

CONTRA AESTHETIC: THE STRUGGLE FOR THE NEW ART IN POST 1968
BELGRADE, YUGOSLAVIA

by

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B.A., The University of Belgrade, 1983

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 2002

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Abstract

In the late 1960s Yugoslavian artistic production underwent radical change prompted by the emergence of a "New Art," which pursued the "dematerialization" of the art object. This enterprise necessitated new artistic approaches, methods and media, and challenged the very assumptions of established artistic discourse, rendering codified modernist art into the realm of obsolescence.

Modernist art and architecture was adopted by the Titoist regime after Yugoslavia broke with Stalinist Soviet Union in 1948, initially as a sign of difference from that regime. Indeed during the fifties, modernism was a trope of progress. Formalist modernism was a potent ideological tool for the Titoist regime during the Cold War in Yugoslavia, which, playing the role of a buffer zone between the two adversary blocks, was considered an open country. While offering an aestheticized picture of reality detached from everyday life, formalist modernism became, in effect, the officially sanctioned artistic vocabulary.

The tension between the new art and modernism manifested itself primarily in the conception of the individual and in the relationship between artistic practice and everyday life. In a radical shift, the new art practitioners promoted practices and forms of representation that destabilised an autonomous creator by introducing local narratives and active spectators. The bureaucrats concerned with artistic production in established institutions of art such as the Academy of Art understood this approach as an intervention into the official image of reality. After the outburst of students' discontent in 1968, the officials opened "The Student Cultural Centre" as a safety valve under the banner of accommodating "experiments in art." From the very beginning this institution fostered the wide array of cultural activities and became a "cult" space among the youth. Although it is reasonable to suppose that the regime's hidden agenda was to ghettoize the "New Art," the Student Cultural Centre, served to transform the art scene in Belgrade.

In my thesis I address the socio-historical reasons that prompted this shift in the sphere of art production. The Belgrade artistic scene in the early seventies was split between canonized modernism and a periphery reserved for new art practices. The 19th century building housing Student Cultural Centre was the site where proponents of conceptual art struggled against the entrenched modernist canon by introducing new methods and media. In the analysis of new art practices I follow the work of the two artists, Marina Abramovic and Zoran Popovic, whose activity epitomized this struggle at the turn of the seventies.

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Acknowledgments

I wish to thank my professors Serge Guilbaut and Rose Marie San Juan for their guidance and support. I am grateful to Serge Guilbaut whose ideas and insightful critiques have been invaluable for the completion of this thesis. His cutting edge comments and instructions proved to be essential for the project. I would like to express my deepest thanks to Rose Marie San Juan whose incisive critical thought not only helped to sharpen my insights, but also to shape my understanding. I would also like to thank my colleagues and friends, among which my special thanks go to Ailie Finely, Ann Shelton and Jasmina Karabeg. I am profoundly indebted to the artist Zoran Popovic for his willingness to share his ideas, comments and memories.

I dedicate this project to my family, friends and other Belgraders who, by using the practice of walking in the city, changed their lives.

Section I

Introduction

Rely solely on a living intercourse between people,
Uninhibited by objects and hierarchical structures.
– A. Mazaev, *Mass festivities of the 1920's*¹

In April of 1999, a high rise building in New Belgrade, a representative example of the International Style from the early 1960s, was badly damaged by NATO bombing. (Fig.1.) This building, which was a headquarters of the Yugoslav Communist Party during their rule in Yugoslavia between 1945 and 1988, can be seen as an epitome of the modernist aesthetic employed by this regime in the domain of architecture, monuments and art. Metaphorically speaking, NATO with its unprecedented air attack radically finished the job begun and successfully conducted by young artists from the late 1960s and early 1970s, whose work was devoted to changing the paradigm by denouncing modernism and its widespread legacy in Yugoslav art.

In the spring of 1972, twenty-seven years before the aforementioned bombing, Marina Abramovic executed the work of art, *Sound Environment: Sonorous Space –Birds Chirping* (Fig.2.) by placing the taped sound of birds chirping in the branches of a tree in front of the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade. People who found themselves at that moment in front of the building could hear the birds' chirping coming from the branches above their heads. It was April, and the birds' song sounded virtually identical to the kind of singing one would expect on a typical spring day. But was it so? Passers-by would have been very surprised to learn that what they had heard was not the chirping of the live birds, but taped sound. Furthermore, their surprise would be even greater if they

discovered that this chirping was a work of art belonging to the art movement which would later be designated by art critics as the 'New Art Practice.'²

The new art, which emerged at the turn of the seventies in the form of various artistic practices such as performance, environments, installations or textually based works, was concerned with "the concept or idea" and "dematerialization of art object."³ There is all likelihood to assume that the unsuspecting public encountering Marina Abramovic's piece *Birds Chirping* did not recognize it as a work of art since their artistic experience was formed under the influence of a different artistic paradigm. The governing artistic paradigm promoted by the communist regime was a modernist aesthetic, today defined by contemporary art critics as 'socialist modernism,'⁴ which was a blend of mild geometric abstraction, associative abstraction, *informel* and new figuration. If one takes Marina Abramovic's 1972 artwork, *Sound Environment: Birds Chirping*, (Fig.2) as an early example for the new art practice in Belgrade, it might be said that, as the early birdsong announces the spring, Abramovic's *Birds Chirping*, had announced new concepts in this art scene as well as in politics.

What I would like to discuss here are the paradoxical circumstances that provided the conditions for the whole set of new art practices to come to fruition in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In other words, to explicate how the substitution of the image of a cube belonging to the modernist aesthetic of abstraction for a work of art – birds' song – belonging to conceptual art, radically changed Yugoslav art scene.

Together with Marina Abramovic's work *Birds Chirping*, Zoran Popovic's multimedia piece *Axioms*, reflected this change in most overt way. (Fig.3.) The *Axioms* was displayed during the exhibition of the *Group of Six Artists* at the Student Cultural

Centre Gallery in October 1972. This multimedia project comprises different media application: drawings, prints, film, slides, theoretical explanations, photos, videotapes and performance – consisting of light-movement-sound-rhythm. The *Axioms*, in which eight basic geometrical forms are visually restated in different media: linocut, photograph, film, video, slide projection, includes also the artist's presence in the room where this piece is displayed. The artist performs eight gestures in a completely darkened room, filled with intense sound. (Fig.4.)

The piece *Axioms* laid bare the tensions between the new art and socialist modernism. In his article "For Self-Management in Art" (1975), the artist writes:

Art must be negative, critical of the external world as well as its own language, its own artistic practice. It is absurd and hypocritical to be committed, to speak and act on behalf of political and economic freedom, and on the other hand to be passive in relation to the system of the "universal" values of art, i.e., to the system which provides the basic condition for the existence of the artistic bureaucracy and along with it unbelievable star-plundering.⁵

The "universal" values of art based on the principle of logocentrism in thinking and artistic attitudes, was the point of division between the new art and socialist modernism. What the *Axioms* proposed was "complication" of art with life, that is, the introduction of different "non-artistic" forms, photograph, film and video in the production of art, as well as broadening the scope of the artistic production with the inclusion of audience.

In the early seventies, when the New Art emerged as a movement, the Yugoslav art scene was a conglomeration of modernist trends in sculpture and painting, stretching from geometric and associative abstraction, *informel* to the new figuration. (Fig.5.). Socialist modernism, which had evolved in the surroundings of the Yugoslav communist society immediately after World War II was adopted by the ruling communist strata as an

‘almost compulsory aesthetic.’⁶ A series of factors brought the codified modernism into being. Among these were the break with the Soviet Union and Stalinism in 1948, the creation of the “new class” or the “red bourgeoisie” designated as such by students during their protest in 1968, and the development of the artistic scene which was ready to respond to the changes in the official attitude towards art.

The break with Stalinism in 1948 was certainly the crucial cause for the introduction of modernism. The Titoist regime was keen to have visible signs of differentiation from the Soviet Union and its visual trope, socialist realism. Thus in the moment when it became obvious that the alliance with the Soviets had collapsed, Yugoslav communists put the visual into the service of politics. Although it may seem that the outcome of this clear-cut division, socialist art vs. modernism, in Yugoslavia had its clear resolution, this was not the case. Modernism in Yugoslavia came about through a series of complex negotiations with the ruling stratum in the form of a theoretical dispute between the two opposing factions, which can roughly be described as Realism vs. Modernism.⁷ The so-called ‘Conflict on the Literary Left’ – a heavily charged series of discussions within Yugoslav political left during the 1930s, focusing on the issues of social engagement of art, its role in revolutionary practice and its potentially autonomous nature – became the base for the postwar theoretical conflict.⁸

In the early 1950s the modernist option had won and modernism was enforced in Yugoslavia. What kind of modernist aesthetic was implemented and from which modernist tradition this art had derived is the problematic that Zoran Popovic treats in the article “Critique of Art Mechanisms in Belgrade, Yugoslavia”, written in 1975-76.⁹ What Popovic underlines here is that during the 1950s “...socialist realism was substituted by a

retarded artistic concept.” By subsuming the ‘modernist trends’ in art during the 1950s and 1960s such as “... lyric abstraction, painting of matter, some forms of fantastic art, surrealism, new figuration, etc.” under the notion of the ‘*intimism*,’ the author relates them to the experience of the “Parisian School”. In Popovic’s words, “The history of the very condensed power of *intimism* begins in the period between the two World Wars.” It was during this period that the artistic orientations of “... postimpressionism, postcezanism, expressionism and fauvism were dominant.”¹⁰

In his analysis of art mechanisms in Belgrade, Popovic infers that after WWII this ‘intimistic’ sensibility of the art scene evolved and included itself within all the trends mentioned above which showed strong susceptibility to this kind of aesthetic. These trends in many cases were in effect copies of modernist styles resulting in art that was “anemic and unquestioning.”¹¹ Thus, in Zoran Popovic’s words, the “intimistic consciousness” governed the art scene throughout the whole postwar period up to the new art. Along with shaping the art scene, modernist art substantially influenced the Academy teaching programmes. Popovic asserts in the article that “The Academies of Fine Arts systematically enforce and repeat in their work with students the terminology, methodology and ideology of the spectacular unconflictual art of Paris.” Or, as Bojana Pejic puts it in her article “Socialist Modernism and the Aftermath,”

Modernist art in Serbia never actually reached a totally anionic stadium, that is, it never fulfilled the modernistic, evolutionist dream of “pure abstract” or zero form. It merely remained – *une abstraction bavarde*.¹²

In the next section we will see how the communist political and artistic bureaucracies put the modernist aesthetic to work towards their own ends.

The new art from the late 1960s and early 1970s was the first artistic concept in the communist Yugoslavia which was not based on negotiation with the ruling elite and its artistic bureaucracy. On the contrary, its existence depended on the sole engagement of young artists, who, by turning against socialist modernism and its proponents (academy professors-artists, state-artists, art institutions, academies and galleries) promulgated a new artistic *persona* as the centre of the artistic interest.¹³ The formation of a new subjectivity through the “new art” was based on a complete rejection of the modernist idiosyncratic inclinations towards self-expression in art. But how was it possible to abolish self-expression in art, and simultaneously to create a new artistic *persona*? The rejection of the modernist concept of self-expression entailed, what Boris Groys would call, a “grammatical distance”¹⁴ from the artist’s own work. The new art practitioners understood and carried out art as an inquiry into lifelike art, raising the question of the creative process as the “lived experience.”¹⁵ I shall discuss the new subjectivity and its relation to the problematic of self-expression in art later.

In this context, the new art produced a new understanding of art that asserted an asymmetry and imbalance on the centrality of painting and sculpture in socialist modernism. It introduced different possibilities of the artistic expression as performance art, and explored the extensive usage of the “new” media in art such as video, film and photography. Art of performance brought about a shift in the meaning of art. It promoted the dialogue “not with art but with everything else,”¹⁶ by changing the artistic objectives from the concerns with autoreferentiality embodied in aesthetic values to the concerns with ethic embodied in the “social aspect”¹⁷ of the performance work.

If the new art is to be seen as driven by the cluster of different and diversified connections among its participants, i.e., artists, audience and art critics, it is important to emphasise that it "...drew attention to the complex relationship between artistic concept, art object, and medium of presentation,"¹⁸ as well as to the context in which the work of art had been produced. This attitude directly confronted codified modernism and its artistic concept that removed both, the work of art and its viewer, from the context in which the work was produced and consumed. As Jesa Denegri, the critic of the time puts it: "The ubiquitous 'metaphysics' of traditional art, whose alleged purpose is to justify the subconscious roots of artistic activity has been abandoned..."¹⁹ Along with it exclusivity and originality of the art production as the basic premise of modernist art has also been abandoned. Keeping with this, the modernist concept of the art object as a site of representation that "reproduces a regime of subjectivity"²⁰ controlling both the work of art and its reception, was deconstructed. This modernist concept was substituted with the concept of fragmented, uncontrollable art process produced within the new regime of subjectivity intrinsically dependent on the reception coming from an engaged viewer – a participant in the art process.

In this situation, the context of the artistic production in the new art served as a vehicle for the inclusion of the spectator's agency. It meant that the new art, with its requirement for an active engagement on the part of both the artist and the viewer stood in opposition to the "disinterested perception"²¹ of the aesthetic concerns in art favoured by the codified modernism. Since the new art questioned the very basis of modernist discourse as it was employed in the Yugoslav art scene, its aestheticism and symbolic language which too often served "...as a good vehicle for the ideological misuse of

art...,²² the consequence was its marginalisation. As Zoran Popovic put it, the wide web of galleries was closed to the new art display, except, the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade, the Gallery of Contemporary Art Zagreb, the Gallery Nova and the Gallery of the Student Centre in Zagreb (today Croatia).²³

Thus, the new art was compelled to embrace the situation of the 'compulsory freedom', enforced by the system which showed an amazingly huge capacity for adopting change in any aspect of social life by ignoring it. The communist bureaucracy applied precisely the same strategy in the situation of the student protest of June 1968.²⁴ The new art in Belgrade was substantially tied with the Student Cultural Centre (Fig.6.) whose founding in July of 1968 was connected and/or conditioned by the student protest in June of 1968. In this political configuration the SKC²⁵ operated as the space of a 'compulsory freedom' bestowed upon young intelligentsia by the ruling bureaucracy as a 'safety valve.'

Sharp opposition of the new art and modernist art brought about the differentiation and identification of exhibition spaces. While modernist art was displayed at the official sites such as museums and galleries, the new art works in Belgrade were performed and exhibited at the SKC Gallery and at some other non-official sites, such as the Visual Art Section of an annual theater event BITEF.²⁶ It might be argued that this situation, which on the one hand alienated the new art from the domestic general public, on the other hand reflected the mainstream artistic concerns of the western world. Not only did the new art treat acute artistic problems of the time such as the art object and its status, art work and its context, art process or body as a bearer of various socio-political and artistic contents, but it also prefigured the system of a coherent Yugoslav art scene.

The art scene underwent massive changes related to the inclusion of other professions in the production of art.²⁷ Individuals who carried out new art practices used the avant-garde collectivist strategy as a form of their artistic activity. A considerable number of groups that mushroomed in Serbia (*Bosch&Bosch, Kod, Group143*, to list a few) were formed by different professionals like poets, engineers or mathematicians. In this way the concept favoured by Joseph Beuys which argued that anybody, regardless of his or her profession could be an artist became reality.

Unlike the majority of other groups, the members of the *Group of Six* from Belgrade (Marina Abramovic, Zoran Popovic, Rasa Todosijevic, Slobodan Milivojevic, Nesa Paripovic and Gergelj Urkom) were artists trained within the academic discourse. (Fig. 7.) I shall concentrate on the work of two artists from the group – Marina Abramovic and Zoran Popovic – in order to discuss their anti-modernist position and avant-garde strategy, which eventually led to their total rejection of socialist modernism concepts. Marina Abramovic explains their group strategy in an interview: “At that time, our work was against all the norms to such an extent that it was only possible to work in the group.”²⁸

Given the fact that the new art in Belgrade was part of a broader Yugoslav artistic arena, it is worth noting that the situation in the country at large showed the same signs of exhaustion visible in the repetition of old modernist patterns. The configuration of the Yugoslav art scene in the early seventies reflected its geopolitical setting, i.e., the federation in which the three most prominent centres, Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, were the sites of new artistic practices. As all of these centres lived under different social and artistic circumstances in terms of their local and national specificities, the new art had its

different forms of practice. As opposed to the present situation, the communication among the artists and exchange of exhibitions among the cities throughout Yugoslavia in the early 1970s was fully developed. In fact, it has to be seen as part of the widespread web of contacts among different artists, which corresponded to "... a rapid exchange of information and to the establishment of international networks of contacts and friendships."²⁹

The aim of this thesis is to explore the meaning of the individuality that enabled the new art practitioners to employ local narratives in their work and to successfully carry out the struggle against socialist modernism. The sequence of events tell us that the different mode of artistic expression had begun its radical advent (at least in Belgrade) after the student protest in June of 1968. Although it has been acknowledged in Serbian art criticism that the events of 1968 facilitated and even accelerated the appearance of new art practices, the emergence of the new individuality has not been discussed in connection with the student protest.

