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Novi Sad Art Scene

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Brief orientation

Within a Yugoslav context the terms “neo-avant garde” and “new art practice” are associated with the phenomena in the periphery of the Yugoslav artistic field during the late 1960s and 1970s. These phenomena were an important part of the art scene in Novi Sad, the major city and the capital of Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. Neo-avant-garde in Novi Sad was formed through the activities of artists and art collectives that consciously broke with the poetics of socialist aestheticism that were dominant at the time. The alternative art scene evolved through new models of art communication outside, beyond and in spite of strong political support for the official culture. These new models included happenings, performances, actions and interventions, new modes of behavior and new life strategies, as well as language-based conceptual art. Regardless of the fact that artists collaborated with each other, performed together and joined informal or ad hoc groups, they did not act as a fully coherent movement nor did they formulate collective programs or create shared art platforms. Moreover, the new art practice raised ontological, epistemological and institutional issues about art, subverted traditional concepts of art and art creation, and explored the institutional character of the artist, the role and models of reception, the audience, as well as the status of galleries, museums, art critique etc. Finally, by exceeding the limits of different art disciplines, the new art practice in some cases transcended the boundaries between art and life. As far as the literary neo-avant-garde was concerned the crucial genre was poetry. Its specific feature was an experimentation with the medium of language and text, a practice subsequently classified as textualism (Uri 2000: 86). Novi Sad based artists (Vujica Rešin Tuci?, Vojislav Despotov, Judita Šalgo, Slobodan Tišma, Miroslav Mandi?, Slavko Bogdanovi?, Vladimir Kopicl, Miša Živanovi?, Janez Kocijan?i?, Branko Andri?) practiced forms of visual, concrete and conceptual poetry. They shared a critical attitude towards the literary tradition and through their work extended the boundaries of poetry as a genre.

Historical aspects

The emergence of the neo-avant-garde in Yugoslav art is linked to the wider social turmoil that swept the world in the late 1960s, particularly in the United States and Europe, and which led to a widespread reevaluation of political, cultural and everyday life. Student demonstrations, the fight for human and women's rights, the hippie movement, the sexual revolution, new forms of sociability, new patterns of behavior and lifestyle, new images and gestures of youth, all took place against a broader reactivation of left wing theory and activism that challenged the immutability of post-war civil society.

During this period Yugoslavia was open to the West and to the influence of the wider cultural and artistic trends of the time. It was in the late 1960s that the first attempts at liberalization in Yugoslav society took place. The paradigmatic voices of the new critical mind-set came from the Korčula Summer School (1963-1974), which gathered not only prominent Yugoslav philosophers, writers and artists but also the world's left-wing elite, and which grew into a prestigious international forum. The philosophical journal *Praxis* (1964-1974), which was edited by the same circle of philosophers (Milan Kangrga, Gajo Petrović, Danko Grlić, Branko Bošnjak, Rudi Supek), did not hesitate to focus their reflections on contemporary Yugoslav society and its current problems. Above all they were seeking to re-read and re-actualize Marx's original thought. The new democratic and critical orientation in the political discourse was articulated by the high-ranking officials in the SKJ (League of Communists of Yugoslavia), Mirko Tepavac, Latinka Perović, Bora Pavlović and Marko Nikezić.

It was within this context that various, mostly incoherent art activities with a more radical intention began to spread through the Yugoslav art space. The new Yugoslav art practice (a term used by Ješa Denegri who in turn borrowed it from Catherine Millet) emerged simultaneously, but also in a completely decentralized manner in Ljubljana, Novi Sad, Subotica, Zrenjanin, Zagreb and later Belgrade. The new art practice also sought to distinguish itself from the predominant artforms of the time: in contrast to the art in Western Europe and America, the new art practice confronted commercialized art which was subjected to the market and its demands. And in contrast to the Soviet Union where art reflected the structure of socialist realism as one of the key suppliers of ideology, the Yugoslav neo-avant-garde developed in opposition to "socialist aestheticism". Socialist aestheticism was a special form of moderate modernism that was actively encouraged in the former Yugoslavia. Institutionally and politically supported, this highly aestheticized and ideologically "neutral" art practice was imposed as the dominant discourse in art and culture. Against this "civilized" and politically harmless "marriage" of art and politics, a space emerged for the neo-avant-garde.

