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Art and Ideology: Neo-Avant-Garde and Post-Avant-Garde Art Practices in Croatia

The main objective of my dissertation project is to advance a theoretical and methodological contribution to the analysis of relations between politics, art and philosophy in former Yugoslavia after WWII, specifically in the context of the Cold War international relations. The analysis made to this topic points to a critical positioning of the (radical) art practices, and intellectual scene within the “Marxist horizon” of the Yugoslavian self-managed socialist system ideology, this following the distinction between the concepts of so-called “socialist modernism”, neo-Avant-garde (EXAT 51, New Tendencies, Gorgona group) and critical post-Avant-garde art (case studies: *institutional critique* in work of Goran Trbuljak, retro-Avant-garde of Mladen Stilinović)¹ in Croatia. In that aspect, the purpose of my research is to analyze how art and philosophy could indicate and expose mechanisms of ideology in late socialist and post-socialist period, i.e. reveal the anomalies of the socialist system from the phase of its construction to its deconstruction.

¹ Short reference list regarding theories of the Neo-avant-gardes and Post-avant-gardes: Aleš Erjavec (ed.), *Aesthetic Revolutions and Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde Movements*, Duke University Press, Durham/ London, 2015, and *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition, Politicized Art under Late Socialism*, University of California Press, 2003.; Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta. Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989*, London: Reaktion Books, 2009; Dubravka Djurić, Miško Šuvaković, *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991*, MIT Press, Massachusetts, 2003.; Marina Gržinić, „Retro-Avant-Garde, or Mapping Post-Socialism“ in: *Fiction Reconstructed*, Edition Selene, Wien, 2000; Boris Groys, *Stalin, The Total Art of Stalinism*, Princeton University Press, 1992., Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2000., etc. Original source materials about Croatian art practices are from the archive of Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, Croatia, and partially from the archive of Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, Serbia.

I am using and questioning the concept of “socialist modernism”² as a cultural framework to posit Croatia (Yugoslavia) within global constellations after the famous split with Stalin in 1948, following its departure from the socialist realism as an obligatory style and theory in the region. Unlike socialist realism, socialist modernism was marked by apparent emancipatory nature of Yugoslavian socialist system that made possible the liberalization of cultural and art space towards international flows of Western modernism which resulted in plurality of art movements from the early 1950s onwards on the one side, but it also marked the conservative if not repressive cultural politics on the other side (similar to the situation in Poland after 1956.). In that respect, it could be said that the radical artistic and theoretical approaches in the Yugoslavian cultural sphere were simultaneously dissent and integrative to the dominant ideology of self-managed socialism.

Even though the term was mainly used in the context of visual arts, I use it here to describe a context of Yugoslavian philosophy as well, encompassing humanist (Praxis School of Marxist humanist thought) and anti-humanist (mainly Slovenian theoretical anti-humanists) departure of Yugoslavian social theory from the rigid, official understanding of Marxism as an “ideological horizon” of Yugoslavian society.³

To achieve that, I have split my research in two levels; the level of conceptualization and the level of contextualization. The first one implies re-reading the ways of conceptualizing art practices and philosophical practices on the basis of nominally equal or similar philosophical and theoretical concepts, and the ways they had (if so) been embodied in the society (such analysis will show gradual departure from modernist ‘holism’ towards its post-modern critique through art, i.e. dissolution of the ‘modern subject’). The second one implies consideration of a ‘history’

² The actual definition of socialist modernism is partly based on the original use of the term 'socialist aestheticism' by Sveta Lukić, and the later use of the term in the visual arts by Lazar Trifunović, Lidija Merenik, Ješa Denegri, Miško Šuvaković and Bojana Pejić.

³ Short list of sources: *Praxis* (journal), publisher: Croatian Society of Philosophy, Zagreb; *Problemi. Razprave* (journal), publisher: Society for Theoretical Psychoanalysis, Ljubljana; Mihailo Marković, Robert S. Cohen, *Yugoslavia: The Rise and Fall of Socialist Humanism. A History of the Praxis Group*, Spokesman Books, Nottingham, 1975; Oscar Gruenwald, *The Yugoslav search for man: Marxist humanism in contemporary Yugoslavia*; J. F. Bergin Publishers, South Hadley, MA. 1983, Dragomir Olujić i Krunoslav Stojaković (ur.), *Praxis. Društvena kritika i humanistički socijalizam*, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, Beograd, 2012; Ferry, Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism*, Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1990., etc.

of intellectual positions in the sphere of the Yugoslav cultural production in broader sense, not only in regard to the ideas of self-management socialism, but also inter-connections between philosophical, theoretical and artists circles, or/and of its lack of such connections.

The aim of my research is not solely to probe the form and content of art itself, but to apply a contextual analysis within the interdisciplinary postulates: spreading the disciplinary methodologies of art history by referring to materialistic theory of ideology, politics, cultural history, and derisively semiology and post-structuralism, as well as to question the term “socialist modernism” and the position of Yugoslavian (Croatian) intellectual and art scene in the context of (in my opinion) oversimplified usage of antithetical positions of East and West in the Cold War geopolitical context.