A Matter of Decision: Experimental Art in Hungary and Yugoslavia, 1968-1989

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of Art, Art History
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<u>ABSTRACT</u>

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Abstract

This dissertation analyzes experimental art movements in Hungary and the former Yugoslavia from 1968 to 1989, examining the variety of ways that artists responded to the ideological and practical failures of communism. I also deliberate on how artists, living in the specter of Marxist ideology, negotiated socio-political and cultural systems dominated by the state; how they undermined the moral consciousness that state socialism imposed from above; and how they created alternative ways of being in an era that had promised the opening of society and art but that failed that pledge. I suggest that some artists increasingly questioned the state's hegemony in everyday relationships, language, and symbols, and attempted to neutralize self-censorship and gain sovereignty over their own bodies and minds through "decision as art." The dissertation approaches authoritarian domination within the context of the artists' aesthetic choices, especially the development of conceptual and performance art as a mode of opposition. Deliberating on the notion of decision as central to the conceptualization and execution of resistance to the state, I focus on the alternative ways in which Yugoslavian and Hungarian artists made art in variegated forms and modes of ethical commitment. I argue that such art must be understood as an active decision to live in and through art while enduring political circumstance.

Dedication

To my grandmother, Eržebet Toma, and my parents, Eržebet and Petar Tumbas.

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction: Decision as Art —Political Subjectivity in Yugoslav and Hungarian Art, 1968-1989

In his 2007 retrospective, and under the probing title "WHAT HAPPENED TO US?", Romanian artist Dan Perjovschi covered the wall of the Donald B. and Catherine C. Marron Atrium at the Museum of Modern Art in New York with numerous drawings commenting on current and past political, social and cultural conditions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. One of his drawings, a plainly sketched face with a sickle that carves a forced smile, declares that to have experienced state socialism was anything but funny even if nostalgic filmic portrayals like *Goodbye Lenin* (2003) or *Sonnenallee* (1999) often use humor to ridicule the outrageous assaults of various forms of institutionalized socialism on millions of Europeans. [Figure 1] In this drawing, Perjovschi conveys the psychological impact of authoritarian implementations of communism and socialism on the body, visually referring to Kristine Stiles' 1993 landmark essay, *Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies: Representations from Cultures of Trauma*, in which the art historian argued that, "marked bodies enunciate the silence that is a rudiment of trauma and a source of the destruction of identity."[1] Perjovschi, one of the subjects of Stiles' text, deploys humor as a critical method for addressing the traumatic past, and his rendition of the face as wounded by

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[1] Kristine Stiles, "Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies: Representations from Cultures of Trauma," in *Strategie II: Peuples Mediterraneens* [Paris] 64-65 (July-December 1993): 95-117; reprinted with a new Afterword in Jean O'Barr, Nancy Hewitt, Nancy Rosebaugh, eds., *Talking Gender: Public Images, Personal Journeys, and Political Critiques* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996): 36-64.

the smiling cut of communism signifies the impact of autocratic states on citizens and raises the urgency to examine how artists responded to their lives and art while living behind the Iron Curtain and under the grip of the police state.

My dissertation attends to how vanguard Hungarian and Yugoslavian artists, who practiced performance, installation, video, and mail art, all diverse modes of conceptual art under surveillance by the state, responded to the ideological and practical failures of institutionalized socialism during the years 1968-1989; and how such art countered state repression, empowered artists to exercise personal agency and contributed to the transformation of these societies. This comparative analysis will highlight how these artists from two different socialist systems negotiated their socio-political and cultural systems to undermine their respective states' impositions of a social consciousness from above; how the state deployed Marxism to shape conceptions of self, nation, and culture in each country; and how severe applications of Marxist principles by the state traumatized these societies, punishing artists in the name of a collective promise that was never fulfilled. I propose that using various forms of conceptual art enabled Hungarian and Yugoslavian artists to deconstruct ideology in everyday life, destabilize state-imposed structures, and slip between the cracks and beyond police-controlled borders to connect their art to life-sustaining ideas outside the severe strictures of their particular socialist systems. My methodology is informed by the social histories of art, new historicism, feminism, and trauma and identity studies with their attendant politics.

In this comparison, it must be noted that Hungary experienced the specter of the Soviet Union more directly than did Yugoslavia, whose unique brand of socialism under Josip Broz Tito opened spaces for artistic exchange that were beyond imagination elsewhere in the Eastern bloc. In Hungary, the violent suppression of the 1956 revolution, along with the history of executions institutionalized socialism, such as that of László Rajk in 1949 and Imre Nagy in 1958, established Hungary as a solid police state that perpetrated severe measures of punishment. Rajk had served as the Minister of Interior and former Minister of Foreign Affairs 1946-1948, until he was charged with being a Titoist spy during Rákosi's show trials and then executed on October 15, 1949. Imre Nagy, who had acted as the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Hungary from 1953 –1955, was charged with treason for his leadership in the 1956 revolt in Hungary and was subsequently executed two years later. Between 1958 and 1960, the János Kádár administration transformed socialist institutions associated with the arts, leading to "the state's monopoly in purchases of artworks, control of exhibition venues, and artists' access to studio spaces and stipends."[2] Social realism remained the dominant style at Hungarian academies, and only those artists who were members of the Association of Hungarian Artists and who graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts or the Academy of Decorative Arts had professional careers as artists.[3] After 1963, the Kádár regime began pacifying the public while attempting to make up for the

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[2] Éva Forgács, "Does Democracy Grow Under Pressure? Strategies of the Hungarian Neo-avant-garde throughout the Late 1960s and the 1970s," in *Centropa* 8, no.1 (2008), 38.
[3] Ibid.

brutal executions during 1956.[4] Although the artists discussed in my dissertation worked during the more "pacified" period of state socialism in Hungary, my analysis will show that their experiences and artworks addressed the violence, oppression, and manipulation operative within Kádár's state socialism, which regularily censored artists' works, infiltrated artist networks with secret agents that reported on dissident activities and thoughts, and forced a number of scholars, thinkers, and artists into exile.

While Yugoslavia was one of the most open and Western-oriented countries in Eastern Europe, with all of the federal units "empowered to have presidents, parliaments, and ministries,"[5] Tito implemented this decentralization without democratization, meaning that together with high ranking communists he still controlled all aspects of cultural production in Yugoslavia.[6] Meanwhile, "socialist realism had been officially abolished" in 1952, and "freedom of creation, pluralism, and respectively modernism were allowed in principle, but rigid committee cultural policy was implemented in shadow."[7] However, modernist abstraction was to serve a social purpose, funtioning as a form of socialist modernism that would honor the Yugoslav nation and its partisan heroes, as well as offering an image of Yugoslavia as more open and closer to the

[4] Edit Sasváry, "A Moment of Experimental Democracy in the Kádár Era. György Galántai's Chapel Studio in Balatonboglár and the Social Milieu of Counter-Culture in Hungary in the 1960s and 1970s," in Ivana Bago, Antonia Majača, and Vesna Vuković, eds., *Removed from the Crowd: Unexpected Encounters I* (Zagreb: BLOK and DeLVe, 2011), 85.
[5] Ivan Vejvoda, "Yugoslavia 1945-91: From Decentralization Without Democracy to Dissolution," in David A. Dyker and Ivan Vejvoda, eds., *Yugoslavia and After: A Study in Fragmentation, Despair and Rebirth* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), 15.
[6] Ibid, 15-16.
[7] Slavko Timotijević "Shortcuts through Serbian Contemporary Art History," in *Remek Dela Savremene Umetnosti U Srbiji of 1968. Do Danas/Masterpieces of Contemporary Art in Serbia from 1968 until Today* (Novi Sad: Contemporary Art Museum, 2005), 7.

West; for abstraction was canonized and celebrated in the West, while the Soviet Union famously rejected abstract art in favor of socialist realism. The artist community in Yugoslavia knew very well that "artistic expression was allowed only when it did not question the dominant ideology"[8] or its impervious leaders, Tito and the communist party.[9] It is also necessary to note that in 1974, Tito implemented a new constitution that not only planted the seed for nationalistic self-determination in the 1980s, but also magnified the totalitarian aspects of the regime; for the new constitution gave Tito unlimited power to act as the head of the state until his death in 1980. That decision put Yugoslavia in line with other Eastern Bloc countries controlled by socialist dictators even harsher than Tito. However, Tito's 1974 constitution decentralized Yugoslavia into a de-facto confederation of six republics and two autonomous provinces, a structural approach to homogenize culture by framing the Yugoslav identity in non-ethnic terms, censoring and purging the attempts of the intelligentsia to exploit Yugoslavia's history of ethnic conflicts.[10] Yugoslavian artists were controlled and manipulated by the government and harassment led to arrests and political pressures that halted their public and international careers and resulted in a paucity of recognition beyond their insular situation.

In his *Early Writings*, Karl Marx posited that communism could enable the "positive supersession" of the state, eradicating the need for an intermediary

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[8] Dejan Sretenović, *Thank You, Raša Todosijević* (Belgrade: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002), 109.
[9] Bálint Szombathy in conversation with the author November 11, 2011, in Budapest, Hungary.
[10] The discrepancy of a constructed homogenized national identity and the existing heterogeneous culture fueled resentments that were framed along nationalist terms and that ultimately led to brutal Balkan wars of the 1990s.

between the individual and his or her sovereignty.[11] Marx urged "the complete restoration of [wo]man to [her/]himself as *social*, i.e. human, being."[12] By this account, communism aimed to collapse the gap between the public and civil self, between the ideal citizen and the actual living person. Despite the stated aim of socialist governments, Hungarian and Yugoslavian artists with a different vision of Marxism experienced this purpose as a nightmare with cultural, social, and political consequences. As my dissertation will show, such circumstances were especially evident in Hungary in the aftermath of the revolution of 1956, where the wish to forget or move past the experience of those events, especially within families, led to the susceptibility of future generations to become vulnerable to the misleading narratives advocated by the government.[13] In Yugoslavia, only one memory of World War II was permitted: Yugoslavia had fought the Nazis on its own and had freed the nation from external domination, marching its way towards a humane socialism that stood in stark contrast to the Soviet Union. Never mind the work camps, arrests of political dissidents and artists, and a general mistrust of alternative modes of thinking and living. Both in Hungary and Yugoslavia, state socialism was sold as a new freedom and new form of society able to heal the wounds of World War II and defeat the alienating machine of capitalism, greed, and individualism. Miklós Haraszti, the Hungarian writer and political dissident, explained in 1986:

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[11] Karl Marx, *Early Writings* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1992), 348.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Nora Csiszer and Eva Katona, "Hungary: Replacing a Missing Stone," in *Beyond Invisible Walls: The Psychological Legacy of Soviet Trauma, East European Therapists and Their Patients* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2001), 40.

The advent of state socialism heralded a rise in social mobility (...) Many

artists of the first generation had genuine proletarian origins. They were

members of a class to whom education had been denied. Their

emancipation seemed synonymous with the liberation offered by

socialism. Even now (…) They see their own rise as a consequence of the

rule of the people, and they have had to continue to insist on this illusion

even after the self-critical discovery of "mistakes" and "crimes." The

revolution is like family: no matter how terrible your parents, without

them you certainly would never have been born.[14]

The exhibitions, artists and works discussed in my dissertation aimed at

breaking out of this logic, particularly the generation of young artists in the 1970s

who, like their international colleagues, were driven to protests by the 1968

"revolt" that Julia Kristeva described as "a violent desire to rake over the norms

that govern private as well as the public, the intimate as well as the social, a

desire to come up with new, perpetually contestable configurations."[15] Such aims

were inspired by Marxist principles in the East and West, but a Marxism that

distinguished itself from the totalitarian and limiting socialism states worldwide

offered to their citizens. As my analysis will show, artists in Yugoslavia and

Hungary were not against socialism as a political ideology and many even

embraced it. Instead, the artists critiqued the distorted, hypocritical, and

authoritarian versions of socialism carried forth by their respective socialist

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[14] Miklós Haraszti, *The Velvet Prison: Artists Under State Socialism* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 51-52.
[15] Julia Kristeva, Brian O'Keeffe, trans., Sylvere Lotringer, ed., *Revolt, She Said. An Interview by Philippe Petit.* Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series (Cambridge, Mass, and London, England: MIT Press, 2002),12.

governments. Such artists' performance, conceptual, video, and installation art, as well as mail art and samizdat publications, I argue, embodied political acts, as if making a solemn pledge to Walter Benjamin's decree: "We must wake up from the world of our parents."[16]

My thesis centers on the question of sovereignty through the theme of "decision as art," a phrase first introduced by the Yugoslavian artist Raša Todosijević in his action *Decision as Art* (1973). This performance was itself indebted to and inspired by Marcel Duchamp's emphasis on the intellectual, rational, and conceptual decision to choose an ordinary object for the purpose of creating a new aesthetic way to think about the world of objects, actions, and events. As Duchamp wrote:

> Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no
> importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so
> that its useful significance disappeared under a new title and point of
> view – created a new thought for that object.[17]

Deliberating on the notion of "decision," or choice, as central to the conceptualization and execution of resistance to the state, I focus on the many ways in which Yugoslavian and Hungarian 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 analyzed with regards to state repression, and my dissertation is no exception. However, I also approach that

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[16] Walter Benjamin, "Das Passagen-Werk," in Rolf Tiedermann ed., *Gesammelte Schriften, v. 5* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982), 1048. This quote was brought to my attention by Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, 209.
[17] Marcel Duchamp, "The Richard Mutt Case," in *The Blind Man* 2 (1917), 5.

authoritarian domination in the context of the artists' aesthetic determinations, especially the use and development of conceptual and performance art as a mode of opposition. I suggest that such art must be understood not only as a passive form of defiance, but also as an active decision to endure through art while challenging political circumstance.

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 or the more contemporary regard for the positive aspects of socialism, 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 upsurge of 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 examples come from three to five decades ago and from Eastern and Central Europe.

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 "is the incarnation, the production, and the liberation of the multitude."[18] The question of decision-making lies at the center 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,"[19] 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."[20] 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."[21] 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."[22]

In the context of this dissertation, the various forms of the nascent conceptual art during the mid-1960s addressed politics, and flourished under the

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[18] Michael Hart and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 303.
[19] Michael Hart and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 356.
[20] Ibid, 351.
[21] Michel Foucault, "Is it Useless to Revolt?" in Jeremy R. Carrette, ed., *Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 134. Originally published as 'Inutile de se soulever?' in *Le Monde*, 11 May 1979. Translated by James Bernauer as 'Is it useless to revolt?' in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 8, no.1 (Spring 1981): 1-9.
[22] Ibid.

principle of "the idea becomes a machine that makes the art."[23] Embracing this "difficult work" in the equation "choice = idea," conceptual artists offered a social, political, and institutional critique of art. In the environment of state socialism, such a direction assumed a much greater stake in corporeal essence, and was interpreted, especially in Hungary, as a profound threat inherently in conflict with state control. It should not be necessary to point out, but many have already forgotten, that Hungarian and even Yugoslavian artists faced different political and social problems than conceptual artists in New York, San Francisco, London, Düsseldorf, or Tokyo, even if they were similarly interested in expanding the possibilities of art, its purpose, and its reach within society. They faced the very clear discrepancy between ideology and political practice in their respective socialist governments; and they vehemently fought against conservative and limiting art practices in a context in which surveillance and incarceration were real. Moreover, as curator Marijan Susovski has noted, artists in the East believed "that the development of a progressive socialist system also required a new artistic language which was already being practiced in the world."[24]

The conceptual and political rigor of the artists discussed in this dissertation feature prominently in my analysis, as does their creativity in surviving the trauma of repression. To make such an observation is not the same as being locked into the "martyr logic" that Yugoslavian critic Bojana Pejić

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[23] Sol LeWitt "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art", in *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967): 79-83.
[24] Marijan Susovski, "The Seventies and the Group of Six Artists," in Janka Vukmir (ed.) *Grupa Šestorice Autora* (Zagreb: SCCA Zagreb, 1998), 19.

questioned when she asked: "[W]hen we try to open and rewrite the archive of state socialism today, do we need to center again and again on hagiographic models?"[25] My effort to explicate how artists responded to their social and political conditions takes the form of an examination of what I am calling "decision as art" and is linked to the concept of self-sovereignty, which artists practiced through their art in the face of traumas that emerged in the systematic imposition of state control, or, as in the case of Hungary, the murder of citizens in the 1956 revolution.

Clinical psychologists conclude that through dissociation the unconscious preserves trauma, dissociation being the only condition of mind in which it is safe to exist, and that consciousness relies on the unconscious to protect the individual from re-experiencing the mortal threat posed by traumatic circumstances. The event is literally preserved in the body, which retains it in a "black hole" inaccessible to full memory and consciousness. This is what psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton calls the "life/death paradigm and symbolization of the self" constituted by the "warding off" of the "death threat," which leads to such psychosomatic conditions as numbing, fragmentation, and the discontinuity of the self.[26] Cathy Caruth has described this disjuncture (between not knowing

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[25] Bojana Pejić, "Proletarians of All Countries, Who Washes Your Socks? Equality, Dominance and Difference in Eastern European Art," in Bojana Pejić (ed.), *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (Cologne: Walter König, 2009) 21.
[26] Robert Jay Lifton, "From Hiroshima to the Nazi doctors: The Evolution of Psychoformative Approaches to Understanding Traumatic Stress Syndromes," from John P. Wilson and Beverley Raphael, eds., *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes* (New York and London: Plenum Press, 1993): 11-23.

what the body knows) a "crisis of truth."[27] She writes, "It is the fundamental

dislocation implied by all traumatic experience that is both its testimony to the

event and to the impossibility of its direct access."[28] The void created by memory

is where the inaccessible truth of the traumatic event(s) resides. Thus, "central to

the very immediacy of [traumatic] experience…is a gap that carries the force of

the event and does so precisely at the expense of simple knowledge and

memory."[29]

Following these and other theorists of trauma, I will suggest that for an

artist to make the choice to consciously revisit the place of the unconscious

struggle - the black hole where memory resides inaccessible to consciousness -

constitutes a powerful decision as art to perform a form of self-sovereignty in the

effort to regain agency. I claim that art, for the artists discussed in this

dissertation, functioned as the most immediate vehicle not only for access to their

traumatic events and the social conditions of living in what Stiles described in

1993 as "cultures of trauma," but also their reenactment through alternative

symbolic means. For, as Stiles explains, "a multitude of representations and

cultural productions emanate from social and political events located in, and

imprinted with, trauma," and "these images and attendant behaviors constitute

the aggregate visual evidence of 'cultures of trauma,' [which] denote traumatic

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[27] Cary Caruth, "Introduction," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 6.
[28] Ibid, 9.
[29] Ibid, 7.

circumstance… manifest in culture [and] discernible at the intersection of aesthetic, political, and social experience."[30]

My emphasis will be on artists' decisions to break through the conditions of their various cultures of trauma, using conceptual, performance, installation, video, and mail art, among other experimental approaches aimed at altering the oppressive status quo, and opening up – even if only for the moment of encounter with the work of art – the possibility for self-assertion, sovereignty, and a new relationship to the past, present, and future. Such artistic decisions also resisted and exposed the political conditions under which the artists lived, and were aimed at raising awareness within (and expanding the possibilities for) society at large. Foucault stated, "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."[31] In this dissertation I join such thinkers in "doing it," in looking "behind politics" for that which did, indeed, limit it: decision as art.

Chapter overviews

This dissertation highlights four places in Eastern Europe that became important sites for experimentation, collaboration, and artistic innovation in the

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[30] Stiles, "Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies," 64.
[31] Foucault, 134.

1970s: Belgrade and Zagreb in Yugoslavia, and Balatonboglár and Budapest in Hungary. Broadly, Chapter I traces the history of conceptual art from performance to installation art in Belgrade, and concentrates on Zoran Popović, Raša Todosijević, and Marina Abramović, who were part the Group of Six Artists active at the Student Cultural Center (SKC) in Belgrade. Founded by President Tito in 1968, the SKC began to launch exhibitions in the early 1970s and gained international recognition for its *April Meetings for Expanded Media*, which were attended by international artists and curators such as Joseph Beuys, Ana Mendieta, Tom Marioni, Jürgen Klauke, Germano Celant, Ursula Krinzinger, Ecke Bonk, and Kristine Stiles, among many others. In my analysis of SKC's internal politics, as well as selected actions and artworks, I interrogate the role that Marxist theories played in shaping these artists' conceptions of self, nation, and art. I argue that these artists' performances and interventions represented the rebellious subjectivity of the Yugoslavian counter-culture, and embodied correctives to socialist ideologies, practices, and dogma by addressing the traumatic suppression of corporeal sovereignty by the autocratic power of the state and its omniscient and omnipotent leader.

Chapter II moves to Zagreb, a city geographically and politically closer to the West, a geographic location that benefitted vanguard artists whose proximity linked their practices to established experimental traditions in the West. Želimir Koščević's role as a curator at the Students' Center Gallery (SC), as well as the Group of Six Authors/Artists (Boris Demur, Željko Jerman, Vlado Martek, Mladen Stilinović, Sven Stilinović, Fedor Vučemilović) proved significant for

conceptual and performance art in Zagreb and the rest of former Yugoslavia. An analysis of Mladen Stilinović's, Sven Stilinović's, and Tomislav Gotovac's conceptual and performance works feature prominently in this chapter, as well as works by artists Sanja Iveković and Vlasta Delimar, whose works exposed the state's patriarchal domination of women. Apart from fusing experimental art, ranging from poetry, theory, and manifestos to photography, video, and performance, I argue that artists in Zagreb had an early investment in breaking out of conventional exhibition spaces and involving the public, critiquing the hypocritical and repressive ideological foundations of politics and culture, and heralding critiques of gender norms and inequalities in Yugoslavia during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Chapter III begins with Balatonboglár, where György Galántai established what came to be known as the Chapel Studio in 1970 and ends with a discussion of *Artpool,* founded by Galántai and Julia Klaniczay, which became the singular and most important institution for the circulation of mail art, the organization of happenings, and the distribution of samizdat works within the network of the cultural and intellectual opposition in the Hungarian socialist state, as well as for facilitating and sustaining experimental art networks within and beyond Eastern Europe. Although Hungary was even closer to the West geographically than Zagreb, it was politically isolated and artists had little-to-no chance to travel or exhibit abroad. Furthermore, the Yugoslav political and economic doctrine of self-management meant a certain independence from the USSR and also the most open form of state socialism in the Eastern Bloc, which allowed Yugoslavian

artists to travel and participate in international art events. During Galántai's summer camp exhibitions at Balatonboglár, various modes of conceptual and performance practices took place before the state closed the Chapel and Galántai was harassed and followed by the secret service until the collapse of the Hungarian socialist state in 1989. Galántai negotiated the oppressive cultural climate under state socialism that politicized non-traditional modes of art, while he practiced non-conformist international experimental art (especially associated with Fluxus) banned by the state.

This chapter analyzes how Galántai and his Hungarian art colleagues' practices constitute political opposition and resistance; how conceptual and body art function as resistance to the state and as constitutive of artistic sovereignty; and how mail art played a central role in Hungarian art and its surreptitious communications with the world. I also analyze works by István Harasztÿ, Tibor Hajas, Tamás Szentjóby, Miklós Erdély, Gyula Pauer, and Endre Tót, all of whom participated in and shaped many of the art actions and exhibitions in Balatonboglár. This chapter acknowledges how such experimental art encouraged the cause of the oppositional community of artists, writers, intellectuals, and political dissidents to exchange ideas that made it bearable to live in the specter of the socialist state and in their effort to gain independence from it. I theorize mail art as an extension of the artists' own concepts and actions sent covertly outside from inside the Iron Curtain through the state's own official postal system, which maintained its oppressive structures. Piotr Piotrowski has pointed out that, "local regimes, precisely because of differences in

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implementation of 'real' socialism in different countries, did not favour transnational artistic exchanges," despite the fact that "official international policies" in the Eastern Bloc "were supposed to encourage cultural exchange." Piotrowski rightly states that such official support for cultural exchange was nothing more than a "facade that masked mutual hostility among leaders of different countries."[32] I argue that mail art broke through such political barriers as no other art form could or did, interconnecting East European artists, intellectuals, and dissidents with each other and with avant-garde and revolutionary movements throughout the world.

Deliberately crossing political, social and aesthetic boundaries in the shadow of their respective governments, Yugoslavian and Hungarian artists drew upon and transformed twentieth century European avant-garde traditions, many of which were founded on socialist and anarchist principles in the early 20th century, standing in stark contrast to the "lived" socialism imposed by authoritarian states worldwide. As Marxist theoretician and historian Etienne Balibar has pointed out, Marxist-Leninism and its principle of "the dictatorship of the proletariat," led "extreme violence" to be situated at "the very heart of emancipatory politics" of the twentieth century, informed by state mechanisms that had their own missions of "civilizing" their citizens, even by force. "I am convinced," Balibar continued, "that the solution for that historical puzzle is actively searched for in many places today, but it is not clearly found or

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[32] Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe* (London: Reaktion 2012), 70.

shown."[33] Through an analysis of selected artists' works in these three chapters, I will consider how the rise of state socialism was driven by violence, destruction, and abuse of citizens, transforming a utopian theory with an emphasis on equality and justice into a mechanism of tyranny. The artists included in my dissertation explored the contradictions of communist ideology and state socialism through body actions, installations, and textual practices (mail art in particular) in an effort to visualize the trauma of life under authoritarian governments, as well as to offer alternative models for living and perceiving the world. Moreover, with their emphasis on collaboration and decision as a form of bearing witness to state abuses of power, the artists raised the moral stakes of art and its purpose for the larger society, often endangering their own lives, careers, and futures in favor of civil courage.

Literature Review

Research on contemporary East European art is challenged by the fact that, with few exceptions, artists from these regions have only been included at the margins of the dominant, Western, art historical canon and scholarly discourse until very recently. After the fall of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989, a number of exhibitions and collaborative projects began to address East and Central European art. The first of such exhibitions was *'Europe Unknown,'* organized by Anda Rottenberg and held in honor of the European Cultural

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[33] Etienne Balibar, *We, The People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 131.

Forum in Krakow, Poland in 1990. This significant exhibition was followed by many small exhibitions of East European artists. The Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle in Bonn launched another significant exhibition in 1994, *Europa, Europa: The Century of the Avantgarde in Central and Eastern Europe*. Laura J. Hoptman curated *Beyond Belief: Contemporary Art from East Central Europe*, which ran from 1995 to 1997 and travelled to numerous cities in the United States, showcasing experimental art after WWII in Central Europe. Four years later, Hoptman, along with Tomas Pospiszyl, published *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s*, an edited volume of writings by artists, art critics, philosophers and art historians from Eastern and Central Europe. This book offers critical insight into the current research on Eastern Europe, as well as primary texts by artists and critics from the region that informed my understanding of artists' theorizations of their own practices.

The late 1990s generated only a small number of exhibitions and projects. Bojana Pejić curated *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe* at Moderna Museet (Stockholm) in 1999 and the groundbreaking exhibition travelled to the Ludwig Múzeum (Budapest) in 2000. This exhibition presented an unprecedented critical engagement with the notion of "post-communist Europe" and the hegemonic Western narratives of East European art. Similarly, *Aspects/Positions - 50 Years of Art in Central Europe 1949-1999*, an exhibition curated by Lóránd Hegyi that traveled from 2000 to 2001, added to the much needed scholarship on the transitions of East and Central European arts in the last fifty years. Aleš Erjavec's compilation of

essays in *Postmodernism and the Post-Socialist Condition* discusses a variety of issues surrounding Eastern Europe, including some dissident artists from Hungary and the former Yugoslavia. IRWIN's *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* includes essays addressing a range of countries and time periods, as well as theoretical considerations of artistic tendencies in Hungary and Yugoslavia before and after the Cold War. Djurić Dubravka's and Miško Šuvaković's volume of essays titled *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1818-1991* (2003) explores both modern and contemporary art from Eastern Europe, providing insight into the historical trajectory of experimental art before and after World War II in Yugoslavia.

Similarly, Péter György and Hedvig Turai's compilation of essays in *Art and Society in the Age of Stalin* is a critical examination of both modern and post-modern art currents in Eastern Europe. Steven Mansbach's discussion of East European modern art, such as in *Vision of Totality: Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, Theo Van Doesburg, and El Lissitzky* and *Graphic Modernism: From the Baltic, to the Balkans, 1910-1935*, serve as exemplary models for a cross-cultural analysis of artists' quests to serve the "present" state of culture, creating an artistic vision from Marxist ideologies, but also struggling with its utopian and, therefore, fallible potential. Piotr Piotrowski's 2009 publication of *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and Avant-garde in Eastern Europe 1945-1989,* offers a rich discussion of experimental art from the region, mapping the artistic currents in the post-war era while also relating their experimental forms to modernist practices. That same year, Bojana

Pejić presented *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* at MUMOK in Vienna. The first large-scale exhibition to examine questions of gender and sexuality in East European Art, it travelled to the Zacheta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw and remains an essential resource for my examination of gender politics in the region. Bojana Pejić also had a team of 25 researchers from 24 countries, out of which Pejić edited a reader accompanying the exhibition that offered heretofore-missing documents on and consideration of feminist art and activism in Eastern Europe.

A number of exhibitions stand out in their emphasis on performance art. In 1998, Paul Schimmel organized *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object 1949-1979* at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. The show featured works by performance artists from around the world and traveled to Spain, Austria, and Japan. It was also the first international exhibition to present the works of performance artists from various East and Central European countries, curated into the show by Kristine Stiles. The same year, Zdenka Badovinac curated *Body in the East: From 1960s to the Present* at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, Slovenia. This exhibition was solely devoted to body art from East European countries and Russia and still serves as a principal resource for research on performance art in Eastern Europe. Stiles also wrote essays for both *Out of Actions* and *Body in the East*, texts that include discussions of trauma and experimental art from the 1960s to the 1980s, which are especially important for my theoretical framework, as they discuss performance art and its relation to national and personal trauma.

Exhibitions in the early 2000s emphasized the traumatic circumstances of the Balkan wars of the 1990s. Harald Szeemann's *Blood and Honey: Future's in the Balkans*, 2003, in Essel, Germany, included performance art, video, film, conceptual art and installations. Similarly, *In the Gorges of the Balkans*, 2003, at the Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel, thematized the division of the former Yugoslavia, the question of East versus West, and the concept of the so-called "Balkans." René Block's and Marius Babias' edited volume, *The Balkans Trilogy,* 2007, came out of this exhibition and includes critical discussions of Western concepts of the East that problematize the very notion of "Eastern" European art. More recently, after hiring Stiles as an advisor on East European artists, the Museum of Modern Art in New York launched a number of exhibitions focusing on East European art, including presenting retrospective exhibitions for Marina Abramović and Sanja Iveković.

Numerous exhibitions and research projects have also emerged within Eastern Europe in the last decade. Notably, the work of independent curators and collectives has increased the scholarship on art from the region. Kuda.org, a New Media Center in Novi Sad, Serbia, directed by Branka Ćurčić, along with the Zagreb-based curator collective WHW, 'What, How & for Whom' led by Ivet Ćurlin, Ana Dević, Nataša Ilić and Sabina Sabolović, have launched a number of exhibitions, symposia, and seminars that deal with post-1945 and contemporary art from former Yugoslavia, exhibitions and symposia that were also in collaboration with Dora Hegyi and tranzit.hu in Budapest. In Belgrade, Dušan Grlja and Jelena Vesić lead *Prelom*, a critical art journal that addresses

contemporary art from Eastern Europe, including the works by the Student Cultural Center in Belgrade from the 1970s onward. Maja and Reuben Fowkes have also organized symposia for the "SocialEast Forum on the Art and Visual Culture of Eastern Europe," along with exhibition and publications, including *68: Revolution I Love You* (2008) and *Loopholes of Happiness* (2011), which critically address the questions of revolutionary thinking in artistic production in Eastern Europe, as well as offering perspectives on a range of countries, artists and artworks. Amy Brouillette's M.A. thesis, *Remapping Samizdat: Underground Publishing and the Hungarian Avant-Garde, 1966 to 1975* (Central European University, Budapest, 2009), offers an important discussion of police surveillance, intimidation, interference and arrests of artists and writers in Hungary. Ivana Bago and Antonia Majaca founded the "Institute for Duration, Location and Variables" (DeLVe) in 2009 in Zagreb, and have organized exhibitions featuring artists from Eastern Europe, along with several publications on the subject. These East European initiatives have significantly added to the research on the 1970s and 1980s in Yugoslavia and Hungary, and have greatly informed my analysis of artworks from these two regions.

Much of the literature on mail art elaborates on its revolutionary potential, such as Steward Home's seminal *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Letterisme to Class War*, which offers an historical trajectory of mail art and its connection to Dada, Surrealism, the Situationist International, and Fluxus. Home's theorization of *samizdat* publications is useful for Chapter III, in which I suggest that mail art and *samizdat* may be understood as forms of "corporeal

metonymy." Judith Hoffberg's mail art journal *Umbrella* and her anthology *Umbrella: 1978-1998*, as well as Géza Perneczky's *The Magazine Network: The Trends of Alternative Art in the Light of their Periodicals 1968*-1988, and his most recent publication, *Assembling Magazines, 1969-2000,* all are essential surveys of mail art publications and activities. In fact, because most discussions of mail art are international, attention to Hungarian mail art has been neglected. Nevertheless, Artpool's Research Archive in Hungary, founded in 1979 by György Galántai and Julia Klaniczay, Géza Perneczky's private archive in Germany, founded in 1986, and the Museum Schwerin's Mail Art Archive, hold the most important and extensive collections of Hungarian mail art, and were the primary sources for Chapter III.

While such exhibitions and publications have increased the focus on art from East and Central Europe, lack of funding has limited the number of publications on the subject, especially those coming from organizers in the region. Furthermore, most contemporary research attends to post-communist conditions, often ignoring or simplifying the works of artists from the 1970s and 1980s. Instead of serving as a survey of these regions, my dissertation attempts a close analysis of selected exhibitions and artworks with the aim to render palpable the intricacies of decisions and risks these artists took in their social, political, psychic, and aesthetic interventions; to show what Mansbach has called "the most distinctive character" of art from Eastern Europe: "its effective negotiation between the universal and the particular, between the local and

transnational."[34] It is my hope that my work will illuminate the creative vitality of these three different places in Eastern Europe, and that this dissertation successfully conveys why the decisions of these artists mattered then, and why they still matter today.

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[34] Steven Mansbach, "Methodology and Meaning in the Modern Art of Eastern Europe," in Timothy O. Benson, ed., *Central European Avant-gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910-1930* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 289.

Chapter I: Belgrade, Yugoslavia

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."[1] This chapter focuses on Zoran Popović, Raša Todosijević, and Marina Abramović, three artists active at the Student Cultural Center (SKC) in Belgrade during the 1970s, whose conceptual and performance art provided visual and corporeal testimony to how the authoritarian state bred its internal enemies and how they, in turn, provided implicit witness to the government's abuses of socialist ideology.

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. 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

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[1] Slavenka Drakulić, *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993), 17.

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 counterculture, especially given that this new cultural center was housed within the ex-headquarters of the Yugoslav secret police, undoubtedly still wired for surveillance.[2]

Nevertheless, the SKC, along with the student cultural centers in Zagreb and Novi Sad, became centers 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.[3] The informal group of six at the SKC consisted of academically trained artists who resisted socialist modernism taught at the university in Belgrade and instead sought alternate modes of artistic expression within their own circumstances. 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 center of art and which created a radical atmosphere of experimental artistic production in Belgrade.[4] Speaking about the conditions

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[2] Roxana Marcocci, "Art in Transitional Times, Post-1945, 1968, and 2000 in the Former Yugoslavia," in Roxana Marcoci, ed., *Sanja Iveković: Sweet Violence* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 19.
[3] Roxana Marcocci, "Art in Transitional Times, Post-1945, 1968, and 2000 in the Former Yugoslavia, in Roxana Marcoci, ed., *Sanja Iveković: Sweet Violence* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 19.
[4] 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 Beleške* (Film

under which he made the film in 1975, Becker noted that, "Operating in a sphere of limited tolerance and public indifference" fueled a certain "energy and internalized aggression," which was fundamental to this new incorporation of the artist's body.[5]

The artists' frustrations with the supposed freedom to travel, along with the concomitant repression of independence and critical thinking in the country, fueled 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.[6] 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)" in the Eastern Bloc.[7] Yet this form of socialism used "hidden strategies and methodology of power,

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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 Djordević, 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.
[5] Lutz Becker, "Art for an Avant-Garde Society Belgrade in the 1970s" in IRWIN, ed., *East Art Map: Contemporary At and Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 393.
[6] Slavko Timotijević "Shortcuts through Serbian Contemporary Art History," in *Remek Dela Savremene Umetnosti U Srbiji of 1968. Do Danas/Masterpieces of Contemporary Art in Serbia from 1968 until Today* (Novi Sad: Contemporary Art Museum, 2005), 9.
[7] Ibid.

planned total control wrapped in the cover of self-management, democracy and apparent civil freedoms."[8]

In spite, or because, of this disingenuous emphasis on self-management, artists and intellectuals like Zoran Popović (b. 1944) and Jasna Tijardović (b. 1947) seized the opportunity to invent a form of aesthetic self-sovereignty and created work that criticized those art institutions that failed to offer the types of "self-management" artists and intellectuals envisioned in a state based on that very ideology. While Popović created art and wrote texts, as I shall soon discuss at length, Tijardović's role was crucial for how she explicated much of the artworks and programs presented at the SKC gallery, while also working for the major Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade. Along with a number of women curators, such as Dunja Blažević, Bojana Pejić, and Biljana Tomić, Tijardović lent a feminist voice to the artistic dialogues and practices in Belgrade and the rest of Yugoslavia, and did not shy away from confrontation. For Tijardović and Popović, the politics of art were the central focus of the direction new art could and would take during this period. Experimental exhibitions began already in the late 1960s and early 1970s at BITEF (Belgrade International Experimental Theater Festival), especially under the influence of Biljana Tomić (b. 1940), who encouraged artists to create ephemeral and performative works for BITEF, a curatorial objective she later continued at the SKC.

Zoran Popović's multi-media performance work *Axiomi* (*Axioms*) premiered at BITEF in 1972, and was "the first work of that kind" in Yugoslavia,

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[8] Ibid.

incorporating "photography, slides, posters and video."[9] [Figure 2] Arguably the

most astute multi-medial artist in the Belgrade scene at the time, Popović had

already begun making films in 1966, screening them using multiple projectors.

To wit, his film *The Head/The Circle* (1968-9) examined the artist's head,

represented in the sign of the circle, from various angles. I begin my discussion

of the SKC with Popović because his work exemplifies the range of experimental

art and its politics at the SKC, including the merging of analytic conceptualism

with body action; commitment to Marxism within the process of innovative

experimental approaches; the accompanying tensions and debates that arose

between the main artist-protagonists in that space; the ways in which artists'

rejection of the "red bourgeoisie"[10] in Yugoslavia compared to and was informed

by Western conceptual art movements such as Art & Language; and represented

the artists' collective rejection of capitalist ideology and its appropriation of art.

Popović serves also to introduce the SKC artists' struggle against the Yugoslav

system and its bureaucratic dominion over art and culture, the artists' traumatic

experiences of living in such a duplicitous environment, and their efforts to

create a space where such hypocrisy and ideological propaganda would be

replaced with self-sovereign individuals who seek truthful and authentic

interactions.

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[9] Jasna Tijardović - Popović, "Performance Art in Belgrade in the 70s. On the exhibition of photo-documentation and photographs," in *Performance / 1968-1978* (Belgrade: Gallery Beograd, 2006), 27.
[10] A term used in the Yugoslav 1968 counterculture to describe the communist elite.

Axioms is paradigmatic of Popović's art. A highly conceptual work, Popović performed a system of geometric signs, animated by his body, within an imagined grid structure. Using his hands to which were attached light bulbs, Popović created patterns by moving his arms in the forms of a square, circle, dot, X, vertical and horizontal lines, and plus signs. Tightly linked to elementary corporeal significations, when combined in motion, Popović was able to alter viewers' perceptions, as well as temporal and spatial visual experiences. Popović often performed *Axioms* in darkened spaces illuminated only by his gestures, the light from which rendered him invisible while leaving traces and fleeting signifiers of his presence, an apparition producing signs.

For Popović, *Axioms* "is an early association and it belongs to the class of the primitive-analogues [for] problem solving," where, as he stated, "the imaginary structure, compared with an experienced image from the material world, becomes evident, due to our using a pictorial language."[11] In such a work, Popović responded to the Gestalt principle of the phi phenomenon, an optical illusion that when viewed rapidly gives the impression that motion between separate objects is continuous. First observed by the Czech psychologist Max Wertheimer in 1912, who realized that the eye and mind connect separately flickering lights into a cohesive and moving image/perception,[12] the phi

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[11] Zoran Popović, "Mental-Spacial Definition of Axioms" in SKC gallery, Biljana Tomić, *Zoran Popović Axiomi 1971-1973* (Belgrade: Student Cultural Center, 1983), 7 (np). Original quote amended (for grammar and typos) by author.

[12] Two or more stationary lights, if lit in temporal proximity, appear as moving and create a whole moving line, i.e. a "Gestalt." That new Gestalt cannot be reduced to its parts. See, Duane P. Schultz and Sydney Ellen Schultz, *A History of Modern Psychology*, 9th Edition (Belmont. California: Wadsworth Publishing, 2007).

phenomenon would become a key point of analysis of German-American psychologist Hugo Münsterberg's film theory, a fact that was certainly familiar to Popović, who worked in film early on.

Popović's interest in this kind of analytic and phenomenological perception in conjunction with the function of pictorial and textual languages was congruous with international iterations of conceptual art that elevated language, words, and images such as mathematic symbols to the status of art. Of utmost importance is that such actions and gestures provided an unconventional language of the body that could be intuited as signaling behavior contrary to normative conduct and, therefore, divergent from state ideologies. However "free" the Yugoslavs may have been relative to other Eastern bloc countries, such highly symbolic actions proved the urgency artists felt to formulate a visual and corporeal language of signs enacted as alternatives to the life given by the socialist state. At the heart of such conceptual art works were techniques that Biljana Tomić would insist were created to change perception.[13]

It is also of consequence that between 1974 and 1975, Popović worked closely with artists associated with the conceptual art group Art & Language during the period when they were located simultaneously in New York and London, a collaboration to which I shall soon return. For art historian Charles Harrison, a theorist and artistic participant in Art & Language, conceptual art of the period was "primitive in the sense that it was 'made' of words and 'ideas' which were the unattainable stylistic and intellectual property of the art world's

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[13] Biljana Tomić in conversation with the author, August 4, 2011, in Belgrade, Serbia.

betters."[14] What Harrison implied by this comment is precisely that Art & Language's intent was to take possession of the discourses of art and its histories.[15] Groups like Art & Language, he continued, "treat(ed) the concept of intellectual property with a prodigal irresponsibility, while refusing the notion that artistic practice might be offered as an alibi for intellectual inadequacy."[16] In this context, Popović's *Axioms* had the effect of intervening in pre-conceived notions of what art history could be by appropriating its fundamental signs (squares, circles, dots, Xs, vertical and horizontal lines, and plus signs) to the body and, thereby, reformulating perception in terms of the language of the body through light and motion.

In addition to the strong influence of Marxism that Popović shared with the Art & Language group, he was also reading Ludwig Wittgenstein, a key philosopher for many conceptual artists including Art & Language and Joseph Kosuth. It was especially Wittgenstein's emphasis on "problem solving," or the philosophical ability to formulate logical conclusions drawn from, but also able to eradicate, specific philosophical problems, that impressed these artists.[17] In a letter to artist Gergelj Urkom that Popović wrote while he was collaborating with Art & Language in New York, he emphasized the concept of ambiguity

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[14] Charles Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 2001), 76.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] "'Not Marx or Wittgenstein, but Marx and Wittgenstein' was an Art & Language slogan of the late 1960s." See Harrison, 58.

fundamental to Wittgenstein's writing.[18] Popović further explained this idea in

another sentence about *Axioms*: "With the language of analogy we make a

maximum cut and the thing being objectified is exhausted and stops

functioning."[19]

What this comment suggests is that Popović had made the decision, as art,

to introduce "analogy" in *Axioms*. By this means of comparison, he might further

contribute to exhausting the functioning of the state and its ideology. At the

same time, he wisely claimed: "These Axioms have not been arranged in relation

to a kind of art, they themselves are art."[20] For in the context of a repressive state,

art must not be anything else but art. Such a context further requires that art

depend on its very existence in immaterial signs. For Popović that meant the

immateriality of light and motion, solely dependent on the perception of the

human eye, and the formulation of the mind delivered by the body that is critical

of the state. Moreover, the connection between such a conceptual body

performance and its perception in art was in accord with the dematerialization of

art that Lucy Lippard and John Chandler first theorized as fundamental to the

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[18] Zoran Popović, "O Axiomatizaciji Umetnosti i o Formiranju Praznih, Idealnih Sistema Umetnosti," in SKC gallery, Biljana Tomić, *Zoran Popović Axiomi 1971-1973* (Belgrade: Student Cultural Center, 1983), (np).

[19] Zoran Popović, "Mental-Spacial Definition of Axioms," (np). Original quote amended (for grammar and typos) by author.

[20] Popović quoted in Jasna Tijardović, "Marina Abramović, Slobodan Milivojević, Neša Paripović, Zoran Popović, Raša Todosijević, Gergelj Urkom," in Marijan Susovski (ed.), *The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1966-1978* (Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art Zagreb, 1978), 62.

operation of conceptual art in 1967, and published the following year in *Art International*.[21]

In 1973, *Axioms* was included in the Gallery of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade's exhibition and publication, *Dokumenti o Post-Objektnim Pojavama U Jugoslovenskoj Umetnosti 1968-1973* (*Documents of Post-Objects Trends in Yugoslav Art 1968-1973)*. It appeared along with the work of the Slovenian collective OHO, the Novi Sad Grupa KÔD, and Bosch + Bosch from Subotica, art collectives whose art posed questions related to the cosmos, immateriality, and spiritual-linguistic interrelationalities. While Art & Language found the notion of "dematerialization" untenable and, as practicing Marxists, had little use for speculations on the cosmos and would have found spiritual/linguistic ruminations utterly unacceptable, Popović clearly tread a middle-ground as evinced by the very fact that he permitted *Axioms* to be exhibited in the context of such works. At the same time, this middle-ground characterizes the entirety of Popović's oeuvre during the socialist era, ranging from rigorous Marxist conceptual and performance experiments and film works in the 1970s to mystical eroticism and telekinetic drawings and paintings in the 1980s. Popović did not limit himself to any dogma, but practiced experimental art freely.[22]

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[21] See Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art, " *Art International* 12:2 (February 1968): 31-36.