The new art practice was related to the activities of individuals and art groups centered upon cultural institutions for young people that were originally intended to promote culture and art in accordance with socialist values. The space that was granted to alternative youth culture has been termed an "institutionalized margin" by some authors (Szombathy 1988: 105). On the one hand it was a place where critical thought, subversion and experiments in art took place. On the other hand it resulted in their ghettoization. The excess that was generated in those places was only possible in an isolated and politically controlled form, something which would soon be dramatically confirmed in Novi Sad.

Interestingly, the alternative art scene in the province of Vojvodina during the 1960s and the 1970s was very much in alignment with the artistic and theoretical turbulence that was taking place around the world at this time. Previously traditional cultural spaces occupied by young people suddenly became full of artistic and critical energy, as well as social activism. Besides Novi Sad, there were artists and groups engaged with new art practice in Subotica (Bosch+Bosch group: Slavko Matković, Bálint Szombathy, Katalin Ladik and Attila Csernik) and Zrenjanin (Vujica Rešin Tucić, Vojislav Despotov, Jovica Aćin, Dušan Bijelić). That said, although the neo-avant-garde scene existed at the same time in other cities, its center was primarily in Novi Sad and ultimately, it was Novi Sad to which authors from both Subotica and Zrenjanin converged, and where the presentation of the new art was most vivid and consistent.

The center of the experimental art scene in Novi Sad was Tribina mladih (The Youth Tribune), which was led by Judita Šalgo. Tribina mladih was a cultural center in which a number of different art programs were taking place: exhibitions, artistic actions and performances (Gallery), as well as book launches, lectures and public discussions (Parket salon). It was also the place where the editorial boards of two literary journals, *Polja* and *Új Symposion* kept their offices. Tribina's editorial policies and internationalism facilitated the exchange of people and ideas among different regions of the country and abroad. Tribina's protagonists were well informed about the international art scene, although they were mainly students of humanities. Tribina was a space where different ideas intersected and where young artists could work and perform together, producing a radical new art practice.

The Gallery of Tribina mladih hosted exhibitions by Slavko Matković, Balint Sombat, Bosch+Bosch group, Goran Trbuljak, Braco Dimitrijević, Mangelos, and was also where Janez Kocijančič presented his conceptual work Aesthetic Restaurant (*Estetički restoran*). In addition, the program of Tribina included Slovenian and Croatian artists such as Tomaž Šalamun, Franci Zagorčnik, Josip Sever, Srećko Lorgar, Borben Vladović, the OHO group and many others. Zvonko Maković gave a speech about Arte Povera and conceptual art there and Miroljub Todorović did the same on Signalism and computer poetry. Katalin Ladik and Ernő Király explored the dimensions of sound. Ladik performed her phonic poetry. Traditional poetry evenings and book promotions were deconstructed by happenings and performances of Vujica Rešin Tucić and Branko Andrić. Apart from Tribina mladih, the DT 20 studio of Bogdanka and Dejan Poznanović and the Neoplanta film (Želimir Žilnik) office premises were cultural spaces where diverse critical ideas were circulating and spreading.

The self-organization of artists and their collaborations was usually done within informal or *ad hoc* groups that gathered around a common goal and thus subverted the prevailing concept of collective action and program. The groups were open, with no permanent membership, and, unlike avant-garde movements from the early 20th century, they did not gather around pre-formulated programs. As advocates of a “new sensibility”, the new art groups in Novi Sad often sought to develop alternative forms of sociability (communes).

One such group, the multidisciplinary Group KÔD was founded in 1970, at precisely the same time as the traditional art scene in Novi Sad saw the emergence of new, alternative ones. Besides the original members, Slobodan Tišma, Janez Kocijančič, Mirko Radojić, Slavko Bogdanović and Miroslav Mandić, other members such as Branko Andrić, Kis Jovák Ferenc, Peđa Vranješević joined and left the group. According to Mirko Radojić, “The first works in Novi Sad, (that were) begun as a deliberate effort to achieve something new in art, were those by the group KÔD... the group KÔD were from the start interested in language and the problems it involved, and this was reflected in all the works they produced and in all the media they used” (Radojić 1978: 36). The members of Group KÔD were engaged in conceptual poetry and analytical conceptual art, but also in critical and neo-anarchist actions and performances. Group ?) was founded in 1971 after the break-up of Group KÔD. Prior to its founding, the members of Group ?) participated in the performances of the ad hoc formed groups *January* and *February* in Novi Sad and Belgrade. The group ?) -KÔD was formed to participate in the Paris Biennale in 1971, since within Group KÔD, to whom the invitation was sent, there were disagreements in the interpretation of the strategy of art production and exhibition, as well as in the understanding of the mission of art itself.

