

Neja Kaiser

University of Groningen, The Netherlands

Performing Freedom: Intertwinement of Art and Politics in Yugoslavian Performance Practice

Introduction:

In recent decades, the field of performance has been receiving more and more attention within the art historical context. Yet not enough if we think of Yugoslavian performance practice that has been almost completely excluded from mainstream histories of performance art as well as from histories of modern and/or contemporary art.

Performing Freedom is not intended to be an all-inclusive overview of the performance practice in Yugoslavia. It also does not seek to provide a precise description of the chronological development of performance practice in the region. Instead, it aims to advance the understanding of how art and politics are entangled in Yugoslavian performance practice.

Central Questions of the dissertation:

What does the relationship between art and politics look like in performance practice? In what way do art and politics interact with one another? To which extent? Is there tension between these two aspects? Are they something that is part of particular work, or are they added from an outside source? Are there two aspects at all? How do you even know where the art ends and politics begins and the other way around?

It is challenging to answer these questions purely on theoretical bases, which is why *Performing Freedom* employs a case study approach and introduces a number of significant performance practices from former Yugoslav republics, including Marko Pogačnik's actions against the war in Vietnam (1966), OHO's *Triglav* (1968) Red Peristyle Group's *Project for the chromatic redesigning of the Peristil environment* (1968), Grupa KÔD's program *The Buffet of The New Arts* (1971), Balint Szombathy's *Lenin in Budapest* (1972), TOK's *Public Demonstration* (1972), Marina Abramović's *Lips of Thomas* (1975), Sanja Iveković's *Triangle* (1979), Tomislav Gotovac's *Zagreb, I love you* (1981), Laibach's performance

project broadcasted on TV Slovenia (1983) and Women in Black's initial appearances on Belgrade streets (1991).

Material focus of my research:

My research involved consultation of both primary (artifacts, still images, video and/or audio recordings, artists' statements, announcements, press clippings, reviews, correspondence, and official documents) and secondary (scientific literature and exhibition catalogues) source materials in Slovenian, Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian, and English languages at local public archives, including the Archive of Radiotelevizija Slovenija National and University Library Ljubljana, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Ljubljana, Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb, Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade, Museum of Contemporary Art of Vojvodina, and Archive of the Student Cultural Center in Belgrade. However, many of the most important institutions lack any substantial archival holdings on the most of selected study cases discussed here, which is why I needed to turn to private collectors, particularly Marinko Sudac, independent cultural organizations like New Media Center_kuda.org or Tomislav Gotovac Institute, and most importantly artists themselves.

Methodological approaches:

This research relies on familiar methods of art history such as historical research, archival research, document analysis, interviews, etc. While the research described here is deeply rooted in the academic discipline of art history, it does not shy away from taking advantage of the contributions provided by the other disciplines interested in performance art.

Potential problems:

- Evidence and performance are closely entangled in performance art.
- The evidence contains inherent bias, whether it was authored by the artist or someone else.
- Using affectively worded (leading) questions, double-barreled questions, and overly complex questions during interviews.
- The interviewees see events I am interested in through a memory screen.