[22] Miško Šuvaković, *Konceptualna Umetnost* (Novi Sad: Muzej Savremene Umetnosti Vojvodine, 2007), 325.

Popović and Tijardović spent a year in New York between 1974 and 1975 in close association with members of the Art & Language group, especially Joseph Kosuth and Sarah Charlesworth, founders, editors, and writers for *The Fox*, a short-lived publication with three issues that emerged after the break of the New York and London factions with Art & Language and its publication <u>Art-Language</u>. Popović and Tijardović also took part in anti-institutional rallies against the Whitney Museum of American Art, as well as discussions about the changes envisioned for a more socially relevant art practice. Popović documented this time in *Struggle in New York* (1976), a 56:30 minute, 16 mm, black and white film that shows the Whitney boycott of 1975. He also filmed actions by New York Art & Language members and other artist activists, who idealistically imagined that conceptual art could restore the dignity of art as a political practice, serve to redress the rapacious art market of the period, and confront the Vietnam War.[23]

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[23] Among others, the film features the following artists, musicians, and thinkers: Margaret and Gerrit Hilhorts, Thomas Henner, Preston Heller, Aaron Roseman, Ruth Rachlin, Saul Ostrow, Michael Krugman, Andrew Menard, Terry Berkowitz, Corinne Bronfman, Carole Conde, Karl Beveridge, Adrienne Hamalian, Howard Schamest, Klaus Metting, Katharina Sieverding, Michael Krugman, Ian Burn, Kathryn Bigelow, Jesse Chamberlain, Christine Kozlov, Paula and Mel Ramsden, Mayo Thompson, Jasna Tijardović and Zoran Popović. On the question of anti-war politics, Charles Harrison noted in an interview from 2007: "It's easy to fall into the assumption that all the politics is in the East, and in the West we only have a very political modernism. However, it's important to remember that part of the motivation behind the split that was going on in America—to a certain extent mirrored in England—was one between the Left and the Right at the time of the Vietnam War. Those who identified with postmodernism and Conceptual art in America were often members of the Art Workers' Coalition, opponents of the American strategy in Vietnam, the invasion of Cambodia, and so on. They were picketing museums with placards saying "Against War, Racism, and Oppression," and had a strong contingent of feminists. Hard-line modernists, post-painterly abstractionists, were mostly defenders of the American policy in Vietnam. I remember Greenberg saying at the end of an interview, when he was off the microphone, "I know what we should've done: we should've sent in another 20,000 troops and held them off the Vietnamese coast." Artists like Ken Noland were putting up American flags outside their lofts. There were ideological divisions there, not unrelated to what was going on in

Conceptual art "is an argument about the political nature and destination of culture in the so-called democracies of the Western world," Harrison proclaimed, "and about the terms in which that culture is best diagnosed and represented."[24] Such rhetoric echoed Guy Debord's writings on the spectacle, and were also apparent in aspects of Popović's *Struggle in New York*, where the members of Art & Language made an effort to include the viewer in their discourse about who made the film, rendering its process semi-transparent in discussions about the parameters of collaborations and their relation to viewers. "Within the context of <u>this film</u>," a text as caption explains, "we /Sarah[25], Anthony[26] and Joseph[27]/ are working collaboratively, and there is a human social relationship between us." This effort at rendering their process transparent continued in the text:

> In this context we are not working collaboratively with other participant
> artists. Their segments and ours are individuated products. Here, we
> exist in a purely formal relationship with them. There is no dialogue
> between us in regard to this product --- although at other times or in
> other contexts we have worked socially and cooperatively with may of
> these individuals. In the context of this project we have a social
> relationship with Zoran. He is the Producer of this film with whom we

have entered into a social contract to direct one section. Zoran 'made' this film as a whole and he alone determines its distribution. He will permit us to control /own/ our section which we have produced, but this is only a part of the whole. There are many other people whose labor is part of this film. They are not visible and they do not own or control any aspect of their production. This film as a whole is the product of collaborative and non-collaborative, paid and unpaid, labor. This film is an object which mediates our relationship with you. Since we do not control its distribution, we do not know whom we are addressing as you. We know you generally through the mediation of other objects and any one or more of us <u>may</u> know any or more of you, but since we are not – in the context of this project – in a direct social relationship, we do not know if we know you.[28]

By addressing the multiple relationships among the artists, workers, collaborators, and viewer(s), the film's captions reveal a concerted effort to render the artists' labor, thought, and the history of their art production clear and relevant to the contemporary moment, especially in terms of its opposition to capitalism. These aims recall Karl Marx's comments in *Das Kapital*: "….by incorporating living labour into their lifeless objectivity, the capitalist simultaneously transforms value, i.e. past labour in its objectified and lifeless form, into capital, value which can perform its own valorization process, an

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[28] This writing appears in *Struggle in New York* as text on the screen. Thanks to Zoran Popović's generosity, I was able to view the film in his studio during my research in 2011. He also provided a photocopy with screenshots and details of the written and spoken content of the film, as well information about its production, created in 1977 by Centar Za Fotografiju i TV in Zagreb. Centar Za Fotografiju i TV, *Zoran Popović Struggle in New York* (Zagreb: Centar Za Fotografiju i TV, 1977) np. Minor grammatical errors amended by author.

animated monster which begins to 'work', 'as if its body were but love

possessed'."[29] Marxist artists like Popović and Art & Language wanted to shake

the "love possessed" art world at its core, to challenge the respective capitalist

and state socialist art contexts, and to break out of submission to the state,

money, the market, and art conventions.

These goals became even more unambiguous in Popović's "For Self-

Management Art" (1975), a text that would gain wide influence and attention in

Yugoslavia and remains relevant to global politics and art today. He demanded:

> Our work must not turn into an apology of the artistic status quo, of our
>
> complete cultural alienation, we must not rejuvenate the blood of the
>
> conservative and dogmatic, socially dangerous establishment, which
>
> holds the common cultural values of people in the hands of a few, which
>
> has the monopoly over the art market over artistic production and, what
>
> is most significant, over the source of information and education, all this
>
> in order to reproduce its own parasitic life. The artists should cease their
>
> passivity, which prolongs the parasitic life of their bloodsuckers. They
>
> should cease to support the class enemy of the proletariat, in order not to
>
> produce such works as demanded and "arranged" by the bureaucracy, its
>
> power of decision-making, distribution of awards, purchase policy,
>
> organization of exhibitions, financing of culture, scholarships and so on.
>
> We, the artists, should seriously reexamine our allies, our interests, our
>
> work, our role and our real social position. All those artists who are
>
> disinterested regarding the existing sociability, who care only for

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[29] Karl Marx, *Capital. Volume I* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1990), 302.

themselves, belong to either the category of bureaucracy or [the] petite

bourgeoisie, which form the socio-psychological basis for the

development of usurpation of power, mastery over [wo]man and

plundering of [wo]man."[30]

Popović's social critique employed language akin to that of Marx in *The*

18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, where he examined the defeat of the proletariat

after the 1848 French revolution. In his elaborate analysis of the contradictions

between the classes and their representative*s* (actual bodies within the

government), Marx demonstrated how representation is linked closely with

imagination, the latter serving to mask the hollowness of the former. Marx

suggested that the notion of representation played a fundamental role in

changing the nature of revolutions in 1848. While previous revolutions were

"mov(ing) along an ascending line," replacing those in power – a body for a

body,[31] the 1848 revolution was in a "state of retrogressive motion" from the

onset, hesitant to replace the old order and becoming an instable conglomerate of

"crying contradictions."[32]

In 1975, Popović similarly argued that artists needed to move forward, not

backward, and smash the "edifice" provided by the Yugoslavian state and its

purported triumph over both fascism and capitalism. He also urged artists to

resist, as Marx would have it, "the possession of this huge state edifice as the

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[30] Zoran Popović, "For Self-Management Art," *October 75* (Belgrade) I (1975), reprinted in Tom Marioni, *Vision, Eastern Europe*, no. 2 (Oakland: Crown Point Press, January 1976): 24.
[31] Or "an eye for an eye."
[32] Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 2004), 43.

principle spoils of victory."[33] For as Marx proposed in his *Early Writings*, the

belief that society could possess such an edifice signified the "simple

estrangement of *all* these senses" and reduced its imaginary to a "sense of

having."[34] Consequently, the revolutionary class did not *own* the edifice it

inherited, but rather was possessed by it; that is, the naïveté of society invoked

the parasitic organism, which swiftly multiplied transforming its unaware host

(society), until the it became unrecognizable to itself, a mere appendage to the

parasite, offering up its last precious attribute - the humanity of the proletariat.[35]

For Popović, this parasitic edifice took the form of the art bureaucracy in

Yugoslavia, which not only withheld and ignored information about "the real

state of affairs, the real reality, in favor of bureaucratic reality," but also thrived

on "spreading misinformation instead of information."[36] In this regard, it is

imperative to remember that Milovan Djilas, who served by Tito's side and was

widely considered the next leader to follow Tito, earned a nine-year prison

sentence in 1956 for publically siding with Hungary's revolutionary war against

the USSR.[37] His writings against the corruption in the Yugoslav state were

circulated among the students and fueled much of the aggression against the

state in 1968, and an acute awareness that "freedom of expression" did not really

exist in Yugoslavia.[38] Dunja Blažević summarized the impact of 1968:

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[33] Ibid, 122.
[34] Marx, *Early Writings* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1992), 352.
[35] Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 44.
[36] Popović, "For Self-Management Art," 24.
[37] James Westcott, *When Marina Abramović Dies. A Biography* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2010), 37.
[38] Ibid.

Those eight days in 1968 remain the sole political capital of that

generation. In exchange for the abolished student organisations, that had

led the demonstrations and appeared to pose a potential danger for the

bureaucratic government, the students got the Student Cultural Centre in

Belgrade, the Student Centre in Zagreb … and the Student Cultural

Centre in Ljubljana. The young people that led and gathered around

these centres believed in the subversive, revolutionary power and

potential of the arts, which could change not only art and society, but also

the world.[39]

This revolutionary fervor was not isolated, as the 1968 student protests

throughout Europe challenged their respective governments and institutions for

such corruption years earlier. As Debord would state the theoretical exegesis of

Marxism and its revolutionary potential during the 1960s, "When ideology,

having become absolute through the possession of absolute power, changes from

partial knowledge into totalitarian falsehood, the thought of history is so

perfectly annihilated that history itself, even at the level of the most empirical

knowledge, can no longer exist."[40] In Yugoslavia, where state socialism held

sway and where Marxism was a maxim taught in schools, such efforts to

annihilate history did not go unnoticed, especially years after the students had

fought against such hypocrisy in 1968.

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[39] Dunja Blažević, "Who's that singing over there? Art in Yugoslavia and after. 1949-1989," in *Aspects / Positions. 50 Years of Art in Central Europe 1949 – 1999* (Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 1999): 92-93.
[40] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* London: Aldgate Press, 1983. [*La Société du Spectacle*, Paris: Buchet-Chaste, 1967], Thesis 108.

"The remarkable remaking of history," Popović concluded in his 1975 essay, "has proven to be a successful method of oppression, of killing new theses and the new artistic alternatives, which are critical towards hitherto existing art practice."[41] For Popović, as well as Tijardović and other SKC artists, it was not the closed borders of the Eastern Bloc that were barriers, but the relentless control of media, culture, and art in Yugoslavia. "SKC was de facto a kind of cultural ghetto," Goran Đorđević remembered in an interview from 2006.[42] Đorđević had also exhibited at the SKC in the 1970s, and was close to the artists active in the scene. He added: "Information on its [SKC's] activities were either ironic or malicious or disdainful, or there was no information at all."[43]

Popović's commentary on the corruption in the Yugoslav art world also came at the heels of the arrests and shutdown on Novi Sad's alternative scene during the early 1970s, when Slavko Bogdanović and Miroslav Mandić, members of the conceptual and experimental art collective Grupa KÔD, founded in 1970, were arrested for their dissident and artistic stands.[44] Bogdanović was part of the Youth Tribune established in 1954, which served as a platform for critical engagement with post-war Yugoslav cultural policies.[45] In "Pesma Underground Tribina Mladih" ("Underground Song of the Tribina Mladih in Novi Sad"),

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[41] Popović, "For Self-Management Art," 24.
[42] Goran Đorđević, "Story on Copy, an interview with Goran Đorđević," in *PRELOM Journal for Images and Politics* 8 (Fall 2006): 253. Translated by Jelena Maksimović.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Other members of Grupa KÔD: Slobodan Tišma, Mirko Radojičić, Miroslav Mandić, Janez Kocijančić, Pedja Vranesevic, Peđa Vranešević, Branko Andrić, and Kiš-Jovak Ferenc.
[45] Slavko Bogdanović's "Turnover tax" (1970), as well as his "L.H.O.O.Q Underground Magazine for the Development of Human Relations", a Comic book style magazine about the Group KÔD, which he established with Miroslav Mandić, were received with much controversy in Yugoslavia.

published in *Student* (December 1971), Bogdanović exposed the government's manipulative strategies of suffocating creative processes in Yugoslavia.[46] He distinguished between a commercial, intellectual, and a "real underground." In this poem and/or song, Bogdanović called for resistance, criticized censorship, and ascribed his and Grupa KÔD's activities to the real, spontaneous and therefore illegal underground. The publication of "Underground Song of the Tribina Mladih in Novi Sad," along with his other artistic activities, led to Bogdanović's and Miroslav Mandić's imprisonment for eight months, as well as the replacement of the editorial boards for the non-conformist magazines such as *Polja* and *Index* between 1972-1974. As Timotijević recalls, these "normal processes of turmoil within artistic groups … meant automatisation and the[n] practical abolition of the scene of this type in Novi Sad."[47]

The feminist curator and art historian Dunja Blažević, who founded the SKC with a clear Marxist agenda, was frequently torn between her family's own communist affiliations and the rebellious stands of SKC artists.[48] Her father, Jakov Blažević, was a prominent communist official in Zagreb, serving as the president of the parliament in Croatia since the late 1960s, and she was well connected in the official Yugoslav cultural scene.[49] Popović, Todosijević, and Urkom confirmed that Blažević was tied to the state through her family and was interested in merging the state ideology of self-management with the arts, which

[46] Slavko Bogdanović, "Pesma Underground Tribina Mladih" ("Underground Song of the Tribina Mladih in Novi Sad"), published in Muzej Savremene Umetnosti Vojvodine, *Evropski Konteksti Umetnosti XX Veka U Vojvodini* (Novi Sad, 2008), 813-816.
[47] Timotijević, 15.
[48] Zoran Popovic, interview in 2011.
[49] Westcott, 49.

brought conflict between her and SKC artists and curators. At the same time,

Blažević ensured that these artists were exposed to the international art world,

and also provided the solidarity and support that they needed. As Abramović (b.

1946) remembers:

> Dunja was not just anyone. She was an art historian, extremely bright,
> and rich. She was a Croatian and her father was the Minister of Culture of
> Croatia in that time when everything was fine with the republics. So it
> was incredibly important because whatever she was doing there, she had
> the background and the protection of the party. We [the SKC] became the
> island of the freedom of experiment in art in the middle of the old things.
> It was really like a miracle.[50]

Blažević began to organize the famous *April Meetings* in 1972, attracting

numerous international artists, including Joseph Beuys, Gina Pane, and Ana

Mendieta. She was, according to Branislav Dimitrijević, "oriented towards the

idea of SKC as a "meeting point" of radical youth culture and the political

establishment," and exemplified "those progressive and younger communist

officials who tried to be sensitive to the idea that the "new society" should bring

up "new art" too."[51] Her political investment in the SKC became apparent when

she organized the *Oktobar 75* meeting/exhibition in 1975 that functioned as an

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[50] Marina Abramović in conversation with Kristine Stiles, 17 April 2007, New York City. Cited in Stiles' "Cloud with its Shadow," in Kristine Stiles, Klaus Biesenbach and Chrissie Iles, *Marina Abramović* (London and New York: Phaidon, 2008), 33-95, page 136, footnote 62." Stiles added: "Dunja Blazevic also traveled extensively and showed Abramovic the important Documenta V exhibition catalogue in 1972, the first major international exhibition of Body Art, video, and installation."
[51] Branislav Dimitrijević, "Altered Identities: Goran Đorđević as an Artist, SKC as an Institution," in *PRELOM Journal for Images and Politics 8* (Fall 2006): 243.

alternative to the official Yugoslav *October Salon*, bringing together SKC artists and curators for a "collective re-thinking of the potential of the principles of 'self-management' in the field of culture, through either the affirmative or critical positioning." [52] Similar to Popović, who had published his "For Self-Management Art" essay on the occasion of *Oktobar 75*, Blažević also criticized the Yugoslavian government for its strict policies regarding the distribution or acknowledgement of "new" art:

> Art should be changed! As long as we leave art alone and keep on
> transferring works of art from studios to depots and basements by means
> of social regulations and mechanisms, storing them, like stillborn
> children, for the benefit of our cultural offspring, or while we keep on
> creating, through the private market, our own variant of the nouveau
> riche or kleinbürgers,[53] art will remain a social appendage, something
> serving no useful purpose, but something it is not decent or cultured to
> be without.[54]

Blažević created a space in the SKC that encouraged breaking through normative artistic practices, but she advocated for an art that would have a "useful purpose" besides furthering the bourgeois desire to be "cultured." This apparent Marxist stand, similar to Popović's analysis of self-management art,

[52] Jelena Vesić, "'Oktobar 75," in the catalogue of Prelom kolektiv and ŠKUC Gallery's exhibition, *SKC in ŠKUC: The Case of Students' Cultural Centre in 1970s*: SKC and Political Practices of Art (Ljubljana: ŠKUC Gallery, 2008), 5.
[53] Kleinbürger was the German expression for petty bourgeoisie, a term frequently used by radical activists such as Ulrike Meinhof of the Red Army Faction.
[54] Dunja Blažević , "Art as a Form of Ownership Awareness," in catalogue of Prelom kolektiv and ŠKUC Gallery's exhibition, *SKC in ŠKUC: The Case of Students' Cultural Centre in 1970s*: SKC and Political Practices of Art (Ljubljana: ŠKUC Gallery, 2008), 7.

was also shared by their Western colleagues (especially Art & Language), who were fiercely critical of Western art institutions and artists, and who also showed their work in exhibitions at the SKC in 1972 and 1974. In 1975, Popović and Tijardović were invited by *The Fox* to write an article about the Yugoslavian art scene and its relationship to the West, in which they stressed how disappointed many of the Yugoslavian artists and intellectuals were by the fact the artists like Joseph Beuys and Daniel Buren, who had participated in SKC exhibitions and events in the early 1970s, had received so much money for their works, despite their self-proclaimed Marxist intentions. "We couldn't understand what made them -and they were allegedly Marxists - so powerful and important," they noted, stressing: "A lot of Yugoslavian artists did similar work but received no money, no accolades. So we all thought, given the notion of the Yugoslavian self-management system, that we could make something of our own, which really belongs within our society and culture."[55]

They brought these intentions to the *October 75* event, with the result that factions separated them from Blažević. Although it appears from Blažević's statement that the collective rethinking at *October 75* was harmonious, nothing could be further from the truth, as vehement disagreements erupted between SKC artists and curators. Biljana Tomić left the SKC in 1975 because of this very politicized project. She considered the program too doctrinaire; Tomić did not want to propagate politics attached to art (or serving art), but instead was interested in the innovations that various formulations of art could take in order

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[55] Zoran Popović and Jasna Tijardović, "A Note on Art in Yugoslavia," in *The Fox* 1 (1975), 50.

to enrich culture, namely a "new language, new forms of behavior, new forms of communication, and new forms of expression."[56] She distinguished herself from the politics at the SKC by emphasizing the cultural-political potential of changing perception at the root, instead of viewing art as a personal political project.[57] Despite this disagreement, Tomić remembers that the difference between her and Blažević brought a kind of balance into that space, and under the urging of Blažević, she returned to the SKC in 1976. [58]

That same year, Tijardović wrote a scathing critique of the SKC in *The Fox* v 3 (1976). There, she accused the SKC art gallery of its complacency vis-á-vis the state and for abandoning its initial aim of "oppos[ing] certain established forms of consciousness," instead "becom[ing] a self-protective bureaucracy within a larger self-protective bureaucracy, the State."[59] Tijardović worked at the Museum of Contemporary Art at the time, and was frequently asked to organize and write about exhibitions at SKC. The lack of funding and support frustrated her, and like Popović, she argued that self-management in the arts meant that outside organizers needed to be paid, and "on equal footing in the distribution of resources."[60] Tijardović also strongly rejected SKC's emphasis on the "liquidation" of traditional forms of avant-garde practice, and critiqued that vision of art as totalitarian. "The term "transcendence" or "liquidation" is too imitative – it comes from politics," she argued, calling it "an unhealthy,

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[56] Biljana Tomić in conversation with the author, August 4, 2011, in Belgrade, Serbia.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Jasna Tijardović, "The 'Liquidation' of Art: Self-Management or Self-Protection," in *The Fox* 3 (1976), 98.
[60] Ibid.

masculine idea, [which] reveals the extent to which repressive forces are stored

up and the extent to which they can appear as a distorted form – in this case the

idea of "transcending" art reminds me too much of the transcendence and

liquidation of people."[61]

The equation of liquidation in art with "liquidation of people" was

without a doubt informed by Yugoslavia's traumatic past, which, like many

other European countries, housed concentration camps and, at the same time,

prided itself on uniquely overturning the fascists without any help from the West

or the Soviet Union.[62] In countries like the U.S. and Yugoslavia, both of which

were proud of defeating fascism, such accusations hit a nerve in the post-World

War II moral consciousness and self-presentations of these nations. Tijardović's

aim was not to shut down the SKC; on the contrary, she wanted the SKC to resist

complicity with the state, and to permit artists and intellectuals to pursue artistic

experimentation and political interventions. As she stated, the SKC "has opened

its doors but it cannot go out of them – the people within it have become slaves

to the pressures o f their own creations. I can now understand why some art

groups and many individuals in this country have stopped working, become

silent, or chose mysticism instead of activism."[63] This scrutiny of the SKC was

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[61] Ibid, 99.
[62] There may be a connection between a sectdion of Popović's *Struggle in New York* where a statement by Kathryn Bigelow draws the film into conversation with such self-congratulations for overturning fasism. "Let's not pretend," she says, that "most of the power and clout in the art world is in the hands of <u>Fascists</u> of one kind or another. Fascist interpretation and use of piping production in its fiefdom must only enjoy neighborly relations with the self interpretations of the of the 'producers'. Question: is Weltanschauung an intrinsically Fascist concept?" See, Centar Za Fotografiju i TV, *Zoran Popović Struggle in New York* (Zagreb: Centar Za Fotografiju i TV, 1977) np.
[63] Jasna Tijardović, "The 'Liquidation' of Art," 99.

perhaps too harsh, as it did provide space for experimentation, publication, and visibility. But Tijardović's perspective represented the dedication of artists to new forms of political and social life, and also attested to the fact that the SKC was a space in which this kind of dispute was accepted, especially given the fact that both Tijardović and Popović stayed involved with the SKC.

Already by the early 1970s, the SKC had developed an international reputation for performance art, in large measure due to the respect garnered by Raša Todosijević, Zoran Popović, Neša Paripović, Gergelj Urkom, Marina Abramović, and Era Milivojević, six artists known as the Group of Six. Their works exposed the discrepancies between state ideology and Yugoslav day-to-day reality, and were most notoriously known internationally for Abramović's 1974 *Rhythm 5* performance, a body action featuring a burning star suggesting the Yugoslav flag. Its flames absorbed the oxygen around her, nearly suffocating the artist who passed out, rendering the work with its flaming star a symbol of the millions of psychic deaths under socialist systems.

But it was Raša Todosijević (b. 1945) who presented his political critique in conceptual works, installations, films, and performance, and who was the unstated leader of the group. While Abramović became the most renowned artist from Belgrade, Todosijević was the prominent artist working in performance in the early 1970s in Belgrade. It was Todosijević who proclaimed: "Our sole treasure is our bodies and our ideas."[64] Todosijević saw the body and its subject,

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[64] Todosijević quoted in Dejan Sretenović, *Was ist Kunst? Art As Social Practice* (Belgrade: Geopoetika, 2001), 27.

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." [65] In his performances *Art and*

Memory and *Edinburgh Statement,* two actions from 1975, Todosijević presented

poignant denunciations of the art world.

In *Umetnost i Memorija* (*Art and Memory)* performed at the SKC,

Todosijević spent four hours reciting from memory all the artists' names he

knew, starting with those from Sumeria, Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt up to the

twentieth century, and adding himself chronologically to this long list. [Figure 3]

Appearing with his mouth covered by a scarf, Todosijević looked like the iconic

image of "a terrorist announcing his requests on television."[66] At this moment in

history, such a representation evoked leftist guerrilla groups like the Italian Red

Brigade and the German Red Army Faction, both of which had formed only a

few years earlier, attracting criticism and support from the New Left after the

1968 student protests, at the same time as these groups were condemned by

governments and the media for their violence. Intentionally appearing as if a

revolutionary terrorist, Todosijević aligned himself with the outlaw, who after

demanding change, revolts. Todosijević's recitation of names underscored his

aim to situate his art within the continuity of the revolutionary throughout

history and to provide his art its own self-validation as an image in art history.

Pointing to how the history of art is constructed through the formation of

canons, Todosijević also underscored how it is erased and prohibited within

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[65] Todosijević quoted in Ibid, 26.
[66] Ibid, 32.

given political contexts, in his case the socialist framework of Yugoslavia, which - unlike the rest of the Eastern Bloc - advocated socialist modernism over socialist realism. In his performance, *Edinburgh Statement: Who is making profit on art and who is earning honestly* (1975), Todosijević, again with his mouth covered by a scarf, painstakingly enumerated all the people and institutions that "profit from the good and bad in art," from the "factories which produce materials necessary to artists," "firms which sell materials" along with "their workers, clerks, sales personal," "gallerists," "fire inspectors," and "janitors." The list goes on for numerous pages, and ends with the artist addressing: "..cheap politicians who … through relatives, friends and connections… [are] brainwashing artists [while] mak[ing] enough money for two lifetimes."[67]

Todosijević's text and action anticipated what would become known as institutional critique, which is still relevant today, but his performance took place on the occasion of the "ASPECTS 75' Contemporary Yugoslav Art" exhibition in Edinburgh, organized by the impresario Richard Demarco, a seminal figure bringing East European experimental art into an international art context.[68] Todosijević implicated both the East and the West, as well as his own and other artists' complicity with the industry of art. Such institutional criticism was central to both performance and conceptual art during this period, and the San

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[67] Raša Todosijević, "Edinburgh statement: Who is making profit on art and who is earning honestly," in Tom Marioni, *Vision, Eastern Europe*, no. 2 (Oakland: Crown Point Press, January 1976), 32-34.
[68] The Richard Demarco Gallery chronology lists the following artists out of 49 Yugoslav participants: "Abramovic, Aleksic, Anastasov, Bem, Bucan, Biard, Dimitrijevic, Generalic, Ferri, Martinis, Group Oho, Ivekovic, Jesih, Nusa and Sreco Dragan, Knifer, Richter, Paripovic, Trbuljak, Tadic," chronology available at: http://www.demarco-archive.ac.uk/richard_demarco_chronology.pdf

Francisco conceptual and performance artist Tom Marioni featured Todosijević's text in a special 1976 issue on "Eastern Europe" of his journal *VISION*, published by the renowned Crown Point Press in Oakland. This landmark publication on Eastern Europe featured artists working in conceptual, performance, and land art from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Yugoslavia. It served a seminal role in educating an entire generation of artists and scholars about East European experimental art, and nothing comparable was ever published in New York.[69]

Nonetheless, it must not be forgotten that there was no market for East European artists (either in the East or West), especially conceptual and performance artists like Todosijević, whose resentment was fueled by the highly distorted and hypocritical program of self-management in Yugoslavia. Without a market, the famous *April Meetings for Expanded Media* that Blažević organized at the SKC in Belgrade, served the function of creating a dialogue between East European and Western artists and scholars. Moreover, these meetings attracted numerous internationally recognized performance and conceptual artists, who also created installations, sound, and video art. Indeed, after meeting SKC artists and seeing their performances at Demarco's *Edinburgh Festival* in 1973, the following year Joseph Beuys participated in the Belgrade SKC *April Meeting*, the

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[69] Tom Marioni, *Vision, Eastern Europe*, no. 2 (Oakland: Crown Point Press, January 1976). This special issue on Eastern Europe was foundational for art historian Kristine Stiles, who was a graduate student at the University of California at Berkeley at the time, knew Marioni and interviewed him at his Museum of Conceptual Art (MOCA), and belonged to the San Francisco art world. After reading the special issue when it came out in 1976, she began researching Eastern European performance and conceptual art and travelled to Vienna (where she first met Todosijević and saw him perform) and then to Zagreb and Belgrade where Todosijević introduced her to BiljanaTomić, Zoran Popović, and others. Stiles credits Marioni and this special issue with single handedly determining the future direction of her scholarship on experimental art in Eastern Europe. Stiles in conversation with the author, June 28, 2013.

same meeting at which Todosijević presented *Pijene Vode* (*Drinking Water).*
[Figures 4-6]

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."[70] 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 discolored the white cloth as it became saturated with water and vomit.[71] Todosijević continued his action until almost all of the cloth was stained with the violet pigment, and the fish died.[72] Marinela Koželj, Todosijević's elegant and beautiful wife, 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

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[70] Todosijević's statement about *Drinking Water* published in Sretenović, *Was ist Kunst? Art As Social Practice*, 59.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

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!"[73]

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?"[74] 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?[75] 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.[76] Todosijević enhanced this religio-

philosophical context by using the color purple, which is one of the six original

liturgical colors 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 where artists could express the symbolism

of dissidence that was more often than not misunderstood by the state, and

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[73] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Bernard Williams, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 120.
[74] Ibid.
[75] 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 from http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06083a.htm
[76] Points Kristine Stiles discussed in her "Methodology of Art History" course at Duke University, November 5, 2007.

where the artist functioned with the aura of a priest and even a healer.[77] 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 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."[78] 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

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[77] 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*." See Hegyi, "Central Europe as a Hypothesis and a Way of Life," in Lóránd, Hegyi, Dunja Blažević, and Bojana Pejic, eds., *Aspects/Positions: 50 Years of Art in Central Europe* (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 1999): 32.
[78] Jelena Vesić, "'New Artistic Practice' in Former Yugoslavia: From Leftist Critique of Socialist Bureaucracy to the Post-Communist Artifact in Neo-Liberal Institution Art," in the catalogue of Prelom kolektiv and ŠKUC Gallery's exhibition, *SKC in ŠKUC: The Case of Students' Cultural Centre in 1970s*: SKC and Political Practices of Art (Ljubljana: ŠKUC Gallery, 2008), 4.

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, Rrose Sélavy, became evident already 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 but

written exactly during the period when Todosijević began performing *Was Ist*

Kunst?!, 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."[79] Irigaray's insights help point out that in

his art action, Todosijević consumed and purged himself of water, signifying the

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[79] Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans., Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 12; originally published in 1980 as *Amante marine de Friedrich Nietzsche* in Paris by Minuit.

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."[80]

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's described on his wall text as "Josephine Beuys"(Joseph Beuys' anima),[81] Marcel Duchamp (doubled in Rrose Sélavy), and Todosijević's own feminine mirror image, Marinela. Is it any wonder then that Todosijević orchestrated a performance in which he would receive no answer to his question (and the title of a long series of actions): *Was ist Kunst?* series (1977-78). 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:

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[80] Luce Irigaray, Gillian C. Gill (trans), *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 66.

[81] 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.

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?[82]

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. 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!"[83] Todosijević took just such risks, without the guilt that Nietzsche insists gets in the way of creative genius.[84]

One additional dimension of Todosijević's actions must be addressed here: the violence, destruction, and psychophysical pain he initiated and endured, a condition viewed by a beautiful woman. Turning to Nietzsche, again, the philosopher proposed that such art enables one to experience suffering, agony that battles against resignation. When Todosijević swallowed, choked, and vomited, and harmed himself, as well as sacrificed another creature, he did so in the name of a kind of Nietzschean catharsis. For such devastation, Nietzsche

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[82] Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, pages 12 and 67.
[83] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 105.
[84] Ibid.

insisted, is related to tragedy, which must include its Apollonian and Dionysian elements in order to express the depth of the human condition. In *Drinking Water,* Todosijević confronted the fragmented self, misery, and inevitable Thanatos, as well as the female element of Eros. Testing the limits of his own body, the perception of his viewers, and the limits of art – as a decision *in* art – Todosijević cried out for understanding of the enormous power of art as a social force.

Writing about the structure and affect of trauma, Dominick La Capra calls for an art that incites "empathic unsettlement," disturbing viewers and requiring them to consider their own actions:

> One should recognize and imaginatively apprehend that certain forms of
> behavior (that of the *Einsatzgruppen* or of camp guards, for example) may
> be possible for oneself in certain circumstances, however much the events
> in question beggar the imagination. One may even suggest that
> recognition is necessary to resist even reduced analogues of such
> behavior as they present themselves as possibilities in one's own life.[85]

Art may, therefore, present behaviors that are not responsible, but that serve to act out life in order to work through it. Artists such as Todosijević taught this lesson long before critics theorized it. For Todosijević, decision is art. He states: "The way in which an artist asks a question about art is a work of art."[86] Making the decision to challenge himself - to explore the limits of survival was a

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[85] Dominick La Capra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 104.
[86] Todosijević quoted in Sretenović, *Was ist Kunst? Art As Social Practice,* 26.

way to preserve the sovereignty of his body and will in the socialist autocratic regime.

In this regard, it is important to recall that Tito had made himself a dictator by establishing a new constitution in 1974, which granted him power until his death in 1980. Todosijević's actions, therefore, also grappled with the loss of the sovereignty of the body within the autocratic power of the state, where the head of the country was no longer elected by the people but acted as the omniscient and omnipotent leader; where those who resisted were confined to the shadows of society, or, in the case of Todosijević, within the "ghettoized" and "tolerated" SKC space. Relevant to this state of affairs, in 1976 Todosijević wrote *From the Street: Before the Introduction into History*:

If you want to be in history

You have to be ME- RAŠA TODOSIJEVIĆ

But, admit that

it is impossible to be ME and simultaneously to keep your own self …

If you really want to go down in history

(even though you have to be Me)

(even though you have to lie)

…you have to accept something so that you can be accepted and so you

will lose everything to get something and to get something you have to

accept something to be accepted so that you lose everything to get

something…[87]

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[87] Dejan Sretenović, *Thank You, Raša Todosijević* (Belgrade: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002), 58-64.

Todosijević's willingness to lose and gain himself at the same time in the form of art, in order to grasp history, was his answer to the question "What is Art?" and why the resolve he demonstrated in his actions were vital to his construction of historical truth. The desire to "make history" entails a loss of the self, encourages one to "lose everything to get something" that is already marked by a loss of everything else, namely always already being inauthentic.

This could not be a more accurate description of how the state and the market holds tyranny over the artist, encouraging him or her to "sell out" to history or fame (money), which in themselves are always also inauthentic. These dilemmas are the foundation of Todosijević's art and his decisions as art. As he writes:

BUT THE CAKE OF HISTORY STILL LAY UNTOUCHED IN THE SHOP WINDOW

SO I HAD TO:

smear myself with mud

swallow water…

breath like a carp…

think of history

keep notes on profiteers

screw museums

write about revolution

hate art

make things clear

talk

scream[88]

History is a construction that cannot witness and bodies are the only records of events, as Todosijević sardonically notes: "FROM THE DEPTHS OF HISTORY – SILENCE."[89] The demonstration of his certitude did not provide a way out of this polemic for Todosijević, but art was the means by which he sought autonomy, to encounter the depths of history.

Marina Abramović used her body to resist any kind of control of herself that she herself had not imposed on herself. Her body became not only her resistance to the state, but also to the family. Thus, Abramović was trying to discipline her body - following her mother's training - and to wrest control of its management from others, while countering the false policies of self-management by the state. Now celebrated as the "grandmother" of performance art, as she identifies herself (ignoring the fact that Carolee Schneemann preceded her performance art and informed it by over a decade), Abramović rapidly became known for her radical self-harming actions. Indeed, her first self-mutilating performance took place during Richard Demarco's 1973 Edinburgh Festival: *Rhythm 10*.[90] One of the most extensive analyses of this action, Stiles describes the work this way:

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[88] Dejan Sretenović, *Thank You, Raša Todosijević* (Belgrade: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002), 58-64.
[89] Ibid, 64.
[90] Similar to the rest of the Group of Six, with the exception of Era Milivojević (b. 1944), who could not afford to travel at that time, Abramovic travelled frequently to the West, a luxury afforded her by the powerful position of her parents, as heros of World War II and apparatchiks of the military and Yugoslav Communist party, as well as the fact that her maternal grandfather was the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church from 1930 to 1937.

Abramović applied polish to the nails of her left hand and then, kneeling before an array of twenty knives in different shapes and sizes, the twenty-six year old artist splayed her fingers on the floor and began stabbing between them with her right hand. Conceiving of the varying sizes and sounds of the knives as 'rhythms', she recorded the process on a tape recorder, only stopping each time she cut herself to rewind the tape, pick up a different knife, and begin again. After she had used all the blades, Abramović rewound the tape, listened to the first action, and then attempted to repeat the performance in the same rhythm, sequence, and manner of lacerating herself. That she would convert such violence into a musical metaphor related to rhythm summons the fact that her mother 'forced me to play the piano even [though] I didn't have any ear for music'. Re-playing that obligation in its most painful literal manifestation, Abramović punished the fingers that struck the notes without joy or talent for what she perceived to be their clumsy failure. This aesthetics of pain visualized a somatic memory of emotional suffering disengaged from the source of its wound, even though Abramović has insisted, 'I was never interested in shocking. What I was interested in was experiencing the physical and mental limits of the human body and mind. I wanted to experience these limits together with the public. I could never do this alone.'[91]

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[91] Kristine Stiles, "Cloud with its Shadow," in Kristine Stiles, Klaus Biesenbach and Chrissie Iles, *Marina Abramović* (London and New York: Phaidon, 2008), 64. Stiles cites Abramovic in Pierre Coulibeuf *Balkan Baroque* (1999), UbuWeb Film: http://www.ubu.com/film/coulibeuf.html, and Abramović quoted in Johan Pijnappel, *Art Meets Science and Spirituality in a Changing Economy* SDL, Amsterdam, 1990, p. 301, quoted in Pejic, 'Im-Körper-Sein', p. 29.

This theorization of *Rhythm 10* both introduces the artist's fierce art, but also its profound foundation in her family, to which I shall return at the end of this chapter.

For the moment, it must be understood that Abramović's extreme body works were uncharacteristic for the rest of the Group of Six with the exception, to a certain but lesser degree, of those of Todosijević. Moreover, she did not identify as a feminist. Nonetheless, both Pejić and Šuvaković propose that some of Abramović's work "could be read in feminist terms," even though the artist does not have a feminist agenda, and has denied feminism as a political model for herself.[92] In addition, and although dominated by male artists, the exhibition space at SKC in Belgrade was directed and curated by a number of feminists, including Blažević, Pejić, and Tomić. Gržinić has argued that, "the feminist experience in the 1970s laid the foundations for the avant-garde in art and culture in Belgrade and Zagreb."[93] Tijardović has identified three artists who performed in Belgrade and who embodied women's performance art –Gina Pane, Ana Mendieta,[94] and Abramović. Tijardović further suggested that these three women experimented with "the ritual of pain" in response to the fact "that

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[92] Quote from Bojana Pejić, "Marina Abramović," in *Kontakt…works from the Collection of Erste Bank Group* (Vienna and Cologne: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Buchhandlung Walther König, 2006), 83. For Šuvaković's comments on Abramović, see Šuvaković, *Konceptualna Umetnost* (Novi Sad: Muzej Savremene Umetnosti Vojvodine, 2007), 265.

[93] Marina Gržinić, "Feminism and Performance in the Territory of Ex-Yugoslavia," in Laura B. Lengel and John T. Warren, eds., *Casting Gender: Women And Performance in Intercultural Contexts, Critical Intercultural Communication Studies* 7 (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 165.

[94] Ana Mendieta did a performance at the SKC gallery in 1976.

the woman's body was publicly controlled."[95] Of these three women, however, Abramović was the only local woman artist in Belgrade who tested the limits of her female body. By deliberately placing herself in situations that came dangerously close to death and that represented a woman's insistence to control her world within the boundaries of art, Abramović perpetually located herself between Eros and Thanatos, two dichotomous conditions intrinsically linked to the poles of life and psychic death in trauma.

Abramović began as a painter before moving to sound installations. Her friendship with Tomislav Gotovac and Era Milivojević strongly influenced her view of what "new" art could do, or what shape it would take. Gotovac had already begun nude performances in the early 1960s and continued to use his naked body in pornographic and experimental films, photographs, and street actions until his death in 2010.[96] In 1971, he was arrested for a *Streaking* performance in Belgrade's Sremska Street, and Abramović was present for many of his other actions in Belgrade.[97] That same year, Milivojević made Abramović the object of art, when he taped her with packing tape to a table at the SKC in

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[95] Jasna Tijardović - Popović, "Performance Art in Belgrade in the 70s. On the exhibition of photo-documentation and photographs," in *Performance / 1968-1978* (Belgrade: Gallery Beograd, 2006), 30.

[96] Gotovac is considered the most important performance artist in Zagreb and the earliest and most radical body artist, whose actions resulted in multiple arrests throughout his career.

[97] In the 1970, Gotovac also did a performance in Abramović's atelier on the occasion of the Bavarian TV film "Belgrade Youth," which featured a nude female performer whose body was painted and smeared, among other things. For documentation, see Aleksandar Battista Ilić and Diana Nenadic, *Cim Ujutro otvorim Oci, vidim Film/When I open my Eyes in the Morning I see a Movie* (Zagreb: Croatian Film Clubs' Association and Museum of Contemporary Art, 2003), np.

Belgrade. Milivojević's spontaneous action drew in the artists and curators of the SKC, who rejoiced in this new "art" at the SKC.[98]

By 1974 in *Rhythm 5*, Abramović would make her own explicit aesthetic statement against the state and for her sovereign individuality when, situated outside, but on the grounds of, the SKC, she entered in a wooden 5-pointed star structure filled with 100 liters of gasoline that she lit on fire. [Figure 7] She then ritually cut her hair and nails, and threw the clippings into the fire before lying down in the middle of the star. Among others, Joseph Beuys (who had met Abramović at Demarco's Edinburgh Festival) watched the artist, became limp and lost consciousness. As Stiles has argued, "although she internalized the necessity for strict adherence to severe disciplinary measures at home and to communist principles in the public sphere, Abramović also externalized their psychosomatic affects in body actions for others to witness."[99] Those who witnessed such effects felt a need to "rescue" the artist and Urkom and Radomir Damnjan came to the rescue, pulling her from the flaming star and ending her performance. Later Abramović expressed frustration that the performance had concluded prematurely, but it was Urkom's and Damnjan's action that saved her life and signified the ethical choices presented to viewers by performance artists.

That Abramović objected to the intervention in her work by the public establishes several conditions of her art. First, it was more "theatrical" than body

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[98] This is evidenced by a photograph at the SKC archive, which shows Todosijević, Popović, Paripović, Urkom, Abramović, Milivojević, as well as Tijardović, Pejić, and Denegri, among others. See Marinko Sudac, *Virtualni Muzej Avangarde*, http://www.avantgarde-museum.com/hr/museum/kolekcija/4463-ERA-MILIVOJEVIC/

[99] Kristine Stiles, "Cloud with its Shadow," in Kristine Stiles, Klaus Biesenbach and Chrissie Iles, *Marina Abramović* (London and New York: Phaidon, 2008), 34.

art in that, regardless of where or how it was presented, she tried to insist on an inviolable proscenium. Second, in excluding intervention from the public, she hoped to maintain absolute control. And, third, such dangerous work and her rejection of assistance suggest, if not a death wish, at least conditions of an inner turmoil with which she would struggle her whole life.

Urkom's and Damnjan's intervention was not the only one to occur in the early years of her work. Similarly, the Austrian artist Valie Export would interfere in Abramović's *Thomas Lips* (1976), which involved Abramović cutting a pentagram onto her stomach and laying on crucifix-shaped ice block with a heater pointed at her wounds, bleeding profusely, an edurance piece Export and other viewers could not endure witnessing without intervening; they removed the ice blocks and Abramović was taken to the hospital.[100] Even in her infamous *Rhythm 0* action in Italy (1974), the artist surrendered her body to the mercy of gallery visitors – allowing them to do whatever they "desire" to her, including using any of the 72 potentially dangerous objects (like a gun placed on a table). In this manner, Abramović intended and attempted to control the length of the performance at exactly six hours, regardless of any intervention. That same year, Abramović had another encounter with an audience member during *Art Must Be Beautiful. Artist Must Be Beautiful*, an action that she performed at the Charlottenburg Art Festival. [Figure 8] Repeatedly exclaiming the words of the title while violently brushing her hair until her scalp bled, Abramović was accosted by a woman who walked up to the artist and "grabbed" her, "first by

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[100] See Westcott, 82.

the hand, and then by the hair," Abramović remembers. "I pushed her away, continued and eventually finished my 'happening'."[101] Abramović continued her performance but she felt that the woman's intrusion had ruined her "happening."

