinbergs, photography was the most essential medium in his performance: “How did I start making those photos? They are my unrealized paintings. I could not draw, write or express myself well enough in music, yet I had ideas” (Grinbergs cited in Meistere 1992, p. 2) that needed to take shape in an experimental, uncommon form.

Grinbergs’s performances were mostly photographed by Jānis Kreicbergs, who was a well-known fashion photographer in the first public sphere. When off-duty, Kreicbergs often joined Grinbergs and together they created a hybrid work of art,

which transformed from a process-based, one-time action into a fine art object becoming easily transportable and adaptable. Kreicbergs appropriated the plots, characters and aesthetics from Grinbergs's happenings and presented the resulting images as a new and original work of art. He did so because he never considered himself only a photographer invited to document the process-based events under a strict guidance of an authoritarian director. Instead, Kreicbergs saw performances as a collaborative project with an element of spontaneity and improvisation. They provided him with an opportunity to produce free creative expression. Similar acts of appropriation occurred in the case of photographer Atis Ieviņš, who experimented with merging painting and photography. This way he produced several silkscreen prints by appropriating Grinbergs's performances – the outcome was presented as serigraphy. Whereas the wedding of Lancmanis was appropriated by a prominent Latvian painter Maija Tabaka, who created the large-scale painting *Wedding at Rundāle* (*Kāzas Rundālē*, 1974), based on a photograph of Lancmanis's wedding.¹¹ These and other instances of performance art and its parallel (inter)media, which occurred as a result of hybridization and adaptation, illustrate that intermediality and appropriation were integral parts of performance art in Latvia allowing it to migrate from one author and medium to another, also crossing the boundaries between the first and the second public sphere.



Figure 10.2 *Cave Paintings (Alu zīmējumi)*, 1973/1974, Atis Ieviņš' Private Archive.

Courtesy: Atis Ieviņš.

The democratic attitude of building a community and practicing sexual freedom, both important features of the Latvian art of the second public sphere, were contrary to the image of the ideal socialist individual, or *Homo Sovieticus*. The positive hero of the Soviet ideology was expected to demonstrate obedience, trust in the superior authorities, discipline, and responsiveness to the commands of the regime. These values were needed to ensure the continuity of the totalitarian regime:

The qualities of the positive hero could be best explained in terms of the requirements of a totalitarian society, which desires to maximize control over its citizens. Patriotism and Party-mindedness, antiindividualism, . . . acceptance of subordination, unquestioning loyalty to leaders, lack of *genuine* initiative, obedience, adaptability, susceptibility to shame – all these are qualities, which facilitate control over the individual.

(Hollander 1983, p. 49)

However, performance artists proved the opposite: the regime was unable to silence their creative expression, individualism and initiative, and, consequently, they never turned into *Homo Sovieticus*.

Intermediality and appropriation in performance art in Latvia in the late socialist period were not only important counter-cultural side effects of ruling sociopolitical circumstances, but also the results of individual efforts to establish a community and micro-environment where democratic principles of freedom of expression, participation, initiative and non-hierarchical work relationships could be implemented. Performance art adapted to the given social reality by hybridizing into different media and managing to appear in the first public sphere in a “camouflaged” form, that is in photographs, paintings and printed canvases. This process of metamorphosis and intermedial appropriation demonstrated the unique symbiotic relationship between a process-based art and a fine art object without presupposing the superiority, authenticity, originality or authority of either mode. Such joint collaborative projects and networking in the second public sphere ensured that the artists could express their creative agency while remaining immune to the ideological pressure, indoctrination and homogenization epitomized by the synthetic constructions of the New Soviet Man and the *Homo Sovieticus*.

Notes

- 1 Silkscreening is a printing technique that allows printing images repeatedly on a single canvas. The machine-like look and the lack of artist's touch was especially appealing to Andy Warhol, who produced most of his iconic works in this technique.
- 2 It is interesting to note that pantomime – which is akin to performance art in that it is body-based and process-based – could exist officially and, in fact, was very popular all over the USSR. It was praised by the Soviet ideologues as a kind of Soviet Esperanto – a language, which all Soviet brotherly nations could understand without words.
- 3 The most famous cafe in Riga in the 1970s, a meeting place for the Soviet counter-culture.
- 4 The National Film Actors Studio was established in 1965. Research on the Office Group has been carried out by Latvian art historian Vilnis Vējš, available on CD-ROM, the Contemporary Art Centre of Latvia.
- 5 Lectures given in 1969 by the Tartu University professor Yuri Lotman.

- 6 The most important legacy of the Group would have been the experimental “self-portrait” short films made in 1972. Unfortunately, through an incident with the Committee for State Security (KGB) only two of these films survived. Due to the previous records of Andris Grinbergs’s activities, in January 1974, the KGB started to show interest in the Group’s activities: Ivars Skanstiņš received a notice to come to the KGB office for an interrogation, Juris Civjans’s film was “borrowed” and never returned. In fear of repression, Mudīte Gaiševska cut out “compromising” shots from her film, and Eižens Valpēters’s film was mysteriously lost, while he was working as a renovator at the Rundāle Palace. In January 1974, the Office Group ceased its activities and gatherings.
- 7 Participants: Andris Bergmanis, Irēna Birmbauma, Māra Brašmane, Ināra Eglīte, Mudīte Gaiševska, Aija Grinberga, Andris Grinbergs, Inta Jaunzema (Grinberga), Ninuce Kaupuža, Ingvars Leitis, Ināra Podkalne, Sandrs Rīga, Ivars Skanstiņš, Eižens Valpēters.
- 8 His wife Inta Grinberga was a frequent participant in Grinbergs’ performances.
- 9 Grinbergs talks openly about his sexuality and queerness only in the interviews after 1992, when homosexuality was decriminalized in Latvia.
- 10 The idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* – that is, a total artwork – was prophetically envisioned by Richard Wagner as the integration of traditional disciplines into a unified work with the aim of intensifying the audience’s experiences of art.
- 11 This painting was also crucial in Tabaka’s own development as an artist, since it was “the beginning of [her] art theatre, system of images and autonomy that was referred to as *the Theatre Of Madame Tabaka*” (original emphasis; Blaua 2010, p. 85).

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11 Escape into nature!

The politics of melancholy in Czechoslovakian performance art

Adam Czihak

The Czechoslovakian performance artists who fought for the autonomy of their art and consequently rejected the dominant doctrines of socialist realism and aesthetic conformism were forced to present their works and actions in the second public sphere: in private apartments, ateliers or basements. Today, these art actions are often only available in the form of rudimentary instructions; or they have been preserved for posterity by a single camera, the only witness, as it were.¹ In what follows, however, I will discuss art actions and experiments that were performed in deserted natural landscapes, often far away from the cities. In Eastern Europe, many neo-avant-garde artists chose to set up their studios in nature. Equipped with a photographic camera and a few props, they set out into the mountains, visited open fields or went to the sea, where they could work without being disturbed. By making nature, a sphere not fully appropriated by society, the preferred site of their performances, they contributed to a certain blurring of the lines between land art and performance art. In the Western theory and practice, these two genres have been kept apart and are usually discussed as discrete categories in the aesthetics of neo-avant-garde art. Their respective representatives developed different ways of opposing the traditional rules of presenting and exhibiting their artworks. In the East European context, the art critic Elisabeth Jappe talks about a kind of “media nomadism” (1993, p. 67), by which she means a certain mixing of genres, such as action art, land art, concept art, and performance art. As I will try to demonstrate in the following pages, the artistic endeavours of this geo-cultural region defy categorization according to genre-specific characteristics.

One of the remarkable things about these performances in nature is that they evoke traditional motifs of melancholy. By withdrawing from the everyday world and its automatisms, all movements that encourage an escape into nature bare the traces of a politics of the subject that we can describe as melancholic. Thus, the politics of melancholy does not imply an intervention in the concrete political issues of the day. Instead, and paradoxically, it means a kind of dissociation from these issues and from the horizon of expectations created by the state-socialist directives concerning artistic representation and the ideological commitment of the artist. Accordingly, the attachment to nature, which already in the ancient theory of the temperaments (Hippokrates 1936) was defined as a melancholic state of being that creates a kinship with the element of the Earth, indicates a disengagement

from social ties, which, as Seneca pointed out, turns out to be a necessarily futile attempt.² Seneca's argument that an escape into nature by no means constitutes a return to an ideal state of being will be taken up in the following performance analyses. As we will see, the aesthetic and political dimensions of these performances are closely intertwined with the ideological and social circumstances of their time.³

This melancholic penchant for a sphere that lies outside of the city and culture is best exemplified by an action that was performed collectively, Milan Knížak's *Stone Ceremony* (*Kamenný obřad*, 1971). Accompanied by a group of artists, Knížak turned to the theme of isolation. Every participant built a small circle made out of stones around himself or herself, only to stand still, silent, eyes looking down at the floor.

The melancholic mood of the performance was not simply the effect of an image of people being spatially separated from each other and not engaging in any form of communication. In addition to carrying a literal political message about the exclusion of the non-conformist artist, the deserted landscape, a remote, desolate, isolated scenery of ruins, also brought to mind allegories of *vanitas* and the futility of the world.⁴ Quite strikingly, the barren landscape corresponds to a medieval topos of melancholy, namely that of *acedia*. When actualizing the code of human helplessness in the face of the motionless stagnation of the glaring sun devoid of all signs, Knížak was very much aware of this cultural tradition.

According to the medieval imagination, when humans find themselves out in the daylight and in a natural environment that lacks all movement or rhythm, they are at the risk of being affected by *acedia*, since, realizing the "inescapable stagnation of all things" (Bader 1990, p. 11), they become world-weary and, despite their intentions to the contrary, are simply unable to get up and do things. "Typically, *acedia* arises between 10 am and 2 pm, in full daylight", that is to say, "it is not so much the sun itself but its idleness or apparent idleness that gives rise to *acedia*. It is a disturbance of rhythm, the disappearance of a rhythmic order as such" (*ibid.*). *Acedia*, which is also known as the noonday demon, led the medieval monk to stare into space and was considered a danger that threatens to bring inaction and thus a deadly sin, for it beguiled people into gaping at the motionless sun and surrendering to an existential boredom. This type of unproductive distraction, which made the monks abandon the reading and prayers, threatened to make people neglect their own environment and lose interest in the world.

The deserted landscape, with its constant, unchanging and rhythmless atmosphere, was considered particularly dangerous for the medieval melancholy. Thus, it is not the night but the sun-drenched midday landscape that threatens to lure people into inactivity, as the preacher Qoheleth says: "I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (Goebel 2003, p. 449).⁵ The fact that, since the late Middle Ages, the accidious state of mind became detached from its religious context and was consequently removed from the catalogue of vices is largely due to Petrarch's semantic re-evaluation of *acedia*, which paved the way for an amalgamation of accidious and melancholic discourses that continued into modernity, and which at the same time provides a link to Milan Knížak's *Stone Ceremony*. This fascination with the sun and its stagnation returns in a number of Eastern European landscape actions highlighting the

political significance of the topos: as Petrarch pointed out, when people are seized by the monotony of nature, they experience a sweet world-weariness that can be turned into creativity (ibid. pp. 460–462), whose efficiency, however, can only be recognized beyond the social realm.

From the perspective of conceptual history, *acedia* and *melancholy* acquire overlapping meanings in Walter Benjmain's analysis of the baroque tragic hero,⁶ or, according to Adorno (1991) and Heidegger (Theunissen 1996, pp. 28–29), become coextensive in modernity. They are characterized by the slowing down of time, which becomes duration and opens up a sphere in which there is freedom not to act or to dissent, and not in the framework of so-called leisure time, which is regulated and spent in accordance with the norms established by society. So, instead of the religious ideas related to medieval faith, Knížák's accidious landscape of bodies negotiates the experience of tiredness, the lack of variation, and "the unreadability of the world" (ibid., p. 15) which, as Dave MacQuarrie has shown (2012), are anxieties of modern and contemporary culture. In *Stone Ceremony*, we are confronted with an image of reluctance, which, as we will see, keeps oscillating between an apolitical attitude and subversion.

Due to the unreadability of the world and the experience of melancholy it gives rise to, in these remote natural landscapes Knížák can focus on himself and the regularities inherent in the state of nature. Losing oneself in the observation of nature is the point of many of Milan Maur's performances, such as the ones in which he



Figure 11.1 Milan Knížák, *Stone Ceremony*, 1971.

Courtesy: Milan Knížák.

threw himself in a river to be taken by its currents or followed the whimsical flutter of butterflies and then charted these random paths of movement. On 9 May 1988, about one and a half decades after Knížak's *Stone Ceremony* and twenty years after the Prague Spring, he decided to follow the sun, from sunrise till nightfall, in an effort to get closer to it (*On May 9, 1988 I walked from dawn to dusk, following the sun [9. května 1988 šel od úsvitu do soumraku za sluncem]*). The route, which has been marked on a map, documents Maur's daily choreography that led the artist from the city into the countryside and forced him to ignore the streets and pathways and their predetermined courses of movement. Submission to nature and its rules and using the sun not only as the source of light but also as the primary organizer of artistic statements are precisely what the performative experiments collected in this chapter have in common. They draw inspiration from a cosmic monotony in order to overcome social constraints.

Showcasing nature in nature

When a group of Slovakian action artists decided to set up their easels in nature, as it were, this was a result of concrete political events that had happened in that country (Bátorová 2009, pp. 21–50). The decisions made at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party in 1956 led to a relaxation of restrictions in the cultural sphere of Slovakia, and even artists who emancipated themselves from socialist realism were allowed to exhibit their works freely. After the Prague Spring, however, this liberal cultural politics changed and neo-avant-garde artists were marginalized. As art historian Zuzana Bartošová argues, the artists of the 1970s should not be described as “alternative” but rather as “unofficial”, given the cultural political circumstances of the period (2005, p. 5). Due to the new conditions of production in the country, they were only able to present their work in front of a limited audience. Against this backdrop, withdrawing into nature was for many artists a “solution for realizing projects of intimate nature, which were later made available to the public through various forms of documentation” (Bátorová 2009, pp. 100–101).

Intrigued by the possibilities of the artistic exploration of nature, Michal Kern decided to spend several years on observing and aesthetically capturing the processes of a landscape in a close-up with no perspective. The Slovakian artist grew up close to nature and, after completing his studies in painting, the surrounding landscape served as his only atelier. Equipped with a white canvas or a mirror, he would go and search for images in the middle of the Slovakian forest, trying to reproduce the fragmentary reflection of shadows of a sunny landscape on the two-dimensional surface or to capture it in a calculated photographic moment. In *Searching a Shadow (Hľadanie tieňa)* from 1980, we see the cast shadow of a bough captured as a temporary trace on a white canvas positioned horizontally in the grass. What the viewer is presented with is a double framing of a snippet of nature, which, on the one hand, by means of the sunlight, temporarily inscribes itself on an apparently randomly placed white surface while, on the other hand, being exposed to a light-sensitive photographic emulsion as an artificially highlighted fragment of nature.

While the monochrome play of reflexes keeps disappearing without a trace as soon as the sun retreats, and thus the medium of classical representation remains blank and infinitely reusable, Kern's photographs capture the fleeting encounters between light and surface, artistic framework and state of nature.⁷ What is remarkable about this procedure is the double application of the photographic principle, which underlines the media-reflexive dimension of Kern's photographic performances.

As is well known, the first commercial photo album, published in 150 copies, was created in 1846 by Henry Fox Talbot, whose minimal definition of photography as the "Pencil of Nature" foregrounds the physical recording of traces, which is a result of the inscription of light on a two-dimensional surface. In the foreword to his album, Talbot points out that the principle of the mechanical reproduction of images goes hand in hand with the artist's diminishing power to shape the artwork: the plates are "wholly executed by the new art of Photogenic Drawing, without any aid whatever from the artist's pencil" (Talbot 1844, p. 89). In this sense, Talbot absolutizes the phenomenon of natural light, which, as technology became more and more prevalent in the arts and the sciences, and the camera obscura, the magic lantern or photography became ever more common, developed into an essential, generative constitutive element of the *indexical* production of images.

When Kern sets out to visit sunny, dreary landscapes where, after finding refuge from the noonday sun under the trees, he exposes his canvases to nature's uncontrollable play of lights, he gives up his status as *homo generator* and limits his artistic control to the selection of the photographic moments that freeze the unpredictable shadow formations. His attitude can be seen in relation to the accidious disposition; his chosen setting is nature at midday and he condenses its monotony through two-dimensional framings. In the melancholic setting, in which artistic control reaches its limits, Kern captures traces of shadows in accidental pictures that seem rather unspectacular. Thus, he subscribes to an *aesthetic of chance*, the history of which begins with Lucretius's didactic poem *De Rerum natura* and is equally represented by Andrea Mantegna's cloud pictures, Marcel Duchamp's *Stoppages* and John Cage's musical compositions.⁸ These artists are connected by the intention to give up their position as the autonomous creator, to lose their artistic control and thus to explore a production principle that lies beyond artistic will.

In the photographic performance *Double Reflection* (*Dvojité zrkadlenie*, 1978), this artistic programme is radicalized. In it, Kern even gave up control over the exact placing of his "canvas". First, he noticed potential images on the reflecting surface of a lake and placed a square mirror on it. Losing the control over the spatial determination of the floating reflection surface, Kern's photography framed a picture in the picture that mirrors nature in nature, linking the sky and the water and relating them to each other. Despite the seemingly unspectacular reflections, Kern's struggle to find a motif is led by an urgent conceptual question that concerns the classical definition of the image as such and helps to overcome it. According to the art historian Horst Bredekamp, who even to this day insists on a definition of the image formulated by the 15th century artist and mathematician Leon Battista Alberti, "we

can speak of an image (*simulacrum*) once the objects of nature, such as a root system, show the slightest traces of human processing. As soon as a natural formation shows signs of human interference, it fulfils the definition of the image” (Bredekamp 2010, p. 34). In accordance with this definition, Kern rejects the idea that the visual arts are inherently concerned with human artefacts and dismisses the concept of the original artist as a genius who creates art out of himself. At the same time, however, through the individual photographic documents, he does produce artworks that provide access to his critical and short-lived art practice.

The simultaneous subversion and intensification of aesthetic framings returns in other land art projects of the period, which, while taking place in the absence of an audience, acquired the status of an artwork due to their documentation. Thus, the photographic performances that take place in nature show the paradoxes inherent in the melancholic politics of representation in which the fading of artistic intention turns out to be an intentional act and which reflects the boundaries of the creative will in art. They demonstrate that the melancholic withdrawal of the self is an ambivalent gesture because this melancholic disposition does *not* entail a *disappearance*, it only entails a *turning away*. The melancholic politics of representation that the Czechoslovakian performance artists espouse relativizes the status of a strong “subject” as *homo generator* or *homo politicus* (Steinlein 2003, p. 156), but at the same time makes clear that these artists do not withdraw completely, they express their absence in society, they leave traces behind, disrupt the aesthetic consensus, and critically subvert the ideas of social functionality and efficiency.

The Slovakian land art and performance artist Ľubomír Ďurček, who also performed his actions all by himself and made them accessible to the public only by means of photographic recording, pursued similar artistic aims. Intrigued by the possibilities of transposing nature’s regularities onto the white surface of the picture, in 1984 he delved into the dilemma of putting on paper the horizon, a natural phenomenon that is impalpable, untouchable and can only be perceived from a distance. It is for good reason that the horizon as a supposed mark of a distant contact surface between the sky and the earth or the water is a recurring motif in utopias. It suggests that there is a place where the mundane and the ethereal touch each other, which *de facto* does not exist.⁹ By letting one half of a white sheet of paper submerge under water and then photographing the half-wet paper, Ďurček was trying to capture on a piece of paper that point of the horizon where “the water” and “the white sky” converge, and to represent the unbridgeable gap between them literally, through the principle of indexicality: his paper is divided by a clear line separating the dry upper part and the lower half which had been deformed into a wavelike shape. The photographic idea is manifest in *Horizon* as well, but instead of the light, it is the water that inscribes itself on the surface.

The action *Horizon* (*Horizont*, 1984) provides a lucid demonstration of the extent to which the genres of performance art, land art, painting, photography and concept art have been woven together in Kern’s and Ďurček’s work and aesthetically unified in their artistic practice. The unifying force was the intention to overcome the powerful tradition of representation and to create a direct connection with

the thing represented.¹⁰ In brief, without aggressively testing the limits of cultural censorship and explaining their withdrawal from society in the sphere of figural representation, which is necessarily shaped by ideological factors, they combined their practices of isolation with moments of the photographic “theatricalization” of nature. These forms of articulation are apolitical only at first sight. For the melancholic gestures have a critical dimension: the oppressed artists find spaces that cannot be censored, places where they are free to become productive and communicate in unusual ways.

From today’s perspective, the action artists who set up their studios in nature can be seen as related to the institutional critique that appeared in the United States at the same time. Artists such as Michael Heizer, Dennis Oppenheim or Robert Smithson left their galleries mainly because they felt that the traditional exhibition spaces were framing their aesthetic interests in a limiting way, which paved the way for land art (Sayre 1989, pp. 211–245). The so-called white cube – that is the white, quadrangular gallery space – reminded them of the rigid structures of the square frame that they also associated with the canvas. Therefore, they sought to expand the possibilities of exhibiting their art by abandoning the regime of two-dimensionality and the tradition of hanging pictures vertically on walls, and adopted a three-dimensional and spatially unrestricted field of compositional possibilities. For them the gallery was a hermetically closed white frame. As the concept artist Brian O’Doherty argues,

a gallery is constructed along laws as rigorous as those for building a medieval church. The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light. . . . The art is free, as the saying used to go, “to take on its own life.” . . . Modernism’s transposition of perception from life to formal values is complete. This, of course, is one of modernism’s fatal diseases.

(O’Doherty 1976, p. 25)

Against the backdrop of the restrictions that the museum imposes on art and which to a large extent predetermine and, according to O’Doherty, delimit the possibilities of both the exhibition and the reception of art, the land art artists discovered nature as an “open space” but without any idyllic projections or idealization of the countryside. We can see that their efforts had a lot in common with the Eastern European actions performed outdoors. While embracing nature, neither the “Western” nor the “Eastern” artists had any romanticizing projections or idyllic hopes of a return to a pre-social, paradisiacal primal state. But unlike North American land art, Knížák’s, Kern’s or Ďurček’s actions in nature are not only concerned with showing the restrictive character of the white gallery as an exhibition space or critiquing the art market, but also, and to a larger extent, with the possibilities of presenting art in its political environment. To put it simply, while the abandonment of their ateliers corresponds to the Western aesthetic trends of land art, it cannot be discussed separately from the conditions of production in Eastern Europe and their ideological context.

Temporary and interactive transformations of the state of nature

After having made unusual use of the canvas as a temporary reflection surface beyond artistic fixation, in *Touch* (Dotyk, 1982) Michal Kern searched for opportunities to create a connection with nature. In it, we see him touching the surface of the water, generating many concentric circles of waves and thus blurring the horizontal reflection of the surrounding scenery of the forest. This gesture of touching epitomizes the minimality of Kern's connections with the natural landscape, which at the same time uncover revealing asymmetries. The touch does not promise the restoration of a lost unity with nature, but makes us aware of an insurmountable separation which subverts the romantic illusion of a harmonious bodily contact: "Indeed, contact does not carry out any fusion or any identification, nor even any *immediate* contiguity. Once more we have to dissociate touch from what common sense and philosophical sense are forever according it, namely, *immediacy* – as evidence itself, as the first axiom of a phenomenology of touch" (Derrida 2005, p. 119). As we contemplate Kern's minimal intervention in the water surface that produces waves that spread out in space and have uncontrollable consequences, we realize that his touch creates differences instead of fusions, diffuse fields of force instead of harmonious congruence. In this sense, the movement of his hand approaching the water surface reflects Rousseau's idea about the lost relationship between man and nature and thus the fictional character of the idyllic state of nature which, according to Rousseau, "no longer exists, which perhaps never existed, which probably never will exist" (1964, p. 91). While the photography suggests that the countryside is beyond social construction and control, the aestheticization and artistic articulation of nature imply a distortion. Consequently, nature cannot be shown in its own autonomous reality.

The performance photography *Traces in the Sand* (*Stopy v piesku*, 1976) shows a similarly ephemeral intervention in nature, and renders concrete the dilemma of the underground artist, which at the time was understood metaphorically, in a literal form: how is it possible to leave traces outside the official public sphere? Kern leaves a footprint that will soon be erased by rain and wind, but which is captured photographically and preserved as a tiny modification of the environment or a microscopic land art action, as it were.

No matter how lasting or fleeting Kern's footprints were, we should remember that in the Eastern Bloc the artistic interventions in the natural landscape were rarely motivated by ecological considerations. Since the reports about the continued deterioration of air and water quality were not published behind the Iron Curtain and industrialization was portrayed as a process with only positive consequences, the ecological disaster would rarely become the subject of artistic reflection (Fowkes 2015, pp. 16–19). Instead, these artists were fascinated by nature as a place of work and material for their artistic endeavours, and, in accordance with Alberti's definition of the image, tried to make minimal changes to nature and its laws.

The impetus to make minimal changes to nature was at the core of the work of the Czech performance artist Jiří Kovanda. In xxx. *I carry some water from the river in my cupped hands and release it a few meters downriver. . .* (xxx. *Vodu z reky přenáším v dlaních o několik metru dál po proudu . . .*, 1977), an absurd direction is carried out in all seriousness. Kovanda set an unachievable goal for himself. By trying to accelerate the river's flow speed, he aimed to intervene in a natural process. He took some water in his hands, ran downstream and then threw a few drops of water back in the river. The image of obsessive work whose result is continually delayed leading to failure is an explicit allusion not only to the mythical figure of Sisyphus, but also to the unnecessary and irrational production directives of the socialist planned economy in which human work was measured by the visible (and often wasteful) effort rather than by efficiency. This motivic superimposition of socialist work and the Sisyphus myth became a leitmotif in the entire Eastern Bloc (Seidensticker and Wessels 2001), but above all in the GDR. In literature and performance art, Sisyphus, who was too smart for his own good and is condemned to forever rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, only to have it fall back in the valley again, was a symbol of the worker who had to devote himself to the realization of the communist utopia and suppress the melancholic certainty of its impossibility.

In the August of 1978, excited by the idea of a microscopic intervention in the state of nature, a group of Slovakian artists¹¹ went to a nature reserve south of Bratislava, where they first documented some improvisations, like spraying water or throwing stones about, and then wrote on the stones that were lying about with a pen, writing the book of nature, as it were. The title of the action (*Lake Book [Jazerá kniha]*) evokes an Augustinian idea from late antiquity according to which nature has become a secret code that awaits decipherment. The assumption about a book of nature that speaks in secret signs is an explicit reference in this collective performance. But contrary to the history of the motif, which includes the Romantic tradition, this art action is not about reading the "book of nature", but about helping to write and develop it. Thus, nature is not regarded as some untouched primal state, but as a reciprocal relationship between man and landscape. The collective work on the book of the lakescape manifests the intention to overcome the melancholic experience of the "world's unreadability", that is to reach an "anti-accidious" (Bader 1990, p. 61) state. In the discursive history of melancholy, reading and writing are considered remedies, even if these intellectual activities lead to a dialectic of creative will and the experience of its boundaries, and thus inevitably change into a melancholic experience. For both reading and writing lead to the disillusionment of the melancholiac, so much so that "all readability can only be seen against the background of much vaster unreadability" (ibid., p. 64).