I hope that I will show how the new notions of individuals fractured the monolithic system of the codified modernism. The new art practitioners introduced the concept of the independent individual not subjected to the paternalistic art scene governed by the unchangeable hierarchy of administrative centers 'above,' which promoted obsolete, codified and entrenched modernism. Their proponents, among them the most influential state-artists and professor-artists belonging to socially privileged group, used their positions to keep the *status quo*. They monopolised 'freedom of artistic creation' and turned themselves into artistic bureaucrats, who stood for the values of the communist bureaucracy with whom they shared power. The new art encountered and

struggled against this kind of power while promoting the new concepts in art. The new art practitioners developed a practice of permanent public execution of their works with the goal of freeing the artistic production from metaphorical connotations through direct engagement with the public. The author of the catalogue to the exhibition *Materials 73*, asserts that their goals comprise following interests: experiment as the basis for the investigation of the possibilities and domains of art; interdisciplinary approach as a method in erasing the formal boundaries among different arts; the use of all accessible technological devices, with the emphasis on the exploration of their possibilities; exploration of the senses and thought in communication; direct mental communication with the viewer.

The artists who carried out the project of the new art operated with mechanisms which cannot be followed without examining the nature of modernism in Yugoslavia. The questions to ask would be, how and by what means was Socialist Realism with its connotations of the engagement with the left abandoned by this communist society, in favour of the modernist aesthetic with its capitalist connotations? What tactic was employed by the communist ideologues in providing a legitimization of this passage from Socialist Realism to Modernism?

While investigating these matters, it is important to bear in mind that the individual in Yugoslav communist society was comprehended as stable and self-contained. Let me explain this by making a parallel between the position of the individual in Yugoslav communism and in the Soviet Union. The subordination to party control was the practice that governed both communist societies, but the levels and the scope of this subordination differed. In addition to the fact that Yugoslav communism and its system

of party control exerted less pressure on the individual, the Leninist program of social change that required subordination of the individual to collective life³⁰ was almost entirely shunned in Yugoslavia. As opposed to Soviet society, which, in Boris Groys words during the Brezhnev era "...excluded any form of self-expression, be it artistic or political...",³¹ Yugoslav communist utopia operated on the premise of self-expression. The very concepts of self-expression and originality were presuppositions for the introduction of the modernist aesthetic after the break with Stalin in 1948.

Yet the tensions between the new art and socialist modernism at the turn of the 1970s were manifested precisely in these realms of self-expression and originality. It was the new art that destabilized socialist modernism and its master narrative based on the notion of the artist-genius and its homogeneous individual. By introducing the factor of volatility in the 'eternal' system of socialist modernism, the new art envisioned the need for constant reestablishing of subjectivity.

Scholarly work on the subject of the new art is limited, comprising a seminal book-catalogue from 1978 and two other survey books.³² With hindsight bearing the risk of oversimplification, it might be said that the common theoretical position of the authors comprised by the aforementioned publications operate in the domain of preserving an autonomous status of art, with limited excursions into historical circumstances.

Section II

The Cold War Profiteers³³

It is not an exaggeration to say that modernism in Yugoslavia came about as a product of two conflicts: the first one was international and involved a theoretical debate over issues concerning the application of communist ideology, and the second one was a domestic quarrel over the application of ideology in the arts. The first one ended as the well-known break with the Soviets in 1948, the second as the victory of modernism during the fifties. These two conflicts were based on two different concepts of the individual.³⁴

International conflict with the Soviets, such as the one that occurred between the two communist countries, was a conflict between two authoritarian systems. The position of the individual in both countries at the time was somewhat comparable as it was a seemingly stable one, predetermined by the social hierarchical scheme.³⁵ This meant that the personal freedom depended on the position of the individual in the party hierarchical structure.³⁶ The other conflict occurred within Yugoslavia in the sphere of culture. This conflict which was possible due to the break with Russian communism, brought forth in the sphere of culture a 'westernized' type of individual with her or his legitimate rights of freedom of artistic expression.

The dispute with the Soviets in 1948 was actually a struggle between two types of cult, the cult of Tito and the cult of Stalin.³⁷ This struggle was wrapped up in the story of a search for a "distinctive national path to socialism."³⁸ The Yugoslav communist

establishment perpetuated this ideological disagreement with the Soviets over different routes to socialism. This disagreement would eventually serve them as a mask for different purges conducted in the name of the Party and its ideological purity.

The Yugoslav communist authorities saw legitimate reasons for refusing to take a subordinate position. Yugoslav communism was the only genuine communism other than the USSR's among the countries of the Communist Bloc. In the Yugoslav communists' opinion this 'pedigree' position was acquired due to their respectable contribution to the forces – both allied and Russian – that fought against fascism during WWII (Churchill supported Yugoslav partisans by sending military envoys and weapons during the war because of their effectiveness in fighting Germans). In addition, there was a strong communist movement in Yugoslavia before the war that culminated in their victory over Yugoslav royal forces during the war. The knowledge that their communism was not imported as in other countries of the Eastern bloc, furnished Yugoslav communists, immediately after the war, with the construction of their country as the "... 'eldest brother' in the Eastern European family, led by the paternal Soviet Union."³⁹

But it was not only that the Yugoslav communist establishment perceived itself as second in the rank, next to the Soviets, they also tried to find a way of realising their territorial and political claims. Tito's undisputed authoritarian position in his own country, in combination with these territorial and political claims, elevated his own and Yugoslav communists' aspirations. Immediately after the war, in 1946, Tito was pressing Yugoslav national claims to Trieste so vehemently, that USSR, after backing Tito at the beginning of the crisis, had to warn him to behave responsibly in order not to aggravate the tense situation between the blocs.⁴⁰ That was the first international crisis in which

Tito's adventurous, premature and provocative anti-Western Cold War attitude made him appear transformed from an imitator of the Soviet model, into a leader.

The next crisis that added to that picture, was Tito's "patronage of project for a large Balkan federation that was supposed to include Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Albania, and eventually Communist Greece..."⁴¹ Although this project has never been realised, many historians agree that the idea of the Balkan federation was understood by the Soviets as a direct threat to their hegemony, and became an important factor in the Yugoslav-Soviet schism in 1948. Thus, the final blow to the Tito-Stalin relationship – the expulsion of the Yugoslav Communist Party from the Cominform in June of 1948 – came as a cosmetic gesture. Rothschild and Wingfield's remark, that it is important "...to bear in mind that Stalin broke with Tito, not vice versa,"⁴² speaks of Stalin's dissatisfaction with Tito's arrogant stance⁴³ in pursuing the Yugoslav special way to socialism. But why was Tito's decision so annoying to the Soviets?

The main reason lay in the domain of the application of ideology and economic measures. Yugoslav Communists claimed for themselves the correct interpretation of Marxist-Leninist doctrine, and accused the Soviets of chauvinistic imperialism in their foreign policy, and for bureaucratic despotism in their internal affairs. By claiming the rightfulness in the application of ideology, the Yugoslavs saw themselves as "...the isolated and unique island of 'pure' socialism."⁴⁴ In addition, the line of differentiation between Yugoslav communism and the Soviets cut across the theorization of the individual position in a society and, combined with it, the notion of individualism. These distinctions were suppressed during the incubation of the Tito-Stalin rift, immediately after the war, when Yugoslavs tried blindly to imitate the Soviet model. However, they

came into the open after the break with Stalin, when Yugoslavia changed course and turned gradually to the West.

The changes, which were executed primarily in the domain of the economy, were prompted by the isolation imposed upon Yugoslavia by the Soviets in 1948, who used these measures as a 'whip' for straightening out the Yugoslav's deviations in understanding communist ideology. Needless to say the Soviet's economic sanctions were aimed at hitting the Yugoslav economy hard, but the effects of these measures were limited, for Titoist communism appeared much more vital and versatile than the Russians expected. Namely, Tito and his comrades changed their over ambitious five year economic plan into more feasible one, and abandoned the program of collectivization in agriculture which was the direct imitation of the Soviet policy. This change in agriculture policy had far-reaching consequences in all domains of social life.

At the heart of the practice of collectivization in Russia lay the Leninist conception of the individual. In New World Disorder, Ken Jowitt puts it in this way: "... the Leninist program of social change has been the substitution of the individual for the corporate group as the social and cultural base of social action and identification."⁴⁵ Jowitt points out that Leninism's attitude towards the individual is ambivalent. While the Leninist theory evaluates positively the individual's historical emergence, at the same time it negatively evaluates "individualism."⁴⁶ By quoting Trotsky, who praised "the progressive side of individualism... (the expression of critical views, the development of one's own opinion, the cultivation of personal dignity),"⁴⁷ Ken Jowitt stresses that Trotsky at the same time rejects "... the bourgeois institutional framework historically associated with it."⁴⁸

Although the suppression of the autonomous public realm in Yugoslavia continued after the break with the Soviet bloc, as well as the subordination of the individual to the collective, i.e. the “charismatic impersonalism”⁴⁹ of the Communist Party, the economic strategy based on an “ingenious error leading to collectivization-industrialization”⁵⁰ was abandoned. The process of collectivization in agriculture in Yugoslavia could not have been successful, because the *petit* bourgeois element, with its ‘owner’s’ philosophy, stubbornly persisted through all the postwar years of pressure and even in some cases, torture, imposed by the Party upon the ‘*petit* bourgeois owner’ and peasantry. It might be said that the collapsed process of collectivization sowed the germ of freedom, for land ownership in Yugoslavia was limited, but never abolished.

The genesis of the process of liberalization can be followed from the crisis that erupted between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in 1948. In the moment when the Russians threatened Yugoslav independence, Titoist Yugoslavia found the space for political maneuvering in the bipolar cold-war world by turning to the adversary bloc. The American attitude was to preserve Yugoslav integrity and to support Tito as an independent heretic in the communist sphere.⁵¹ From that point on Titoist Yugoslavia becomes, as Predrag J. Markovic put it in his Ph.D. thesis Belgrade between East and West, ‘the profiteer of the Cold War.’ Markovic writes in the conclusion of the book:

After 1948 the regime had to search for support in the population, and culture. But, the very foundations of the system, Party monopoly on political life, and state monopoly in economy, were only slightly modified. All reform attempts were stopped, when they had dared to question these bases of power. So, Yugoslav culture and everyday life were almost entirely westernized, but political life and economy remained basically eastern.⁵²

This political situation had far-reaching consequences for the position of the individual. The process of questioning the position of the individual in Yugoslav society after the break with the Soviets in 1948 was certainly undertaken under the influence of the Western democracy that came into play during the years of crisis in the early 1950s. Towards the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, Yugoslavs came to define themselves as "...a country with open borders, free circulation of people, a general liberalisation of lifestyles, introduction of market elements into the economy, intensive exchange with the world in all disciplines and free artistic expression."⁵³ The notion of free artistic expression as a specific form of self-expression is important for the further discussion since this very notion served as a theoretical basis for the introduction of modernism.

Socialist Modernism as a Space of Illusionary Freedom⁵⁴

At this point it is important to juxtapose the picture of the individual's position in the West, with the one which has already been suggested in the Eastern bloc. Across the ocean, during the years that followed the war, there was a sense that "... America was ready to lead the newly liberated world into the 'American century.'"⁵⁵ As the flip side of the Cold War coin, the American expansionistic goals did not differ from the Russians. What differed was a method based on an ideology of democracy and the autonomous position of the individual. As opposed to Leninism, which acknowledged the individual's historical emergence, but divorced it from individualism, Americans used the notion of individualism as their ideological weapon against Soviet authoritarianism during the Cold War.⁵⁶

While investigating the individual's position in American Modernism and its importance for the conjuncture of art and politics in the first years of the Cold War in How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art, Serge Guilbaut asserts that "There was also an important shift from critical studies of the artist's alienation (a radical notion connected with society) to studies of neuroses (connected with the individual)."⁵⁷ Guilbaut concludes that "Marxism gave way to psychiatry. The individual moved into the place of history and social relations."⁵⁸

The notion of individualism was not openly used in Yugoslav art criticism as a point of dissension with the Soviet ideology. What was used however, was the notion of modernism, which was heavily exploited during the Cold War years as a factor of

differentiation from the Eastern bloc. Sveta Lukic, a literary critic who started to write criticism in the late fifties, asserts:

The fact is that both the politicians and ideologues at the time needed proof of freedom of ideas in literature and culture in order to undermine Soviet dogmatism. However too much independence of mind in domestic literature went beyond official plans and desires. The League of Communist of Yugoslavia was more interested in scoring a foreign policy goal against the Soviet Union than in securing genuine internal freedom for Yugoslav culture... Such an assessment is supported by none other than Milovan Djilas, the party ideologue... In his book *Legenda o Njegosu* (1952) he says: "Leave politics to us politicians, while we leave aesthetics to you writers. It is obvious which of these is more important."⁵⁹

Yet what deserves mention here is that during the fifties, in other words, during the period of de-Stalinization, the art that bore modernist persuasions bore not only signs of distinction from the Russians, but also of progress and novelty, equated during these years with the Party programme of the postwar renewal. As the 50s progressed, so did the rhetoric of modernisation, industrialization and new technological devices in the service of socialist man. It was believed that progress would help socialists to reach the future situated in an indefinite time. While Western postwar art reflected existential trauma, art in Yugoslavia produced the image of reality aimed at conveying postwar optimism coming from the idea of an unlimited progress provided by communism.⁶⁰ Besides exploiting modernist art as a sign of progress and also as a sign of differentiation from Stalinist dogmatism in their quest for an idiosyncratic path to socialism, Yugoslav communists used abstract forms as emblems of power. This was the case with public art consisting of the ambitious sculptural projects celebrating communist victory over fascism during WWII. Their abstract shapes exploited the whole repertoire of phallic forms aimed at expressing rhetoric of power. The advent of modernist art ran parallel to

the “Yugoslav economic miracle” between 1953 and 1965.⁶¹ It was in this social climate that modernist aesthetic epitomized by the International style in architecture and abstraction in painting and sculpture acquired the status of a trope for progress. The modernist discourse was implemented in Yugoslavia almost immediately after the repudiation of Stalinism in 1948. The meeting of architects in Dubrovnik in 1951 served as a springboard for launching the modernist aesthetic. Architects discarded at this meeting ‘socialist realism’ in architecture in favour of the International Style.⁶² The term socialist realism itself begs a clarification. Contemporary art criticism retains serious doubts regarding its theoretical designation and perplexity. The authors of the book Stalinist Architecture, Tarkhanov and Kavtaradze assert:

‘Socialist Realism’, which for many years was declared to be the only possible socialist style, was born in the field of literature. It remains a mysterious term. Thousands of books and articles had been written on the subject over the past fifty years, and all officially approved Russian art from the early 1930s until present times has been labeled ‘socialist realism’. Yet no one has managed to explain exactly what this means.⁶³

Although it is true that the term socialist realism today is loaded with an enigmatic quality, there is also all likelihood to suppose that Yugoslav communists in their cultural politics during the schism with the Soviets at the turn of the fifties, equated socialist realism with Stalinism. ‘Stalinist architecture’ operated with the architectural forms of a grandiose scale bearing the connotations of *impersonalism*. This architecture was based on symbolism. In conveying the message of the communist victory, it used monumentality of classical elements heavily burdened with symbolism in detailing deriving from the Soviet proletarian vocabulary – a star, a hammer and sickle or ear of wheat. This architecture not only glorified the Stalin era before the war, but it also

created the picture of the postwar “triumphalism.”⁶⁴ (Fig.8) The position of architects at the 1951 meeting in Dubrovnik was to refrain from the application of socialist realism in architecture. While reflecting the political climate after the rift with the Soviets, this decision in effect envisioned and supported implementation of modernism in Yugoslav culture of the time.