In the mid-1970s, Abramović equated body art and performance with the more antiquated term "happening," defining it as follows:

> This term encompasses everything that is going on in a gallery or outside of it, where the artist works or rather the body does the work. 'Happenings' like these have their own regulations – they are conditioned by place and space. This means that the artist conceives a project (the contents of a 'happening'), and during the performance is consistent with his [or her] design… .She [the woman], therefore, violated the framework of my design, which in turn lost in value that I would attach to it, she upset the flow of things and those rules that I defined.[102]

A decade earlier, in 1965, Allan Kaprow had outlined the parameters of happenings in his *Untitled Guidelines for Happenings*, emphasizing its aim as the dissolution of the line between art and life, as well as that between the artist and audience: "*It follows that audiences should be eliminated entirely.* All the elements – people, space, the particular materials and character of the environment, time – can in this way be integrated [Kaprow's emphasis]."[103] Abramović attempted to

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[101] "Marina Abramović in conversation with Radovan Gajić, 1974," in Stiles, Biesenbach and Iles, *Marina Abramović*, 125. It seems that this interview is wrongly dated, as the performance to which she refers took place in 1975.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Allan Kaprow, "Guidelines for Happenings," in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, eds., *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*. Second edition, revised and

keep that line intact, although she deliberately made herself vulnerable to the audience, a risk many performance and action artists take. Nevertheless, she insisted upon remaining in a position of power by fighting the intruder's interference. Although Abramović interpreted this interruption as a destruction of her work, what she failed to realize was that such interactions with the public proved the power of her art event to encourage others to act. For Abramović, however, sovereignty over her body, her decisions, her actions, and most importantly her art, had more weight than the participation of a viewer. Abramović later remembered, without commenting further: "Right after the 'action' that same girl, as I was told, committed suicide."[104]

Unlike Abramović's rejection of viewer intercession, Chris Burden welcomed it, and even attempted to surreptitiously structure it into his work. For example, that same year, he would perform *Doomed* (1975). Lying in a gallery underneath a large pane of glass, with a clock positioned on the wall above him, Burden endured some 45 hours before a staff person from the museum took the personal initiative to intercede by placing a glass of water next to the artist, who immediately jumped up, smashed the glass and the clock, ending the performance. In an interview, Burden later recalled his anxiety about leaving the responsibility of ending the piece to members of the art institution. "On the second night," after he had been lying under the pane of glass for over twenty-four hours, Burden thought to himself, "my God, don't they care anything at all

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expanded by Kristine Stiles (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2012), 837.
[104] "Marina Abramović in conversation with Radovan Gajić, 1974," 125.

about me? Are they going to leave me here to die?"[105] For Burden, the question of public intervention was central to the significance and ethics of body art; while for Abramović, her own sense of endurance, control, self-expression, and the exploration of her psychic and corporeal limits belonged to her decision alone. In addition, Abramović expressed difficulty in participating in other artists' works; for example, when she performed in Hermann Nitsch's *Orgies Mysteries Theater* in 1975, she remembered: "I wanted to see how far I could work inside another artist's concept … and found out that I didn't have the motivation for this." Her answer? She abruptly ended her participation in Nitsch's work.[106]

The exhibition of total control whilst complete submission to the strictures of her own body characterizes Abramović's body works, a conceptual and corporeal strategy that bore the emotional and psychic intensity of a woman otherwise absent at the SKC. She introduced this female perspective during the last year of her life and work in Belgrade when she participated in the *April Meeting* by performing *Oslobadjanje Glasa* (*Freeing the Voice*),[107] an action that included screaming for three hours. [Figure 9] The score read:

> Laying on the floor with my head tilted backwards
>
> I scream until I lose my voice[108]

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[105] Roger Ebert, "Chris Burden: My God, are they going to leave me here to die?" in *Roger Ebert Interviews*, http://www.rogerebert.com/interviews/chris-burden-my-god-are-they-going-to-leave-me-here-to-die
[106] Westcott, 79.
[107] This action was part of her 1975 trilogy of performances titled *Freeing the Voice, Freeing the Memory, and Freeing the Body*.
[108] Marina Abramović, "Freeing the Voice," in Klaus Biesenbach, *Marina Abramović The Artist is Present* (New York: MOMA, 2010), 84.

The extreme minimalism of Abramović's endurance pieces evinces her admiration of Burden. Eyes wide open and laying down with her legs up, Abramović's scream turned into a tormented howl, one that induced empathy in the viewer, who witnessed and heard what might be described as the primal scream of women's experience from child bearing to rape, war, murder and oppression.

Only five years earlier, inspired by the Puerto-Rican American artist Raphael Montañez Ortiz's *Self-Destruction* performance at the Destruction in Art Symposium in 1966, psychologist and psychiatric social worker Arthur Janov published his best-selling book, *Primal Scream* (1970).[109] Janov argued that "screaming" would release the pain resulting from a traumatic wound buried in the unconscious. While Janov's therapeutic approach was widely undertaken by such artists as John Lennon and Yoko Ono, but equally widely contested as effective by psychologists, the emphasis on releasing psychic pain through body action was a prevalent concern to artists in the 1960s and 1970s, especially feminists.

In reducing her experience to an animalistic howl, Abramović felt that she had "freed" her "voice." Such an extreme method for finding one's voice recalls how traumatic suffering cohabits the silences that literary theorist Elaine Scarry explored in her book *The Body in Pain* (1985). She pointed out that such trauma "actively destroys" language bringing about "an immediate reversion to a state

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[109] Kristine Stiles, "Synopsis of the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) and Its Theoretical Significance," *The Act* [New York] 1 (Spring 1987): 22-31.

anterior to language."[110] Following Scarry, Caruth identifies "a wound that cries out," and suggests that such corporeal narratives enunciate trauma in "the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available."[111] The lack of actual narration in Abramović's performance attests to what Stiles described as the continuous necessity "to undermine its invisibility [and] its concealed conditions, its silences [that] are the spaces in which the destructions of trauma multiply."[112] The delayed appearance of traumatic experience "cannot be linked only to what is known," Caruth points out, "but also to what remains to be unknown in our very actions and our language."[113] Abramović's emphasis on complete control during her exhausting effort to free her voice signified the artist's stubborn and vehement examination of the limits of her body, as well as her attempt to use art to transform and heal her own and her audience's experiences.

Abramović would only temporarily share control over herself and her art after meeting the German artist Ulay (Frank Uwe Laysiepen) in Amsterdam in 1975. Ulay had been working in performance and photography, and performing female personas in the gay and transexual environments of Amsterdam. In an interview with Alessandro Cassin, Ulay stated: "Humans have animus or anima. I was always had a great flirtation with my female side, my anima. And I believe

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[110] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4.
[111] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press. 1996), 4.
[112] Stiles, "Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies," 38.
[113] Caruth, Unclaimed Experience, 4.

my anima is a very important part of my intuition."[114] Ulay found his anima in Abramović. They not only shared the same birth date (November 30), but also bore a striking physical resemblance to each other, which they magnified in their joint performance works, often styling their hair in identical ways and wearing unisex and matching clothing.

The couple performed together a few times at the SKC in Belgrade, but Abramović's attachment to Ulay increased her desire, and gave her an excuse, to leave Belgrade permanently, which she did in 1975. This decision meant to break the control of her country over her body and to separate once and for all from communism. But it also meant that she could escape from her mother Danica Abramović, who Abramović has insisted was a major source of her oppression.[115] Abramović often claims that her mother, a high ranking communist of the state and dominant figure in Yugoslav culture, pushed her to become a traditional painter and was disturbed by the artists' self-mutilating and naked performances. Danica apparently also exercised social control over her daughter subjecting her to a ten o'clock curfew until her late twenties, even after her

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[114] Alessandro Cassin, "Ulay with Alessandro Cassin," in *The Brooklyn Rail. Critical Perspectives on Arts, Politics, and Culture* (May 2011): http://www.brooklynrail.org/2011/05/art/ulay-with-alessandro-cassin

[115] Abramović was born to two partisan fighters, whose heroic deeds in the fight against fascism were celebrated by the communists. Her father, Vojo Abramović served by Tito's side as the "chief commander" of the prime minister's elite guard. Danica Abramović studied art history after the war and was a powerful figure in Yugoslav culture. Danica Abramović's father was Varnava Rosić, the patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox church from 1930-1937, when he was murdered. Rosić was a Nazi sympathizer. For more information about Marina Abramović's family history, see Kristine Stiles'"Cloud with its Shadow," in *Marina Abramovic* (London: Phaidon, 2008), 33-94.

marriage to Neša Paripović in 1971, control that Danica continued to maintain because the couple lived in Abramović's parents' more spacious home.[116]

Stiles has pointed out that Abramović referred to her parents in many works of art, including *Delusional* (1994) where the artist associates her mother with a rat and a kind of regal authoritarianism while linking her father to dance, play, and sexuality. This work of art, in which the artist performs a striptease, while eating a tear-inducing onion, Stiles argues, strongly suggests an erotic relationship with her father and the subsequent conflicted response to her parents typical of incestuous homes wherein the child idealizes the perpetrator and demonizes the parent who did not, even if she could not, "save" her from the abuse. Stiles quotes Judith Lewis Herman's *Father-Daughter Incest*, to point out that when a daughter is 'drawn into the marital conflict in the role of mother's rival', she can please her father 'only at the expense of alienating [her] mother', who is often blamed for the daughter's misery and for not protecting her against the father.[117] "In Abramović's case," Stiles writes, "her mother's

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[116] By the mid-1970s, the marriage with Paripović had ended, although it was not officially dissolved until 1977. For his part, Paripović (b. 1942) was strongly independent and today continues to reject the fame of having been married to Abramović. During my research, it would have been impossible to meet Paripović in Belgrade without the help of Zoran Popović, who introduced me to him and encouraged Paripović to screen his films for me at his home, on August 5, 2011. Paripović's work stands out in its conceptual clarity in his body works, which he regularly recorded on film or in photographs. Paripović's most powerful work is his silent 25-minute film *N.P. 1977*, an artistic investigation of urban space and its material effects. In the film, the artist can be seen walking through Belgrade, following an imaginary path that forces him to climb over walls and benches, and jump from the roof of one building onto another, only to then walk through parks, parking lots, and climb over parking garages, among other obstacles. Paripović pursued his walk with a rhythmic quality that paralleled his confidence and haste, marking architecture in a unique and personal manner. See Dejan Sretenović, "Neša Paripović: Becoming Art," in *Neša Paripović Becoming Art. Works 1970-2005* (Belgrade: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2006), 77-97.
[117] Judith Lewis Herman with Lisa Hirschman, *Father-Daughter Incest* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1981), 115. An incestuous environment is one in which actual sexual relations

dominating and demanding personality made her an even more accessible target [and] Abramović expressed the emotional results of this Oedipal double bind."[118]

Moreover, Stiles argues that Abramović came of age under the doctrine of the communist red star and ironically escaped when she found her double and equal in Ulay, who was born during the fascist era in Germany and who "came from the same town that was also the birthplace of Adolf Eichmann, the high-ranking Obersturmbannführer (Nazi SS Lieutenant Colonel)."[119] When the couple staged their *Communist Body/Fascist Body* in 1979, Stiles adds, they slept together under a red blanket in the presence of their friends, with their birth certificates taped together and displayed on a table along with traditional Yugoslav and German food. Here, however, "while marked at birth with the star and the swastika" and "united by a color that would otherwise symbolically separate them," Abramović and Ulay "neutralized culturally explicit and destructive ideologies and nationalisms through two requisite actions for life: rest and food."[120] In this action, they anticipated how fascism and communism would be united again, explicitly in Yugoslavia, where genocide would resurface in the 1990s for the first time in Europe since World War II.

As I shall suggest in my conclusion, the Slovenian groups Laibach and Neue Slowenische Kunst would thematize this ideological unity of communism and fascism in the 1980s in their provocative works and actions. Abramović's

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between child and parent may never occur, but the atmosphere of the home is sexualized and the child's response is similar to those who have been molested.
[118] Stiles, "Cloud with its Shadow," 48.
[119] Ibid, 56.
[120] Ibid, 56-57.

and Ulay's joint "act[ion] of love" represented a "decision to create … a new humanity,"[121] and to exemplify ways in which to heal traumatized bodies that carry the silent histories of communism and fascism. It could be argued, then, that in the context of Abramović's life, her art operated in a manner described by Julia Kristeva: "[W]e know that man – like a work of art – has no goal outside himself: he is his own goal."[122] Abramović's decisions in art placed her as a totally autonomous being, beyond the reach of others.

Nonetheless, there is a particular ironic pathos in quoting Kristeva's non-gender inclusive text in so far as it would appear to permanently condemn Abramović to the patriarchal world of the father. But let us recall that it was Abramović herself who refused identification with feminism, binding her history inextricably to patriarchy and to the nation that she, nevertheless, fled. Justifying her actions in a denunciation of communism and her mother, the artist took solace and a new home in the West under the protection of her lover (Ulay). It could be hypothesized, then, that when she fled the East in the mid-1970s, the West stood for protection under patriarchy, while Eastern Europe remained feminized, weak and unable to wrest itself from control into sovereignty. Paradoxically, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Abramović returned to images of Balkan women cleaning and healing, as in her action *Balkan Baroque* (1997) in which she sat cleansing an enormous pile of 1,500 fresh beef bones, while continuously singing folksongs from her youth as if cleansing history; and in

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[121] Michael Hart and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 356.
[122] Julia Kristeva, Jeanine Herman, trans. *Intimate Revolt, Volume 2.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 233-234.

Balkan Erotic Epic (2005), she filmed "women dressed in folk costumes massaging their breasts, and exposing their breasts and genitals to the earth in a rainstorm," and "nude men copulating with the earth."[123]

I have extended my discussion of Abramović beyond the limits of 1989 to demonstrate how the content of her later work progressively returns to and remains within the perimeter of her former life in Yugoslavia. She is not alone in rehearsing the themes of her life under communism. This traumatic repetition may be found in the work of all of the Belgrade Group of Six.

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[123] Stiles, "Cloud with its Shadow," 38.

Chapter II: Zagreb, Yugoslavia

Zagreb artists' distinctive emphasis on art as process and on the public as necessary for activating a work of art contributes to the shape of the history of Yugoslavian experimental art from the 1960s to 1989. Zagreb artists prized themselves on sustaining the longest and most illustrious modernist avant-garde in the country. Some have attributed this distinction to the city's and its artists' close proximity to and interchange with the West, Vienna being only some 233 miles away, less than a three hour car trip. Others have suggested that the artists' highly developed conceptual approach, combining multiple mediums into sophisticated hybrids, from poetry, theory, and manifestos to photography, video, and performance, accounts for Zagreb's prominence in the former Yugoslavia. Such an artistic approach was rooted in Zagreb's early twentieth century avant-garde practices, such as Ljubomir Micić's *Zenitism*, which was equally experimental, political, and innovative.[1] While Belgrade artists exhibiting at SKC emphasized performance, sound art, and installation, Zagreb artists advanced conceptual art, such as Braco Dimitrijević, Sanja Iveković, Mladen Stilinović, Sven Stilinović, Tomislav Gotovac, Vlasta Delimar, Vlado Martek,

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[1] Ljubomir Micić founded the experiemental art magazine *Zenit* in Zagreb in 1921. Zenitism operated in Zagreb for three years (1921-1923) and in Belgrade for another three years (1924-1926). As Miško Šuvaković has pointed out, *Zenit* introduced "a new avant-garde Balkan movement with expressionism, futurism, dadaism, and constructivism," and was "characterized by a paradoxical and polemic confrontation of Croatian and Serbian cultural and national ideology." See Miško Šuvaković, "Impossible Histories," in Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković, eds., *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1818-1991* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 14.

among others. They were also associated with the "New Artistic Practice," a term coined by Ješa Denegri to describe experimental art, and they showed their art at the Students' Center Gallery (SC) [Galerija Studentskog Centra] in exhibitions often curated by Želimir Koščević.

But while these artists are the primary focus of this chapter, I begin with a brief introduction of Gorgona, a loose group of artists. Active between 1959 and 1966, Gorgona artists, such as Dimitrije Bašičević (Mangelos), Josip Vaništa, Julije Knifer, Ivan Kožarić, and Radoslav Putar, created works devoted to language, poetry, conceptual art, and collaborative actions, the latter undertaken both out of doors in nature, in buildings, and in unconventional urban spaces. They also contributed to the samizdat magazine *Gorgona,* published by Josip Vaništa. The chapter then turns to the 1970s generation known as the Group of Six Authors (Grupa Šestorice Autora), which emerged with their first action in May of 1975, and included the artists Boris Demur, Željko Jerman, Vlado Martek, Mladen Stilinović, Sven Stilinović and Fedor Vučemilović. Calling themselves "authors," rather than "artists," these artists distinguished themselves from the Group of Six in Belgrade, but, more importantly, they emphasized the prominence of writing and poetry in their individual and collective work. Like Gorgona before them, they published a samizdat magazine, *Maj 75* (1978-1984), each edition represented by a letter of the alphabet. *Maj 75* served as a publication as well as an alternative exhibition format to which many artists contributed, including international mail artists. *Maj 75* was distributed among friends and colleagues, as well as being mailed abroad to artists. The art that Group of Six Authors

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published came primarily from the burgeoning environment of conceptual and performance art, both of which emphasized the body as a medium for physical and conceptual liberation from the constraints of the prevailing cultural and political conditions. Most of all, the Group of Six Authors conceived their work as a vehicle to incite action and alter the public's perception about art, society, and politics. In addition, this chapter discusses four of the few artists in the former Yugoslavia who made the nearly taboo subject of sexuality and gender a primary focus of their art: Sanja Iveković (who belonged to *Podroom*, another artist collective), Sven Stilinović, Tomislav Gotovac, and Vlasta Delimar.

In 1978, Davor Matičević, the curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, observed that Zagreb's "milieu shows the characteristics of the international art developments coupled with those of a small town located on the cross-roads between Central Europe and the Balkans."[2] The international aspects of this small town were already well known for the work of the "New Tendencies Movement" (1961-1973), which organized exhibitions of concrete and constructivist art, but especially of op and kinetic art. New Tendencies artists advanced the idea of "art as visual research," a phrase that must be understood as a foundation for conceptual artists in Zagreb itself. Those associated with New Tendencies were also current with and involved in parallel kinetic and optical art groups and movements in the West, while the art collective Gorgona served the

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[2] Davor Matičević, "The Zagreb Circle," in Marijan Susovski (ed.), *The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1966-1978* (Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art Zagreb, 1978), 23.

"small town" community of younger local artists that flourished in the 1970s with the advent of conceptual and performance art.

Nevertheless, New Tendencies' programs and interests in new technologies were viewed by some as complicit with international modernism, while Gorgona was known to be staunchly anti-institutional and conceptual, emphasizing "spiritual and intellectual freedom" as an "end in itself."[3] Such principles also guided Zagreb 1970s artists. Gorgona equally emphasized social and spiritual relations between group members and considered the collective itself a work of art.[4] They did not exhibit in traditional galleries and museums, but instead founded alternative spaces in apartments and throughout the city, and they considered *Gorgona,* their "anti-magazine," an exhibition too.[5]

"For instance, the Gorgona retreated to privacy and walks on Mount Medvednica (Sljeme)," according to Tihomir Milovac, noting that, "occasionally, they would mount a happening, for personal amusement, like the one with all members of the group switching hats or staring at the sky, together; excessive, articulate and very Gorgona-like."[6] Each issue of *Gorgona* was devoted to a single artist, and featured his conceptual drawings, photography, and sculptural works, printed often without an accompanying caption. Gorgona were well aware of

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[3] Nena Dimitrijević quoted in Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković, eds., *Impossible Histories*, 202.
[4] Ješa Denegri, "Inside or Outside "Socialist Modernism"?" in Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković, eds., *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1818-1991* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 201-203.
[5] *Gorgona* ran for five years in which eleven issues were printed (1961-1966).
[6] Tihomir Milovac, "The Misfits," in Tihomir Milovac, ed., *The Misfits: Conceptualist Strategies in Croatian Contemporary Art* (Neprilagođeni: konceptualističke strategije u hrvatskoj suvremenoj umjetnosti (Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002): 9.

vanguard art in the West and included contributions to the magazine by such well-known artists as Victor Vasarely and Dieter Rot, and the British playwright Harold Pinter. Indeed, Gorgona's conceptual approach, along with its publications and the members' correspondence with artists like Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni, and Robert Rauschenberg, called attention internationally to advanced art in Zagreb, demonstrating Gorgona's aim to resist the didactic approach of socialist modernism favored in Yugoslavian art academies.

Croatian curators and art historians Ivana Bago and Antonia Majača have noted that Gorgona's anti-institutional and ephemeral approach to modernism was crucial to their resistance to socialist modernism, especially because of the group's emphasis on independent collaboration and its open-ended approach:

> From the society of imposed collective optimism, Gorgona slipped into friendship and spiritual kinship. Even if it would have had a manifesto and a programme, it would have not felt the need to read it out loud. There was no clear message and thus no addressee.[7]

Gorgona rejected the optimistic, pragmatic messages fed to the public under institutionalized socialism, and favored free experimentation and provocation. Their emphasis on friendship and exploration of life was the result of the fact that Gorgona members belonged to a generation that had survived World War II. Their lack of a clear message, along with the absence of a chosen addressee were also indicative of the residue of war, leaving them with the

[7] Ivana Bago and Antonia Majača, "Dissociative Association, Dionysian Socialism, Non-Action and Delayed Audience: Between Action and Exodus in the Art of the 1960s and 1970s in Yugoslavia," in *Removed from the Crowd: Unexpected Encounters I*, ed. Ivana Bago, Antonia Majača, and Vesna Vuković (Zagreb: BLOK and DeLVe, 2011), 266.

questions: What use is art when the memory of the traumatic experiences of violence and the trauma of lost loved ones intervenes? What purpose can art have when faced with such destruction? What meaning follows such obliteration when war destroys faith in a clear message and no one to tell it to anyway?

Gorgona was also inspired by Yves Klein's introduction of the human body as a "living brush" in 1959, and his identification of that body with the memory of the "aura [and] affective atmosphere of the flesh" left by the atomized bodies in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.[8] Together with thinking about the destruction of WWII and Klein's invention and use of International Klein Blue (IKB), Gorgona established their own color to signify the loss and ambiguity of their period. Yet, despite the fact that "Gorgona's Black" symbolized their sense of an empty period stuck in the past, Josip Vaništa remembered that they "ideologized the world of the 1960s," communicated the "dark ingredients, absurdity, and emptiness" of their period, and still retained a lively spirit. In addition, they comprised "a community of young people, preoccupied with a marginal magazine," *Gorgona*, whose first issue appeared in 1961 with the aim of depicting "an empty stage, [in] nine images in which nothing was happening any more."[9] Vaništa described the group further:

> Gorgona was not a group of painters. Perhaps there was a spirit of
> playfulness, which provoked a defeat. Stay closed, something was telling

[8] Kristine Stiles, "Uncorrupted Joy: International Art Actions," in Paul Schimmel, ed., *Out of Actions: Between Performance and The Object 1949-1979* (Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998): 237.
[9] Josip Vaništa, "Gorgona: What's That? (This is what I think)," in Zak Branicka, *Gorgona* (Berlin: Zak Branicka, 2013), http://www.zakbranicka.com/files/pub_file_44_en_d41d8cd98f00b204e9800998ecf8427e.pdf.

us. Keep a low profile. … Word was displacing image, and there was

interest in something beyond painting….We wanted some space to

breathe; we gazed through the window, at the emptiness and silence.

Almost nothing was happening to us…"[10]

This post WWII malaise, together with the heady atmosphere of "The

'60s," became guiding principles for Dimitrije Basičević (b. 1921), the group's

most influential member and a singular artist for his development of conceptual

art in Zagreb. Basičević, a curator, art historian, and art critic, was born in a small

town west of Belgrade, and held a doctorate in art history from the faculty of

philosophy in Zagreb. He adopted the pseudonym Mangelos in order to

"distinguish his private artistic project from his public roles as a critic and

curator."[11] Among other things, his works often included pictures that were

painted over in solid black with white words written on them. He also was

known for a series of black globes, "death landscapes," or painted sculptures and

two-dimensional surfaces that he titled *Tabula Rasa*. In addition, Mangelos wrote

short manifestos concerned with memory, the future of art, aesthetic theory, and

many other topics on art and its role in society. In a 1982 interview with fellow

artist Mladen Stilinović, Mangelos explained that his formative years as an artist,

especially beginning in 1941 during WWII, were preoccupied with the question

of death, which "was coming for all of us, coming for me, which was ahead of

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[10] Ibid.
[11] Branislav Dimitrijević, "A Brief Narrative of Art Events in Serbia after 1948," in IRWIN, ed., *EAST ART MAP: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 290.

me, time changed with that."[12] In *Paysage de la mort, m. 8* (*Landscape of Death*) (1971 – 1977), Mangelos decided to obliterate a landscape image by painting it black, and "to negate the picture by writing it with words, to negate the word by painting it."[13] [Figure 10] This work marked the artist's investment in new beginnings even while couched in death and meaninglessness. His use of black has been understood as the color of homage to the friends he lost in the war,[14] and the words, often written on tiny school boards and on lines that resemble school paper, signified the limitations of language to teach – or find words for – the experience and bereavement of death, as well as its incompetence to describe the realities of war.

Mangelos' choice to face the world with a kind of existential void suggests the writings of Jean Paul Sartre, especially a text on Giacometti, whom Sartre described as defeated and someone who "could collect his wager at any time":

> He has only to decide that he has won. But this he cannot resolve to do,
>
> he puts off the decision from hour to hour and from day to day;
>
> sometimes, in the course of a night's work, he is ready to admit victory; in
>
> the morning everything is broken.[15]

Deploying a different formal and conceptual language than Giacometti, Mangelos embraced defeat, albeit a decision that, paradoxically, enabled him to

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[12] "Mladen Stilinović: razgovor s dimitrijom basičevićem mangelosom," in Branka Stipančić, ed., *Mangelos no. 1-9½* (Zagreb: Biblioteka Monografije, 2007), 53. Author's translation.

[13] Magelos quoted in Dimitrijević, "A Brief Narrative of Art Events in Serbia after 1948," 290.

[14] "Mladen Stilinović: razgovor s dimitrijom basičevićem mangelosom," 53.

[15] Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Search for the Absolute (1994)," in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, eds., *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, 2 ed. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2012), 214.

resist the didactic paradigm of socialist universalizing formulas for progress, permitting him to enunciate a symbolic planet painted black in the context of the suspension of the authority and hypocrisy of language.

Gorgona artists offered up the mysterious aura of artistic creation and collaboration with a provocative language lacking a clear message. Their dark and voiceless truth attracted the rebellious political youth of the late 1960s, and certainly the 1970s generation that followed Gorgona's footsteps in Zagreb, artists who not only devoted themselves to conceptualism but also created alternative and artist-run spaces, and continued to publish samizdat magazines. Posing a challenge to the status quo, their work was "thought to be dubious, and … often quite simply banned by the official critics."[16]

The most important venue for such art was the Students' Center Gallery (SC) founded in 1961, nearly a decade before the SKC in Belgrade for which it served as a model, and seventeen years before the Student Cultural Center (ŠKUC), founded in 1978 in Ljubljana. Even though the SC was sponsored by the state, it was the first alternative space in Yugoslavia. In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, the SC came under the influence of the curator and impresario, Želimir Koščević (b. 1939), who made considerable efforts to encourage and permit artists to experiment and to extend their work beyond the SC itself. Scholars have identified his 1969 "Exhibition of Women and Men" at

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[16] Marijan Susovski, "The Seventies and the Group of Six Artists," in Janka Vukmir, ed., *Grupa Šestorice Autora* (Zagreb: SCCA Zagreb, 1998), 19.

SC as indicative of Koščević's open-minded approach, which won him the respect of the new generation of 1970s artists.[17]

In "Exhibition of Women and Men," Koščević left the walls of the gallery empty to stare back at the viewers, who came to see art and left looking only at themselves: visitors had become the artworks themselves. Influenced by Klein's *The Void* (1958) at the Iris Clert Galerie in Paris, an installation that featured the space painted white and emptied of everything but the artist's aura, Koščević applied this concept to the political space of socialism, declaring: "Be the exhibition itself. At this show you are the creation, you are the figuration, you are the socialistic realism."[18] Mocking the political ideology that celebrated socialist realism, Koščević enlivened the concept of art about life with the actual people that comprised socialism, provoking viewers to think beyond traditional art objects and posing a challenge to Yugoslavia's propaganda of "third-way" socialism with a human face.

Although the Yugoslavian art academies had abandoned socialist realism, Tito repeatedly expressed his dismay about the development of modernist abstraction, and the doctrine of socialist modernism remained secure, as long as it was abstraction with a social function, commemorating and celebrating the Yugoslav nation and its heroes, a dogma that experimental artists in both Belgrade and Zagreb equally rejected. By transforming viewers into art, one

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[17] Davor Matičević, "The Zagreb Circle," 23.
[18] Cited and translated by Katherine Ann Carl, from *Novine*, No. 8 (1968-9), 29. In "Aoristic Avant-garde: Experimental Art in 1960s and 1970s Yugoslavia," dissertation May 2009, State University of New York, Stony Brook, 59.

could argue that Koščević's exhibition posed a tongue-in-cheek hyper-socialist realist approach that was, at the same time, deadly serious. "Beware, your eyes are on you," Koščević announced. "You are the body in space, you're body that moves, you are a kinetic sculpture, you are spatial-dynamism. Art is not adjacent to you, it either does not exist or you are the art."[19] Alerting viewers to project their gaze on themselves, "Exhibition of Women and Men" propelled the meeting of the social, natural, and visceral bodies of everyday people with highly conceptual thought regarding the principle of decision as art, but a decision that was both reliant on the conceptual prompt of the curator, as well as on the participation of the public. Koščević incited viewers to suspend their inhibition and consider themselves art, to decide to be art, to exist as art, and in this way re-examine their lives and its purpose through the lens of artistic experimentation.

In June 1970, Koščević organized "Akcija Total (Action Total)," an exhibition-action at the SC that, humorously, did not actually take place there at all, but throughout Zagreb itself. Koščević wanted to break out of the confines of the gallery, and extend its reach to the broader urban public. Instead of inviting the viewers to come into the gallery, this exhibition would confront them on the streets. Comprised of advertisements and propaganda, Koščević hung black posters featuring nothing but minimal geometric shapes designed by Boris Bućan and Davor Tomiči, and he also distributed leaflets with the heading: "The Draft

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[19] "Izložba žena I muškaraca" ("Exhibition of Women and Men"), in *Novine*, No. 8 (1968-9), 29. Translation by the author.

Decree on the Democratization of Art." Something like a manifesto followed this title:

1. The following is hereby abolished: painting, sculpture, graphic art, applied arts, industrial design, architecture and urban planning.

2. A ban is hereby placed on the following: all activity in the history of art and especially the so-called art criticism.

3. There shall be no exhibitions in galleries, museums or art pavilions.[20]

These three commands were discussed in a longer text elaborating on these points, including an emphasis on anti-institutional art and art for the social good.

Institutionalized forms of presenting art should be gradually phased out. Galleries, museums, exhibition halls, pavilions, must become active art houses, culture houses, their physical properties (covered space) should only be used in the event of rain, snow and other weather disasters … Cultural, historical, scientific and artistic materials need to be reevaluated according to these criteria, and what may be of general use to be taken out to the tram station, promenade, to night-clubs, factories and department stores…. The monstrous factory of Yugoslav contemporary art is … made of the thousands and thousands of images, sculptures, graphics, countless applied art objects, luxury designs, stupid architectural and urban concepts and realizations, and even more stupid "critical" interpretations, in general it is reminiscent of the purely

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[20] Statement translated in Davor Matičević, "The Zagreb Circle," 21. Originally published in Croatian on the front page of *Novine Galerija SC*, no. 22 (Zagreb: Galerija SC, 1970).

reactionary action in society which now more than ever needs

conceptually powerful art." [21]

The utopian ideology of the Russian avant-garde inspired Koščević's plea

for "conceptually powerful art" critical of the bourgeois model and dedicated to

affecting public life.[22] Koščević wanted to disrupt "the really boring and

conservative local art scene," and show his "radical orientation to young

artists."[23]

OZEHA, the official media house of Zagreb, granted Koščević permission

to hang his posters throughout Zagreb, authorization that made "Action Total"

possible.[24] To realize the exhibition, Koščević and other artists went onto the

streets and distributed the pamphlets to people going about their everyday

business. Koščević explained that he "made a decision to provoke public opinion

with 'Action Total'," and he characterized his motivation as "utopic,

nevertheless, but quite nice."[25] He also remembered that, "There was no

repression (administrative or by police)," and, in fact, the point of his exhibition

was not to disrupt Yugoslavian politics. Instead, he laid the emphasis on

eradicating the idea of the closed artwork, creating art that "does something

other than sit on its ass in a museum," as Claes Oldenburg had written in his

1961 essay "I am for an Art."[26] "Action Total" asked "galleries, museums,

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[21] *Novine Galerija SC*, no. 22 (Zagreb: Galerija SC, 1970): 1.Translated from Croatian by the author.
[22] Želimir Koščević in email correspondence with the author, June 6, 2013.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Claes Oldenburg, "I am for an art," in Stiles and Selz, eds., *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, 2 ed., 385.

exhibition halls, pavilions, …[to] become active art houses, culture houses," not just spaces where "thousands and thousands of images, sculptures, graphics, countless applied art objects, luxury designs" would be stored. In 1970, just two years after the 1968 uprisings and their dramatic end in August in Prague when Soviet tanks crushed the spring of hope, such a plea for action demonstrated Koščević's continued desire to bring public opinion and interaction into the arena of art, and to make a difference in social life by eradicating conservative efforts to institutionalize art.

Action and inclusion of the public sphere would become the major characteristic of Zagreb's New Artistic Practice in the 1970s. In 1971, Braco Dimitrijević (b. 1948), an artist originally from Sarajevo (Bosnia-Herzegovina) but a student in Zagreb at the time, also attempted to provoke the public by making the everyday world of the polis his subject of art. He used the urban landscape to undermine the separation between private and public life in an effort to break through the containment of art in gallery spaces. In his *Casual Passer-By Series* (begun in 1971), the artist photographed people he had met informally on the streets, and placed huge photo portraits of them "on hoardings reserved for distinguished personalities from social and political life."[27] [Figure 11] Dimitrijević's decision to show these unknown people in such a public context, and elevate them to the status of celebrity, presented a poignant Marxist critique of the socialist state and its red bourgeoisie, which thrived on celebrating the select few and marginalizing the experience of the many.

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[27] Davor Matičević, "The Zagreb Circle," 22.

Marx had already put forth such a critique of the bourgeoisie in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, when he argued that the dominant party socially represented "the bourgeois world-order."[28] Unlike the bourgeoisie, which Marx diagnosed as hollow and lifeless, the proletariat was filled with life. Under the abuse of the bourgeoisie, it became bodiless, composed of "shadows that have lost their bodies" [29] and served as an "appendage of the petty-bourgeois-democratic party."[30] Marx's observations help underscore Dimitrijević's decision to challenge the state's dominance of socialist imagery by offering a Marxist intervention within and against socialism that was more communist than the state itself; for the artist brought the faces and lives of the proletariat out of the shadows of the state and presented them in public as an art action. As Nermina Zildžo has pointed out, Dimitrijević's "primary concern has been to re-examine the social norms that shape the relationship between artist and spectator and between what is and is not art."[31] In this regard, like Koščević's two exhibitions – "Exhibition of Women and Men" (1969) and "Action Total" (1970) – Dimitrijević's intervention was conceptual and performative while equally immersed in a transformed socialist realist tradition, as his inclusion of the proletariat in the representation of socialism on the streets brought art closer to life, politics, culture, and the everyday.

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[28] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 2004), 48.
[29] Ibid, 44.
[30] Ibid, 42.
[31] Nermina Zildžo, "Braco Dimitrijević," in *EAST ART MAP*, 147.

The Group of Six Authors shared this interest in the everyday and the public, and in 1975 began to exhibit actions and artworks in public squares all over the former Yugoslavia. The group created "exhibitions-actions"[32] and also produced the samizdat publication *Maj 75*. Art historian, curator and artist Branka Stipančić has characterized their actions as embracing "the style of guerrilla warfare, the tactics of constant disturbance… a resistance full of a critical spirit and imagination, simultaneously derisive and joyful."[33] They used town squares, public spaces for leisurely activities, housing areas that lacked any cultural life, and also universities.[34] But unlike "guerrilla warfare," these artists made sure to obtain police consent for every action,[35] which was mostly granted, despite leading critics' regular dismissal of the art.

The Zagreb scene shared Belgrade artists' dismay and frustration over the hypocrisy of the government and art world, and openly proclaimed their critiques. For example, at the SKC April Meeting in Belgrade in 1975, Zagreb artist Željko Jerman's contribution was the simple phrase: "Ovo Nije Moj Svijet" (This is not my World). Written on a large rectangular piece of white paper, the artist hung it on an outside wall of the Student Cultural Center where it served as testimony to how youth felt about the "world" Yugoslavia offered them. Regardless of this statement, actions by the Group of Six Authors and exhibitions like "Action Total" were more directly aligned with Western approaches to

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[32] Mladen Stilinović has been credited with coining the term "exhibitions-actions." See "Vlado Martek, "Rococo Biographies," in *Grupa Šestorice Autora,* 10.
[33] Branka Stipančić, "This is <u>Not</u> My World," in *Grupa Šestorice Autora,* 101.
[34] Miško Šuvaković, "The Post-Avant-Garde: The Group of Six Artists 1975-1978 and After," in *Grupa Šestorice*, 69.
[35] Janka Vukmir, "Conceptual Co-Existance," in *Grupa Šestorice Autora*, 29.

provoking the public to use its imagination, break free from conventions, and merge the separate spheres of art and life. This was not only due to Zagreb's proximity to the West, but also to Yugoslavia's policy to permit artists to travel and exhibit outside of the country.

The political weight of such aesthetic experimentation would be magnified in Hungary, where similar performances and conceptual works resulted in much harsher repercussions for artists and curators, and where artists had little to no opportunities to travel in the 1970s. In Belgrade too, the capital of the socialist state, the repression was felt much more acutely, as evinced by the extremes to which artists like Abramović and Popović went in their corporeal and conceptual criticism of socialist oppression and institutions. What distinguished the Zagreb scene from that of Belgrade, however, was its early and earnest investment in the public, in collaboration, and in merging multi-form avant-garde practices that blurred or eradicated the division between conceptual, performance, samizdat, video, and mail art in unprecedented ways in the region.

The most ferocious artist critic of the socialist system was Mladen Stilinović (b. 1947). He repeatedly appropriated socialist symbols and slogans in his conceptual works, which bore comparable morose undertones to those of Mangelos and were similarly invested in exposing the dark underbelly, cruelty, ignorance, and brutality of socialist ideology, prominently displayed in socialist slogans and symbols of state dominance. In *Odnos Nogo-Kruh* (*The Foot-Bread Relationship*) (1977), the artist exhibited photographs of himself kicking loaves of bread with his foot, mocking the classical symbol of sustenance for the

proletariat and unmasking socialist hegemony. As a self-proclaimed anarchist,

Stilinović's aggression symbolized youthful disrespect and disregard for

traditional values but also pointed to how totalitarian governments throughout

East and Central Europe used bread as a form of coercive "blackmail" of the

people. As Branka Stipančić put it, "Tyrants keep the people subjugated by

threatening to leave them breadless. Bread is also a symbol of oppression."[36]

In 1977, Stilinović inverted the famous socialist creed –"an attack on the

achievements of the revolution is an attack on socialism and progress" – by

announcing in bold red letters on pink silk: *An Attack on My Art is an Attack on*

Socialism and Progress (1977).[37] Four years later in 1981, he claimed that *Work is*

Disease – Karl Marx[38] in red on black background, agitating the highest principles

of socialism: Marx, labor, and the working class.[39] Considered an act of

blasphemy in the socialist context, Stilinović remembers, "All that was signed by

Karl Marx was taken as an absolute truth."[40] The artist's decision to invert

language by constructing sentences that sound as if they were actual decrees

valued by the state, as well as to sign his self invented slogans with the name of

Karl Marx, suspended the authority of those words, as much as it endowed his

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[36] Stipančić, "This is Not My World," 103.
[37] Original Croatian: NAPAD NA MOJU UMETNOST NAPAD JE NA SOCIJALIZAM I
PEPREDAK. See reproduction in Spomenka Nikitović, *Mladen Stilinović* (Zagreb: SCCA, 1998),
58.
[38] Original written in Croatian: *Rad Je Bolest – Karl Marx*.
[39] First people believed that this was an actual quote by Marx, but then realized that the artist had
signed the work with "Karl Marx" instead of his own name.
[40] Nataša Vasiljević, "Mladen Stilinović," in *Flash Art* 288 (January – February 2013):
http://www.flashartonline.com/interno.php?pagina=articolo_det&id_art=1033&det=ok&title=
MLADEN-STILINOVI%C4%86

own art with authority in its calculated power to deracinate the ideological

foundation of the socialist regime.

But Stilinović also criticized international currents in theory and art with

the dark humor that played a leading role in his pointed political critiques of

linguistics, theory, and the use of political symbols [Figure 12]. In A, the first

issue of *Maj 75* from 1978, he jabbed at Western academics like Roland Barthes

who theorized "The Death of the Author" in a 1968 essay. Stilinović wrote:

> I hear that they are talking
>
> that the death of art is
>
> the death of the artist
>
> Someone wants to kill me
>
> Help[41]

Stilinović's sardonic plea for "help" mocked the lethal combination of

ideology and theory, probing what consequences a simple decision to eradicate

both art and author/artist, in order to elevate theoretical exegesis, may have had

for him and other artists, especially East Europeans who were already

marginalized in their own political context and also in the international art

world. What's more, this message was deliberately written in pink color on a

piece of newspaper: pink to provoke the absence of the forbidden "red" color of

the state, and the use of newspaper to remind the viewers by whom and at what

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[41] *Maj 75 A (1978)*, n.p. Copies accessible at Zagreb's Museum of Contemporary Art Archive. The
original was written in Croatian:
Cujem da se Govori
O Smrti Umetnosti je
Smrt Umjetnika
Mene Neko Hoce Ubiti
Pomoc

cost propaganda was served to the masses. Moreover, pink also evoked the

mocking term "pinkos" applied to the East in the West and to Westerners

sympathetic to communism.

Further assaulting the sacrosanct color red – seized by state socialism(s) in

the name of socialism and revolution worldwide – Stilinović announced in red

words on white paper *The Sale of Red* (1977), which would take place at the SKC

in Belgrade, the country's capital and home of President Tito and his

administration. A year earlier in 1976, Stilinović cut his own finger with a

razorblade and then, taking a brush and loading it with blood, he lay his hand on

an old stool, inscribed his palm with the words *My Red (Writing in Blood)*, and

photographed his hand.[42] Challenging how red, as a representation of state

ideology, violates the body, this work echoes a 1969 diary entry by the Romanian

artist Ion Grigorescu, written during the early days of Nicolae Ceaușescu's

regime:

> I forget and I start again to search desperately in the field sown with
>
> ugliness. The former intuitions contain a magnificent malice. I went to the
>
> other camp too quickly, and forgetting, and I have double and triple
>
> reasons for rebuke. Besides, I try to pull politics behind the door and have
>
> its edge to the door's. The struggle is between a direct art devoid of
>
> mysteries and an art of mysteries and inexplicit. Politics is sharp and cuts
>
> the hands which hold it.[43]

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[42] The title in Serbian was *Moja Crvena (Pisanje Krvlju)*.
[43] Ion Grigorescu, "Politics, Religion, and Art Facing Crime (1992)," in Stiles and Selz, eds., *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, 2 ed., 363-364.

Grigorescu's entry questions how the real intention of ideology can be kept hidden when it is all prevailing, and what an artist can do to retain the beauty and mystery in art contaminated by politics and culture.

Stilinović cut his own finger, and his actions came at the price of sorrow, at the same time as release, a central theme for the artist. Stilinović faced his own excruciating anguish to offer the public a picture of its own misery and, through art, break the constraints of a dreary life. "Fear is the seed of all pain," Stilinović has stated, referring to fear induced in society to control citizens.[44] In 1977, he produced *Igra Bol* (*The Pain Game*), a series consisting of a photograph of a hand holding a white die with six identical sides inscribed with the word pain (bol) and the following instructions: "Only one player, the die is cast according to his own rhythm, the game lasts 7 minutes."[45] [Figure 13] Stilinović reduced an object of chance to one of inevitability, with only one outcome: pain. He insinuated that taking a chance always brings suffering, grief, perhaps even agony, no matter how often the die is thrown.

While Spomenka Nikitović surmised about the work that an "individual experience is expressed as uniform,"[46] the kind of "inevitability" that Stilinović analyzed was anything but uniform: it was always idiosyncratic. In his effort to nullify chance, Stilinović made it the axis of his concept, reversing the whole history of Western artists' fascination with chance from Mallarmé and Duchamp to Cage and plunging chance into the inexorable certainty of the dull life of the

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[44] Mladen Stilinović in conversation with the author, January 27, 2012 in Zagreb, Croatia.
[45] Spomenka Nikitović, *Mladen Stilinović* (Zagreb: SCCA, 1998), 46.
[46] Ibid.

Eastern Bloc. Moreover, the limit of 7 "lucky" minutes, which he set for the proposed action, rendered palpable the absurdity of inescapable misfortune, even tying the player's destiny to the deadly seven sins and raising the moral and spiritual dimension of the work. Stilinović thereby made certain that when viewers encounter this work, they must take a chance, but that decision will not bring them release, as hoped for or even promised in Western iterations of chance. Instead, participation will always bring pain, which is the result of exhaustion and the principle of darkness in which one is restrained by inferior minds and adversity. What Stilinović understood, that so few others do, is that there was not a single side of the die that could have prevented pain. No matter what decision he made, he would be condemned to weigh what the least painful result might be, and to take on the burden of that pain for himself in order to show its truth to others.

Continuing to explore the threat of the condition of inevitability of pain became even more pronounced when Stilinović began *Riječnik* (*Dictionary*) in 1979, a conceptual work in which he investigated the violence of language. [Figure 14] For *Dictionary*, the artist created a lexicon in which every single word is described with one declaration: "BOL" (PAIN). The decision to equate every word with pain deconstructed the very concept of a dictionary, the function of which is to explicate and serve the constructive purpose by providing clarity and precise information about the meaning of words. Stilinović had not read Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1967) when he made *Dictionary*. But it is worth noting that Derrida hypothesized that language precedes all existence. "There

has never been anything but writing, there have never been anything but supplements," he claimed, adding that any kind of writing is always an act of violence that merits deconstruction.[47] For Derrida, reading any text is a "task," an examination of the choices the author makes, as well as the words the author uses, at the same time as there is the certain inevitability of never fully understanding the meaning and instead adding to the life of the text through active participation in critical reading.

In this regard, Stilinović's dictionary invites reader participation, opens up the signifying structure of pain, and annihilates any room for error: everything is pain. At the same time, the repetitious use of the word "pain" testifies to the very incoherence of what pain actually means, or what purpose a dictionary can actually serve, and how the assignment of meaning and definition is not "natural" but always authored and bound within a social, historical and subjective process. "It's not about destroying anything," Derrida explains, "only, and out of fidelity, trying to think how it came about, how something that is not natural is made: a culture, an institution, a tradition….And then trying to analyze it through an act of memory but also to take account of everything that cannot be decomposed into simple elements or to theoretical atoms..."[48] For Stilinović, memory itself was atomized into nothing but pain, which is always a "failure," as pain cannot be expressed in words.

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[47] Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, trans., *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 159.
[48] Jacques Derrida, "What does it mean to be a French Philosopher today?" Interview by Franz-Olivier, R. Bowlby, trans., in *Paper Machine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 115.