For some artists, the excitement of these actions derived also from challenging nature's unreadability and showing its capacity for storing history. To conclude this overview of the politics of melancholy espoused by performance artists who tried to render their withdrawal from everyday life visible through microscopic or ephemeral traces, I would like to briefly consider the actions of Prague artist Zorka Ságlová, who turned Czechoslovakian fields into massive tableaux of

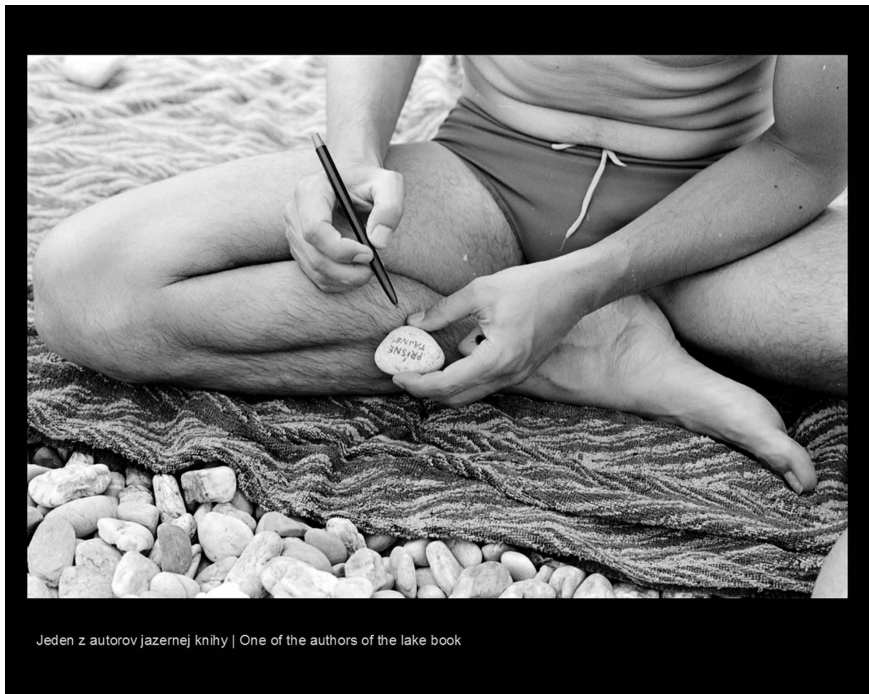


Figure 11.2 Ľubomír Ďurček, No. 25 from file RUSOVCE. Crossgeneration friendly meeting by the lake, 1978.

Courtesy: Ľubomír Ďurček.

memory, highlighting the historical resonances and stratifications of the landscape. Ságlová created temporary monuments to individual episodes from the history of her homeland. *Homage to Gustav Oberman* (*Pocsta Gustavu Obermanovi*, 1970) took place in the nature reserve Bransoudov, halfway between Prague and Brno. Ságlová used the snowscape as a venue for representing the historical war ruins of her country, which has been occupied and set ablaze many times.¹² The action consisted in filling twenty-one bags with petrol, arranging them in a circular pattern and, with the help of friends, setting them alight after sunset. Full of connotations of destruction and a revolutionary new beginning, the powerful light effects evoked a “monumental and fascinating” (Jindřich Chalupecký cited in Fowkes 2015, p. 205) landscape of ruins, which reminded the viewer of a concrete historical event. On the one hand, Ságlová made a reference to the legend of Gustav Oberman, a shoemaker who, during the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, kept running up and down the mountainside spitting fire as a sign of his resistance and would not stop even when the soldiers were about to attack him. And on the other hand, Ságlová’s tableau of flames evoked a more recent occupation of the country in

the wake of the crushing of the Prague Spring and a series of self-immolation protests that followed the occupation. These are echoes of history, which in Ságlová's action were coupled with a melancholic feeling caused by the fact that one was not allowed to relate to one's own history. For the action was centred around the image of a cemetery of unburied victims, which brought into focus those secret but not completely erasable "ruins" that, according to Jean Claire, prevent us from coming to terms with the past. A landscape of ruins is not a residue of the past. It haunts the order of the present and manifests a "never-ending grief at a world lost forever" (Clair 2006, p. 352). Thus, Ságlová's monument to remembrance can be related to many episodes from the history of global destruction, such as the burning of Berlin or Moscow, London or Dresden, which, performed in nature, can be commemorated in a short-lived monument to history.¹³ Ságlová historicizes the landscape and shows its hidden scars, and thus creates a space for reflection beyond the time regime of a modernistic, and above all real socialist, emphasis on the present. The field at night, suddenly lit up by the blazing flames, expresses the melancholy of the flight from the present and leads Ságlová into the complex temporal dimensions of the past. These temporal dimensions cannot be precisely identified, but they extend beyond the present, lying "between elsewhere and elsewhere" (Goebel 2003, p. 480).

In light of these analyses, the escape movements that sought liberation from the consolidated patterns of behaviour imposed by urban civilization can be understood as an attempt to enter a sphere that is neither idyllic, nor a place for creating a parallel society, but which can be used for alternative forms of communication, historical recollections, and aesthetic experiments. The melancholy of monotonous landscapes, be it in sunlight or at night, together with their well-known scenery lacking in variation and the temporary connections or discursive interactions with elements of nature range from illegible writing on stones to an eerie tableau of flames in the twilight dusk. The natural landscape emerges as a protected domain of the second public sphere, which is beyond the control of state surveillance and allows artists to take a step back from day-to-day politics. In it, the neo-avant-gardists of Eastern Europe found a place for a temporary escape and a departure, for a halt and a new beginning.

Translated by Balázs Rapcsák

Notes

- 1 In this respect, the photographic performances that did not take place in front of a live audience can be seen as related to what Philip Auslander calls "theatrical modes of performance documentation" (Auslander 2012).
- 2 Seneca's verdict in his Letter 104 underlines this futility: "tecum sunt quae fugis [you have to fly]" (Seneca cited in Goebel 2003, p. 456).
- 3 In Czechoslovakia, just as in all neighbouring countries, the establishment of a totalitarian system of government was accompanied by a number of repressive measures such as the disempowerment of individuals, the nationalization of their properties, and the restriction of the freedom of speech. After Stalin's death, the political supremacy of the party remained intact in all spheres of life. These circumstances as well as the decades of supply shortages and economic difficulties led to the events of the Prague Spring in 1968, which was an attempt at democratization "from below". However, after the troops

of the Warsaw Pact had marched in and radical changes in the party leadership had been implemented, it became clear that “socialism with a human face” and liberal values, which had been proclaimed in this country, would have to remain a utopia. The Prague Spring was a real watershed that separated a hopeful period of democratization from the subsequent period of depression and scepticism. This periodization is reflected in the performative arts: Milan Knížák, the most important representative of the first generation of Czechoslovakian performance art, showed a great interest in playful actions in the streets or in factory halls, which, like the American happenings, celebrated the emergence of an egalitarian society “outside of” society and aimed at a temporal escape from the existing orders of sociability. After 1968, the aesthetics of Czechoslovakian performance art changed radically. After the bloody showdown of the Prague Spring and a series of public self-immolations, which started with the suicide of the philosophy student Jan Palach in Wenceslas Square on 19 January 1969, performance artists such as Petr Štembera or Jan Mlčoch made self-harm the central strategy for expressing their melancholic politics of isolation. In basements and other secret private spaces, they carried out auto-aggressive actions, which can be seen as the sedimentation of their failed attempts at establishing connection with the outside world in their own body. Correspondingly, we see an increased number of performances carried out in nature and thus beyond the scope of what was allowed.

- 4 On the tradition of melancholic landscapes and their conventional motifs see Schmidt 1994, pp. 111–114.
- 5 English translation from the New International Version of the Bible.
- 6 “In the inert mass [of the stone] there is a reference to the genuinely theological conception of the melancholic, which is to be found in one of the seven deadly sins. This is *acedia*, dullness of the heart, or sloth” (Benjamin 2003, p. 134).
- 7 Maja Fowkes also emphasizes this logic behind the performances in nature: “Whether they found their expression in performance, public art, land art, or conceptual projects, their works bore the characteristics of the concurrent tendency to dematerialize the art object, and therefore left no material or physical remains of their activities in the natural environment, but ensured their presence in art history through photographic documentation and archival materials” (2015, p. 264).
- 8 Cf. Horst Bredekamp: “Die Wiederkehr des état d’imaginaire. Sammeln aus der Perspektive des Gottesblicks”, talk given at the conference *Die Zukunft der Wissensspeicher: Forschen, Sammeln und Vermitteln im 21. Jahrhundert* at the Nordrhein-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Künste (Düsseldorf, March 5–6, 2015).
- 9 For a discussion of horizon as a utopian motif see Koschorke 1990.
- 10 Kern und Ďurček share this fascination with indexicality with a number of American neo-avant-garde artists. Cf. Krauss 1977.
- 11 It was a collaboration among Peter Bartoš, Lubomír Ďurček, Stano Filko, Vladimír Havrilla and Juraj Mihálik. Cf. Daniel Grůň: “Performative Exhibitions and Artists’ Communities in the 1970s and ’80 in (Czecho)Slovakia”, talk given at the conference *Performing Arts in the Second Public Sphere*, Berlin, Mai 9–11, 2014.
- 12 For an extensive description of the action see Fowkes 2015, pp. 205–206.
- 13 The main motif in Ságlová’s *Laying Out Napkins near Sudomer (Kladení plín u Sudoměře*, 1970), an homage to the Czech Hussite Wars, arose from a similar politics of memory. This time, Ságlová visited a field north of Prague to re-enact a legendary battle at its original scene. The Hussites, as the legend has it, laid textile napkins on the field, so that the horses of the occupiers would get entangled in them and the soldiers fall off the horses. Allegedly, this ploy helped the Hussites to victory.

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Part III

Facets of gender in the second public sphere



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12 Gender, feminism, and the second public sphere in East European performance art

Amy Bryzgel

The topic of gender, not to mention feminism, in communist Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe remains a complicated and complex one. Prior to 1989 in the region, the women's question, at least on an official level, was considered largely to have been resolved (Pejić 2010a), with gender equality a priority of socialist governments. Across the East, women benefited from equal access to jobs, child care, and often equal pay. Women's reproductive health, too, was on the agenda, and in many countries, abortion was legal. Of course, the approach to gender equality was not uniform across the East – as a case in point, in Romania, in an effort to increase the birth rate to build the socialist state, abortion was made illegal, and contraception difficult to come by. Furthermore, across the East, quota systems were in place to insure that women advanced in their positions and were represented at all levels. However, much of this was superficial, as women were placed in positions before they had enough experience, training or skills to make them capable of succeeding in them, and it was really the men who maintained the power. As Piotr Piotrowski has stated, “the practice of selecting the delegates to the Party Congress from among various seamstresses, the practice of holding meetings between the First Secretary of the Communist Party and the representatives of the Polish League of Women . . . could not fully obscure the reality of the situation for women during this period” (2009, p. 253). The reality of the situation was that while some things had changed for women, gender equality had not, in fact, been achieved, especially in the domestic sphere, where traditional gender roles were maintained.

Piotrowski's statement regarding life in the People's Republic of Poland rings true for the situation across the East. Speaking about the Soviet Republic of Latvia, Mark Allen Svede commented that

one risks accusations of sophistry to propose that gender parity existed in a society in which washing machines were luxury items and food shopping required standing in queues, yet women were expected to perform these domestic chores even after working all day as a gallery director, all-Union legislator, or Artist Laureate of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. At best, a pyrrhic victory might be claimed.

(Svede 2001, p. 241)

While Western feminist artists may have looked to the socialist countries of Eastern Europe as a model of egalitarian society, women artists in the East knew better. Following her correspondence with feminist art critic Lucy Lippard, in 1971, Polish artist Natalia LL was asked by Lippard to be the Polish or Eastern European representative of the feminist movement. Lippard also sent her a feminist manifesto by Giselda Kaplan, which Natalia LL recalls,

was banal and not very innovative. It postulated that the woman should achieve what the women of the real socialist 1970s Poland had already achieved. Apart from the hardships of maternity, women in our reality had already received the right of suffering, hard work and superhuman responsibility. So these feminists were a bit funny for me. I was irritated by the faith of feminists who wanted to create their own feminist theory and history of art. But since they chose me as their representative, I restrained from criticizing their ideals.

(Natalia LL 2004, p. 484)

This is a statement that has echoed with those made by others who lived through the so-called socialist experience in Central and Eastern Europe. And indeed, the sphere of everyday life and the sphere of the art world were not that different, with traditional patriarchal structures being maintained in each, not to mention the fact that the lack of recognition, acknowledgement and exposure of women artists was a pattern that was repeated in both the East and the West, demonstrating a point of continuity between the capitalist West and the supposedly egalitarian socialist East.

Performance and experimental art practices under communism developed, for the most part, within the unofficial or second public sphere. In many instances, performance art was presented in unofficial or private spaces, and attended by a small group of like-minded individuals – trusted colleagues and friends of the artists themselves. If for Habermas the public sphere was based on a domain of common concern and inclusivity, then the second public sphere in the East only included the former. That said, the common concern of the second public sphere was primarily human rights, with the counter-culture opposing the hegemony of the socialist governments. In places where the state exercised control over much of everyday life, the common “enemy” for all was the totalitarian regime, and, as Martina Pachmanová explained, was what “women and men in the counterculture fought against” (2010, p. 39). It was not, however, an inclusive domain, but rather a closed one, its exclusivity a necessity of the sociopolitical circumstances. Even though artists tried to maintain a closed space, it was sometimes infiltrated by informants – such was the case in the German Democratic Republic.¹ Furthermore, dissident circles usually maintained the phallogentric structures of the regime. According to Edit András, the “political opposition and the counterculture mirrored the way official power worked; they were equally militant, arrogant and intolerant. Their soldiers stood in close formation on this side of the trench and soldiers were obliged to surrender gender, racial and ethnic identity. Deviation and difference were tolerated neither by the opposition, nor by the state ideology” (1999, pp. 4–5). Thus if

performance art practices were part of the second public sphere in Eastern Europe, then art that addressed gender, or claimed a feminist position, was a footnote of that second public sphere. Feminism was considered by many to be superfluous in the East, it was often viewed as not only unnecessary, but also an “import” from the West by activists and artists, especially given the close alignment with the feminist movement in the West and the feminist art movement.

In contrast to North America, which led the way in feminist art, there were only a small number of artists working in the socialist period whose work even addressed gender issues, let alone claimed to be feminist. Artists such as Natalia LL, Sanja Iveković, Jana Želibská, Maria Pinińska-Bereś, Ewa Partum, and Orshi Drozdik explore gender, femininity and sexuality in their work, yet each has a different, and sometimes complicated, relationship with feminism. For example, Natalia LL distanced herself from the feminist movement, although she was also responsible for bringing many ideas of feminist art into Poland, and even organized and participated in feminist art exhibitions. While the Oxford English Dictionary defines feminism as the “advocacy of equality of the sexes and the establishment of the political, social, and economic rights of the female sex” as well as “the movement associated with this,” in this article I shall nuance this term slightly to account for the fact that, in socialist Eastern Europe, there was no active feminist movement, for reasons outlined above. Given that equality of the sexes was already being “advocated” as the official party line, a feminist movement appeared unnecessary. However, the perception and recognition of the disparity between rhetoric and reality can be witnessed in examples of art from the period, thus constituting a form of feminist art, without the label. Consequently the definition of feminism outlined by Kumari Jayawardena will be utilized in this chapter: “a *consciousness* of injustices based on gender hierarchy” (1995, p. 9, italics mine). It is also important to note that this work was not designated as feminist at the time of creation because of the awareness that there would not be a receptive audience for such work. Because of its marginal status within the marginal second public, it lacked visibility. In this sense, Ivana Bago’s and Antonia Majaca’s notion of the “delayed audience” (Bago 2012) can perhaps provide a remedy to the question of what to call this art. It may have been feminist art for a delayed audience.

Insofar as gender inequality did exist in socialist Eastern Europe, it makes sense, then, to examine work that deals with representations of women, female sexuality, the reification of woman, and gender roles in the context of a feminist approach. Various terms have been used to qualify the approach by artists working on gender-related issues in the region, outside of the context of a feminist movement. Zora Rusinová, referring to Slovak artist Jana Želibská’s work, has described it as “latent feminism” (Bünigerová 2012), implying the unconscious use of feminist strategies in the artist’s work. Romanian artist Lia Perjovschi described herself as a feminist who worked instinctively, rather than in relation to feminist theory or examples of feminist art. In her words, “I was a feminist without knowing the history of the movement. Information on feminism came too late for me, this is why I am a feminist with a small ‘f’” (Perjovschi 2014, p. 97).

Writing about the work of Croatian/Yugoslav artist Vlasta Delimar, Lilijana Kolesnik has used the term “intuitive feminism,” although the artist would no doubt have been aware of feminist strategies and debates. Svede has referred to Latvian painter Ilze Zemzare’s work as “proto-feminist,” given that she was working in the 1960s, in an environment that would have had less exposure to feminist art and debates than Yugoslavia. And Bulgarian artist Adelina Popnedeleva has described herself as a “soft feminist” (Popnedeleva 2014, n.p.).

What I believe all of these different labels indicate is a general and genuine concern with the principles of feminism, namely, the awareness of the lack of equality of women, both in the region and globally, and a motivation to change that, regardless of the term that the artists themselves identify with. Finally, given that many of the artists working on gender issues during the socialist period were doing so independently of one another, Jana Geržová has referred to their work as “islands of interest in feminism” (2010, p. 32) in the region. One of the aims of this contribution, then, is to connect these “islands” utilizing the bridge of performance art. While all of the artists in this chapter were working in different sociopolitical contexts within the overall context of state-sponsored socialism in Eastern Europe, and its presumption of gender equality, what they share is the use of performance art – not necessarily as their prime practice, but certainly in individual works – to address issues such as gender inequality, the reification of women, and the rigidity of traditional gender roles.

Performance

Performance art was a preferred genre among feminist artists in North America who were working in the 1960s and 1970s – a time when live, body and action art was rapidly gaining currency among both male and female artists, providing a platform that enabled agency in the artwork – especially in an era of political activism. One of the reasons for this is that performance itself encompassed the activist stance of many feminists. As Jayne Wark has stated, “as women artists became politicized by feminism . . . the potential of performance as an ‘art of action’ coincided with their growing sense of themselves as agents of social and political change”² (2006, p. 32). Similarly, Amelia Jones outlines the subversive potential of feminist performance art. She suggests that in soliciting, or “literalizing desire,” the artists, and thus body art itself implicates the viewer “in its dispersal and particularization of the subject (as body/self) and open[s] . . . the art-making and viewing processes to intersubjective desires and identifications” (Jones 1998, p. 26). This, consequently, serves to threaten “Western subjectivity, which insists upon the oppositional staging of an other (who lacks) to legitimate the self (who ostensibly has)” (ibid., p. 180). Of course, this type of phallocentrism was not the exclusive domain of the West, as Piotr Piotrowski has pointed out. As he has argued, the socialist and communist regimes in Eastern Europe depended on the strict maintenance of traditional gender roles. In his words, “any authority system, including the totalitarian system that is its extreme version, can function safely only under conditions that ensure

the stability of the hierarchically defined social structure based in phallocentrism" (Piotrowski 2009, p. 385). Although women had equal access to jobs and equal pay, it was the male who remained privileged in these societies.

This characterization of the radical potential, then, of feminist performance and body art coincides with Lucy Lippard's notion of feminist art as "a value system, a revolutionary strategy, a way of life" (1980, p. 362). Furthermore, Wark has emphasized the plurality of feminist art practice: rather than holding on to polarized essentialist interpretations of feminist art, she proposes that artists were capable of pursuing various strategies and techniques, emanating from different traditions in feminist discourse (2006, p. 181). This is an important point to remember also when considering art from the East that addresses gender issues. Katy Deepwell, among others, has put forth the notion that instead of feminism, we should remember that there is no one "feminism," but numerous feminisms,³ which comprise different approaches throughout the world (1997, p. 62). This is also a point that Beáta Hock emphasizes in her discussion of gendered artistic practices in Hungary during the socialist period, putting forth a situated feminist perspective, one that does not use Western feminism as a "yardstick" by which to gauge feminist activity. Although she, among others, has noted the fact that the label "feminist" seems "more a social and political liability" (Gal and Kligman 2000, p. 103) for non-Western examples, I feel that this term is relevant and useful in the context of Eastern Europe, given the fact that artists in the region were aware of, connected with, and often responding to Western feminist artists in their work. Furthermore, given the fact that gender inequality and hierarchy *was* an issue under communist rule, despite the public reticence with regard to it, then these actions and works that draw attention to this issue can be seen as feminist, in the same manner that the suffragette movement of the first wave of feminism was also not necessarily labeled as such. That said, I agree with Hock's point that "the articulation of feminist concerns in cultural work or in social activism is not always and necessarily tied to a conscious feminist identification" as well as the assertion that "ambiguity towards feminism and reluctance towards feminist identification are not always results of a clear refusal or informed *non-choice* of feminism" (Hock 2013, p. 34). Indeed, this choice to take such a definitive political stance under communist rule was decidedly complicated.

In lieu of a codified feminist movement in Eastern Europe, during the communist period, artists in the region often used performance art to explore, expose and challenge traditional gender roles, especially by focusing on representations of masculinity, femininity and notions of female beauty, from within their individual "islands." Because of the limited audiences for experimental art in general during the 1960s and 1970s, it was rare that performance art that addressed gender during the communist period attracted much public attention or discussion. Consequently, it was also rare that these works addressing gender entered the (first) public sphere. Sanja Iveković's *Triangle* (*Trokut*) is one exception: sitting on her balcony during Marshal Tito's visit to Zagreb in 1979, drinking whisky and pretending to masturbate, the security officers stationed atop a high-rise hotel across the street noticed her and summoned their colleagues on the street below to knock on her

door and ask her to leave the balcony (along with removing her things). However, as Mechtild Widrich has noted, all that remains of that performance are the photographs, and we are forced to take the artist at her word that she did the actions, and that the police interrupted her in the manner that has been captured as the narrative of the piece (Widrich 2014). It is my contention that despite a lack of visibility, these explorations of gender in art, discussed in this text, nevertheless exist as evidence of cracks in the monolithic grand narrative of traditional heteronormative gender roles supported by the state. Following from Piotrowski (2009), any challenge posed to those principles also posed a challenge to the regime. In scrutinizing gender, gender equality, and representations of women, the work of the artists discussed in this chapter represent a distinct challenge to the stability of the hierarchically defined social structure in Eastern Europe.

In socialist Yugoslavia, which succeeded in combining consumer culture with ideology, the situation was ripe for critique of the culture of the spectacle, the reification of the female body and the male gaze. Sanja Iveković (b. 1949), for example, scrutinized these mechanisms at work in the mass media, exposing not only the manner in which femininity and notions of beauty are constructed, but also how patriarchal power structures in both the political and social realms are created and maintained. In her photomontage *Diary* (*Dnevnik*), created between 1975–1976, the artist juxtaposed the make-up removal pads and cotton balls that she used over the course of a week with glossy images from a women's magazine depicting a woman fully made-up. In her 1976 video performance, *Make-Up, Make-Down*, she fetishizes the application of make-up, by displaying it as a sensual act. The camera focuses on the female subject's cleavage and hands (her face is not visible), which slowly manipulate and caress various objects containing make-up: tubes of lipstick and mascara, a bottle of lotion, etc. She followed this piece with the performance *Un Jour Violente* (1976), where she applied make-up and dressed according to an advertisement in *Marie Claire*, which told women how to live glamorous lives through their style: "One day, violent: today you are dazzling, you don't yourself know why, you feel irresistible joy, you want sparkling drinks, intensive light, unusual hairstyles, provoking dresses." In the course of the performance, in three different spaces, she applied three different "looks" provided by the magazine: tender, violent and secret, attempting to become or align with the *representation* of woman.

In terms of her strategy, Iveković had this to say: "I tried to reflect my own position as a woman in a patriarchal culture, which was, in spite of the officially egalitarian policy, always alive and present in socialism. A recurrent theme in these early works was the politics of the representation of femininity in the mass media. I publicly declared myself as a feminist artist and in this sense my position was really specific" (Iveković and Majaca 2009, p. 9). Furthermore, she stated that because of the absence of the feminist context or feminist criticism her work was usually only interpreted as self-referential. That said, she did mention finding sources for her work in the international feminist conference in Belgrade that took place in 1978 – the first feminist conference in Eastern Europe – along with the Women's Section of the Sociological Society of the University of Zagreb, "Women and Society,"



Figure 12.1 Sanja Iveković, *Un Jour Violente*, Bologna, 1976.

Courtesy: Sanja Iveković.

which was established around that time and presented lectures on feminist theory, which the artist attended. Since their research didn't include visual art, however, this context did not help with the interpretation of her work along those lines.

Polish artist Ewa Partum used make-up to different ends. In her 1974 performance, *Change* (*Zmiana*), she had a professional make-up artist paint half of her face to make it look aged and wrinkled; in 1978–1979, in *Emphatic Portrait* (*Portret emfaticzny*), posters of a photograph of the artist's face made up that way were posted all over Warsaw with the text below reading: “my problem is the problem of a woman.” In 1979, she used that text for the title of another performance, an expansion on this concept, in which she aged half of her entire body (*Change – My Problem Is the Problem of a Woman* [*Zmiana. Mój problem jest problemem kobiety*]). In both pieces, she performed the act of becoming *invisible* through the use of make-up, highlighting the iconic nature of the youthful female nude. Partum was one of the only women artists in Poland at the time creating work based on gender who *defined* her position in feminist terms, although she was not necessarily familiar with Western feminist theory. The artist used her work to critique the patriarchal society in which she found herself. In her words, “Feminism became present in my

practice later . . . When I saw that, despite my earlier works, men don't appreciate me as a conceptual artist. It was an impulse for me to go beyond the art that I had been making so far. To start speaking about something that had to do not only with art but with reality" (Partum cited in Szylak et al. 2013, p. 5).

Partum began writing feminist manifestos in the 1970s, and reading them aloud at exhibitions, standing before her audience naked, which, she maintained, was a form of protest against social discrimination against women. Her definition of feminist art was as follows:

Women can function in a social structure that is alien to her if she masters the discipline of camouflage and omits her own personality . . . At the moment of discovering her own awareness, possibly having little in common with the realities of her current life, a social and cultural problem arises. Not fitting in the social structure created for her, she will create a new one. The possibility of discovering the self and the authenticity of her own experiences, work on her own problems and awareness through the very specific experience of being a woman in a patriarchal society in a world that is alien to the self, is the problem of what is called "feminist art." It is the motivation for creating art for a woman artist. The phenomenon of a feminist art reveals to a woman her new role, the possibility of self-realisation.

