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Engaged Art Practice and Institutional Change: A Brief Introduction to Art Experiments in Yugoslavia and Serbia from 1968 to the Present

Abstract: This article will explore examples of art practices and the work of curators in Yugoslavia and Serbia, from 1968 until the present, and will attempt to challenge the capitalist logic of the dominant art institution and its criteria that enable the exploitation of the work of artists. Focusing on collaboration, participation, democratization, and transformative experiences, these practices are shifting the modes of production and disturbing hierarchies between the artist, the artists' work, and the audience. This shift implies changes in the nature of artwork, trying to re-imagine and test a new institutional framework outside the dominant art system and its logic of exploitation. The examples explored emerged from the student and youth centres in Yugoslavia around 1968, from the anti-war movement of the 1990s in Serbia, and from the so-called *independent cultural scene* in Serbia during the first decades of the 21st century. This paper's focus is inspired by the current students' protests taking place in Serbia and the need to analyze them in relation to the legacies of the art practices which can be recognized in some features of the current movement and its related artistic articulations.

Keywords: participation; engagement; art labor; avant-garde; democratization; art institution; social change; Student Cultural Centre.

Introduction

Starting in November 2024, when the canopy of the public train station collapsed, killing sixteen people in Novi Sad, Serbia has been going through an intensive movement of social transformation led by students. Continuous protests, faculty blockades, marches throughout the country, public gatherings, discussions, street actions, collective silences commemorating the death of sixteen people, all manifest students' and citizens' calls for accountability and responsibility of the state institutions mired in corruption. Within an eight-month-long process, student-organized plenums, forums of direct democracy, have demonstrated a new logic of collective organizing, horizontal decision making and communal living. The movement has no leaders, and everybody's voice matters. Inspired by their efforts, citizens and workers have also started to self-organize through forums, informal initiatives, and new waves of unionized struggle, in an attempt to collectively re-imagine democracy, its

structure, values and principles for the future.¹ The students' struggle has also become marked by street actions, protests, exhibitions, and the occupation of the Student Cultural Center (which, for decades, due to the mismanagement and corruption, has had no relevance for youth culture and students). The very nature of these interventions and actions initiated by students demonstrate the values of community work, interdisciplinary approaches, collective endeavor, and the dismantling of the hierarchy between artists, artwork and the audience. They draw on a rich heritage of cultural activism; artists, curators and art collectives active within the youth centres and student cultural centres in Yugoslavia around and after the students' protests of 1968; art collectives, curators and artists involved in the anti-war movement of the 1990s in Serbia; numerous art collectives, curators and artists of the independent cultural scene² which emerged at the turn of the century.

This article aims to introduce examples of this rich heritage of art practices, focusing on collaboration, participation, community building, and transformative experiences in Yugoslavia and Serbia from 1968 to the present. One of the most important characteristics of the examples in question is their tendency to challenge the hierarchies inherent within the dominant art system, as well as the modes of production, distribution and communication of the work of artists maintained and reproduced by the institution of art.

Art work and ideology

The art practices addressed in this article aim to test and challenge the modes and conditions of production in the best tradition of Walter Benjamin's ethics regarding authors as producers. His instruction to authors not only on the level of "transcending the specialization in the process of intellectual production"³ but also on the level of organizing potentiality of the character of work of an artist as a new resonance today. Publicly presented in 1934, Benjamin's article offers the following articulation:

His [the author's] work will never be merely work on product but always, at the same time, work on the means of production. In other words, his products must have, over and above their character as works, an organizing function, and in no way must their organizational usefulness be

¹ More on the nature of current protests in Serbia and its relation to the process of reimagining democracy in: Saša Savanović, "The protests in Serbia are historic, the world shouldn't ignore them," *Aljazeera*, February 23, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2025/2/23/the-protests-in-serbia-are-historic-the-world-shouldnt-ignore-them>.

² The notion of the independent cultural scene is still informal but a widely accepted term that defines civil society's artistic and cultural organizations, free-lance artists, informal groups and collectives operating based on self-organization, non for profit logic, economically dependent on unstable project financing but active in the struggle to preserve art and culture as public good, confront commercialization of artistic and cultural production with pro-active relation toward wider social processes both locally and internationally.

³ Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer", in *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 2*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 775.

confined to their value as propaganda...What matters, therefore, is the exemplary character of production, which is able, first, to induce other producers to produce, and, second, to put an improved apparatus at their disposal. And this apparatus is better, the more consumers it is able to turn into producers – that is, readers or spectators into collaborators.⁴

This organizational function of the work of an artist and the focus on the conditions of work and modes of production rather than the final product, exposes the inherent danger of the capitalist system, which hides, in its very logic, structural mechanisms of exploitation and reproduction of injustice. The apparatus of production, reshaped by the artist as an integral part of their practice, should emancipate and empower audiences from being passive to active, turning them from spectators to collaborators, as Benjamin is suggesting, or from ‘viewers’ or ‘beholders’ toward ‘co-producers’ or ‘participants’, as Claire Bishop suggests in her influential study *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*.⁵

Sociologist Katja Praznik identifies the tactics of glorification of the figure of an author/artist, the mystification of the artistic work, and the fetishization of an art object as the main strategies of institutional control. She recognizes the artistic labor is “neither seen nor defined as ‘work’ let alone appropriately remunerated”.⁶ Praznik is offering an important parallel between women’s domestic labor and the labor of the artist, both made invisible by the strategy of essentialization:

[...] one is understood as the natural inclination of women – a quint-essential femininity and expression of love – and the other as the natural inclination of those who possess artistic genius, creativity, or, better yet, an ability to create. In both cases, particular skills are essentialized, declared, or culturally constructed as naturally stemming from the subject’s essence or nature. Neither is defined as work; they are invisible in relation to the process of their production. Only the outcome (the clean house or the work of art) is allowed to be visible, in such a way as to obscure the work involved. Both are therefore economically devalued by being essentialized.⁷

This essentializing strategy within the art system is linked to the notion of autonomy of art, which Peter Bürger defines as an ideological category of the bourgeois class, implying “dissociation of the work of art from the praxis of life” and thus creating

⁴ Ibid., 777.

⁵ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells – Participatory Art and Politics of Spectatorship* (Verso, 2012), 2.

⁶ Katja Praznik, *Art Work: Invisible Labour and the Legacy of Yugoslav Socialism* (University of Toronto Press, 2021), 4.

⁷ Ibid., 41.

conditions for understanding the work of art as “totally independent of society”.⁸ The avant-garde project identified the bourgeois art institution as one that is “unassociated with the life practice of man”⁹ and set about attempting to dismantle the form of an artwork and its modes of production, as well as its relationship with an audience. However, transitioning from the logic of the artwork toward the logic of labor is, maybe, most directly enacted by the productivism movement of the Soviet avant-garde during the 1920s, as explored and pointed out by art historian Nikola Dedić.¹⁰

The attempts of artists to change the apparatus of production and thus the notion of the ‘work’ of art go hand-in-hand with the demand to transform the art institution and the norms and values it represents and nurtures. Examples of avant-garde, socially engaged art practices, are often followed by experiments in institutional transformation; attempting to provide adequate conditions for new practices to develop. This tendency, particularly related to wider social movements and critique of the politics in power, can be traced through numerous examples in Yugoslavia and Serbia from 1968 until today.

Self-governance

Although the global student movements of 1968 sparked artistic resistance to the commercialization of art and the influence of the art market, Yugoslav students engaged in the struggle from a position shaped by their distinct political and ideological circumstances. The Yugoslav self-management socialist model was supposed to contribute toward greater decentralization of power. However, the creation of the party’s elites and hierarchies provoked students to protest in favor of greater democracy within society. In opposing the so-called “red bourgeoisie” – a term used to describe the party elites – students expressed their resistance to the adoption of bourgeois habits and the increasing centralization of power.

One of the first to challenge the dominant modernist model of cultural policy, which embraced the logic of glorification, mystification, and fetishization of the artist, artwork and art object, was art historian Želimir Košćević.

In 1969, in the Gallery of Student Centre in Zagreb, Košćević organized the *Exhibition of Women and Men* conceived as an empty gallery space where the only exhibits were visitors themselves. A few years later, in 1972, he organized the exhibition *Postal Packages* with the only object on display being a postal package containing the works of artists who had exhibited at the 1971 Paris Biennale.¹¹ In 1970, Košćević ini-

⁸ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Manchester University Press, 1984), 46.

⁹ Ibid., 49.

¹⁰ Nikola Dedić, “Avant-Garde Transformation of Artistic Labor: The Productivist [View of Boris Arvatov,” *Art and Media Journal* 28 (2022): 133–51.