As if in anticipation of Elaine Scarry's extraordinary work, Stilinović's *Dictionary* may as well have articulated pain. She wrote that pain is something with "no referential content [and that] ensures unsharability through its resistance to language."[49] Scarry continues: "It is not *of* or *for* anything. It is precisely because it takes no object that it, more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language."[50] Writing PAIN beside every word, page after page after heartbreaking page, exhibits how Stilinović faced the inexhaustibility of pain, leaving him with no other certainty than its ubiquitous existence in every word, every thought, every where and nowhere. As if commenting retrospectively on Stilinović's profound work, Scarry would also write: "Alarmed and dismayed by his or her own failure of language, the person in pain might find it reassuring to learn that even the artist – whose lifework and everyday habit are to refine and extend reflexes of speech – ordinarily falls silent before pain."[51] In his *Dictionary*, Stilinović faced pain as an act of art providing a visual and conceptual language for the pain of others; and then he went on, a decade later, to produce a second *Dictionary* (1989) where every word is equated to "DEATH."

Mladen Stilinović's younger brother, Sven Stilinović (b. 1956), turned pain into desire and rebellion. His artist colleague and friend, Vlado Martek, described the younger Stilinović as "[a] solid anarchist (his well known maxim: either all or none)," the "boyfriend of many girls," and "[a] particularly cool

[49] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4.
[50] Ibid, 5.
[51] Ibid, 10.

person."[52] 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. [Figure 15] 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.[53]

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 labor from which he is simultaneously alienated. His aesthetic labor 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

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[52] Vlado Martek, "Rococo Biographies," in *Grupa Šestorice Autora*, 10.
[53] Artwork reproduced with quote in Tihomir Milovac, ed., *The Misfits: Conceptualist Strategies in Croatian Contemporary Art / Neprilagođeni: konceptualističke strategije u hrvatskoj suvremenoj umjetnosti* (Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002), 88. The quote comes from an unknown translation of Karl Marx, "Estranged Labour," in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.

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 labor, 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 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 labor – into a vision of pride and self-regulation.

In her discussion of the work, Stipančić surmised: "[T]he 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."[54] Equating such self-castigating representations of a male artist with the defense 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. While Belgrade's scene was one of fierce criticality of the state and its

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[54] Branka Stipančić, "This is Not My World," 103-104.

mechanisms of oppression, as well as the exposure of its traumatic affect, artists like Sven Stilinović linked their work to desire manifest in a range of forbidden sexualities.

The question of representations of masculinity in art is only in the early stages of scholarship on the region, as is the exploration of the artistic and conceptual investments of artists in gender politics. Piotr Piotrowski is one of the few scholars who has made significant contributions towards addressing masculinity and homosexuality in the East. However, he has claimed that the "sexual revolution" was absent in Eastern Europe.[55] The pioneering work of an artist like Sven Stilinović is thus virtually ignored by scholars. An aspect of *Untitled (Bound Figure)*, then, that begs discussion, is how it 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 "[t]he unknown, imaginary 'West'" which served as an "ideal anti-type," comprised of "dandyism, social waywardness and rebellious, adolescent gestures."[56] Calling the West "unknown" is an exaggeration, as artists in Eastern Europe had access to and were familiar with the work and personae of

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[55] Piotr Piotrowski, "Male Artist's Body: National Identity vs. Identity Politics." In Laura Hoptman, ed., *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since 1950s* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002): 227. Even Pejić's elaborate introductory essay in *Gender Check* ignores the question of masculinity and homosexuality. See Bojana Pejić, "Proletarians of All Countries, Who Washes Your Socks? Equality, Dominance and Difference in Eastern European Art," in Pejić, ed., *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (Cologne: Walter König, 2009): 19-29.

[56] Georg Schöllhammer, ""Was ist Kunst, Marinela Koželj?" (1976)," in Bojana Pejić, ed., *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (Cologne: Walter König, 2009) 140.

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. Sven Stilinović's *Untitled (Bound Figure)* of 1980, as well as his *Svenpištolj* (*Svengun*) of 1984-1986, anticipated images in LaBruce's film by some two decades. [Figure 16] In *Svenpištolj* (*Svengun*), 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 disproportionally 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.[57]

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

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[57] Similarily, the beginning scene in *Raspberry Reich* shows a male character in front of a huge Che Guevara poster, stroking and licking a long phallic gun.

hetero-normative conceptions of both male and female sexuality. 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.

During this same period in the early to mid-1980s, Stilinović appeared

naked on the cover of Zagreb's newspaper *Studentski List*. What makes this

photograph so volatile is that he is sitting with the artist Radomir Radovanović,[58]

and resting his hand on Radovanović's thigh. [Figure 17] Radovanović, in turn,

tenderly touches Stilinović's shoulder. A red triangle strategically covers

Stilinović's penis, but the semiotic implications of the color 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.[59]

This photograph was created, in part, to advertise the exhibition

"Kolektivni Akt (Collective Act)," organized by Davor Matičević, an openly gay

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[58] 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.
[59] 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.

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."[60]

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.[61] 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.

The writings of the Marquis de Sade, widely read in Zagreb at the time, directly influenced such rebellion for how de Sade suspended conventional sexual norms, analyzed the interrelationship among sex, politics, and society, and launched a moral, social, and political critique of the state, religion, and cultural hypocrisy. De Sade's characters are frequently forced to decide and

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[60] Translation by the author.
[61] 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.

confront the consequences of their acts of free will. For example, in *Eugénie de Franval* (1800), a story about an incestuous relationship between Franval and his daughter, a priest comments on the tension between the law and self-sovereignty:

> Do not believe it, Sir. Virtue is not an illusion. It is not a matter of ascertaining whether something is good here, or bad a few degrees away, in order to assign it a precise determination of crime or virtue, and to make certain of finding happiness therein by reason of the choice one has made of it. Man's only happiness resides in his complete submission to the laws of his land. He has either to respect them or be miserable, there is no middle ground between their infraction and misfortune. … One can surely do no harm by preferring to stroll along the boulevards than along the Champs Elysees. And yet if a law were passed forbidding our citizens from frequenting the boulevards, whosoever should break this law might be setting in motion an eternal chain of misfortunes for himself, although in breaking it he had done something quite simple.[62]

The priest's assertion that the act of breaking the law summons an unhappy life is cunningly paired with the declaration that laws are nothing but social and political constructions. Such regulations of the body by the state were regularly exposed as absurd in Tomislav Gotovac's (b. 1937) work. Gotovac was a student at the Faculty of Architecture in Zagreb from 1955-1956, and briefly moved to Belgrade in the 1970s, where he enrolled in the directing program at

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[62] Marquis de Sade, "Eugénie de Franval," in *The Marquis de Sade: Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, and Other Writings* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 410-411.

the Academy of Performing Arts. He returned to Zagreb in the mid-1970s, where he was respected as a pioneering figure of the New Artistic Practices in Yugoslavia. Never an official member of the Group of Six Authors, he was, nonetheless, prominent in the alternative art scene, organizing what is considered the first happening in Yugoslavia in 1967, *Happ Our-Happening,* and being credited with having begun to experiment with his body in art in 1954. Gotovac also frequently appeared nude in performances and in pornographic films coupled with socialist iconography, actions that consistently resulted in his arrest.

An autodidactic scholar of film and habitual visitor to the cinema, Gotovac carefully studied all the aspects of filmmaking, including sound, structure, and film direction. He began to make experimental films in 1962, most of which paid homage to popular and avant-garde films, and honored musical virtuosos like Billie Holiday and Glenn Miller. One of the earliest examples of his structuralist work was his trilogy of 1964: *Straight Line (Stevens – Duke); Circle (Jutkevic – Count);* and *Blue Rider (Godard – Art).* By 1960, the artist began to develop photographic series, often displaying them as film sequences and records of his many performances, such as *Showing Elle* (1962), *Hands* (1964), and *Streaking* (1971). These radically innovative anarcho-film works deliberately interwove different avant-garde art genres, from happenings, conceptual and performance art to collage and film, and were aimed at merging art with the quotidian, elevating the status of the mundane, and simultaneously critically evaluating social and political taboos like the public display of sexual desire.

Gotovac confronted the issue of public nudity in *Streaking* (1971), an action

he realized in Belgrade in which he ran naked through the streets, being arrested,

and subsequently being featured in Lazar Stojanović's banned film *Plastic Jesus*

(1971). [Figure 18] That led to repeated political scrutiny by the authorities,

which prevented him from graduating from the Academy of Performing Arts in

Belgrade until 1976. By doing what the priest in *Eugénie de Franval* described as

"something quite simple," running naked in the street, the artist deliberately

entered the "eternal chain of misfortunes." Gotovac sought out and embraced his

tribulations repeatedly "finding happiness therein by reason of the choice one

has made of it." But instead of finding pleasure in obeying the law, the artist

relished disrupting it – with his body. A decade later when he repeated the same

action in Zagreb, in a work titled *Lying Naked on the Asphalt, Kissing the Asphalt*

(Zagreb, I love You!) Homage to Howard Hawks' Hatari!, (1981), Gotovac challenged

the police to arrest him again. In his "explosion of pure and useless joy," Gotovac

identified his "naked and desiring body as the main protagonist of action" and

tested the limits of artistic and individual independence in Yugoslavia, knowing

the results.[63] Gotovac required arrest for the work to have value. Without

incarceration, his provocation would have proved tolerable and social conditions

and mores for nudity would not have changed.[64]

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[63] *The Orange Dog and Other Tales (Even Better Than the Real Thing)*,
http://www.kontejner.org/lying-naked-on-the-pavement--kissing-the-pavement-zagreb-i-love-you-homage-to-english
[64] When KONTEJNER (the Bureau of Contemporary Art Praxis in Zagreb) organized a
reenactment of Gotovac's *Zagreb, I love You!* in 2009, the contemporary performer was arrested
again. For more details, see *The Orange Dog and Other Tales (Even Better Than the Real Thing)*,

Ješa Denegri thinks of Gotovac's use of his naked body as a "ready-made," which proves the "inescapable fact of existence" and "the material and basic substance of his own art."[65] Following Denegri's insight and Duchamp's own defense of the *Fountain*, one could add that for Gotovac the human body was "an ordinary article of life" that he chose, thereby making "its useful significance disappear under a new title and point of view." In this way Gotovac "created a new thought for that object."[66] But what exactly does that new thought signify in Gotovac's work but precisely the autonomous decision by the artist to *be* art? In this act of sovereignty, he provided an example of how to resist the socialist system's control by appropriating his body as a readymade and re-imagining how to express its independence from the state. He both rebelled against moral conventions and laws and joyfully brought on the state's retribution. Such a "new thought" for the public meant that it too could explode.

Not only did Gotovac provoke the state with his nudity, in 1967 he also cross-dressed in a performance with his female partner / lover in a work he entitled *Preoblačenje* (*Disguise*). Dressed in women's pajamas, the artist lies on a bed while his female companion, also disguised as a man with a mustache and cigarette dangling from her mouth, moves her hand between and up Gotovac's thighs between his legs. Such a work stands in stark contrast to what Jelena Vesić noted about the representation of the East European artist, who is reduced to "an

http://www.kontejner.org/lying-naked-on-the-pavement--kissing-the-pavement-zagreb-i-love-you-homage-to-english
[65] Denegri, Ješa, "When I open my Eyes in the Morning I see a Movie," in Aleksandar Battista Ilić and Diana Nenadic, *Cim Ujutro otvorim Oci, vidim Film/When I open my Eyes in the Morning I see a Movie* (Zagreb: Croatian Film Clubs' Association and Museum of Contemporary Art, 2003), 273.
[66] Marcel Duchamp, "The Richard Mutt Case," *The Blind Man* 2 (1917): 5.

individual rebel…stereotypically represented through the skinny body of the performer in the gloomy alternative (art) space."[67] Instead, Gotovac's work characteristically flaunted nudity in public as the very expression of his intent to challenge prevailing mores. Neither does Vesić's comment recognize the Stilinović brothers' work.

Mladen Stilinović turned the social mechanisms of shame upside down in *Conversation with Freud Or the Artist As His Own Complex* (1982). In this series of images of himself naked, with his body three times collaged into each photograph, Stilinović performed positions of fellatio and anal sex on himself. This psychoanalytic study of the id, ego, and superego and their Freudian relationship to sexual drives and the complexes emerging from suppression, resulted in Stilinović's suggestion that the male body desires itself, neither fearing penetration nor the performance of oral sex and does so despite being either hetero- or homosexual (the artist is heterosexual and married to the same woman for over forty years). This display of homosexual eroticism proves what Martek called the artist's "keen mind for social and political relations,"[68] as well as to the emerging interest in psychoanalysis and homosexuality in the early 1980s during the, then, emerging AIDS crisis. Moreover, and more importantly, this work operated against the social constructs of male dignity formed around the idea of sexual dominance over women.

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[67] Jelena Vesić, "'New Artistic Practice' in Former Yugoslavia: From Leftist Critique of Socialist Bureaucracy to the Post-Communist Artifact in Neo-Liberal Institution Art," in the catalogue of Prelom kolektiv and ŠKUC Gallery's exhibition, *SKC in ŠKUC: The Case of Students' Cultural Centre in 1970s*: SKC and Political Practices of Art (Ljubljana: ŠKUC Gallery, 2008), 4.
[68] Vlado Martek, "Rococo Biographies," in Janka Vukmir, ed., *Grupa Šestorice Autora* (Zagreb: SCCA Zagreb, 1998), 10.

Sexy black panties stretched open by a sharp red sickle screeched refusal of socialist patriarchy with the word "Neću" (I don't want to/it), 1979, written in gold as the title of Vlado Martek's (b. 1951) sculpture.[69] [Figure 19] What Martek emphasized was his solidarity with women who didn't want to conform to the lies of the state, as described by Suzana Milevska: "Laws and social policies favored a new image of women…seen as mothers and wives [and] as equal creators of a new society."[70] Evoking Judith Butler's proposition that women turn inward for self-realization and recognize a need for outside support from the state, Milevska discusses how gender issues in Eastern Europe were brought to a halt because the government invented the veneer of equality and crippled critical approaches to gender, feminism, women and their roles in state policies.[71] Martek's "Neću" panties visualized the state's hypocritical ideological intrusion into women's lives and the role of patriarchal state socialism in its attempt to control the female body that refused: "I don't want it!"

Vlasta Delimar (b. 1956) explicitly embodied and performed the illicit desires of women, challenging the paradigms of normative sexuality while paradoxically resisting alliance with feminism. Like Gotovac, Delimar is renowned in Croatia, but ignored internationally. Quoting Marina Gržinić's

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[69] This artwork was featured on the front cover of the in Bojana Pejić's *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* exhibition catalogue (2009). The title of the work was translated as "I don't want it," but the word can be read in two ways: I do not want to, or I do not want it, depending on the context.
[70] Suzana Milevska, "The "Silkworm Cocoon" Gender Difference and the Impact of Visual Culture on Contemporary Art in the Balkans," in Bojana Pejić (ed.), *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (Cologne: Walter König, 2009), 231.
[71] Suzana Milevska, "The "Silkworm Cocoon" Gender Difference and the Impact of Visual Culture on Contemporary Art in the Balkans," in Bojana Pejić (ed.), *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (Cologne: Walter König, 2009), 231.

identification of Eastern Europe as the "second world," I would like to suggest

that unlike Abramović and Sanja Iveković, to whom I shall soon turn, Delimar is

the "second world's" least desirable export to the West.[72] 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).[73]

She does not appear in other important surveys of the region. Why? I propose

that, similar to the generally negative, but ironically global, reception of Carolee

Schneemann, Delimar has been charged with producing pornographic,

narcissistic, exhibitionist work that is too sexually explicit. Unlike Schneemann,

Delimar never identified 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 Kolešnik 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.[74] Reducing

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[72] Marina Gržinić, "Linking Theory, Politics, and Art," in Zoya Kocur, ed., *Global Visual Cultures: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2011), 27.
[73] See IRWIN, ed., *East Art Map: Contemporary At and Eastern Europe* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2006) and *Piotr Piotrowski, In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe*, 1945-1989 (London: Reaktion Books, 2009).
[74] Ljiljana Kolešnik: "Intuitivni feminizam Vlaste Delimar" [Vlasta Delimar's Intuitive Feminism], Quorum, časopis za književnost 13, no. 4 (1997), 197-201. Translation by the author.

Delimar's artistic approach to "coloration," however, ironically typifies the ways

in which her rigorous critique of sexuality is frequently not taken seriously.

Although Delimar worked independently on performance, collage, and

photography works, she also collaborated often with the Group of Six Authors

and contributed to *Maj 75*; and she was married to two of its members, Željko

Jerman and Vlado Martek. As mentioned earlier, the artists produced *Maj 75*

collaboratively with Željko Jerman in his atelier, using silkscreen and inserting

pages with artworks by individual artists.[75] Her work *in Maj 75* also had

elements that called for haptic encounters. For example, many of the

contributions included actual objects, like pencils, fabric, or other items that

could be touched and that transformed the samizdat publication into a sculpture.

Maj 75 L (1983) featured a work by Delimar with a photograph picturing a

vagina that also had painted drops of blood projecting from the image, and that

was covered with a solid black square sheet so that viewers were required to lift

the black square in order to see it.[76] [Figures 20-21] To feature such graphic works

confirms the fact that both male and female artists in Zagreb actively explored

overt questions of sexuality, and that the men of Group of Six Authors respected

Delimar's work.[77]

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[75] Mladen Stilinović in conversation with the author, January 27, 2012 in Zagreb, Croatia.
[76] Vlasta Delimar, Maj 75, number K, 1983, (np). The Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb holds all the May 75 issues. Maj 75, number K is also particlly accessible online, see the Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb's *Digitizing Ideas Archive*, http://www.digitizing-ideas.hr/en/
[77] *Maj 75* frequently included works by women, and even had a special issue dedicated to women artists in 1981, *Maj 75 F*, which was conceived of and edited by Delimar. Artists included in this issue: Breda Beban, Rada Čupić, Vlasta Delimar, Sanja Iveković, Jasna Jurum, Vesna Miksić, Vesna Pokas, Bogdanka Poznanović, Duba Sambolec, Edita Schubert, Branka Stanković, Iris Vučemilović. A copy of *Maj 75 F* (1981)

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, *Volim Kurac* (1982), "*I Love Dick*." 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 groundbreaking 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.[78]

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 that feminists "in Yugoslavia did not, of course, speak of overthrowing socialism," but instead emphasized "the need to overthrow patriarchy and of the failure of socialism to

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 accessible at Zagreb's Museum of Contemporary Art Archive.

[78] This is true for both Delimar and Schneemann. It took decades for Schneemann to be recognized, and she still has not had a retrospective.

do so,"[79] Delimar had already produced a vehement critique of patriarchy and the state in *Jebite Me (Fuck Me)* in 1981, when the artist invited everyone to penetrate her: men, women, the state, religion, socialism, feminists, anti-feminists, dogs, cats, and cigars. [Figure 22] 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."[80]

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

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[79] Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Social Currents in Eastern Europe: The Sources and Consequences of the Great Transformation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 226.
[80] Miško Šuvaković, "You Can't Find a Woman, Can You? An essay on performers' theme-questioning of politics, body and sex in Vlasta Delimar's deed," in Miško Šuvaković, Marijan Špoljar, and Vlado Martek, *Vlasta Delimar: Monografija Performans* (Zagreb: Areagrafika, 2003), 68. Original quote amended by the author.

Vejvoda has described them.[81] 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.[82]

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."[83] 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

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[81] Ivan Vejvoda, "Yugoslavia 1945-91 – from Decentralisation Without Democracy to Dissolution," in D.A. Dyker and Ivan Vejvoda, eds., *Yugoslavia and After: A Study in Fragmentation, Despair and Rebirth* (London: Longman, 1996), 20.
[82] Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Social Currents in Eastern Europe: The Sources and Consequences of the Great Transformation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 229. By 1987, Serbia would pass a law that increased the 5-year penalty to 10 years for non-Serbs who had raped Serbian women.
[83] Rebecca Schneider, "The Explicit Body in Performance," in *The Explicit Body in Performance*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 28.

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 simultaneously *symbolically* depict subjects of social degradation rather than *actually* degrade herself. Rather, she is the author of a metaphorical image of defilement metonymically conveyed through her body.

As Cathy Caruth has pointed out, return to traumatic experiences is not conscious,

> not the signal of the direct experience but, rather, of the attempt to overcome the fact that it was *not* direct, to attempt to master what was never fully grasped in the past….The survivor is forced, continually, to confront it over and over again.[84]

The result of surviving trauma, then, provokes the "endless inherent necessity of repetition, which ultimately may lead to destruction, [for] the history of the traumatized individual, is nothing other than the determined repetition of the event of destruction."[85] In this context of trauma, Delimar's covered eyes may also be understood as symbolic of an inability to witness one's own psychic death. Her repeated commands to audiences to violate her suggest an urgent return to that state of destruction as paradoxically as do her aesthetic efforts to move beyond it, a paradox that is part of the etiology of trauma. Delimar's

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[84] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press. 1996), 62.
[85] Ibid.

passionate and continual plea for sex, throughout her entire oeuvre, and her embrace and display of her desires, have been interpreted as forms of sexual liberation, but the images also attest to psychic suffering that cannot be ignored. The artist's repetition of aspects of sex as putative empowerment may, in fact, screen a reality otherwise inaccessible even to her, or by extension, inaccessible to victims of physical, psychological, and sexual violation.

According to Freud, the screen memory is "one which owes its value as a memory not to its own content but to the relation existing between that content and some other, that has been suppressed."[86] Similarly, Auerhahn and Laub define a screen memory as "the creation of a fiction that covers over that absence [of memory]. These fictions, which often contain half-truths, hint at traumatic knowledge even while screening against it."[87] The creation of a "screen memory serves as the rem(a)inder of another history," one that is "encrypted," and "gesture[s] toward both the representation of the present and what was never fully present memory."[88]

Such "half-truths" come most poignantly into view in another work by Delimar, a 30-minute performance at the Expanded Media gallery in Zagreb titled *Jebanje Je Tužno* (*Fucking is Sad)* (1986).[89] In this performance, Delimar lay on her back on top of a white cross with her body painted black, her face veiled, and

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[86] Sigmund Freud, "Screen Memories," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 126.
[87] Nanette C. Auerhahn and Dori Laub, "Integrational Memory of the Holocaust," in *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, ed. Yael Danieli (New York: Plenum Press, 1998), 25.
[88] Loreen K. Kippen, *Screen Memories: Trauma Theories and the Reinvention of Style*, (Thesis, MA in department of English, University of Calgary, 1998), 7.
[89] The phrase *Jebanje Je Tuzno* (*Fucking is Sad)* is a quote from Vlado Martek.

her nipples painted red. [Figure 23] An androgynous male performer wearing lipstick sat against a large black cross before walking slowly up to Delimar, placing a white rose on her body, and exiting the room. [Figure 24] Delimar lay in place for another twenty-eight minutes like a dead corpse put to rest with the parting gift of a rose. The symbolic clout of this action connotes just how sad only "fucking" might become. With her face veiled and her crucified body painted black and lying on the white cross, Delimar became a dark intermediary between the whiteness of the cross, and the single white rose signifying virginity. But the white rose is also used at funerals, thus indicating both innocence and its destruction, which she accepts in silent stillness. In addition, the recurring image of the cross, prominent in the flyer for her action, indicated the foundational presence of religion and her critique of it, in her work. [Figure 25]

Shoshana Felman writes that "the *will-to-silence* is the will to *bury* the dead witness inside oneself,"[90] a silence that results from the impossibility of accepting what is seen, and that constitutes an immense burden of the responsibility of "the historical impossibility of witnessing and the historical impossibility of *escaping* the predicament of being – and having to become – a witness" to the actual witness of an event.[91] Like Caruth, Felman bases her insights on the pioneering research on trauma by the psychoanalyst Robert Jay Lifton. He has described trauma as a "symbolic death," one that occurs in traumatic

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[90] Shoshana Felman, "The Return of the Voice: Claude Lanzmann's Shoah," in ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Rutledge, 1992), 225.
[91] Ibid, 224.

dissociation "in order to avoid a permanent physical or psychic death."[92]

Delimar symbolically buried herself, acting out the effects of "reliving and denial, with alternating intrusive and numbing responses"[93] evinced by a visual, performative testimony to endure and to the fact that when love-making is reduced to violation, it is indeed sad for everyone.

While Delimar's poignant and courageous art has often been elided from art history, Sanja Iveković (b. 1949) has been internationally recognized as the most outspoken, powerful feminist artist of Zagreb. She directed her work at a critique of the Yugoslav state and culture, exposing the manifold ways in which patriarchy shapes and constructs women's identities and sense of dignity. Iveković, an important leader in the Zagreb art world, also belonged to and participated in organizing the art collective *Podroom* (basement).[94]

This group carried out much of its work in her and her husband Dalibor Martinis' basement on Mesnička Street. From 1978 to 1980, *Podroom* "function[ed] not only as a gallery, but also as a place that would be dominated by the hitherto non-existing or long-forgotten forms of communication between artists, such as open debates, dialogue, publishing activity, and organized struggle for the

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[92] Robert J. Lifton "From Hiroshima to Nazi Doctors: The Evolution of Psychoformative Approaches to Understanding Traumatic Stress Syndromes," in John P. Wilson, ed., *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes* (New York: Plenum Press, 1993), 18.

[93] Bessel A.Van Der Kolk, " Psychological Consequences of Overwhelming Life Experiences," in *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Psychological and Biological Sequelae* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, 1984), 3.

[94] "Podrum" is the proper term for "basement" in Serbo-Croatian. The artists playfully combined the Serbo-Croatian "pod" (underneath) with the English term "room," which sounds like "podrum" (basement), and which stood for the basement space the artists used for exhibitions, meetings and other art events.

improvement of the social and economic position of artists."[95] *Podroom* operated

as an alternative space in constant flux, and included group actions with artists

from throughout Yugoslavia, as well as spontaneous exhibitions with

experimental curatorial approaches. One of the principle activities of the artists

was constant debate about the nature of *Podroom*, its future goals, and its

purpose.[96] The organizers resisted state funding and aimed to bring together

artists working with ephemeral body actions, samizdat publications, and

conceptual and street art. "*Podroom* artists thus found themselves in an empty

space—a basement— where the products of their work were neither destined for

the market nor desired by socialist society," Bago has commented, adding that

their art "could be only stored for a delayed audience, for future use."[97] Bago also

deduced that the nature of the basement space and its "aspect of privacy, and

especially of storing and nurturing, enables us to conceive of the basement also

as a 'female' space."[98] That the basement space may have been feminized, with its

symbolic reference to female genitalia, is possible, but what is of primary

significance is that *Podroom* was a place of immense imagination that,

nonetheless, was dissolved after two years and many internal disagreements.

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[95] Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb, *Digitizing Ideas Archive*, http://www.digitizing-ideas.hr/en/explore/podroom. Participants included the following: Boris Demur, Vladimir Dodig Trokut, Ivan Dorogi, Tomislav Gotovac, Sanja Iveković, Željko Jerman, Željko Kipke, Antun Maračić, Vlado Martek, Dalibor Martinis, Marijan Molnar, Goran Petercol, Rajko Radovanović, Mladen Stilinović, Sven Stilinović, Goran Trbuljak, Fedor Vučemilović, and Mirjana Zorić.
[96] Ivana Bago, "A Window and a Basement: Negotiating Hospitality at La Galerie des Locataires and Podroom - The Working Community of Artists," in *ARTMargins* 1, no. 2-3 (June-October, 2012), 128.
[97] Ibid, 136.
[98] Ibid, 128.

Iveković survived the end of *Podroom* to participate regularly in
international art events and to distinguish herself both amongst the primarily
male dominated scenes in Zagreb and Belgrade and as an equal with Marina
Abramović, with whom she would share in the 2000s the distinction of having a
retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. One of the unique
features of her work is Iveković's feminist critique of advertisement, history, art,
and visual culture. For example, a film made in 1964 advertized Pan Am
Airways in Yugoslavia and described the country as an idyllic and historic place
in Europe, with a history of ancient civilization that offered everything from
beaches to ancient ruins. "Yugoslavia, a land slightly bigger than Great Britain,"
the film went on to explain, "has been described as being masculine in character -
rugged, strong, robust - still there are plenty of pretty girls."[99] Although she did
not use this film in her work, such representations of the patriarchal nation and
its pretty girls are emblematic of the kinds of images Iveković thematized in
samizdat books, videos, and performances that analyzed the position of women
in popular Yugoslav culture. In *Übung Macht den Meister (Practice Makes a Master)*
(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

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[99] Kodachrome film for Pan Am Airways, 1964. Available online:
http://mycentury.tv/balkani/item/653-yugoslavia-on-
kodachrome.htmlhttp://mycentury.tv/balkani/item/653-yugoslavia-on-kodachrome.html

artist in New York the previous year."[100] [Figure 26] 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."[101] 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 grueling 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."[102] 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.

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[100] See, Practice Makes a Master: http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/events/13792 See, also, Sanja Iveković, "Übung Macht den Maister (Practice Makes a Master, 1982," in Nataša Ilić and Kathrin Rohmberg, eds., *Sanja Iveković. Selected Works* (Barcelona: Fundacio Antoni Tapies, 2008), 134.
[101] Tom Holert, "Face-Shifting. Violence and Expression in the work of Sanja Iveković," in *Sanja Iveković. Selected Works,* 27.
[102] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjugation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 20-21.

Three years earlier, she performed *Trokut (Triangle)*. 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 the 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. [Figure 27] 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 behavior. This intentional "act of disobedience," as Stipančić called it, disclosed the Yugoslavian government's security measures forbidding citizens from viewing the President from their windows or balconies.[103] 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.[104] 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 multi-media performance *Inter Nos (Between Us)* of 1978.[105] [Figure 28]

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[103] Branka Stipančić, "Body Language in Croatian Art," in Zdenka Badovinac, *The Body and the East: From the 1960s to the Present*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1998), 59.
[104] British Marxist sociologist Tom Bottomore's *Elites and Society* (1964).
[105] Produced by MultiMedia Centre, Zagreb, 1978. MultiMedia Centar, Zagreb, 23 December 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.

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."[106] 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" mediated by objects.[107] In other words, the performance was plagued by the absence of actual intimacy, rendering the geographic and psychic

Concurrently, the audience receives only participant's image." See in *Sanja Iveković. Selected Works,* 100.

[106] Branka Stipančić, "Body Language in Croatian Art," 59.

[107] Kristine Stiles, "Survival Ethos and Destruction Art," in *Discourse: Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 14, no. 2(1992), 96.

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. 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.[108] Moreover, Iveković's actions call to mind José Esteban Muñoz's understanding of queerness in which alternative political and social relations can pose utopian possibilities for society and art.[109] As Muñoz stated:

> we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds. Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing…[it] is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an instance on the potentiality or concrete possibility of another world.[110]

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[108] Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 2.
[109] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Politics and Performance of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009).
[110] Muñoz, 1.

Iveković, along with her colleagues in Zagreb, embodied their historical moment and its destructive effect, but rose beyond it, with and through art. Such efforts expressed in actions, conceptual and video works, as well as samizdat publications, all aimed at engaging the public and altering every-day reality. Knowing that "something is missing" and that the "concrete possibility of another world" exists, the artists shared an investment in experimentation that would lead them beyond social, political, gender, and sexual norms, and enable them to present possibilities of alternative inter-relationships that raised the stakes for art, and its significant role in resisting the absurdities of bureaucratic and political oppression, disclosing and fostering the vitality of culture and political consciousness, and being in life as a decision in art.

Chapter III: Balatonboglár and Budapest, Hungary

The situation in Hungary was much more dire for experimental artists than in Yugoslavia. Hungary's version of state socialism was bitter, strong, and overwhelming. Disobedient artists in Hungary faced arrests, police surveillance, expulsion from academies, and a hostility from the authorities that continually forced them to make a decision between what their artwork could, would, and sought to accomplish, communicate, evoke and mean. To summon Foucault again, such decisions were accompanied by acute awareness of political and social consequences, involving "A simple choice, but a difficult work."[1]

In his memoire of Eastern Europe, A *Guest in My Own Country*, George Konrád, the Hungarian novelist, intellectual, and dissident, narrated both his survival of the Holocaust and his experience of Soviet oppression in Hungary during the war and postwar era. In the context of state socialism, his memories are plagued by the omnipresence of surveillance mechanisms, incessant invasion of privacy, blurring the lines between private and public space with the gaze of the omniscient collective.

> Living in Eastern Europe meant being constantly prepared for defeat and
> backwardness but also to question what it is to be human. There was no
> real dictator, only a long line of downtrodden individuals, each
> imagining that everyone in front of them was an informer and everyone

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[1] Michel Foucault, "Is it Useless to Revolt?" in Jeremy R. Carrette, ed., *Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 134. Originally published as 'Inutile de se soulever?' in *Le Monde*, 11 May 1979. Translated by James Bernauer as 'Is it useless to revolt?' in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 8, no.1 (Spring 1981): 1-9.

behind them a reckless anarchist. But once informing has become

common currency-and the informer a model citizen-what is left to inform

about? Where is the truth whereby we can recognize the liar?[2]

Such an atmosphere of distrust manipulated the public's faith in family

alliances, friendships, artistic communities, careers, livelihoods, visions for the

future, political consciousness, and, finally, truth. In this regard, Hungarian

psychiatrist Eva Katona has examined how the state caused, sustained, and

enforced a "norm" requiring citizens to be complicit with the system. She

deduced that two types of "psychological adaptation" occurred: "One is

submission to autocratic power (abdication of responsibility) while the second is

a kind of laissez-faire attitude towards political and social phenomena beyond

one's control (disavowal of responsibility)."[3] She suggested that this "disavowal

of responsibility" is what leads to "organized irresponsibility."[4] Given that

dissident movements existed in all East European countries, Katona's diagnosis

begs the following questions: Are these the only two options for coping? What

does "responsibility" in this context mean and how does it square with trauma

imposed by the state and its aftermath? How did a few experimental artists in

Hungary address these questions with decisions of their own to act through and

in art?

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[2] George Konrád, Jim Tucker, trans., Michael Henry Heim, ed., *A Guest in My Own Country* (New York: Other Press, 2007).
[3] Nora Csiszer and Eva Katona, "Hungary: Replacing a Missing Stone," in *Beyond Invisible Walls: The Psychological Legacy of Soviet Trauma, East European Therapists and Their Patients* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2001), 38.
[4] Ibid, 39.

In *A Carnival of Revolution*, Padraic Kenney offers a rich and detailed discussion of some of the social movements in Central Europe that resisted "organized irresponsibility," fueling the democratic opposition and paving a road of resistance that led to the events of 1989. As many have understood, Kenney affirms that 1989 was not a moment of revolution without a foundation, but rather the manifestation of the concrete efforts of social movements that educated people about democratic processes.[5] "There are no miraculous events here, but many years of concerted action. The actors are not famous dissident intellectuals and the ruthless communists, but hundreds of lesser known individuals."[6] While Kenney's book is thought to have pioneered the discussion of lesser-known but seminal movements that brought democratic change in authoritarian societies, the contribution to social transformation by artistic communities is often omitted in such scholarly discussions.

This chapter considers some of the cultural interventions by the Hungarian artist György Galántai (b. 1941), focusing on his transformation of an abandoned chapel into an exhibition space for experimental art in 1970: the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio located in the lakeside city of Balatonboglár in the West of Hungary. I analyze the work of selected artists, actions, and exhibitions that spoke to, embodied, performed or gestured against the very disavowal of responsibility Katona described. The last part of the chapter turns to *Artpool*, the now internationally renowned archive of experimental art that he and writer,

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[5] Padraic Kenney, *Carnival of Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 13.
[6] Ibid, 16.

editor, and curator Julia Klaniczay amassed from 1979 until today. After the state

closure of the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio in 1973, *Artpool* served as Galántai's

vehicle for distributing samizdat works, organizing mail art exhibitions, and

instigating events central to the development of intellectual, artistic, and social

networks within and beyond Eastern Europe. I propose that in his work as an

artist, curator and organizer, Galántai resisted indecision and instead pursued

and promoted the very non-traditional, experimental modes of art politicized

and banned by the state, remaining in constant dialogue with international art

practices from minimal, conceptual, and body art to Fluxus and mail art, art

forms that fostered alternative art communities and critiqued the suffocation of

personal sovereignty by totalitarian conditions of existence.

The possibilities for building alternative networks and practicing

experiential experimental art after World War II were met with firm resistance in

Hungary. Kádár's "goulash communism" in the 1960s was an act of guilty

conscience, and no more than a handful of exhibitions attempted to put unofficial

art on display at this time.[7] In December 1968, *Iparterv*, a "semi-official venue" at

an "architectural planning office in the center of Budapest," showed a

multiplicity of styles, from pop and *arte povera* to graffiti works, all of which

diverged from standard official Hungarian art.[8] Such unofficial artworks were

tolerated, a deliberate nod to temporary lenience aimed at mollifying dissident

artists. As Forgács has argued, "the means to keep the neo-avant-garde in check

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[7] Nikita Khrushchev coined this phrase to describe Hungarian Socialism under Kádár.
[8] Forgács, 38.

were more subtle and more manipulative in Hungary" than in the Soviet Union,

which had publicly destroyed an unofficial art show with bulldozers on

September 14, 1974 (now referred to as "The Bulldozer Exhibition").[9] According

to Edit Sasváry, "[t]he control of art was informed by the political principle of

balancing: make allowances here, clamp down there. How the leash relaxed or

tightened always depended on the political and social constellation of the

moment."[10] After a 1972 Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party meeting, the

government "declar[ed] the return to hard line politics," which reinforced the

divide between official and unofficial art; "vanguard art was forced out of public

venues, and the term 'underground' came to be used as a synonym of the 'avant-

garde', or non-official art."[11] Exhibits like *Iparterv* were ridiculed and social

realism remained the dominant style in Hungary, sustained by academic distrust

in, disrespect for, and most of all fear of state reprisals against abstract and

experimental art.

State antagonism towards experimental art turned transparent in the

reception and treatment of Galántai's artworks four years after he found,

renovated and rented the abandoned church in Balatonboglár, which he rented

in 1968 and began using in 1970 as an exhibition space, organizing shows for

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[9] Ibid. "The Bulldozer Exhibition" in the Soviet Union describes the events that took place on September 14, 1974, when an open-air exhibition of experimental art organized by Evgeny Rukhin and Oscar Rabin was destroyed with bulldozers and water cannons and resulted in a number of arrests. Because of international criticism of this censorship, the Soviet Union decided to put up the exhibition two weeks later for four hours, which resulted in thousands of visitors, which some refer to as "Russian (or Soviet) Woodstock."

[10] Edit Sasváry, "A Moment of Experimental Democracy in the Kádár Era. György Galántai's Chapel Studio in Balatonboglár and the Social Milieu of Counter-Culture in Hungary in the 1960s and 1970s," in Ivana Bago, Antonia Majača, and Vesna Vuković, eds., *Removed from the Crowd: Unexpected Encounters I* (Zagreb: BLOK and DeLVe, 2011), 85.

[11] Forgács, 47.

conceptual and performance artists in Hungary and Europe.[12] In his biographical

sketch, Galántai described the activities at the chapel as follows:

> Altogether 35 exhibitions, concerts, poetry recitals, theatrical
>
> performances, and film showings were held in those 4 years, featuring the
>
> best of Hungary's (undesirable) avant-garde artists, and guest artists from
>
> abroad. Some highlights: 1972: the first exhibition of conceptual art in
>
> Hungary; Avant-Garde Festival (which had been banned in Budapest);
>
> István Haraszty's kinetic statues (banned in Budapest); 1972-73:
>
> performances by the banned Kassák Theater; 1973: the first exhibition of
>
> visual poetry in Hungary; etc.[13]

Exhibiting "undesirable" works of art, the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio

quickly became identified as a space of confrontation in which art was a visible

sign of resistance, evincing the presence of an alternative culture instantiated

within state culture. Never mind if some of the artists were in pursuit of the sole

exploration of conceptual and aesthetics questions, the Balatonboglár Chapel

Studio legitimated their roles as oppositional figures in the minds of curious

bystanders, certainly the authorities, and even some participants. At the

conceptual core of the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio, Galántai fostered an open

and collaborative environment, encouraging the participation of Hungarian and

international artists and visitors alike, building networks through numerous

exhibitions that would underpin Galántai's later mail art activities.

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[12] Petra Stegmann, *Fluxus East: Fluxus Networks in Central Eastern Europe* (Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien GmbH, 2007), 145.

[13] György Galántai and Julia Klaniczay, eds., *Lifeworks 1968–1993* (Artpool: Enciklopédia Kiadó, Budapest, 1996) 300. György Galántai, "Biography," *György Galántai: Life Explains Art, Art Explains Life*, http://www.galantai.hu/appendix/biography.html.

In 1973, Dóra Maurer and Gábor Tóth organized the exhibition "Texts" at the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio, a show that was billed as "the first international exhibition of visual experimental poetry."[14] The exhibition contained works by fifty-nine artists from numerous Eastern and Western European countries, works belonging to international conceptual art tendencies that Galántai saw at "documenta 5" in 1972, the landmark exhibition, curated by Harald Szeemann, that first brought worldwide attention to conceptual, performance, installation, and video art. Galántai wanted to advance just such experimental art at the chapel.[15] In 1973, Hungarian art historian and curator László Beke also organized a proto-mail art exhibition, "Mirror," there, which included postcards, collages, photographs and conceptual artworks by artists from more than thirty countries, as well as Hungarian artists like János Tölgyesi, whose *Postcard* (1972) is one of the many memorable works in "Mirror."[16] [Figure 29]

The postcard that Tölgyesi addressed to Beke instructed: "Put the postcard in front of a mirror and look out through the hole: you can get a reality-

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[14] Julia Klaniczay and Edit Sasvári, eds., *Törvénytelen avantgárd. Galántai György balatonboglári kápolnaműterme 1970–1973 [Illegal Avant-garde, the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio of György Galántai 1970–1973]* (Budapest: Artpool–Balassi, 2003), 177.

[15] Julia Klaniczay in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, January 14, 2012.

[16] Among the artists exhibiting in this show were Jörg Schwarzenberger (Austria), Angelo de Aquino (Brazil), Jiří H. Kocman and Petr Štembera (Czechoslovakia), David Mayor (England), Ben Vautier (France), Klaus Groh (German), Sándor Pinczehelyi (Hungary), Mieko Shiomi (Japan), Gustave Cerutti (Switzerland), and Jerzy Kiernicki (Poland). In 1970, Galántai also wanted to show a Chapel exhibition in Budapest and collaborated with a number of artists in the process. Held in the building R of the Technical University in Budapest, the "R-Exhibition" ended up being organized by Attila Csáji. During the preparations for this exhibition, Endre Tót shared a lot of contacts with Galántai, including the mailing address of Klaus Groh, who proved to be an important connection for East European artists and for Galántai's mail art practices. Galántai in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, January 12, 2012.

like view. If the view is not resembling enough you may cut out a larger hole equal to the 'durch-sicht' - for sure you will get a real view."[17] Situated vertically on the edge of a table with the backside of the postcard facing outwards, a mirror was placed on the opposite side of the table, reflecting the postcard's image of "The Ferryman" and "Fisher," both monuments at the Balaton port. Tölgyesi also marked a hole in the postcard that would allow a viewer to look through it to see his or her own and the postcard's reflection. Beke explained:

> The mirror has a dualistic character, being dull and everyday on the one side, brilliant and incomprehensible on the other. It is coldly rational and mysterious in the same time. The single possibility to face ourself is the mirror. The reflect[ion] is the most perfect and most transitory image…The mirror is a magic object.[18]

As such, the mirror connected the physical art object (postcard) – selected, written, and sent by the artist – to the viewer who attempted the act of viewing it from both sides at the same time in a mirror. In this key way, Tölgyesi's work of art reinforced the purpose of mail art: to unite artist, viewer, and installation in one experiential, dialogic artwork. It also incited the participation of the viewer, whose decision to look through the hole would determine the experience of this

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[17] Klaniczay and Sasvári, 168. All of the exhibition details, such as a list of artists and images of artworks and the exhibition, can be found on Artpool's website, http://www.artpool.hu/boglar/1973/tukor/mirror.html

[18] László Beke, "Introduction – Mirror," 1973. Beke's introduction first appeared in a typewritten "catalogue" of four A4 sheets, in a Hungarian and in an English version. His text was on page 1. A facsimile of these "catalogues," including both the Hungarian and the English versions with some illustrations and a new introduction by Beke, was published in 1992, when Artpool reorganized the show for the opening of the Artpool Art Research Center. The 1992 catalog is not paginated but the original English text is on page 11. The publications can be found at the Artpool Art Research Center. Also, *Mirror*, http://www.artpool.hu/boglar/1973/730805e.html.

dialogic artwork. This purpose was facilitated by the object's metonymical capacity for linkage, a function with sociopolitical ramifications that warrant more discussion here.

In formulating a political role for mail art, I follow Kristine Stiles, who in 1987 suggested how metonymy appended the conventional communicating mechanisms of metaphor in body art by directly linking viewers to performing subjects and thereby contributing to "the radical potential of body art for subject-to-subject communication."[19] In her theorization, Stiles followed Roman Jakobson.[20] While metaphor operates by "substitution," he explained, metonymy operates through "combination," namely a part for the whole by virtue of being a part of the very object, idea, word, and – I would add here – the individual to whom it refers.[21] Metonymy can not stand on its own, being always in relation to, and part of, something else. (Stiles used the example of one's shadow as a classic metonymy; in linguistics the example often given is the crown for the king). In metonymy, it is not the visual or semantic similarity that constitutes linkage, but instead "their contiguity, such as syntactical or physical proximity and con-textuality."[22] What I am suggesting here is that samizdat publications and mail art, like Tölgyesi's postcard, perform both metaphorically (to re-present an artist's ideas in objective form) and metonymically (to concretize the contingency

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[19] Kristine Stiles, "Synopsis of the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) and its Theoretical Significance," *The Act* 1, no. 2 (1987), 29.

[20] Ibid. See also Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *The Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton & Co, 1956).

[21] Sadeq Rahimi, "The Unconscious: Metaphor and Metonymy," *Somatosphere* 4 (2009): http://somatosphere.net.

[22] Ibid, 3.

of artists' ontological, epistemological, and aesthetic visual and linguistic decision).

Jacques Lacan wrote about the role of metonymy in 1957, an argument neatly summarized by Paulina Aroch Fugellie in her description of "the slippery chain of unsatisfied desire [that] can never be fulfilled," such that "metonymy is the place of the subject's lack of being."[23] Homi Bhabha argued similarly in 1994, writing that metonymy is "a figure of contiguity that substitutes a part for a whole (an eye for an I)," and "must not be read as a form of simple substitution or equivalence."[24] While serving to bind and connect, metonymy also reinstates absence: a part of both, but never one or the other, metonymy concretizes felt absence through its own presence between two elements. In this way, Tölgyesi's mirror postcard joined artist to viewer, embodying (in the condition of its unstable reflections) a transitory, unfixed state, which could be said to have realized Lacan's point that metonymy is "a lack of being…where I am not, because I cannot situate myself there."[25] Considering mail art through the trope of metonymy makes it possible to grasp its sociopolitical image and bridging affect, but also how it, following Lacan's logic, made geographical distances and political challenges paradoxically more palpable in their absence. This was

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[23] Paulina Aroch Fugellie, "The Place of Metaphor in a Metonymic World: Of Homi Bhabha's De-realizing Politics and Other Academic Events," presented at the *Encuentro II Migratory Politics* conference (Amsterdam, 2007), 8.