A special role in the visibility and dissemination of ideas about new tendencies in culture at the time, and especially the art works of the literary neo-avant-garde, was played by students and the literary journals *Index*, *Polja* (Fields) and *Új Symposion* (New Symposion). At this time, the protagonists of the neo-avant-garde made up the majority of the editorial boards of these periodicals. For instance, in 1969 and 1970, the student’s journal *Index*, published the poetry and multi-genre texts of young artists and writers written in the spirit of the neo-avant-garde and the editorial board fostered mutual cooperation with artists and writers from all over Yugoslavia, primarily Slovenian Realists and conceptualists.

Likewise, the literary journal *Polja* published actual texts in the field of literary and art theory, as well as texts on structuralism, poststructuralism, and the new leftist theory etc. A special issue, no.156 from 1972, was dedicated to conceptual art with texts by Joseph Kossuth, Art & Language, and Catherine Millet. *Polja* also regularly published the poems and conceptual work of Slobodan Tišma, Vladimira Kopicl, Miroslav Mandić, Vujica Rešin Tucić, Branko Andrić, Slavko Bogdanović, Janez Kocijančič and others. In addition to the connections with the contemporary Slovenian and Croatian art scene, there was an active cooperation with artists gathered around the Hungarian-language literary journal *Új Symposion* (Katalin Ladik, Fenyvesi Ottó, Sziveri János, Kis Jovák Ferenc, Domonkos István, Tolnai Ottó). Creatively designed by Ferenc Maurits, the magazine was also published in Novi Sad and its editor-in-chief, Ottó Tolnai, had a good ear for new directions in art. Finally, Bogdanka and Dejan Poznanović published “Information about

the visual arts" regularly in *Polja* and occasionally in *Új Symposion*. They believed that information about art had reached the same rhythm as newspaper information and that a critic must turn into a chronicler if he wanted to follow events in modern art.

Another medium of expressing alternative or countercultural critique of the prevailing art establishment were underground newspapers and magazines. These forms operated on the margins of official culture and, with their non-traditional design, print runs and methods of distribution, subverted the very idea of the magazine as a medium of public communication. With their content and design, they followed multi-genre trends in art and poetry. The 1970s saw several underground newspapers published in Vojvodina. In 1971 Dušan Bijelić and Vojislav Despotov published *Neuroart, magazine of nervous art; L.H.O.O.Q.*, the journal of anarchist orientation and energy (for "permanent destruction of everything"), was founded in 1971 by Slavko Bogdanović and Miroslav Mandić, members of Group KÔD. *Pesmos*, "journal for the new art and new life" was launched by Vojislav Despotov in 1972; the magazine *Adresa* (Adress) edited by Vujica Rešin Tucić appeared in 1976 and published texts which the official journals considered unacceptable.

In 1971, ad hoc groups *January* and *February*, with various strategies of provocation, radicalized public performances within the neo-avant-garde scene. They performed twice: first with the exhibition *A Working Day of the Group January* (Radni dan grupe Januar) at Tribina mladih (in January), and the next month (in February) the group *February* performed the program *The Buffet of The New Arts* (Zakuska novih umetnosti) at Dom omladine (Youth Home) in Belgrade. The actions were becoming fiercer and more uncompromising. The participants became more and more unruly and unrestrained. Public condemnation was growing, and cultural workers, journalists, working people as well as the party and self-governing organizations were appalled.

As part of the program performed at Dom omladine, the group *February* issued An Open Letter to the Yugoslav Public (Otvoreno pismo jugoslovenskoj javnosti) which was addressed directly to the most prominent state and party officials, institutions and media. It warned against the complete bureaucratization and institutionalization of the cultural space in Novi Sad, and blamed the state for stifling creative freedom and disqualifying both contemporary artistic tendencies and young artists. The letter ended with the manifesto sentence: "Our language is the language of art and we do not want it to become a language of politics". Nevertheless, the language of art was read as the language of politics and as such had political consequences.

After the massive student demonstrations in Belgrade in 1968, the military intervention of the Warsaw Pact troops in Czechoslovakia and the Croatian Spring of 1971, the political situation worsened. In 1972, President Tito sent a letter to members of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia stating an urgent need for the strengthening of "democratic centralism". Following this, "liberal" politicians were "relieved" of their duties and removed from public life. Over the next two years, Korčula Summer School and Praxis were shut down. A somewhat similar destiny (in some cases even more dramatic) awaited the protagonists of the new art scene in Novi Sad.