Yet it is important to bear in mind that modernism did not appear in Yugoslavia as a consequence of a Party directive. It was established through the process of a ‘democratic’ conflict between two factions. As suggested in the Introduction, these two factions belonged to two mutually exclusive camps, Realism and Modernism, inherited from the period before the war. This was “The Conflict on the Literary Left,” which culminated in 1939-40.⁶⁵ The conflict itself was shaped upon the model of the Russian avant-garde art criticism which involved much discussion and many controversies over the question of the artistic and intellectual freedom of creation in the USSR, immediately after the revolution.⁶⁶ The fact that the conflict of Modernism vs. Realism in the fifties was nothing other than a continuation of the same conflict from before the war, which for its part was shaped upon the discussions and controversies in the Russian revolutionary art scene of the twenties, is an indication that the process of de-Stalinization was in full sway.

Yet the question, what is real freedom of creation? was the theme of many debates during the fifties and sixties entertained by different art critics of the time. We shall see some of these opinions later. At this point it is worth mentioning that both modernisms, in Russia and Yugoslavia, succumb to the ironic twist of fate. While the Russian revolutionary avant-garde modernism ended up strangled by Stalinism,

Yugoslav modernism was created to strangle Stalinism, and ended as an autonomous art, detached from the needs of reality (the working class), and in the service of the 'Cold War profiteers,' i.e., communist elite. Possibly that was the reason why modernism in Yugoslavia had never substantially reflected on the Russian avant-garde.⁶⁷ It became a 'compulsory aesthetic' and, in the case of Belgrade, looked to the *Ecole de Paris*⁶⁸ for its inspiration. Interestingly enough, the communist cultural bureaucrats through the system of various grants, began sending artists to Paris, emulating in this way the policy of the pre-war Ministry for Cultural Affairs. This was, what one of the most prominent art critics of the time, Lazar Trifunovic, called, the shift from a "revolutionary to bourgeois art."⁶⁹

In the spring of 1951, there was a solo exhibition in Belgrade which inaugurated modernism in Yugoslavia. The painter was a pre-war artist, Petar Lubarda who exhibited his associative-abstraction paintings. Lubarda's painting *The Heat* (Fig.9) might be seen as an epitome of modernism in its advent in the early 1950s. This painting bears all the features of an autonomous art, created in the way which allows its producer an unlimited amount of *self-expression*. The spectator here is a passive receiver of stimuli. The painter actually invites the viewer to feel the heat "emanating" from the canvas. The abstract forms associating the landscape are geared to transport the viewer in a private world of the painter's associations. If the spectator is furnished with some additional information, in this case, that the painter is from Montenegro where Mediterranean sun melts the rocky landscape, the entering into the painter's imagination is supposed to be smooth and complete.⁷⁰

This exhibition signified the abrupt rupture with Social Realism, substituting the artist's engagement with society for personal experience. The Socialist Realism lifespan was short (1945-50). Its extinction was painless and easy, because it had never been established properly. Lazar Trifunovic asserts that abstract painting contributed to the autonomy of art, and that the struggle for abstraction in Yugoslav art during the fifties was a synonym of struggle for modern art.⁷¹ The camp of intelligentsia who supported the modernist project, argued for a 'freedom of expression' and 'artistic pluralism' which would allow a treatment of the artwork as a reality *per se*. The modernists understood art as a creative process, as opposed to the socialist realists who insisted on "art-as-education."⁷²

In the conflict, Modernism vs. Socialist Realism, the modernist camp had crucially important support in the pre-war Surrealists, who, before the war belonged to the Communist party, and after the war participated in the high level politics as ministers or as professors at the Belgrade University. By taking part in an enacted utopia such as Yugoslav communism, Belgrade Surrealist poets from the 1930's actually supported the project of the aestheticised modernism that bore all the features of an opposition to the avant-garde modernism they were fighting for before the war.

Modernist artists, who produced abstraction in painting and sculpture based on the notion of art's autonomy, promoted in effect the concept of "Socialist Aestheticism."⁷³ The literary and art critic of the time, Sveta Lukic, who coined this phrase, although being opposed to Socialist Realism, expected art to critically refer to reality. He describes the fifties as a period of de-dogmatization and liberation during which "... an extremely strong and merciless polemic against socialist realism was instituted. To fill the void left

by cultural Stalinism a new aesthetic was adopted which may be called socialist aestheticism.”⁷⁴ Lukic criticised the Yugoslav art scene for failing to establish any relation to first-hand reality, and for taking a stance which reflected the taste of the bureaucratic structures. This author asserts that the real aestheticism in Yugoslav art reached its full sway between 1955-1962, during which period, literature exercised a “...theoretically raw, undifferentiated and unrelativised aestheticism...”⁷⁵ The fact is that this period (1955-1962) corresponds to the formation of the ‘new class’ or ‘red bourgeoisie’ as it was designated during the events of 1968, which developed new tastes and new needs in the form of luxurious goods which comprised art as an object of concealed commodification.

Although there was a decade long quarrel between Modernism and Socialist Realism, engaging literary and art critics gathered around two literary journals, it was already clear in the early fifties that Modernism had won. The artistic scene was replete with abstract art exhibitions, such as: French Modern Art from the collection of Belgrade National Museum in 1950; Contemporary French painting in 1952, 1958, 1963; Contemporary Dutch painting in 1953; Henry Moore in 1953 (with an introduction in the catalogue by Herbert Read); American Contemporary painting in 1956, 1961. It is worth noting that the rhythm of these exhibitions was in some cases determined by international politics.

Abstract art became national art. From 1954 on it began to “officially represent the country at the Venice Biennial.”⁷⁶ As analyzed previously, abstract art acquired an emblematic quality of a trope for ‘progress.’ At the end of 1950s abstraction in painting, sculpture and monuments with modernist architecture was the most visible sign of

modernity, and its prerogative progress. Thus, when the “Committee for Cultural Ties with the Foreign Countries” at the end of 1950’s was asked to include a figurative painter in future exhibitions abroad, one of the members of the Committee answered that “... figurative painting would only be suitable for an undeveloped country.”⁷⁷ Bojana Pejic asserts in her article “Socialist Modernism and the Aftermath” that the transition from ‘revolutionary to bourgeois art’ in the fifties “... was possible and somehow easy, as the art produced in Serbia this century accepted Modernism as formulated in Paris, which was to say that it embraced an art which never manifested much interest in social issues but more so in the formal aspects of the art making.”⁷⁸

Thus, the Yugoslav art scene in the fifties and throughout the sixties was actually based on the concept of the *contradictio in adjecto*. This concept on the one hand was based on the equation of socialist modernism, i.e., abstract art with modernity and progress, while on the other hand promoted art detached from reality. The art criticism of the time which defended autonomy of art together with academic circles, sought in art “... disinterested experience of an emotional or spiritual value.”⁷⁹ This approach required disinterested, self-contained individual calling for art’s autonomy. This art, which detached itself from life, governed the artistic arena up to the seventies when the new cultural forces emerged.

Section III

The Student Cultural Centre as the Space of 'Compulsory Freedom'

The emergence of the New Art at the beginning of the seventies runs parallel to the formation of the Student Cultural Centre. It is a well-known fact in Belgrade's artistic circles that the new art was intrinsically linked with this institution, since its formative years and development depended on the SKC. It was the space of this youth organization where the new art was produced and communicated to audience. Very soon after the SKC opening on April the 4th 1971, the institution acquired special status among youth, as a space where artistic freedom stretched the regime's political boundaries. The proliferation of contacts with international artists who had visited the SKC during the seventies – Josef Beuys, Gina Pane, Jannis Kounellis, Daniel Buren, Michelangelo Pistoletto, to mention some of them - in the occasion of numerous exhibitions, symposia, interviews and talks, added to this picture. (Fig. 10)

The concept, realization and reception of Abramovic's (Fig.2) and Popovic's (Fig.3) works of art were bound to the space of SKC in the moment of their production. When one takes into consideration this interrelationship, it becomes clear that an analysis of the works is not possible without an enquiry into the space of the SKC.

When talking about the SKC probably the most important question to ask is what kind of a social enterprise was it? That is, was the Student Cultural Centre a space which served the institutionalisation of the new art practice and its anti-modernist avant-garde position? It is interesting that Belgrade University founded the SKC in July of 1968, one

month after the student protest.⁸⁰ Although, February of 1969 is another date which figures as an official SKC foundation day, the first date resonates with a meaning which cannot be neglected.⁸¹ It is almost common sense to suppose that this meaning is related to the concessions that the communist bureaucracy was ready to give to students in order to regulate the outburst of their discontent in June of 1968. Milovan Djilas, a communist ideologue from the fifties and later dissident, examines the fact that communists used concessions as their ruling strategy in his book The New Class.⁸² The fact is that the 'rebellious generation' of young artists at the time did not question the motivation behind the communist bureaucracy's decision to open a new cultural space for students. This situation could be explained by the position in which that generation found themselves after the student protest.⁸³

The student protest itself, which initially began as a protest against the poor conditions in the students' dormitories, eventually turned into bloody clashes with the police. As a result of this conflict, the students overtook the Faculty of Philosophy and Academy of Art. As the protest proceeded, the students' objectives changed into demands for a "real democracy, real worker's self-management, ... an end to unemployment..."⁸⁴ and the 'red bourgeoisie' deposition. After a prolonged tension, conflict ended with Tito's sentence: "The students are right!" This mastery of demagoguery not only helped student protest come to an end, but it also promised students a positive outcome in the form of the fulfillment of their requirements.⁸⁵ There is a great deal of possibility that not all the students trusted Tito's statement, but the fact is the great majority of them did. This majority truly believed in a 'special position' of their country in a permanent searching of 'its own way of socialism.' This way of thinking entailed the perception of

the emerging 'red bourgeoisie' and the lack of a 'real democracy' as a little deviation on the socialist path which could easily be corrected. With hindsight, it might be said that students swallowed the propaganda, overlooking the contradictions between the propaganda and the reality surrounding them.

But how did the events of 1968 affect art? Since the SKC was a space which, from its inception, repeatedly produced and communicated the new art, it cannot be discussed in a cultural and historical void, a tendency to which art criticism in Serbia occasionally showed profound inclinations. What I wish to emphasise here is that the SKC came about thanks to the intertwined events around the student protest.⁸⁶ The ambiguous question that also needs to be answered is, what was the interest of the communist bureaucracy in creating this kind of space where the cultural needs of the youth, as I mentioned at the beginning of this section, could have supposedly been exercised fully? Was the SKC balancing on the never declared borderline between the sanctioned and permitted in art? Bojana Pejic puts it in this way: "...it (SKC) was still part of the University of Belgrade and, consequently, the art with a contestational spirit displayed there was linked with 'experiments' otherwise characteristic of 'youth.'"⁸⁷ If this is so, the claim that SKC was the communist regime's safety valve is defensible. If one pursues this claim further, the SKC might be situated in a domain of the communist government intervention into public space after 1968.

Although the structural transformation of the society which students asked for had never occurred, there were some other changes related to the government's intervention into public space which had an impact on art. The communist government policy was conceived as a plan of dealing with a young generation which did not share their postwar

‘partisan’ concerns, nor their codified form of representation – Socialist Modernism. To that generation belonged artists who were “... educated by modernist professors teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts...,”⁸⁸ who found themselves amidst the linguistic change in the sixties when English prevailed, and who were well informed about American contemporary art.⁸⁹

The government intervention which came as an aftermath of the student protest, although it has never been pronounced as such but rather as an improvement of the students’ way of working and living, brought selective restructuring of the old urban text that incorporated several university buildings into its fabric. What actually had happened was an urbanistic rearrangement of the Faculties whose buildings served as a stage for the protest. These buildings on the one hand were interlinked among themselves by the feature of their spatial closeness that gave an opportunity for the circulation of people and ideas, and on the other hand were interwoven into the city structure giving a possibility for an even greater circuit.

Thus, in the name of progress, the nineteenth century building of the Faculty of Philosophy – whose large inner courtyard and sturdy obscure walls gave a protection to the students during their upheaval – was exchanged for the new one which was built next to the old building. This new building was built in a tradition of modernism – it was bright, transparent and easy to manage. The Academy of Theatre and Film was also endowed with the new building across the river, in New Belgrade. Within a few years after the protest of 1968, the University architecture in the city had been changed. The new University itinerary envisioned the possibility of regulated circulation. By dispersing the landmarks of the student unrest, “panoptic administration”⁹⁰ intervened not only into

a probability of a 'suspicious' physical circulation and assembling of the students, but it also intervened into people's memories. In this way, the ubiquitous city panoptic has been extended from the surveillance of the physical circulation to the surveillance of the circulation of ideas.

This mode of reconstructing the city space was conceived, in Michel de Certeau's words, "...on the basis of a finite number of stable, isolatable, and interconnected properties."⁹¹ By changing the architectural countenance of the city university structures, communist authorities envisioned the city as the space of transparency and consensus. What the authorities did not understand is that "The kind of difference that defines every place is not on the order of a juxta-position but rather takes the form of imbricated strata... beneath the fabricating and universal writing of technology, opaque and stubborn places remain."⁹²

What separated the new art practices from socialist modernism was its interest in elucidating those layers within the 'imbricated strata' which could no longer be articulated with the help of old discourses, and which required the creation of new discourses. This project required from the new art practitioners not only a declarative denouncing of the academic master narrative of modernism⁹³ that occupied the visual representation of the whole society, but also new understanding of the cultural field as an "...arena in which active contestation is possible."⁹⁴ The new position of art introducing the concept of heterogeneity made clear that "...no cultural moment is total or definitive..."⁹⁵ This new understanding was reflected on the cultural production. In their strategy of opening up spaces of an active contestation, the new art practitioners adopted 'local narratives' prompted/affected by the viewer and his or her environment.

While writing about this problematic, Victor Burgin asserts "... 'local' narratives – narratives which can no longer be assumed as always in place, but which must be continually *in process*..."⁹⁶ This new perception discarded "... the autonomously expressive individual,"⁹⁷ the basic postulate of socialist modernism, and introduced different comprehension of art as the work in a continuous process. This perpetual process allowed different agencies to intervene in the work of art. In this way, the work of art itself becomes a site of contestation that is affected both by the viewer and its environment and the subject who created the work of art. Above all, the new art practitioners equated art with the everyday, and its 'hero,' the ordinary person. This constellation – the multiplicity of the environmental factors, the work of art in process which is no longer solely determined by its creator, and 'local narratives' with their alternative spaces – had become increasingly susceptible to the everyday which shapes the creative process, allowing the factor of constant modification to intervene in it.

The space of SKC, with its fluctuating range of youth viewers, such as students and those interested in acquiring new knowledge, allowed the kind of artistic intervention which was based on the mingling of art with life. This institution became not only the space of articulation of the new ways in which art and life converged, but also a space of exchange with international artists. Yet the space of SKC was a space of 'compulsory freedom,' since its formation and support depended on the communist system which found a way of appeasing a rebellious generation.