[24] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 78.

[25] Lacan wrote: "This signifying game between metonymy and metaphor, up to and including the active edge that splits my desire between a refusal of the signifier and a lack of being, and links my fate to the question of my destiny, this game, in all its inexorable subtlety, is played until the match is called, there where I am not, because I cannot situate myself there." See, also, Lacan's "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud" in *Ecrits: A Selection*. Edited and translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 171.

particularly true for Galántai, living within, and yet beyond, the context of Hungarian state socialism through his mail art practice.

Critical to remember is that mail art used the state's official postal system, the very institution that maintained the policing mechanisms of the government. While this particular network opened up possibilities of intellectual and artistic collaborations and exchanges, it also operated under the gaze and control of the authorities. As Galántai pointed out:

> Of course, nothing is truly private under dictatorship – even your soul's inner corners are under observation. Stepping out of private circles required some caution, since bringing my concepts to the larger society proved always to be problematic. As long as I worked with some restraint, there were no great difficulties, though my mailings were under observation.[26]

On a number of occasions, mailings to and from Galántai never arrived.[27] He remembers: "The secret police were quick to note the international networking that mail art allowed, and took care to interfere particularly in Hungarian artists' contacts in the Eastern block."[28] While the postal system served as the primary means of transporting and extending artists' concepts and actions, its surreptitious network frequently intercepted artists' postings,

[26] Excerpt from a longer interview with György Galántai in December 1991, originally published in *The New Hungarian Quarterly*, no. 125 (Spring 1992): 96-100. Republished and edited in Hans-Peter Feldmann, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Beatrice von Bismarck, Diethelm Stoller, Ulf Wuggening eds., *Interarchive. Archivarische Praktiken und Handlungsräume im zeitgenössischen Kunstfeld / Archival Practices and Sites in the Contemporary Art Field* (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2002), 393-395. Quote taken from 393.
[27] Galántai in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, January 12, 2012.
[28] Galántai, *Resistance as "Behavior-Art": The Dissident Hungarian Avant-Garde* (Manuscript, 1999), 2. Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest, Hungary.

interrupting their metonymic circulation. When mail art was delivered, its obscure visual and textual references helped artists to evade censorship. Perhaps like a rhizome, but more like an artistic rock thrown through the postal window of a nation's boundaries, mail art laid bare cultural separation breaking through metaphorical and actual political barriers. As one mail art manifesto urged: "Mail art is not objects going through the mail, but artists establishing direct *contact* with other artists, sharing ideas and experiences, all over the world."[29]

Just such aims inspired László Beke's *Tug of War Action* (1972) and *Shaking Hands* (1972) at the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio, both intended to create international artistic dialogue. [Figure 30] In these events Hungarian and Czechoslovakian artists first participated in a "tug of war" followed by "shaking hands," actions that were photographed. Beke remembers:

> I somehow happened to come across an English language periodical with a special issue on Czechoslovakia. It featured a fascinating photo of the unified troops, which had just marched into Czechoslovakia, lining up to play a game called "tug-of-war", immediately before or after occupying a village. Thus, I organized a tableau vivant to this effect in Balatonboglár.[30]

Beke then assembled the close-up photographs of each handshake in a pattern of squares. Gyula Pauer recalls that the series of photographs signified how the two countries had "symbolically made peace with each other, at a time

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[29] John Held Jr., "The Mail Art Exhibition: Personal Worlds to Cultural Strategies," in Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark, eds., *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005), 101. Exphasis added by the author.
[30] "An Interview with László Beke, 1998," in Klaniczay and Sasvári, 141. Translation taken from *Parallel Chronologies: "Other" Revolutionary Traditions: How Art Becomes Public. An Exhibition in Newspaper Format* (Budapest: Tranzit Hungary, 2011), 33.

when our political system was still in conflict with Czechoslovakia. We made

peace, and that was important."[31] But in addition to this metaphoric meaning,

Beke's decision to assemble these photographs also had a metonymic role: even if

the action was brief and the artists dispersed after their temporary union, the

photograph served then, as it does today, as an extension of their meeting,

marking a moment of physical contact and creative immediacy that their

respective countries of origin made difficult.

The incentive to re-envision the public's choice, versus that of the

government, shaped another exhibition at the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio that

year. Remembering that Galántai's Chapel Studio was not an officially

sanctioned public exhibition space makes it even more important to

acknowledge how the artist's attempts to gain permission for such a space were

repeatedly denied by the state,[32] a rejection that prompted Galántai to think

creatively about how to subvert such bureaucratic restrictions. He decided to

name the chapel his "studio," which increased his agency in organizing "atelier

exhibitions" but which also meant that he assumed the sole responsibility of

what transpired there. Given that the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio emerged out

of such a calculated choice, it comes as no surprise that one of the exhibitions

was titled, "Today You Open the Exhibition – Responsibility-taking action"

(1972). Galántai and István Harasztÿ jointly came up with the idea for the

exhibition, which involved a "ribbon bearing the three colors of the Hungarian

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[31] "An Interview with Gyula Pauer, 1998," in Klaniczay and Sasvári, 142. Translation taken from *Parallel Chronologies,* 33.
[32] Dóra Hegyi and Zsuzsa László, "How Art Becomes Public," in *Parallel Chronologies,* 9.

flag […] stretched across the entrance with a sign next to it about how 'Today

YOU open the exhibition.'"[33] [Figure 31] But it was not as simple as bursting

through the ribbon: Using a very short string, Galántai and Harasztÿ tied a pair

of scissors on the door, deliberately making it impossible to utilize them and

"cut" the Hungarian string. In a 1998 interview, Harasztÿ recalled:

> I was well aware of how much sweat and sacrifice was in what we were
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> exhibiting there, as was the case for the members of the Pécs Workshop as
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> well. And I said, whoever enters should bow down and slip under this
>
> ribbon. So those who bent down and slipped under the ribbon, that was
>
> so gratifying to us, that lo, we had not worked in vain. And then
>
> comrades of the various councils from nearby towns like Kaposvár
>
> slipped under the ribbon, in dark attire, to verify that nothing had been
>
> put on exhibit that they had not signed.[34]

The expectation of the viewer to face a decision, either not to enter or bend

over/under the Hungarian flag to view the artworks, could have not been a

more fitting commentary on the state of "unofficial" art in Hungary and its

relationship to the public. Not only did viewers have to make the choice to be in

the ghetto of experimentation and ideas in art, but they also knew very well that

representatives from the state would note their presence.

Hungarian artist István Harasztÿ (b. 1934) was no stranger to censorship,

as his kinetic sculpture *Madárkalitka* (*Bird Cage)* was banned by the Hungarian

authorities in Budapest in 1971. [Figure 32] Galántai exhibited the work at the

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[33] "Recollections," in *Parallel Chronologies:* online: http://exhibition-
history.blog.hu/2009/06/11/recollections
[34] Ibid.

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Balatonboglár Chapel Studio the following year, where it made more than a provocative statement about state control, surveillance, and (im)possibilities of rebellion that such systems unwittingly offer; exhibiting a banned sculpture aggressively threw down the gauntlet to the authorities, challenging them to stop and ban Galántai's own activities.

Using a live bird in his sculpture, Harasztÿ built the cage in such a way that the bird had to sit on a red and black painted swing in order to open the cage door. As soon as the bird left the swing, the cage doors would close, leaving the animal without options to escape captivity. Harasztÿ's sculpture took up the question of how to "endure" states of repression, or what forms life can take under those circumstances, and served as a metaphor for and witness to the emotional, creative, and bodily restraints for artists in Hungary, as a work that visualized the manipulative strategies of the government to trap citizens in illusory freedom of expression. Exaggerating the possibilities and the limits of personal liberty under Hungarian state socialism, the work confirmed what Beke characterized as Harasztÿ's "philosophical caricatures clothed in metal, cybernetics and electronics," works that were "inspir[ed] by Conceptual Art."[35]

Harasztÿ's conceptual experimental technique lays bare the traumatizing conditions of living and working as an artist in Hungary at that time. A more optimistic reading of Harasztÿ's sculpture may be as follows: as long as one operates within the state-sanctioned space of art (the cage), one only lives with

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[35] László Beke, *István Harasztÿ: Retrospective Exhibition 1963-1998* (Mücsarnok/Kunsthalle Budapest, 1998), 8.

the illusion of freedom. But the artist, who created this sculpture, had already

escaped that mental cage, exposing its psychic and structural confinement within

an exhibition space external to the state, namely the Balatonboglár Chapel

Studio. So, too, did Galántai, whose decision to show forbidden works alerted

the authorities, leading to massive bureaucratic and political problems for the

artist, who was subjected to surveillance thereafter for more than a decade and

whose efforts the secret police reports categorized as "hostile" and "rebellious"

activities directed against the party's general and cultural policies."[36]

Harasztÿ's birdcage, then, stood for the artifice of the calculated system of

politics in Hungary, and perhaps even for its fragility, as small breaks in such

systems undo the workings of its machine with the results of metaphorically

setting the bird free. Perhaps then Harasztÿ also pointed to the hidden

fascination of keeping a bird in a cage as an object of admiration, coveted for its

colors, sounds, and ability to fly. It could be argued, thus, that the state enjoyed a

perverse obsession with "dissident" artists like Harasztÿ and Galántai, and that

its incessant surveillance signified resentment for lives filled with forbidden and

unknown thoughts and experiences.

Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's 2006 film *The Lives of Others* (Das

Leben der Anderen) helps explicate this multifaceted question of desire and

aggression by thematizing the internal struggle of one secret agent (Stasi-

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[36] "Summary of the secret investigation into individual under code name "painter." In the MINISTRY OF INTERIOR, III/III-4-b-Sub-department report, available at the Artpool Art Research Center's Archive. (Excerpts from Összefoglaló jelentés "Festő" fn. bizalmas nyomozásban [Summary Report of the secret investigation into individual under code name "Painter"], BM III/III-4-b alosztály. (December 1982): TH O-19618/2: 91-98, English translation by Krisztina Sarkady-Hart. Forthcoming in Artpool, edited by Julia Klaniczay (Budapest 2013).

Hauptmann Gerd Wiesler) in the GDR during the early 1980s. Wiesler's fascination with and respect for the actress Christa-Maria Sieland and her partner, Georg Dreyman, a dissident writer and playwright, led to the secret agent's decision to sabotage the state's ordered investigation against them. One scene especially speaks to the artist as an admired but captured and oppressed being (like a bird in a cage), which nevertheless retains the gift of art. Wiesler encounters the distressed actress in a bar, who in that very moment is facing the decision of whether or not to sell out (literally, to trade sex with an elite socialist party member), which would permit her to continue her career in the GDR. Not knowing that she is facing a GDR secret agent who has been observing her for weeks, she asks about herself in the third person: "Would she sell herself for art?" Wiesler answers: "Sell herself? But she already has art. That would be bad business." After a short pause he says: "You are a magnificent artist. Don't you know that?" Sieland responds: "And you are a good human."[37] This dramatic encounter incites the actress not to submit herself, or at least not do it that night, although the pressure of the government and its corrupt authorities ultimately lead to her death.[38]

The Lives of Others articulates the innate mystery of the bird trapped in Harasztÿ's Bird Cage, which nevertheless maintains its beauty and ability to fly,

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[37] Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, *The Lives of Others* (2006). Translation of dialogue from German to English by the author.

[38] Sieland's answer to the secret agent alludes to another scene in the film, where Wiesler's hears the classical song *Sonata for a Good Man* during his surveillance of Dreyman, who plays the song on the piano after the blacklisted theatrical director Albert Jerska committed suicide. Moved by the music (art), the secret agent experiences a profound change in consciousness and decides to protect the dissident artists.

but which can also be destroyed by the greed and domination of others. Another focal point of the film is the surreptitious publication of Dreyman's essay on the increasing rates of suicides in the GDR, a situation that was similar and perhaps even worse in Hungary at the time. Harasztÿ's kinetic live sculpture, as a system, embodied the devastating situation for individuals living in such conditions, and exacerbated the endurance it takes to make it through, to survive.

As Stiles has observed, the body in post-1945 art became the "signifying vortex of the contingent relationship between nature (the body) and culture (social constructions)."[39] Reacting to a history of violence, works of experimental art that enunciate traumatic events visualize their psychical destruction. "Destruction art," Stiles writes, "is the visual corollary to the discourse of the survivor: it bears witness to the tenuous conditionality of survival – survival itself being the fundamental challenge posed by humanity in the twenty-first century."[40] So, too, does Harasztÿ's bird in a cage signify a body to viewers, serving as what Dori Laub has theorized a "password" for witnessing. "There are times in which it is as though a chord is struck and an internal chorus, a thousand voices are set free," Laub explains, adding, "The other melody, that more subtle music, then emerges, suddenly resounding loud and clear. It has

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[39] Kristine Stiles, "Survival Ethos and Destruction Art," *Discourse: Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 14, no. 2(1992), 90.
[40] Ibid, 76.

always been there, center-stage, waiting to be liberated from its captivity of silence."[41]

Harasztÿ's decision to confront the public – and himself - with this truth required acts of witnessing on the part of himself and his viewers, and also on the part of the state. Laub distinguishes between three kinds of witnessing, "the level of being a witness to oneself within the experience; the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others; and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself."[42] Without a doubt, all three levels can occur simultaneously in one place and did so in Harasztÿ's live sculpture, aided and augmented by Galántai's chapel studio in Balatonboglár. It provided *the* space for witnessing, as well as for facilitating intellectual exchange and authentic, uncensored interactions. As such the chapel studio attracted not only artists but leaders of democratic resistance like Miklós Haraszti.[43]

Yet, despite all the censorship, arrests, and harassment, political scientist Rudolf L. Tökés has argued that Kádár's measures against dissidents were not drastic. "Whereas Stalin shot or imprisoned his troublesome intellectuals," Tökés wrote, "Kádár only distrusted and, by all accounts, despised them."[44] Instead of executing the insubordinate intellectuals, Kádár pressured these putative

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[41] Dori Laub, "Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening," in ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M.D. *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Rutledge, 1992), 63.
[42] Dori Laub, "An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival," in *Testimony*, 75.
[43] Miklós Haraszti in conversation with the author, September 22, 2008. István Haraszty's sculpture, for example, was shown only one day after an exhibition entitled "Direct Week" in which, among others, Miklós Haraszti and Miklós Erdély took part. For more information, see Artpool, *Chapel Exhibitions at Balatonboglár – 1972*,
http://www.artpool.hu/boglar/1972/chrono72.html.
[44] Rudolf L. Tökés, *Hungary's Negotiated Revolution: Economic Reform, Social Change, and Political Succession, 1957-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 156.

enemies of the state into non-existence by delegitimizing their status in society, and denying them all legal means of expression and self-determination. During the 1970s and much of the 1980s György Aczél, the minister of culture and "chief communist party ideologue,"[45] implemented "guidelines of the ruling party" and sustained "the centrally organized state institutions for the teaching, funding and exhibiting of the fine arts."[46] Kádár's intimidations mechanism and punishments were also highly personalized and readily enforced by Aczél. When Hungary's more liberal (but still official) 'Young Writers' literary journal *Mozgó Világ* (*World in Motion*)[47] was accused by the conservative Communist Youth League (KISZ)[48] of publishing articles critical of the socialist state, they were interrogated by Aczél. According to a Radio Free report from July 1982, Aczél bribed the editor of *Mozgó Világ* with promises of increased circulation if he agreed to change the content. He wrote: "Why don't you accept guidelines from us? (…) Of course, then you would have to give up the publication of theoretical, Lukacsist articles like the one by Tar about that shop-foreman, whom he supposedly modeled on a real-life person, or the popularization of Jewish- fascist "artists" like Tibor Hajas."[49] Calling Tibor Hajas a Jewish-fascist reveals how Aczél's manipulative use of language politicized artists and pressured the journalists that wrote on

[45] Forgács, 43.

[46] Tom Mulligan, "Hungarian Underground Art: 1970-1990," in *Art Monthly* (UK), June 1990.

[47] *Mozgo Vilag* was a journal that was initially sponsored by the party to serve as "an extensive system of programs originally intended to impart as much knowledge to the less educated segments of the population as possible." See Steven Polgar, "Second Issue of Hungarian samizdat "*Beszélő*" appears," in *Radio Free Europe* 36-7-108 (7-26-1982). Published online, the *Open Society Archive*, http://files.osa.ceu.hu/holdings/300/8/3/text/36-7-108.shtml.

[48] Ibid. KISZ censored *Mozgó Világ* and wanted to replace the editorial board because they believed it had abandoned its purpose and become a place where anything could be published.

[49] Ibid.

them. In the case of *Mozgó Világ*, the editor was also harassed by phone calls and

bureaucratic complications, which lead to his decision to resign.[50]

Tibor Hajas (b. 1946) was, indeed, Jewish, noted for violent, self-harming

artistic performances, and despised by the official establishment and Aczél.

Hajas was a frequent partipant in the events organized by Galántai at

Balatonboglár. In 1965, only a year before Galántai discovered abandoned

Balatonboglár chapel, Hajas was arrested at a street demonstration

commemorating the 1956 Hungarian revolution, and served twenty months in

jail for writing a provocative poem entitled "Fascist Comrades," which

eventually led to his dismissal (as a student) from university.[51] Because of his

self-destructive, aggressive and poetic actions and images, one secret police

report labeled Hajas' oeuvre in 1970s as "sick and sadistic."[52] In *Dark Flash* (1978),

Hajas hung by ropes from the ceiling in a dark room, blindfolded and with a

camera, taking images of his surroundings using a flash.[53] [Figure 33] This work

signaled the dire situation of art making and living and *seeing* reality under

autocratic rule. This performance ultimately led to Hajas losing consciousness,

requiring his audience to save him by intervening. His work attests to art

historian Zdenka Badovinac's observation that, "[b]ody art does not guarantee

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Vera Baksa-Soós, "Emergency Landing: An Homage to Tibor Hajas," in *Tibor Hajas Emergency Landing* (Budapest: Ludwig Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005), 1.

[52] "These people embody aggressive, destructive (and in Hajas' case sick and sadistic) aspirations ("Be Forbidden!")." MINISTRY OF INTERIOR, III/III-4-b-Sub-department, available at the Artpool Art Research Center's Archive. BM III/III-4-b alosztály, TH O-19618/2, pp. 148-155. (September 1983), English translation by Krisztina Sarkady-Hart. Forthcoming in Artpool, edited by Julia Klaniczay (Budapest 2013).

[53] László Beke, "The Hungarian Performance: Before and After Tibor Hajas," in Zdenka Badovinac and Mika Briški, eds., *Body and the East: From the 1960s to the Present* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999), 105.

the truth; its essence is rather the fact that it upholds the process of development of truth as an open structure."[54] Viewers – left in the dark to observe Hajas' performance, but able only to view fractions of it in the flash of light he provided – witnessed his traumatic struggle and became implicated in its process and his search for truth in human relations (and possibly their own) through the "open structure" of art.

In a 1978 statement, Hajas commented on the internal struggle and experimental condition that is essential to using the body in art:

> The body is the only reliable medium. The painter does not dare touch
> the picture now. Something has come into being which is beyond his
> control and whose laws are unknown to him. He has brought something
> to life, something greater than himself and of which he can never be sure
> that it will not turn upon him. An artist must to some extent be a danger
> to himself. This is, however, not enough to satisfy him. He would like to
> execute or have executed the same unforeseen saving gesture on himself,
> one which is not of his own making but which he receives as an act of
> grace, not chosen by him but which he accepts to be chosen by. He forces
> himself to become a work of art, his own Golem.[55]

Hajas' characterization of only his own body as reliable offers a moving testimony to the fear, doubt, and lack of trust engendered by totalitarianism. Moreover, it demonstrates his belief in art as a transformative process that

[54] Zdenka Badovinac, "Body and the East" in *Body and the East*, 10.
[55] Tibor Hajas, "Performance: The Sex Appeal of Death (The Aesthetics of Damnation)" in *Hajas Tibor: 1946-1980*, 18.
[55] Tökés, 187.

permits the artist to become something else (art) and to be someone else (an artist).

Art also permitted Hajas to be "his own Golem," which points to the restorative and the dissociative power of art. In Jewish tradition, a Golem is a "magically created" imitator of human life, a kind of ghost that was invoked by human magic in contrast to Adam, created by God.[56] Thus while art, especially body art – the only "reliable" medium – may be curative, Hajas' emphasis on the creation of an "other" specter, a Golem, suggests the splitting of the self – on one hand, a threat to one's sovereignty while, on the other, the only possible way to survive threats to the self. Trauma scholars Nanette C. Auerhahn and Dori Laub have pointed out that "in many works of art that attempt to give voice to, or master, trauma, there often is a 'lie,' a distortion, covering over the as-yet un-worked through and unknown aspect of trauma."[57] These distortions occur because the process of making art is itself linked to dissociation, as Stiles has written:

> Dissociation exists at an intersection between behavioral and mental
> fields. For example, the idea that artists "lose" themselves in the work
> which comes to "speak" for them, is stated by Rimbaud, Nietzsche, and
> Rilke, all of whom accounted for their artistic abilities as if they had been
> "spoken by another." Rimbaud observed, "Je est un autre;" Nietzsche's

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[56] Christoph Vallant, *Hybride, Klone und Chimären: zur Transzendierung der Körper-, Art- und Gattungsgrenzen: Ein Buch über den Menschen Hinaus* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann GmbH, 2008), 22.

[57] Nanette C. Auerhahn and Dori Laub, "Integrational Memory of the Holocaust," in Yael Danieli, ed., *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, (New York: Plenum Press, 1998), 26.

"es denkt" names something "thinking in" him; and Rilke wrote, "Where

there is a poem, it is not mine but that of Orpheus who comes to sing it."

In this regard, dissociation is a common condition of mind associated

both with creativity and with the functions of thought, such as driving a

car. As such this dissociative aspect of cognitive behavior is coded

positively when it is associated with creativity and survival. But

dissociation is also coded negatively when associated with traumatic

subjectivity. There aspects of consciousness are truncated from normative

experience and memory, only to reappear in altered forms as de-

realization, depersonalization, amnesia, confusion and alterations in

identity where various parts of the subsystems of mind "disconnect in

terms of information exchange or mutual control," leading to

compartmentalization of experience, fragmentation of identity, memory,

and perception. Such forms of dissociation sustain victims through

traumatic experiences too painful for consciousness to absorb and are a

key survival mechanism that protects the psyche.[58]

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[58] Stiles first presented aspects of this paper at the "The Incident: An International Symposium to Examine Art, Technology and Phenomena," organized by Rob Le Frenais and Kathleen Rogers in Fribourg, Switzerland in 1995. In 1997, she presented an expanded version at the international conference, "From Energy to Information: Representation in Science, Art, and Literature," organized by Linda Dalrymple Henderson and Bruce Clark, at the University of Texas at Austin. In 2000, she presented a third, shorter version at The Annual College Art Association in New York, and a final version was published in *Reframing Consciousness: Art and Consciousness in the Post-Biological Era.* Exeter: Intellect, 2000. She cites Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*. Trans., Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 257; D.J. Bem, and C. Honorton, "Does Psi Exist? Replicable Evidence for an Anomalous Process of Information Transfer," in *Psychological Bulletin* 115:1:4 (1994): 14-8; M.H. Erdelyi, "Dissociation, Defense, and the Unconscious," in *Dissociation*: 3. This is especially true of dissociative identity disorder (DID) - formerly called multiple-personality disorder (MPD) - a psychological behavior that is primarily attributed to childhood sexual abuse. See, B.G. Braun, "Multiple Personality Disorder and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Similarities and Differences," in J.P. Wilson and B. Raphael, eds. *The International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes* (New York and London: Plenum Press, 1993): 35-36, 583; and also refers to D. Spiegel, "Introduction," in D. Spiegel, ed., *Dissociation:*

When Hajas stated that, "[s]omething has come into being which is beyond his control and whose laws are unknown to him" and "something greater than himself and of which he can never be sure that it will not turn upon him," he was expressing the function of dissociation in both creative and traumatic forms. Performance art was one way for Hajas to visualize his traumatic condition. "An artist must to some extent be a danger to himself," Hajas wrote, continuing, "He would like to execute or have executed the same unforeseen saving gesture on himself, one which is not of his own making but which he receives as an act of grace, not chosen by him but which he accepts to be chosen by." Hajas willingly surrendered his body to art, a decision that in itself became the subject of art, allowing him to access his own traumatic experience of the spectral and actual violence of the state.

Destruction used in art embodies this very contradiction, as "artists present the "'imagery of extinction' localized in the body, the object which is offered both as a destructible material and/or an agent of that destruction."[59] While Hajas' decision as art was to put himself in danger, to lose consciousness in *Dark Flash* and have "no pulse" such that the public would have to save him by untying "him with great difficulty,"[60] it was his unconscious that acted as art, causing his life to be endangered. Such dissociative action is the sign of post-traumatic stress, typified by the unconscious repetition in an alternative form of

aspects of the originating trauma. Such repetition may provide temporary relief from traumatic suffering, but it seldom leads to recovery. Yet, at the same time, and characteristic of the paradox of trauma, through the use of his body as art, Hajas inadvertently performed a resurrection with the assistance of the intervention of the audience, which would open his work to an exchange necessary to healing, namely the interchange between testimony and witnessing. The artist mutely testified to his own suffering through an extreme demonstration of his corporeal pain, which had a profound effect on viewers to witness and themselves act.

Five years after Hajas' tragic death in a car accident in 1985, Beke remembered that, "Everyone who met [Hajas] or was confronted with his works could not but feel this touch of total freedom."[61] That "total freedom" came at the cost of trauma, a condition in which - because one has nothing more to lose and having lost a part of the self - one is free. In a country that offered few possibilities, trauma became a gift to the imagination as much as it damned the artist to exit the specter of the state at the potential cost of his life.

Tamás Szentjóby (b. 1944) also put his body on the line, and did so with the public's mental participation in his artwork.[62] When he performed *Kizárás-Gyakorlat Büntetésmegelőző-Autoterápia* (*Expulsion Exercise Punishment Preventive Autotherapy*) at the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio in 1972, Szentjóby sat in a chair with a bucket on his head and had placed a list of questions on the wall next to

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[61] Beke, *Hajas Tibor: 1946-1980*, 4.
[62] Among other names, the artist has also called himself Tamás St. Auby, Stjauby, Emmy Grant, St. Aubsky, and T. Taub.

him for viewers to ask. [Figure 34] They were also encouraged to ask him whatever they wanted. His given questions included:

Are all the life-schemes immoral that exclude even one other human being?

Can one form a community with another person without being completely free oneself?

Is culture's real purpose to make one conscious of the fact that one's fate is identical with history?

Is it the most important thing to discover and realise what is needed by life?

Those who bear the unbearable, do they know nothing about life?

Know nothing about that interdependence that is contained in life: Can he bear himself without us, is everything hopeless without us?

Can the blockade of the present be broken only by a new behaviour?

Is the realisation of the future in the present an acceleration of our lives?

Because historical time applies to the totality and not to the individual, would you try to live the facts of the present and your future desolation simultaneously?

Is this all to manifest difference and therefore there to activate the potentially different?

Can the changeable also be unfinished?

Is the unfinished to be changed?

Is unchange: suffering?

Is incompleteness: suffering?

Do you hope that you can make us conscious of interdependence by demonstrating that we are all at each other's mercy?

Is there punishment in your action?

Is there action in your punishment?

Is action a sin?

Is punishment a sin?

Is sin action?

Is action punishment?

What is a sin?

Is sin that action that causes suffering?

Is sin that action that causes no change?

Is there anything at all that you can call an action that would not produce a change, and whose existence is not aimed to decrease suffering?

Are you punishing yourself because by self-punishment taking the punishment of self-punishment you release the punisher from the punishment that is not action: that is sin?

Do you feel particularly exposed because you can not see whom you are talking to?[63]

The artist's compelling and puzzling questions were aimed at the very problem/question of individual decision: Why did the artist do this? What choice did he make? What is the *moral* commitment of the artist? What is the spiritual weight of his action? The variety of the questions also illustrated that no one answer would suffice, but that the artwork itself – the performance and

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[63] Translated by Keith Donovan, in *Parallel Chronologies,* online: http://exhibition-history.blog.hu/1972/07/06/text_exhibited_with_the_action

ACTION – negotiated all these questions, no less within the space of a Chapel (religion) turned into an artist studio (individual), turned into an unsanctioned and self-managed exhibition space for collaborative and experimental art (culture) under the censor's nose (state).

Moreover, given the bucket on his head, the artist was unable to either properly hear or answer his own questions. Thus did the questions serve viewers as conceptual prompts to become responsible, thoughtful participants in the action embodied by the mere presence of the artist in the space, a presence that amplified their inability to actually communicate with the self-censored artist. *Expulsion Exercise Punishment Preventive Autotherapy* represented Szentjóby's brilliant and scathing commentary on how the state punished the very act of thinking, at the same time as the action served as a preventive measure of self-conscious "autotherapy." The philosophical self-reflexivity of the artist, who deliberated on earthly and divine offenses (sins) as an exercise, no doubt foreshadowed his arrest by the Hungarian state in 1974, and his subsequent exile from Hungary until 1990. For the enigmatic and highly influential artist, who was also a musician, poet, and photographer, had established *IPUT* already in 1968, the International Parallel Union of Telecommunications, a fake institution that he ironically paralleled with the military status quo, as a ruse behind which to hide his activities, including participation in the lively samizdat movement that developed in private flats in Hungary.[64]

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[64] Victor Sebestyen has pointed out that, in Hungary, "dissidents were permitted to operate – within carefully circumscribed limits [and] intellectuals in the centre of Budapest were allowed to

Szentjóby's action prefigured the question of vulnerability and individual subjugation posed by Judith Butler in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjugation* (1997). Responding to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, in which he proposed that power is not only oppressive but also a productive mechanism that generates different forms of power, Butler asked how the "norm" (operating as an external force) enters the "interior" psychic life of an individual, and argued that "If one is to oppose the abuses of power (which is not the same as opposing power itself), it seems wise to consider in what our vulnerability to that abuse consists."[65] Szentjóby negotiated precisely this question in *Expulsion Exercise Punishment Preventive Autotherapy* two and a half decades earlier: "Are you punishing yourself because by self-punishment taking the punishment of self-punishment you release the punisher from the punishment that is not action: that is sin? Do you feel particularly exposed because you can not see whom you are talking to?" By "releasing" the punisher (i.e. the state) from direct punishment, but embodying that very punishment in his own artistic action as a form of release from "actual" self-punishment (and instead "performed" self-punishment), the artist exposed the "sinful" punishment of the punisher, which lies not in direct action, but in one's very vulnerability to power.

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produce samizdat publications and hold meetings….watched, of course, by the secret police." Sebestyen notes, too, that the architect Lászlo Rajk hosted a meeting "every Monday night" where samizdat publications "would be laid out on a long table [and] the 'customers,' whose names would never be taken, would say which magazine they wanted, and Rajk's team of 'copiers' would produce the texts in time for them to be collected the following week." See Sebestyen's *Revolution 1989: The Fall of the Soviet Empire* (New York 2009), 149.

[65] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjugation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 20.

Szentjóby's performance therefore brought to light the mental subjugation to, and struggle with, power inside the psyche, and yet always in relation to others and the dominant moral and spiritual maxims and conditions of one's time. In addition, he implicated the state and the church, bearing witness to the ways in which artists negotiate their own sense of power within the greater powers that regulate social norms. "That subjects are constituted in primary vulnerability does not exonerate the abuses they suffer," Butler concluded; "on the contrary, it makes all the more clear how fundamental the vulnerability can be."[66]

In 1973, Szentjóby presented another work at Balatonboglár that constituted a direct provocation to the government, only a few months before the authorities closed the chapel studio. Situating his *Légy Tilos!* (*Be Forbidden*!) within the space of the chapel's altar, Szentjóby roped off access and placed an A4-size piece of paper with the following two phrases written in four languages (English, German, Italian, French, and Hungarian) on the altar:

ART IS EVERYTHING, WHICH IS FORBIDDEN.

BE FORBIDDEN![67]

Viewers could not read what was written on the paper unless they disregarded the rope and climbed over/beneath it.[68] [Figures 35-36] Szentjóby's

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[66] Ibid, 20.
[67] The exhibition of the work is documented on Artpool's website, http://www.artpool.hu/boglar/1973/730624_sze.html
[68] Júlia Klaniczay and Edit Sasvári, *Törvénytelen avantgárd. Galántai György balatonboglári kápolnaműterme 1970–1973* [Illegal Avant-garde, the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio of György Galántai 1970–1973] (Artpool–Balassi, Budapest, 2003), 151.

logic resembled that of Galántai and Harasztÿ in the organization of the 1972 exhibition "Today You Open the Exhibition – Responsibility-taking action." But Szentjóby exaggerated the stakes. Because participants were forbidden to cross the line, and nevertheless decided to do so, their decision to follow their curiosity and breach the artificially imposed boundary became the artwork. How better could Szentjóby have anticipated breaking down the Berlin Wall? For Szentjóby, art comprised everything denied, everything tied to suspect action and experimentation. In an interview of 1998, Szentjóby reported that this work at that time was not solely aimed at the Hungarian experience but at the world. "What was important for me," he explained, "was to name this territory—the territory of what is forbidden—and to suggest that this should be forbidden, as art has always been expressly such for us."[69]

Szentjóby's interest in public interaction and the psychic life of the individual was without a doubt informed by the artistic mentorship of Miklós Erdély (b. 1928), considered the earliest and most influential figure of experimental art in Hungary. Szentjóby participated in the first Hungarian happening, *The Lunch. In Memoriam Batu Khan*, organized by Erdély in 1966. But a decade earlier, Erdély had explored the question, tacitly posed in *The Lunch*, of vulnerability to power. In *Money Left Unguarded in the Street*, a proto-happening he organized during the violent suppression of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, Erdély placed open trunks at six different spots in Budapest, with a written sign

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[69] "Tamas St. Auby – Interview 1998," in *Parallel Chronologies,* online: http://tranzit.org/exhibitionarchive/texts/1298-2/

stating: "The justness of our revolution allows [us] to raise money for our martyrs' families in such a way."[70] The trunks rapidly filled with cash contributions and "not a single bill was taken out of them."[71] Within a few hours, the artist collected all the money and distributed it among those who needed it in the city. While Erdély did not conceive of his event as art at the time, he later realized that this was indeed his first art action. Erdély justified his ascription in "Theses for the Marly Conference of 1980," stating: "What we regard as art is a matter of decision, not of definitions." In his sixth thesis, he wrote: "Just because an exhibition is a matter of decision, it does not mean that it must be arbitrary."[72]

Erdély's decision to consider the 1956 action as art must be understood within the moral purview of art. While Erdély professed that art functions as an "empty sign," he also insisted that the emptiness produces, "a place for the not-yet-realized" within the "recipient's mind," opening up new ways of perceiving and acting in the world.[73] Erdély contrasted the position of the artist to that of the soldier by emphasizing that "self-questioning," which an artist must endure, "is inconceivable" for the soldier, who resides within the hierarchical structure of military authority. But the confrontation with art, defined as "a place for the not-

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[70] Quoted in Beáta Hock, "What was Aided, Rejected, Tolerated in Hungary in the 1970s and 1980s," Lecture held at the "ACTINART – SYMPOSIUM AND WORKSHOP" (Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava, 2001), http://www.artpool.hu/performance/hock.html
[71] Ibid.
[72] Miklós Erdély, "Theses for Marly Conference of 1980," in Laura Hoptman, ed., *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since 1950s* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002): 99.
[73] He wrote: "The message of art is its inherent emptiness. The receptive mind receives this emptiness. The work of art creates a space within the recipient's mind when the latter "understands" its message. Then the recipient says, "beautiful" – which is another empty statement. This is followed by a feeling of freedom, which is nothing else than emptiness, a break in the chain of "recognized necessity": a place. A place for the not-yet-realized. In "Theses for Marly Conference of 1980," in *Primary Documents,* 101.

yet-realized," produces unpredictable, unprecedented, and uncontrollable reactions, as it is unknown. "Yet even in this sphere, moments may arise such as on the warship *Potemkin*," Erdély added with regard to the environment of war, "when those facing the firing squad shout to the marines aiming their guns at them, 'WHO ARE YOU SHOOTING AT?' Whereupon the marines lower their weapons; the task has lost its self-evidentiality" in the now realized, but unexpected, moment.[74]

Such realizations are usually short lived and contingent on the very immediacy of that "not-yet-realized" space, time, and interaction of the people and elements. The traumatic experience of 1956, which made violence and punishment tangible, soon turned people against each other in the ways that Konrád described in his memoir. The spaces of thinking and acting that Erdély attempted to regenerate were not only tied to the Hungarian context, but more broadly, to the violent history of the world. Or, as Milan Kundera would have it, "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting."[75]

In 1980, 24 years after his *Unguarded Money* action, Erdély diagnosed the Hungarian people as "caught unprepared by the social changes," clinging to "tradition" and "expect[ing] the arts …to represent stability in a changing world."[76] This judgment of Hungarian society stemmed, in part, from the experience of censorship, intimidation, police surveillance, arrests, and exile

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[74] Erdély, "Art as an Empty Sign," in *Primary Documents,* 97.
[75] Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1980).
[76] Erdély, "Art as an Empty Sign," 97.

many of the artists experienced. Especially at the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio, the question of the "authenticity" of action, as well as the matter of decision in art, was continually confronted by artists like Erdély, Szentjóby, and Gyula Pauer.

Gyula Pauer's (b. 1941) "pseudo" artworks and manifestos, begun in 1970, drew attention to the ambiguity of truth, loyalty, commitment, the power and formal aspects of art, and the intentions of artists. In his "Second Pseudo Manifesto" from 1972, Pauer proclaimed the following:

…Get acquainted with PSEUDO and there is no more getting confused in the company of cultured people!

for PSEUDO is the form of existence of modern man, the secret of making a good impression!...

YOU ARE UNIMAGINABLE WITHOUT PSEUDO!...

with the help of PSEUDO you can have fun getting an insight into the deepest problems of our age!...

Can you be sure that you are always seeing a real conflict, originating from the real contradiction of real elements?

PSEUDO will easily convince you that you can't be sure of that! Believe it or not, PSEUDO DOESN'T SEEM TO BE WHAT ITS REAL FORM IS! …

Useful, profitable! it also contains CONCEPT ART, because CONCEPT ART can also be PSEUDO, and PSEUDO can also be CONCEPT; …

Thanks to PSEUDO you may learn that what is sold to you as art, is only a means of the economic and ideological manipulations of the prevailing power!

Be you an agricultural labourer, an engineer, clerk or technician, living in

any circle of society, for the future you have to know:

THE PSEUDO-CHARACTER MEANS THE MANIPULATEDNESS OF

THE WORK OF ART!

MANIPULATEDNESS CHARACTERIZES THE GENERAL EXISTENCE

OF ART!

A WORK OF ART THAT IS MANIPULATED -- IS IT STILL A WORK OF

ART?

ART THAT CREATES MENDACIOUS WORKS -- IS IT STILL ART?

A LIFE THAT DOESN'T PRODUCE ART -- WHAT KIND OF LIFE IS

IT?...[77]

Pauer addressed the question of "pseudo" art both formally and

conceptually, creating artworks (especially boxes) that appeared like minimalist

cubes, bearing illusionistic properties, playing with viewer perception, and

dislodging any sense of the actual materiality of the work. As he stated in his

"First Pseudo Manifesto" (1970), "Pseudo misleadingly creates the impression of

the surface of another sculpture over the puritan forms of MINIMAL sculpture,

giving the image of two sculptures simultaneously."[78] Excerpts from Pauer's

second manifesto above confirm that such work was politically loaded. His

emphasis on conflict and contradictions, which bring about art, as well as his

mention of different classes, bore a Marxist language that was also aimed to

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[77] Gyula Pauer and Annámaria Szőke, "Gyula Pauer (1941): A Short Guide To His Work in English," translated by Ilona Molnár, *Eötvös Loránd University Institute of Art History* (2005), 25. http://arthist.elte.hu/Tanarok/SzoekeA/PGy/Pauer_A_short_guide_2005.pdf
[78] Gyula Pauer, "The First PSEUDO Manifesto, October, 1970," in *Parallel Chronologies,* 27.

expose how "the artistic object has been manipulated into a consumer good."[79] But the fact that he was under police surveillance and that some of his artworks were also destroyed speaks to another subversive dimension of his pseudo works, as he not only attacked the sanctity of the art object but also questioned the possibility of authenticity in life itself.[80] His declaration that everything is "pseudo" – manipulated and appearing to be what it is not – cunningly described the ways in which one experiences life under totalitarianism. As Konrád had asked: "Where is the truth whereby we can recognize the liar?"

Yet, such questions are not only relevant to totalitarian societies, but to many forms of political and social life. Marxist scholars like Louis Althusser have long argued that the development of subjectivity does not come from within the individual, but from ideology, which functions both as the "apparatus" (institutions like schools and prisons) and "practice" (such as rituals in society);

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[79] Iris Dressler, "Subversive Practices: Art under Conditions of Political Repression: 60s-80s/South America/Europe," in Hans D. Christ, Iris Dressler, eds., *Subversive Practices: Art under Conditions of Political Repression: 60s-80s/South America/Europe* (Ostfildern: Wuerttembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgard, 2010), 44.

[80] For example, his 1978 work *Protest-Sign-Forrest* was destroyed only days after it was erected. Little is known about this work, but its caption speaks to Pauer's interest in creating artworks that exceed the boundaries of art and its censors, time, museums or any governing mechanism, in short: merging art and life:
"I want to make sculptures, Clotilda,
Such that, if they are buried,
They will rise again someday, on their own,
With no need of bulldozers or archeology.
From under the earth may they shape and form
The space around them, to their own laws."
Quoted in Edit Sasváry, "Long live the Protest-Sign Forest!" Documents for the Protest-Sign Forest," in *Vivid [Radical] Memory: Radical Conceptual Art Revisited: A Social and Political Perspective from the East and South*, The Time of an Artwork / The Artwork through Time International Symposium within the [VRM] Project, Workshop Budapest, 2007.

and the subject "acts insofar as [s]he is acted" by the all-pervading ideology.[81] Ideology is "an *omni-historical* reality, in the sense in which that structure and functioning are immutable," and it is "omnipresent, trans-historical and therefore immutable in form throughout the extent of history."[82] Fredric Jameson similarly has observed that mass culture actively shapes societies, functioning as "a transformational work" whose "omnipresence" appears intangible because it thrives within the "insubstantial bottomless realm of cultural and collective fantasy."[83] Mass culture is therefore part of ideology, and it is not "even dimly sensed" but is a vital part of the formation of human consciousness.[84]

Pauer's concept of "pseudo" spoke to the reality of mass culture in which everything is already manipulated by ideology. Pauer's decision to embrace that space of "the all-pervading ideology" offered conceptual freedom to experiment in the context of art that was an act and a model of agency in a country where ideology is more than dimly sensed on a daily basis and invades the lives of artists in apparent and confrontational ways (arrests, exhibition closings, banned artworks), suspending the illusion that art can be completely autonomous and unmanipulated. Announcing how artworks can be manipulated instantiated a provocative declaration of honesty in stark contrast to the lies of the government.

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[81] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in Louis Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984), 44.
[82] Ibid, 35.
[83] Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," in Fredric Jameson, *Signature of the Visible* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 22 and 25.
[84] Jameson, 22.

Judith Butler's discussion of how ideology (as Jameson and Althusser understand it) functions within the creative act of writing helps elucidate my argument:

> …the author does not create the rules according to which that selection is made; those rules that govern the intelligibility of speech are "decided" prior to any individual decision. A more radical view would be that those rules, "decided" prior to any individual decision, are precisely the constraining conditions which *make possible* any given decision. Thus there is an ambiguity of agency at the site of this decision. The speaking subject makes his or her decision only in the context of an already circumscribed field of linguistic possibilities. One decides on the condition of an already decided field of language, but this repetition does not constitute the decision of the speaking subject as a redundancy. The gap between redundancy and repetition is the space of agency.[85]

Butler points out that as creative subjects are always bound to repeat that which is already instituted by ideology, every decision is also already pre-empted by power. However, this does not mean that the decision made by the subject is redundant. Instead, Butler argues that the realization of the "constraining conditions" actually *"make possible* any given decision." While she calls the struggle one of the "ambiguity of agency at the site of this decision," I propose that Pauer called it "pseudo" as a means to subvert ideology into a conceptual mission of self-proclaimed manipulatedness, and ambiguity as a place of creation. Perhaps no truth can expose a liar, with the exception of

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[85] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 129.

knowing that the only truth that exists is that everything is maneuvered. Embracing that fact as decision in art equated, for Pauer, "A LIFE THAT DOESN'T PRODUCE ART -- WHAT KIND OF LIFE IS IT?"

With a sardonic and tenacious declaration of "TÓTalJOYS" and gladness, Endre Tót (b. 1937) produced art to counter the very manipulation of the government. His repetitious use of zer0s, as well as his conviction that "Nothing ain't nothing," expressed an excessive joy that pointed to the very absence of actual happiness. These tropes became guiding principles of his conceptual artworks, poster actions, telegrams, postcards, rubber stamps, T-shirts, and artist books beginning in the early 1970s. No other artist in the region was as persistent and stubborn about "gladness" as Tót; and no other artist immersed him or herself in joy and the concept of nothingness as tirelessly as Tót. As expected, his supposed enjoyment came at a high price and was closely linked to the oppressive mechanisms of the state, which perpetually mark – or cut into – the body, as Jacques Derrida surmised about his experience of being arrested and jailed in the Czech Republic in 1981: "Our daily life is one of dissociation; at once terrifying and comic, it is our unique historical lot . . ."[86]

Tót decided to counter the circumstances of living within the confines of the socialist state, the "censorship, isolation, suppression sensed in every field of life," as he described it, with an "absurd euphoria of Joys."[87] His second

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[86] Jacques Derrida, "Derrida l'insoumis." Interview with Catherine David," in David Allison et al., trans. Originally in *Le Nouvel observateur* (Sept. 9): 62-67. Reprinted in David Wood and Robert Bernasconi, eds., *Derrida and Différance* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 79.
[87] Tót quoted in Géza Perneczky, "Endre Tót and the Mental Monochromy," in *Tót Endre: Nothing Ain't Nothing/ Semmi Sem Semi, Retrospektiv 1965-1995* (Budapest: Műcsarnok, 1995), 32.