Unfortunately, the heroic time of the neo-avant-garde lasted only a few years. The production of critical discourse as well as excessive and subversive actions that sought to criticize the generally accepted cultural paradigm could not go unnoticed. Nor could the movement's openness to dialogue and a freedom of expression that went beyond the local territorial framework go unpunished. The editorial boards of the periodicals were fired. Judita Šalgo and Darko Hohnjec were removed from their position as editors-in-chief at Tribina mladih. Slavko Bogdanović and Miroslav Mandić were sentenced to several months in prison for the texts they published in *Student* and *Új Symposion* in 1971. Finally, due to the scarcity of evidence, archives, lack of interest, unwillingness or the incompetence of the theory and criticism of the time, this *enfant terrible* disappeared from the public scene after the state intervention and remained underground for many years, as a subculture or a part of local urban mythology (Pantelić and Lukić 2005: 15).

Knowledge of the neo-avant-garde did not become a part of public discourse again until the late 1990s when its revaluation began. After that, a number of exhibitions of neo-avant-garde artists took place at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Vojvodina (Vladimir Kopicl, Attila Csernik, Slavko Matković, Bálint Szombathy, Vujica Rešin Tuci, Katalin Ladik, Božidar Mandić). Likewise, in recent years, the literary neo-avant-garde has aroused the interest of academic circles and has become a topic for scholarly research and a part of the university curriculum.

Avant-garde strategies

The art practice of neo-avant-garde artists in Novi Sad was nomadic in terms of genre. They used various means of artistic expression: including performance art, theme-based artistic interventions and actions, land and body art, para theatre, language based conceptual art as well as literature. For this reason, it is difficult to detach literature from other activities taking place concurrently in the world of art. As far as literature specifically is concerned, neo-avant-garde artists were mostly practicing poetry. Many of them began their artistic careers with poetry, even if they later expanded their art practice to other genres, especially to language based conceptual art. A number of meta-textual poems were written by Miroslav Mandić, Slavko Bogdanović, Branko Andrić Andrla, Miša Živanović, Vojislav Despotov and other authors, who, for a while, gathered around this poetic paradigm. The *samizdat* collection of poems *I'm mom's little sexual* (*Ja sam mamim mali seksualac*) by Branko Andrić with its unconventional image subverted the institution of authorship and the book itself. His poems deconstructed the traditional language of poetry and stepped out the canon of lyric. On the other hand, in 1970, Slavko Bogdanović published conceptual poems such as "200 Ideas" and "Tax on Transaction" ("Porez na promet") written in a ready-made manner, as well as a conceptual work "Marsh" ("Močvara") in which he progressively reduced the language to a vocal or written material by removing all the semantic layers. Miroslav Mandić, can be considered an exceptional figure in the framework of the neo-avant-garde, due to the consistency and intransigence of his artistic and life choices. His artistic practice completely occupied his life to the extent that it became an artistic life or his life a realization of his art. Apart from his early poetry published in *Index* during 1970, Mandić as well as Slavko Bogdanović, radicalized his activity through the medium of anarchist, political and quasi-poetic texts. Slavko Bogdanović published "Underground Song of the Tribina Mladih in Novi Sad" in *Student* (Belgrade) in 1971. The same year, Miroslav Mandić published in *Új symposion* "A Poem about a Film" (Pesma o filmu), defending Dusan Makavejev's film "W.R.-Mysteries of the Organism", translated into the Hungarian language by Katalin Ladik. This kind of textual practice could be described as activism of the text. Activism of the text refers to a kind of surplus value generated by the text, which transcends the domain of textuality. The text as a discursive practice gained the meaning and the power of social practice or social threat and could therefore bear similar consequences. This was confirmed by the fact that Miroslav Mandić and Slavko Bogdanović were sentenced to jail soon after these texts were published.