(Partum cited in Szylak et al. 2013, pp. 136, 140)

Consequently, the artist found in her art the possibility of emancipation not offered to her by the state or official structures surrounding her. She used her work as a platform to express these ideas, although they would have reached somewhat limited audiences.

One could draw parallels between these works by Iveković and Partum with that of North American artists such as Eleanor Antin or Martha Wilson, both of whom interrogated the category of beauty and its perpetuation by the mass media. Throughout her work, Wilson used make-up to alter her appearance and take on different appearances. For example, in her 1974 performance *I Make Up the Image of My Perfection/I Make Up the Image of My Deformity*, two photographic documents of the action show the artist as feminine and made-up in one, and with bags under her eyes and bad skin in the other, the juxtaposition of the two revealing the fact that appearance is merely a façade. While Partum arrived at her feminist views independently, as the 1970s progressed, Poland became more connected with the Western feminist movement through the work of Natalia LL, who traveled to the US in 1977 and met with artists such as Carolee Schneemann. Iveković traveled outside of Yugoslavia often, to places such as Italy and Canada, and was aware of developments in contemporary performance and feminist art. While in Poland, the feminist context of Partum's work was not widely understood, Yugoslavia was perhaps the only place in the Eastern Bloc where the "women's question" was even on the agenda – for example, the first international feminist conference to be held in a socialist country took place at the Student Culture Center (SKC) in Belgrade,

in 1978. Entitled *Comrade Woman: The Women's Question – A New Approach?*, the conference was criticized by the official Yugoslav women's organizations. According to Pejić, "their criticism was based on their claim that a feminist stance was superfluous in our society, which had already 'overcome' gender difference in the Revolution. Moreover, they saw the 'new approach' as an 'import' from the (capitalist) West" (2010b, p. 107). She goes on to describe a definite need for feminism particularly at that time, as by the late 1970s Yugoslavia had pornography, and women in films were either represented as "'liberated' or whores" (ibid., p. 108). That said, the works of Iveković and Partum remain unique examples of the examination of the representations of women in mass media through performance, during the socialist period.

As early as 1966, Slovak artist (at that time, Czechoslovakian) Jana Želibská (b. 1941) was creating objects, images, installations and performances that referred overtly to female sexuality. Female sexuality was a subject that was rarely touched upon by artists in Eastern Europe during the communist era, and Želibská's work particularly stands out when one considers that Carolee Schneeman's orgiastic performance *Meat Joy* had only taken place in 1964, first in Paris. At the time, the Slovak art world was not only progressive, but well connected with the Western art world, particularly Paris.⁴ Despite the content of her work, which focuses on the female body, female sexuality, female virginity and the passage from girl into womanhood, Vladimira Büngerová feels that her work "cannot be classified as part of the radical wave of feminism; it rather carries traces of influences of psychoanalysis and a wave of liberal feminism and eco-feminism – a so-called second wave which sounded in our milieu [Czechoslovakia – AB] only through this author's voice, where Marxists and the socialist feminism wave based on political ideology ruled." She further comments that Želibská remained a singular figure in that context because of the fact that the paradigm she was working with was "understood as alien in our environment, as 'an import from the West'" (Büngerová 2012, p. 27). Whereas 1967 was designated the "Summer of Love" throughout North America and Western Europe, following from events in the Haight Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco, no such sexual revolution occurred in Eastern Europe, where the hippie counterculture was frowned upon by the government, who viewed it as yet another example of dissident activity. Thus Želibská's explorations of female sexuality cannot be connected to these external impulses. In Rusinová's words, her work "had no support in Slovak theory ..." let alone the Slovak social context, "... and was created rather intuitively, and yet ultimately was aligned with the feminist discourse of the era" (Rusinová cited in Büngerová 2012, p. 6).

The 1970s in Czechoslovakia witnessed a number of happenings and actions in the countryside, in part a consequence of the period of Normalization following the failed Prague Spring, which resulted in increased restrictions on freedom and expression, which forced artists into alternative spaces. Rusinová points out that this was also a time when artists (not only female) throughout the world sought a return to nature, stating that "apart from ecological motifs, performance and ritual became a favorite form of a search for the 'new sensibility' for its ability to deny secular time,

duration and history in an exemplary attempt to transfer into mythical, archetypal space, ‘out of time’” (ibid., p. 11). In Želibská’s collective event or action entitled *Betrothal of Spring* (*Snúbenie jari*, 1970), the sexual act was depicted metaphorically through the meeting of spring and summer, or the passage from spring into summer, from virgin to woman. A group of artists met in the village Dolné Orešany, and guests were given flowers; then, white ribbons (symbolizing innocence) were dropped on the crowd from an airplane (organized by Alex Mlynárčik), and they subsequently tied them to the trees; finally, girls wove wreaths and wore them on their heads. This exploration of the transformation from virgin to bride can also be seen in Želibská’s event from 1982, *Metamorphosis II (Girls)*, in which a group of girls of varying ages, all dressed in white flowing dresses, enter a peaceful countryside setting, where they spent the afternoon laughing, running, dancing, collecting flowers, making wreaths and adorning themselves with them; eventually they slowly leave at the end of the day, when the sun begins to set.⁵ Both of these events were documented in a series of photographs.

A contemporary of Želibská’s in neighboring Poland, Natalia LL’s (Lach-Lachowicz) (b. 1937) *Consumer Art* series (1972, 1974, 1975) of photographic performances and video performances foregrounds female sexuality quite overtly, while connecting it to the act of consumption, a sensitive issue in a socialist society that opposed itself to the consumer-oriented West. In the photographs and videos, the artist captured models eating sexually suggestive objects, such as bananas, sausages, bread sticks, as well as pudding, cream and jelly. They do not simply consume these objects, however, they explore them with their mouths and tongues as if for the first time, licking and thrusting the phallic shapes in their mouths, and putting the jelly and cream in their mouths so that it bubbles over and streams out, suggesting other fluids and familiar scenes from porn films – with ejaculate running out of the models’ mouths. Although the artist is not present here, in directing the models, she creates performative photographs that highlight the consumption of the reified female.

Consumer Art appeared in Poland in the 1970s, a decade when citizens often encountered food shortages. Foods like sausages and bananas could only be found in the shops on holidays or special occasions, for example May Day, consequently the artist recalls being very busy around those dates. Thus the piece enjoys a different reading than one might expect in the context of late-socialist Poland. Western feminists interpreted this as a critique of the deficit of materials in socialist Poland. However, Piotr Piotrowski has highlighted issues with reading the work as either feminist or critical of consumerism. In his words, “consumption was only expected and hoped for by society and the authorities” (Piotrowski 2009, p. 352). The models’ fetishization of these objects reflected the real desire on the part of everyday citizens to have what were then and there considered luxury items – bananas and hot dogs.

Unlike her colleague Ewa Partum, Natalia LL distanced herself from feminism, not to mention a feminist reading of her work, and she has a complicated relationship with Western feminism and Western feminist art. Nevertheless, in 1971, at her exhibition in Warsaw, the artist asserted her independence from patriarchal structures when she disconnected herself from both her father’s (Lach) and her husband’s



Figure 12.2 Natalia L.L. at an LGBT rally in New York City, 1977, holding an image from the *Consumer Art* series.

Courtesy: Natalia L.L. and lokal_30 Gallery, Warsaw.

(Lachowitz) surnames, by taking the name “Natalia LL” Furthermore, because of her subject matter and unique treatment thereof, Western feminists declared Natalia LL as the Polish, or even Eastern European representative of their movement. Natalia LL herself, however, does not consider herself a feminist; when an image from *Consumer Art* was used as a poster for the *Women’s Art – New Tendencies (Frauen Kunst – Neue Tendenzen)* exhibition in Innsbruck in 1975, as an icon of feminism, the artist commented that “For me, it [the work – AB] was rather a manifestation of the meaningfulness of life, of vitality” (Natalia LL 2004, p. 485). Indeed, an examination of her later work, which continues to focus on the phallus as the giver of life – for example, the banana, which is both phallic and food, and the wang peony, suggesting fertility – could support that argument. The artist found herself

in a perplexing situation, living in a country that was idolized by Western feminists as having achieved women's equality, yet not experiencing that herself. In a recent interview, when asked whether she thought that Western feminists might have anything to learn from women artists in the East, she stated that: "Artists from the West should constantly thank God that they were spared the experience that artists from former socialist countries had" (Natalia LL 2015, n.p.).

Orsolya (Orshi) Drozdik (b. 1946) began making work exploring gender and the female body in the 1970s, in Hungary. One of her earlier performances took not only society, but also art history, and the art world, to task. In *Nude/Model* (*Akt/Modell*, 1977), a live exhibition at the Young Artist's Club, the artist sat in front of an easel and proceeded to draw a live (female) model over the course of one week. Each day the exhibition was opened by a male artist (four) or art historian (one). Viewers could not enter the room where the performance took place, they could only view it from the doorway. Looking into the room, they saw only the back of the model, not the front, and they saw the artist at work, from the front, but not her easel. The doorway was also covered with a sheer curtain made of gauze, which further hindered viewing. While the artist took on the male role of the active artist, casting the gaze on the nude model, the audience was only able to see the artist as active – at work, yet could not reify the nude model through their gaze. Drozdik had turned the tables on the art system, while also commenting on its absurdity.

In 2007, Emese Süvecz interviewed some of the participants from that live event, to gather their recollections. At that time, Drozdik stated that "the intention was



Figure 12.3 Orshi Drozdik, *Nude/Model*, Budapest, 1977.

Courtesy: Orshi Drozdik.

to show the grotesque nature of the situation – that a woman artist has to draw a naked woman” (Süvecz 2007, n.p.). The model was well-known, employed at the art academy, drawn by many, and was even the lover of some. Therefore, she was not only the object of desire in the eyes of art history, which dictates that women be depicted as nudes in paintings and not paint themselves, but she was also literally the object of desire of many of the men in the academy. However, the audience was denied the opportunity to cast their desiring gaze on her nude body. Instead, that gaze was taken over by the artist, but it was not the same type of gaze. As Drozdik stated:

I did not look at the nude model with desire. To be frank, my nude model was the mistress of those friends of mine whom I had invited. She was the object of their sexual desire. And I inherited an academic method, which is totally ambiguous: for women to depict naked women is an ambiguous procedure. It was a normative condition that women painted female nude models, and no one had changed this.

(Süvecz 2007, n.p.)

Indeed, women on both sides of the Atlantic were attempting to change this, but Drozdik was one of a few lone voices in her native Hungary at the time. She left the country in 1978, and eventually settled in the U.S. in 1980, by way of Canada.

According to Hock, Drozdik began working on pieces that interrogated female subjectivity and corporeality without an awareness of feminist discourse or feminist art practices in the West. The source of her “‘inspiration’ was rather the masculinist atmosphere of the neo-avant-garde in which she started her creative practice” (Hock 2013, p. 190). However, her work was received with indifference, which prompted her to emigrate to the West. Since 1989, she works between New York and Budapest.

A room of one's own

Virginia Woolf's 1929 essay “A Room of One's Own” argued for both a literal and figurative space for woman: a physical space in which to create and be rebellious, in order to create a figurative space for herself, her work, and womankind in a patriarchal society. In the male dominated art world, both concepts of space are relevant. It is known that American Abstract Expressionist painter Lee Krasner, for example, initially created smaller works of art because she confined herself to a smaller room of the house, leaving the larger studio space for her husband, Jackson Pollock. In communist Eastern Europe, where private space was at a premium, due to urban planning that allocated minimal shared living spaces, a woman finding a space of her own – almost her own alternate, or “second public” sphere – was that much more challenging.

Polish artist Maria Pinińska-Bereś (1931–1999) was a sculptor who also worked in performance and installation. Her art was often overshadowed, however, by that of her husband – the sculptor and performance artist Jerzy Bereś. While their home

was equipped with a studio, it was filled with Bereś's large wooden sculptures. When visitors would come to the studio, they would look away if they spotted her work: pink and white soft sculptural pillows, for example. They expected her to make tea while the men spoke about art, and some even referred to her as "Bereś's wife" (Tatar 2011, p. 15). Consequently, instead of ascribing to a strong political platform in her work, the artist often addressed her subjective experience in relation to gender and oppression. According to Ewa Małgorzata Tatar, Pinińska-Bereś analyzed the patriarchal order, "deconstructing it and trying to revitalize the feminine in the space assigned to it" (ibid., p. 16). She often utilized humor and irony to address these issues, objects that referred to a feminine sensibility (soft forms, usually pink), but these expressions were not self-referential. According to Agata Jakubowska, "she adopted a 'feminine' position but did not identify with it, if only because in this dichotomous pair the woman is silent, a fact that she did not accept" (2011, p. 27). Her work also often focused on space, as in her 1980 performance *Annexation of the Landscape* (*Aneksja krajobrazu*), in which she erected a private and feminine space outdoors, in the landscape, by fencing off an area with white stakes and rope, complete with a pink flag and a sign, in curly, feminine script, that read "(temporarily) annexed area." The artist also hung sheets of cloth from the rope, as if hanging out the laundry, further demarcating this as a domestic space. The message is clear: a woman can only have a space that is temporary, makeshift, improvised. However, in utilizing the genres of performance and land art, the artist is able to shape the space according to her own design, and accesses a space with a much larger footprint than that of her own apartment – the earth.

Dóra Maurer (b. 1937) is primarily a painter and graphic designer, however she is also known for having created some pioneering works that can be discussed in the context of female body art in Hungary in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1967, she moved to Vienna on a scholarship, and one year later, she married Tibor Gáyor, an Austrian citizen, which enabled her to get an Austrian passport and travel between Hungary and Austria freely. She described her time in Austria as "energizing," and she utilized her position as a dual citizen to disseminate knowledge about contemporary art and the avant-garde, between Austria and Hungary. She organized exhibitions on constructivism both in Hungary and abroad, and even invited the artist Peter Weibel to Budapest; he had his first video exhibition there in 1977 (Maurer 2014). She began creating photographs in 1968–1969, and in the 1970s she made a number of experimental films with the assistance of a film student who acted as her cameraman, while she directed.

One of these films was entitled *Proportions* (*Arányok*, 1979). Using her body as a measure, she drew lines on the surface of a piece of paper to create a grid – a grid that was based on the dimensions of her own body. She then performed minimalist actions in the squares, such as placing her hands next to one another, stepping in the squares, lying on the paper – comparing the proportions of her hands, arms, feet and legs. In this piece, she replaced Leonardo's Vitruvian Man, making woman the measure of all things, and placing her, iconoclastically, at the center of the universe. Maurer does not identify herself as a feminist or feminist

artist, and most of her work comprises geometric abstract paintings, in bold colors, reminiscent of Frank Stella. While *Proportions* can no doubt be understood in the context of her two-dimensional work as a study of form and geometry, it is also interesting to consider in the context of female body art. Maurer was not ignorant of the feminist discourse and the feminist art movement going on at the time. For example, the exhibition *Woman's Art – New Tendencies* took place at the Krinzinger Gallery, Innsbruck, and Natalia LL and Marina Abramović both took part. In addition to functioning as a conduit of information on the art world between East and West, Budapest and Vienna, she also brought information on feminism and feminist art. She initiated and moderated a radio broadcast on the position of women in the visual arts in 1979, “F”: *Women in the arts*, in which artist Judit Kele (also known for some performative work dealing with gender) also participated. Retrospectively, however, Maurer commented that her interest in feminism was more intellectual curiosity than necessity, and, according to Hock (2013, p. 191), the feminist discourse didn’t really speak to her, as she did not feel discriminated against because of her gender.

Conclusion

If performance art was positioned within the second public sphere of culture in Central and Eastern Europe, then feminist performance, or performance that addressed issues related to gender, was on the periphery of that second public sphere. Because of feminism’s perceived superfluity in the East, it was not an issue for experimental artists – except, perhaps, those that felt marginalized by the male-dominated sphere of unofficial circles. What’s more, if performance art from the period lacked visibility, then gendered strategies and artistic practices suffered further invisibility – it was a ghost of the experimental art scene. Artists who engaged with these strategies had a range of responses to feminism – either completely denying it, being interested but not defined by it, or, in rare cases, identifying as feminist. Nevertheless, regardless of the intention, the work addressed in this article, all of which confronted issues of gender, gender relations, female sexuality and beauty, can be read as feminist insofar as it was concerned with the place of women within the world. It was not until the collapse of communism across the East, which prompted the dissolution of the second public sphere, that these works were able to gain the visibility that they would need to create change. That said, the issue of gender and feminism in the post-communist period is an issue that merits an entirely separate discussion, which goes beyond the possibilities of this text.

Notes

- 1 This was confirmed to be the case with the artistic group Clara Mosch, from Leipzig, whose photographer was eventually revealed to be a Stasi mole, and the artists associated with the Autoperforationsartisten, from Dresden, commented that they often suspected infiltration.

- 2 Contrary views, however, were voiced by theorists such as Griselda Pollock, Lucy Lippard and Mary Kelly, questioning whether women's bodies can function in a political stance without being reified.
- 3 This is quite similar to the phenomenon of the second public sphere, which is, in point of fact, not one, but many diverse second public spheres, a fact to which I believe the articles in the volume will attest.
- 4 In 1964, Slovak artist Alex Mlynárčik, during a trip to Paris, brazenly knocked on the door of French art critic Pierre Restany and introduced himself. The two remained friends, and maintained correspondence throughout their lives.
- 5 This event was part of the *Terrain I* series of actions.

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13 Decision as art

Performance in the Balkans

Jasmina Tumbas

In her distinguished political memoir, *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed* (1993), the Croatian feminist writer Slavenka Drakulić remarked about her experience of Yugoslav state socialism: “In a totalitarian society, one *has* to relate to the power directly; there is no escape. . . . politics never becomes abstract. It remains a palpable, brutal force directing every aspect of our lives. . . . Like a disease, a plague, an epidemic, it doesn’t spare anybody.” Drakulić then followed her metaphor of viral state socialism with a more optimistic decree: “Paradoxically, this is precisely how a totalitarian state produces its enemies: politicized citizens” (1993, p. 17). My contribution to this edition will argue that artists from former Yugoslavia, especially those associated with the New Artistic Practices in the Republics of Croatia and Serbia during the 1970s and 1980s embodied just such enemies for the ways in which they critiqued socialist ideology, attesting to Drakulić’s observation: “To be yourself, to cultivate individualism, to perceive yourself as an individual in a mass society is dangerous. You might become living proof that the system is failing” (ibid., p. 26).

Such living proof was the very matrix of the second (or alternative) public sphere, the topic of this anthology, in which artists were tolerated in Yugoslavia, and which was, as I argue, dependent on the very decisions they made. Deliberating on the notion of “decision,” or choice, as central to the conceptualization and execution of resistance to the state, I focus on the ways in which Yugoslavian artists made art in variegated forms and with subtle modes of ethical commitment and engagement in their time and circumstances. East European art is usually analysed with regards to state repression, and my text is no exception. However, I also approach that authoritarian domination in the context of the artists’ aesthetic determinations, and argue that the emphasis on gender politics and sexuality in conceptual and performance art is to be understood as a mode of opposition.

Like their international colleagues, artists in Yugoslavia were driven to protests by the 1968 “revolt” that philosopher and literary critic Julia Kristeva described as “a violent desire to rake over the norms that govern the private as well as the public, the intimate as well as the social, a desire to come up with new, perpetually contestable configurations” (2002, p. 12). In Yugoslavia such contestable configurations could be understood as a representing of a second public sphere that would be determined by the private albeit political decisions and actions of artists situated within the public. How did these artists’ performance and conceptual works challenge the division between the intimate and the social in Yugoslavia’s brand

of socialism? It will be my argument that the artists selected for this essay were interested in raising the intimate sphere – such as confronting gender and sexual norms – to the level of the social and political. By focusing on questions of gender and sexuality in my analysis, I argue that these artists' experimentation with their own and others' bodies embodied political acts, as if making a solemn pledge to Walter Benjamin's decree: "We must wake up from the world of our parents," (1991, p. 1214)¹ or perhaps, "We must stop sleeping in the beds of our parents."

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's theorization of the multitude negotiates the contemporary possibilities for resistance and the revival of the commons, which they define as "the incarnation, the production, and the liberation of the multitude" (2000, p. 303). The question of decision-making lies at the centre of their argument for such a possibility. They consider decision-making an "act of love," a "decision to create a new race or, rather, a new humanity" (2004, p. 356), a race that may emerge from "the ontological and social process of productive labor." Furthermore, they argue, such decision "is an institutional form that develops a common content; it is a deployment of force that defends the historical progression of emancipation and liberation; it is, in short, an act of love" (ibid., p. 351). Anticipating such a view, in "Is It Useless to Revolt?," Michel Foucault noted already in 1979 that revolt "is how subjectivity . . . is brought into history, breathing life into it" (1999, p. 134). He further observed in a comment on the question of taking a stand on the Iranian revolution, that it was "a simple choice, but a difficult work" (ibid.). I will argue that such simple choices had the effect of opening up a semi-autonomous sphere, where Kristeva's "contestable configurations" were possible and probable.

Some may consider my conviction that such decision-making-as-art-in-life is too idealistic, no longer possible, retrograde, or even naïve, especially in light of postmodern theories of undecidability, the death of the author, and the concomitant death of biography, as well as the post-World War II Marxist emphasis on ideology as shaping every aspect of life. The more contemporary regard for the positive aspects of socialism can also be problematic, itself linked to the growing view that state socialism was "not that bad after all." This latter emotional assessment feeds the resurgence of Marxism in light of the contemporary invasion of privacy, vast repression of student revolts, abject poverty, governmental and corporate corruption, racism and gender inequalities, and media control perpetrated by various iterations of capitalist democracies. Nevertheless, and paradoxically, we live in a time when the very term "resistance" has gained currency in contemporary art, and where the upsurging global biennials regularly include calls for projects that critique social conditions locally and internationally. Thus, the question of what function art can play in addressing repressive politics could not be more acute, and it is especially poignant that many examples throughout this volume come from three to five decades ago and from Eastern and Central Europe.

Masculinity and Revolt: Raša Todosijević

The artist whose work perhaps best encompasses Kristeva's "contestable configurations" was Raša Todosijević, who was a leading figure of the Group of Six artists in Belgrade's Student Cultural Centre (SKC). The SKC in Belgrade became

internationally renowned almost immediately after its founding for the conceptual installations and performance actions presented there. Tito founded the SKC in 1968. As a former leader of the Yugoslav Partisans during World War II, a group considered Europe's most effective anti-Nazi resistance movement, Tito led the country from 1945 until 1980, becoming Yugoslavia's first President, a dictator known widely as the most benevolent of the East European autocrats. The founding of the SKC took place during what has been termed his "soft dictatorship," and many interpreted his support of the SKC as a manipulative way to tame the frustrated 1968 counter-culture, especially given that this new cultural centre was housed within the ex-headquarters of the Yugoslav secret police, undoubtedly still wired for surveillance (Marcoci 2012, p. 19).

Nevertheless, the SKC, along with the student cultural centres in Zagreb and Novi Sad, became centres for politically charged and experimental art in Yugoslavia, where artists' indirect and symbolic criticisms of the state resulted in "some of the most" radical art works in Eastern Europe (*ibid.*, p. 19). The informal Group of Six at the SKC consisted of academically trained artists who sought alternate modes of artistic expression to the socialist modernism taught at the university in Belgrade. The German filmmaker Lutz Becker's film *Kino Beleške (Film Notes)* captured the innovation of conceptual and performance art, which located the body as artistic medium at the centre of art and which created a radical atmosphere of experimental artistic production in Belgrade.² Speaking about the conditions under which he made the film in 1975, Becker noted, "Operating in a sphere of limited tolerance and public indifference" fuelled a certain "energy and internalized aggression" (2006, p. 393), which was fundamental to this new incorporation of the artist's body.

The artists' frustrations with the supposed freedom to travel, along with the concomitant repression of independence and critical thinking in the country, fuelled their aggression towards the system, which propagated the idea of independent socialism for the people, who were to be active participants in the formation and longevity of the socialist state. The fact that Tito relaxed the Yugoslav borders with the "red passport," a pass that provided citizens the opportunity to travel to the West, seemed more than promising, and many artists took advantage of this prospect, unique and singular in the context of East European state socialism (Timotijević 2005, p. 9). However, as Slavko Timotijević, curator and art critic at the SKC, pointed out, Tito opened up the border in order "to release himself from awful social [and international] pressure" and to create a uniquely "enlightened communism (that is, soft totalitarianism)" (*ibid.*) in the Eastern Bloc. Yet this form of socialism used "hidden strategies and methodology of power, planned total control wrapped in the cover of self-management, democracy and apparent civil freedoms" (*ibid.*).

Knowing very well that such civil freedoms were nothing but a farce, Rasa Todosijević produced works that encapsulated his tenet: "Our sole treasure is our bodies and our ideas" (Todosijević cited in Sretenović 2001, p. 27). Todosijević saw the body and its subject, the self, as the primary instigator of art, and he believed that "the way in which an artist asks a question about art is a work of art" (*ibid.*, p. 26).

But beyond thinking of the individual body, Todosijević presented poignant denunciations of his own gender by conveying exaggerated authoritarian masculinities clashing against the femininity of another body, that of his wife Marinela Koželj. In 1974, when the artist participated in the famous April Meetings for Expanded Media that Dunja Blažević organized at the SKC in Belgrade, Todosijević presented *Drinking Water (Pijene Vode)*, one of the most potent examinations of gender politics in the Yugoslav alternative scene at the time. This work would also be seen by such internationally renowned artists as Joseph Beuys, who participated in that April meeting and who had already met SKC artists and observed their performances at Richard Demarco's Edinburgh Festival in 1973.

Bearded and bare-chested, Todosijević grabbed a carp weighing "1 kilo and 200 gr. fish" and threw it "in front of the public." A large white board illustrated with words and phrases written in capital black letters, such as "PRESUMPTION ABOUT – ART" and "DECISION AS ART," served as the backdrop for this action. Over thirty-five minutes, Todosijević drank 26 glasses of water and attempted "to harmonize the rhythm of swallowing with the rhythm of the dying fish breathing on the floor" (*ibid.*, p. 59). As the fish gasped for its life, needing water to breathe, Todosijević drank water and followed the pace of the animal's attempts to breathe with the pace of his own swallowing efforts. This soon resulted in Todosijević vomiting water and gasping for oxygen. Prior to the performance, Todosijević had scattered powdered violet pigment on the tablecloth covering the table at which he sat consuming water. The pigment discoloured the white cloth as it became saturated with water and vomit (*ibid.*). Todosijević continued his action until almost all of the cloth was stained with the violet pigment, and the fish died (*ibid.*). Marinela Koželj sat next to him with a stoic expression throughout the action.