"euphoria" - one that was intrinsically linked to joy itself for him - was the number ZERO. After the artist had stopped painting in 1970, he began to send postcards, often flooded with zeros or simply marked with his "I am glad if I…" sentences. Commenting on the political dimension of Tót's break with painting, László Beke concluded: "The public soon noticed the attitude of criticism inherent in Tót's gestures: a talented painter suddenly gives up painting and he is only glad if he can draw 000."[88]

Tót began his first gladness piece in 1971, using an A6 sized postcard on which he typed: "I am glad if I can type this sentence."[89] He expanded this concept into a series of works in which seemingly mundane actions - with the artist as the protagonist - were photographed and complemented with phrases like "I am glad if I can watch myself in the mirror" (1973, at the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio); "I am glad if I can lift my leg"; "I am glad if I can walk back and forth"; and "I am glad if I can photograph my own shadow" (1973-1975). [Figure 37] As Géza Perneczky explained, "The less we believe the artist, the more he reiterates it."[90] Tót texts underscore the tragic reality that to carry out even the most ordinary actions must elicit "absurd euphoria" for citizens that have so few options under the authoritarian specter of the state.

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[88] László Beke, "The Hungarian Performance. Before and After Tibor Hajas," in *The Body and the East*, 104.
[89] Endre Tót in conversation with the author in Cologne, Germany, April 16, 2012. The following year, he was invited to the 1972 Paris Biennial, which featured a large mail art exhibition, including among others Klaus Staeck, Petr Štembera, Ray Johnson, Geoff Hendrix, Ben Vautier, and Klaus Groh.
[90] Géza Perneczky, "Endre T*ót* and the Mental Monochromy," 30.

Tót became an important figure for the Balatonboglár artist community

not only because of his artwork, but also because he was connected to the West,

for example to the German writer and mail artist Klaus Groh, who became a

chief ally for many artists working in the East. Piotr Piotrowski has suggested

that, "if one can speak at all of the 'classic' doctrine of conceptualism in the

Hungarian context, one must consider the work of Endre Tót."[91] And as is widely

thought, but overstated, "the neoavantgarde artists of Eastern Europe were

completely ignored by both the monopolistic museums and the other institutions

and publications," and Tót was perhaps "the only Hungarian artist who

managed to make it to world fame in the concept and mail art circles," mostly

because of his mail art works and correspondences.[92] In order to circumvent

censorship, Tót regularly travelled to Belgrade to send his mail to the West, as

the censorship in former Yugoslavia was less severe.[93] Tót also participated in the

April Meetings for Expanded Media at the Student Cultural Center in Belgrade in

1975, and had his first exhibition in the Israel Museum. For this show, he was

forced to smuggle his work outside of Hungary, but the exhibition resulted in

significant international press.[94]

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[91] Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 320.
[92] Géza Perneczky, *The Magazine Network: The Trends of Alternative Art in the Light of Their Periodicals, 1968-1988* (Cologne: Soft Geometry, 1993), 53.
[93] "The Mail Art network was like a thriller," the artist remembers. "I was free with the post because my mailings could overcome the iron curtain." Endre Tót in conversation with the author in Cologne, Germany, April 16, 2012.
[94] "Ich beschäftige mich in den letzten Zeit besonders mit den Problemen der "Mangel" oder "Verschwinden." Mit dieser Arbeit probierte ich das Problem auszudrücken." Translation from German to English by the author.
Tót's friendship with John M. Armleder, who in the 1980s became an important artist in the Neo-Geo movement and who ran the gallery Écart in Geneva in the 1970s, brought about invitations

Tót's *Die Wunderbarsten Bilder der Welt* (*The Most Wonderful Images in the World*) (1972) was featured in Groh's milestone publication, *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa* (1972). [Figure 38] There, Tót announced: "Lately, I am especially concerned with the problems of 'lack' or 'disappearance'. With this work, I tried to express the problem."[95] It is no secret that under dictatorships – artworks, documents, mailings, and individuals disappear – resulting in a sense of lack felt in every aspect of life. Tót remembers:

> My family experienced the 'arrival' of the Russians twice, lost everything
> twice; once in 1945 when the Red Army took control of Hungary and then
> in 1956, when the Soviet tanks crushed the Hungarian revolution. It felt
> like an eternity… And then my father died in 1961, at the age of 60.
> Leukemia. I think his early death may have been caused by the
> dictatorship.[96]

All of this sorrow led to Tót's decision to assert unwavering joy as art. His joy was his coping mechanism, his survival technique, his fight against the devastation and profundity of his moribund situation with its complete lack of joy. Tót's joy was also his courage and his art.

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to do his first street actions in 1976, including the artist's ZERO demonstrations. Tót's work was also printed in the *Vision* publication on *Eastern Europe* by American artist Tom Marioni. See Tom Marioni, *Vision, Eastern Europe*, no. 2 (Oakland: Crown Point Press, January 1976): 39. Along with Gabor Attalai and Visy Laszlo, Tót was one of three artists that represented Hungary. They reproduced Tót's "I'm glad if I can draw a line."

[95] Klaus Groh, *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa* (Cologne: Verlag M. Dumont Schauberg, 1972), n.p. The theme of forgetting and disappearance was also central to many of his conceptual ZERO works, as for example in one work from the early 1970s that bore the number zero in the middle of the page and a headline stating "If you look at this zero yoo got to forget all," and another work that consisted of a page filled with small zeros carefully typed across the whole page with the exception of the bottom of the page, where the artist ends the last line of zeros with the sentence: "zer0s make me calm."

[96] Endre Tót in conversation with the author in Cologne, Germany, April 16, 2012.

Of all the work in Tót's gladness series to take up the question of what it meant to live under state socialism, and the misery it imposed, was the double portrait of himself and Lenin; and it has also become the most renowned work in his oeuvre. Below the image in typed script is the sentence: "You are the one who made me glad" (1975). [Figure 39] "[T]he juxtaposition mocks Lenin's severity,"[97] art historian Klara Kemp-Welch has observed, and in comparison Tót appears as an unkempt, unmanly (boyish) artist, a youngster who has yet to become a proper man, who therefore represents a kind of failure. This "failure" to conform to the severity of the patriarch and the self-disciplined Bolshevik leader functioned as a form of deliberate defiance that was common for the 1970s counter-culture; for "failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior," theorist Jack Halberstam has argued, and it "preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood."[98]

When Tót earned a DAAD fellowship for West Berlin in 1977, the Hungarian authorities refused to grant him permission to travel five times for the next some eighteen months. This resulted in a scandal that was widely publicized in Germany, after which the Hungarian government finally granted him permission to leave.[99] But once he traveled and then emigrated to Germany, Tót continued to struggle with gladness, revisiting what he described as his "distressing situation" in 1978, when he wrote on the Western side of the Berlin

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[97] Klara Kemp-Welch, "Affirmation and Irony in Endre Tót's Joys Works of the 1970s." in Liniara Dovydaityte, ed., *Art History & Criticism 3, Art and Politics: Case-Studies from Eastern Europe*, (Kaunas, Lithuania: Vytautas Magnus University, 2007), 139.
[98] Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 3.
[99] Endre Tót in conversation with the author in Cologne, Germany, April 16, 2012.

Wall: "I should be glad if I were allowed to write something on the other side of this wall" (1978).[100] [Figure 40]

Tót's inscription on the Berlin Wall points to his failure to have access to expression in the East, just as he fails to be glad. By juxtaposing gladness with failure Tót assumed responsibility for both. "While failure comes accompanied by a host of negative affects, such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair," Halberstam writes, "it also provides the opportunity to use those negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life."[101] Tót accomplished precisely this end in his exaggerated celebration of gladness, in his double-portrait with Lenin, and in his inscription on the Berlin Wall. He undermined the obscene hypocrisy of socialist propaganda, rendering it visible in his morose abjection, his pervasive sadness, and in his fight against defeat even in a condition of failure.

The international exhibitions at Balatonboglár Chapel Studio provided a space where such failure was experienced, lived, and attended to, as well as presenting early opportunities for contact between artists within Eastern Europe and abroad. In doing so, this alternative space helped artists to endure their political isolation. Galántai's egalitarian approach as an organizer and artist provoked the authorities so severely because it offered a model of self-management that both Hungarian and Yugoslavian socialism lacked. Moreover, Galántai generously financed most of the exhibitions on his own and used his

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[100] Original German: "Ich würde mich freuen, wenn ich etwas auf die andere Seite der Mauer schreiben dürfte."
[101] Halberstam, 3.

own studio primarily to show works by other artists. Galántai paid the price for defying prescribed artistic norms and for mocking state dictates, as the Chapel Studio in Balatonboglár was closed, in part through the policies of György Aczél.

Serving as the "chief communist party ideologue" during the 1970s and much of the 1980s, Aczél implemented guidelines for the Party; sustained "the centrally organized state institutions for the teaching, funding and exhibiting of the fine arts"; and asserted the sovereignty of state over that of the people, and certainly over what were perceived as the excesses of artists.[102] The police carried out these policies through intimidation, repeated checkups, and arrests at the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio that began as early as June 1973.[103] Such police activities continued along with a bureaucratic conflict (between Galántai and the authorities) resulting in the false accusation that the chapel was closed because of "reasons of health" among others.[104] Although Galántai and other artists and intellectuals disputed the closing, as well as the accusations against Galántai, they did not prevail.[105]

Only four months after being shut down, an incriminating column written by László Szabó, editor in chief of the crimes column for *Népszabadság*,

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[102] Forgács, 43. See also, Tom Mulligan, "Hungarian Underground Art: 1970-1990," *Art Monthly* [UK] (June 1990), 12-13.
[103] Artpool, *Chapel Exhibitions at Balatonboglár – 1973*, http://www.artpool.hu/boglar/1973/chrono73.html. Around the same time, the infamous writer and political dissident Miklós Haraszti was also arrested for his samizdat publication *A Worker in a Worker's Sate*. Haraszti had frequently visited the events at the Chapel Studio. By 1974, a number of artists associated with the Chapel Studio had been arrested by the police, including Tamás Szentjóby, who left Hungary for Switzerland by the end of 1974.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.

guaranteed Galántai's professional alienation and ruin.[106] The party daily, *Népszabadság,* was the perfect vehicle to attack the artist as it served the Politburo and dominant party politics.[107] But as Julia Klaniczay has noted, while it was absurd to find an artist discussed in the crimes column of the official party newspaper, it proved that artistic experimentation, which challenged the state's political vision, had serious consequences.[108] Some well-known dissidents tried to help Galántai. László Rajk, for example, who enjoyed "quasi-political immunity" because his father was the "executed and yet rehabilitated former Interior minister,"[109] urged the István Kovács Studio to collect money for Galántai.[110] Others wrote to *Népszabadság* in support of Galántai and asked the magazine editors to rehabilitate his public image, but to no avail.[111] Szabó's article marked the beginning of Galántai's isolation, since friends and artists with whom he had worked distanced themselves in fear of reprisals and being blacklisted.[112]

One thing Galántai did not have to face was a prison sentence. But the closing of the Chapel Studio devastated his professional and private life. "For years, he would get no work; his acquaintances would be afraid to be seen with

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[106] Ibid.
[107] Tőkés, 271-272.
[108] Klaniczay in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, January 14, 2012.
[109] Barbara J. Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2003), 130.
[110] György Galántai, "Biography."
[111] Artpool, *Chapel Exhibitions at Balatonboglár – 1973*.
[112] Klaniczay in conversation with the author, January 14, 2012.

him on the street; he was penniless; and his teeth fell out from malnutrition."[113] Banned at the margins of society, becoming increasingly invisible, and harassed by bureaucratic demands, the artist prevailed. "What saved him from starvation," Galántai explained, talking about himself in the third person, "was an order from a tradesman for some gaudy souvenir tablecloths."[114]

After the six-year hiatus following the closing of the Chapel Studio, Galántai reincarnated the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio in a new form by collaborating with Julia Klaniczay in the creation of *Artpool* in 1979, the framework that enabled Galántai to work as a conceptual, performance, video, installation, and mail artist, as well as to curate and publish. *Artpool* served as an archive, exhibition venue, unofficial samizdat publication house, as well as the most important space for mail art in Eastern and Central Europe. The mail art network of artists around the world offered interpersonal contact, support, and recognition, as well as an open flow of inspirational works. The result of his involvement in mail art was that Galántai earned respect both within and outside of Hungary. "For me, it was the connection that was important,"[115] Galántai stated in 2007: "I saw the magical qualities of stamps: a lot of information in a small space. (Don't forget we were in an environment that was starved of information!)."[116] The decision to embrace the opportunity to "exist" and travel

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[113] György Galántai, "Biography," *György Galántai: Life Explains Art, Art Explains Life*, http://www.galantai.hu/appendix/biography.html.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Kata Bodor, "Interview with György Galántai, the curator of the *Parastamp* exhibition," in *Parastamp: Four Decades of Artistamps, from Fluxus to the Internet* (Budapest: Szepmuveszeti Museum, 2007), 89.
[116] Ibid, 85.

"in a small space" (as small as a stamp), all under the gaze of the government, was miraculous indeed. Mail art permitted him to become connected virtually with others around the globe while knowing very well that he was actually "starved" of such a reality. In a 1979 diary entry, Galántai asked: "What is Mail Art/Network? Sect, sickness, [safety] valve, exchange of information, satisfaction of secret desires, constant presence, expanded space, readiness, discipline, devotion, daily exhibition, maximal inspiration, voluntary hard labor, feedback, etc."[117]

The process of finding "maximal inspiration" and establishing creative networks was an element of Fluxus that appealed to Galántai, who first encountered Fluxus in the early and mid 1970s, especially through the work of the French economist, poet, and artist Robert Filliou.[118] Together with George Brecht in the south of France in the summer of 1965, Filliou had also conceived of the "The Eternal Network," a concept requiring artists to accept the idea that art making is a shared process, a "Fête Permanente going around [one] all the time in all parts of the world."[119] This idea inspired Galántai's own concept of art, and his emphasis on the medium of mail art, as initiating an ethical bond with a recipient. Galántai positioned *Artpool* squarely in the international community with an ethical foundation dedicated to global, democratic artistic practice, respectful of the individual, and ever changing.

[117] Galántai, "Diary," in *Lifeworks 1968–1993*, 243. Also György Galántai, "Biography," *György Galántai: Life Explains Art, Art Explains Life*, http://www.galantai.hu/diary/Network_Institutions.html.
[118] Stegmann, 143.
[119] John Held Jr., "The Mail Art Exhibition: Personal Worlds to Cultural Strategies," 102.

Galántai viewed his early Balatonboglár Chapel Studio activities and his subsequent work with *Artpool* as "a unique Fluxus Product," namely the recognition of art as "an institution-work."[120] He also identified with "Fluxus…as a publishing venture [with] publishing…at its very heart."[121] Fluxus publications produced in the Unites States by Lithuanian émigré George Maciunas ranged "from pamphlets and flyers to tablecloths and films; from luxurious, handcrafted furniture to deliberately flimsy throwaways; from vainly ambitious commercial projects to those that held darkly obscured innuendos."[122] Galántai used such unconventional publications of the international Fluxus community as a model for *Artpool*, but his context was decidedly different. Maciunas flirted with a Marxist critique of capitalist modes of art production (especially under Henry Flynt's more radical political influence) all the while churning out Fluxus boxes, Fluxus films, Fluxus publications and ephemera, and Fluxus exhibitions.[123] Moreover, in typical absurdist Fluxus fashion, Maciunas wrote Fluxus letters to Nikita Khrushchev, then the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, urging him to adopt Fluxus as an official

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[120] Stegmann, 145.
[121] Simon Anderson, "Fluxus Publicus," in Liz Armstrong and Joan Rothfuss, *In the Spirit of Fluxus* (Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1993), 40.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Kristine Stiles discusses Henry Flynt's influence on Maciunas and the conflicts it caused with George Brecht and other Fluxus artists in "Between Water and Stone: Fluxus Performance, A Metaphysics of Acts," in Elizabeth Armstrong and Joan Rothfuss, eds., *In The Spirit of Fluxus* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1993): 62-99. On the subject of Flynt's influence and politics, also see Stiles' essay "David Tudor - Alive, Free, and Without Need of Culture," in the special issue "Composers inside Electronics: Music after David Tudor," in *Leonardo Music Journal* 14 (2004): 62-63.

cultural policy of the USSR.[124] Such playful aesthetics were unthinkable for

Galántai living under the political specter of the USSR and under constant

surveillance until 1988 in Hungary. Nothing even remotely similar to the

mischief of Maciunas' actions was possible for Fluxus-associated artists in the

East. Few examples make this point more poignantly than that of Milan Knížák,

who was arrested and imprisoned in the former Czechoslovakia over 300 times

between 1959 and 1989 for his Fluxus-associated identity and work.[125]

One of the challenges in Hungary was a lack of information about national

and international art events. For this reason, from December 1979 to 1982,

Galántai and Klaniczay began to distribute their first samizdat newsletter *Pool

Window.* [Figure 41] It was initially directed at Hungarian artists and called for

participation in international mail art exhibitions. They also listed addresses and

names of mail artists from all over the world and reported on *Artpool*'s activities.

In the spirit of internationalism, the thirty-one issues of *Pool Window* were

primarily published in English and aimed at involving - and thus representing -

Hungarian artists in the international art scene. Nevertheless, published material

about existing experimental art events and happenings in Hungary remained

almost non-existent, leading Galántai and Klaniczay to publish the more

elaborate *Aktualis Level* or *Artpool Letters* (*AL*) from 1983-1985, "a Xeroxed

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[124] Astrit Schmidt-Burkhardt, "Maciunas'"Atlas of Russian History," in George Maciunas
Foundation Inc, Exhibitions - "Fluxus Happening: "Mapping Maciunas" and "Exercise,"
http://georgemaciunas.com/?page_id=1880.
[125] Stiles has noted Knížák's arrest record in numerous essays since the late 1990s. Knížák became
an important leader of opposition in the art world and took the office as the rector of the
Academy of Fine Arts in 1990 (after the Velvet Revolution) in Prague. Knížák and other Fluxus
participants like Vytautas Landsbergis, who later became the president of Lithuania (from 1990-
1992), are now relatively well known in the art world and have received some scholarly attention.

samizdat art journal, each copy certified as art, numbered and signed," which

they distributed to the Hungarian art community.[126] *AL* contained updates on the

underground activities of artists, unofficial exhibitions, critical essays by

oppositional writers, and Hungarian translations of articles about new and

alternative international art tendencies and was the only current publication in

Hungary that reviewed, announced, and documented the "unofficial"

Hungarian art scene.[127]

In the first issue of *AL*, Galántai and Klaniczay published a talk given in

December 1982 by the artist Ákos Birkás in which he "analyzed the causes that

formed the international and Hungarian avantgarde and the ones that hindered

its further development and finally led to its fall." Birkás surmised that the

"Hungarian avantgarde today finds itself in a moral crisis which entails the

corruption of the moral norms of the avantgarde."[128] Similar questions occupied

Galántai and Klaniczay and motivated them to publish a samizdat art journal

that encouraged discussion about experimental art that was otherwise missing,

and keep its readership current with changing artistic events.[129] *Artpool* also

reached out to foreign artists and included an English summary of the contents

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[126] Julia Klaniczay in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, January 14, 2012, and György Galántai, "Biography."

[127] For example, in the *AL* summer issue of 1983, dedicated to celebrating the tenth anniversary of the last year of the Balatonboglár chapel in 1973, *AL* printed Miklós Haraszti's written entry in the Chapel guestbook, in which he commented on Tibor Hajas' happening of the same year. Artpool, *Artpool Letter* no. 5, 55, http://www.artpool.hu/Al/al.html. All copies of *AL* are also available for research at the Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest, Hungary.

[128] Klaniczay in conversation with the author, January 14, 2012.The English summary of Ákos Birkás' lecture on the death of the avantgarde, "Who's the Victim? Who did it? What should be done?" in *AL* 1 1983. Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest, Hungary. Original translation amended by the author.

[129] Klaniczay in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, January 14, 2012.

of each *AL* for non-Hungarian readers.[130] The cover of the first issue bore the work of the French artist Ben Vautier, who ironically proclaimed in Hungarian: "Everything must be said." [Figure 42] In a country where what is published or spoken often resulted in a confrontation with the authorities, *Artpool*'s publications posed additional challenges to the Hungarian government. While some have pointed to differences between political and artistic samizdat, arguing that artistic samizdat were not concerned with politics but with aesthetics, it is impossible to make that distinction in state socialist regimes where artists' samizdat publications throughout the Soviet Union and its bloc were also confiscated regularly as damaging to the nation. The point is that when life is viewed primarily in political terms, the decision to produce samizdat is itself an act of noncompliance.

Indeed, for Kornelia Röder, mail art was especially "politically motivated…in the countries of Eastern Europe" due to "the lack of basic freedom of opinion, press, assembly and travel."[131] Drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the rhizome in *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1987, Röder has also observed that mail art enabled democratization in Eastern Europe rhizomatically within the developing Global Village.[132] This notion is indebted to Marshall McLuhan's 1967 proposition that the ethics of a global society, or what he called

[130] Klaniczay in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, May 27, 2008.
[131] Kornelia Röder, *Topology and Functionality of the Mail Art Network and its Specific Significance for Eastern Europe between 1960 and 1989*. Schriftreihe fuer Künstlerpublikationen v. 5 (Cologne: Salon Verlag, 2008). Quote taken from Röder's summary of her dissertation (University of Bremen, 2006) 3, http://www.museum-schwerin.de/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Summary12.pdf.
[132] Röder, *Topology and Functionality of the Mail Art Network and its Specific Significance for Eastern Europe between 1960 and 1989*. Schriftreihe fuer Künstlerpublikationen v. 5 (Cologne: Salon Verlag, 2008), 15.

the "new environment," is that which "compels commitment and participation," making everyone "irrecoverably involved with, and responsible for, each other."[133]

Not surprisingly, the police did take notice, and perceived Galántai's activities as a threat. Secret agent "Zoltán Pécsi" (Gustav M. Habermann), who was a trusted member in art circles and known as László Algol, wrote the following in a police report from August 31, 1983:

> During the period between 1970 and 1973 when Galántai was active in Balatonboglár he was already playing a decisive organizational, community-forming role. He brought together and connected the divided and isolated "Avant-garde" groups from the fine arts and to a lesser degree from theatre, film, music and literature. On occasions this activity even extended to Hungarian artists abroad... However, the publication titled "AL" far more efficiently performs this task than Galántai could ever have dreamed of in Balatonboglár (or after it).… the new periodical now keeps 200-250 individuals in contact with one another on a permanent basis. (This is Galántai's true objective anyway, as he has openly proclaimed in sympathetic circles). News of events, which would otherwise remain the private affairs of 3-4 people, now reach hundreds and their ripple effect gives rise to further debates. Isolated groups and individuals are able to become informed about each other's activities in

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[133] Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage* (New York: Penquin Books, 1967), 24.

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detail, and – if Galántai succeeds in keeping up the pace he has set so far

– with little delay.[134]

This excerpt from the secret police report demonstrates that Galántai and

Klaniczay, in creating and distributing their samizdat publications, considerably

expanded the possibilities for collaboration at the risk of attracting further

government harassment. Referring to that period of the production of samizdat

publications in Eastern Europe, the contemporary Zagreb-based curator's

collective *What, How and for Whom* has suggested: "The political practice of art

was realized as a fight for the complete self-realization of individuals and

culture, against real bureaucratic limitations, taking socialist ideology more

seriously than the cynical political élite in power did."[135] Indeed, like so many

artists in the Eastern bloc, Galántai intensively studied Marxist aesthetics and

identified with communist theories, frequently challenging the authorities when

they labeled his work as anti-communist.[136] In fact, artists experienced this

conundrum throughout many socialist countries, namely of being perceived by

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[134] The secret police report further stated: "….However powerless and inert some artists may be, we have no reason to reject the assumption that the information published in "AL" will increase the number of meetings between individuals and - setting a chain reaction in motion – will "forge together" the Avant-garde circles, which until now were dispersed. After reading the articles many will clearly be enthused to see exhibitions and actions by individuals whose activities they were thus far only vaguely aware of or indeed not at all." MINISTRY OF INTERIOR, III/III-4-b-Sub-department, available at the Artpool Art Research Center's Archive. BM III/III-4-b alosztály, TH O-19618/2, pp. 148-155. (September 1983), English translation by Krisztina Sarkady-Hart. Forthcoming in *Artpool,* edited by Julia Klaniczay (Budapest 2013).
[135] What, How and for Whom, "Artist's Books in (what was formerly known as) Eastern Europe," *Printed Matter,* http://www.printedmatter.org/researchroom/essays/whw.cfm. Slavoj Žižek has argued that "overidentification" with any regime's political ideology poses the greatest threat to the government itself. See his essay "Why are Laibach and the *Neue Slowenische Kunst* not Fascists?" in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, Laura Hoptman and Tom*ás* Pospiszyl (New York: MOMA, 2002), 285-288.
[136] Galántai in conversation with the author, January 5, 2012.

the regime to have made art contrary to the state but who saw themselves as believing in socialist and/or communist values.

The most audacious political decision they made was to stipulate that those who bought a copy of one of their publications were required to leave their signatures with *Artpool*. As Klaniczay put it, such participants in their work had to be held accountable; "they had to gain responsibility."[137] For the act of signing reaffirmed one's autonomy and sovereignty, or it exposed the duplicitous. In this way, Galántai and Klaniczay decided to educate themselves about the legal ambiguities that would permit them to produce and distribute samizdat artworks in and beyond Hungary.

Galántai and Klaniczay operated *Artpool* from their apartment, and as exhibition spaces for such activities were few and far between and constantly in flux, and they referred to their situation and presentations as *Artpool Periodical Spaces*.[138] For example, in the Artpool event "Everybody with Anybody," which took place on February 26, 1982 at the Young Artists' Club in Budapest, artists and viewers were invited to create improvised artworks with rubber stamps, which were hard to come by in Hungary at that time. [Figure 43] In a telephone interview with Galántai, Miklós Erdély made a critical distinction between stamps used by the state and stamps used by artists. When employed by the state, Erdély insisted, stamping represented, "something extremely simple to

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[137] Julia Klaniczay in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, May 27, 2008.
[138] The idea to create such periodical exhibition spaces was prompted by a postcard Robert Filliou sent to Galántai in 1979, in which he asked the artist to make a poster for the Young Artist's Club in Budapest.

solve extremely difficult problems, such as taking somebody's life. Pulling the

trigger and that's all there is to it. That is bureaucracy."[139] In view of the power of

such seemingly insignificant, everyday objects, Erdély's description of the state

as a body holding a loaded weapon underscores the severity of the pedantic

bureaucratic aggravation endured by the public for decades.

Because the government did not permit rubber stamps for private

individuals, fearing that they would be confused with official stamps (which in

mail art, of course, they were and were intended to be so), Galántai asked a

number of artists to design stamps and he hired one engraver to produce the

stamps illegally.[140] Galántai hung the artist's rubberstamps from the ceiling, and

when the action began, people stamped sheets of paper and each other's faces

and bodies. Klaniczay remembers that "Everybody with Anybody" offered an

extraordinary moment of release from censorship, as this spontaneous art

making and simultaneous exhibition could not be juried, thus creating an

atmosphere of play and connectedness rare at that time in Hungary.[141] But this

event also confirmed that it took the decision of one artist, Galántai, to use his

institution as art, explicitly to grant Hungarian artists such a moment. Moreover,

such an exhibition/happening also demonstrated how mail art bridged the

absence of those unable to be physically present. For whenever a sheet of stamps

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[139] Miklós Erdély in telephone interview with Galántai, translated by György Somogyi and published in *Mindenki Mindenkivel/Everybody with Anybody* exhibition catalogue, Artpool's Periodical Space No. 11. Exhibition at the Young Artist's club Budapest, February 26, 1982. The catalogue accessed from Artpool Research Archive, Budapest.
[140] Géza Perneczky, *The Magazine Network: The Trends of Alternative Art in the Light of Their Periodicals 1968-1988* (Cologne: Soft Geometry, 1993), 82-83.
[141] Julia Klaniczay in conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, January 10, 2012.

was "finished," Galántai made the decision to ritually stamp it with Dutch mail artist Ko de Jonge's *Open Here*, marking its completion with the sign of the absent, yet present, Dutch artist.

Such metonymic connection constituted Galántai's art and was also his decision that it be so. *Artpool*, as his artwork, grew and thrived on this very connectivity. No other exhibition would show how far he would take his *fête permanente* than the "World Art Post" exhibition, held at the Fészek Klub in Budapest in 1982, for which Galántai brought art works from more than thirty countries to Hungary.[142] "We wanted the whole world to appear in one definite place at one definite time," Galántai and Klaniczay remembered.[143] Fittingly, the samizdat catalogue cover featured the world with only time zones - not borders - marked in order to symbolize the possibilities of establishing networks beyond social, geographical, and political barriers. [Figure 44] Galántai showed every single work of the 550 artists in the catalogue, which he produced with the help of two professional factory printers, whom he convinced to print the catalogue illegally with his assistance on the weekend when the factory was officially closed. "The result" of "World Art Post" was to facilitate "a communication network with special emphasis on its spatial existence," art historian and sociologist Anna Wessely wrote in the catalogue, concluding that the exhibition

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[142] Artists from the following countries participated in *World Art Post*: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, France, (East) Germany, (West) Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, New Caledonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, USA, USSR, Venezuela, and Yugoslavia.
[143] Galántai and Klaniczay, "World Art Post," in *World Art Post* (Budapest: Artpool, 1982), n.p. Catalogue accessed at the Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest.

and samizdat catalogue itself had become "a conceptual sculpture." Wessely

added, "The action had a time dimension as well. The temporal sequence of

artists' stamps as delivered by the postman, realizes a random montage of

pictorial forms which, as a whole, becomes significant on a new level as one

single statement speaking many languages simultaneously."[144]

Artpool as institution and artwork operated by presenting possibilities for

"speaking many languages simultaneously," the "World Art Post" project

thereby undermining the "monolithic voice" of the government with the

heteroglossia of artists communicating with one another in multiple verbal and

visual languages but also in one voice of many dialects.[145] What's more, the

catalogue emphasized this connection, as Galántai and Klaniczay sent it to all the

participants, creating a permanent exhibition, open to anyone who owned or had

access to a copy of the catalogue or, today, the internet where the exhibition and

its catalogue are posted on Artpool's website.[146]

As might be expected, before long the authorities began to interfere again

more actively in Galántai's mail art activities. In January 1984, the police

immediately closed his mail art exhibition "Hungary Can Be Yours! International

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[144]Anna Wessely, "Untitled Statement," in *World Art Post,* n.p.

[145] Kristine Stiles has noted: "The struggle between the multiplicity of internal voices and the monolithic voice of external authority breeds trauma." In "Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies: Representations From Cultures of Trauma," originally published in *Strategie II: Peuples Mediterraneens* [Paris] 64-65 (July-December 1993): 95-117, reprinted with a new forward in *Talking Gender: Public Images, Personal Journeys, and Political Critiques* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 52.

[146] See "World Art Post," http://www.artpool.hu/Artistamp/WAP/default.html.

Hungary," at the Club for Young Artists in Budapest.[147] The Ministry of Interior Report on the banned exhibition, written by secret agent Pécsi, stated: "For Galántai's competition several 'works of art' (in reality plain botch-works) had been provided that are politically problematic, [as they] destructively criticize and, moreover – primarily some of those made by Hungarian 'artists' – mock and attack our state and social order as well as the state security organs."[148] Pécsi also noted that, "enemy ideas were on show" and that "enemy persons belonging to the opposition" were present at the exhibition.[149] Political dissidents Miklós Haraszti and Gábor Demszky were among those identified as subversives present at the exhibition.

The works of some fifty "enemy persons" were sent from eighteen foreign countries to Budapest to be part of "Hungary Can Be Yours! International Hungary."[150] Galántai's curatorial decisions for the display of these artist's works in the exhibition stands out. A TV installation that connected the two exhibition rooms served as a one-way communication by video between foreign artists and Hungarian artists. [Figure 45] Works by foreigners were displayed inside the "Black Room" with the TV set, which screened the Hungarian artworks exhibited inside the "White Room," where the camera was placed along with audio tracks

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[147] László F. Földényi, "Der Weg der Ungarischen Kunst," in *Kunst der Neunziger Jahre in Ungarn* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1999), 12.
[148] This official Ministry of Interior document discussing and evaluating the "Hungary is Yours" exhibit is dated 1984 and entitled *MINISTRY OF INTERIOR, III/III-4-b-Sub-department,* available from the Artpool Art Research Center's Archive, http://www.artpool.hu/Commonpress51/report.html.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Földényi, 11.

of "songs of the communist movement."[151] In this interactive video and sound

installation, Westerners were literally placed in the dark about the nature and

history of Hungarian art, and could only encounter Hungarian culture in a

mediated and artificial way.[152] The frequent delay of information traveling from

the camera to the video screen emphasized the problems of communication

between the East and West. Galántai's own artistic contribution to this mail art

exhibition was as a curator designing the installation as a metaphor for disjointed

cultural relations and a metonymy for uniting Hungarian and international art.

     That same year, *Artpool* edited and published *Commonpress 51*.[153] In a

humorous, satirical, social critique of the banning of the exhibition "Hungary

Can Be Yours! International Hungary," this samizdat bookwork documented the

works of the 110 artists involved in the show.[154] [Figure 46] In preparing the

issue, Galántai and Klaniczay sent invitations to the participants promising that,

"Any media, any size. Every material related to Hungary will be reproduced."

While they had planned to collaborate on the cover by featuring Hungarian

tourist propaganda, the individual that had promised to provide *Artpool* with

that material pulled out of the project fearing further reprisals from the

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[151] To see documentation of this event, *Hungary Can be Yours! International Hungary*,
http://www.artpool.hu/Commonpress51/defaulte.html.
[152] Video installations were uncommon and difficult to execute at the time, Klaniczay remembers,
as video was a difficult medium to acquire and use for filmmakers and artists. Klaniczay in
conversation with the author in Budapest, Hungary, January 10, 2012.
[153] After the political turn in 1989, the pair organized a "Reconstruction of a Banned Exhibition"
in the Young Artist's Club, which was an exact replica of the 1984 banned exhibition "Hungary
can Be Yours!" For this occasion, they printed 300 copies of *Commonpress 51* in color.
[154] This was a separate issue of the international mail art magazine *Commonpress* launched in 1977
by Polish artist Pavel Petasz, who invited artists from throughout the world to edit issues of the
journal, including Ko De Jonge from the Netherlands (1978), Klaus Groh from Germany (1979),
and Russell Butler (1980) and John Held Jr. (1984) both from the U.S.

government. Undaunted, Galántai and Klaniczay assembled 25 photocopy editions of *Commonpress 51* and mailed them out to individuals in Hungary and around the world. Galántai summarized the affect of this mail art exhibition and subsequent samizdat publication when he commented: "We can take it as symbolic that the last exhibition banned by the regime was a Mail Art exhibit in 1984, entitled: 'Hungary Can Be Yours / International Hungary'."[155]

Although banned repeatedly, blacklisted, and living a socially and professionally isolated life in Hungary, Galántai, in partnership with Klaniczay, persisted. Perhaps the best synopsis of his efforts was the establishment of *Buda Ray University*, a project that kept the artist mentally and emotionally productive in the 1980s, and enabled him to make contact with the American artist Ray Johnson. In 1982, after Johnson sent him a work with the instruction – "add to and send it back" – Galántai extended to other artists the opportunity to collaborate with Johnson. Then in the spirit of both Johnson's *New York Correspondence School* and his *Buddha University*, Galántai founded *Buda Ray University* within *Artpool,* an "institution of continuity, as a model of a world where everything is in continuous change, where everything is transformed into various media and even goes back to the starting point."

Some 300 artists from over thirty countries have sent artworks to Galántai for the *Buda Ray University*.[156] Galántai eventually initiated *Artpool's Ray Johnson*

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[155] Galántai, *Resistance as "Behavior-Art": The Dissident Hungarian Avant-Garde*, 2.
[156] Artists from the following countries participated in *Buda Ray University*: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Cuba, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany (West), Germany (East), Great Britain, Holland, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Poland,

Space in order to display the correspondences of *Buda Ray University*, and to curate mail art exhibitions.[157] Thinking about the relationship between Johnson and Galántai, the writer William S. Wilson commented in a letter to *Artpool*:

> Buda and Pest are both two and one….[M]ention of Budapest is mention of bridges. "Bridge" is an image governing many of Ray's images, as he bridges gaps and opposites like opposite banks of a river. Heidegger on the Danube hovers in the background, because his meditation on bridges illuminates Ray's art, as his methods of visual and verbal thinking, and his life, as it ended in a leap throwing himself from a bridge. I have just bridged Ray and Budapest.[158]

Johnson and Galántai, like many artists in the mail art network, linked their geographical distance with the conceptual proximity of both artists' decisions to connect as art. Although far removed, "Ray" was metonymically tied to "Buda"pest, as Galántai was to Ray and the artists he included in *Buda Ray University* and *Artpool's Ray Johnson Space* exhibitions. They are yet another iteration of how the mail art network ameliorated an artist's sense of isolation, from Johnson's own hermetic correspondence course practices in a small town in Long Island (where he lived after 1968 until his suicide in 1995) to Galántai's sequestered existence in Hungary and continuous struggle with authorities.

Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Uruguay, USA, Yugoslavia.

[157] Galántai has curated such shows in thirteen countries, including France, Canada, Holland, Italy, Ireland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. See Galántai, "Biography," http://www.galantai.hu/appendix/biography.html.

[158] William S. Wilson in an email correspondence with *Artpool*, 2011.11.25. Wilson has published extensively on Johnson and amassed a singular archive on the artist.

The political dimension of Galántai's resistant artistic strategies was rewarded after 1989 when *Artpool* began to receive modest financial government support, official recognition that in Eastern Europe it instantiated the global network of experimental art and international artistic collaboration. Embracing mail art and samizdat publications as a perpetual bridge to artists worldwide, Galántai had remained a thorn in the eyes of the authorities, all the while being recognized internationally as an artist who altered artistic relations between Hungary and the world. "After all," Galántai has stated, "you're never anyone in yourself [but] only [someone] as part of a network of relationships."[159] Galántai has held fast to his course.

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[159] Stegmann, 142.

Conclusion: Decision Matters

In thinking about artworks and exhibitions in Hungary and Yugoslavia during the 1970s and 1980s, I have drawn on a number of conceptual frameworks to examine the political nature of artists' aesthetic decisions to incite that "wake up" from the dull world of institutionalized socialist dogma: artists' reactions to the growing tensions between state-sovereignty and individual-sovereignty under state socialism; trauma theory for how it illuminates strategies for survival, endurance, and psychic release; and artists' investments in communication through criticism of ruling regimes. Given these frameworks, my analysis singled out works that particularly embodied these approaches, with the aim to better understand what making a decision, in the process of making art, might mean and what can be gleaned from such decisions today.

In the early 1960s, Robert Filliou, along with Joachim Pfeufer, conceived of the *Poipoidrom*, a conceptual institution for permanent creative activity. Robert Filliou remembered the process of conjuring up such an institution in this way:

> Paris, Winter of 1963. …On that cold morning I was watching the people
> on the subway. They all looked sad, worried, angry, and lonely. (I,
> myself, must have looked the same.) "What shall I do?", I was wondering,
> "I would love to do something. What? Why? For whom? For these people.
> But what? And why?", and so on. I thought of my life. Is my creative
> activity worth all the effort and discipline? After all, I only feel a tiny little
> better than as if I had not broken free from the system. And I am not

positive even about this one. As Marianne[1] said once when she grew tired

of our artsy ways and the continuous hypocrisy: 'You are only artists

when you are working on something. As soon as your work ends, you

stop being artists.' And this is true. Creative activity alone is not enough.

One can not just stop. One must not do that. That's it, I thought. What I

have to let everybody know is the art of the permanent creative activity.

The Institution for the Permanent Creative Activity. Based on humor,

wackiness, goodwill, and participation.[2]

For Filliou, the idea for permanent creativity was born out of a wish to

transcend loneliness, sadness, and to connect with other people through art,

which he realized exists only through a permanent effort and endurance.

Moreover, his decision-making process demonstrated a fundamentally radical

approach, which "means to envision and produce in a way that alters

observation, changing perception at the root."[3] Such words as subversive,

transgressive, and radical have global cultural capital today, and may be found

frequently in descriptions of a plethora of "activist" artworks that "critique

capitalist oppression," but are most frequently displayed in international

biennials supported by capitalist globalization. However, the artists discussed in

this dissertation made decisions linked to radical actions with immediate

consequences in their daily lives, and were motivated by the existential and

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[1] Marianne Staffels, Robert Filliou's wife.
[2] Robert Filliou quoted in *The Year of Installation at Artpool: Installation Project 1998* (Budapest: Artpool Art Research Center, 1998), np. English translation by Beáta Hock.
[3] Kristine Stiles, "Never Enough is *Something* Else: Feminist Performance Art, Avant-Gardes, and Probity," in James M. Harding, ed., *Contours of the Theatrical Avant-Garde: Performance and Textuality* (The University of Michigan Press, 2000), 275.

political need to "investigat(e) the world, *closely* and with difference," as Stiles

has observed.[4] She distinguishes between radicalism and radical, proposing that

radicalism "always speaks *as if* from a position of alterity, of being outside" in "a

self-appointed marginality as if it is a socially ascribed one."[5] Radicalism does

not necessarily have one master and can follow any political ideology. Radical

thinkers, on the other hand, have very specific ideas: "Radicals do not seek to be

disobedient (for the sake of marginalizing themselves socially and feeling a sense

of martyrdom typical for radicalism)."[6]

This distinction is crucial because East European artists are frequently

understood as either victims and/or political heroes. On the one hand,

increasingly scholars attempt to dislodge artists from traumatic narratives in

order, ironically, to rescue them (as victims) from being labeled martyrs, and, on

the other hand, scholars increasingly attend to what they consider the more

positive aspects of state socialism, especially given the global crisis of capitalism.

Still other scholars debate 'who was the greater victim' in the East. For example,

the Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski argues that, "the Hungarian State

Ideological Apparatus tolerated the neo-avant-garde movement and at the time

forbade its 'official' way (as the Balatonboglár story shows), but definitely did

not repress it, as in Czechoslovakia."[7] What kind of repression is he talking

about? Do the following experiences of Galántai not constitute repression: being

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[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid, 274.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Piotr Piotrowski, "How to Write a History of Central-East European Art?" in *Third Text*, *Special Issue: Socialist Eastern Europe* 23, no. 1 (2009): 14.

harassed by the government; having his exhibitions banned and the Chapel Studio closed; becoming a social and cultural persona non-grata; and being the subject of the secret police's surveillance of all his actions for more than a decade? Or what about the imprisonment and exile of Tamás Szentjóby? Where is the line drawn between "real" repression and the traumatic impact of totalitarianism? Instead of weighing one state against the other in its affect on artists, I aimed in this dissertation to explicate the different forms of resistance to varied levels of repression and violence, neither celebrating nor belittling their individual experiences based on an artificial measurement of who was more or less traumatized or more or less suppressed. As an alternative, I emphasized the decision individual artists took, including the risks, and the radically reflective and innovative experimental forms these expressions of agency generated.

I have tried to demonstrate that similar questions occupied artists in Hungary, Belgrade and Serbia, while remembering Filliou's effort to help others: understanding that his "creative activity" was, indeed, "worth all the effort and discipline;" but also recognizing that his decision would "only [make him] feel a tiny little better;" and acknowledging that "one can not just stop" engaging in such an attempt. The artists I have researched and written about were neither heroes nor victims. They were people who could not, and would not, stop, despite living in one of the most difficult periods in modern political history and despite experiencing constant deprivation, political isolation, and not knowing who was a friend or enemy, while simultaneously enduring patriarchy and sexism. Meanwhile, they witnessed their Western artist friends succeeding in the

market and the histories of art while they, with their deeply probing body and conceptual works, were left behind until very recently.

Hungarian Decisions

In a recent interview about the current extreme right-wing developments under the Viktor Orbán administration in Hungary, philosopher and Holocaust survivor Agnes Heller emphasized the history of Hungarian submission to totalitarian politics:

> [T]he people do not think about freedom. They never knew what freedom is, and never practiced freedom. They also lack the practice of civil courage….When someone gives an order, they obey….That is the Hungarian tradition. Saying 'no' is not a Hungarian tradition.[8]

Heller's pessimistic assessment comes on the heels of nationalist uprising in Hungary, with a semi-autocratic leadership by the conservative, nationalist and extreme-right wing party, FIDESZ, along with the increasing popularity of the anti-Semitic and racist extreme-right wing party Jobbik. But Heller's verdict is also linked to the history of the Holocaust in Hungary, which was never fully addressed within the context of the nation, as the country experienced the

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[8] "Es fehlt die Praxis der Zivilcourage in Ungarn." Die Philosophin Agnes Heller gilt als prominente Kritikerin der Orbán-Regieung." *Deutschlandradio Kultur – Tacheles,* June 8, 2013, http://www.dradio.de/dkultur/sendungen/tacheles/2133808/. Translation by the author. The original quote by Agnes Heller: "Da meine ich konkret, dass sich die Menschen überhaupt keine Gedanken über die Freiheit machten. Sie wussten nicht, was Freiheit ist, haben keine Freiheit praktiziert. Es fehlt auch die Praxis der Zivilcourage in Ungarn. Das heißt, Ungarn sind das so gewöhnt: Wenn ihnen jemand einen Befehl gibt, gehorchen sie. Das heißt, sie bekommen einen Befehl und gehorchen dem Befehl. Das ist die ungarische Tradition. Neinsagen ist keine ungarische Tradition."

trauma of World War II followed immediately by the brutal reign of the USSR. However, in the same interview Heller additionally pointed to the fact that there was always a dissident (or democratic) minority in Hungary, which is still fighting against such oppressive conditions.

My dissertation has emphasized the dissident community of artists active in socialist Hungary, and how, for them, decision as art became the equivalent to life as art. The artists at Galántai's Balatonboglár Chapel Studio fought for a means of expression that investigated the question of how to make a decision as an artist in a country where every thought and action was to be regulated and decided by the autocratic state. Tamás Szentjóby's self-punishing actions tried to evoke and thereby disarm the mechanisms of psychic punishment by the state, while Miklós Erdély sought to create "a place for the not-yet-realized" to change viewers' perception of art and the world. Gyula Pauer's pseudo-manifesto pointed at the hypocrisy and manipulation dominating life under state socialism, and considered art's embrace of that reality to operate as a suspension of its control over his decision-making. Endre Tót threw himself into excessive joys, which shrieked sadness; Tibor Hajas tested the limits of his body and made viewers witnesses to traumatic subjectivity; and István Harasztÿ trapped a bird in a cage to express the traumatic confinement of artists under the totalitarian system. Most of all, these artists desperately sought connections with one another, a space where they could just be artists, learn from one another, and most importantly, where artists and viewers would take action and responsibility for their – and each others' – lives. Actions like László Beke's *Tug*

of War Action (1972) and *Shaking Hands* (1972) were invested in creating

connections beyond Hungary, generating artworks that would metonymically

preserve that bond.