Nevertheless poetry had a dominant place in the artistic production of Vujica Rešin Tuci, Judita Šalgo, Slobodan Tišma and Vladimir Kopicl. According to Vujica Rešin Tuci, the poetry written within this circle of neo-avant-gardists was meant to transcend the concept of "national literature", radically breaking with traditional aspects of literary work. Neo-avant-garde poetry went beyond the boundaries of lyric poetry as a genre, and included visual and performative arts, as well as theoretical and other metalanguage discourses. Their poetic expression was non-narrative, nonmimetic, non-expressive and hybrid in terms of genre. Language as a medium became the subject and content of poetry. First it was the appearance of language, in its material dimension. Language was self-presenting, and as a sensory and graphic material, it became the subject of poetic work. Second, the poetic text developed self-reflexivity. It reflected on itself as a work of art, its own language and its textuality, as well as the world of art and the field of culture to which it belonged.

The theoretical context surrounding this textualist research in poetry relied on the linguistic turn in philosophy, which made the philosophy of language a pivotal and groundbreaking theoretical paradigm in the 20th century. It primarily referred to early Wittgenstein and his axiomatic statements in the *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* that redefined philosophy as a critique of language as well as to Wittgenstein's later work *Philosophical Investigations*, which explored the performativity of language and interpreted the world in terms of language-games. The linguistic turn in philosophy created the conceptual framework for the linguistic turn or textualism that followed in art and literature in addition to other theoretical paradigms, such as structuralism and post-structuralism. Such movements were also based on an analysis of the structure of language within artistic and literary practices. The new art practice was under a considerable influence from conceptual art. Its basic thesis was formulated within the visual arts in the early 1960s by Joseph Kosuth, but it later expanded to literature, usually creating an interspace connecting literary text and visual art, encompassing the field of philosophy and theory in a broader sense. Finally, beyond the intersection of these theoretical platforms, which generated a kind of theoretical eclecticism in the formation of the neo-avant-garde scene of Novi Sad, the influences of the historical avant-garde from the beginning of the 20th century (particularly that of Dadaism), as well as Slovenian Reism were also significant.

Despite being grouped together the literary neo-avant-garde in Novi Sad did not represent a homogeneous group of poets and artists with shared poetic and metapoetic perspectives. Rather, it was a poetic space that encompassed various kinds of textual research, from visual and concrete poetry to textual and analytical work in the domain of conceptual art.

On the one hand these inter-genre and multi-genre works in the interspace – or intersection – between poetry and visual arts could be included under the label of visual poetry. The visual investigations broke down the unity of the text with montage techniques and reduced it or supplemented it with their visual and optical aspects. This poetry often relied on the iconography of mass culture and the language of the media, adding to them a critical and political charge. Examples of such visual poetry were written by Slavko Matkovič and Attila Csernik (also as land art and body art), as well as by Branko Andrić, and Vojislav Despotov.

On the other hand, concrete poetry relied on the graphic arrangement of textual elements. The relation between words and space on a sheet of paper, the relation between the text and the blank space, became the constitutional part of the poem, such as in the poem "Delicate Skin" by Judita Šalgo:

NEŽNA KOŽA

ogrebotina opekotina razderotina presađivanje prepariranje prepovijanje
erozija erotika milovanje batinanje zabodina raselina silovanje
golicati raspaliti razapeti razvaliti uprljati oprljiti
otisci opušci ožiljci biseri ekseri kuršumi krateri
mirisna precvala skorela debela podatna opasna
raskriti kidati krpiti ljuštiti ljubiti
dodir damar čežnja zebnja jeza balzam
čvrsta rasna čista tesna smrtna
drati grepsti gristi prati
usta vulva otvor otrov
glad strah skalp
grč led prah
tre sja zri
crn zli
rez

These poetic works incorporated fragments of prose, essays and theoretical text, challenging the purity of genre. In addition, the poetry included everyday speech, popular, administrative language or forms of media. In concrete poetry, language was reduced to vocal and graphic material. Those poems enhanced the productivity of language and text and got rid of grammatical, semantic, and syntactic conventions. The words were fragmented into their vocal elements without any meaning. “Aklope / prku, /prkapo, / tu negde crko / Alan Po!”..... “O dri mu / mudr, /radupr! / Na lancu ska?e ljudski glas! /Do?i ?e neko i ponas / I glasno re?i: / PRKU PE!!”, wrote Vujica Rešin Tuci? in the poem “Alan Po”.

Often the voice and the body were equal participants in the poem. Some of Judita Šalgo`s poems, for instance “Position of literature” (Položaj književnosti) and “My Six Minutes” (Mojih šest minuta) were written as scores for public performance. The text was organized according to the inherent linguistic rules and the meaning no longer had a dominant place in the literary work. Thus, poetry became self-reflexive, reflecting and reporting on the writing process itself. Poems were frequently accompanied by metalinguistic commentaries or explanations about the genesis of the poem, as well as by guidelines for reading. Examples of such concrete poetry can be found in the works of Vujica Rešin Tuci? and Judita Šalgo.