Immediately after the SKC was opened in 1971, its 19th century building became the site of the cognitive change. (Fig.6.) For artists and their public, the SKC building embodied the space of artistic freedom where art production allowed different

approaches. The Student Cultural Centre with its 19th century building was marked in the city's map as the site of the specific cultural venture exploring the novelties in art. It was the site where different and challenging modes of thinking could have been encountered and exercised, and the SKC building became the sign of freedom. Thus the newly acquired space of freedom for the youth promoting the principle of heterogeneity was identified with the building conveying stability in its meaning equated with freedom. However, the meaning of the building as a stable public space was limited to its users, and it was reached through a ghettoization of its space by the artistic bureaucrats. The location of the Student Cultural Centre tells about its marginal position in the cultural scene of the time. The building allocated to students was situated at the fringes of the central city structure, far from the mainstream galleries and exhibiting sites.⁹⁸

The SKC building is a 19th century structure that served as an architectural edifice in which different social spaces has been produced. Before WWII, The Royal Army officers' ballroom was situated in the building, and after the war, in the communist Yugoslavia, the building accommodated the State Security. Henri Lefebvre's comment in The Production of Space pertains to the contrasting nature of spaces inhabiting the SKC building: "An existing space may outlive its original purpose and the *raison d'être* which determines its forms, functions, and structure; it might thus in a sense become vacant, and susceptible of being diverted, reappropriated and put to a use quite different from its initial one."⁹⁹ At the beginning of the seventies, for the first time in its history, the function and the meaning of the building went beyond direct official use of the respective system. The building acquired a new function as the site which sheltered the new artistic engagement that was put in a marginal position by the artistic bureaucracy and the

mainstream cultural production. Yet the new function appeared as not being at odds with the building's architecture. On the contrary; the works of art became intrinsically connected to the architecture of the building since they entered into a close dialogue with it. (Fig.2.) The new art practices evolved in the space delineated by the architecture that served as a "container" for the art. Although all the spaces in the building were important for the artistic production, not all of them engaged the same meaning. This situation led to the differentiation of spaces in the building. Thus, the space of two galleries, the library, the cinema, the bookstore or administrative rooms, constituted different significance for the producers of art.

At the same time the building was part of the street. It served as a mediator between artists and the public. This was the site where both, the artists and their public invested their interests. The public interest revolved around the possibility of acquiring information about the new knowledge involved in the change of the paradigm. The artists who were engaged in the production of this shift from abstraction to conceptual art, found in the building not only the haven for developing the new concepts, but also the possibility to pursue these concepts through debates and heterogeneous thinking. In a word, the building stood as simulacra of freedom. For its users, it became the embodiment of a dream in which they could move outside the norms. And they did move outside the norms. By reappropriating the space of the building, the new art practitioners in the early seventies put the building in the service of art that moved against all the norms in the cultural scene of the time.

The New Art as the Space of Local Narratives

“Long before space, as perceived by and for the ‘I’, began to appear as split and divided, as a realm of merely virtual or deferred tensions and contacts. Long before space emerged as a medium of far-off possibilities, as the locus of potentiality. For, long before the analysing, separating intellect, long before formal knowledge, there was an intelligence of the body.”¹⁰⁰

When Marina Abramovic placed the taped sound of birds chirping in the branches of a tree in front of the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade, in the spring of 1972, she produced the work of art which opened up different areas of investigation concerning space and the body, and the relationship between the two. (Fig.2.) The piece, *Sound Environment: Sonorous Space Birds Chirping*, also tells about the artist’s interest in revealing liminal spaces of everyday life that bear the energy of the clandestine poetic potentials. I would like to discuss here the hidden mechanisms which the artist employs as the strategy in this work of art.

The piece *Birds Chirping* puts into motion a whole set of links connecting spatial practices, i.e., the architecture, the street, the body “...as the generator (or producer) of space.”¹⁰¹ There is the space of the street with pedestrians, the building and the tree in front of the SKC. The sound of the birds chirping comes from the tree. This sound, in the moment of its reverberating from the building façade, fills the space of the street while pedestrians in the street experience the space through that sound. This is the same moment in which the sound becomes the carrier of the work’s meaning, introducing the building into the work of art. The façade of the building, i.e., the architecture becomes a component of the conceptual work of art. The architecture physically backs the conceptual work of art in the same way as a gallery wall backs a painting.¹⁰² While

attacking the mode of the 'high art' presentation, this work at the same time involves the public in its own production, both in a discriminatory and non-discriminatory way. The audience that comes to attend the event intermingles with the unsuspected public attending the event by chance. In this way the work of art broadens the spectrum of the audience that engages with it. The public, which comes to participate in the production of a "non-formal knowledge"¹⁰³ critiquing established forms of artistic production, finds in this piece a clear message. The *Birds* constitutes its meaning through the process of "dematerialization of the art object."¹⁰⁴ This implies the inclusion of the context in the work's production. The part of the street in which the building is situated provides this context. How does the piece relate to the building?

What Abramovic's work of art *Birds Chirping* does is in effect the appropriation of the building space. Lefebvre's assertion that "An appropriated space *resembles* a work of art" explicates the notion of an appropriation of space as a modification of space in order to serve the needs of a group. In this case the space of the building and its façade has been appropriated in order to serve as a supporter of the conceptual work of art. The space of the building, which serves the needs of the congruous group of people, appears as a homogeneous space bordering with the space of the street that is full of tensions.

By transgressing the boundaries of a homogeneous space of the building, the piece *Birds* enters the space of possible tensions in the street. The street can be the space of a "hostile" territory for the conceptual work of art, where passers-by play the role of the unsuspecting public, which is heterogeneous and volatile. The tree, which denotes the liminal space residing on the borderline between the building and the street, becomes the ready-made derived in this case not from the consumer culture but from nature. The other

form of the ready-made involved in Abramovic's work is the culture of passers-by in the street.

The inclusion of passers-by in the piece tells about the artist's interest in the space of everyday life and its hidden poetic potentials. How does the simple artistic device of the taped birdsong relate to the passers-by hidden poetic potentials buried under the layers of everyday life? Could not the birdsong instead of only adorning the space of the street with a sense of tranquility, have also brought dissonant notes in the space of the city which was envisioned by the authorities as the space of unity? In what ways could this quality of 'dissonant notes' help the work to open up the space of escaping social control, or to elude discipline in an ordered and disciplinary society?

While talking about 'avant-gardiste' works of art, Peter Burger writes in Theory of the Avant-Garde: "... whereas art forms owe their birth to a specific social context, they are not tied to the context of their origin or to a social situation that is analogous to it, for the truth is that they can take on different functions in varying social contexts."¹⁰⁵ Marina Abramovic could have staged *Birds Chirping* elsewhere in the world with consequences which would have resulted in a different meaning of the work. However, since the artwork was executed in Belgrade, I would like to frame the analysis within everyday practices in this city as a lived place,¹⁰⁶ four years after the events of 1968.

By executing the artwork which was inexpensive, repeatable, and which left no traces behind, Abramovic introduced in the art scene the concept of volatility. While playing with this concept, the artist "... tacitly acknowledged that culture, like reality, is created in the mind, and can be de-created."¹⁰⁷ "I think a work of art should have that

kind of energy, which is not descriptive or visual. It is just the presence that makes the difference in a space,” asserts Marina in an interview from the nineties.¹⁰⁸

To make the difference in a space is the idea standing behind Abramovic’s *Birds Chirping*. Yet this piece of art did not really exist by itself because it merged with its surrounding. The employment of the agency of passers-by as participants in the artistic work – process is the other strategy that the artist engages in the production of the work. While interacting with the surroundings, i.e., the street in front of the SKC gallery, Abramovic’s work of art exposes the spaces of the city which have potentials of escaping the omnipotent surveillance of the social control. On the other hand, by introducing technology in her work in the form of the taped birdsong sound placed in the crown of a tree, the artist commented on how technology intervenes with the human interaction with the space.

As a tactic of escape from technologies of control, Michel de Certeau proposes practices of everyday life, which can open up new spaces bearing potentials of unexplored possibilities. In The Practices of Everyday Life, Michel de Certeau asserts: “The language of power is in itself ‘urbanizing,’ but the city is left prey to contradictory movements that counterbalance and combine themselves outside the reach of panoptic power.”¹⁰⁹ But where was the space ‘outside the reach of panoptic power,’ in 1972 Belgrade?

Certainly, it was not the space of avant-garde underground art as in some other communist countries at the time.¹¹⁰ One of the examples of the avant-garde underground art in communist countries, would be a manual production of the *samizdat* books, which circulated through the space of their underground cultures in the sixties and seventies.

While talking about Moscow conceptualism in his article “The Russian Novel as a Serial Murder or The Poetics of Bureaucracy,” Boris Groys mentions that “...there was a sharp opposition between the official mass culture and the *samizdat*, handmade books of unofficial culture.”¹¹¹ Although there was also a sharp opposition between the new art and official modernist culture in Yugoslavia, this situation cannot be compared with the Eastern bloc countries. The new art, not only in Belgrade, but also elsewhere in Yugoslavia, “did not belong to underground or dissident culture”¹¹² which fought against the sturdy wall of the communist ideology and its ubiquitous lack of freedom.

The wall, which the new art practitioners fought against – it is appropriate to use this metaphor – was made of a malleable material that could not be permeated but that could be shaped. In other words, the new art practitioners encountered the situation in art which allowed for all kinds of whimsical explorations in the domain of artistic freedom, with the emphasis on the word **artistic**. Any art which questioned or contested political structures of the regime would be stripped of the prerogatives of art and put in the column of **politics**. In the “open” Yugoslav society, which exposed itself more to the influences coming from the West than those from the East, the endeavour of mingling art with politics was an explosive business that was, in all known cases, penalised. This slippery terrain was most frequently entertained, during the sixties and seventies, by the ‘Black Wave’ in Film. Many of these films, immediately after their first screening, were banned and put in the so-called ‘bunkers.’¹¹³

Thus the only tangible wall for the new art was politics. As mentioned earlier, Yugoslavia of the seventies was a country with open, “westernized” cultural politics, and closed, one party, totalitarian – communist political system. Such a principle might be

encapsulated in the phrase: freedom in art but not in politics. Consequently, this situation that was imposed upon the new art practitioners prompted the question of investigating the possibilities for opening up the spaces 'in between' which could have had the potential for escaping ubiquitous control. It might be said that the SKC with its diversity of programmes did explore spaces belonging to everyday practices of the subcultures in society. Since the Centre was created with an idea of serving students, the youth and marginalised groups, i.e., alternative intellectuals, musicians and the like, the SKC programmes had comprised film, theatre, concerts, exhibitions and forums which accommodated debates on different cultural topics. It is not an exaggeration to say that all these programmes treated liminal spaces of the mainstream culture: rock&roll, jazz, fashion, theoretical debates or exhibitions which did not have an access to the 'official' galleries.

Yet the question which emerges here is, were these liminal spaces, residing at the outskirts of the mainstream culture, the 'spaces in between' which could have brought more freedom to the public that so faithfully and arduously attended the SKC? The possible answer resonates with ambiguity. It is important to bear in mind that the space of SKC was the space of an 'endorsed' freedom. Although it is true that this level of freedom did not come on its own, and that it was actually extorted, there is another component to this fact which points to the form of SKC exclusiveness. Not all strata of the society were included, neither were all gaps in terms of age or different groups abridged.

Then what was it that gave the possibility for more inclusion in terms of opening up alternative spaces within the everyday? Had Abramovic's art piece *Birds Chirping*

acted as a catalyst for that kind of inclusion? If the answer points to a positive conclusion, due to the sheer fact of the broader scope of the public passing by, the question would be how was this inclusion obtained? How does pedestrians' rhetoric of walking find its poetic utterance in a taped birdsong? Michel de Certeau's statement, "The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organisations, no matter how panoptic they may be... It creates shadows and ambiguities within them,"¹¹⁴ might elucidate the meaning of Abramovic's work. Seen in this way, the meaning of the work is related to the author's intention to point out the fact that shadows and ambiguities in spatial organisations do exist, and that no matter how hard the authorities try to make the urban text transparent and easily readable, they continue to inhabit the city.

Another strain of thought underlying this artwork points to the concept of the 'anarchy of imagination' as an important constituent of the work's text. It might be said that the condition of the 'anarchy of imagination' was the intellectual framework of the work. Herbert Marcuse quotes Benjamin Péret's statement made in 1943: "The Language of imagination remains a language of defiance, of indictment and protest."¹¹⁵ If Abramovic's work is seen as a direct intervention into the present, that intervention is done in a highly mediated fashion. Marcuse points out that "...the Surrealist thesis... elevates the poetic language to the rank of being the only language that does not succumb to the all embracing language spoken by the Establishment..."¹¹⁶

By relying on the poetic potential of a birdsong, Marina Abramovic actually pronounces "unutterable" truth about everyday reality. When the artist placed a loud tape-recording of birdsong in the branches of a tree in front of the SKC in 1972, the passers-by could feel delighted. But, as mentioned previously, a taped birdsong could

have brought dissonant notes as well. Four years earlier these very streets were saturated with the fear and anxiety provoked by street anarchy during the 1968 events. At the moment when the work *Birds Chirping* was staged, street anarchy was relegated to the imagination and pedestrians' memory which resided in the space 'in between' the layers of the city 'imbricated strata,' as an opaque and stubborn remnant of these events. Abramovic's work operated within this space 'in between' in a way of conjuring up the phenomenon of chance. The artist made it possible by ceding her control to the outer element, a sound, and in this way invoking, almost emulating the element of chance which was a governing principle in the 1968 protest.

In the condition in which panoptic administration showed a strong anxiety regarding governing spatial practices of the city, a taped sound of birdsong could have destabilizing resonance. Four years after the turmoil of 1968, when the officials wanted to reestablish the univocality of the citizens' voice and automatization of everyday life, the 'tranquilizing' sound of a birdsong in the street brought the threatening note of an equivocality. The closest description of this effect would be M. de Certeau's explanation of a homology between verbal figures and the figures of walking which both consist "... in 'treatments' or operations bearing on isolatable units, and in 'ambiguous dispositions' that divert and displace meaning in the direction of equivocality in the way a tremulous image confuses and multiplies the photographed object."¹⁷ In other words, the taped sound of a birdsong had the effect of a disturbance produced by equivocality of its meaning.

Having this in mind, *Birds Chirping* played on the subversive level by engaging the element of the poetic which worked towards the end of opening up the space of

freedom, in other words, the space of possibilities, which resided beyond the reach of those who aimed at controlling urban text. By ceding her control to the taped birdsong sound, the artist not only played with the notion of authorship, but she also introduced the local narrative and everyday practice as a governing force of the work. “A work of art is not necessarily something worked on: it is basically something conceived. To be an artist it is not always to make something, but rather to engage in a cultural enterprise in which artistic pieces are proffered for consideration.”¹¹⁸

The artist exerts in this piece precisely such a kind of artistic will to engage in a ‘cultural enterprise,’ for the *Birds Chirping* piece can be seen as the artist’s answer in the confrontation with the tranquilized post 1968 reality of the socialist society which operated during these years in the condition of an ‘anesthetisation’ and ostensible unisonity. While opening the spaces in between, bearing the possibility of escape from ubiquitous social control, this performance is aimed at provoking the public’s fresh attention, displaying for them a bit of everyday life in the form of an ordinary, well known and completely free birdsong sound, “liberated... from objects.”¹¹⁹

Marina Abramovic’s conceptual work of art, *Sound Environment – Birds Chirping* announced not only new concepts in the art scene of the time, but also new apprehension of space. Although, it might be argued that the conceptual work of art *is* intervention into space, Abramovic’s work indeed perceives the space as the product of a whole set of interconnected spatial practices. These spatial practices encompass both architectural structures (buildings and streets) as well as “an intelligence of the body”¹²⁰ which engages with space. The taped sound in the *Birds* produces the meaning of the work by connecting the architecture, the street, passers-by in an interplay. The artist’s

interest in the practices of everyday life creates the environmental work of art, which, via the sound, touches upon liminal spaces where the poetic potentials of the audience and passers-by in the street reside, affirming the new understanding of the space of everyday life.

A Proposition: Art is Art, and its Ramifications

Zoran Popovic's multimedia piece *Axioms*, (Fig.3.) produced in the period 1971-1973, is one of the artworks of the new art project which brought forth new understanding of the cultural sphere as an arena of "active contestation." This artistic work provides a particularly useful example of the new position of art which introduced the concept of fragmentation and heterogeneity challenging in this way the modernist concept of the art autonomy and its precondition, homogeneous subject of a solitary creator.

The piece *Axioms* was displayed during the group exhibition of the *Group of Six Artists* at the Belgrade SKC Gallery in October 1972. This is a complex artwork, extending both in time and space in terms of different media application: drawings, prints, performance - consisting of light-movement-sound-rhythm, film, slides, theoretical explanations, photos, video tapes. The *Axioms* is multimedia project in which eight basic geometrical forms are visually reiterated in different media: linocut, photograph, film, video, slide projection. Multimedia concept of the work includes also the artist's presence in the room where the *Axioms* is displayed. The artist performs eight gestures in a completely darkened room. On his fingertips he has small light bulbs. (Fig.11.) The room is filled with intense sound.