Two essential themes in Todosijević's complex art are decisive to an understanding of this action: the question of religion and its relation to art and politics, and the classic position of the male artist as perpetrator. Todosijević's killing of the fish, a symbol of Christ, resonates with Friedrich Nietzsche's proclamation that "God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!" (2001, p. 120) For Nietzsche, God does not have a place in modern society, and society caused his obliteration. Next Nietzsche asks, "Do we not ourselves have to become gods merely to appear worthy of it?" (*ibid.*). Given this context, I ask: might one then see Todosijević's performance as a commentary on the abandonment of God, and his subsequent silence, in socialist and (more broadly) modern society?³ In addition, Todosijević's decision to kill the fish as art could be said to enact Nietzsche's idea that the artist comes closest to the truth of life, and takes the place of – or imitates – God by taking the life of the fish. Todosijević enhanced this religio-philosophical context by using the colour purple, which is one of the six original liturgical colours used in the Eastern Orthodox Church (the others being white, green, red, blue, and gold), followed by black vestments and in some places, scarlet orange or rust.

Under state socialism, such art actions turned the studio, or an alternative art space (like SKC), into a sanctuary, a second public sphere where artists could express the symbolism of dissidence that was more often than not misunderstood

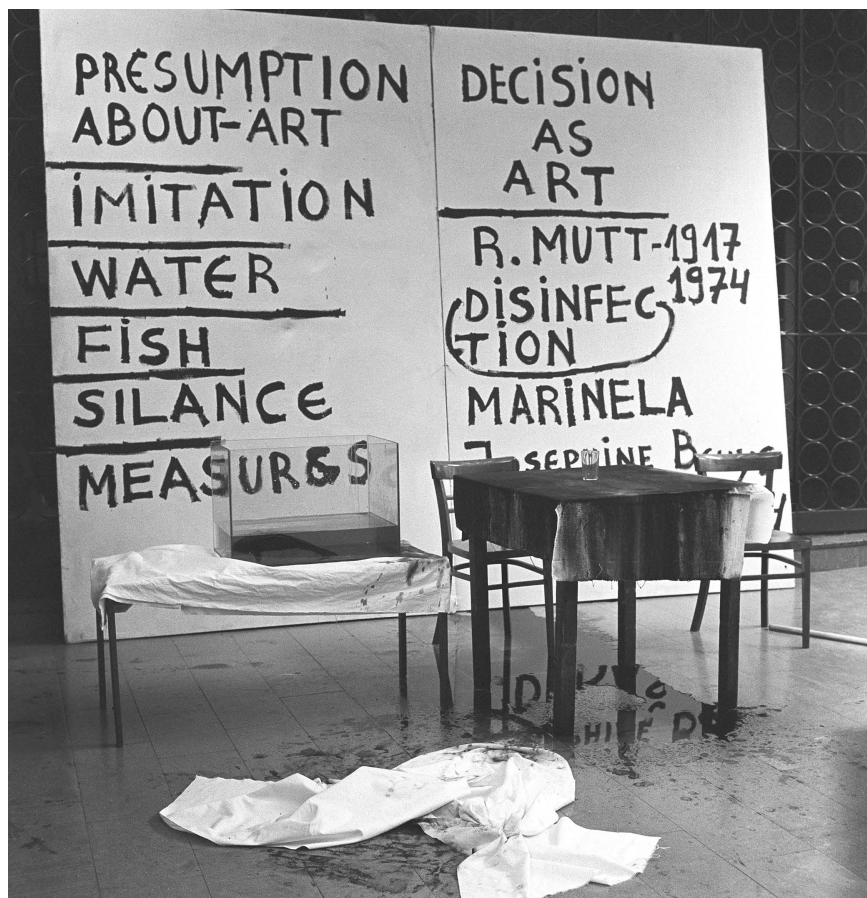


Figure 13.1 Raša Todosijević and Marinela Koželj, *Drinking Water*, performance, April Meeting, Student Cultural Center, Belgrade, 1974.

Photo: Marinela Koželj.

by the state, and where the artist functioned with the aura of a priest and even a healer.⁴ In addition, totalitarianism mythologized the East European male artist as a genius, as Serbian curator and art critic Jelena Vesić observed in her introduction to PRELOM's exhibition *SKC in ŠKUC: The Case of Students' Cultural Centre in the 1970s*. She wrote that "'critical art' created inside the Socialist state can only be the representation of an individual rebel in totalitarian society stereotypically represented through the skinny body of the [male] performer in the gloomy alternative (art) space" (Vesić 2008, p. 4). Todosijević embodied every aspect of this myth including placing a woman, Marinela Koželj, in the passive role of observer and observed.

In *Drinking Water*, Todosijević also placed the compliant Koželj strategically in front of the right side of the board featuring the phrases and names: DECISION AS ART; R. MUTT – 1917; DISINFECTION 1974; MARINELA; JOSEPHINE BEUYS; T. D. RASA. Neatly dressed and calm, Koželj provided a visual manifestation of balance and reason, in stark contrast to the vomiting God-like artist and the dying fish. Viewers could find solace in Koželj's personification of the norm (seated, calm, dressed), but also empathize with her painful position as a witness prevented from intervening. She was the concrete manifestation of the "stability" in Todosijević's battle and its "disinfection." Todosijević placed Marcel Duchamp in the same role for having initiated the concept of the readymade in 1913 with the *Bicycle Wheel*, or when he famously signed a urinal R. Mutt in 1917. Indeed, Todosijević's indebtedness to Duchamp, and perhaps even his female double, Rose Sélavy, had become evident two years earlier when the artist exhibited *Marinela* in *Drangularium*, the first SKC exhibition (also curated by Blažević in 1972). Inspired by Arte Povera's emphasis on "found objects," *Marinela* represented just such an object, and she became a standard feature in most of Todosijević's early actions, including *Drinking Water*. Todosijević used her to fill the absence of women artists in the SKC exhibition space, and more broadly, in the history of art, at the same time as he objectified her. In this regard, Todosijević's battle with water begs a feminist examination.

In her book *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, published in 1980, the French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray began to examine how water, as an uncontrollable and immeasurable substance – like the silence of God – has always been understood through the phallic emphasis on solidity and containment driven by a fear of fluidity, i.e. the fear of women. "But (I) no longer wish to return into you," Irigaray wrote to Nietzsche in *Marine Lover*. "As soon as I am inside, you vomit me up again" (Irigaray 1991, p. 12). Irigaray's insights help point out that in his art action, Todosijević consumed and purged himself of water, signifying the patriarchal impossibility of understanding women's experiences. His decision to face death as art, and become God-like, speaks to Irigaray's exclamation to Nietzsche: "And what a struggle that impossible choice wages within you! To be or not to be only one, isn't that still your dilemma? And you have invented no grammar other than the one that creates the gods – that makes you god" (ibid., p. 66).

Todosijević embodied this "impossible choice" by evoking the female *as* witness, whose sensitivity mediates his violence, disinfects presumptions about art, and inspires the male artist to feminize himself, in the multiple forms of what Todosijević described on his wall text as "Josephine Beuys" (Joseph Beuys's *anima*),⁵ Marcel Duchamp (doubled in Rose Sélavy), and Todosijević's own feminine mirror image, *Marinela*. Is it any wonder then that exactly in the same period as Irigaray was writing *Marine Lover*, Todosijević orchestrated his most infamous performance series, in which the artist would receive no answer to his question (and the title of a long series of actions): *Was ist Kunst?* (1977–1978). In this powerful series, the artist incessantly whispered, grunted, screamed, begged, whined, and asked the question "Was ist Kunst?! (What is Art?!)" while looking at the impassive *Marinela* (his partner/double and representative of women). Despite his plea for an

answer, Marinela ignored Todosijević's screams and remained silent. It would take another woman to scream in response. Irigaray would reproach Nietzsche's silence, his apparent inability to hear and to answer, by asking:

Are you waiting for me to scream out so loudly in distress that the wall of your deafness is broken down? For me to call you out farther than the farthest recesses you frequent? Out of your circle? . . . Endlessly, you turn back to that enigmatic question, but you never go on, you leave it still in the dark: who is she? Who am I? How is that difference marked?

(Irigaray 1991, p. 12 and 67)

Such a text illuminates Todosijević's struggle, both with water and with the question of the identity of art. The battle was as much with himself as it was an encounter with the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas of art and its role in society, all played out within the public space of the SKC. Todosijević always decides – in art – to remain the patriarch, the villain, the provocateur, as if following Nietzsche's decree: "We have also to *be able* to stand *above* morality – and not just to stand with the anxious stiffness of someone who is afraid of slipping and falling at any moment, but also float and play above it!" (Nietzsche 2001, p. 105). Todosijević took just such risks, without the guilt that Nietzsche insists gets in the way of creative genius (*ibid.*). The SKC served as the very space where such provocation without guilt was possible, a second public sphere where an artist like Todosijević could display the violence, failures, and struggles of his masculinity, all the while using his body to elevate the intimate relationship with his partner and his art to the public realm.

Feminist interventions: Sanja Iveković and Vlasta Delimar

A better example of, and engagement with, Irigaray's question of just how that difference between men and women is marked was the subject of another artist, from Zagreb, a city with an even longer and more illustrious avant-garde tradition and certainly the most powerful feminist artist of the period, Sanja Iveković. Iveković vehemently resisted and systematically undermined patriarchal containment and exposed misogyny in politics, advertisement, history, art and visual culture, and brought even more forcefully to the forefront the tension between public and private space. Zagreb, like Belgrade, was an important centre for experimental art in Yugoslavia, and Iveković was a leading artist in a scene primarily dominated by men. In *Practice Makes a Master* (*Übung Macht den Meister*, 1982), the artist wore a little black business or cocktail dress, high heels, and a white plastic bag over her head. She repeatedly collapsed and got up again while one of Marilyn Monroe's songs from the movie *Bus Stop* played, along with "the jarring clamor of guns and other machines from video games, recorded by the artist in New York the previous year" (Iveković 2008, p. 134; Iveković 2009). As Tom Holert observed, Iveković became a "performing body – defaced, decapitated," but a body that "speaks, though deprived of a voice [that] incorporates the secret of a somewhat obscene . . . knowledge of violence directed against women" (2008, p. 27). As one without facial identity and

despite her effort to gain control over herself, Iveković performed as one unable to communicate, a silenced woman struggling to stand.

Battling with the gruelling mechanisms of subjugation while embodying them, Iveković could be said to have demonstrated a principle later articulated by Judith Butler when she noted that “the moment in which choice is impossible, the subject pursues . . . subordination as the promise of existence.” Such a “pursuit is not a choice, but neither is it necessity,” Butler continued, as “subjection exploits the desire for existence, where existence is always conferred from elsewhere; it marks a primary vulnerability to the Other in order to be” (1997, pp. 20–21). In continually getting up and falling, Iveković exposed one’s susceptibility to the vicious forces of violence. By enacting these conditions in-and-as art, Iveković broke through the constraints of Butler’s “impossible choice” and bore witness to women’s subjugation and forced conformity, as well as the self-negation that such psychic and bodily events impose from within.

Three years earlier, she performed her now infamous work *Triangle (Trokut)*. Seated on the balcony of her apartment during a visit to Zagreb by President Tito in 1979, Iveković deliberately provoked the attention of security personnel on top of the roofs surrounding her apartment, officers that she assumed would observe her with binoculars and alert the police that something was amiss on her balcony. Reading a book, sipping whiskey in an American T-shirt, and gesticulating as if masturbating, she incited the police to make her leave the balcony and stop her disgraceful behaviour. This intentional “act of disobedience,” as Branka Stipančić called it (1998a, p. 59), disclosed the Yugoslavian government’s security measures forbidding citizens from viewing the President from their windows or balconies. But Iveković inverted the gaze, confronting the watchdogs of the state with her own calculated measures of surveillance to expose their fear of a female threatening their control by ignoring the President, reading a book on Marxism, drinking whiskey in broad daylight, and pleasuring herself.⁶ It took less than eighteen minutes for the police to intervene and stop her private act in a public, highly politicized, and surveyed space.

She also featured issues of how public space invades private lives in her 60-minute multimedia performance *Between Us (Inter Nos)*, 1978.⁷ Iveković situated herself in a room separated from the audience where, facing a TV screen, her actions were recorded by a video camera pointed at her and the television. One at a time, visitors could enter another room in which a television transmitted the images from the video camera recording Iveković’s actions, thereby allowing each visitor to see her interaction with the simultaneous recording of their own facial expressions and body movements. Iveković caressed and kissed their televised faces on the screen while participants concurrently interacted with her video image. Similar to the intimate mechanics of a dance with a stranger, the artist and participants found themselves leading one another in an intimate, quasi-romantic and erotic interaction, fittingly accompanied by a recording of Claude Debussy’s “Clair de Lune,” a composition based on Paul Verlaine’s 1869 poem of the same name.

The physical separation of Iveković from the visitors, “speaks of isolation, of being closed in, and demonstrates an effort to break through,” according to Stipančić. It

also depends on the mediation of video, which served as both “a hindrance to and a channel of communication” (1998a, p. 59). The performance suggests how the limits of communication rely on structures of performance that hinge on “an interplay of subjectivities established and transmitted in body gestures, systems, and relations” (Stiles 1992, p. 96) mediated by objects. In other words, the performance was plagued by the absence of actual intimacy, rendering the geographic and psychic distance between two people palpable while also the sense of proximity equally nullified intimacy.

Strikingly, Iveković’s performance evoked relations that exceeded hetero-normative affection and intimacy. For during the performance, she kissed, touched and embraced another woman, who willingly participated in this intimate exchange of suggested bodily contact. *Inter Nos*, mediated by the screen and dependent on an imagined haptic encounter, took effect in a confined and simultaneously secured closeted space of each room, safe from public intervention. At the same time, it was also a space that was public by the nature of being an art event: the public had access to such exchanges of intimacy, and these experiences were then raised to the sphere of culture and art. Iveković’s action could be said to have initiated moments when, as Jill Dolan suggests, “audiences feel themselves allied with each other” and the public (2005, p. 2). Moreover, Iveković’s actions call to mind José Esteban Muñoz’s understanding of queer futurity in which alternative political and social relations can pose utopian possibilities for society and art (2009). As such, the private sphere of touch, interrupted by the screens of artist’s multi-medial mode of communication, incited the blurring of social and political barriers that so vigorously discipline interpersonal and public relations.

The Croatian performance artist Vlasta Delimar most explicitly broke the boundaries between the personal and the public by embodying and performing the illicit desires of women, and challenging the paradigms of normative sexuality while paradoxically resisting alliance with feminism. Like performance artist Tomislav Gotovac, Delimar is renowned in Croatia, but ignored internationally. Quoting Marina Gržinić’s identification of Eastern Europe as the “second world” (2011, p. 27), I would like to suggest that unlike Marina Abramović and Sanja Iveković, Delimar is the “second world’s” least desirable export to the West. Her work has been left out of most exhibitions on performance and other kinds of art from Eastern Europe and especially the Balkans, with the exception of Bojana Pejić’s exhibition *Gender Check* (2009). Delimar was also omitted from the art group IRWIN’s book *East Art Map* (2006) and Piotrowski left her out of *In the Shadow of Yalta* (2009). She does not appear in other important surveys of the region. Why? I propose that, similar to the reception of Carolee Schneemann, Delimar has been charged with producing pornographic, narcissistic, exhibitionist work that is too sexually explicit. Unlike Schneemann, Delimar never identified herself as a feminist. Indeed, she has been called a “miso-feminist,” especially because her art openly proclaims a desire and love for men, and therefore has often been interpreted as misogynist. Such negative appellations ignore or purposefully reject the unprecedented ways in which Delimar confronted female sexuality not only in Croatia but also in the region.

Ljiljana Kolečnik characterizes Delimar's work as "intuitive feminism" with "its specific and open sexual coloration . . . a unique phenomenon in our country that had no parallel even then, and there is none today" (1997, pp. 197–201). Reducing Delimar's artistic approach to "coloration," however, ironically typifies the ways in which her rigorous critique of sexuality is frequently not taken seriously. Delimar had no trepidation about the circulation of her images and the titillating possibility that she might be touched and played with through the metonym of her photographs. She even proclaimed in the title of one work, *I Love Dick* (*Vôlim Kurac*, 1982). Photographed with naked men holding their penises in her hands, Delimar frequently exhibited sexually explicit acts both in performance and two-dimensional works. Her unapologetic proclamation of loving the penis, sex, and pleasure ran counter to some feminist theoretical and political interventions that considered such imagery to belong to the objectification of women. However, drawing on much earlier works by Schneemann that opened the aesthetic door to women throughout the world to not only be the image but to make it, such as in Schneemann's ground-breaking photographic essay *Eye Body* (1963), her happening *Meat Joy* (1964) and her film *Fuses*, (1964–1967), Delimar freely displayed her heterosexual desire and pleasure to the world, images that resulted in fascination, accusations of impropriety, laughter in the art world, and exclusion from the histories of art.⁸

What many of those laughing missed was how she assaulted totalitarian, nationalist, and religious foundations in Yugoslavia. While feminists like political scientist Sabrina Petra Ramet could write in 1995 "Yugoslavia did not, of course, speak of overthrowing socialism," but instead emphasized "the need to overthrow patriarchy and of the failure of socialism to do so," (1995, p. 226) Delimar had already produced a vehement critique of patriarchy and the state in *Fuck Me* (*Jebite Me*) in 1981, when the artist invited everyone to penetrate her: men, women, the state, religion, socialism, feminists, anti-feminists, etc. For the verb *Jebite* indicates the plural of "fuck," while the golden crucifix of the Catholic Church pictured between her breasts, and her strategic placement of a miniature roundel of a church, emerging as a red phallic architectural object on top of her vagina, all point to the collusion of the church and state in the control of women's bodies. For Miško Šuvaković, Delimar's work represented a "break-through in the representation of Catholic 'sin' with all of its otherwise invisible ideological folds, promises, and prohibitions" (2003, p. 68).

Such criticism of the church took place within the context of Tito's so-called unified Yugoslavia, a state in which citizens were not allowed to celebrate their own national heritage openly, and to do so had already caused arrests by the 1970s, most famously that of Franjo Tuđman, who later became the leader of Croatian nationalism and the first president of a newly independent Croatia in 1992. National identity in the republics of the former Yugoslavia was deeply tied to religious convictions and constructed "narratives of suffering," as Ivan Vejvoda has described them (1996, p. 20). This was true especially following Tito's death in 1980, when uprisings in all the republics indicated a return to religious and ethnic divisions. In fact, in 1981, a massive rape controversy emerged in the Yugoslav media when

“Albanian men allegedly began vindictively raping Serbian women,” and the media framed the discussion around those rapes as “interethnic” rather than what Sabrina Petra Ramet calls “intersexual” events (1995, p. 229).⁹

In her political and psychic aesthetic intervention, Delimar called the hidden patriarchy of totalitarian, nationalist, socialist, and religious institutions alike to account for themselves. Covering her eyes in *Fuck Me* signified the ways in which the state and church blind(ed) women to their violent corporeal abuses. As Rebecca Schneider has argued about feminist performance, “Something very different is afoot when a work does not symbolically depict a subject of social degradation, but actually *is* that degradation, terrorizing the sacrosanct divide between symbolic and the literal” (1997, p. 28). Such a view requires consideration of whether or not Delimar embodied “social degradation.” Considering that the phrase “fuck me” also implies to cheat, betray, or victimize someone, an invitation to be “screwed,” meaning deceived and oppressed, summons the perpetrators to display themselves. Moreover, the artist’s frequent references to dicks, fucking, being fucked, smelling genitals, and blood protruding from vaginas, further evokes the experience of millions of women who have undergone the psychic death of rape, and the thousands that, because of their religious and ethnic backgrounds, would encounter such traumatic events during the Balkan wars of the 1990s. Thus does Delimar *symbolically* depict subjects of social degradation rather than *actually* degrade herself. Instead, she is the author of a metaphorical image of defilement – one that has public resonance, but which is metonymically conveyed through her private body.

Queering masculinities: Sven Stilinović

Homoeroticism and the reconfiguration of masculinity as critiques of the political system became most pronounced with Sven Stilinović, who embodied an alternate masculinity as a mode of rebellion. His artist colleague and friend, Vlado Martek, described Stilinović as a “solid anarchist (his well known maxim: either all or none),” the “boyfriend of many girls,” and a “particularly cool person” (1998, p. 10). Sven Stilinović’s pedigree as an anarchist derived in no small measure from the photographs he exhibited of himself accompanied with texts by such figures as the libertarian socialist and self-proclaimed anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, as well as by the Marquis de Sade and others like Karl Marx. In his 1980 *Untitled (Bound Figure)*, Stilinović is shown sitting on a chair bare-chested with his legs, hands, and neck bound with a rope and his mouth taped shut but staring straight at the camera. The caption for the photograph is a quote from Marx:

In the same way in which he produces his own production for his negation and for his punishment, and in which he produces his own product for the loss of a product which does not belong to him, he also produces the ownership of the one who does not produce, the ownership of the production and a product. In this way, work is alienated from the worker and at the same time appropriated by a stranger to whom this work does not belong.

(Milovac 2002, p. 88)¹⁰

Presenting himself in *Untitled (Bound Figure)* as the embodiment of Marx's text, the artist exhibits himself punished and silenced, yet also in the process of producing his own labour from which he is simultaneously alienated. His aesthetic labour does not belong to him and, in an ironic twist, he has appropriated it from Marx, who himself has been appropriated by the socialist state that punishes and silences its citizens. This is a picture of the proverbial Ouroboros, the snake that bites its own tail as a metaphor for self-reflexivity and/or eternal return. But in this case, the return is the endless submission to Marx's analysis of labour, ownership, the stranger as the state that appropriates the artist as its own. Stilinović's smile as he gazes into the camera is inscrutable. But his smile suggests that the artist's visual exegesis has not only appropriated Marx to reveal his theory as itself appropriated and abused, punished, and silenced by its authoritarian socialism, but also has triumphed in having understood and objectified this process, all the while being forced to submit to it while simultaneously transforming it – through his control of his aesthetic labour – into a vision of pride and self-regulation.

In her discussion of the work, Stipančić surmised: "The emphasis is on the autonomy of the individual as opposed to the state, as well as on resistance to all the forces within a person that deprive them of their right to arrange their life according to their own needs." Stipančić added that Stilinović "highlight[s] rebellion as a natural creative negation which abolishes all alienation and stresses the innate dignity of human beings and their wish to fully assert themselves in action" (1998b, pp. 103–104). Equating such self-castigating representations of a male artist with the defence of human dignity points to how decision as art deeply undermined the estrangement of some artists by attending to how they individually resisted their bodies being owned by the state. Such attention to corporeality by a few artists in Zagreb led them to investigate socially suppressed aspects of sex and gender, and artists like Sven Stilinović linked their work to desire manifest in a range of forbidden sexualities.

Stilinović's consistent attention to and emphasis on the interconnections among sex and violence, and their imbrications in the socialist hegemony determining even the ideological foundations of sexuality itself in the East, suggest a nascent visual discourse that anticipated queer politics, a Western term coined in the late 1980s to describe sexual politics that challenged or subverted hetero-normative conceptions of both male and female sexuality. In *Svengun (Svenpištolj, 1984–1986)*, Stilinović lies naked on a bed with a beautiful white rose in his hands. The artist's large flaccid penis rests on his leg, a phallic image magnified by a disproportionately large collaged photograph of a gun glued on top of the photograph that points not at the artist but at the photographs framed on the wall above him. By exposing himself as vulnerable, alone, languid, and feminized with a rose (Olympia or Odalisque-like), yet dominated by large phallic gun pointed at art (possibly his own art) hanging on the wall above his reclining body, and also by making himself available to the sexual imagination of both men and women, Stilinović not only disturbed but also threatened the naturalized image of the heroic, self-contained, invulnerable Balkan male.

As such, *Untitled (Bound Figure)* and *Svengun* undermined the hyper-masculinity associated with the Balkan region. Georg Schöllhammer associated such

male figures as fictions of the “unique ideal of masculinity” borrowed from “the unknown, imaginary ‘West’” which served as an “ideal anti-type,” comprised of “dandyism, social waywardness and rebellious, adolescent gestures” (Schöllhammer 2009, p. 140). Calling the West “unknown” is an exaggeration, as artists in Eastern Europe had access to and were familiar with the work and personae of such artists as Andy Warhol, and Stilinović’s self-representation was certainly informed by such artistic discourses. In addition, Schöllhammer’s emphasis on disobedience recalls the strong interest by both Eastern and Western leftist artists in the eroticized figures of such groups as the Baader-Meinhof (Red Army Faction) in Germany, whose sexual openness and radical politics added to their fame and public fascination. That allure persists today, evinced in Uli Edel’s blockbuster film, *The Baader Meinhof Complex* (2008), and Bruce LaBruce’s *Raspberry Reich* (2004), a pornographic and queer parody of the Red Army Faction. The beginning scene in LaBruce’s *Raspberry Reich*, for example, shows a male character in front of a huge Che Guevara poster, stroking and licking a long phallic gun. Sven Stilinović’s *Untitled (Bound Figure)* of 1980, as well as his *Svengun* of 1984–1986, anticipated the types of images in LaBruce’s film by some two decades. These works also paralleled the rise of the gay rights movement in Slovenia at the time, such as the founding of the non-governmental gay rights organization Magnus in 1984, as well as alternative artist and music groups like Laibach and Borghesia, which embraced the celebration of leather culture and other forms of non-normative or (what were considered) deviant sexual desires, and which could thrive within the second public sphere.

During this same period in the early to mid-1980s, Stilinović appeared naked on the cover of Zagreb’s newspaper *Studentski List* (*Student List*). What makes this photograph so volatile is that he is sitting with the artist Radomir Radovanović,¹¹ and resting his hand on Radovanović’s thigh. Radovanović, in turn, tenderly touches Stilinović’s shoulder. A red triangle strategically covers Stilinović’s penis, but the semiotic implications of the colour are all too clear: they signal the patriarchal authority of state socialism, writ large as homophobic, and, more dangerous for the artist, are suspended in his art. For the “boyfriend of many girls” keeps his eyes closed and is relaxed while the erect triangle points to another man, suggesting a homosexual relationship between them.¹²

This photograph was created, in part, to advertise the exhibition *Collective Act* (*Kolektivni Akt*), organized by Davor Matičević, an openly gay curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, who announced on the cover of *Studentski List*:

We are taught the stories and legacies of the ancient stones that nurtured a cult of the body. Because of this tradition today, tourists besiege Greece. However, at the present time, nothing of this sort seems interesting to the audience with regard to the relation of the (male) artist as – model (nude) – work; and two thousand years later, we still deal with the discovery of something that once was “normal.”

(Cover of *Studentski List*, 1981)



Figure 13.2 Cover of *Studentski List*, 1981.

Photo: Mijo Vesović, Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb, Archive.