Galántai would extend this metonymic function to his mail art practices

and exhibitions operating through *Artpool*, the latter, to this day, preserving and

augmenting that purpose. Moreover, with the samizdat publications and

exhibitions like "Hungary Can Be Yours" in 1984, Galántai fought for the

emancipation of citizens from the tyranny of socialist ideology, a quest often

interrupted and/or halted by the authorities. After 1989, however, Artpool was

finally able to operate openly and organized an exhibition titled "Europe Against

the Current" in Amsterdam.[9] The following December, Hungarian artists

reclaimed their history with the "Reconstruction of a Banned Exhibition" in the

Young Artist's Club, which was an exact replica of the 1984 banned exhibition

"Hungary can Be Yours," and which involved a discussion with artists and

censors of that exhibition.[10] In February of 1990, *Artpool* exhibited "Underground

Art in the Aczél-Era in Budapest," offering a platform for an "Exhibition with

slide show of documents of the non-official art of the '70s from the Artpool

Archive."[11] With the fall of the communism in 1989, *Artpool* launched these

exhibitions not only to address the trauma of their country, but also to make

visible the artistic activities suppressed during the Soviet era.[12]

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[9] György Galántai, *Artpool Research Archive,* http://www.artpool.hu/events79-91.html#M
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] It may be time to re-launch an exhibition in Hungary today, which could reclaim Hungary as an oppositional force against the conservative, nationalist and religious take-over of the Orbán

Klaniczay stands out as one woman whose contributions to the counter-culture of the 1970s and 1980s were extensive. For one, *Artpool* could never have emerged with such strength and persistence without her substantial organizational skills, her knowledge of art and foreign languages, as well as her devotion to honoring and recognizing experimental art. Klaniczay's prominent position was unique, as the Hungarian underground and counterculture had their own exclusions: women artists. In her devastating verdict about gender politics and feminism in Hungary, Edit András has examined the artists' "inquisition-like faith in the exclusively redeeming nature of its one and only truth," based on "a deeply ingrained [commitment to the] avant-garde tradition," specifically that the male-dominated art scene discard and debase women's role in art.[13] Relying on interviews, archival documents, and surveys, Beáta Hock analyzed the participation of women in the alternative art scene during the 1970s and 1980s, and confirmed that women were not only marginal, but that issues like body art and identity politics, typical in Western feminist experimental art of the period, were hardly present at all.[14] Even within the unique context of textile art, typically associated with women's work/art, the

administration, which has not only launched a massive attack on alternative cultural institutions and media in Hungary, but also cut the funding of art institutions, closed museums and theatres, banned radio stations, fired curators, and replaced employees with openly anti-Semitic and racist members of the far-right. *Artpool* has consequently lost over 50% of its funding in the process, and is operating on the good-will and persistent effort by Klaniczay and Galántai.

[13] Edit András, "A Painful Farewell to Modernism: Difficulties in the Period of Transition."In Bojana Pejić, ed., *Gender Check: A Reader. Art and Theory in Eastern Europe* (Cologne: Walter König, 2009) 121.

[14] Beáta Hock, *Gendered Artistic Positions and Social Voices: Politics, Cinema, and the Visual Arts: In State-Socialist and Post-Socialist Hungary*. Doctoral Thesis submitted to the Department of Gender Studies at Central European University, Budapest, 2009. The doctoral dissertation has since then been published as a book. See Beáta Hock, *Gendered Artistic Positions and Social Voices: Politics, Cinema, and the Visual Arts: In State-Socialist and Post-Socialist Hungary* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2013).

question of the female body, sexuality, and feminism remained missing. As Hock argues, while there were more women active in exhibitions like "Textil Textil Után (Textile After Textile)" (1978), "the problems and ideas [the exhibition] addressed were those of the period's conceptual, constructivist and abstract-geometric tendencies," a transformation that Hock rightly deduces "'desexualized,' or rather de-sensualized, textile art."[15] Feminists like Klaniczay are often forgotten in such discussions. But as I noted in this dissertation, she must be remembered not only as Galántai's partner but as an equal in the continuation of his Balatonboglár studio and in the foundation and realization of *Artpool.*

Another woman who must be acknowledged for her substantial cultural involvement is Dora Maurer (b. 1937), whose curatorial and organizational contributions to Hungarian culture cannot be overstated. For Maurer was one of the few women who exhibited with the artists at the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio and elsewhere in Hungary, although she was anything but a feminist.[16] Maurer worked in a highly conceptual, neo-constructivist style that Hock has charged was complicit "with the expectations of a professional male world."[17] Even though by 1979 Maurer expressed some interest in feminist issues,[18] she

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[15] Ibid, 222.
[16] Maurer was also featured in the *Gender Check* exhibition. The other two women artists that have been put under the umbrella of "feminist" art in Hungary (and also featured in *Gender Check*): Zsuzsi Ujj and Orshi Drozdik.
[17] Hock, *Gendered Artistic Positions and Social Voices,* 225.
[18] Hock discovered that Maurer had conducted a radio interview with members of InAkt, an Austrian union of women artists in Vienna.

remained disengaged.[19] According to Hock, "Maurer today says that her interest

in feminist thought was part of a general intellectual openness and was not more

personally motivated than 'the interest of a bug collector in any unfamiliar

creature.'"[20] Maurer's provocative metaphor demonstrates how unfamiliar this

creature - woman – was in the Hungarian context, not only to men but to women

themselves, a reality that attests to Simone de Beauvoir's observation in *The*

Second Sex (1949), that, "The world is defined without her, and its face is

immutable."[21]

 One of the artists who tried to break the immutable face of the art world

was Katalin Ladik (b. 1942), a poet, actress, and performance and sound artist

based in Novi Sad, Vojvodina, in the former Yugoslavia (now Serbia). Vojvodina

was an autonomous province in Tito's Yugoslavia, a territory with a large

Hungarian population and primarily bilingual (Hungarian and Serbo-Croatian).

As Hungarian as she was Yugoslavian, Ladik has a doubled national identity,

which is typical for this multi-cultural region.[22] As a result, along with members

of the group Bosch+Bosch (based in Subotica and Novi Sad), Ladik frequently

visited Hungary and Galántai's Chapel Studio.[23] During the Cold War,

Yugoslavia, which operated as "a kind of 'intermediary zone'," according to

Šuvaković, permitted artists to move around in this way; "and the group

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[19] Ibid, 225-226.
[20] Ibid, 226.
[21] Simone de Beauvoir, Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (trans.), *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 344.
[22] Ladik left Yugoslavia during the war in 1992 and settled in Budapest, where she lives and works today.
[23] Other members of Bosch+Bosch included: Slavko Matković, Bálint Szombathy, Attila Csernik, László Kerekes, László Szalma, and Ante Vukov.

Bosch+Bosch" he added, was "a real mediator in the communication of Central European artistic practices, ranging from neo-avantgarde to conceptual art."[24] Vojvodina, itself, was particularly fit for such an intermediary zone for Hungarians, as it was very close to the border and had previously been Hungarian territory during the Habsburg Empire.[25]

Galántai was in regular contact with the Bosch+Bosch members and visited Subotica in 1972. In 1973, Galántai held an exhibition entitled "Jugoszláv Kollégák (Yugoslavian Colleagues)" at the chapel, which included a number of members from Bosch+Bosch, along with other artists.[26] By then, Ladik was already well known in both Yugoslavia and Hungary, and between 1973 and 1977 she exhibited regularily at the SKC in Belgrade. She was particularly known for *Incantation*, a performance she did in 1970, in which she appeared nearly nude, her body covered only with a strip of fur that left one breast exposed. Ladik performed a kind of ritualistic dance while singing and playing bagpipes and other ancient instruments. Šuvaković has characterized Ladik's work as "behavioral pro-feminist conceptual art," arguing that the artist "problematized and provoked sexual, political and cultural identity…in socialist society."[27] While

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[24] Miško Šuvaković, "The Power of a Woman: Katalin Ladik. Narratives of Interpretation, of Subjectification, Women and Art between the Cold War and transition in Central Europe," *The Power of a Woman: Katalin Ladik* (Novi Sad: Museum of Contemporary Art Vojvodina in Novi Sad, 2010), 51.

[25] For example, Galántai's visit to Subotica in 1972 for an exhibition brought about an experience that starkly contrasted that of Hungarian socialism: "I loved it there and was thinking: why was Hungary so bad? Why could it not adopt more of Tito's socialism?" Galántai in conversation with the author, December 21, 2011, at the Artpool Art Research Center in Budapest, Hungary.

[26] Participants included: József Ács, Ferenc Baráth, Attila Csernik, Gábor Ifjú, József Markulik, Slavko Matković, József Smit, Bálint Szombathy.

[27] Miško Šuvaković, Konceptualna Umetnost (Novi Sad: Muzej Savremene Umetnosti Vojvodine, 2007), 259. Translation by the author.

her art was welcomed and respected in Yugoslavia, she was degraded as narcissistic and an exhibitionistic "poetess" in Hungary.[28]

Reflecting on the Hungarian situation in the 1990s, András blamed the "pollution and poisonous gases like Eastern European sexism whose heavy smell permeates every layer and sphere of society."[29] For her such a condition leads to "the instant ostracizing and professional discrediting of anyone said to be associated with gender or feminism-related issues – methods and devices that have long become unacceptable in the West."[30] While András points to discrepancies in the reception and production of feminist thought and action in the East and West, neither eradicated patriarchy and its destructive mechanisms of oppression. Galántai, however, supported Ladik, invited her regularly, and continued to foster this relationship with her and other artists in Vojvodina through mail art in the later 1970s and 1980s.

Balkanian Decisions

My dissertation also examined two former republics in Yugoslavia, which now represent two separate nations, Serbia and Croatia, but which in the 1970s were not understood in terms based on these national distinctions. While Serbia is frequently considered the heart of the Balkans, Croatia fluctuates between being viewed as Western European or Balkan, depending on one's vantage point.

[28] Hock, 227.
[29] Edit András, "Gender Minefields." In *n.paradoxa* 11 (1999): 8;
http://www.ktpress.co.uk/nparadoxa-issue-details.asp?issueid=11.
[30] Ibid.

Since the beginning of the 1990s wars in the former Yugoslavia, and the discussions and negotiations about accepting some, but not all, of the Balkan countries into the European Union, have seen the rise of Serbia and Croatia being charged with nationalism, racism (especially against Roma), the use of rape as a political tool, torture, homophobia, and the more general cultural stereotype of the region as backward. These terms have become idioms for the Balkans, or "Schimpfwoerter" (disparagements), as Maria Todorova has noted; specifically, they are terms used to define and picture the so-called "Land of Blood and Honey."[31] In answering the wavering question of what exactly constitutes the Balkans, the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek commented in *The Specter of Balkan*:

> For Serbs, it begins down there in Kosovo or Bosnia, and they defend the
> Christian civilization against this Europe's Other. For Croats, it begins
> with the Orthodox, despotic, Byzantine Serbia, against which Croatia
> defends the values of democratic Western civilization. For Slovenes, it
> begins with Croatia, and we Slovenes are the last outpost of the peaceful
> Mitteleuropa. For Italians and Austrians, it begins with Slovenia, where
> the reign of the Slavic hordes starts. For Germans, Austria itself, on
> account of its historic connections, is already tainted by the Balkanic
> corruption and inefficiency... So Balkan is always the Other: it lies
> somewhere else, always a little bit more to the southeast, with the
> paradox that, when we reach the very bottom of the Balkan peninsula, we

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[31] Maria Tordova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3. Angelina Jolie recently made her directorial debut with a film about the war between Bosnia and Serbia titled *In the Land of Blood and Honey* (2012).

again magically escape Balkan. Greece is no longer Balkan proper, but the

cradle of our Western civilization.[32]

Similarly, Boris Buden pointed out that especially in Croatia, the rise of

nationalism went hand in hand with a hatred of the Balkans and Serbs, and a

simultaneous feeling of closeness to Europe, which on the other hand had

betrayed Croatia in the 1990s and left it struggling with the savage and genocidal

Balkanians (i.e. the Serbs).[33] Milica Bakić-Hayden has termed this process of

Othering as "nesting orientalism," whereby people living in the Balkans

"Occidentalize" themselves by equally pushing these stereotypes on people

living "east" or "south" of them.[34]

In a recent interview, the former Dutch diplomat Robert van Lanschot has

noted that "the Balkans," especially Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania,

Bulgaria, Greece, and Bosnia, have contributed nothing to European culture and

are closer to the middle east than Europe. He justified this outrageous claim in

the following way: "Nobody in the Balkans knows what a Chanel costume is,

about the culinary art of Bokus, Pippi Longstocking, English Gardens,

Montaigne's essays, Lego toys, etc."[35] Such stereotypes of cultural ignorance in

the Balkans are certainly not recent, and scholars of the Balkan region have

argued that "the opposition between an abstract East and West [is] as old as

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[32] Slavoj Žižek, "The Spectre of Balkan," in *The Journal of the International Institute* 6, no. 2 (1999), http://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jii/4750978.0006.202?rgn=main;view=fulltext.
[33] Boris Buden, "Europe is a Whore," in Nena Skopljanac Brunner, Stjepan Gredelj, Alija Hodžić and Branimir Krištofić, eds., *Media & War* (Zagreb and Belgrade: 2000), 53-62. Also, see http://arkzin.net/bb/english/whore.htm
[34] Milica Bakić-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia," in *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 917-931.
[35] "Dutch Diplomat: Balkan People Are Not Europeans," http://www.macedoniantruth.org/forum/showthread.php?t=6395

written history."[36] But especially "since the ancient Greeks," and again in the time of the Enlightenment, "the East has always existed as an elastic and ambiguous concept," one that is "relational, depending on the normative values set and the observation point."[37]

Given the current rise of right-wing political parties and neo-Nazi movements in Europe, escalation of racism, homophobia, and violence against immigrants in Hungary, Slovakia, France, and Germany among others, the term Balkan can hardly stand in opposition to the European Union as the violent Other. As Žižek and others have argued, for the West, "Balkan is the exceptional place through which tolerant multiculturalism is allowed to slip into racism,"[38] the Balkan serving as the Other through which the superiority and rationality of European culture can be asserted. "In this respect," Slovenian artist, theoretician and art historian Marina Gržinić asserts, "the East of Europe is always out of joint. One can say that there is a non-existent Second World between the First and the Third Worlds."[39]

So what to make of art from this Second World? It was the purpose of this dissertation to shed light on the groundbreaking and varying art practices in this region, which were, despite van Lanshot's assumption, closely tied to, yet often more perceptive than – and informed by – experiments and innovations in the Western art world. As art historian Steven Mansbach has pointed out about the

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[36] Torodova, 11.
[37] Torodova, 12.
[38] Slavoj Žižek, "The Spectre of Balkan."
[39] Marina Gržinić, "Linking Theory, Politics, and Art," in *Global Visual Cultures: An Anthology*, ed. Zoya Kocur, (MA: Malden, 2011), 27.

reception of modern East European art within the West, "the region as a whole has been the victim of Great Power politics, cultural chauvinism, and shortsighted presuppositions." As a consequence," Mansbach further notes, "over time many in the West have been persuaded to adopt the monolithic label of 'Eastern Europe' to characterize as a whole those lands whose subtleties of culture and history could not easily be accommodated under the reigning (Western) paradigms."[40]

In my analysis of art in former Yugoslavia and Hungary, I have repeatedly recognized what Mansbach and Piotrowski have correctly identified as a heterogeneous Eastern and Central European culture, distinct from, but connected to the West, and whose "Ideological State Apparatuses" (Althusser's phrase adopted by Piotrowski) were varied.[41] But while Piotrowski has proposed a horizontal and heterogeneous approach to the region as an alternative to what he considers Mansbach's reductive assessment of East Central European art, explicated in singular national narratives, my chapter divisions follow Mansbach and reproduce such a logic, as, ironically, Piotrowski's own method does.[42] Why? Because it is impossible to discuss the differences between various East and

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[40] Steven Mansbach, "Methodology and Meaning in the Modern Art of Eastern Europe," in Timothy O. Benson, ed., *Central European Avant-gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910-1930* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 291.
[41] See Piotrowski, "How to Write a History of Central-East European Art?," 5-14.
[42] For example, Piotrowski writes that in "creating our art historical meta-narrative, we have to negotiate those different local meanings, pointing to both the similarities and differences in the wider, let us call it regional, perspective…we have to realise how different they really were, how different were the meanings of art in particular states." While Piotrowski calls them states in his theorization, my question is: how are they different than nations? Piotrowski in the end reproduces the very logic he claims to be critiquing in this article, by comparing Poland, Hungary, and the GDR. See Piotrowski, "How to Write a History of Central-East European Art?", 5-14.

Central European states without considering the contexts of the respective nations; moreover, comparing the different iterations of state socialism within the many nations that made up Eastern Europe - nations whose boundaries have shifted considerably within the last two centuries - is pivotal to understanding the trajectory of state socialism and its impact today.

In his most recent book, Piotrowski has tried to address that trajectory in the post-1989 context, but instead of focusing on different nations, Piotrowski has reduced all of pre-1989 Eastern Europe to a culture ruled by "agoraphobic" state apparatuses, where "its [the state's][43] main goal was to render individual and collective initiatives of its citizens, members of particular societies, more or less dependent on the monopoly of the political apparatus and to subordinate the public sphere to the ideological doctrine."[44] Applying such a generalization disguised as a theoretical framework to discussions of the differences between pre- and post-1989 Eastern Europe – in lieu of focusing on the different countries - certainly does not account for the dissolution of Yugoslavia, or its divided state apparatus in the 1980s. In my analysis of art in Belgrade and Zagreb, I highlighted the unique context of Yugoslavia, where Marxism held sway, but where internationalism was practiced diplomatically and culturally, offering an exceptional instance of socialist and capitalist ideologies colliding and cooperating, a situation which was laid bare in the radical aesthetic and political

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[43] Piotrowski uses the singular to describe the state apparatus of Eastern Europe.
[44] Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe* (London: Reaktion 2012), 7.

decisions of artists and curators resisting state socialist ideology and Western cultural domination.

In Belgrade, such efforts materialized in artists' and curators' emphases on revolutionizing the artworld and offering Marxist correctives to state ideology. Zoran Popović's aim was not only to critique the state, but his artworks, such as *Axioms*, altered viewers' experiences of temporal and spatial visual signs performed by the body, operating against what he called the "preservation of the hegemony of Western culture over world culture in line with tendencies of late capitalism, and its imperialistic needs and aims."[45] He sought such an artistic and theoretical framework not solely within the remote local context, but collaborated with Western artists, such as Art and Language, who had similar aspirations within their own Western contexts. Raša Todosijević's critique of the artworld was also not an isolated one, but rather in dialogue with international art institutions and practices, prefiguring the widespread institutional critique of art today. Todosijević used his own body, along with that of his partner Marinela Koželj, to embody and perform the struggle between self-sovereignty and state-sovereignty, expose the mechanics of the canonization of art, and find a voice in the seemingly immutable authority of official culture. His "decision as art" resulted in some of the most violent and corporeal manifestation of trauma under totalitarianism, as well as displaying the ways in which patriarchy operated within the artist himself, the socialist state, and the artworld. Marina

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[45] Zoran Popović, "For Self-Management Art," *October 75* (Belgrade) I (1975), reprinted in Tom Marioni, *Vision, Eastern Europe*, no. 2 (Oakland: Crown Point Press, January 1976), 23.

Abramović tested the endurance of her own body, making palpable how the female body is regulated and violated by ideology and the power of the state, and displaying the traumatic struggle of retaining her personal sovereignty through the decisive control of all the parameters of her art.

The SKC in Belgrade is now celebrated as a space that was forward thinking and radical, mostly due to the recent fame of Todosijević and Abramović within the international artworld. While Todosijević received some international attention during the late 1990s and early 2000s with his *Gott Liebt die Serben* series (1988-present), it would take almost four decades before Serbia would honor his radical aesthetic and conceptual interventions in 2011, when he represented the Serbian Pavilion at the Venice Biennial. Abramović's decision to leave the Balkans for Western Europe and, finally, the United States, resulted in early international recognition, but also resentment from her native land of Serbia, which refused to show her work for decades and denied her the opportunity to exhibit her groundbreaking performance *Balkan Baroque*, which was ultimately presented in the Italian pavilion at the Venice Biennial in 1997. In 2011, Abramović was finally included as one artist in the pavilion for Montenegro, following her 2010 blockbuster retrospective at MoMA in New York. Unfortunately, Abramović has come to represent the whole of the Balkan region in many people's minds, a perception that the artist has reinforced over the last decade with such works as *Balkan Epic Erotic* (2005) that attempt to characterize the entire region in a manner that perpetuates the very stereotypes

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that writers like Todorova have decried, and that simultaneously fuel the prejudices of individuals like the Dutch diplomat Robert van Lanschot.

In Zagreb, the exhibitions curated by Koščević in the late 1960s and early 1970s fostered an environment that was invested in the participation of the public, a trajectory that was taken up by the Group of Six Authors, who created actions and interventions within public spaces, rather than galleries. The unique emphasis on the merging of poetry, performance, and conceptual art resulted in the important *Maj 75* samizdat publication, which to this day serves as an exceptional testament to the international collaborations of these Yugoslav artists, as well as to the remarkable inclusion of mail artists and many women artists. Koščević's "Mail Items from Paris" exhibition of 1971 demonstrated the stark difference between the artistic circles and cultures of Zagreb and Budapest. For Koščević decided only to exhibit the box of mail art works without opening it or showing the content of the works or the identity of the artist participants. Such a conceptual performance would have been unthinkable for Galántai and Klaniczay, who could not have kept the Hungarian artists "starved for information" from the contents of the box.[46]

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[46] My research has also uncovered mail art works by a number of artists in other regions of former Yugoslavia, such as Tomislav Gotovac (Zagreb), Marko Pogačnik from the Slovenia group *OHO*, Miroljub Todorović in Belgrade, Andrej Tisma in Novi Sad and Bálint Szombathy in Subotica and Novi Sad. Todorović founded and theorized the literary and artistic movement Signalism, serving as the editor of *Signal*, an international review that published the works of artists like Zoran Popović, Raša Todosijević, Neša Paripović, Gergelj Urkom and Marina Abramović. Bálint Szombathy's work also varied from performance to conceptual art and mail art, building relationships between the art community in Vojvodina in northeastern Serbia and Hungary.

But Zagreb artists fought on other fronts: Artists like Tomislav Gotovac, Sanja Iveković, Vlado Martek, Sven Stilinović, Tomislav Gotovac, and Vlasta Delimar sought to undermine patriarchy by breaking through social taboos about gender and sexuality, decisions informed by anarchist critiques of the absurd laws and conventions of the state. While these artists frequently, and willingly, provoked the socialist police force, they also painted a different picture of Balkan masculinity, such as Sven Stilinović's implied queerness or Tomislav Gotovac's embrace of the naked male body as "ready-made" artwork, autonomous and joyful in its battle with the authorities. Mladen Stilinović pointed to the darkest elements of decision-making, explicitly exploring the pain that comes from considering art itself *as* a decision. As he noted in an interview: "I believe that young artists, faced with thousands of definitions, are in great trouble. Particularly if they feel they should somehow relate to it in their work. I created a setting in which I myself proposed certain definitions of art: no art without blood...It's about terror of art over artists."[47]

Taking decisions into their own hands, and allowing art to "terrorize" them into becoming decision-making subjects, has led to considerable and deserved recognition for some of these artists. Sanja Iveković, Tomislav Gotovac, and Mladen Stilinović have become the most renowned artists from Zagreb. Stilinović is considered one of the most important conceptual artists from former Yugoslavia and has been featured in many international exhibitions, including

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[47] "Interview: Branka Stipančić and Mladen Stilinović, Living Means Never Having to Attend Court," in Alenka Gregorič and Branka Stipančić, eds., Borut Cajnko, trans., *Mladen Stilinović: Umjetnik Radi/Artist At Work 1973-1983* (Zagreb: TISAK, 2010), 31-32.

being featured at the 2003 Venice Biennial, and a retrospective at the Ludwig

Museum in Hungary in 2011. Iveković has shown her work at the most

important exhibitions and museums internationally, including Dokumenta, as

well as a retrospective at MoMA in New York in 2011, while Tomislav Gotovac

(posthumously) represented Croatia at the Venice Biennial in 2011.

Moreover, the substantial influence of the 1970s generation of artists in

Belgrade and Zagreb cannot be understated, as their rigorous dedication to

politics, aesthetics, the body and art would educate new generations of artists in

the late 1970s and 1980s, most notably the Slovenian art collective Neue

Slowenische Kunst,[48] founded in 1984, which based its artistic program on

Todosijević's *Was ist Kunst* series and considered Stilinović the grandfather of the

retroavant-garde, the foundational principle of the group. NSK attempted to

aggravate the state and its dictums of political ideology with a systematic

critique of national and religious symbols in Slovenia and its history of fascism.

What's more, they pointed at the politics embedded in the veneration of the

avant-garde, explicated by the repeated use of Kazimir Malevich's *Black Cross*,

which appropriated by NSK, linked religion, culture, and the art world to

political totalitarianism. The punk band Laibach, founded in 1980, and part of

NSK, also became a leader in the Yugoslav alternative punk culture, which

forcefully rejected the state's imposition of gender politics and patriarchy.

Finally, NSK presented a fitting counter-argument to van Lanschot and his

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[48] Based in Ljubljana, Slovenia, NSK was founded in 1984 by three previously existing groups: Laibach (Music Group), Irwin (Visual artists), and Gledališče Sester Scipion Nasice (Theater group). It expanded to include New Collectivism, a group of graphic designers.

conviction that people in the Balkans contributed nothing and are ignorant of European culture, when they launched the *State in Time Project* in 1991. Not only was NSK acutely aware that the European and American ideology of democracy was a far cry from being neutral or "the right path," but they also understood the limits of ideology better than their Western counterparts, who had not experienced the same kind of repression. [Figure 47]

In 2002, Kristeva would extend such experiences of repression to capitalism writing that, "draconian forms of prohibition" exist in capitalism as much as they are found in state socialism; and even if they take different forms, they "don't affect human existence any less deeply than the arbitrary prohibitions we denounce today in the two totalitarianisms of modernity, Stalinism and fascism." Kristeva continues:

> Society at the end of the Twentieth Century isn't lax, far from it. There are lots of places around the world where prohibition is oppressive, where it excludes or forbids, abroad as much as in France. Immigrants have difficulty integrating, not only because they're forbidden access to national territory (just and humane legislation is slowly being implemented on this), but also because they're deprived of certain kinds of political and cultural recognition and then, trapped by their claims for identity, they deny themselves such recognition. The unemployment too, forbidden to work and earn a living…[49]

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[49] Julia Kristeva, Brian O'Keeffe, trans., Sylvere Lotringer, ed., *Revolt, She Said. An Interview by Philippe Petit.* Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series (Cambridge, Mass, and London, England: MIT Press, 2002), 31-32.

NSK's *State in Time* project embraced the utopian principles of democratic

state building and globalization and turned them upside down by creating its

own independent state, with fake passports and embassies throughout the

world. This project's subversive potential demonstrated itself during their *NSK*

State Sarajevo action in 1995,[50] when the Sarajevo National Theater was declared

NSK territory for two days, in which NSK distributed their passports.[51] [Figure

48] A number of individuals were able to use these passports to travel outside of

war-ridden Bosnia-Herzogovina,[52] which pointed to the fact that border officers

were uncertain about new countries that had formed since the demise of state

socialism and the breakup of Yugoslavia, and that NSK not only could, but did,

have an impact on the future of a human being by creating and manipulating

state endorsed documents of power. The NSK passport also reached a number of

people in Africa who were able to use it to enter the EU – a situation that

eventually forced NSK to put a "disclaimer" on their website because these fake

passports were thought to be real and people put their lives on the line.[53] NSK,

like their artist mentors in Belgrade and Zagreb, made radical decisions as art

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[50] The Obala Art Centre, Radio Zid and the Open Society Institutes of Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina supported the NSK members who organized "one of their most important exhibitions and the biggest cultural event in Bosnia since the start of the war." (See *NSK: Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy*, http://www.gla.ac.uk/~dc4w/laibach/deptph.html. Peter Mlakar gave a speech at the "opening ceremony" genuinely urging "Bosnians" 'to conquer evil by forgiving their enemies."
[51] Alexei Monroe, *Interrogation Machine: Laibach and NSK* (Cambrigde: MIT Press, 2005), 255.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Miran Mohar in conversation with the author in Ljubljana, Slovenia, March 3, 2012.

that included the public, that provoked the authorities, and that "investigat(ed) the world, *closely* and with difference."[54]

In conclusion, I would like to return to Drakulić's observation that totalitarianism resulted in the "politicization of citizens" in totalitarian regimes. As my analysis has shown, this process of politicization, while violent and oppressive, also produced generations of activist artists who understood that making art is a political decision with real life consequences, anticipating much of institutional critique in contemporary art today, both in the East and the West.

With the advent of globalization and the putative democratization dictated by the EU, East and Central Europe have entered a new era of economic oppression and confined gender and sexual injustice, a situation aggressively asserted by Serbian artist Tanja Ostojić's work from 2004. [Figure 49] In her *Euro Panties* poster campaign action orchestrated in Austria, Ostojić provocatively pronounced that Balkan women have to spread their legs in order to emigrate to the so-called civilized side of Europe. As expected, her work was censored, whereby Ostojić entered the long history of politicized artists whose works have caused public controversy, such as Gustave Courbet, whose *Origin of the World* (1866) Ostojić deliberately evoked in *Euro Panties*. The Hungarian artist Gábor Gerhes presented the absurdity of the nationalist developments in Hungary in his *Hungarian Moon 1*, a work of art that depicts an astronaut placing the Hungarian flag on the moon. [Figure 50] This work was exhibited in Műcsarnok's 2012 exhibition "What is Hungarian? Contemporary Answers," a

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[54] Ibid.

show that the state considered "blasphemous" and which, in part, resulted in the dismissal of curatorial staff at the museum and the appointment of the conservative and nationalist György Fekete as the head of the Hungarian Academy of Artists (MMA) and in charge the national cultural budget. Fekete has openly proclaimed that his cultural program is about "unambiguous national sentiment" and "a Hungary built on Christian culture [in which] there is no need for constant, perpetual provocation."[55] I conclude with these two contemporary examples of art from the former Yugoslavia and Hungary because they emblematize a need for the type of provocation that is again repressed today, and also to demonstrate the urgency for understanding the political, social, and aesthetic considerations of "decision as art," an action that has guided the analysis of all the art works in my dissertation.

What then does "decision as art" mean for Yugoslavia and Hungary, and more broadly, for Eastern Europe? The title of my dissertation, "A Matter of Decision: Experimental Art in Hungary and Yugoslavia, 1968-1989," refers to a central thesis by Miklós Erdély, as well as the most important leitmotif of Todosijević's actions throughout the 1970s and his conviction that "the art that celebrates the victory abandons the fight."[56] Hungarian and Yugoslavian artists put their art, identities, and communities on the line, performing and fighting against the traumatic loss of the sovereignty of their own bodies within the

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[55] See NEMMA (Autonomy of Art in Hungary), http://nemma.noblogs.org/home/; and "The Lunatics Have Taken Over the Asylum," in *Beyond East European Art*, November 27, 2011, http://beyondeast.wordpress.com/2012/11/27/the-lunatics-have-taken-over-the-asylum/
[56] Dejan Sretenović, *Was ist Kunst? Art As Social Practice* (Belgrade: Geopoetika, 2001), 36.

autocratic power of the state. They pushed themselves, and the sphere of art, out

of the shadows of the state, not only for the sake of self-realization, but also as a

moral and social confrontation with the totalitarian mechanisms of the state. The

intertwined impact of the interlacings of performance, conceptual, and mail art

bore a special affinity to such forms of political resistance in Eastern Europe as

the incorporation of the body/mind as art, which represented the

"transformation of figurative representation into embodied presentation," and

their clever means of communication outside the constraints of their national and

geographic boundaries.[57] Such conceptual and corporeal embodiment was a

political decision for artists, who, under the constant specter of the state, made

informed and courageous decisions to question and deconstruct what art can and

should be, and what we, the 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. Szentjóby took on the decision to

systematically expose the state's repression of art and self-sovereignty in his

actions and conceptual works, while Galántai's decision as art was to overcome

isolation through the creation of networks between artists, as well as his

persistent effort to generate artworks that would metonymically sustain and

nurture that connection. While Todosijević's battle with water embodied the

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[57] Kristine Stiles, "Survival Ethos and Destruction Art," *Discourse: Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 14, no. 2(1992), 91.

struggle of the East European artist under totalitarianism, his performance also raised the question of another ghost: the expressionless East European woman dominated and silenced. She also remained marginal in Hungary, with the exception of Maurer, Ladik, and a handful of other artists. 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 patriarchal domination and violence under state socialism, pushing for alternative models of engagement and sociality with their own bodies and actions. Moreover, artists living in the so-called "Second World" were acutely aware of the fascist histories of the West. Iveković, Todosijević, and NSK used the German language to underscore authoritarianism (symbolized in the sound of the German language) and the dominance of German art and its theories laid bare in the history of violence and oppression of World War II, whose aftermath saw the invention and domination of "the East."

When the European Union received the Nobel Price in 2012, Norwegians praised the EU for its purported achievements in the Balkans, a perspective that hardly anyone from the ex-republics of Yugoslavia, and even many living in the EU, shared. As Ostojić's *Euro panties* affirm, the walls between East and West are alive and well, and are built on the foundations of violence, oppression and patriarchy. The "fascistoid" political developments in Hungary, a country that is now part of the EU but also bears the legacy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, similarly raise the necessity for investigating and understanding the stakes of art for the vitality and development of culture. The artists discussed in my

dissertation found themselves in political situations that seemed even more hopeless, and their decisions to make art, to take control of their lives, to create alternative exhibition venues, new states, to view decision itself *as* a form of art, represented a political struggle and act of civil courage. Their aims to transcend the gallery, open art up to the public, and produce situations and environments that would generate authentic and meaningful relationships, were, according to Koščević, "utopian." Nevertheless, they were not only necessary but also life sustaining for those artists. Today, Koščević sums up the outcome of such efforts as follows: "Naturally it doesn't work, and we are now here where we are!"[58] But as Robert Filliou pointed out, artists "cannot stop." Finally, my dissertation holds that it is a matter of the decision to face what Nietzsche called a "truth [that] is ugly" through and in art. Hungarian and Yugoslavian artists understood, as Nietzsche did, that "we have art so as not to perish from the truth."

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[58] Ibid.

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Biography

Born in 1981 in Subotica, Yugoslavia (now Serbia), Jasmina Tumbas emigrated to Germany in 1988, where she completed the German Abitur in 2001. With the support of the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation undergraduate and graduate fellowships, she earned her B.A. in Art and Psychology in 2005 at Maryville College, TN, and her M.A. in Art History in 2006 at Savannah College of Art and Design, GA. A yearlong International Travel Fellowship from the Duke Graduate School (2011-2012) allowed Tumbas to conduct research at various archives in Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary, and Germany, which resulted in her publication of the journal article - "International Hungary! György Galántai's Networking Strategies" in *ArtMargins* 1:2 (October 2012): 87-115, as well as three short articles for *Grove Art Online*'s "Art in Eastern Europe" section (Oxford University Press), including articles on Tomislav Gotovac (Croatia), Raša Todosijević (Serbia), and Endre Tót (Hungary), published in Fall 2012.