This work of art which produces meaning on different levels, is an example of the artistic procedure described as 'artwork in process.' Due to this fact it was actually never exhibited in its entirety. Even the retrospective exhibition at the Belgrade SKC Gallery,

in October 1983 did not comprise all the works.¹²¹ Contemporary art critics see the piece *Axioms* as one of the key works of the new art practice in Yugoslavia in the early seventies. This work of art treated all the problems conferred by new art practitioners in their critique of socialist modernism: the problem of the art object and its context; the problem of a spectator and his or her transformation into participant; the problem of the artist as producer; and finally the problem of authorship and suppression of the artist as creator.

In the interview from 1989,¹²² the artist explains that this work was central to his artistic activity at that time. In the same interview Popovic talks about the process of the *Axioms*' creation. In the author's words, the *Axioms*, which comprises the whole series of works, initially was started as a project consisting of eight linotypes (40x40cm), with thin white lines on black surfaces. (Fig. 12.) As for his choice of the technique of linocut, the artist gives an explanation that this modest technique, which is void of a draftsman's aura, was primarily aimed at lessening self-expression. In other words, the artist's intention was to empty his artwork of any personal indications: to make it impersonal. How was this going against the modernist aesthetic promoted by the Academy of art? What was the possible political ramification of the artist's attitude? How was the image of Popovic's cube different from the image of a cube in geometric abstraction belonging to socialist modernism? (Fig. 13.)

The tensions between new art practices and socialist modernism at the time were manifested primarily in the realms of self-expression and originality. Popovic's *Axioms* operated on the level of subversion of the modernist aesthetic and its basic postulate, self-expression. It is a notorious fact that the system of the modernist aesthetic privileged

painting and sculpture as forms of art requiring self-expressive and autonomous individual – creator. Such an individual was a guarantor of the concept of art as representation. What Popovic does with his linotypes is a corruption of this concept by using a simple device – a refusal of depiction. In the discussion of the “post-Minimalist or Conceptualist avant-garde” in his book Modernism in Dispute, Charles Harrison asserts: “Their position was grounded in a refusal of the categories of painting and sculpture themselves, and thus of *all* possibilities of depiction, however attenuated.”¹²³ Popovic’s refusal of depiction reflected this position which discards the modernist concept of art as representation, and in connection with this, a regime of subjectivity which was seen as the “... stabilizer or the cement of all those positions of viewing, reception, passivity, deference...”¹²⁴ As opposed to the image of a cube in geometric abstraction perpetuating the notion of subject - centered reason, (Fig. 13) the image of Popovic’s cube in the eight linotypes, (Fig. 12.) shows a radical disappearance of an autonomous individual – creator. Popovic’s linotypes are devoid of a recognizable artistic intervention.

Popovic in effect accomplishes the suppression of self-expression by taking the position which Boris Groys would designate as “programmatically distance” from the artist’s own work. On this level, the piece *Axioms* is a critique of representation. This is particularly important to emphasise, because the new art in Yugoslavia fought against entrenched, calcified representation/image, the basic prerequisite of the codified modernism which became complicit in the mechanism of power.

It is important to take into consideration that Zoran Popovic, together with Marina Abramovic and other participants in the *Group of Six Artists*, belonged to the first

generation of artists after WWII, who were brought up in communist Yugoslavia and educated at the Academy of art by modernist professors. In two first sections of this essay I investigated contesting points related to socialist modernism that made the generation of artists at the turn of the seventies to reject its aestheticized view of reality. In the 1989 interview, Zoran Popovic describes academic training at the beginning of the seventies as a "heavy modernist drill" and the Academy of art as a "sanatorium for healing the chronic disease called *life*".¹²⁵ In the same interview, Popovic asserts that, while studying at the Academy, it did not take long to understand the profound entanglement of the state bureaucracy and modernist aesthetic. "The Academy of Art promoted not only autonomy of art, but also art's superiority over life."¹²⁶ Popovic continues with the assertion that this hegemony of aestheticism provoked reaction among students, who, after finishing their training at Academy, directed their art towards erasing the division between art and life. Their endeavour to establish ties between art and life meant corruption of the aestheticized socialist modernism which "...had been secured against the chaos and contingency of the everyday – against all occasions of conflict and self-interest and doubt."¹²⁷ Popovic concludes his talk on modernism in the interview with the evaluation that "...this impregnability of the high modernist formalism for the inclusion of reality and life, was actually a sign that those were the final years of modernism in Yugoslavia."¹²⁸ But, as mentioned earlier, this denouncing of modernism and its aesthetic values detached from life, came at a price of ghettoization for the new art practice during its inception years in the early seventies.

The piece *Axioms* as multimedia work of art, besides the aforementioned linotypes, comprises performance as one of the elements of its multimedia system.

(Fig.4) Performance itself introduces new domains of artistic interest: the body and the audience. In the catalog of the group exhibition in October 1972, Zoran Popovic talks about the performance part of the project in this way:

The room in which the presentation takes place is completely dark. When the audience is ready and with the first accords of music that is specially chosen for this occasion, the small light bulbs which are on the tips of my fingers are slowly lighted. The sound, lasting as long as the presentation of the axioms, is very intensive, giving an impression that each part of the room is filled with it. The sound has the function of instantaneous enclosing the spectator. The sound exists nonsynchronously with the movements of the performer. At the end of the performance the light bulbs on the fingers are slowly switched off.¹²⁹

As a performance work, the *Axioms* announces a new interest in the body. On the one hand, by including performance in the multimedia system of *Axioms*, Popovic reiterates his lack of interest in traditional forms of art, painting and sculpture. Vito Acconci encapsulates this idea of freeing oneself from art history in the sentence: "People did performance in order *not* to do painting and sculpture."¹³⁰ On the other hand, the inclusion of performance in this work of art raises the whole set of questions related to the problematic of the body: the artist's body and artistic body; the viewer's body and the problem of perception; the body and technology.

It is by now a conventional wisdom that performance as a form of artistic expression brings the body in the centre of artistic interest. The artist's body becomes the apparatus for accomplishing the artistic intent. The body and movement of a maker of the art are the tools of self-expression that is susceptible to its surrounding – the public, their psychological responses, specific moment of execution, or some other circumstance

which could possibly affect performance. This artistic interest in the body and its relationship with the surrounding represented a radical change in the subject position. The new understanding of a volatile position of the subject destabilized the modernist subject and its autonomous position.

The piece *Axioms* investigates yet another aspect of the body that is related to the body interaction with technology. The impact of technology on the body is obvious in different constraints imposed on the body. In his book *The Return of the Real*, Hal Foster discusses the impact of visual technology on the body: "...wiring connects and disconnects us simultaneously, renders us both psychotechnologically immediate to events and geopolitically remote from them..."¹³¹ In the same book Foster quotes Ernst Yünger's statement that technology is "intertwined with our nerves."¹³²

By placing light bulbs on the tips on his fingers, Popovic literally places his body in the jaws of technology. In this situation light bulbs act as a physical extension of the body. This kind of manipulation with the body would fall in the framework of "...*the logic of technology as prosthesis* – as a divine supplement to the body..."¹³³ My intention here is not to speculate on the possible *Axioms* anticipation of the present high-tech prosthesis in the form of visual devices as special glasses for instance that enable an individual to enter the world of virtual reality. What I want to emphasise is that the piece *Axioms* at the moment of its creation and presentation in 1972 called into question not only issues related to the domestic art scene and its specific problems, but also universal issues of technology and everyday life.

Yet, Popovic used technology as the strategy in the process of breaking up with "old modernist forms." This strategy, which was shared amongst all the new art

practitioners, comprised employment of the so-called “new media” as photography, slides, film or video. The concept of intermingling art and technology was an innovative project in the art scene at the time which served the new art practitioners as an agency of a clear demarcation line between the new art and socialist modernism. This novelty was going against the basic modernist concept of purity which required that “...each art would be rendered ‘pure’, and its ‘purity’ find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence.”¹³⁴ The *Axioms* rendered impossible this requirement. While working across barriers of media, the piece *Axioms* functioned by the logic of material employed. The material itself was an expression of industrial or manufactured objects deriving from the realm of the everyday (linoleum for linotypes or light bulbs).

In his discussion of the project in the interview, Popovic suggests that what this performance investigates is in effect related to the audience and its reaction. “The main idea is, that, even during such a performance, which otherwise strongly affects the senses, it is not possible to provoke in the spectator any other ideas except the ones presented. Every narration is avoided during the performance, as well as every interpretation by picturesque means, i.e., every analogousness.”¹³⁵

What does this explanation of the artist’s intent tell us? If put in a broader context of the artistic scene at the time, which was completely governed by the modernist principle, it becomes clear that the artist’s main concern was a “deceived” viewer. The viewer was manipulated by modernism and its representational devices loaded by the wide array of “meanings”: symbolic, associative, lyric, romantic or some other. The fact that any person from the audience could be a performer by putting light bulbs on the fingertips raises the problem of authorship and connected with it, originality. This brings

us back to Petar Lubarda's painting *The Heat* (Fig. 8) discussed in the Section II as an epitome of the high art. Lubarda's painting is made amidst the heated debate over self-expression, i.e., artistic expression, in the early fifties, and this painting embodies the concept of self-expression as a unique and solitary activity. As its basic premise this concept entails division between the solitary, elevated art producer and " 'The adequately sensitive, adequately informed spectator' ..."¹³⁶ Zoran Popovic's work, however, denies this very concept that is grounded on the premise of a disinterested beholder. Popovic's artistic practice was based on the approach of a direct engagement with the viewer. In order to complete such an engagement, new art practices promoted the concept of an elimination of the modernistic division between artists – producers and spectators – consumers. How does Popovic accomplish inclusion of the spectator?

Performance, as an integral part of the project *Axioms*, implies not only the presence, but also the engagement of both – the art producer and the viewer. This is the way in which the project intimates that there is no discontinuity between the production of a work of art and the life of the individual on the one hand and, on the other hand, between the artist and the spectator. That fact, that not all the constituents of performance, such as the sound or dark room are necessarily bound to the concept of beholding, points to the artist's intention to investigate senses other than eye. In other words, the piece *Axioms* was not exclusively addressed to the beholder. This sensory idea was coming from the position which opposed the modernist attitude of privileging the 'optical.' Charles Harrison asserts that, "...given the priority placed in Abstractionist theory upon the primacy of the 'optical', it was inevitable that the 'anti-retinal' position taken by Duchamp after 1912 would sooner or later ring bells in the minds of those

who saw themselves as opposed to Abstractionism...»¹³⁷

“The room in which the presentation takes place is completely dark.” This is the first sentence with which the artist begins his description of the *Axioms*’ performance. It makes us aware that the spectator is devoid of the light. The next information explains that the dark space of the room is filled with the intensive sound. The following step is that small light bulbs situated on the artist’s fingertips are slowly lighted. What does this account of the artistic event tell us? Does the oxymoron – the artistic presentation in the completely dark room – “ring bells?” A possible explanation would fall in the framework of those artistic strategies opposed to the primacy of “the optical,” interested into an inquiry of different domains of perception. In this performance, the artist exposes spectators to the combination of the audit and visual provocation. He explores the ways in which the senses are employed in artistic communication. By moving his arms equipped with the ‘prosthesis’ – light bulbs situated on the fingertips, the artist engages the spectator’s gaze in an *action* of seeing. (Fig. 11) The gaze is not fixed, it wanders around, simultaneously freeing the spectator from the object of gazing.

Popovic’s intervention in the discourse of codified modernism was theoretically based on conceptual art. It is within this theoretical framing that Popovic’s artistic practice opposed the concept of socialist modernism. The proposition, which Popovic promoted, entailed diametrically different concept of art: art is art. This proposition comes from Art&Language and Josef Kosuth’s theoretical work on art as an analytical operation. Charles Harrison, one of the founders of A&L, asserts in his book Essays on Art&Language:

Changes in Art are generally insignificant unless they involve some form of cognitive change, and unless they impose or presuppose some

modification of those processes of triangulation by means of which a spectator, a work of art, and a world of possible practices and referents are located relative to each other. In the search for grounds on which to isolate a Conceptual Art tendency from both previous and concurrent developments, the significant indicator will be some characteristic form of difference in the disposition or activity predicated of spectator and in the forms of matching or reference by means of which the work of art is distinguished.¹³⁸

The Art&Language interest in text as artistic material in the early years of Conceptual art found its fertile soil in linguistics and the philosophy of language, which they understood as a terrain of empirical investigation. Thus Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin in an introductory note to *Index 02* treat social and existential concerns: “Indexing problems... are coincident with the difficulties encountered in mapping the space in which our conversation takes place.”¹³⁹ (Fig. 14.) In 1972 Art&Language participated in “Documenta 5” at Kassel in West Germany, and Joseph Kosuth was one of the creators of the *Index* ‘displayed’ at the exhibition. Charles Harrison describes their collaborative work in this way: “... art of A&L should be seen to be made of ideas not by personalities.”¹⁴⁰

Their interest in text, however, did not envision presenting books, essays or diagrams to be beheld as if they were paintings. What A&L proposed is that aesthetic experience should be replaced with another which “... entailed willingness to conceive of ‘viewing’ and ‘reading’ as requiring the same cognitive capacity.”¹⁴¹ This A&L artistic practice that was extending to the fields of literature and language challenged the modernistic concept of an ‘adequately sensitive, adequately informed spectator.’ It enacted Sol LeWitt’s thought that “Conceptual art is made to engage the mind of the viewer rather than his eye or emotions.”¹⁴² Zoran Popovic associated his conceptual

artistic practice with those trends in Conceptual art affiliated with analytical operations in art. What kind of critical tools did Popovic find in this affiliation?

During his sojourn to New York in the period 1974-75, Zoran Popovic communicated with Art&Language and Kosuth extensively. He published an article on Yugoslav contemporary art in the Fox. The intensive international collaboration and exchange of different artistic experiences helped Popovic to get insight into wide range of theoretical positions. But how does Popovic utilize theoretical work in art as an analytical operation? It is worth noting that the early seventies witnessed the emergence of analytic philosophy at Belgrade Faculty of Philosophy. It is also worth noting that Faculty of Philosophy had the leading role in the events of 1968. The Oxford Companion to Philosophy writes: "Although both politicians and Marxist academics became more tolerant in the early 1970s, it is hard to understand how a critical mass of analytically orientated, practically self-thought non-Marxist students were reached so quickly."¹⁴³ I do not want here to draw any parallels between art and philosophy at the time. I however want to point to the fact that post 1968 climate in both fields enabled their practitioners to fight against entrenched and calcified forms of cultural life.

In the sphere of art this fight was directed against socialist modernism. If it is clear that it was the new artistic individual who prompted this different attitude towards art and society, what was the basis of the new self-assertiveness? How did this new subjectivity shape the circumstances that would change the way of artistic expression? Popovic utilized art 'as an analytical operation' to confront codified modernism. This theoretical approach was based on the concept, art is art, formulated by Kosuth:

Works of art are analytic propositions. That is, if viewed within their context – as art – they provide no information what-so-ever about any

matter of fact. A work of art is a tautology in that it is a presentation of the artist's intention that is, he is saying that a particular work of art *is* art.¹⁴⁴

Popovic understood the work of art as defined by its physical boundaries within which it creates the meaning. This attitude abolished symbolic function of art producing wide array of meaning. Although acting from the marginal position, detached from the cultural forces that seemingly shaped artistic scene in the early seventies, Popovic's work together with the work of other new art practitioners changed the artistic paradigm which governed the art scene since WWII.

The *Axioms* represented a radical shift in discourses on the individual and self-expression. This piece brought forth technologically sophisticated inquiry into perception, and photographic or filmed image, and the language of the body. In this way, the *Axioms* opened up new spaces for the production of new meanings in art. Above all, it introduced the agency of the spectator as an active constituent of the work of art and its production.