This exhibition undermined the paucity in socialist art of representations of nude male bodies with genitals exposed, as well as the veritable taboo on representations of homosexuality.¹³ In the socialist context, images of men were characteristically portrayed as partisan fighters, communist officials, or stylized rigid caricatures of nude male figures in Greco-Roman art. Presenting the image of the eroticized interaction of two men on the cover of the newspaper was tantamount to advocating for a feminized, homoerotic, overt East European male archetype with its origins in the ancient art of Greece.

Conclusion

The works of Todosijević, Iveković, Delimar, and Stilinović surveyed here explicate the artists' political commitment to placing the private within the political realm of the public, pushing the intimate into the social by way of decision as art within the second public sphere. What then does "decision as art" mean for former Yugoslavia? And how does it square with performance? I would like to return Drakulić's observation that totalitarianism resulted in the "politicisation of citizens" in socialist Yugoslavia. As my analysis has shown, this process of politicisation, while violent and oppressive, also produced generations of artists who understood that making art is a political decision that bears real life consequences, anticipating much of institutional critique in contemporary art today, both in the East and in the West. The title of my essay, "Decision as Art: Performance in the Balkans," references the central leitmotiv of Rasa Todosijević's actions throughout the 1970s. Performance art bore a special affinity to various forms of political resistance in Eastern Europe, the incorporation of the body as art represented the "transformation of figurative representation into embodied presentation" (Stiles 1992, p. 91). Such embodiment was a political decision for the artists, who, under the constant spectre of the state, made informed and courageous decisions to question and deconstruct what art can and should be, and what we, as people, can do to resist the normative parameters of social relations, civic engagement, and political consciousness.

I have argued that such decisions *as* art resulted in critiques of totalitarian ideologies, socialist, democratic, and religious alike, all built on, and emblematic of, patriarchal constructions of being. While Todosijević's battle with water embodied the struggle of the East European male artist under totalitarianism, his performance also raised the question of another spectre: that of the East European woman who is silenced and expressionless. Iveković, on the other hand, struggled with and against political and artistic forms of patriarchy. She, along with artists like Vlasta Delimar, exposed the operative mechanisms of relationality and sexual mores under socialism, pushing for alternative models of engagement and sociality with their own bodies and actions. In his implied queerness, Stilinović's work undermined patriarchy by breaking through social taboos of Balkan masculinity, a decision informed by anarchist critiques of normative sexuality and its links to state oppression, as well as the appropriation of Marxist theories and artistic labour by the state.

Perhaps then these artists' *decisions* to make art, to take control of their lives, to offer up their private bodies as forms of interventions and resistance to disciplining

measures of nations and states, to view decision itself as a form of art that could generate an alternative space, one of decided political struggle and civil courage, attests to Foucault's proclamation in 1979: "It is always necessary to watch out for something, a little beneath history, that breaks with it, that agitates it; it is necessary to look, a little behind politics, for that which ought to limit it, unconditionally. After all, it is my work. I am neither the first nor the only one to be doing it. But I have chosen to do it" (1999, p. 134). In this essay, I hope to have joined such thinkers in "doing it," in looking "behind politics" for that which did, indeed, limit it: decision as art.

Notes

- 1 This quote was brought to my attention by Susan Buck-Morss (2002, p. 209).
- 2 Lutz Becker had screened his film "Art and Revolution" at the SKC in 1973, which drew a large audience and became an important subject of discussion. Two years later, Becker returned to make his film about the SKC-artist. See Lutz Becker (producer/director), *Kino Beleske (Film Notes)*, 16mm b&w, 45 mins. With: Zoran Popović (assistant); Dragomir Zupanc and Dunja Blažević (project leaders), 1975. The following people participated: Dunja Blažević, Dragomir Zupanc, Jasna Tijardović, Raša Todosijević, Biljana Tomić, Ješa Denegri, Goran Đorđević, Marina Abramović, Slavko Timotijević, Bojana Pejić, Neša Paripović, Goran Trbuljak, and Zoran Popović. A copy of this film can be viewed at the SKC archive in Belgrade.
- 3 The five letters in Greek that form the famous "*Ichthys*" stand for "*Iesous Christos Theou Yios Soter*, i.e., Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour." This definition is taken from "Catholic Encyclopedia" in *New Advent*, available at www.newadvent.org/cathen/06083a.htm (Accessed June 29, 2017).
- 4 Lóránd Hegyi discussed this phenomenon within the Central European context, noting: "The impracticability of expressing radical avant-garde strategies in the public sphere gave rise to the myth of the *avant-garde as victim* with the cult following of a secret and proscribed mysterious religion that could only survive in the *underground*" (1999, p. 32).
- 5 Joseph Beuys had sent Todosijević a letter which he signed "Josephine Beuys." Todosijević also distributed pamphlets in 1973 at the Edinburgh festival with "Josephine Beuys" written on them, supposedly in protest against the fame of Beuys.
- 6 Cf. British Marxist sociologist Bottomore (1964).
- 7 Produced by MultiMedia Centre (MultiMedia Centar), Zagreb, December 23, 1978. Iveković's description: "The installation consists of two rooms connected by two closed TV circuits without an audio link, and an entrance space where a direct transmission takes place for the audience. During the entire action the artist is shut in the first room, invisible to the audience. Visitors enter the second room one at a time. A private dialogue develops between the visitor and the artist, as the artist interacts with the visitor's screen image, provoking their reaction. Concurrently, the audience receives only participant's image" (Ilić and Rohmberg 2008, p. 100).
- 8 This is true for both Delimar and Schneemann. It took decades for Schneemann to be recognized, and she still has not had a retrospective.
- 9 By 1987, Serbia would pass a law that increased the 5-year penalty to 10 years for non-Serbs who had raped Serbian women.
- 10 Artwork reproduced with quote in Milovac 2002, p. 88. The quote comes from an unknown translation of Karl Marx, "Estranged Labour" from his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.
- 11 Although difficult to decipher given the position of the body, Janka Vukmir confirmed that the other artist on the cover is Radomir Radovanović. Conversation with the author, June 15, 2013.

- 12 Ivana Bago confirmed that at the time, Sven Stilinović was known for his attractiveness to both men and women and that there was much speculation about his sexual orientation. Bago in conversation with the author, June 14, 2013.
- 13 Klaus Theweleit's groundbreaking examination of male sexuality and its homosexual implications in fascism, *Männerphantasien* (1977) was translated as *Male Fantasies* into English in 1987 and published by the University of Minnesota Press.

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14 Communities of practice

Performing women in the second public sphere

Beáta Hock

Among approaches shaping recent art historiographies written on East-Central Europe's socialist period, two are of particular importance for discussing women artists' involvement in the "second public sphere" in general, and in performance art in particular. From the 1990s on, a great number of studies and publications have focused on events and actors within the unofficial or semi-official artistic scene. This attention has been a reaction to the fact that activities unfolding in the second public sphere had to go largely undocumented during state socialist times, and they were therefore missing from existing cultural narratives. Another trend that informed art history in the region in the 1990s was feminist cultural criticism coupled with the insights and methodologies of feminist art history. Exhibitions and publications came into being in an effort both to re-discover forgotten female figures and oeuvres from earlier decades and to create a discourse around contemporary women's art. These two approaches, however, did not really converge: studies on the counter-culture have been presenting a strongly male-dominated scene in which women did not seem to participate, and the new feminist critical narrative hardly helped to prove differently. This latter discourse concluded that the communist systems had not "managed to generate feminist art".¹ Art critics and curators taking this viewpoint tended to project a pre-existing (Western) interpretive framework onto the local context, and when it was found that only a handful of artworks can be roughly captured by this matrix, the respective pieces were somewhat awkwardly referred to as "pro-feminist", "proto-" or "latently feminist". The absence of women artists was especially conspicuous in the domain of performances, happenings and action art – at least within the Hungarian counter-cultural scene, which serves here as the primary source of my empirical material, but not as my exclusive pool of references. I will every now and then broaden the national frame into an Eastern European one when the conditions described also have bearing on socialist societies as one particular geopolitical entity. Furthermore, artists of the Western Feminist Art Movement will also feature prominently – not as a backdrop against which to provide a genealogy or give meaning to Hungarian female artists' work, however. My aim will rather be to re-visit the hierarchical East/West juxtaposition in order to relativize and perhaps entangle it: i wish to explore how and to what degree women's artistic strategies were nested in gender relations prevailing in their respective creative communities and societies at large.²

Performative genres in which Hungarian women appear to have had such low representation, however, did have an appeal both for counter-cultural artists in Eastern European societies and for women artists emerging within the North American Feminist Art Movement, albeit for different reasons. Within Eastern Europe's unofficial art scenes, these elusive art forms were not only popular because they were a new upcoming trend internationally but also because they fell outside the scope of prior approval and censorship procedures that object-based visual arts exhibitions at the time had to undergo in these countries with repressive cultural politics. Within the Western Feminist Art Movement, performances and actions in the public space were preferred forms of expression for multiple reasons. These genres were not yet established and venerated artistic forms and therefore, women artists did not have to insert themselves into a centuries-long established masculine tradition. Live performance gave them the opportunity to take direct authorship over representing the female body and to give voice to women's experiences. Acknowledging this sort of allure and functionality of performance art in various contexts East and West, and taking note of the low number of women-authored performances in the Hungarian art scene, should we comfortably assume that Hungarian women artists took little interest in performative genres? Or should we rather follow a different logic, one that recalls an important lesson learned from women's history, and go on to postulate that there might have been more women engaging with performative genres but their existence got somehow blurred in our art historical consciousness? This article will follow the second proposition and will set out to reveal the reasons behind this art historical oblivion. In so doing, i will not so much discuss those Hungarian protagonists – notably, Katalin Ladik or Orsolya (Orshi) Drozdik – whose names might be already known to readers familiar with performance art in Eastern Europe; limited discussion on their work is already available in English (Kürti 2017; Šuvaković et al. 2010; Timár and Bálványos 2004; Kovac 2000). While acknowledging their important contribution, on this occasion i will look for female performers at more unlikely locations.

The feminist avant-garde

Art historians researching the live art of the 1960–1970s are familiar with the dilemma of documentation, the complete or relative lack of visual material. Artists in these decades appear to have been fairly inconsistent in documenting their ephemeral actions (Hock 2001): some of them did, some of them did not and, especially in Eastern European shortage economies, only few individuals had the equipment to record moving images. According to the testimony of several artists, doing performances or happenings was somehow in the air but these activities were not yet necessarily identified by these terms and were not necessarily regarded as part of the artistic oeuvre worth recording. For those researching the artistic underground of socialist countries, the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio is a well-known and unavoidable reference. The Chapel Studio was a countryside location in Western Hungary where artist György Galántai brought together members of the broader semi-official cultural scene over the summers of 1970 to 1973. At

the time, geometric abstraction, minimalism, “hard edge”, and constructivism were widely practised tendencies of neo-avant-garde painting and sculpture. As Galántai himself pointed out, under conditions in which the freedom of speech has been curbed, these genres offered the freedom of non-speech, of not formulating messages, and hence a kind of bulwark against ideological demands and politicization. But when spending time at the Balatonboglár Studio, painters of the artistic underground stepped out of their imposed social isolation, as they found themselves in an intellectual context eager to communicate and comment on just *those* political conditions which abstraction left unaddressed (Hock 2000; Galántai and Klaniczay 2013, p. 26). This environment drove them towards performative genres: spontaneous happenings, actions, and Fluxus events. The Balatonboglár summer gatherings have thus been regarded as one origin of performance art in Hungary. Motifs of geometrical abstraction fused in these actions with elements of body art, as in the 1972 action *Body Imprints* (*Testnyomok*) by minimalist sculptor Gyula Gulyás. The artist was sitting around for a day with clothespins clipped on his torso and upper arm, and when the clothespins were removed, they left behind tiny square-shaped purple discolorations on his skin. In a durational performance the minimalist sculptor turned his own body into a three-dimensional geometric pattern.

Also preserved in the Balatonboglár files are spontaneous photo actions by Dóra Maurer, an artist devoted, throughout her career, to conceptual and structural thinking, geometric composition, colour qualities, and seriality. In the narratively titled photo action *Once we went* (*Egyszer elmentünk*, 1972), Maurer and a few fellow artists explored the space in and around the Chapel, creating a series of bodily relationships with the environment. In Maurer’s case, however, private actions captured on photographs were not necessarily developments emerging from dwelling in Balatonboglár; her “actions in nature” and her other photo actions following up how marks and traces are being left and erased are landmarks of her early artistic career (e.g., *Street Stone Action* [*Utakő akció*], 1971; *Printing till Exhaustion* [*Nyomatás kimerülésig*], 1979). The photo documentation of the privately executed action, or “pedotypia”, *V’s May First March on Artificial Ground* (*V.május 1-i felvonulása mesterséges talajon*, 1979) features a pair of female calves following a small circular track on a pre-arranged marching area one third of which is composed of crumpled pieces of paper covered with paint, while the rest is plain white paper. The feet engaging in the circular march carried with them paint onto the plain white surface, thus making a one-and-a-half-meter-wide coloured circle on the floor. While *V’s May First March . . .* is perhaps one of the best-known of Maurer’s photo-based works, little has been told about “V”, whose May Day parade we are witnessing. She happens to be the artist’s niece Vera, but in fact, there was another enigmatic Vera in Maurer’s life. In the 1960s, preceding this action, Maurer carried out a small number of Fluxus-type events with a fellow student of hers, Vera Vásárhelyi. But while the archives of the Budapest-based Artpool Art Research Center somehow preserved a typewritten list of these actions in the Maurer folder, the artist herself did not photographically capture them at the time, neither could she recall them when I interviewed her a couple of years ago.

Maurer’s photo actions often invited discussions on the artist’s predilection for conceptual thinking and mathematics, self-developed systems and algorithms. Her

“actions in nature”, on the contrary, have always been interpreted as works based on a cryptic combination of materials such as vegetation, fur, or animal parts, *still* containing “feminine”, sensual and erotic allusions. They allegedly predate a creative turn towards “masculinely monumental formalist post-hard edge painting” (Sturcz 2000, p. 42). It has also been suggested that this turn was a submission, on Maurer’s part, to the standards of a male professional world which at the time was fascinated by abstract forms, colour fields, structures and systems. One can certainly point to a great degree of essentialist fallacy in this evaluation, which automatically renders nature into the feminine domain and woman into the domain of nature.³ Nevertheless, the underlying argument in this assessment may be worth further consideration; women can make inroads into professional areas where men’s predominance is undeniable. As has been observed internationally, women artists and professionals have often opted for disregarding their “female self” (to quote a term often used) in order not to contradict the expectations of an allegedly gender-neutral work environment.

When viewed through the lens of Eastern European art critics, the North American Feminist Art Movement of the 1970s often comes across as an uncontested field in which the voicing and development of feminist concerns, thematic occupations and strategies of expression were unhindered – and this in contrast to the cultural space in socialist countries, where feminist concerns in art were met with indifference at best. But a closer look reveals that women artists within the North American Feminist Art Movement, too, had recourse to a set of different strategies when entering a male-dominated art world. California State University, Fresno and the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) on the West Coast of the United States were the first institutional homes to feminist art programs, initiated by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro in the early 1970s. Here artists embarked on a separatist and thus somewhat self-marginalizing route, inasmuch as they did not rush to comply with professional expectations and constraints shaping the mainstream art scene on the East Coast. Their often collaborative projects were realized in women-only environments and had a therapeutic character. So-called consciousness-raising groups formed an important part of their self-discovery and self-expression, and the female-centred environment allowed for the making and exhibiting of “work about their bodies, sexuality, and lives that was thought to be inappropriate for mainstream galleries and museums of the time” (Fallon 2014, p. 141). At the same time, their projects were explicitly political: they drew on women’s personal and social experiences with a commitment to disclose the social or political roots of seemingly personal problems, and to reveal cultural constructions of power, gender and sexuality.

While this kind of self-consciously personal and politicised practice also had its representatives on the East Coast, here many women artists with a feminist agenda worked side by side with, and were better integrated into, the New York avant-garde. This milieu also had a clearer orientation toward professional recognition, including commercial success and showing in galleries. This is not to say that several of them did not occasionally attend NYFAI, the New York Feminist Art Institute, an educational institution founded by a small collective of women artists in 1979, almost a decade after the inauguration of the feminist study programmes in California (Cercone 2011).⁴ But just as many seminal artists with links to feminism – Yoko

Ono, Mary Kelly, Barbara Kruger or Carolee Schneeman – were in cahoots with the “boys’ club” of the Fluxus group or the structuralist-conceptual clique around Robert Morris, Robert Smithson and the like – some of whom, by the way, regarded West Coast art and the San Francisco Bay Area counter-culture as a direct counterpoint to their structuralism.⁵ In retrospect, feminist artists themselves also express a distinction between the art worlds of the East and West Coasts. In describing their formative years in the 1970s, several artists underline practices that had spread from the West Coast; among others, the formation of a community to develop new discourses and the often collective creation of art works (Rosler 2004, pp. 106–108; Fields 2011). Performances were bent on breaking formal boundaries, deploying both metaphoric and direct speech while drawing on a multiplicity of elements. The language of expression in other genres, too, was pervaded by a degree of mythicism and essentialism: a female essence was to be traced in style and form, including goddess imagery. While, in contrast, within the New York scene, networks were larger, the activities more outward-oriented. The allure of preeminent art institutions and hence individual success was stronger; intellectual considerations operating with a set of competing theories took center stage, while the essentialist suggestions on the part of the California women upset many East Coast feminist artists. Elke Solomon, a teacher at NYFAI, recalled one of these debates, expressing regret that abstract painting was so dogmatically ousted from the feminist visual economy on grounds that “abstraction was seen as male” (Cercone 2011, p. 207). This remark will have a particular relevance for what follows below: my joint discussion of works by Dóra Maurer and Mary Kelly.

The circumstance that female and male artists shared the cultural space of the New York art world raises questions worth considering. Did this situation and the fact that many feminist artists were driven by artistic concerns similar to those of their colleagues also contributed to a wider and easier reception of gender-related subject matters and personalized modes of expression? Or did inclusion in the New York community rather require compliance with pre-existing standards of a male-dominated field which were, and remained, conducive to different sorts of creative expression than those preferred on the West Coast? Contemplating these questions and revealing eventual fault lines within the American art scene might be a useful conceptual move when writing about women artists’ status within the second public sphere, as it can help to pluralize the American scene and diminish its acquired function as a yardstick. When viewed by Eastern European (feminist) art historians, the North American Feminist Art Movement often comes across as seamless and self-contained, if not always already triumphant, against which the absence of a comparably unified artistic practice can be held up as anomaly: the anomaly of the communist systems.

Carolee Schneeman for instance, never quite felt included in the boys’ club; her role within the New York avant-garde remained ambiguous; indeed, she was officially excommunicated from the Fluxus group in the mid-1960s because her performances and other works were deemed too “sexual”, “messy”, and “political” – at a time and in a milieu where “depictions of body and sexuality . . . were

depersonalized, ironic, sterile . . . and curiously void of passion" (Kubitz 2002, pp. 16–17). Barbara Kruger addressed some of the same topics as West Coast feminist artists did, including abortion, the working of the beauty industry, and the broader processes of the social construction of gender, but Kruger delivered her message in a detached conceptual idiom in which text was the primary visual element. Her theoretically inclined work, along with Cindy Sherman's, was sanctioned and approved by the critical avant-garde.

American artist Mary Kelly created her renowned *Post-partum Document* (1973–76) while she was based in London and being actively involved both in the early women's movement and in a critique of conceptualism. *Post-partum Document* touched upon one of modernism's most symptomatic blind spots: the woman as artist and mother. In this work Kelly, too, chose a visual language lacking affect; the artist aimed to depict her subject matter (the mother/child relation) while resolutely avoiding fetishising it. Mother and child were never pictured together throughout the six-year-long series consisting of 139 pieces, except for a lateral image used as the frontispiece of the artist book emerging from the project, as invitation card for a later show or as illustration for press discussions of the *Document*. Instead, subjective observations about the son's development are conveyed in sober and distanced diagrams, sorted into six parts, and are furnished with matter-of-fact textual notes and embedded within theories of psychoanalysis. The way the *Document* has been displayed in exhibition situations accentuates this controlled attitude, giving priority to systemic thinking over the arousal of emotions. A set of identically sized small-format pieces are aligned in plain rows or grids on the white walls of the gallery or museum.

Quite obviously, in the works briefly introduced above, the impact of feminism did not so much point towards the development of new "female" forms of expressions or creative strategies; rather, they deployed the commonly used artistic idiom – here, the abstract, non-representational and detached styles of conceptualism, structuralism and serialism – but filled them with subject matter and narrative content. Their subject matter, however, hit modernist and structuralist principles of art making head-on, perhaps most especially in Kelly's case. The recent exhibition *The Feminist Avant-Garde of the 1970s* placed this sort of amalgamation of both avant-garde and specifically feminist concerns in a broader European and international perspective.⁶ This selection featured some of the best known members of the North American Feminist Art Movement alongside illustrious representatives of feminist art from Western European contexts from the UK and France through German-speaking and Western Mediterranean areas, as well as lesser-known artists from other European and non-European countries. This broadened perspective threw into sharp relief how ubiquitous and easily transferable certain artistic positions, subject matters, materials, particular gestures, or formal solutions were within the international avant-garde, feminist or otherwise.⁷ This wider horizon rendered tangible how even women artists who did not necessarily partake in a tight art world feminism might have easily picked out and appropriated some of the circulating motifs that they recognized as areas of female concern. The display also

helped to comprehend that women's movements and feminist ideas rarely emerge as isolated phenomena. Instead, they develop in relation to specific local or national contexts, while also interacting with other artistic movements and intellectual agendas. Seen in this light, the almost laboratory conditions under which feminist art in the West Coast developed appear fairly singular or, if you wish, *anomalous*. Put differently, the emergence of a coherent art world feminism is not a historical necessity or inevitable development to be expected to happen everywhere, as a chronicler of the Californian feminist programmes also implies: "So a combination of circumstances, both general and specific, created a favourable historical moment for the program" (Harper 2011, p. 88).⁸

These assertions have further bearing on the immediate topic of this essay in that they work toward the destabilization of the prevalent art historical narrative on the lack of feminist art practice in socialist Eastern Europe. This account assumes that the emergence of gender-critical artistic inquiries may only emerge from interactions with a grassroots social movement and in the presence of a unified art world discourse, and hence follows the argument that since there was no grassroots feminism in the 1970s in the Eastern Bloc, the art scene also lacked feminist inspirations and considerations.⁹ In such narrative framing, the frequent cases when "feminist" motifs surface in Eastern European women artists' works repeatedly evoke the question whether or not the particular artist consciously identified herself as feminist, or whether she might have known corresponding discourses and comparable works by "authorized" feminist artists as possible concrete sources of inspiration. A more diffuse conceptualisation of how feminist ideas and avant-garde artistic idioms travel in an intertextual cultural space renders these sorts of questions largely irrelevant.

Here the notion of intertextuality appears to be more helpful than tracking direct and unilinear influences or borrowings. Intertextuality as a mode of analysis captures how signs derive their meanings within and among "texts".¹⁰ While earlier examinations of the "dialogue" between literary products only tracked allusions to a set of essential cultural-religious texts (e.g., the Bible, heroic epics and works by classic authors), for postmodern theories of intertextuality all cultural texts belong to a complex network of other texts, where even the great "originals" cannot claim to have fixed meanings. This approach might be able to account for the phenomenon of borrowing elements from a cultural space shared by an indefinite number of individuals without re-affirming a model of primary and recipient cultures. Second, it points to how different environments may induce different artistic strategies for women: either a reliance on the shared values of a closed community or manoeuvring within a more imbricated field in which gendered content effectively disrupts the gender-neutral artistic paradigm. In what follows, I will attempt to place some Hungarian women artists' work in this framing.

The above reflections over *The Feminist Avant-garde* show also enable me to return to the work of Dóra Maurer and Mary Kelly and point to a certain affinity between their creative practices, even in the absence of thematic congruences. The resemblance between Kelly's diagrams from her iconic feminist project, *Post-partum Document*, and Dóra Maurer's serial works (*Actio Naturale*, 1970; *Quantity*

tables [*Mennyiségtáblák*], 1972) is primarily visual and rooted in their embracement of structuralist and conceptualist artistic idioms. As noted above, critics attributed gendered motives to Maurer's work on account of her use of natural materials, conveniently dismissing the fact that her approach to nature is hardly defined by a nurturing or nature-worshipping attitude. Rather, there is an observable tendency to systematise, often through counting, the organic disorder ruling over nature: objects found in nature are increasingly arranged in rectangular grids. In Maurer's later work, the engagement with measurements, mathematics and geometry, seriality and variability, remained and became her "trademark", while organic materials were forever replaced by lines, geometric forms, and colour fields. The artist's retrospective exhibition at the Ludwig Museum Budapest,¹¹ however, featured a seldom-discussed work from 1997, *Bird and Image Story* (*Madár- [és kép] történet*) which seems to have created a temporary rupture with her signature style. In the show, *Bird and Image Story* stood as a lonely narrative piece amidst a multitude of staunchly non-narrative works, telling the story of an injured young pigeon the artist once found and took home. The pigeon lived nineteen days with the artist, during which time it became an object of close observation, so typical of Maurer's creative praxis. Each of these days is recorded in a diary containing brief information about the weather, the bird's diet, his progress in inhabiting the space, and his coming-and-goings – until one day the bird no longer returned. Observations and the abrupt end are noted in a matter-of-fact tone but they nevertheless add up to a story the effect of which is – *moving*. As the American theorist Eve Meltzer argues

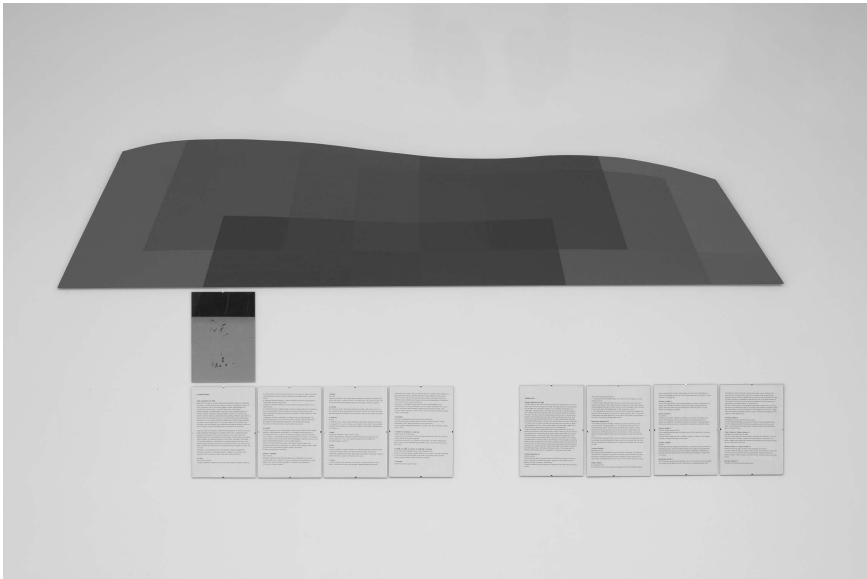


Figure 14.1 Dóra Maurer, *Bird and Image Story* (1997), 1999.