Vujica Rešin Tuci? was certainly one of the first voices of the new poetic practice in Serbia. His book *An Egg in A Steel Shell* (1970), “was perceived as ‘a slap in the face of public taste’ not only in terms of a possible aesthetic change but also of changes aimed at modernization of the overall cultural and literary paradigm and its broader social assumptions” (Kopić 2018: 569). Tuci?’s poetry is an exceptional example of radical and excessive poetic practice, as well as linguistic and textual experiments strewn with witty language games and humor.

Judita Šalgo published three collections of poems but only one of them, *67 Minutes Out Loud* (1980), was written in the spirit of textualism. Šalgo’s poetry had a hybrid form, often as a score or a template for a performative public performance. Through metapoetic and metalinguistic observations, Šalgo questioned her own identity, status and the meaning of poetry, as well as the institution of literature. In the poem “Dictionary” she wrote: “...Ja (li?na zamenica prvog lica jednine, nominative): Judita, ro?ena Manhajm, adoptirana Šalgo, udata Mirkovi? (datum i mesto ro?enja, pol, imena roditelja vidi u Izvodu iz Mati?ne

knjige ro?enih Narodnog odbora Novi Sad, teku?i broj 116, od 27.IV 1950. (original zagubljen)...”

Generally, textual poetry sought to cast doubt on all the constituents of traditional poetry. It brought into question the institution of the lyric, the institution of literature, and finally the lyric subject itself. Despite this, this form of poetry preserved a semantic core that still dominated over the textual one. The latter would completely prevail in conceptual poetry. Conceptual poetry was based on the protocols of conceptual art. The language of art was no longer considered as a natural gift or potential. It was itself a subject of research and reflection that required and generated a theoretical approach. As such this artistic practice was not only theoretically grounded but also pervasive within theory. A work of art, reflecting on the phenomenon of poetry, became a debate on art. It primarily addressed the intellect. The text was more focused on itself than on anything else beyond the page of the paper on which it was written.

In the 1970s there were many poets with an ear for new artistic practices. They wrote poetry which explored language and tried to redefine the concept of a work of art. Still, the poetry written within the theoretical framework of conceptual art was mainly associated with the early works of Slobodan Tišma and Vladimir Kopicl. In fact the quiet presence of Slobodan Tišma was the central figure of the new art scene, and his work reformulated the models, demands and achievements, and, ultimately, the intentions of poetic creation, lyric and literature. It was the publication of the poem “As Someone” (“Kao neko”) by Tišma (*Index*, 1970, 207/208) that not only confirmed a turning point in his poetic work, but also announced the birth of a new poetic paradigm. The poem consists of a series of words, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, and paragrammatical phrases that follow one another in a numerically marked order. Here, words no longer act as a repository of meaning. The requirements of meaning, logic and narration have been eliminated and the traditional lyrical subject has been laid beyond the horizon of the text and devalued.

Vladimir Kopicl's early poetry *Aer* and *Paraphrases of the Road* completely abandoned the pattern of lyrical poetry and could equally be classified as analytical conceptual art. In a metatextual elaboration of his own work, Kopicl explored the nature of language and the (paradoxical) ontology of a conceptual work of art as a text. Metapoetic statements were adopted as an artistic material and became poetry themselves.

Typically, conceptual poetry represented only one excerpt in the poetic work of neo-avant-garde authors. There were a number of reasons for this. On the one hand, political intervention changed the social and political context, abolishing artistic gatherings and the activity of neo-avant-garde artists. On the other hand, by persistently reducing its content to a debate on art, conceptual poetry reached its limit. It faced not only the impossibility of defining the phenomenon of art and determining its ontological status beyond the activity itself, but also the impossibility of its adequate or appropriate recording.

In the following years, neo-avant-garde poetry experienced a kind of de-avant-gardisation process and opened itself up to patterns and models associated with more traditional literature. The tacit return of the lyric paradigm was defined either as a “synthetic” (Branko ?egec) or as an “eclectic” poetry (Slobodan Tišma). Nevertheless, the experience of the neo-avant-garde, interest in language, textual experiments and formal research, will remain permanently inscribed in the poetry and prose of Slobodan Tišma, Judita Šalgo, Vujica Resin Tuci? and Vladimir Kopicl.