Section IV

Conclusion

Since contemporary Yugoslav body art lacks a referential cultural and social background, as well as a connection with the body art of the seventies (which in Yugoslavia did not achieve an appropriate critical evaluation and representation that would make it a reference for new generation of artists), it outlines the field of personal experience which can be said to be a general characteristic of Yugoslav art in the nineties, in which the body is one of the prevailing themes.¹⁴⁵

This thesis is intended to serve both as critical evaluation of the “new art,” i.e., conceptual art from the early seventies, as well as to offer reinterpretation of the relationships among various socio/historical circumstances which framed occurrences in the artistic scene. In order to elucidate these conflicting social vectors I discussed here the paradoxical question of what the new art concept represented in post 1968 Belgrade, and the struggle for the determination of its space in the artistic scene of the time. The new reading of mechanisms that shaped the artistic scene at the turn of the seventies might be useful for reestablishing a possible dialogue between “rebellious” art from the early seventies and contemporary art practice.

The fact that the cultural arena and political construction are intrinsically linked was proven after the student protest in 1968. After this event politics intervened directly in the cultural field by adapting the official picture of reality to the post 1968 situation among youth. The emergence of new art practices in Belgrade sprouted almost simultaneously with the student unrest in 1968, and started to flourish three years later after the event. The institution of The Student Cultural Centre was created by the regime

in 1968 as a safety valve under the banner of accommodating “experiments in art.” From the very beginning this institutions fostered wide array of cultural activities and became the ‘cult’ space of the youth. Although it is reasonable to presuppose that the system’s hidden agenda was a ghettoization of the new art practices, the art created at the SKC nevertheless changed the art scene in Yugoslavia.

Various books related to this subject, primarily Jesa Denegri’s seminal text from 1976, are concerned with the formal aspect of works of art and influences. These are excellent analytical studies, but none of them is truly concerned with the historical frameworks in which relations between social forces were played out. Even the student uprising in June of 1968 has not been taken into consideration. Further, much emphases has been given to international influences. Jesa Denegri in his book-catalogue from 1976, The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1966-1976, gives an insight into occurrences in the Yugoslav scene as part of an international art scene. However it does not give an account of particular reasons that provoked the sharp turn from socialist modernism to conceptual art.

In a discussion of the particular reasons that provoked a change of the paradigm, perhaps the crucial question to ask is what was the core of an antagonism between conceptual art and modernism in communist Yugoslavia at the turn of the seventies? Socialist modernism as an official visual representation of the system had its special role both in the international and domestic politics. Firstly, it served as a sign of differentiation from the Soviet Union after the break with Stalinism in 1948. During the fifties and sixties it was a visual guarantee of an ‘open’ society communicating with the

whole world equally. Secondly, it was the visual expression of the “new class” that germinated along the path of communist bureaucratized structures.

Conceptual art, which emerged in the second part of the sixties, was a product of the social circumstances in which an entrenched, codified modernism served only one stratum of society – communist bureaucrats. Socialist modernism and its visual emblem, abstract art, belonged to ‘modernist trends’ that in many cases were in effect copies of modernist styles. The new art practitioners used new theoretical approaches coming from the international scene, both European and American, to shape new artistic models. The application of a new knowledge resulted in a conflicting relationship between conceptual art and artistic academic structures. A consequence was the marginalisation of conceptual art that was prevented to access the official exhibition sites. The individuals who pursued the new art practices in their work responded to the cultural constraints by forming artistic groups. Different non-professionals, such as engineers, mathematicians, poets etc., constituted many of these groups. I however investigated the work of two artists, Marina Abramovic and Zoran Popovic, who came from academic background, but turned against the Academy of Art. In my analysis I used their works as examples that epitomized the struggle for “new art” in Yugoslavia.

What kind of mechanisms had this generation of conceptual artists used in their repudiation of modernism and abstract art? First of all, the new art practitioners introduced local narratives in art and the spectator as an active participant in the art process. By introducing the audience into the art process, conceptual artists not only investigated the problematic of perception, but also promoted a radical shift in the artistic production. In this way the new art eschewed the modernist division between artists –

producers and spectators – consumers, and intimated that there is no discontinuity between the production of a work of art and the life of the individual. In the situation of the Yugoslav art scene, this postulate of conceptual art acted as a destabilizing force. It dethroned an autonomous creator and invalidated its role as a bearer of an official visual representation of the system.

Marina Abramovic's and Zoran Popovic's artistic engagement would fall in the framework of Charles Harrison's assertion that "Changes in Art are generally insignificant unless they involve some form of cognitive change..."¹⁴⁶ The cognitive shift in art, which these artists developed and pursued in their artistic production, was understood by authorities as an intervention into the official picture of reality. Abramovic's and Popovic's works analyzed here give picture of an effort to determine the conceptual art space in the artistic scene of the time. Their artistic engagement, together with other conceptual art practitioners of the time, deconstructed image of the art system and thus redefined cultural space.

The conceptual artists in Belgrade at the beginning of the seventies did not struggle against commodification of art as their counterparts from the West. This can be explained by the fact that the art market in the capitalist sense of the word did not exist in Yugoslavia at the time. But this is not to say that the art market did not exist at all. It took more concealed forms not surfacing in the open, but also exerting damaging influences on artists. Thus, it is more accurate to say that conceptual artists fought against centralized power structures of the artistic bureaucracy which was invoking and supporting this concealed market, while at the same time maintaining close ties with the regime's power structures as their customers.¹⁴⁷

Yet the conceptual art attack on socialist modernism did not affect artistic bureaucratized structures profoundly. Although it is true that the artistic scene was changed thanks to the agency of conceptual art, one has also to realize that this happened only rarely. This situation can easily be explained by the sheer fact that the scope of the conceptual art influence was limited. As the seventies progressed the new art practices ended up as coopted by the very system it fought against at the beginning of the seventies. This meant that the art concerned primarily with formal and self-referential preoccupations continued to persist during the eighties in the form of different "neo" trends. This art was devoid - with rare exceptions - of any traits of "lifelike art,"¹⁴⁸ in other words, it was emptied of a concern with ethic embodied in the "social aspect."¹⁴⁹

Marina Abramovic and Zoran Popovic, continue their artistic practice. After moving to Amsterdam in 1975, Marina Abramovic tied her artistic production to the West. Abramovic today is an international art star who lives in Amsterdam and teaches in Paris and Berlin, and whose exhibiting practice covers the world. Zoran Popovic's artistic practice is bound to the vicissitudes of the Belgrade art scene. Maybe more than ever the art scene in Belgrade requires a dialogue between art from the early seventies and contemporary practice. Popovic's innovative art, both from the seventies as well as the artist's contemporary work, can play the role of a stimulus for the new artistic urge in the early twenty-first century. This is all the more important to emphasize since today's artistic scene in Belgrade seems to be more concerned with the international corporate artistic agenda than with its own socio/historical circumstances.

Seen in this light, the institution of the Student Cultural Centre, and its building within which a whole set of new art practices developed "lifelike art" in the early

seventies, stands as the epitome of a specific artistic engagement which at one point meant a profound and decisive change. If we engage this 19th century building, a site of a cognitive change in art, in a hypothetical dialogue with the building from the beginning of this thesis, which is an example of the International Style and modernism, what would this dialogue entail? Would it reassert the oblique meaning of graffiti asking for change, which, during 1990's in Milosevic's era appeared in a Belgrade street, on the wall repainted over old graffiti in pristine white: "You painted this wall in vain." Would this dialogue tell us that the appetite for change is timeless regardless of all odds?

NOTES

¹ Herbert Molderings, "Life is No Performance: Performance by Jochan Gertz," in Art of Performance: A Critical Anthology, eds. Gregory Battcock and Robert Nickas (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984), p.167.

² Although this term was created with the pretensions to subsume all phenomena that surfaced in the art scene of the time, in many occasions it might sound too homogeneous. I will use this term in the thesis wherever it is pertinent.

³ Lucy Lippard, Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972, (New York, N.Y.: Praeger Publisher, Inc., 1973), p.5.

⁴ The notion of 'socialist modernism' is introduced and profoundly examined in Bojana Pejic's essay "Socialist Modernism and the Aftermath" in Essays, www.aspects/positions.org (1999)

⁵ Zoran Popovic, "For Self Management in Art (1975)" in Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writing, eds. Kristine Stiles and Peter Howard Selz (Berkeley: University of California Press 1996) pp. 847-849.

⁶ Bojana Pejic, "Body-based Art: Serbia and Montenegro," in Body and the East, from 1960 to the Present, Zdenka Badovinac and Miki Briski eds., Moderna Galerija Ljubljana, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), p.72.

⁷ Ibid., p.72. In the next section I shall endeavour to explain the mode of the Yugoslav modernism, but here I want to point out that Bojana Pejic, while asserting in her article that, "Due to the break between communist Yugoslavia and Soviet Union in 1948, the official art in Yugoslavia was not socialist realism but Modernism.", states that "Socialist Modernism... was an art which did not show any interest in social reality." While this assertion is true for the most part of the modernist aesthetic in Yugoslavia, however, it has to be taken into consideration the fact that Yugoslav modernism itself was not monolithic, and that there were examples of art which described social reality as grim in its appearance. One of the examples would be *Informel*, 'the art of desperation' from the late 1950s.

⁸ Zoran Popovic, "Critique of Art Mechanisms in Belgrade, Yugoslavia," translation in English: Ivan Vejvoda, (Unpublished article, Beograd, 1975-76), p.5. I am grateful to Lutz Becker for lending me this article from his private archive.

⁹ Ibid., p.2.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.2.

¹¹ Ibid., p.2

¹² Bojana Pejic, "Socialist Modernism and the Aftermath," p.29.

¹³ Jesa Denegri, "The Characteristic of New Art Trends in Yugoslavia," in The New Art Practice 1966-1978, ed. Marijan Susovski (Contemporary Art Gallery Zagreb, 1978): p.10: Denegri uses the phrase 'the speech in the first person'.

¹⁴ Boris Groys, "The Russian Novel as a Serial Murder or The Poetics of Bureaucracy" in Subjectivity, eds. Willem van Reijen and Willem G. Weststeijn (Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam - Atlanta GA 2000), p.247.

¹⁵ Allan Kaprow, "The Real Experiment," Artforum (22; n.4), p.36.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.38.

¹⁷ Peter Gorsen, "The return of Existentialism in Performance Art," in Art of Performance, p.139.

¹⁸ Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, "Modernity and Modernism Reconsidered," in Modernism in Dispute, eds. Paul Wood, Francis Francina, Jonathan Harris and Charles Harrison (Yale University Press, New Haven & London in association with the Open University; 1993), p.201.

¹⁹ Jesa Denegri, op.cit., p.9.

²⁰ Serge Guilbaut, T.J. Clark and Anne Wagner, "Interview with Jeff Wall," Parachute 59, pp.5-8.

²¹ Timothy Binkley, "Piece: Contra Aesthetic," in Philosophy Looks on the Arts, ed. J.Margolis; (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), pp.25-45.

²² Jesa Denegri, op.cit., p.10.

²³ Zoran Popovic, op.cit., p. 6.

²⁴ Goran Paskaljevic's film "The Illusive Summer of 1968," (1984) investigates the reception of the student protest 1968 in a small town north of Belgrade. The father of the family (who is the communist aparatchik), forbids his high school children to watch TV which gives information about the students' protest. However, after learning that Tito said: "The students are right," the father decides to let his children to watch TV, as though nothing has happened.

²⁵ The acronym SKC stands for "Studentski Kulturni Centar" (Student Cultural Centre)

²⁶ The acronym BITEF stands for "Belgrade-International-Theatre Festival".

²⁷ Before the new art practice, the art scene was a site of operation of those artist who graduated some of the academies of art and who bore the title - academic painter or sculptor, and those who practiced art with no art education and who bore the title - 'naive' artists. The later group usually belonged to peasantry, and it was highly commercialized especially all over Europe.

²⁸ Jesa Denegri, Sedamdesete: teme srpske umetnosti, (The Seventies: Themes in the Serbian Art), p. 107. /translation mine/

²⁹ Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, Modernism in Dispute, p.200.

³⁰ Ken Jowitt, New World Disorder The Leninist Extinction, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, USA: University of California Press, 1993), p. 28.

³¹ Boris Groys, op. cit., p. 247.

³² Beside the critical material in the form of articles located in catalogues and magazines, there are only three books which treat this subject: The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1966-1978, (ed. Marijan Susovski, Gallery of Contemporary Art Zagreb, 1978); Nova umetnost u Srbiji 1970-1980, (The New Art in Serbia 1970-1980), (different authors, Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade, 1983); Jesa Denegri, Sedamdesete: Teme srpske umetnosti, (The Seventies: Themes in the Serbian Art), (Svetovi, Novi Sad, 1996).

³³ Predrag J. Markovic, Beograd izmedju istoka i zapada 1945-1965 (Belgrade between East and West 1945-1965), (Beograd: Novinski-izdavacka ustanova, 1996), p. 523.

³⁴ I think here of the concept of the individual as seen in two opposite systems, bourgeois democracy and communism.

³⁵ Ken Jowitt, op. cit., pp. 136-7.

³⁶ The same situation was in Yugoslavia up to 1948. Predrag J. Markovic asserts that after this period "...many institutions of liberal legal system were introduced. The arbitrary work of the secret police was

limited, and the rights of citizens were expanded, especially concerning legal and investigation practices.” Predrag J. Markovic, *op.cit.*, p.517.

³⁷ The Oxford Dictionary defines the notion “cult” as: 1 a system of religious worship. 2 a devotion or homage to a person or thing. 3 (*attrib.*) denoting a person or thing popularized in this way (*cult film; cult figure*). I am using the notion “cult” in the third meaning of this word as defined by the Oxford Dictionary.

³⁸ Joseph Rothschild and Nancy Wingfield, A Return to Diversity A Political History of East Central Europe since World War II (New York, Oxford, USA: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 126.

³⁹ Predrag J. Markovic, *op.cit.*, p.516.

⁴⁰ Joseph Rothschild and Nancy Wingfield, *op.cit.*, p. 127.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 132. Joseph Rothschild and Nancy Wingfield quote Nikita S. Khrushchev who wrote in “Cult of the Individual”, that Stalin said: “All I need to do is shake my little finger and there will be no more Tito.”

⁴⁴ Predrag J. Markovic, *op.cit.*, p. 516.

⁴⁵ Ken Jowitt, *op.cit.*, p.28.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.137.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.137. Ken Jowitt emphasises that this quote is from Leon Trotsky, Revolution Betrayed, p.176.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.48.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.48.

⁵¹ Predrag J. Markovic, *op.cit.*, p.85.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.524.

⁵³ Dunja Blazevic, “Who’s That Singing Over there? Art in Yugoslavia and after... 1949-1989...” in Essays, www.aspects/positions.org (1999)

⁵⁴ My intention here is not to suggest that freedom in the West is absolute.

⁵⁵ Serge Guilbaut, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art, Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War (Chicago, USA: Chicago University Press, 1983), p.101.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.165.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.165.

⁵⁹ Sveta Lukic, Contemporary Yugoslav Literature. A Sociopolitical Approach, ed. Gertrude Joch Robinson, transl. Pola Triandis, (Urbana, Chicago, London: University of Illinois Press, 1972), originally published in Yugoslavia by Prosveta, Belgrade, in 1968 under the title *Savremena Jugoslovenska Literatura* (1945-1965), p.105.

⁶⁰ Dunja Blazevic, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

⁶¹ Dennison Rusinow, The Yugoslav Experiment 1948-1974 (U.K.: London: C. Hurst&Company Ltd., 1977), p.139. ff.

⁶² Predrag J. Markovic, *op.cit.*, p.523.

⁶³ Alexei Tarkhanov & Sergei Kavtaradze, Stalinist Architecture. Translated by Robin and Julia Whitby and James Paver (Published by Laurence King 1992), p.44.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.131. ff.

⁶⁵ Zoran Popovic, *op.cit.*, p.5. Popovic quotes Stanko Lasic, Sukob na Knjizavnoj Levici 1928-1952 (The Conflict on the Literary Left 1928-1952), (Zagreb:Liber,1970) There is a French translation of this book published by Denoel,Paris,1974. “...it was a question of two conceptions of art, hence of two conceptions of revolution to a means for realising man. The individual is reduced to nullity”.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁶⁷ That modernism in Yugoslavia was not monolithic shows the example of the group EXAT 51 from the fifties from Zagreb, Croatia, whose works of geometric abstraction were inspired by the Russian avant-garde. The bottom line here is that these works as well as other forms of abstraction entered the larger picture of the Yugoslav aestheticised modernism.

⁶⁸ Zoran Popovic, *op.cit.*, p.2.