Photo: Miklós Sulyok. Courtesy: Dóra Maurer.

throughout her recent book *Systems We Have Loved: Conceptual Art, Affect, and the Antihumanist Turn*, the “disaffected, dry, and intellectually distant” tendencies of the antihumanist turn – postmodernism, structuralism, conceptual art, and the like – may repress and even foreclose the affective experience, yet the repressed finds its way to return. An affective charge nonetheless continues to be produced in many of those purposely impersonal and dehumanized artworks of the conceptualist type, defying the end of art, the “death” of the author and the subject, announced by a variety of theories (Meltzer 2013, pp. 23–24). Meltzer’s central example is Mary Kelly’s *Post-partum Document*, and I want to suggest that there is an affective charge similarly at work beneath the cool structuralism of Dóra Maurer’s *Bird and Image Story*: the two women artists deployed very similar artistic approaches to generate, beyond “the nightmare of the system” (ibid., p. 88), an affective dimension, even pleasure or delight, and to make an arid language vibrate with intensity.

Less-controlled sites of creation and communities of practice

Recent studies on individual countries in the East-Central European cultural space lead to the insight that, under the state socialist decades, various branches of the applied arts opened up less-controlled sites for independent artistic expression than the venues of fine arts proper. Official cultural policy denigrated the formalism and self-referentiality of abstract and neo-avant-garde art, and endorsed narrative-figurative styles, including socialist realism, for the latter’s capacity to communicate unambiguous messages to supposedly broader audiences. Formal and conceptual experimentation, however, could be accommodated within the field of the decorative and applied arts. As recent and ongoing studies demonstrate, in Czechoslovakia, glass art offered such a freer domain; in Poland, woodcuts as a preferred medium of poster art functioned in a similar way. Czech glass artists met resounding success at international expositions and thus gained the status of cultural ambassadors, while they also boasted actual market value. Thanks to these factors, artists working in this field were emancipated from aesthetic prescriptions imposed from above. Jeannine Harder’s research on the leading role Polish film posters assumed in the international domain of graphic art from the 1950s on similarly describes how Polish cultural politics embraced and adopted this success to its own diplomatic interests and how, in return, graphic artists enjoyed considerable creative freedom (Wasmuth 2010; Harder 2014). In Hungary between the late 1960s and mid-1980s, the community forming around textile art appears to have operated outside repressive guidelines.

Textile art has always been a women-dominated area and has been usually viewed as a kind of craft rather than “grand art”; its products are regarded as practical or decorative objects as opposed to distinctive works of art. Feminist art history and the feminist art movement attached new value to *l’art féminin*, including the domestic crafts of quilting, needlework, and album-making as conventional outlets for women’s creativity (Broude and Garrard 1982, pp. 13–14). This is not the kind

of function, however, that textile art fulfilled for women artists and for a larger group of progressive artists in state socialist Hungary. Regarding textile art as a branch of decorative arts where no counter-cultural activity might potentially take place, Hungarian authorities did not exercise tight control over the workshops and showrooms of textile art. The boundaries of the genre have expanded and textile art has gradually become highly conceptual and experimental, an independent carrier of artistic thought (Kovalovszky 1999, pp. 182–211). This sort of re-definition and renewal of textile art was at the same time an internationally observable development in the 1960s and 1970s.

The most important locations for practicing and showing textile art in Hungary was the Velem workshop. Velem is a village in Western Hungary; biannual textile artists' symposia took place there from the early 1970s till the mid-1980s. The strong impact of the experimental and conceptual trend was clearly indicated by the appearance of thematic exhibitions of textile art at the biannual Velem symposia and satellite exhibitions throughout these years at various exhibition venues of the country. At this point, even the material, textile itself, was multiply abstracted, as the very titles of these shows indicate: *Textile after textile* (*Textil a textil után*, 1978), *Textile without textile* (*Textil nélkül*, 1979), or *±Gobelin* (1980). The problems or ideas these artworks addressed belonged to the period's conceptual, constructivist and abstract-geometric tendencies rather than to applied arts proper. As the organizer of the *Textile after textile* show introduces some of these works, they were "mere skeletons of textile" or abstract formulae representing the idea of textile, while taking "an ascetic distance from the appealing qualities of the material itself" (Fitz 2002, pp. 27–43). A reviewer of the 1980/1981 workshop called its closing display a practically black-and-white exhibition, bereft of any aspiration to be visually pleasing (Wessely 1981). The kind of transformation the medium experienced has, I suggest, "desexualised", or rather desensualised, textile art.

This location – both experimental textile as art form and Velem as a physical space – can be beneficially brought into the scope of the present search for female performers at less obvious loci than the Budapest-centred Hungarian neo-avant-garde. As an increasing number of works at the Velem workshop took on a three-dimensional character, environment, action, and performance became genres closely associated with textile art. Péter Fitz points to the eminent role of actions interrogating the relation of textile and the natural environment, and he likens Csilla Kelecsényi's praxis to Lucio Fontana's *Spatial Concepts* (*Concetto spaziale*) and *Cuts* (*Tagli*, 1958–68) (Fitz 2002, pp. 37–38). Kelecsényi inflicted random cuts on threads, creating a similar gestural aesthetic and slashed texture. For her solo show later that year, the artist hardened the resulting jungle of fibre with tar and let harsh white light trickle through the punctures. Another spatial arrangement of the same artist served as the environment for a performance piece. Lujza Gecser's 1980 work *Mirror-space* (*Tükörtér*) was a participatory environment: a constantly changing labyrinth of spatial structures, connected to, and reflected in, each other, the visual, audio and tactile effects of which needed to be actively constituted by the visitor. In Fitz's description: "Distressingly lonely women-shaped shells – forms of rough

canvas or silk, hardened by enamel – stood in a raspingly clear-cut and obfuscatingly bare space defined by a deceptive array of transparent and opaque walls. This mirrorspace is a trap; everything seems to be strikingly public yet hopelessly concealed” (ibid.).¹²

As the above fervid depiction attests, some of the works occasionally established thematic links with the gender of their creators even though textile art in its “progressive” form was stripped of the qualities that usually relegate it to the sphere of *l’art féminine*. Further fairly well-known examples are Zsuzsa Szenes’s knitted sculptures and objects which are now increasingly being featured in group exhibitions on (Eastern European) (women’s) art. Interplays upon attitudes culturally attributed to women such as caring, gentle protection, pacifism or home-making certainly shine through in the masculinely connoted objects – such as a gasmask, a guard shack or a gun – that Szenes covers with, and creates from, knitting or wraps up in cloth (*That which used to be in daily use is now a piece of ornament* [Amikorábban használati tárgy volt, most dísz], 1975; *Against cold, in general* [Hideg ellen általában], 1978). But beside signaling a sort of refusal to the militancy of the Cold War era, they are also a response, or homeopathic treatment so to say, to the repulsion for narrative moments, so characteristic of the art of the mid-1970s. Through re-contextualising these objects, Szenes removed them from their usual web of connotations while also hiding the narrative content behind a conceptual gesture. In her sound performance *Voices of textile* (*Textilhangok*, 1978), Anikó Bajkó was tearing up various kinds of fabric and recorded the different sounds each made. In a photo performance entitled *I Am a Work of Art*, Judit Kele substituted her own naked body for the medium of her art form. Superimposed images of her body were positioned both vertically and horizontally in a loom, whereby this body itself became the thread running through the loom.

Due to its heightened conceptual affiliation, several male artists of the neo-avant-garde took part in textile art exhibitions, yet the ratio of women artists was much higher than in regular fine arts exhibitions, which only featured a few women participants if any. Partly because of this reversed gender imbalance within textile art, I tend to view the Velem workshop as a *community of practice*. Cognitive anthropologist Etienne Wenger, one of the originators of the concept, describes communities of practice as groups formed “by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise” (Wenger 1998, p. 45); a band of artists seeking new forms of expression is a typical example for such a community. The individual as an active participant in the practices of social communities constructs his/her identity through these communities.

Gender is also being produced and reproduced through membership in different communities of practice. The women working at the Velem workshop seem to have formed a creative community resembling the male-only circles of vanguard artists, but this time free from the constraints imposed by a masculine milieu. This, as a site of creation, is not unlike the influential concept that emerged out of the Feminist Art Movement in Los Angeles in the very early 1970s: the need for a space owned and operated by women to offset the intimidating presence of men who would possess more of an insider status. Such an environment is conducive to learning

how to speak out and assert one's ideas, while at the same time it is also more likely to accept and encourage a broader range of artistic ideas and a different sort of performativity than the art world at large (Fallon 2014, p. 38, 138). Thus, more important than the occasional and fairly vague gender-related thematic motifs in the art works, it is the community of practice women artists formed at the Velem workshop that matters most: in Velem female artists engaged with performance and action art, whereas the performance/happening/action art scene of the capital city in the 1970s and 1980s remained an almost exclusively male-dominated arena. It is from the perspective of membership, i propose, that the creative workshop of Velem is a relevant context when exploring the gender dynamics within the unofficial art scene.

Art historical oblivion

Although visual documentation is relatively scarce, the examples listed above, and further references in contemporaneous reviews, offer evidence of female artists' inroads into performance art and action art in Velem. This handful of actions and performances enacted at a non-central location will not triumphantly subvert our previous impression of the low numbers of women performance artists contributing to the cultural activities of the second public sphere in late-socialist Hungary. The resulting extended list of performing women, however, invites reflection on why we have had no art historical awareness of the existence and activities of these women?

The first reason is, of course, the painful lack of documentation and the ephemeral nature of many of these activities, that not even their authors considered, at the time, to be a meaningful part of their artistic oeuvre. Second, the counter-culture was indeed strongly male-dominated, if not sexist, and women might have found it challenging to assume authorship in a very directly present and live art form like performance within a boys' club. It seems to have been easier to realize in women-only environments, or with the term i used earlier: in women-only communities of practice. Performing on the margins, however, evidently led to a lower degree of visibility and recognition. In her recollections of the neo-avant-garde artistic circle, Orsolya Drozdik, who consciously and consequently turned to feminist topics in the late 1970s, intimates that the patriarchal perceptions of the allegedly "progressive" art world did not differ much from the patriarchal perceptions defining the general public or "official culture" (Drozdik 2006).

We also have to allow for the situation that an intellectual commitment to understand and challenge gendered social inequalities might not self-evidently translate into one's art practice, or will not structure one's entire oeuvre. The former appears to be the case with Dóra Maurer: while perusing her personal archive and interviewing her, it turned out that she actively disseminated feminist knowledge in both public and private settings. In my subsequent interviews with participants in the related events, several female art professionals reported about an internalized desire for, and a lived experience of, emancipation, which they explained to be

the result of official discourses advocating women's equality and the very real pro-women social provisions the socialist state introduced. While they did not refuse the problems addressed by feminist criticism, their own experience made it difficult for them to relate to the struggle of Western grassroots feminists, who were still only advocating for many of the changes they themselves already benefited from.¹³

Last but not least, another good way to alleviate art historical oblivion and generate new knowledge is going to institutional and personal archives – and *going back* to them again to revisit documents that may appear meaningless at first sight but might turn out to be revelatory if one is ready to track down their clues. I have demonstrated this with bringing back to light some of the lesser known art works by Dóra Maurer and her broader activity as art organizer. The actual (re-)discovery of Judit Kele and her small oeuvre further confirms the benefits of such inquisitiveness: an intriguing series of performative works were retrieved while browsing the scarce material in the relevant folders of the Artpool Art Research Center and the artist's personal archives. I am closing this essay with the brief presentation of this newly found body of work.

Judit Kele (b. 1944) graduated in 1976 in Textile Design at the Budapest Academy of Applied Arts. She left Hungary in 1980 and is today based in Paris. In about 1985, Kele stopped working as a visual artist and took to filmmaking, which partly explains why her scarce recorded works and performances have been lost for decades. Her leaving of Hungary appears to be the ultimate consequence of a series of works brought together under the title *I Am a Work of Art*. The series started with the photo action presented at the 1979 *Textile Without Textile* exhibition, briefly introduced above. Next year the piece *I Am a Work of Art* moved closer to performativity: in a durational performance, the artist expressly placed herself in the role of an artwork in the spaces of the Hungarian Museum of Fine Arts. Playing upon the ways women had been traditionally represented throughout art history, Kele composed herself into a perfect sight, a beautiful spectacle, and spent three days sitting/living at the empty place of a painting on loan; behind a cordon, in the company of a security guard and the rest of the artworks. The artist juxtaposed the mastery of an artwork on the one hand, and masterfully staged female beauty on the other, and through this gesture she inquired into the durability of the two kinds of value.

Next, Kele was invited to the Paris Biennial in 1980, where she planned to be auctioned off as an artwork. She figured that through selling herself as a work of art, she would learn what she was worth, and armed with that knowledge, she would be better able to take control of her life. The bidders at the auction were selected from among respondents to a matrimonial ad she had published in the French daily paper, *Libération*. As the ad stated, through the marriage she hoped to gain more freedom of movement:

Young and successful Eastern European female artist seeks gentleman for marriage. This marriage would enable her to freely move around and accompany her exhibitions to the West. In exchange accommodation in her home country and local art contacts are offered. Respond to the following address: – –. Meetings possible after July 10.¹⁴



Figure 14.2 Judit Kele, *I Am a Work of Art*, 1979–80, installation view at the exhibition *Agents and Provocateurs*, Institute of Contemporary Art Dunaújváros, Hungary, 2009.

Photo: Miklós Klotz.

Part of the replies Kele received offered help out of comradeship and, rather than requesting a photo of the future bride, inquiring about her looks, or any other personal details, the respondents communicated their own attitudes toward the particular status of an Eastern European woman in Cold War Europe. These ranged from idle curiosity to appended quotes from Marx or Hegel, to intriguing narratives of pro-leftist cultural activism in France. Selected respondents were then invited to bid to possess Kele: a work of art, at an auction. One bidder did purchase her for several years, and then insisted on having the “artwork” in his home. Kele thus had to be converted into an “international artwork”, which at the time was only possible through marriage. Kele divorced her Hungarian husband, and a year or so later followed her new “owner” to the French capital, and remained “in his possession” until 1983.¹⁵ I would suggest that this is a peculiarly gendered piece in the bold tradition of performance and body art in which the artist exposed not only her physical body but her entire existence to an unforeseeable process – perhaps a new category is required here, possibly called “social body art”.

Judit Kele’s *I Am a Work of Art* was reconstructed and first shown in the framework of the exhibition *Agents and Provocateurs* in 2009.¹⁶ Since this first presentation, the Ludwig Museum Budapest has purchased the work for its collection and thus made it publicly available for a broader audience. There is a growing interest

in research on Kele as a visual artist – to which, however, the concise nature of the oeuvre sets a regretful limit.

Notes

- 1 This wording and the qualifiers below were deployed in some of the texts accompanying the exhibition *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Arts of Eastern Europe* (first shown in MUMOK/ Museum Moderner Kunst, November 2009 – Januar 2010; Pejić 2009 and 2010); note how a normative comparison with a supposedly model course of events is implied in these formulations.
- 2 The use of the lowercase pronoun “i” signifies my reservations about a unique convention in the English language, wherein the first-person singular is capitalized and thusly prioritized. It comes across as a remarkably self-centered characteristic and as such may deserve to be denaturalized. In this sense my usage is not unlike the initially distracting but now widely accepted replacement of the generic “he” with gender-neutral pronouns. This usage continues T.R.O.Y.’s practice in his essay, “The new world disorder: a global network of direct democracy and community currency”, submitted for the Utopian World Championship 2001, organized by SOC, a Stockholm-based non-profit organization for artistic and social experiments. Available at: http://utopianwc.com/2001/troy_text.asp (Accessed June 29, 2017).
- 3 Maja Fowkes’s recent book, *The Green Bloc: Neo-avant-garde Art and Ecology under Socialism* (2015) helps to destabilize such essentializing tendencies as it offers ample examples of male artists’ versatile engagement with, and distinctive approaches to, the natural environment in the same period and context.
- 4 Some women artists, like Schapiro or Barbara Kruger, ended up over the years being doubly based in the San Francisco Bay area and New York.
- 5 Eve Meltzer discusses Morris’s 1969 video *East Coast/West Coast* from this perspective (2013, pp. 137–141).
- 6 The exhibition was based on material selected from the Viennese SAMMLUNG VERBUND and was on view in the Hamburger Kunsthalle, March – May 2015 and later (May – September 2017) in Vienna.
- 7 Just a random set of examples from the Hamburg/Viennese material and beyond: sensory organs incapacitated by band-aid are the main motif in photo series both by the (West-)German Renate Eisenegger (*Isolamento*, 1972) and Hungarian Gábor Attalai (*No Air [Levegő nélkül]*, 1971). Clothespegs, mentioned a few pages above in relation to a spontaneous body art action by Gyula Gulyás, also took centre stage in the Japanese Natsuyuki Nakanishi’s assemblages and public performances, in which they were applied on to the artist’s clothed body and face (*Clothespins Assert Agitating Action*, 1963).
- 8 As Harper intimates, “specific circumstances” included the fact that the head of the School of Visual Arts at CalArts happened to be the husband of feminist program initiator Miriam Schapiro.
- 9 Beside the collected essays referenced above, see Kivimaa (2001), and the contributions by Katalin Keserü or János Sturcz in Keserü 2000.
- 10 The term “text” here does not only denote verbal or written messages but any meaningful structure, cultural product, or set of representations composed of a combination of signs.
- 11 *Concise Oeuvre (Szűkített életmű)*, on view December 2008 – February 2009.
- 12 Hungarian textile art has received renewed attention only in the past few years. Primary research to retrieve visual documentation and verbal description of time-based works is now being undertaken as part of ongoing degree projects or research scholarships.
- 13 On the intricacies of how the socialist way toward gender equality might have affected women’s subjectivity and political consciousness, see Hock 2013.

- 14 Translation from the original French by BH.
- 15 A complex analysis of the *I Am a Work of Art* series from the perspective of cross-border mobility, also engaging the history of love, sex, marriage and female self-realization, is offered in my article "Moving across Europe and the use of sex-appeal" (Hock 2014).
- 16 *Agents and Provocateurs*, Institute of Contemporary Art – Dunaújváros, Hungary (October – November 2009) and Hartware MedienKunstVerein, Dortmund, Germany (May – June 2010); curated by Beáta Hock and Franciska Zólyom; cf. www.agentsand-provocateurs.net.

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15 Artistic collaborations of performing women in the GDR

Angelika Richter

West German scholars' myths and projections on the subcultural scenes of fine artists and writers belonging to the second public sphere,¹ particularly the ones of the Prenzlauer Berg in East Berlin, underwent a crucial break shortly after 1989 when it became publicly known that central figures of the scenes had been closely co-operating with the state security for years. It then was in question whether the second public sphere, alternatively named "subculture", "counter-culture" or "underground", was as autonomous as it represented itself and had been perceived up to that point.² Since then, research on the East German³ second public sphere has mainly focused on the analysis of its demarcation strategies from the culture of the first public sphere and from normative life concepts, but also on traditions of reaching back to the historic avant-garde (Muschter and Thomas 1992; Eckart 1993; Kaiser 2016). There are further studies on the particularities of methods, techniques and formal aesthetics of an art production like filmmaking with Super-8 film (Löser 2011) that was generated under completely different political and societal conditions than artistic articulation in the subcultural scenes of West Germany (Blume et al. 2002; Barron and Eckmann 2009). Most of these publications on the GDR's second public sphere show a remarkably asymmetrical proportion of represented female and male artists. Both the GDR's first and second public spheres in the socialist period are canonized as male, with only a few female protagonists posing as exceptional figures. This is not only a phenomenon of East Germany's art historiography but is characteristic of the records of East European art in general. The almost missing discourses on gender, identity, and sexuality within these projects can be perceived as directly related to this imbalance.⁴

The reception, including international publications of the last 25 years, also ensured that the male-dominated history of action and performance art in the GDR was predominantly passed on, whereby the actions by the artist groups Auto-perforationsartisten (Self-Perforation-Artists) and Clara Mosch have been the primary subjects (Blume 1996; Badovinac 1998; Rehberg 2004; Piotrowski 2009). The performative practice of women artists, however, was almost neglected. In the last years, feminist-inspired art scholars and curators realized projects that in a global gender-critical frame, counter-read the history of art reception in Eastern Europe and the GDR. They raised awareness of unknown female artists, gender relations in the arts, and the interdependence of art historiography and gender to further

question the mechanisms of art historical canonisation. The aim was to generate new narratives on women's position and their artistic practice to introduce their oeuvre to a broader public (Pejic 2009; Richter 2014; Hock 2013; Knaup and Stammer 2014; Bryzgel 2017).

My text aims to follow these discussions and will examine some examples of the body-based and social practice of women artists at the end of the 1970s and in the 1980s to underline their contribution to processual and performance art in the GDR. The outline will be set against the backdrop of the characteristic features of the East German second public sphere in relation to its role as well as relevance in action and performance art. My undertakings will extend the present discourses, and question whether the female performers have maintained close interconnections with each other that could have enabled them to experiment in the field of body and performance art and to find new forms of self-expression within male-dominated scenes. In what follows I will try to outline two main characteristics of art practices in the second public sphere: they were *intermedial* and *process-oriented*. These two qualities of event-based art practices inspired a lot of women artists and enabled them – with no regard to their primary expertise in photography, painting, or drawing – to collaborate and to develop together new artistic practices and aesthetics. I will focus on intermedia and process in order to generate an analytical perspective, which will help me to map some of the main scenes of female performance artists and their connections in the GDR.

Intermedia and process

The unifying moment of the protagonists of the Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig, Halle, Erfurt or Chemnitz (formerly Karl-Marx-Stadt) scenes was a common understanding of how to live and work in a self-created sphere of freedom outside artistic norms and lifestyles, though still situated within the system of state socialism and as part of its cultural order (Eckart 1993; Grunenberg 1993). The different groups/communities, including artists, authors, dancers, musicians and filmmakers, were not committed to one special artistic program. On the contrary, their common ground was the pluralism of artistic approaches and methods.

The name of the festival *Intermedia I: Sound images – Colour sound (Intermedia I: Klangbild – Farbklang, 1985)*, that included an exhibition, a series of performances, a program of experimental films, and concerts by punk bands, was (in the words of their initiators Christoph Tannert and Michael Kapinos) not programmatic, but reflected the artistic practice of the second public sphere, which showed crossovers of production forms, genres, styles and programs. The artistic methods and working procedures were intermedial: Painters, for instance, were collaborating with musicians and were themselves playing music while founding artists' bands. The fusion of corporeal movement, music and film, but also the intersection with punk, found numerous similar trends and parallels at that time in the Western part of Germany and West Berlin, such as the experimental artist group and punk band Deadly Doris (Die Tödliche Doris) or the punk band Collapsing New Buildings (Einstürzende Neubauten), of which East German protagonists were well-informed.

This artistic practice shows an analogy to the idea of intermedia, which was introduced by Dick Higgins in the Fluxus movement of the 1960s.⁵ Intermedia back then was understood not so much as a term for a movement but rather as an artistic attitude, a specific access to different materials including daily life objects (Büscher 1998). Alongside the non-hierarchical use of all available materials and techniques, the transgression of institutional and normative borders is another substantial component of intermedia. Against this background, I would put forward the hypothesis that non-conformist women artists from Eastern Germany, alongside their male colleagues, gave rise to performative art practices in bringing conventional art genres into a dialogue with each other and displaying the process of art-making in contrast to producing artefacts. In the absence of an art market and within the second public sphere, they could afford to focus on an experimental form of artistic presentations, beyond aesthetic genres and expectations.

I do fully agree with the statement that performances and body art expressed the artists' mistrust in stylistic norms, but I disagree with the idea that these actions questioned the images in general, panel painting in particular (Rehberg 2004). Most of the artists in the field of performance art continued to work as painters or graphic artists, and even more often included the production of images into their actions – only if it was for documentation purposes, they used image/movement recording devices. Nevertheless, the discovery and the accentuation of process itself is one essential feature of the artistic practice in the East German second public sphere. The body as a spontaneous medium of expression and as artistic territory was widely used. Process- and body-based artistic articulation was not entirely controllable, since it triggered unpredictable actions. As an ephemeral artistic form, an open-ended performance deprived the audience of a final reading. It could spontaneously be staged everywhere and disappear if needed. Action and performance art refused to correspond with the artistic conception of primarily (mis-)using art as an educational instrument carrying a political message. But they did also (involuntarily) imply a political meaning: carried out as liberating acts targeting artistic conventions, they showed strategies of irony, persiflage, masquerade and a critique of mimetic representation that had highly subversive potential.

Action and performance art was used by women and likewise by male artists, since these artistic territories allowed a broad experimental scope. Sometimes it was the only medium artists could work with when they were subject to an exhibition ban or when their primary medium of expression was prohibited, as in the case of painter Cornelia Schleime or filmmaker Lutz Dammbeck.

Attempts to enter into the first public sphere with performance art were continuously prevented or subsequently punished by executors of cultural politics right up until the mid-1980s. Only during the GDR's last year of existence did the Association of Fine Artists of the GDR develop a more tolerant way of dealing with transgressive forms of performance and action art. The first representative event that exhibited performance art – also as an equal art form alongside painting and sculpture – was authorized in 1989 under the title *Permanente Kunstkonferenz* (Permanent Art Conference) on the occasion of the so-called *Bezirkskunstaussstellung* (Regional Art Exhibition) in Berlin.

Social and gender patterns in the second public sphere

The second public sphere has been described as an “emergency association” (“Notgemeinschaft”, Kaiser and Petzold 1997), within which alliances were based on the chronic shortages in social freedom rather than on the principle of solidarity. The art historian Paul Kaiser pointed out that one of the significant characteristics of the second public sphere were the individualisation efforts of its protagonists, ending up in numerous loose collectives and circles of friends – guaranteeing enough involvement and detachment simultaneously – though only into a few steady-working artist groups with collaborating members over several years (2016). Without the reconnection to these communities and their backup, Kaiser emphasizes, artists would not have been able to pursue their self-ruled artistic practice and life.

In addition, the art scenes were described as patriarchal and male-dominated, marginalising alternative subject positions related not only to gender identity but also race and ethnicity and excluding women artists and writers when it came to their presence and visibility within the “institutions” of the second public sphere (Brandler 1991; Dahlke 1997; Ebert 2003; Richter 2017). Did women, for the development of an independent artistic language, need and create their own network structures and locations, as the art historian Susanne Altmann suggests (2009), and if so, what were their key features? The key features of performative expression and networking were, for instance, the direct use of one’s own (naked) body, and addressing gender issues. In performances the body reveals the political dimension of privacy and subverts traditional representations of “femininity”. Performance, as a processual art practice, introduces the body, gender and identity as performative and fluid, instead of fixed and universal entities. It allows women artists to present themselves as active and acting subjects.