Contents

In 1968, the Yugoslav political scene was seriously destabilized by student demonstrations. Yet, despite being a university center Novi Sad, saw almost negligible student protests. In fact, the production of critical discourse took place elsewhere: in the cultural sphere, where new generations of artists were catching up with the rules of the traditionally established art and literary scene. Their radical textual practice was developing across various art disciplines and different literary genres, and in doing so challenging

mainstream patterns of literature and lyric poetry. According to Zoran Erić, there is evidence that shows the swift reception of new radical art practice in the highest national institutions of culture. For instance, the first exhibition of conceptual art was held in 1971 in the Gallery of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade : *Examples of Conceptual Art in Yugoslavia* (Primeri konceptualne umetnosti u Jugoslaviji). Even though this is true regarding visual arts, the literary neo-avant-garde remained on the margins of the institution of literature and predominately went unrecognized by the literary criticism and theory of the time as well as in public discourse. On the other hand, new strategies in poetic praxis that sought to break through the codified genre system, relativized the literary canon, as well as the power relations, historical values and traditions that supported it. For this very reason, the first critical voices came from within the cultural establishment provoking the severe and far-reaching response of the political structure that erased the new art practice from the Novi Sad art scene.

Politically speaking, the Yugoslav neo-avant-garde was more leftwing than the political and cultural establishment of the time. It did not question the principal postulates on which socialist society was based, but instead, confronted with socialism's current bureaucratized forms, called for a more authentic reading and application of these principles.

Nevertheless, radicalization was uncompromising precisely in the field of art. Using a number of genres, art sought to break through its professional framework: it stepped out of traditional exhibition spaces and occupied the so-called "places of temporality" (Bago 2010: 104) in private or public space: squares, streets, balconies and basements, and the environment in general. The artistic process was demystified and democratized. It included a much wider range of participants: students of literature, linguistics, art history etc. Visual arts, linguistics, literature, philosophy, conceptual art equally participated in determining the field of art.

Conceptual art introduced new ways of thinking about art and encompassed a multitude of heterogeneous artistic practices and disciplines. A work of art was far more than an aesthetic object; it could be a process, an event, an action, a performance, a poem, a behavior ... Moreover, it could even be invisible. In the realm of literature, neo-avant-garde artists transferred their experience in conceptual art to the field of poetry. This textual practice, which affected poetic procedures, sought to produce a radical change within the poetic paradigm. Conceptual poetry redefined the usual features of poetry, metaphors, imagination, and emotional expression and challenged the traditional understanding of the meaning of poetry, as well as the traditional values system at its base.

Ultimately, the democratization of art that transcended the boundaries of art as an autonomous sphere, identified art with life and spilled over into a much wider space than was traditionally occupied by art. While the historical avant-garde of the 1920s challenged the value system of civil society and its claims to universality, the neo-avant-garde whittled down the utopian dreams and demands of the historical avant-garde. Utopian projections of society were replaced by a focus on individual life, the pathos of large oppositions was replaced by the tactics of displacement or micro-utopia. Hence, artistic and political activism were understood as a strategy of living and as a kind of demeanor. Art did not depict life but sought to be life itself. Therefore, the artistic body operated as a political body, and art itself became biopolitics. This idea took on a radical form in Slobodan Tišma's decision following the intervention of the state, to cease public performances and instead dedicate himself to *invisible art*.

Ultimately, the political attitude of the new artistic practices, initially provoked by the conditions within Yugoslav society and its culture at the time, gained a new quality in equating art and life. The art that those practices were producing in their universalist and excessive demand outmaneuvered every policy that was intended to either maintain the existing power structures or establish new ones. It was because of this very intemperance, which refused to comply with the rules of the current political and social system or perhaps with the rules of any system, that the new artistic currents had to be ruthlessly silenced.

Finally, it is equally important to note that, regardless of the fact that only a few women were active within the neo-avant-garde scene of Novi Sad (Bogdanka Poznanovi?, Judita Šalgo, Katalin Ladik and Ana Rakovi?), this was a time when the position of female artists in the predominantly male art world was first raised in Vojvodina. Female artists researched the relationship between the political and the personal, the specific female experience, women's routines, their body and sexuality. This was impressively demonstrated in Katalin Ladik's performances which, as an extension of her female identity, can be classified as subversive feminist practices.

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