⁶⁹ Bojana Pejic, “Socialist Modernism and the Aftermath,” p.11.

⁷⁰ Petar Lubarda was the most praised artist of the time. He won the Grand Prix at Sao Paolo Biennale in 1953.

⁷¹ Lazar Trifunovic, Studies, Essays, Critiques, (Vol.3), p.231.

- ⁷² Bojana Pejic, *op.cit.*, p.6.
- ⁷³ Bojana Pejic, *op.cit.*, p. 11.
- ⁷⁴ Sveta Lukic, *op.cit.*, p. 73.
- ⁷⁵ Sveta Lukic, Umetnost i Kriterijumi, (*Art and Criteria*), (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1964), p.195.
- ⁷⁶ Bojana Pejic, *op.cit.*, p.7.
- ⁷⁷ Predrag J. Markovic, *op.cit.*, p.428. Translation mine
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.11-12.
- ⁷⁹ Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, "Modernity and Modernism Reconstructed" in Modernism in Dispute, p. 195.
- ⁸⁰ "Prvih deset godina Skc," (The First Ten Years of the SKC), (Belgrade: Student Cultural Centre, 1981), p. 2.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.2. The fact that this publication brings both dates betrays the confusion with regards to this problematic situation, which requires an investigation in depth. Such an investigation of the archival material would elucidate historical circumstances of the SKC foundation.
- ⁸² See Milovan Djilas, The New Class, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publisher, 1957) Milovan Djilas in his book, The New Class, examines in depth the communists' ruling mechanisms. He asserts that the new class was ready for certain concessions to the masses, turning at the same time these "... democratic measures into positive methods for consolidating the position of the ruling class." The New Class, p.67.
- ⁸³ However, among the generations of students throughout the seventies and eighties - up to the nineties when Milosevic's party took a grip on the SKC - an anecdotal joke has been circulating that the SKC building was given to them because it was 'wired'. In all seriousness, that apocryphal story could have been close to the truth, taking into consideration the fact that this very building before becoming the student centre, was the place where the State Security resided. The history of the building reaches back to the time between the wars, when it accommodated the Royal Army Officers ballroom.
- ⁸⁴ Tariq Ali and Susan Watkins, 1968 Marching in the Streets (London, U.K.: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1998), pp. 108-109.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 108.
- ⁸⁶ As this interconnection between the SKC and student protest of 1968, has not been analysed in Serbian art criticism, at this stage of my investigation I can only make a presupposition with regards to this question. Needless to say, it requires enquiry into archival material.
- ⁸⁷ Bojana Pejic, "Socialist Modernism and the Aftermath," 16.
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.15.
- ⁸⁹ See Zoran Popovic and Jasna Tijardovic, "A Note on Art in Yugoslavia," Fox (Vol. I, No.1, 1975), pp. 49-52.
- ⁹⁰ Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, USA: University of California Press, 1984), p. 96.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.94.
- ⁹² *Ibid.*, p.200.
- ⁹³ Victor Burgin, "Some Thoughts on Outsiderism and Postmodernism", Block (11 1985/6), pp.19-26.
- ⁹⁴ Hal Foster, "For a Concept of the Political in Contemporary Art", Recordings, (Port Townsend, Bay Press), p. 149.
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, *op.cit.*, p.151.
- ⁹⁶ Victor Burgin, *op.cit.*, p. 20.
- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- ⁹⁸ For the perception of this problematic I am indebted to Zoran Popovic.
- ⁹⁹ Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space, (Oxford, UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell), 1996. English translation Donald Nicholson Smith, *op.cit.*, p.167.
- ¹⁰⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *op.cit.*, p. 174.
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 407.
- ¹⁰² I am grateful to Zoran Popovic for this comment.
- ¹⁰³ Henri Lefebvre, *op.cit.*, p. 407.
- ¹⁰⁴ Lucy Lippard, *op.cit.*, pp. 1-5.
- ¹⁰⁵ Peter Burger, Theory of the Avant-Garde, translation by Michael Shaw, (Minnesota, USA: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.69.

- ¹⁰⁶ Henry Lefebvre, op.cit., pp.25-53.
- ¹⁰⁷ Allan Kaprow, op.cit., p.40.
- ¹⁰⁸ John Pijnappel, "Interview with Marina Abramovic, February 1990," in Arts Meets Science and Spirituality in a Changing Economy, (SDU Publishers, 'S-Gravenhage, 1990), p.303.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.95.
- ¹¹⁰ Michael Rush, New Media in Late 20th-Century (London, U.K.: Thames&Hudson, 1999), p.57.
- ¹¹¹ Boris Groys, op.cit., p.251.
- ¹¹² Bojana Pejic, "Socialist Modernism and the Aftermath," p.15.
- ¹¹³ One of the examples was Dusan Makavejev's well known film "WR: Mysteries of Organism" (1971), which reemerged in Yugoslavia only during the second half of the eighties, while it was repeatedly shown in one London cinema for ten years after its production at the end of sixties.
- ¹¹⁴ Michel de Certeau, op.cit., p. 101.
- ¹¹⁵ Herbert Marcuse, "Art in One Dimensional Society," Arts Magazine (Vol.41 no.7 May 1967), pp. 26-31.
- ¹¹⁶ Ibid., op.cit., p.28.
- ¹¹⁷ Michel de Certeau, op.cit., p. 100.
- ¹¹⁸ Timothy Binkley, "Piece: Contra Aesthetics", in Philosophy Looks on the Arts, ed. J.Margolis, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), pp. 25-45.
- ¹¹⁹ Chrissie Iles, "Cleaning the Mirror," in Marina Abramovic: Objects Performance Video Sound, ed. Chrissie Iles (Museum of Modern Art Oxford, 1995), p.22.
- ¹²⁰ Henri Lefebvre, op.cit., p. 174.
- ¹²¹ Catalogue to the exhibition "Zoran Popovic, Axioms 1971-1973" (Gallery of the Student Cultural Centre, Belgrade, October 1983), p.1.
- ¹²² Jesa Denegri, "Interview with Zoran Popovic," Moment (Beograd, no.14. 1989), pp.20-31. Translation mine.
- ¹²³ Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, op.cit., 210.
- ¹²⁴ T.J. Clark, in "Interview with Jeff Wall," Parachute 59, p.5.
- ¹²⁵ Jesa Denegri, "Interview with Zoran Popovic," p.20.
- ¹²⁶ Ibid., p.21.
- ¹²⁷ Charles Harrison, Essays on Art & Language, (Oxford, U.K.: Basil Blackwell Ltd. 1991), p.31.
- ¹²⁸ Jesa Denegri, "Interview with Zoran Popovic," p.21.
- ¹²⁹ Zoran Popovic, Catalogue: Oktobar 72 (October 72), (Belgrade: SKC Gallery, 1972), p.15. The catalogue is in Serbian and English.
- ¹³⁰ Michael Rush, New Media in Late 20th-Century Art (London, U.K.: Thames&Hudson, 1999), p. 48.
- ¹³¹ Hal Foster, The return of the Real (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996), pp. 221-222.
- ¹³² Ibid., p.219.
- ¹³³ Ibid., p.221.
- ¹³⁴ Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology, eds.F. Frascina and C. Harrison (London and New York, 1982), pp. 5-6.
- ¹³⁵ Ibid., p.15.
- ¹³⁶ Charles Harrison, Essays on Art&Language, p.55.
- ¹³⁷ Ibid., p.45.
- ¹³⁸ Ibid., p.30.
- ¹³⁹ Ibid., p.76.
- ¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p.70.
- ¹⁴¹ Ibid., p.69.
- ¹⁴² Ibid., p.49..
- ¹⁴³ Ted Honderich ed., The Oxford Companion to Philosophy, p.823.
- ¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p.20.
- ¹⁴⁵ Dejan Sretenovic, "The Body Lost and Regained" in Body and the East, p.79.
- ¹⁴⁶ See the quote 136 above.
- ¹⁴⁷ Here is what Zoran Popovic wrote in his article from 1975: "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 social values of people in the hands of 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 article is published in Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art, A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings, ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press), p. 849.

¹⁴⁸ Alan Kaprov, *op.cit.*, p.36.

¹⁴⁹ Peter Gorsen, "The Return of Existentialism in Performance Art," Art of Performance, p.139.

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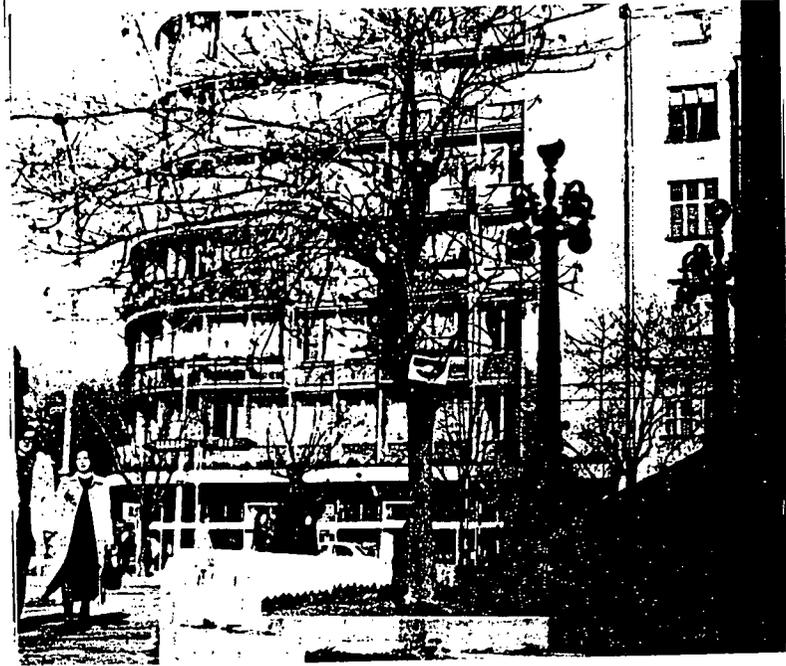
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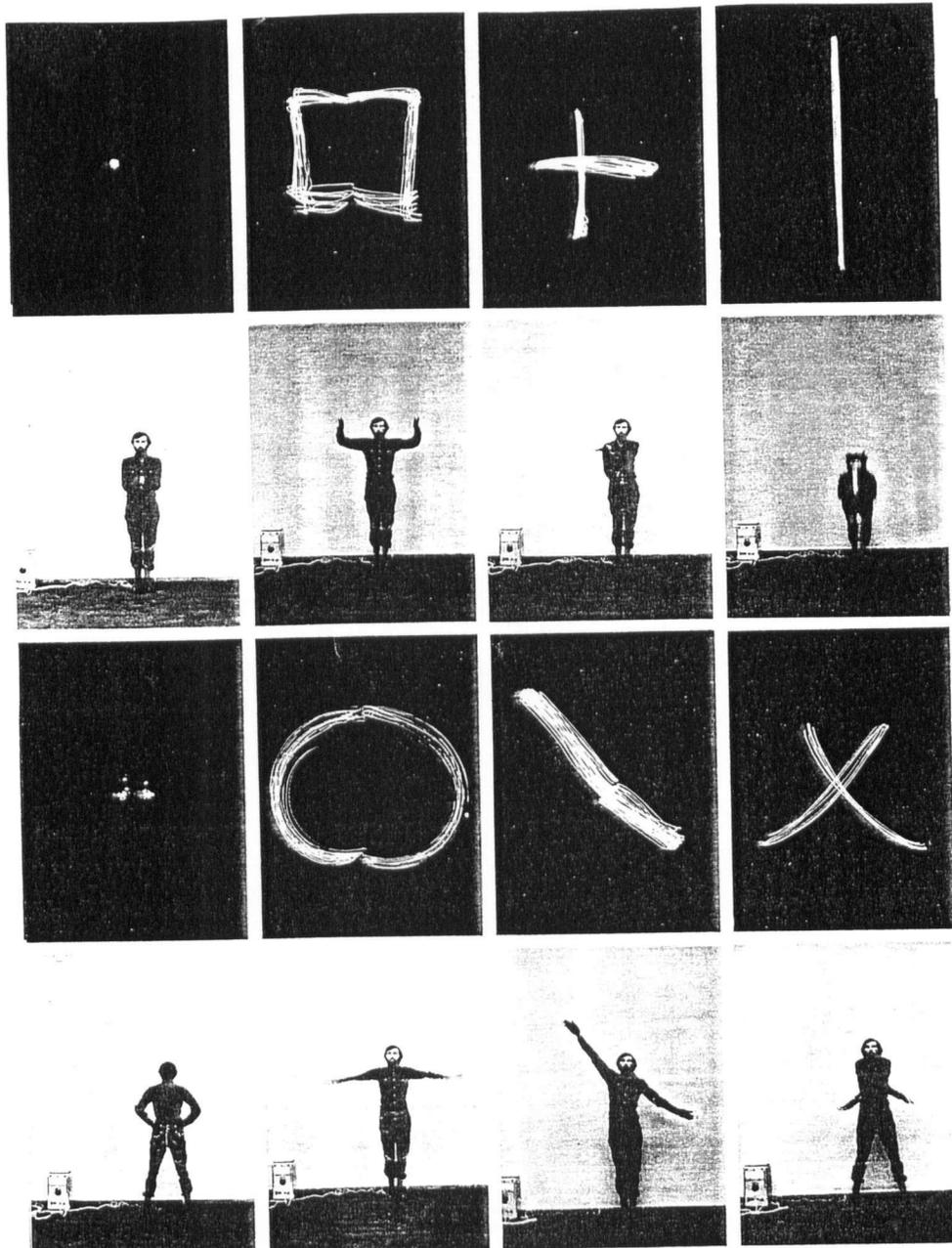
The Central Committee Building

Fig. 1.



Sonorous Space: Birds Chirping, 1972
sound environment
in front of the Student Cultural Centre, Belgrade

Fig. 2.