Her space

One of the major venues for women artists’ independent art making was the farm of Erika Stürmer-Alex in the village of Lietzen, nearby Frankfurt/Oder, where at the beginning of the 1980s the artist was able to buy a derelict house. Stürmer-Alex studied painting and graphics at the art academy in Berlin-Weißensee in the late 1950s and at the beginning of the 1960s. She soon extended her work into collective actions. These, together with the formation of networks and after 1989 with the foundation of an association of women artists, are an essential part of her artistic practice. Stürmer-Alex was a teacher figure and role model for many women artists due to her non-conformist work and life. Primarily women artists of different generations, cultural producers, art historians and autodidacts of the second but also of the first public sphere visited her over the years and collaborated on collective and intermedia projects. Together they initiated plein-air, land-art-actions, performances, painting weeks, summer schools, spontaneous theatre, concerts, lectures, play readings and parties. Sculpture, painting and collages were the media in which Stürmer-Alex primarily worked to capture and transform movement, music, literary texts. Like that of many other artists, her practice of the early 1970s was open

to experiments with small actions reminiscent of theatre plays and costuming based on the East Berlin theatre scene's influence. Photographs on the action *Field Walking* (*Feldbegehung*, 1985) show her in a white mask and costume with a black, abstract pattern. She walks through a field, passing some temporarily constructed geometrical white sculptures. The action reflects the idea of moving structures from *arte informel* and questions the sculptural and spatial relations between the human figure and the medium of sculpture in terms of size and volume. It clearly is an artistic intervention in the landscape and refers to actions of land art as well.

In terms of the "expanded definition of art" (*erweiterter Kunstbegriff*) her social practice can be understood as "social sculpture" (*soziale Plastik*). The term, introduced by Joseph Beuys, stands for an infrastructure, an open and yet sheltered space – here one used by women artists and their non-conformist experiments. Although the farm was not an exclusive place for women only, it meant a rural refuge for female artists, who were normally exposed to the male hegemony of art scenes in cities like Berlin. Although Stürmer-Alex was a member of the Association of Fine Artists, she was under permanent surveillance by the state security who suspected that she intended to establish a center for "illegal" exhibitions (Müller-Stosch 2008). It demanded courage and fortitude to build up the farm, allowing artists such as Karla Woisnitza or the Artist-Group from Erfurt (*Erfurter Künstlerinnengruppe*) to live, work and perform at her place and to return regularly. When taking a broader look at the cultural landscape, Erika Stürmer-Alex's location is one of the very few production spaces owned and established by woman artists in the GDR's second public sphere, where performance art became an attractive form of expression and communication due to its process-based and intermedia qualities.

Collective images

Based on Stürmer-Alex's model of close female friendship, the artist Karla Woisnitza, a regular visitor in Lietzen and a former pupil of Erika Stürmer-Alex, brought together women artists and founded loose networks during her studies of set design at the art academy in Dresden. Woisnitza studied there from 1973 to 1979, and in her core curriculum with Günter Hornig, who was an inspiration to numerous performing artists like Erhard Monden, the Autoperforationsartisten, and Yana Milev. Woisnitza introduced her fellow students – and upcoming artists who later worked also in the field of performance – such as Christine Schlegel and Cornelia Schleime to Stürmer-Alex and her circles. Together with them she realized several collective events, such as the play reading of Carson McCuller's *Ballad of the Sad Café* (1976). Her *Face Painting Action* (*Gesichtsmalaktion*, 1978–79) was most probably inspired by the world of theatre Woisnitza worked in during her studies, and by the numerous artists' festivals of the second public sphere in the 1970s. Additionally, the legendary carnival parties of the art academy in Dresden offered many opportunities for wearing costumes and disguise, to invent new identities and characters. Within the frame of a performance, so to speak, Woisnitza was able to point to the performativity of gender and the processes of identity construction, which undermined the fiction of an essentially given persona. In

Face Painting Action Woisnitza got together with artists Marie-Luise Bauerschmidt, Sabine Gumnitz, Monika Hanske, Christine Schlegel, Cornelia Schleime, and Angela Schumann. Each artist individually applied paint to her face. The women photographically documented the process of painting as well as its final result. In her two-part photo collage Woisnitza later brings a selection of individual portraits together, showing the moment of the “before” and that of the “after”. The women’s mask-like face paintings consisting of abstract, geometrical shapes and stylised eyes modifying their facial features expressing threat, unpleasantness, laughter, and melancholia hint at the representation of culturally different images of women anchored in collective visual memory of the Occident. Expressionism, especially wooden sculptures, paintings, and prints representing non-European cultures created by the expressionist group Bridge (Brücke, 1905–1913), has a long tradition in the city of Dresden. The artists of *Face Painting Action* do not reproduce traditional images of an alleged “original” and “authentic” femininity. They instead create a multitude of rather disturbing images of women while reaching back to Expressionism and breaking with patriarchal visualizations of women. The two-faced photographs created by Woisnitza emphasize the processual dimension of the work: the production process in real time and the representation of women. Both the portraits of the individual artists arranged on the photo print suggest unsettling images of women, and refer to the collective and dialogic character of one of the first (recorded) women-only actions in East German art history. Both collaboration and a communicative attitude serve as proof for the creative and critical character of performing in the second public sphere.

Although these and further collaborative projects could have served as a ground for establishing a female artist group, the loose collective split up in the early 1980s. Their collaborations in their early professional years meant the first encounter with the body as an artistic material, and built the foundation of individual actions and performances in the following years. Woisnitza herself continued with solo performances like the *Mirror-Story* (*Spiegelgeschichte*, 1982) and with *Woman Is the Nigger* [sic] *of the World* (1986) that addressed issues such as gender difference and (again) the visual representation of the cultural “other”. The critical articulation of such issues was almost only possible within the semi-visible art scenes of a second public sphere. One of the main results of these performances lay in the dynamization of rigid images of the “self” (and the “other”), which we can retroactively identify as a prominent strategy of performance art in the GDR. This became especially obvious in the artistic experiments of performed pictures.

Performed pictures

Although Christine Schlegel primarily worked and works as a painter, having studied at the art academy in Dresden from 1973 to 1978, her oeuvre shows a strong influence of experimental theatre, music, dance and film – emphasizing the relevance of intermedia in event-based art production. Through her friend, the poet Michael Rom, Schlegel encountered and later joined one of the very few independent and experimental theatre groups in the GDR, the so-called



Figure 15.1a and b Karla Woisnitza, *Face Painting Action*, 1978–79, 2 Photo Collages, 40 x 30 cm (with Marie-Luise Bauerschmidt, Sabine Gumnitz, Monika Hanske, Christine Schlegel, Cornelia Schleime, Angela Schumann, Karla Woisnitza), private archive: Karla Woisnitza.

Courtesy: Karla Woisnitza.



Figure 15.1a and b (Continued)

SUM-Theater (1982–1984) at Helge Leiberg's studio in Dresden. A painter, musician and experimental artist himself, Leiberg worked with Super-8 film and with dancers, inviting the theatre's improvisation sessions to his large studio space. Schlegel attended the rehearsals and sketched the actor's absurd play and movements on paper while observing the scenery. She, in general, had no ambition to act on the stage and in front of a potential audience except for her first performance *Pergamotten* (1983) where she erected huge paper walls in the studio space and lit them up when acting from *behind* the semi-transparent sheets. This way, Schlegel generated a shadow play with her own body, but more importantly, she captured her dance movements and those of her partner, Angela Leiberg, simultaneously with a brush on the suspended paper sheets. At the end the painter and dancer tore up the paper sheets, before rolling it up and throwing it out of the window. The performance opens up the tension between the visibility and invisibility of the female body and underscores the processes of painting and movement. It does not allow any fixation on a still image, and for that reason even the film documentation of the performance shows in its last scene the fragmentation and floating of the

painted images in the air. From this point on in her actions Schlegel exchanged painting on canvas for the flux of moving film images projected onto the wall that also served as a background to the performers' movements. This turn towards the process as well as to intermedia is also deeply entangled with the second public sphere's features. The experiences with the SUM-Theater were her "most radical" (Schlegel). They can be seen as the source for the expansion of her painting into other media, leading her to an individual artistic language and setting the foundation for artistic collaboration that she once experienced with her female colleagues during her studies.

The collaboration and friendship of Christine Schlegel with the independent experimental dancer and pantomime Fine Kwiatkowski was a highly productive, if partly irregular, co-operation during the existence of the second public sphere and after. From 1984 to the 2000s Schlegel and Kwiatkowski worked together in several performances and films. In the experimental film *Hothouse* (*Treibhaus*, 1985) Schlegel focuses on the movements of Kwiatkowski only, shown in closed spaces and in nature. Schlegel presented her film at the above-mentioned Intermedia I festival with an interesting added feature: the film was projected with a live performance of Kwiatkowski in front of the projection, doubling her own image. For further performances Schlegel edited and processed film images to get scratched, painted over, alienated and destroyed, in the end looking like abstract forms and colours. With their joint performances, Schlegel and Kwiatkowski managed to fuse painting, film, dance, and often music, into an exceptional and independent art form. They defined each part of the joint intermedia productions as equal, opposing traditional gender patterns and hierarchies that were virulent in the artistic scenes of the second public sphere. Her multimedial performances were an attempt to dissolve the hierarchical relationship between *the* (male) painter and *the* (female) model, as was the case in the actions conducted by her male colleagues who were, within this traditional constellation of art production, reproducing stereotypical patterns of gender difference. My interpretation of Schlegel's and Kwiatkowski's performance-screening goes even further, detecting in them a counter-project to the myth of the male painter as a genius, as it was produced in photos and film documents of Jackson Pollock working on his drip paintings. Kwiatkowski as an androgynous apparition with shaved head wearing a white tricot and as an abstracted fictional rather non-feminine character, acted and created images within and against the backdrop of Schlegel's painted films. The dancer converted her body into moving paintings, while she carried out a transformation into image and performing figure simultaneously. Kwiatkowski was fragmented, swallowed, covered and highlighted by the film images. She also served as "surface" for the projection – and rejected visibility at the same time. Through the setting of the image and the stage the dancer's performances were a break from conventional scenery. This case also shows how artistically produced intermedia crossovers challenged the first public sphere's cultural norms. With her movement concept that she also practiced in other artistic collaborations, Kwiatkowski stayed outside the institutional dance culture of the GDR. She nowadays appears to be a pioneer of postmodern dance (Giersdorf 2014).⁶

Body experiences

The story of intermedia and process interwoven with the second public sphere continues with a strong connection that existed between the female protagonists of the Dresden and Erfurt art scenes. An example represents the collaboration of the painter Cornelia Schleime and the gallerist – later photographer, filmmaker and writer – Gabriele Stötzer from Erfurt. They shared several productive encounters, and were mutually inspiring, more so than we realize today. After Stötzer invited Schleime to Erfurt, between 1980 and 1982 both participated in Thuringia-based artists' plein-air, at an open-air workshop in Hüpstedt. Despite the fact that in 1981 the plein-air was prohibited by state security, both artists decided to stay. With this sanction the contrast between the first and the second public sphere becomes clear again, as does which position female artists took on in the constellation of opposing public spheres. Schleime performed a body-painting-action in Hüpstedt. Returning to the motif of the 1978 eye from the *Face Painting Action*, she now applied this to her entire body, and wrapped herself into textile, wire, and rope. All materials referred to the autocratic ties limiting artistic freedom of intermedia and process, as well as to the fixed representations of the female body as the object of the male gaze. In the first place Schleime's self-presentations expressed frustration directed towards the repressions of the authorities that she experienced anew through the ban of the plein-air.

Most of the photos of this action were taken by Stötzer. She further documented wrapping performances of Schleime like *Mouth Up, Eyes Shut* (*Mund auf, Augen zu*, 1982), which again accentuated physical and psychological restrictions. This emphasis was later intensified in her most successful Super-8 film *Under White Cloth* (*Unter weißen Tüchern*, 1983). The archaic images of wrapping, masking and mummification found in Schleime's oeuvre are also present in Gabriele Stötzer's, Heike Stephan's, or Else Gabriel's work, as well as in feminist interventions of women artists from Western Europe like Fina Miralles, Françoise Janicot, or Annegret Soltau. All can symbolize ideas of hiding and cocooning. But these symbols mostly stand for immobility, imprisonment and isolation of the female subject. All of them show subversive subjectivities that could only be performed in the second public sphere. In showing herself exposed in a violent manner, Schleime both addressed the vulnerable subjection to the governmental and male gaze and visualized moments of resistance.

Inspired by filmmaker and author Gino Hahnemann, around that time Schleime and Stötzer started to produce Super-8 films which became a fundamental part of their individual art. Even though the films are not documents of actions, they need to be mentioned in the context of performance since they show numerous references to the artists' painterly as well as body-based work. In Schleime's first film *In the Hourglass* (*In der Sanduhr*, 1982), a surreal collage of overpainted postcards and scenes set in a backyard, Stötzer acts a part. Together with another woman she sits at a table and plays cards – initially unmasked, later in disguise. The film documents one of the rare moments of Stötzer appearing in front of the camera in a production of another artist, instead of photographing and directing herself. Their collaboration

was open to other media, too. Schleime often came to Erfurt to sew her own clothes and do other textile work. Several photographs show Schleime and Stötzer together at Heike Stephan's flat – that served as her studio space – working on the sewing machine. This demonstrates the importance of co-working and co-living as major characteristics of existing in the second public sphere. With the emigration of Schleime to West Berlin in 1984 their fruitful, four-year-long collaboration ended abruptly. Schleime again took up painting, which up to the present is accompanied by costuming and masquerade in performative photographic works.⁷

Women together

As pointed out before, co-working as well as co-living were core elements of event-based, intermediated arts created by women artists. Gabriele Stötzer was one of the most radical and uncompromising women artists in the GDR. Accused of defamation of the state after collecting signatures for a letter of protest against the expatriation of the singer and songwriter Wolf Biermann,⁸ in 1977 she was imprisoned in the worst women's jail in the GDR, in Hoheneck. In prison Stötzer thoroughly examined her identity as a woman. There she encountered femininity as radical mass, power and passion. These experiences built the essential foundation of her collaboration with women and women artists in the 1980s, after Stötzer had entered Erfurt's artistic second public sphere. This was the moment when she took over the private Gallery in the Corridor (Galerie im Flur) which was shut down by the state security only one year later, when she planned to show works of a painter being labeled a dissident by the state. Together with different formations of women artists and autodidacts, Stötzer produced all together seventeen films and various photo series. Her book *Women Together (Frauen miteinander, 1982–1983)*, consisting of thirteen photo series, depict two women, Birgit Bronner and Nora Seifert, in individual actions or in interaction with each other and with different objects: a transparent glass sheet, an egg, a feather boa, a cigarette, gauze bandage and paint. The photographs are an impressive testimonial to the exploration of female corporeality and sexuality as an aesthetic counter-discourse to the manifestations of women's estrangement and domestication in visual representation at the time, especially in the painting and sculpture of the first public sphere. The title of the book is programmatic for Stötzer's artistic expression in activating women's solidarity, as in the close encounter of women she develops a symbolic and real counter-strategy against the isolation and marginalisation of women in the (art) scenes of the second public sphere. Although Stötzer stood primarily behind the film and photo camera, she consistently produced body art and performance pieces herself. Unaware of Yves Klein's anthropometric actions and paintings from the 1960s, in 1982 Stötzer had her colleague Heike Stephan photograph her during the action *Execution (Abwicklung)*. Whereas Klein occasionally used his own body, but worked primarily with female models as "living brushes", Stötzer in her twelve-part series leaves the imprints of her painted body on large paper sheets that are suspended from the wall and introduces a painting and an active female subject. In the second to the last photograph, she lies underneath her body print; in the last picture Stötzer

has disappeared while the picture of her body is still visible. The interplay between presence and absence on and in front of the canvas is an indication of the fact that the status of women in pictures is at one and the same time affirmed and negated. The female persona in action, or in process, is interchanged with the representation of the passive female nude and her allegorical characterization in the art of most male artists – in both the first and second public sphere of the GDR. Active criticism of performing women artists is also true for the next case.

Stötzer had a close creative partnership with the photographer and action artist Heike Stephan. Their exchange was highly productive, occasionally symbiotic in terms of materials and the way they interacted. In 1982 Stephan participated in the actions of Schleime and Stötzer in Hüpstedt. In a series of photographs by Stötzer, that later became the basis of her artist book *Spoken Songs (Gesprochene Lieder, 1982)* and that are part of her *Kink Book (Mackenbuch, 1985)*, both Stephan and Schleime joyfully celebrated their femininity, sexuality and being together. While they were showing themselves in lingerie and erotically charged poses seemingly dedicated to each other, their exuberance and laughter – that contrasts with the sombre self-stagings of Schleime at the same time and site – are, in my view, subversive messages against state oppression and paternalistic structures. Stephan's studio in Erfurt became the venue of her and Stötzer's numerous experiments with body art. Sewing, weaving, dyeing were not only the sources of income for both women but also part of their artistic practices. Textile was the major material that (especially) Stephan worked with in her body actions and performances: being a subversive and creative reference to the boundaries women were traditionally tied to. Stephan not only sewed the dress for one of the series of Stötzer's *Women Together*, but wrapped herself in silk and foil, besides applying soil to her body or squeezing her painted body against a transparent glass plate. It was especially the contrasting and almost metaphorical materiality of silk fabric that Stephan was interested in: it has a soft and pleasant quality when dry, but suffocating effects in its wet state.

Working together was like a mutual support, like having a non-transmitted, direct, understanding public around with whom to share common experiences and feelings.

*Avant femme*⁹

Stötzer became the major initiator and central figure of a collective of women artists and autodidacts. For the women of the Erfurter Künstlerinnengruppe (Erfurt's women artists group) self-organisation into a women's-only group primarily meant coming together and making art together, coping with the surrounding reality and "surviving intellectually" (Stötzer) in the semi-autonomous second public sphere. They made their lives the subject of their art, particularly because these women intended to oppose the regimentation and oppression of everyday life. They gathered to discover, to work with archetypical images of femininity, and to develop their individual visions. The women met weekly in their private houses, in cellars

and gardens, to talk, to produce collectively, to realize Super-8 films, to read and make music together. The collective allowed them to express their concerns about social reality that over the years turned into a variety of individual and collective self-expressions through the media of film and performance. How political and strictly counter-cultural their collective was, shows also the fact that some of the members in 1989 were the first to occupy a secret service headquarters in the GDR – the one in Erfurt. In their experimental actions, performances, and fashion shows, the Erfurter Künstlerinnengruppe discovered a body language that introduced radical counter-images to the predominant pattern of women's representation and emphasized the symbiotic interaction of female bodies. Spontaneous actions by the group were later replaced by roleplays and more staged performances and fashion shows questioning the idea of representation and collective performance. The clothes, costumes and objects for their actions and fashion shows were designed and created by the artists themselves. The women sounded out their dreams, different characters and identities; they also knew about the subversive power of humour, which is crystallized in their film *Humour-Comic (Komik-Komisch, 1988)*, in which they practice absurd movements and walks on the roofs of the city of Erfurt or in the streets of Berlin. They additionally highlighted their non-conformist appearance with fancy costumes.

Only in 1988 could the women's group leave its private studios for a venue outside of the second public sphere with an audience. It was invited to a church congress in Erfurt under the slogan *Women Interpret the Bible Differently (Frauen interpretieren die Bibel anders)*. The first time all of them acted in the "real" first public sphere was in 1989 at an exhibition of the two members Verena Kyselka and Monika Andres in Leipzig. After the fall of the wall the group continued its work until 1994, and founded its own infrastructure when they established an exhibition venue, the Art House Erfurt (Kunsthhaus Erfurt). Kyselka and Stötzer then had the chance to initiate an international women's performance festival in 1992 (Kyselka and Stötzer 1992).

Conclusion

The investigation has shown a wide range of professional partnerships of performing women artists that also brought together protagonists of different artistic scenes in, for instance, Dresden, Berlin or Erfurt. The women's intellectual and artistic exchange was complementary, had formative influences on each other's performance practice, and for some is still alive today. Through the protected setting of trust and friendship these women discovered together the body as an artistic medium and a material at the beginning of their professional careers. Their collaborations provided a solid framework for self-experiences as well as self-expression, gave leeway for their social realities as artists, women, mothers and wives. It was especially in their loose group formations that women artists felt encouraged to experience and develop their intermedia, performative and body-based practice, which was an unknown territory for them then. The horizon of intermedia and

process opened up new possibilities of border-crossings that was an essential feature of (co-)working in the second public sphere.

Their early collaborative projects, such as *Face Painting Action* or the mutual body actions in Hüpstedt, were decisive for their individual process- and body-based artwork in the years to come.

With the state's growing integration efforts and the steady opening of the East German second public sphere towards the first public sphere, action and performance art could more often be given a home in institutions of the first public sphere from the mid-1980s onwards. Women artists, particularly the younger generation, could more radically articulate their artistic vision, and were able to perform "the female subject" in a public sphere that was seemingly no longer split up. Based on the achievements of Erika Stürmer-Alex, Karla Woisnitza, Christine Schlegel and Fine Kwiatkowski, Cornelia Schleime, Heike Stephan, Gabriele Stötzer, and the Erfurter Künstlerinnengruppe, female performers born at the beginning of the 1960s, like Else Gabriel and Yana Milev, had an easier start into their artistic practice, which did not seem to be any longer dependent on women artists' networks. But the legacy of the artistic collaboration of performing women in the GDR within a process-based and intermedia setting reaches to the present day, because some of the artists are still working together or are providing space for other women artists engaged with performance and gender issues.

Notes

- 1 The notion of the "second public sphere" originated in state socialism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and was applied to the "counter-culture" of Hungary, the Czech Republic or Yugoslavia (Knoll 1999; Cseh-Varga 2018). The term "subculture" is more common in the East German art historical context. For my text I prefer "second public sphere" in order to avoid categorizations like "official" and "unofficial" culture. With this term, I describe the activities of cultural producers rather than the political, i.e. the peace, human rights and women's movement.
- 2 Apart from the extensive infiltration of the second public sphere by state security, it would not correspond with reality to talk about a clear demarcation between the first and the second public sphere. Each individual artist's biography shows different dynamics of resistance and assimilation. Many of the artists active in the second public sphere had studied at an art academy and were members of the Association of Fine Artists of the GDR (Verband Bildender Künstler der DDR). They legalized their status to not get stigmatized as underground artists.
- 3 East Germany and German Democratic Republic (GDR) are used synonymously, as well as West Germany and Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).
- 4 Only more recent retrospective exhibitions and their publications on regional scenes like *Zwischen Ausstieg und Aktion. Die Erfurter Subkultur der 1960er, 1970er und 1980er Jahre* at Kunsthalle Erfurt (Büchner and Knorr 2014) showed a more balanced focus on male as well as women artists or addressed gender issues like the catalogue *Gegenstimmen. Kunst in der DDR 1975–1989* (Blume and Tannert 2016).
- 5 Barbara Büscher opened up this analogy between intermedia art in East Germany and "Intermedia" in the 1960s in her article about the Intermedia I festival: www.performap.de/map2/geschichte/intermedia-ddr (Accessed June 29, 2017). One year before his festival, Christoph Tannert already dedicated a text with title *Intermedia. Efforts of a collective cultural production (Intermedia. Versuche kollektiver Kunstproduktion)* to the process-based

artistic practice of the second public sphere (Tannert 1984), but without linking it to Fluxus.

- 6 Christine Schlegel left the GDR in 1986. After the fall of the Berlin Wall both women artists could take up again their artistic dialogue. Among several other undertakings their ambitious performance and film project *Burned Earth with a whiff of liquid* (Rodarquillar. *Verbrannte Erde mit einem Hauch von Flüssigkeit*, 1994), which on 35mm film shows Kwiatkowski performing in a derelict gold mine of dictator Franco in Spain.
- 7 The most renowned work out of this artistic corpus is her photographic series *On further good collaboration* (*Bis auf weitere gute Zusammenarbeit*, 1993), revealing not only the operational characteristics and fears of the secret service in the GDR, but furthermore the construction of the enemy as well as how images of women are produced by male regimes of gaze.
- 8 After a concert tour through West Germany, Wolf Biermann, being banned from performances in the GDR, was refused return to the GDR and was then expatriated by the government. Since Biermann was a prominent personality and a role model for different generations in the second but also first public sphere, writers, poets, singers, actors, directors, fine artists, etc., articulated their protest in an open letter. Many artists from the second public sphere joined with their signature. Many of the signatories were then banned from their profession, persecuted by the state security, and were, like Gabriele Stötzer, imprisoned. The expatriation of Biermann is perceived as a political and cultural turning point: it led to extensive repression in the cultural field, especially of the protagonists of the second public sphere, which made many of them leave the country, but also inspired the politicisation of artists and cultural workers in the GDR (Blume and Tannert 2016).
- 9 This was one of the names the Erfurter Künstlerinnengruppe gave itself during the 1980s (Norman 2008). The group is also known under the name Exterra XX. Women belonging to the close circle of the group were: Monika Andres, Tely Büchner, Elke Carl, Monique Förster, Gabriele Göbel, Ina Heyner, Verena Kyselka, Bettina Neumann, Ingrid Plöttner, Gabriele Stötzer and Harriet Wollert.

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Part IV

Post-socialist performance



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16 Socialist performance replaced

Re-enactment as a critical strategy in contemporary East European art

Maja Fowkes and Reuben Fowkes

All attempts to restage works of neo-avant-garde performance art are confronted with the fact that the setting in which they were originally realised differed radically from that of today. Such differences go beyond widely remarked contradictions between the prevalent attitude of experimental artists of the 1960s and 1970s towards the unique status of performance as existing outside of institutional structures, and a more recent integration of ephemeral works of live art into public and private collections. The particularity of the remaking of East European performances derives rather from the fact that the originals lie on the other side of the historical fissure between the socialist past and the post-communist present. This has far-reaching implications for the interpretation of the content of performances, since for example the making of direct political allusions previously carried the risk of punitive retribution, while the choice of location for performative actions also had a particular meaning during socialism, since both the public and private realms had different connotations. The fall of communism also spelt the end for the distinctive existential territory of the second public sphere, disbanding the context in which live art had primarily been performed. To re-enact a performance from the period is also to engage with the contested legacies of socialism, from processing the experience of surviving under repressive conditions to exploring feelings of loss and nostalgia for a lifeworld that no longer exists.

The tendency of East European artists working in the post-communist period to investigate both the private and public spheres, often with a more openly provocative attitude than was practicable during socialism, has also affected the re-enactment of neo-avant-garde performances. Rejecting the ideological infiltration of cultural institutions, neo-avant-garde artists had inhabited from the 1960s a parallel universe of unofficial spaces, samizdat publications and alternative circuits that flourished in the interstices of the public and the private. Co-existing and overlapping with rather than directly contesting the dominance of the official artworld, the “second public sphere” both provided an outlet for radical artistic practices and restricted their social and political impact. The authorities sought not only to exert control over the public sphere but also over those areas of life that had been considered a separate private domain, out of reach of the state. Attempts by artists to withdraw from the oversight of the collective into the private sphere were therefore viewed with suspicion as a sign of the harbouring of un-socialist individualistic attitudes.