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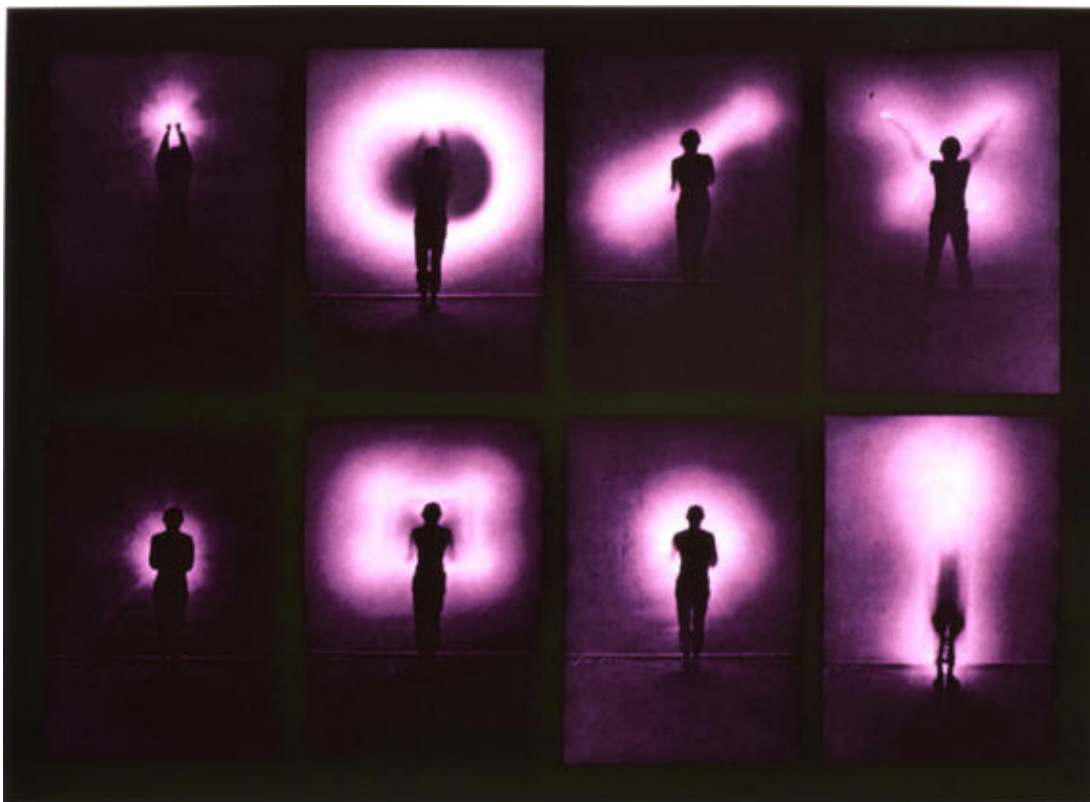
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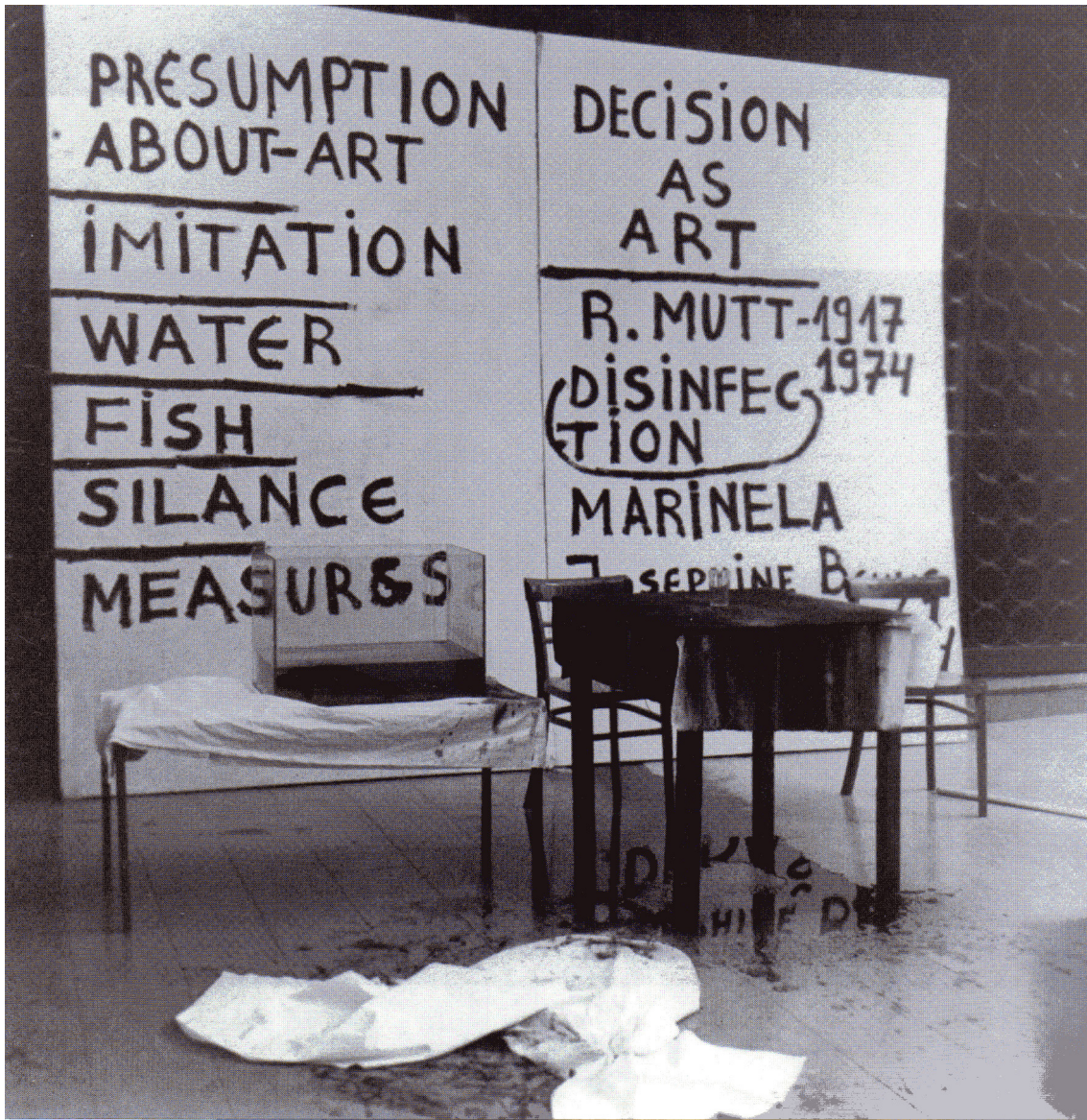
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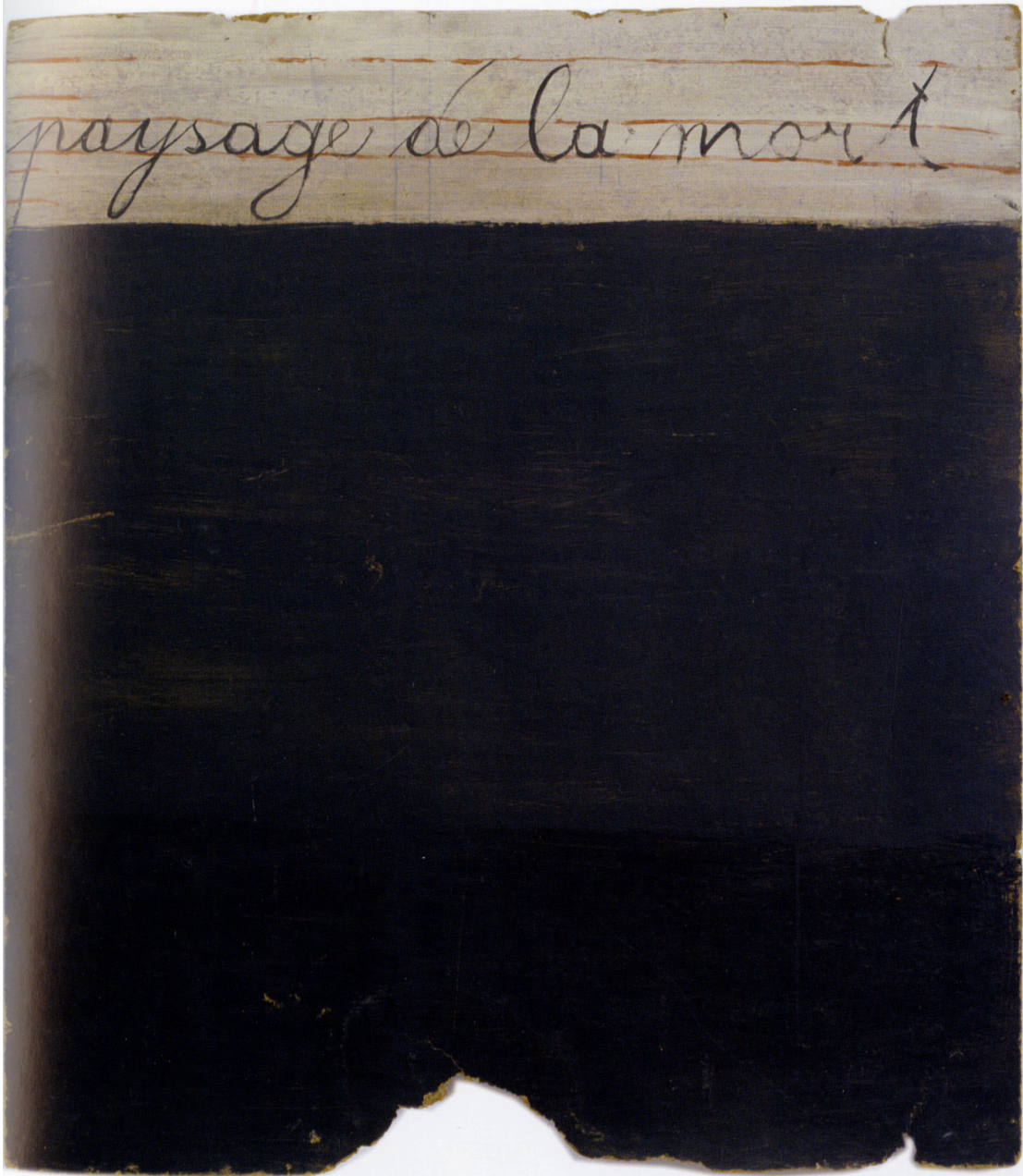
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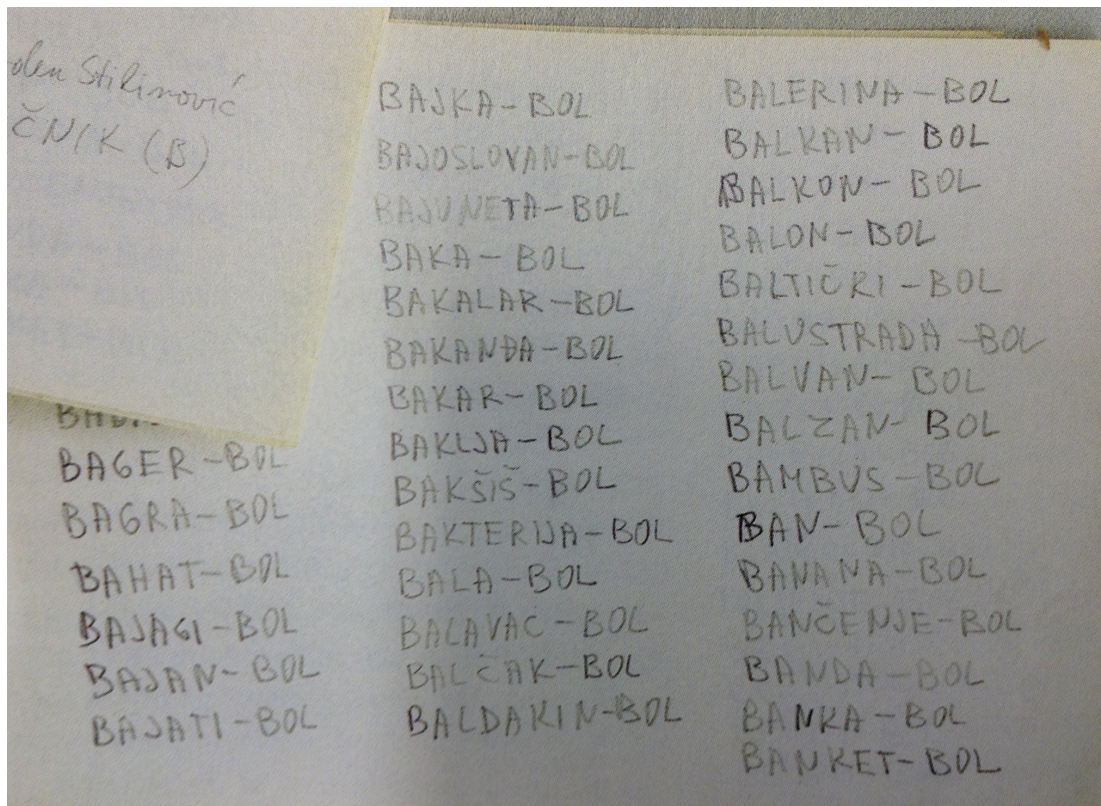
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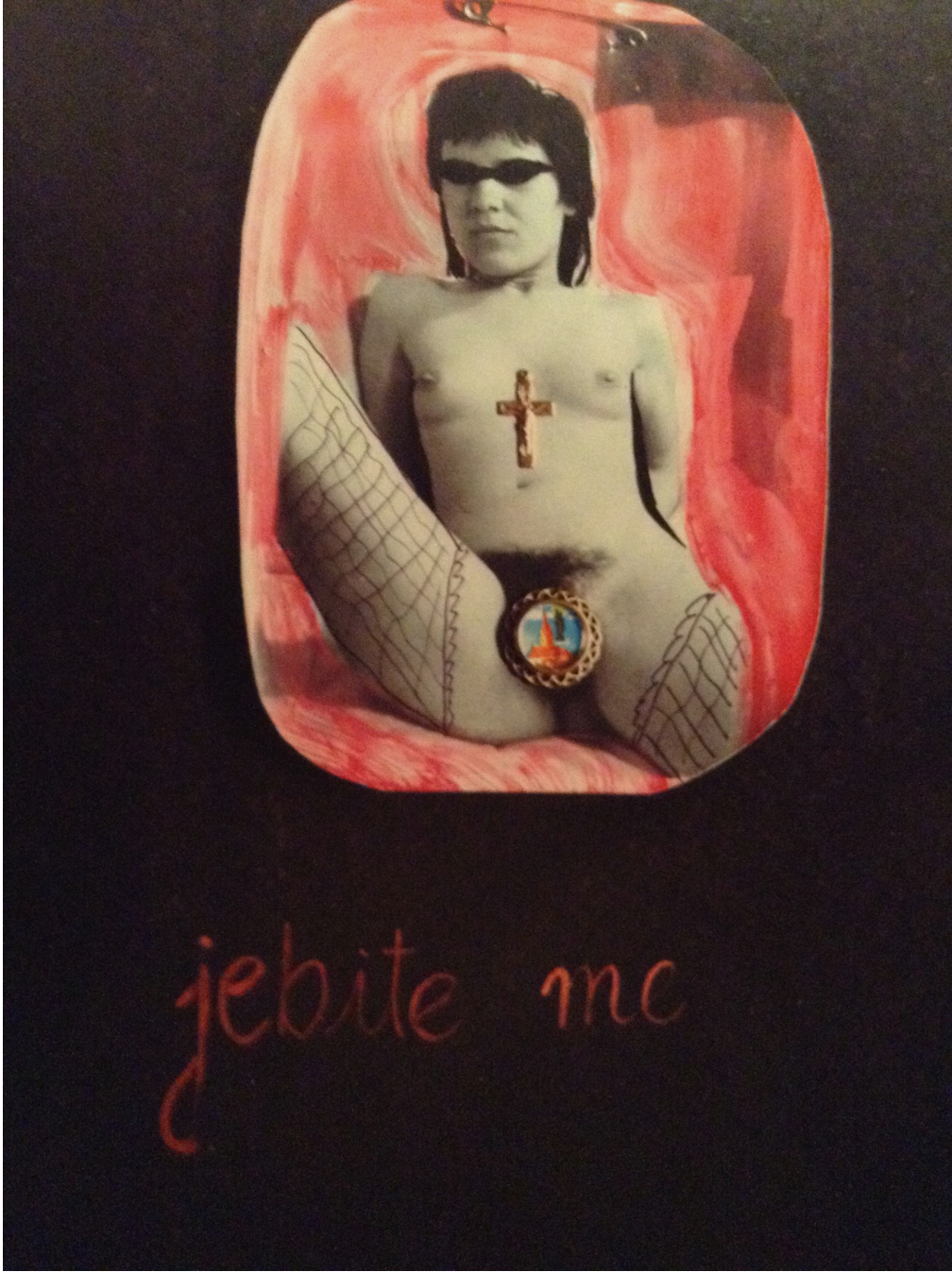
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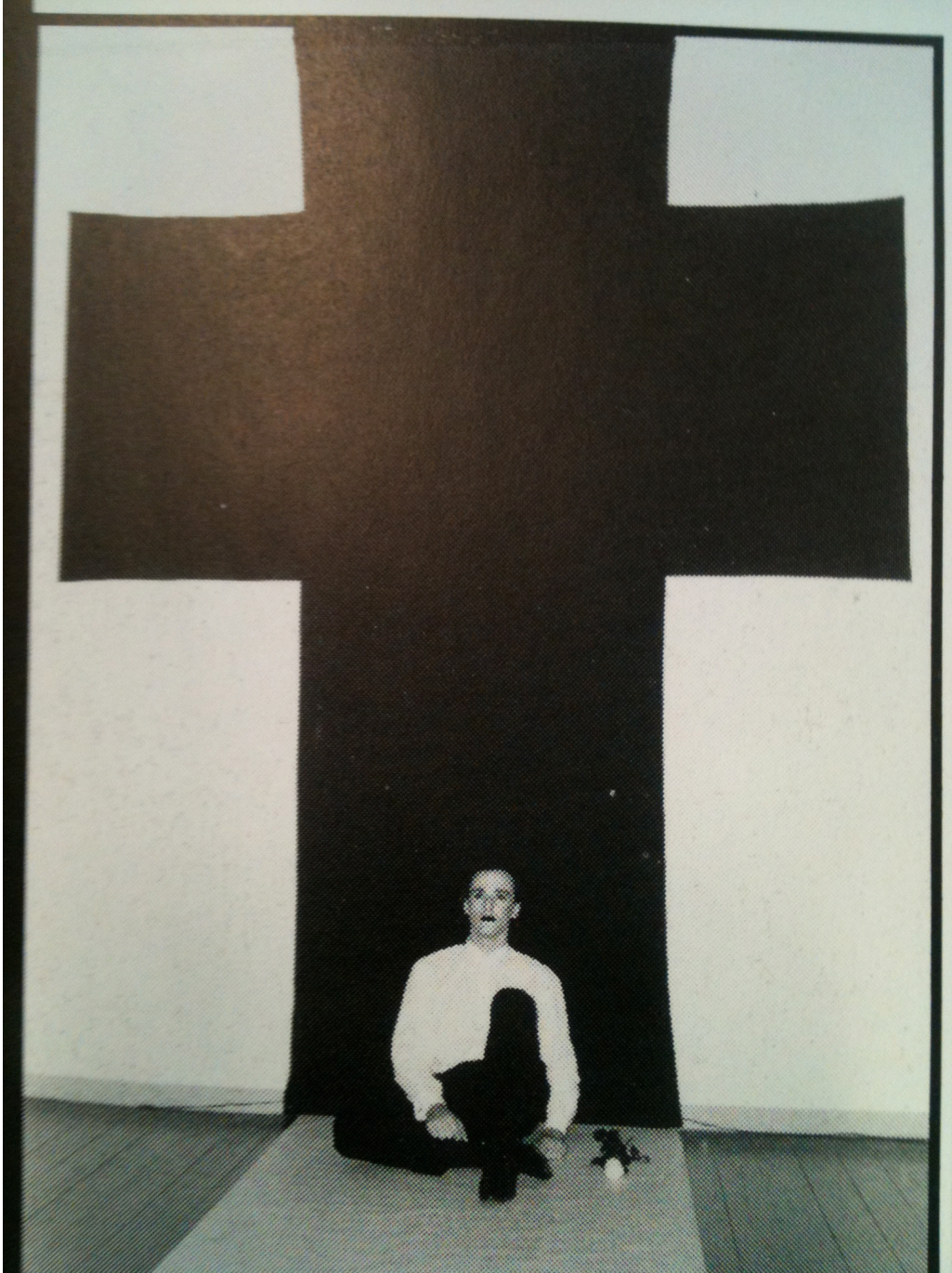
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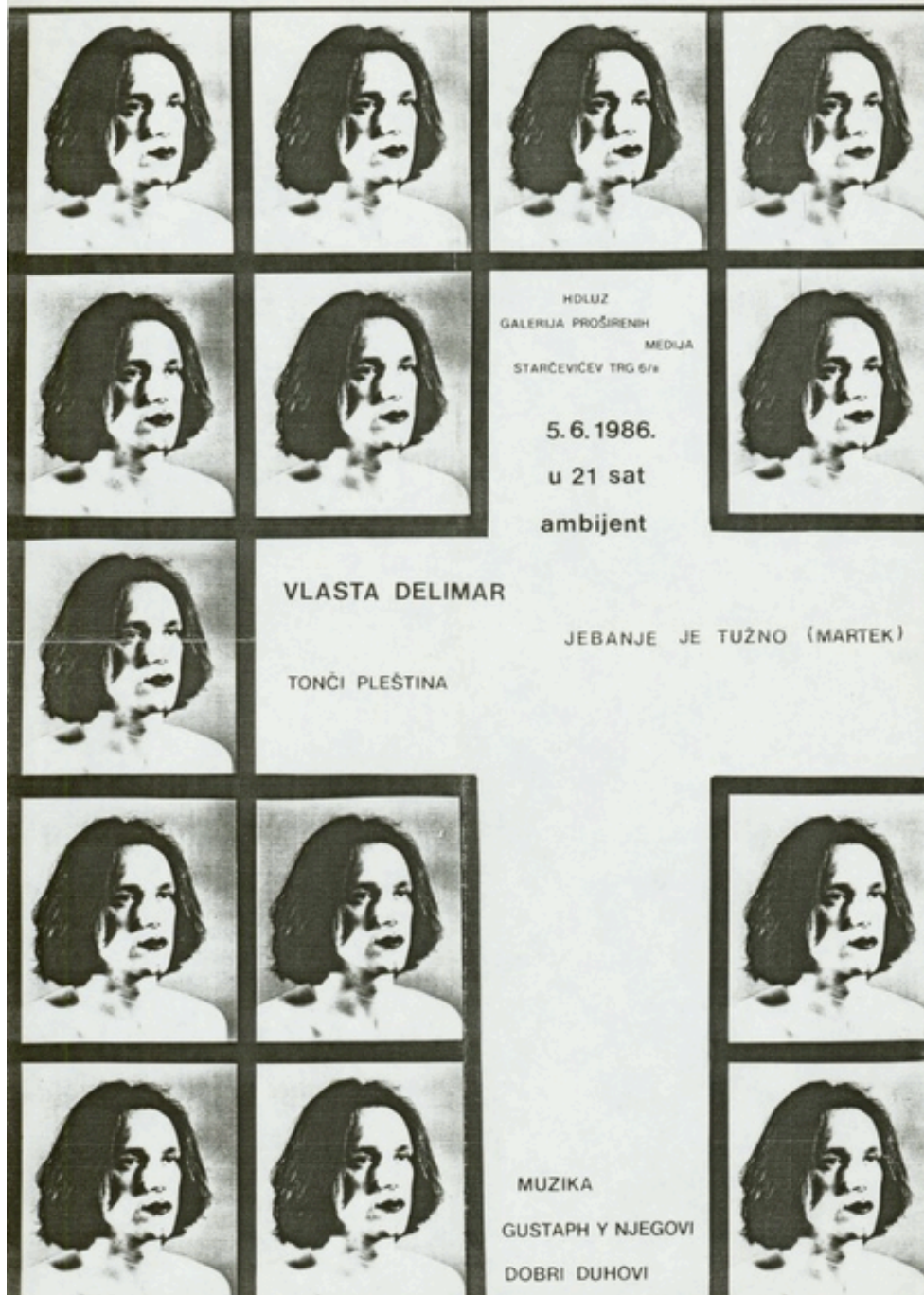
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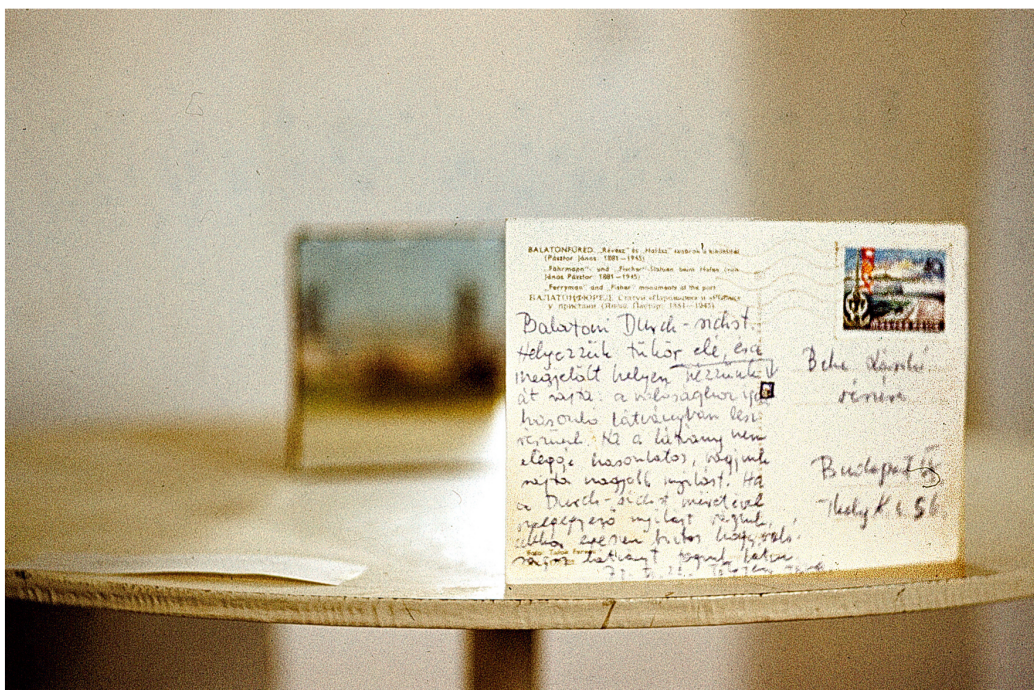
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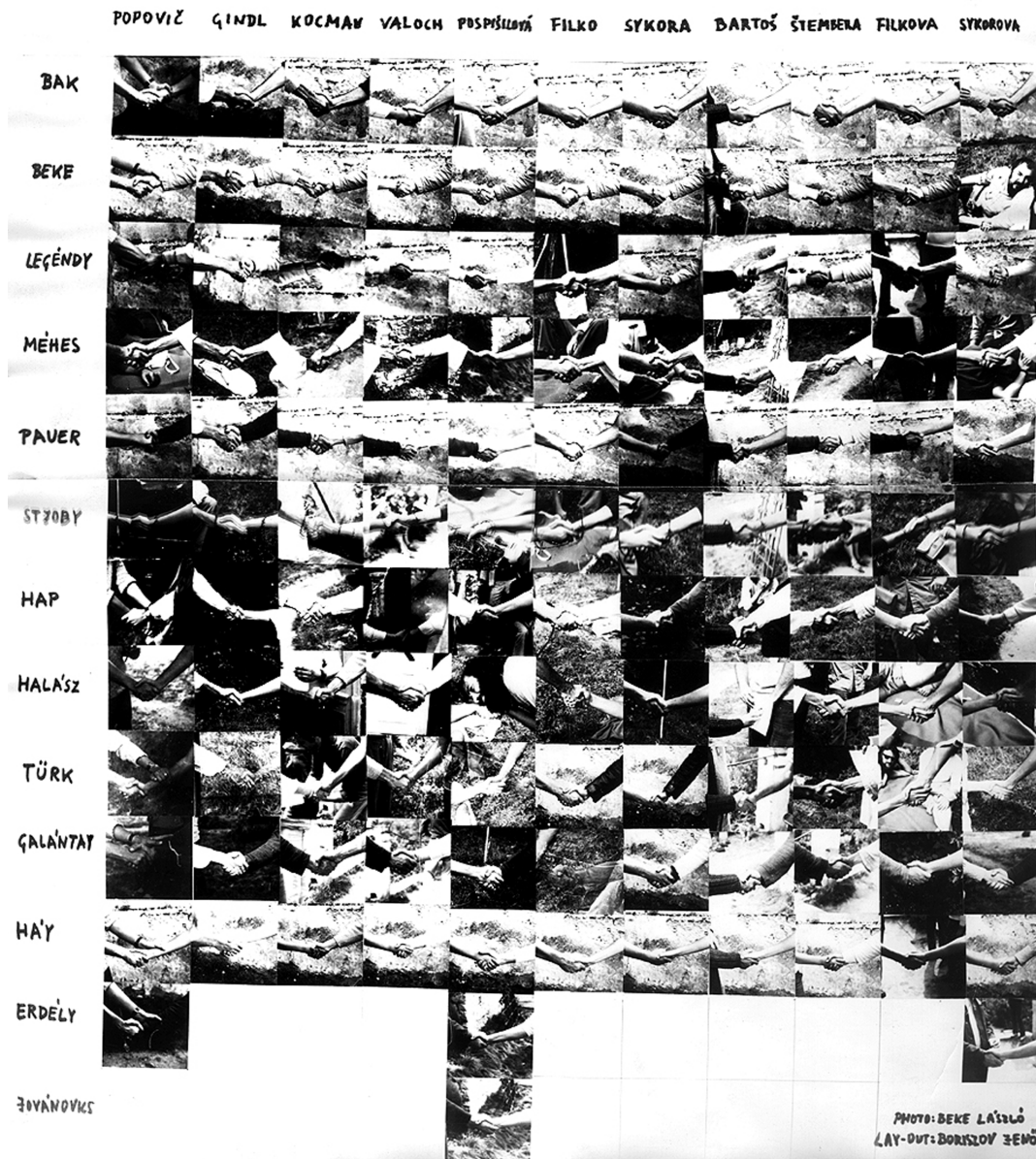
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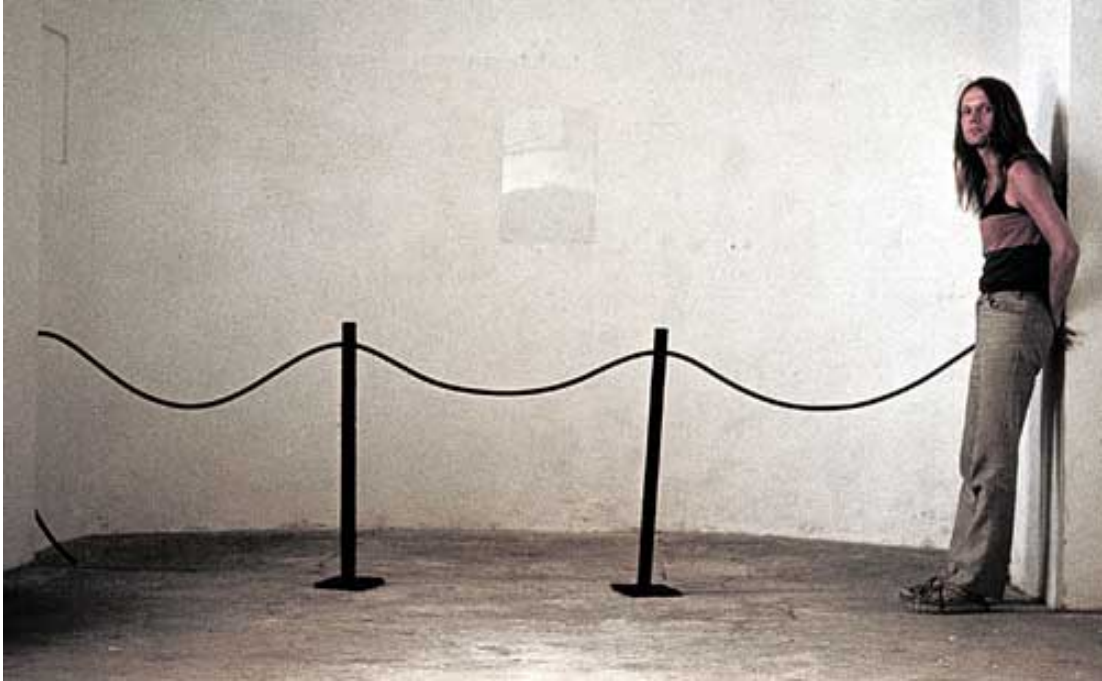
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ART IS EVERYTHING, WHICH IS FORBIDDEN.
BE FORBIDDEN!
+

KUNST IST ALLES, WAS VERBOTEN IST.
SEI VERBOTEN!
+

EL ARTE ES TODO LO QUE ES PROHIBIDO.
!SÉ PROHIBIDO!
+

L'ART EST TOUT CE QUI EST INTERDIT.
SOYEZ INTERDIT!
+

MŰVÉSZET MINDAZ, AMI TILOS.
LÉGY TILOS!

stjóby tamás
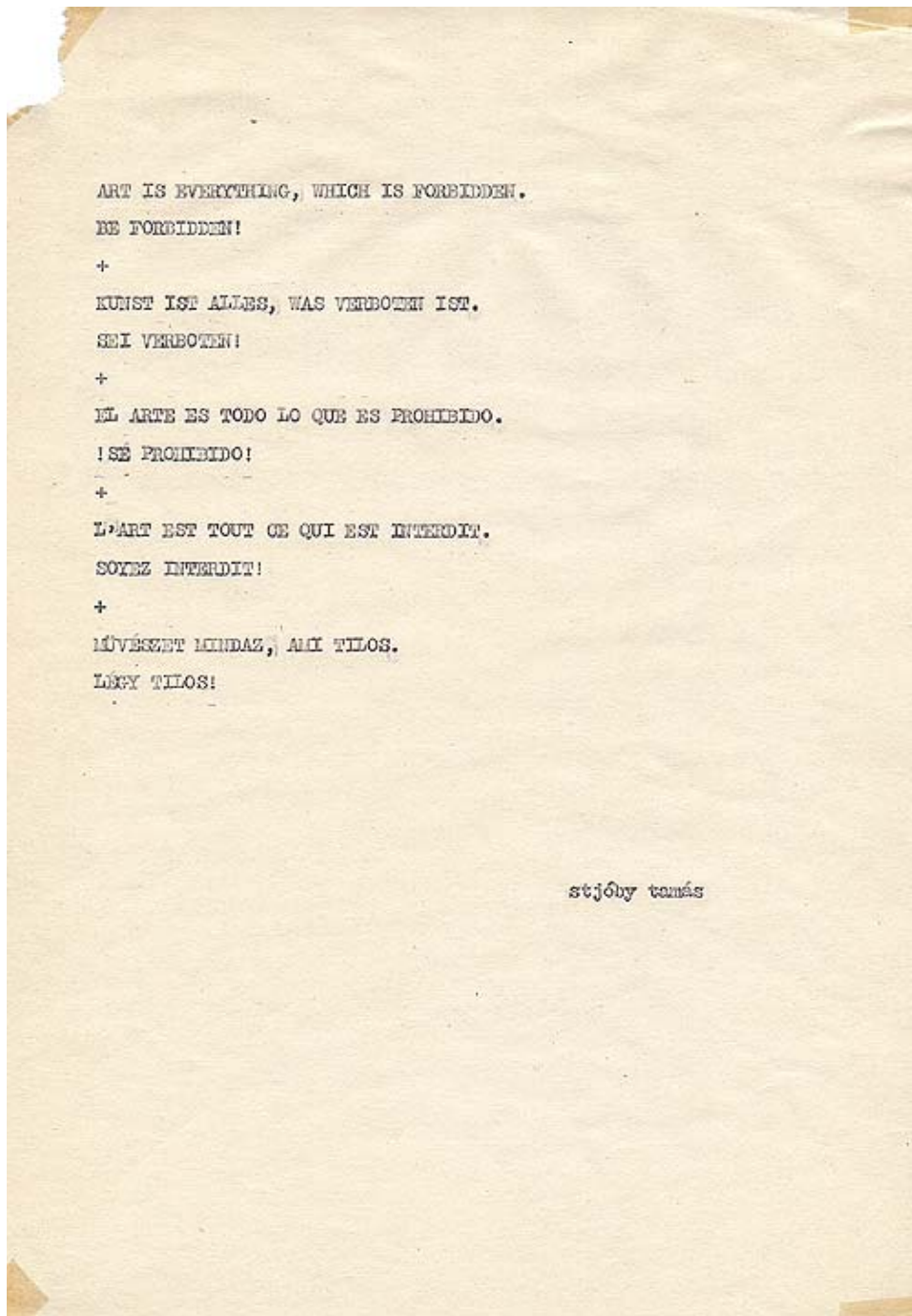
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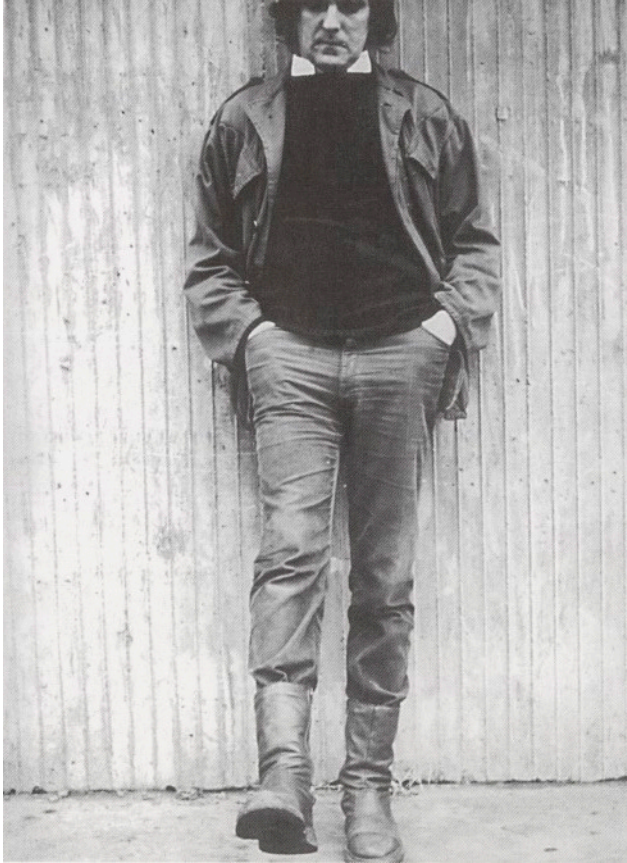
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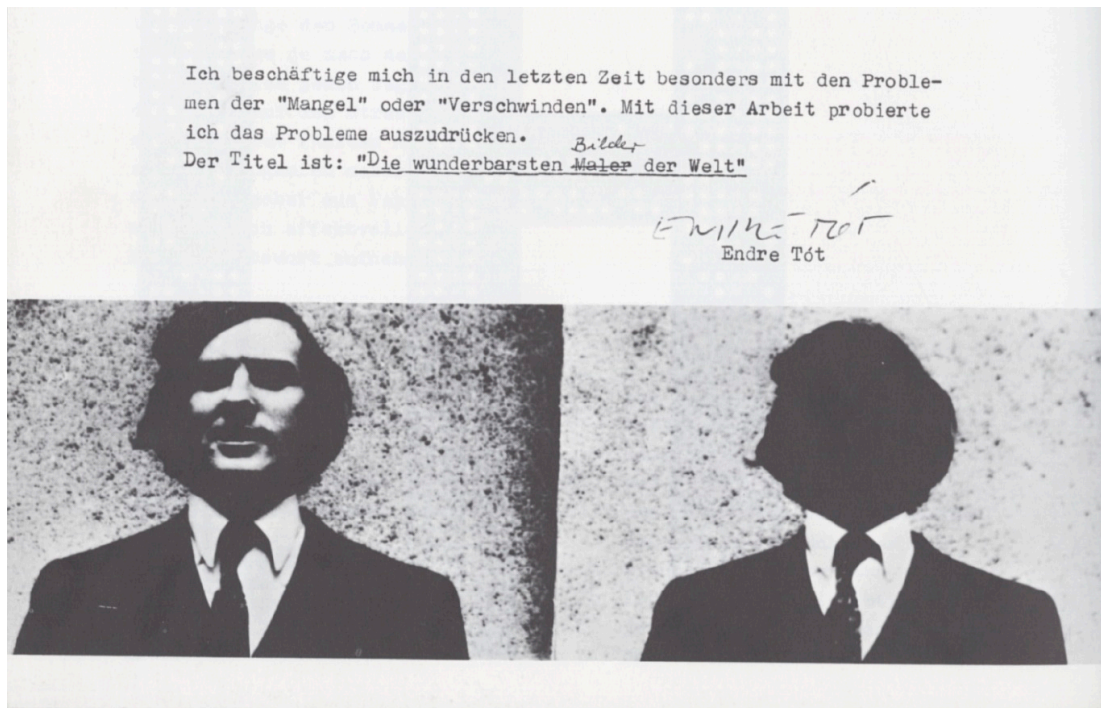
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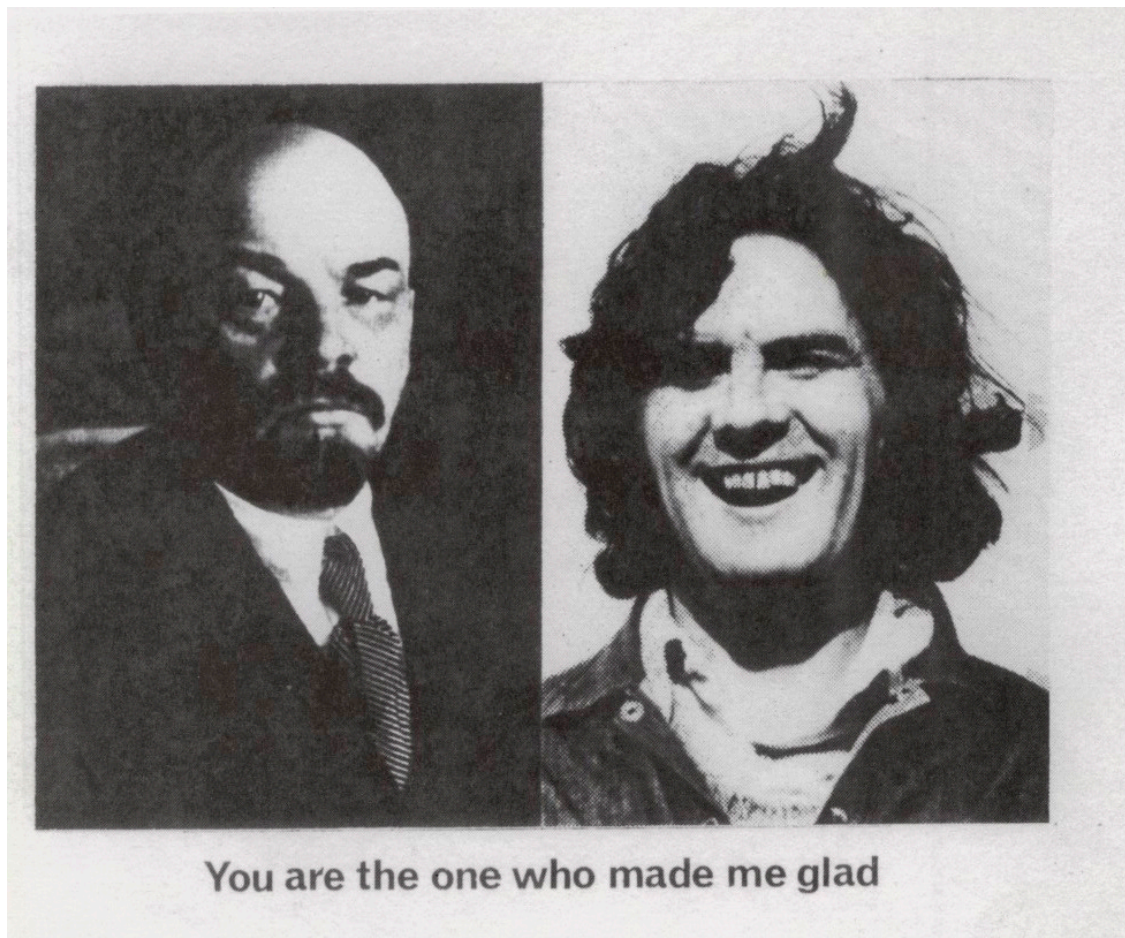
You are the one who made me glad

Figure 39: Endre Tót, *You are the one who made me glad*, 1975. From *Gladness Drawings*, 1973-1979.

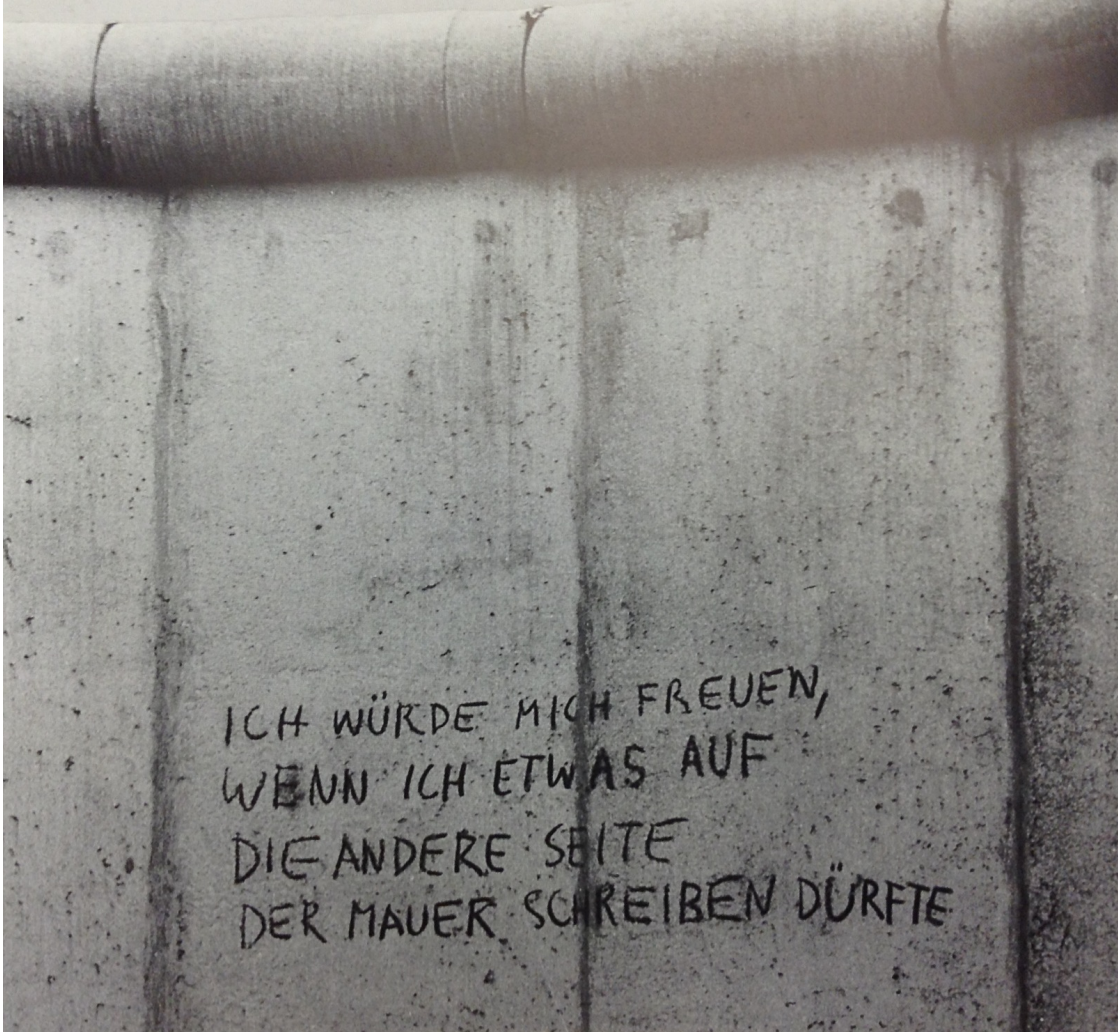In *Tót Endre: Nothing Ain't Nothing / Semmi Sem Semi, Retrospektiv 1965-1995* (Budapest: Műcsarnok, 1995): 84.

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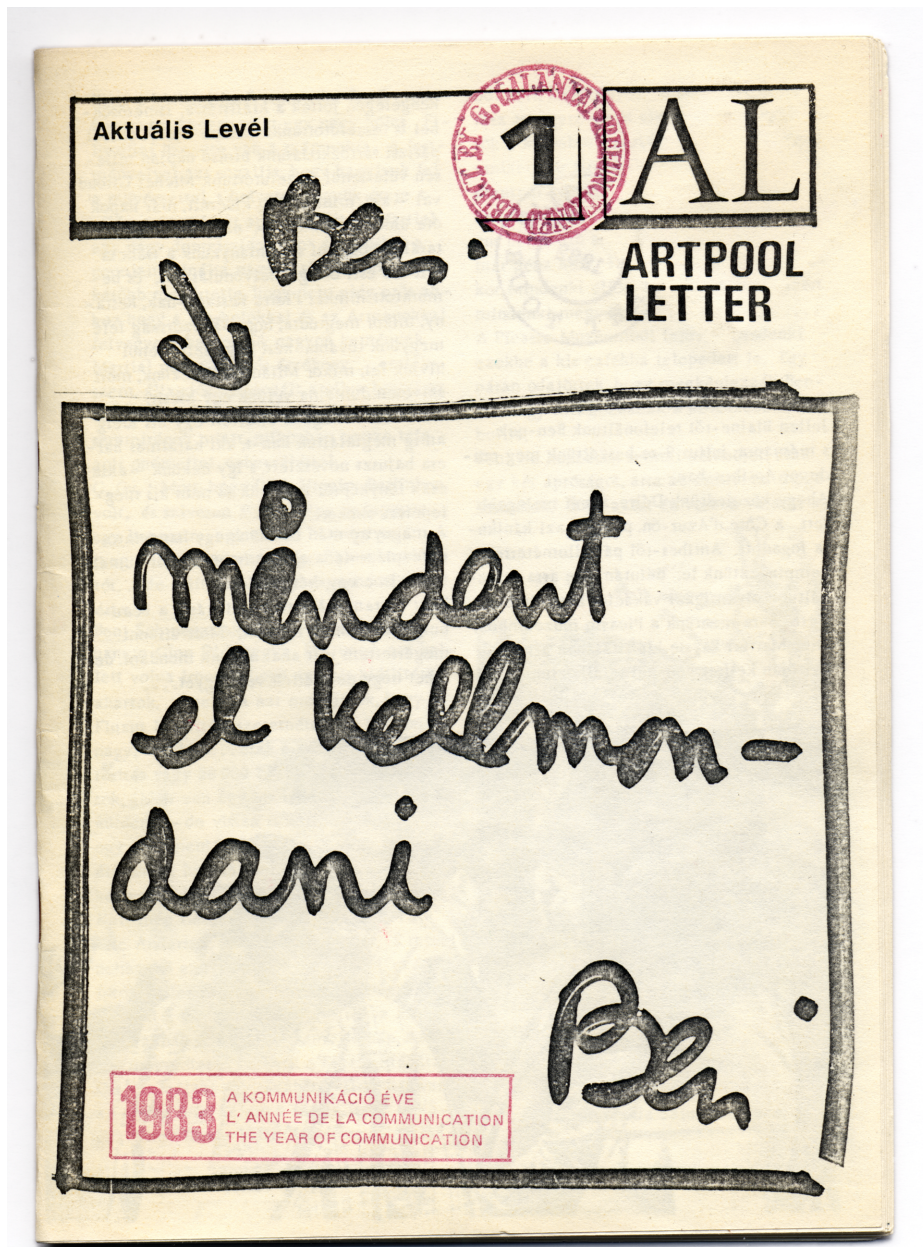
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Image courtesy of the Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest.

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Image courtesy of the Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest. Photo by György

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Image courtesy of the Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest.
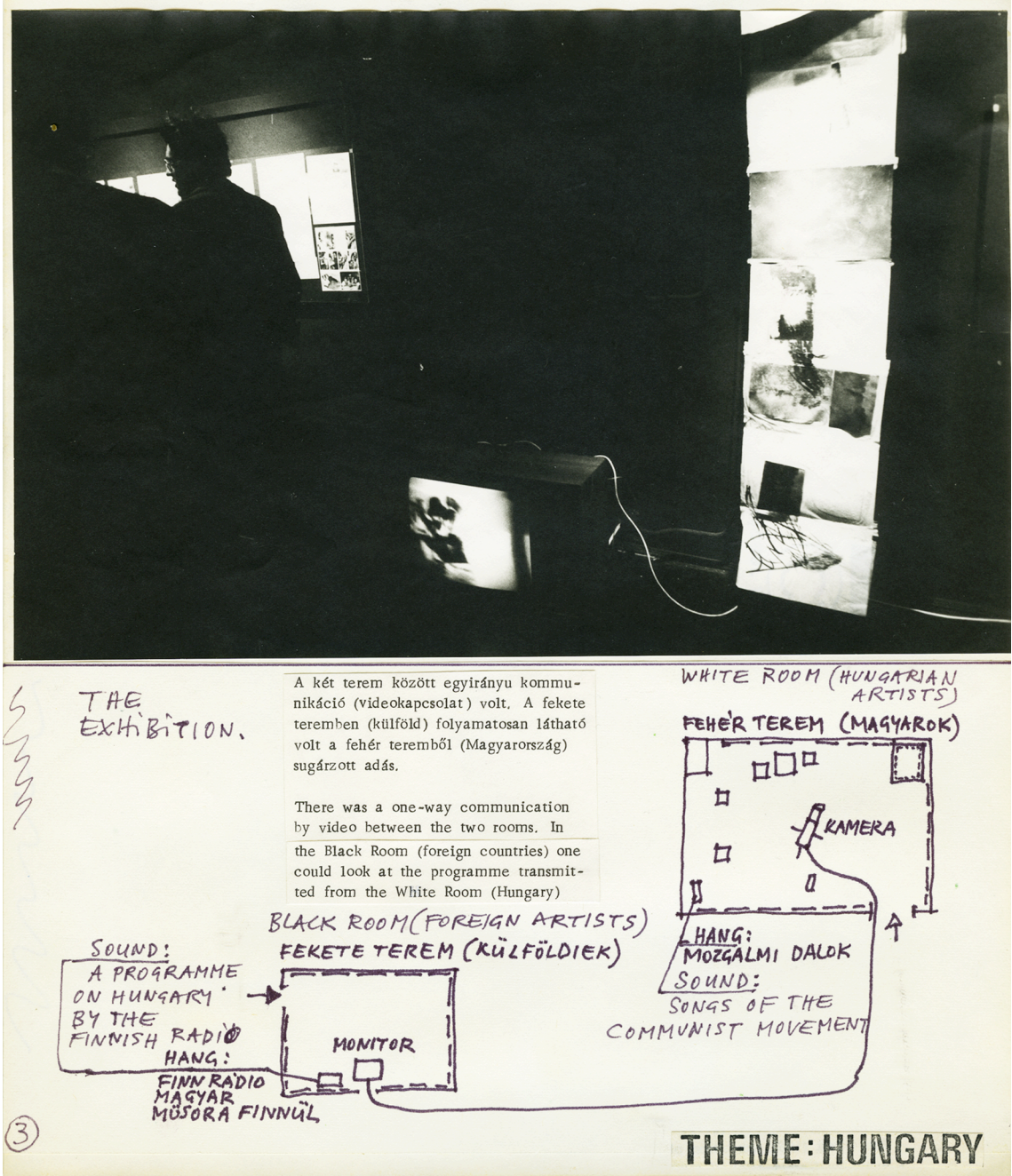
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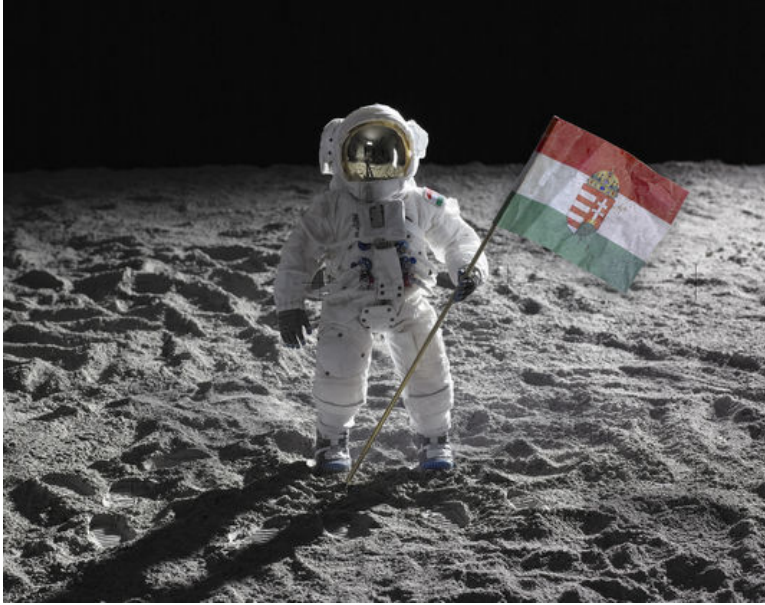http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/archive/images/

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