Axiomi, Performance 1972, Galerija SKC, Beograd

Fig 3

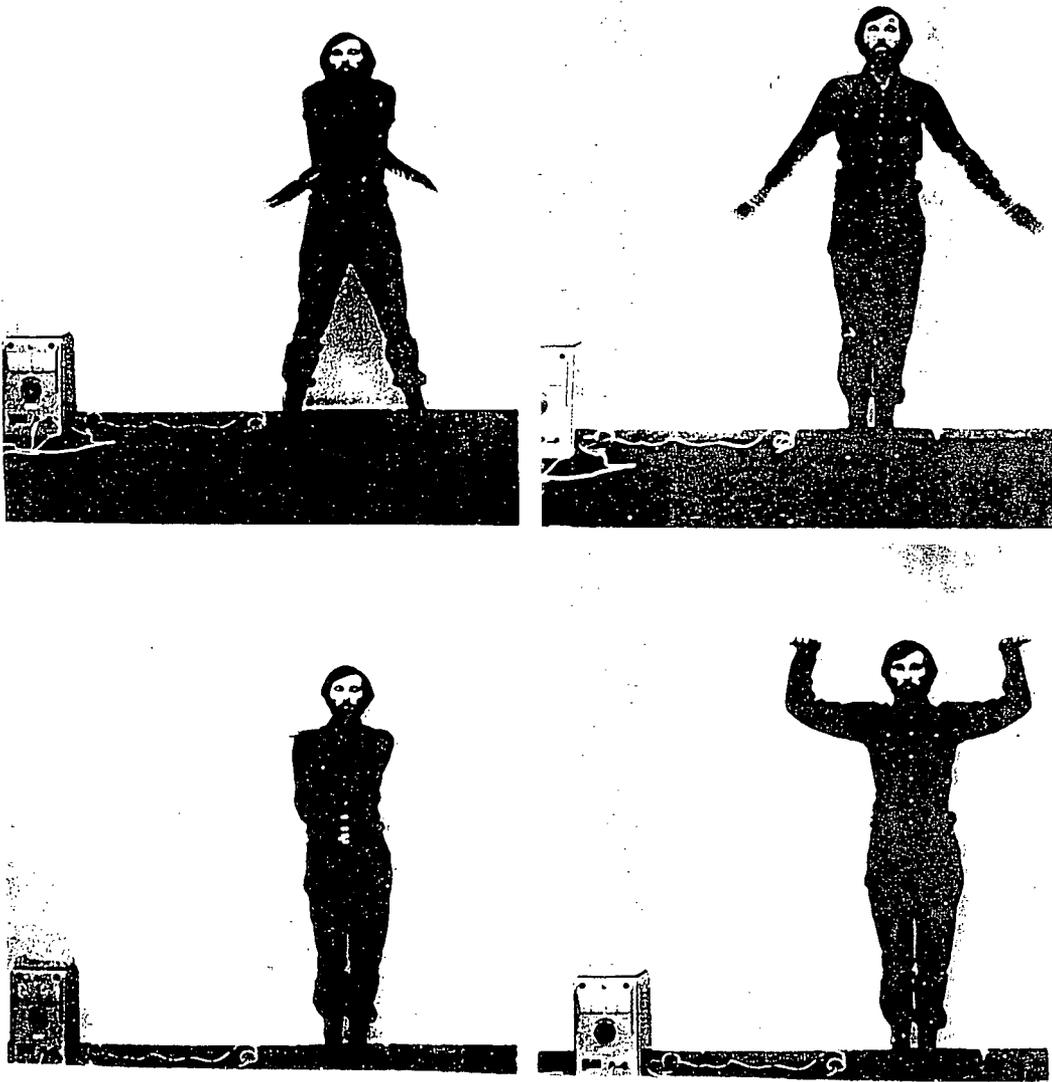
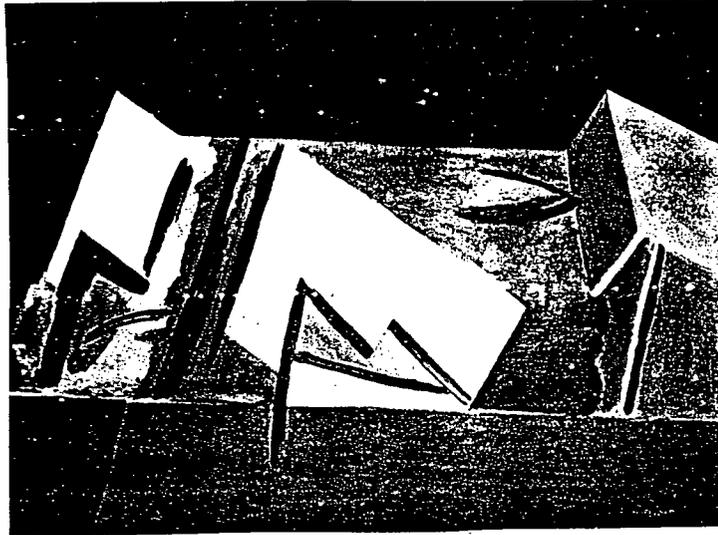
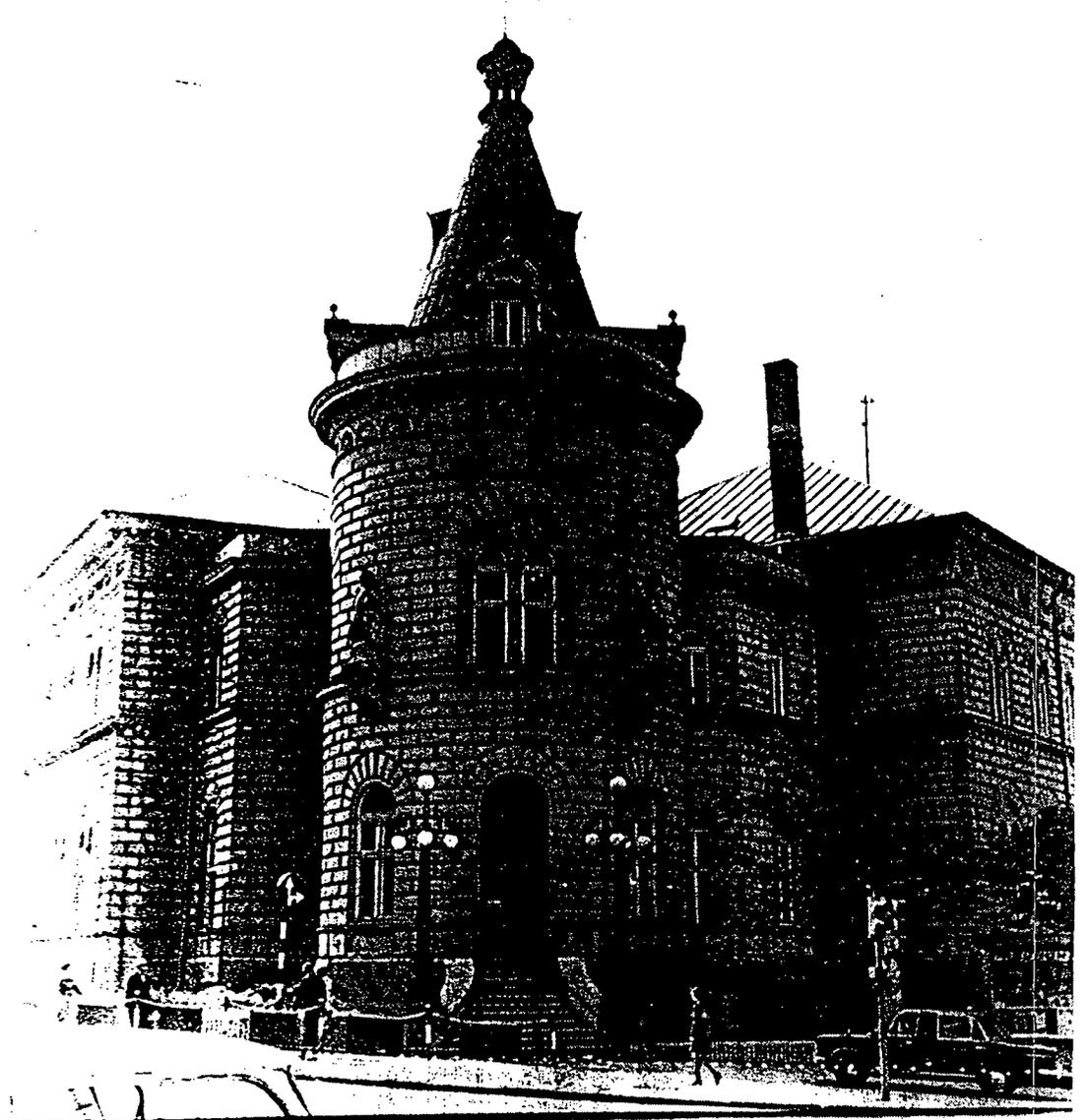


Fig. 4.



Stojan Celic, Predeo sa suvim travama (*Landscape with Herbs*), 1958.
Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade

Fig. 5.



The Student Cultural Centre, Belgrade

Fig. 6.



From left: R. Todosijević, Z. Popović, Marina Abramović, G. Urkom, S. Milojević, N. Paripović,
at the Student Cultural Centre, Belgrade, 1970

Fig. 7.



Moscow State University, Lenin Hills,
Moscow

1949-1953

Architects, Lev Rudnev, Pavel
Abrosimov, Alexander Khryakov and
others

Engineer, Vsevolod Nasonov

Fig. 8.



Petar Lubarda, *Zega (The Heat)* 1952.
Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade

Fig. 9.



Marina Abramović, Joseph Beuys, Neša Paripović, Zoran Popović,
at the Student Cultural Centre, Belgrade, 1974

Fig. 10.

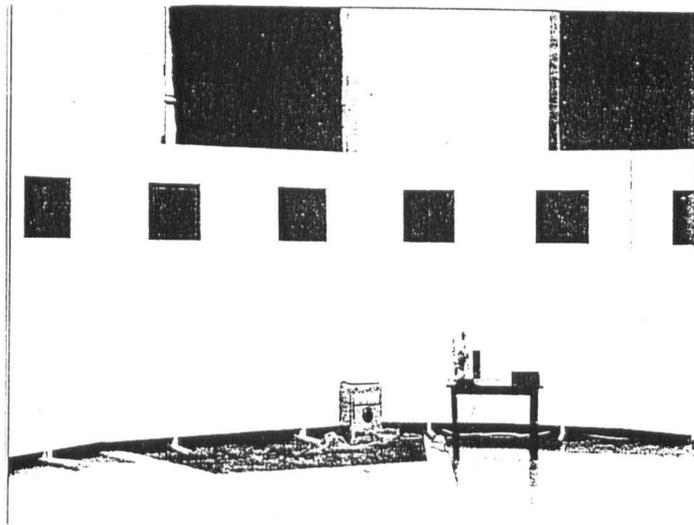
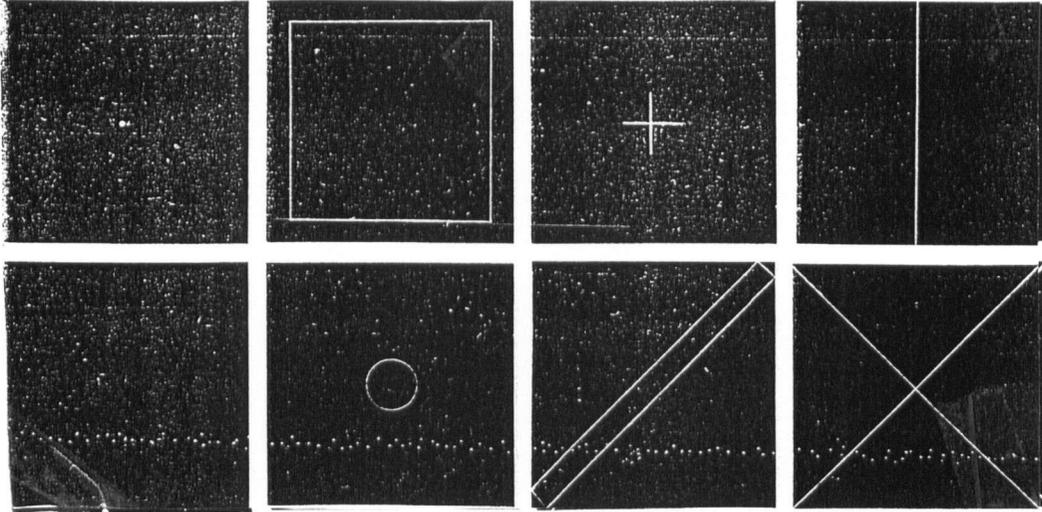


Аутор приказује 8 знакова у потпуно мрачној просторији. На врховима прстију налазе се мале упаљене сијалице. Просторија у којој се изводи приказивање испуњена је веома снажним звуком тако да се чини да је испуњен сваки делић простора.

The artist makes 8 gestures in a completely darkened room. On his fingertips he has small lightbulbs. The room in which the performance is done is filled with very intense sound, so that it seems like it permeates all of the space.

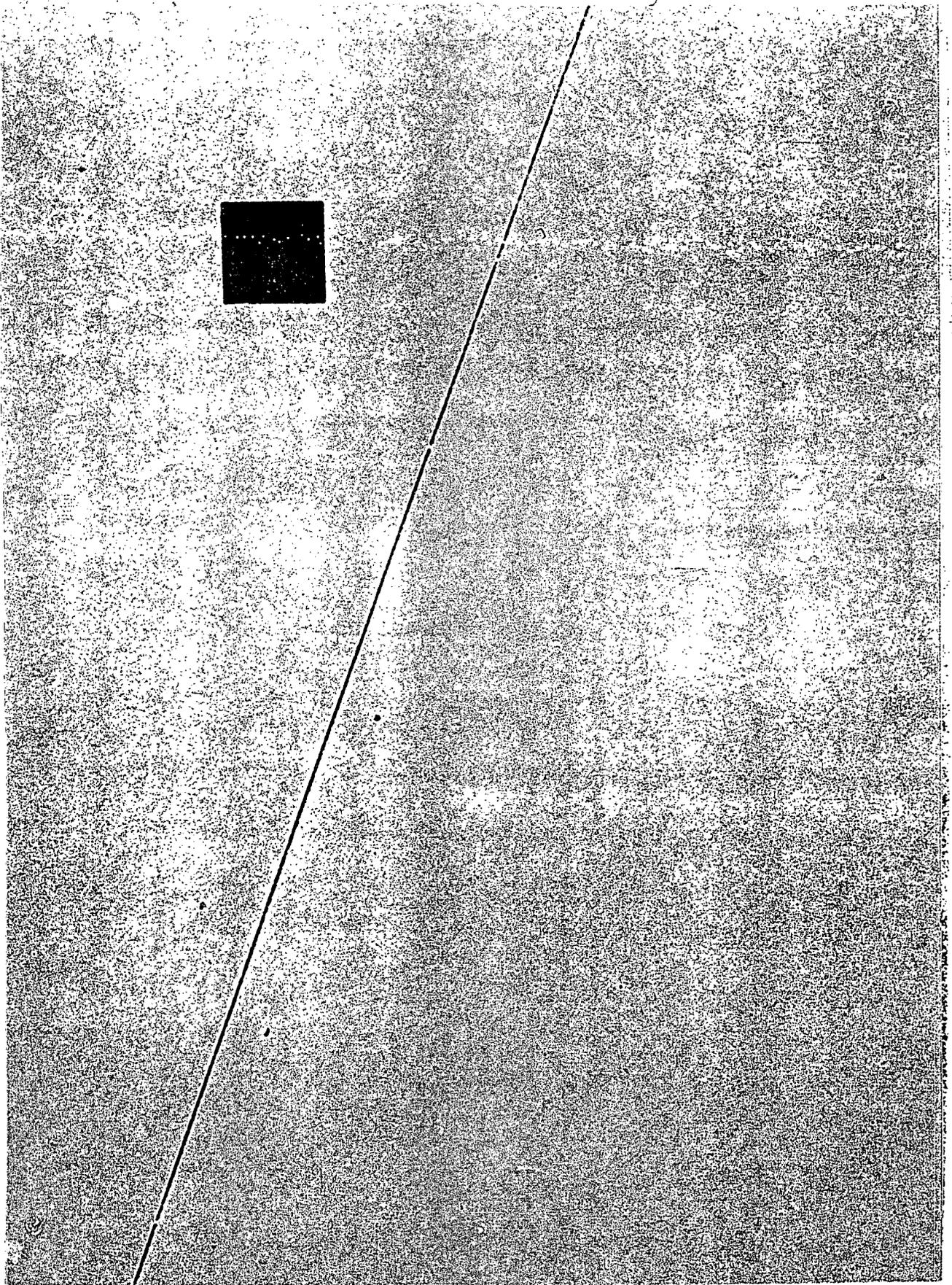
"Anxious"

Fig. 11.



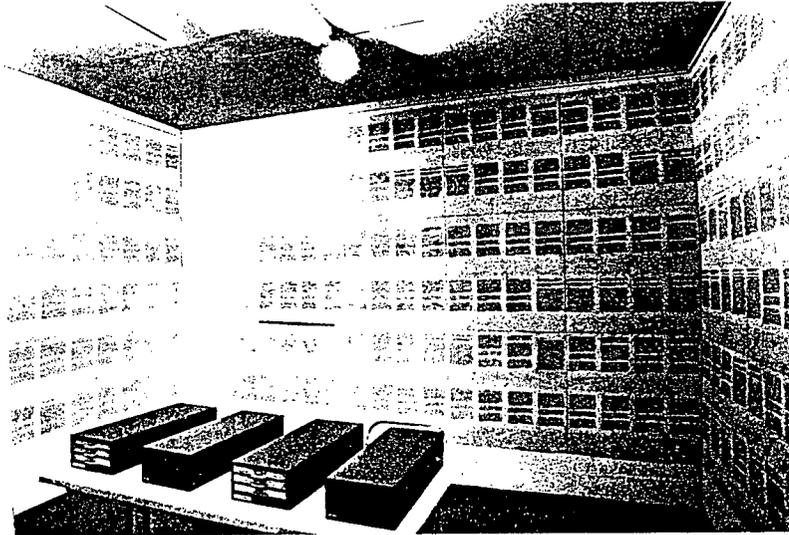
Exhibition October 72, *Axioms*: eight linotypes, installation with eight battery lights, and 8mm film of Performance Axioms

Fig. 12.



Aleksandar Srnec: Kompozicija T-5a, 1955.

Fig. 13.



*Art &
Language, Index 02
(1972), installation at
Lisson Gallery,
London. Four file
cabinets, texts and
photostats, dimensio:
variable. Collection
Annick and Anton
Herbert, Ghent.*

Fig. 14.