After the political changes, artists that had previously been discouraged from dwelling on private matters were suddenly able to freely exhibit works that revealed intimate details about their personal lives, while the availability of public space for artistic interventions completely changed the familiar coordinates of oppositional art from the socialist era. This had, for example, dramatic implications for the career of Ion Grigorescu, who until 1989 had been forced to confine his performance practice to the studio, with transgressive body art works such as *Male-Female* (*Masculin-Feminin*, 1976), carried out solely for the camera. A changed approach can be seen in his 2007 remake of another filmed performance, *Dialogue with President Ceaușescu* (*Dialog cu Președintele Ceaușescu*, 1978), in which the artist, using the technique of superimposition and wearing a mask, played both himself and the Romanian president engaged in an “impossible dialogue” about the failures of socialism. While the original was filmed in secrecy, in *Postmortem Dialogue with Ceaușescu* two figures hidden behind giant paper masks, representing the executed dictator and the artist, walk next to the megalomaniac architecture of the former House of the People broadcasting their conversation about the post-communist transition through megaphones. Speaking from beyond the grave, Ceaușescu defends his record and levels accusations against the iniquities of the capitalist system, a critique that working under post-communist conditions the artist is able to explicitly and publically voice (Kemp-Welch 2013; Debeusscher 2013).

The trend for the re-enactment of neo-avant-garde performances in Eastern Europe became especially pronounced in the new millennium, reflecting the stabilisation of art institutions that have increasingly turned their attention to the reassessment of art histories and the need to incorporate the work of artists from unofficial art scenes in both collections and revised local and global narratives. The question of re-enactment was therefore raised partly in relation to the difficulty in transposing the ephemeral and dematerialised works of the neo-avant-garde into a museum context in the light of both the paucity of documentation and the tendency to reduce the complexity of multifaceted performances to a single dimension arbitrarily frozen in iconic still images. At the same time the period after 2000 saw a revival of artistic interest in the communist past that went beyond the moralising attitude characteristic of the first post-communist decade, with new practices oriented more towards the desire to salvage, re-appropriate and re-activate the singularities of local histories that appeared to offer a counterpoint to cultural globalisation. The question of how to revive the ephemeral performances of the neo-avant-garde became a focus for those who in the wake of the memory turn sought a means to archive, comprehend and literally experience anew the art history of the socialist period. Rather than purely a matter of emotional nostalgia or retrospective fashion, the appeal of re-enacting socialist era performance lay also in the claim or hope that the forgotten radical practices of the past could be reactivated to provide methods or insights relevant to the art activist approaches of the present.

One frequent justification for the re-enactment of live art from the 1960s and 1970s is that even in those cases where photographic and video records do exist, they are never vivid enough to convey the immediacy and feel of the here and

now of the original events. It follows that only by recreating the conditions in which artist and audience share the same spatial and temporal coordinates is it possible to bring performances that have been flattened into neutral documentation back to life. Such methods were deployed, for example, in an attempt to reengage audiences with the social and artistic history of Poland of the sixties at the Contemporary Art Centre Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw, when in 2006 artist Paweł Althamer was asked to re-enact the *Zalesie Ball* (*Bal w Zalesiu*) of 1968. Originally organised in the house of art critic Anka Ptaszkowska and artist Edward Krasiński, the first extravagant gathering had been conceived as a *Farewell to Spring* (*Pożegnanie wiosny*) that offered a coded critique of the recent wave of anti-semitic and anti-intelligentsia witch hunts in Poland, while also drawing attention to the reality of food shortages behind the ideological facade of socialist abundance. In his freestyle remake Althamer cited Krasiński's 1968 outdoor installation of mannequins seated at a table with a bounty of sausages hanging from branches, which itself was an ironic restaging of Bruegel's painting *Land of Cockaigne* (1567), by positioning a trio of passed out dummies in leather jackets against a tree. He also added a campfire and an East German Trabant car to the setting, turning the memory of an elitist ball into an open party that also thematised the socialist past (Nader 2009).

In light of the strong stance taken by the early practitioners of performance art against attempts to contain, reify or convert free-flowing events into representations with the fixed status and exchange value of art objects, the recent wave of re-enactments has met with the accusation that the underlying motive is not art historical but financial. The very notion that performance art can be re-enacted runs against the grain of now classic definitions, such as given by art historian Peggy Phelan in a survey from the early 1990s, according to which "performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations" (1993, p. 146). Her further claim that performance "clogs the smooth machinery of reproductive representation necessary for the circulation of capital," (*ibid.*, p. 148) is hard to square with the recent raft of re-enactments, which point rather to the genre's capitulation to art market mechanisms. What appears to be at risk is performance art's specific claim to authenticity, which depends on the embrace of the singularity of the experience of live art, as exemplified by the axiom of Marina Abramović and Ulay in the 1970s: "no rehearsal, no repetition, no predicted end" (Abramović and Ulay 1980, p. 19). Re-enacted performances by contrast are more receptive to the demands of the art market, not least through the production of new representations that preserve the restaged live actions for perpetuity.

In considering the re-enactment of performances in contemporary art a distinction also needs to be made between experimental practices that challenged individual authorship by encouraging others to repeat performative actions and the unique remakes of today. It was in fact only after the repetition of performances that were designed as unlimited multiples had ended, such as events following a script or set of instructions exemplified by the Fluxus concerts that spread also across Eastern Europe in the period (Stegmann 2007), that their re-enactment could commence. By closing the cycle of free repetition, a process of historicisation, museumisation

and marketisation was set in motion, with the result that “the re-enactment emerges as yet another original with its own claims to authenticity that are inextricably linked to its reproduction” (Allen 2005, p. 195). However, it could also be remarked that the photographic and video documentation of earlier episodes of performance art, despite or perhaps even because of its often intermittent or fragmentary character, already possesses the aura of a unique artwork.

Addressing in particular the revival of East European neo-avant-garde performance culture, there are, though, strong reasons to identify radical potential in the return of live art. Within the specific context of the post-communist transition, re-enactments of socialist-era performances, often including critical or iconoclastic reinterpretations of older artists’ work, offer a position to critique both the direction of social and political transformation and the structural changes to local art-worlds. In her discussion of re-enactments, Amelia Jones notes that “the return to the live via complex modes of re-enactment, re-staging, reiteration,” holds out the possibility of social and political intervention by “activating fresh ways of thinking, making, being in the world” (2012, p. 14). Specifically addressing the East European context, art historian Tomasz Żaluski has singled out an “activist politics of inheritance” in the re-enactment trend, motivated by the desire to “rediscover and regain emancipatory impulses” from the past in order to “repurpose them within the context of contemporary struggles” (2016, n.p.).

In the typology of contemporary re-enactment of neo-avant-garde performances, the category of artists remaking their own work from the socialist period without additional collaborations appears to be the exception rather than the rule. Where they have done so, the new performance often functions as a sequel, updating their original concept to reflect on the contemporary social and political context. In that sense, when Sanja Iveković recreated her performance *Triangle (Trokut)* from 1979, a pioneering piece dealing with Tito’s Yugoslavia that featured the artist apparently masturbating on a balcony overlooking the leader’s cavalcade in full view of secret agents, she brought in new references to issues of gender and public space in contemporary Croatia (Noack 2013). Entitled *Triangle 2*, the re-performance took place in 2005 on the same balcony overlooking the hotel that Tito had passed by a quarter of a century ago, but which was now hosting 15 heads of state in Croatia for an EU summit (Džuverović 2013). Commenting on the distance between ordinary citizens and the political institutions of the new democracy, while alluding to official indifference towards artistic interventions in public space compared to the hypersensitive communist-era authorities, the artist attempts and fails to reach by telephone the Croatian Foreign Ministry, President, Parliament and local police station to inform them about her performance, before settling down to read about the summit in local newspapers.

A related category of re-enactment pertains to cases when an artist from the neo-avant-garde generation commissions or instructs other artists or actors to stand in for them as body doubles in the recreation of works. When in 2009 Iveković decided to remake *Practice Makes a Master (Übung Macht den Meister, 1982)*, first for a conference in Berlin, and then for her solo show “Urgent Matters” held both at BAK Utrecht and the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, she invited dancer Sonja

Pregrad to carry out the 18-minute performance (Knaup and Stammer 2009). First performed in Künstlerhaus Bethanien Berlin in 1982, this physically intensive work dealing with violence involved the artist standing on stage in a black evening dress with a white plastic bag over her head, before repeatedly falling to the ground then getting up again, to the sound of a Marilyn Monroe song followed by gunfire. This was arguably a case in which video documentation of the performance could not come close to reproducing the nausea provoked by a live viewing, while the performer was able to more authentically replicate the atmosphere of the original work. It also reflects a situation in which a performance piece consists of a set of instructions that can be carried out by an institution without the involvement of the artist, far removed from the original understanding of performance as a singular unrepeatable act. The work was re-enacted once again for Iveković's solo show at MoMA New York in 2012, at a further remove from the original context, but gaining new associations in light of discussions on the human rights abuses of the war on terror (MoMA 2012).

Pertinent questions around authorship, collaboration and inter-generational communication were raised over the course of a series of inconclusive attempts to re-enact performances by Ewa Partum at the Wyspa Institute of Art in Gdansk in 2006. In preparation for the solo show of the influential Polish neo-avant-garde artist, a re-enactment workshop was organised for students of fine art and art history, where tension arose between the aim of documenting and preserving her performances by reproducing them as accurately as possible, and the desire of participants to "treat their scores as something to remix and repurpose" (Zaluski 2016, n.p.). For example, when the group went with Partum to the beach to re-enact *Poem by Ewa* from 1971 that entailed letting paper alphabet letters float away on the waves, one of the participants tried to modify the instructions by reading out a poem with a megaphone, to the artist's disapproval. Disputes also arose over the issue of nudity, with the workshop participants not sharing the enthusiasm of the neo-avant-garde generation for the authenticity of the naked body. Another unsuccessful attempt to persuade Partum to adapt her performances in dialogue with the re-enactment workshop participants was in relation to *Change, My Problem Is a Problem of a Woman* (*Zmiana. Mój problem jest problemem kobiety*, 1979). While in the original performance Partum had half of her face transformed by a makeup artist into that of an old woman to draw attention to the misogynistic ageism of the artworld, a participant in the 2006 workshop wanted to edit shots of half of the artist's face and half of her daughter into a single film to show the physical process of aging.¹ What this discordant course of events underlines is the importance of proper preparation on the part of art institutions, as well as the need for a clear understanding of the aims and scope of the re-enactment of neo-avant-garde performances, especially when they involve collaboration with the original author.

In cases where neo-avant-garde performances have been re-enacted not by their authors but by other artists, there is little to prevent the re-enactor from making radical interventions in the original work, appropriating it for their own purposes. Marina Abramović has tendentiously explained her decision to remake the work of five other performance artists from the 1960s and 1970s, along with one of her

own, at the Guggenheim Museum in 2005 in terms of a pragmatic and conservationist response to the paucity of the surviving documentation, since “the only real way to document a performance art piece is to re-perform the piece itself” (Abramović 2014, p. 47). In practice, however, her re-enactments completely transformed the classic works by her peers, with the result that, “*Seven Easy Pieces* itself becomes constructed and viewed as a set of ‘original’ acts, pivoting around the name Abramović” (Jones 2012, p. 17). At the same time, her reworking of performances by Bruce Nauman, Vito Acconci, Valie Export, Gina Pane and Joseph Beuys was respectful rather than iconoclastic or demythologising, since as she explained in an interview, “in re-enacting other artists’ work you have to ask permission, you have to do your own interpretations, but there has to be a kind of seriousness about it, because there are so many artists out there making slapstick art” (Jones and Abramović 2012, p. 554). It should also be noted that the success of Abramović’s re-enactments at the Guggenheim cleared the path for a wave of East European neo-avant-garde remakes during the second half of the decade. Despite or perhaps because of her own experience of re-enacting the work of others, she rarely consents to others performing hers, making an exception for the digital remake by Eva and Franco Mattes of *Imponderabilia* (1977) in the non-competing virtual environment *Second Life* in 2007.²

The tendency of younger artists to use re-enactment to take a critical position towards the legacy of the neo-avant-garde can be observed in Hungarian duo Little Warsaw’s restaging of Tamás Szentjóbby’s landmark 1972 performance *Exclusion Exercise-Punishment – Preventive Autotherapy* (*Kizárás gyakorlat: Büntetésmegelőző autoterápia*) in 2005 (Fowkes 2014). Explaining their attitude to the older generation in an interview, Bálint Havas and András Gálik noted that “artists who lived and worked in the previous (Communist) era tend to mythologize their own activity”, while Little Warsaw “seek to demythologize and de-sacralize them, in other words, approach them in a more matter-of-fact way” (Spieker and Little Warsaw 2009, n.p.). Indeed, despite the fact that in many ways the remake was identical to the original, with Szentjóbby again sitting with his head under a bucket ready to answer questions whispered to him by viewers or chosen from a list on the wall, much of the pathos of issues of individual freedom, fate and history that the work had daringly exposed in an atmosphere of censorship and repression in the early 1970s was lost on post-communist audiences. Little Warsaw commented on the new situation by producing a short video entitled *Cyrill & Method – Re-enactment – Exclusion Exercise* showing two older men with long beards talking animatedly to each other and at the bucket on Szentjóbby’s head with a soundtrack of choral music bringing associations of the medieval missionaries.

The addition of new layers of meaning and commentary to neo-avant-garde performances is exemplified by the multiple re-enactments of OHO’s iconic work *Mount Triglav* (1968). In the first remake in 2004, IRWIN restaged the identical scene in the same location but as a full colour digital print, with the heads of IRWIN rather than OHO artists sticking out of a cloth mountain in a snowy Ljubljana park representing the “three heads” of Slovenia’s most famous peak. In contrast to the strategy of postmodern over-identification with totalitarian symbols for

which the Neue Slovenische Kunst movement is best known, their *Mount Triglav: Like to Like*, one of a series of six re-enactments of OHO performances, is a straight homage, or perhaps act of self-insertion into the national canon of modernist art. Three years later, a Slovenian, Italian and Croatian artist marked the official change of each of their names to that of the then Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša with a more disruptive re-enactment of the same work (Tomić 2012). Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša's *Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav* (2007) was carried out not in urban space but instead against the backdrop of the actual mountain, redirecting attention away from the circulation of cult images towards the existential, spiritual and geological implications of OHO's original performance, since "what emerges at the end, under all the layers, is not a meaningless fetish object, but the hard rock of the mountain" (Quaranta et al. 2014, p. 91). Miško Šuvaković has also located the specificity of their remake in its "tragic" reflection on the fact that contemporary artists are no longer "ludist actors (OHO) or professional creators of high art (IRWIN), but 'subjects' in performative life praxis" (2007, n.p.) in the frame of the biopolitical apparatuses of transitional countries.

There are instances in which the transfer of neo-avant-garde works from the 1970s into a contemporary context through their re-enactment exposes not the



Figure 16.1 Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša, *Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav*, 2007.

Photo: Gaja Repe. Courtesy: Aksioma – Institute for Contemporary Art, Ljubljana.

gaping chasm between the present and the past, but rather the existence of underlying elements of continuity between the socialist and post-communist contexts. Karol Radziszewski's re-performance in 2014 of Natalia LL's work *Dreaming* (*Śnienie*, 1979) grew out of a longer collaboration that included the film *America Is Not Ready For This* (2011), in which the younger artist retraced Natalia LL's journey to New York in 1977, conducting interviews with artists and gallerists she met to probe issues of feminist art, queer consciousness and conceptual art, as well as to investigate the obstacles facing East European artists in launching their careers on the international art scene both during the Cold War and in the post-communist period. It was the parallels rather than the differences between their experiences as artists that Radziszewski also highlighted in his re-enactment, in which he lay apparently fast asleep in an exact copy of the glass capsule used by Natalia LL in her performance in Permafo Gallery in Wrocław, wearing the same outfit of a white robe and colourful socks, with a garland of flowers on his head (Viola 2015). While questions of femininity and gender are transfigured in his faithful restaging into expressions of queer identity, it is the trans-historical experience of dreaming and the shared sense of human vulnerability of the original that are reiterated in this re-performance based on sentiments of inter-generational trust and solidarity.

Focusing in particular on the aspect of public space and the changes it has undergone since the fall of communism, Barbora Klímová's project *REPLACED – BRNO – 2006* entailed re-enacting five performances originally carried out by artists Karel Miler, Jiří Kovanda, Vladimír Havlík, Petr Štembera and Jan Mlčoch in the 1970s and 1980s. An exchange of ideas with the older generation was also an essential element of her project, with the artist conducting interviews with them touching on politics, urbanism, as well as changing social conventions in the use of public space. Re-enacting ephemeral gestures that during the socialist era had elicited a strong reaction, most notably from the authorities, was a means for Klímová to comment on post-communist "apathy that is a result of the over-saturation of urban space with commercial stimuli" (Budak 2009, n.p.). Symptomatically, her remake of Karel Miler's performance *Either/ Or* from 1972, that entailed the artist lying face down on and next to the horizontal line of the kerbside, was restaged by Klímová in various city locations in order to test the reactions of her fellow citizens. It turned out that seeing a body lying on the street was automatically associated with the new social problem of homelessness and therefore ignored by a hardened post-communist populace (Pospiszyl 2006). Similarly, when replacing Vladimír Havlík's *Experimental Flower* from 1981, which delicately intervened in public space by planting a flower between cobblestones, symbolically addressing the fragility of creative life under socialism, Klímová chose to plant a flower in front of a bank, drawing attention to the vulnerability of individuals in the world of financial markets and pointing to the extinguishing of opportunities for spontaneous free expression in the privatised urban spaces of post-socialist cities.

The Rafani group also remade a performance by Jan Mlčoch about his hesitation on whether to join the Charter '77 protest movement, which involved the artist lying on his back and spitting in the air for thirty minutes, before sitting at a table and writing his name very slowly on a sheet of white paper, with the performance

eventually ending without him signing. In their 2004 re-enactment of *Bianco* (Bianco, 1977) they carried out the same sequence of actions, with the difference that the three artists were dressed in identical uniforms and placed the emphasis on the act of collective spitting rather than the solitary dilemma of political commitment under communism (Morganová 2014). When Daniela Baráčková re-enacted Jiří Kovanda's *Untitled (Bez názvu)* action from 1977, for which the artist spread his arms on Wenceslas Square in a gesture of openness that contrasted with the repressive atmosphere of normalisation Czechoslovakia, she decided to transpose it to Times Square in New York. Restaged in these completely different geopolitical and historical circumstances, the performance offered a renewed critique of biopolitical regimes of state power and the post-9/11 paranoia about unauthorised public acts, as the documentation shows her harmless action interrupted after three minutes by police officers.

The vogue in the 2000s for remaking neo-avant-garde performances was also manifest in curator-led projects, such as *The Orange Dog and Other Tales (Even Better Than the Real Thing)* organised by curatorial collective Kontejner in Zagreb in 2009. Conceived as an "(art) history theatre play" in which the work of art historians is "turned into a drama, instead of a scientific paper" (Kontejner 2009, n.p.), the project involved the re-enactment of 13 pivotal moments in Croatian performance art by actors. Bringing to mind Claire Bishop's strictures about the ethical pitfalls of "delegated performance" (Bishop 2012, pp. 91–112), the press release also sensationally indicated that "the performances by the actors are not simulated; they are 'copies', repetitions, but all 'cuts' in the actors' bodies or the performing space 'truly' happen (again)" (Kontejner 2009, n.p.). Unusually, the actors involved in re-enacting individual pieces are not named on the photographic documentation, although they were clearly chosen on the basis of the facial or bodily similarity to the artists at the time of the original performances. For example, the photographs of the re-enactment of Tomislav Gotovac's iconic *Lying Naked on the Pavement, Kissing the Pavement (Zagreb, I Love You!)* (*Ležanje Gol Na Asfaltu, Ljubljenje asfalta [Zagreb, Volim Te!]*, 1981) show a bald naked man of very similar build, while the actress riding naked on a white horse in the remake of Vlasta Delimar's *Lady Godiva* had her dark hair styled identically. The distinction theorist Sven Lütticken makes between re-enactments that "take the form of very free variations," and those that "follow appropriation art in attempting to generate difference from extremely literal repetitions," (Lütticken 2005, pp. 57–59) is of relevance here, since despite the efforts at precise recreation, productive differences emerge from the temporal disjuncture.

Re-enactments have been used most provocatively as a tool to re-politicise debates over democracy, social justice and access to the public sphere in post-communist societies. The Kassaboys group in Košice collaborated in 2013 with Lenka Kukurová to re-enact Stano Filko and Alex Mlynářčik's conceptual happening *HAPPSOC* from 1965 in order to provoke critical discussion of the realisation of the multimillion euro project Košice – Culture Capital 2013 (Čarný et al. 2014). In Łódź in 2012 Ewa Partum's *Legality of Space (Legalność Przestrzeni)* was re-enacted not as a static copy of her traffic signs with absurd prohibitions from 1971, but as an activist initiative to reactivate its utopian attitude to re-imagining urban life in the

new circumstances of post-communist Poland (Zaluski 2016). The radical potential of re-enactment for envisioning alternative scenarios was pinpointed by artist Irina Bucan, who noted that “when you know the ending, you’re really focused on how something happened and what possibilities were not taken advantage of” (Picard and Botea 2011, n.p.). Her own work *Auditions for a Revolution* (2006) involved young people in Chicago auditioning for roles in a re-enactment of the Romanian revolution of 1989, which was notoriously the first to be televised. Juxtaposing documentary footage from Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica’s experimental film *Video-gram of a Revolution* (1992) with attempts by non-Romanian speakers to act out the same historical scenes, this work raises questions about the nature of protest, the gap between the theatricality of political behaviour and conformism of everyday life, as well as the possibility of imagining further revolutionary transformations of society.

Although taking the form of an extensive series of re-enactments, the project in the Romanian Pavilion at the Venice Biennial of 2013 went far beyond the aim to preserve, archive or reanimate historical artworks, laying out the vast ambition to sum up and appropriate the whole history of the Biennial, while drawing attention to social and geographical inequalities. Alexandra Pirici and Manuel Pelmuș’s *An Immaterial Retrospective of the Venice Biennale* reduced more than a century of

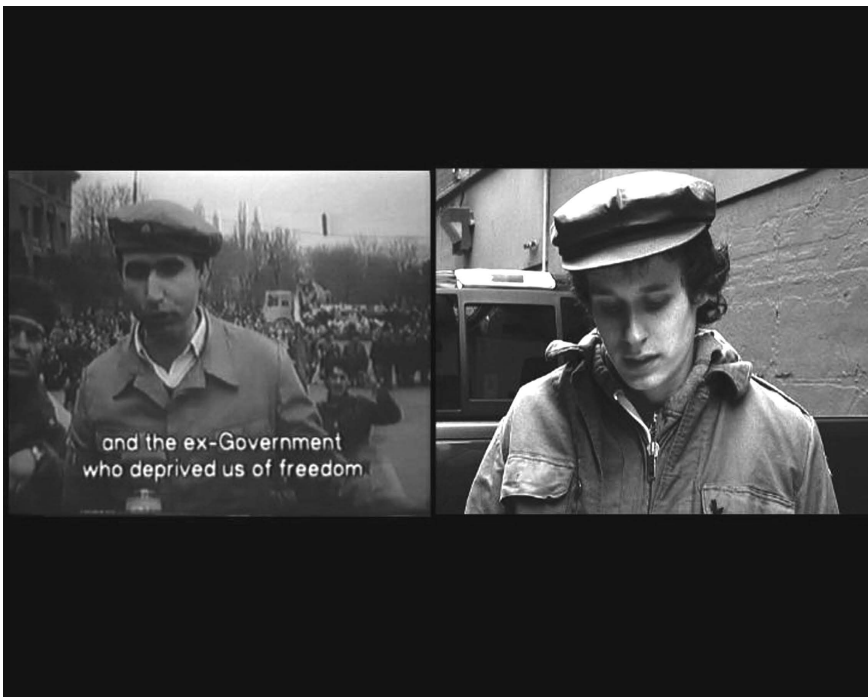


Figure 16.2 Irina Bucan, *Auditions for a Revolution*, 2006.

Courtesy: Irina Bucan.

“bronze and oil on canvas, marble or steel, smoke and screens, hyperbolic paintings, majestic sculptures, delicate objects, immersive installations or conceptual art, performance, live art or happenings” (Voinea 2013, n.p.), to the economical movements, gestures and phrases of a group of performers. Amongst the works of East European artists re-enacted in the pavilion was a socialist realist *Welder* statue from the 1950s, Dan Perjovschi’s *rEST* drawings made on the floor of the Romanian Pavilion when he represented the country in 1999, Nedko Solakov’s *Enactment of A Life (Black et White)*, and Anri Sala’s short sad film *Uomo Duomo* of a homeless man asleep in a church. As the curator Raluca Voinea pointed out, again highlighting the radical potential of re-enactment, the exhibition did not require any expensive equipment, transport or customs paperwork to be realised, but depended instead on the precarious labour of the Romanian performers working in Venice “for a survival salary plus the plane ride and a bed” (Voinea 2013, n.p.) As often happens in contemporary art, the work of Pirici and Pelmuş also pushed the concept of performative re-enactment to its logical end, from which thus far there has been no return.

The re-enactment of neo-avant-garde performances in Eastern Europe has been undertaken for a wide range of sometimes contradictory motives. Remaking performative actions and events has turned out to offer an effective strategy for reflecting on the legacy of artworks produced in the socialist era, easing the integration of the dematerialised practices of the 1960s and 1970s into museum collections and stimulating art historical reassessments both locally and globally. Restaging performances has also helped to satisfy the demand for representations of ephemeral actions in the form of tangible art objects, at the risk of compromising their historical and genre-specific authenticity as live art. Most intriguing are the many cases in which re-enactment has been adopted as a subversive tactic for opening up critical perspectives on the social and ideological transformations of post-communism. The re-enactment of performance has also been initiated and realised by a wide range of institutions and individuals, with the artists who carried out the original pieces often choosing to collaborate with a new generation of artists who frequently also contribute novel elements to socialist era performances that reflect on post-communist realities. Recognising the futility of attempts to exactly recreate the circumstances of historical performances, artists have instead freely adapted original scenarios to reconfigure, revitalise and reanimate their critique for contemporary conditions. The “second public sphere” emerges as a historicised particularity of socialist performance art and as a renewable critical position outside of both neo-liberal and neo-official East European artworlds.

Notes

- 1 None of the documentation of these attempted re-enactments was included in the exhibition catalogue and the workshop receives only a cursory mention (Szylak et al. 2013).
- 2 *Imponderabilia* was also referenced by Janez Janša as part of the project *Life [in progress]* (2008–), which expanded significantly on Abramović and Ulay’s 1977 performance, quoting the premise of the original but going beyond re-enactment to create a work with different performers, media and objectives (Janša 2014).

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