¹¹ On curatorial experiments within student centers in Yugoslavia during the 1960s and 1970s pointed toward anti-capitalist critique of the institutional logic see in: Ivana Bago, “Dematerijalizacija i politizacija izložbe: Primjeri kustoske prakse kao antikapitalističke institucionalne kritike u Jugoslaviji tijekom 60ih i 70ih godina 20. stoljeća,” *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 36 (2012): 235–48.

tiated a public action entitled *Action Total*¹² within which the leaflets of a *Decree on the Democratization of Art* were distributed in the streets, calling for the abolition of all traditional artistic forms, from painting to architecture, the banning of art criticism and activities in the field of art history, calling for all art institutions to be shut down. The decree also stated:

Galleries, museums, exhibition halls, pavilions must become homes of active art, homes of culture...The monstrous creation of Yugoslav contemporary art, composed of thousands and thousands of paintings, sculptures, prints, countless applied arts, luxury design, foolish architectural and urbanistic ideas and realizations, and even more foolish 'critical' interpretations, increasingly resembles a purely reactionary activity in a society that needs the ideological force of art more than ever.¹³

An active curatorial position in critique of the dominant institution of art was further demonstrated within programs of the editorial team of the gallery of the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade; not only on the level of working ethics but also within experiments with exhibition formats. During her time as the gallery editor, from 1971–1975, art historian Dunja Blažević introduced a process of horizontal and open decision-making to the team of curators and artists linked to the work of the Centre. The so-called *Wednesday Encounters* became a regular platform for everyone interested in the program to take part and discuss formats, topics, tactics and strategies of the gallery's activities.¹⁴ A series of annual exhibitions entitled *October* were consciously articulated as an alternative to the *October Salon*; a mainstream annual city manifestation, which nurtured the tradition of Yugoslav modernism. Within a few years, *October* became a polemical space where artists and curators actively debated the nature of the art practice as well as the role of art in the wider social context. In 1975, through the initiative of Dunja Blažević, the only exhibit at the *October 75* exhibition was a publication with statements by artists, art historians and curators on self-managing art. This was an attempt to create a blueprint for transformation of the organizational function of art production within the official self-management system of the state.¹⁵ The *October 75* publication, with contributions by Dunja Blažević, Raša Todosijević, Jasna Tijardović, Ješa Denegri, Goran Đorđević, Zoran Popović, Dragica Vukadinović, Slavko Timotijević, Bojana Pejić, and Vladimir Gudac, offers a series of artistic articulations of possible alternatives within the art system which could respond to the needs of the artistic production. The overall tone of the publication is

¹² Davor Matičević, "Zagrebački krug," in *Nova umjetnička praksa 1966–1978*, ed. Marijan Susovski (Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, 1978), 21–28.

¹³ Želimir Košćević, "Akcijska Total – nacrt dekreta o demokratizaciji umetnosti," *Almanah 4* (Bitef, 1970), 120. Author's translation.

¹⁴ More on Wednesday encounters in: Биљана Томић, "Сусрети средом," in *Дрангуларијум* (Студентски културни центар, 1971).

¹⁵ Jelena Vesić, "SKC (Student Cultural Centre) as a Site of Performative (Self-)Production: October 75 – Institution, Self-organization, First-person speech, Collectivization," *Život umjetnosti* 91, (2012): 30–53.

directed toward a critique of the existing art system, whether it concerns the Western market-oriented model or the model of the bureaucratic socialism, seen as one in which ideology instrumentalizes art, as a “strategy of control over all material and spiritual resources of society.”¹⁶ The monopoly held by the ruling structure is identified as a major barrier to a broader democratization due to its control over the domains of education and information. It is recognized that this monopoly inhibits the affirmation of the public sphere and prevents the wider impact of new artistic ideas within society. On the notion of institutional transformations that would adequately respond to new principles of the artistic production, different ideas are presented in the publication, from the recommendation to secure the status of science for the art field – thus ensuring permanent employment for artists engaged in new practices and their economic independence from market relations (Timotijević) – to emphasizing the need for decentralization of society, which would disable top-down control over labor and its outcomes, enabling a principle of direct decision-making as a path to creating space for individual and collective freedom (Đorđević). Bojana Pejić emphasizes the necessity of emancipating art from its decorative authority toward a socially responsible act. The publication offers a relevant debate on the position of art practice within society, its role and function, and ideas and opinions presented by artists and curators still resonate with current challenges faced by artists and art collectives.

In Novi Sad, the radical artistic direction and program of the Youth Centre (*Tribina mladih*) triggered a sharp response from local party authorities, culminating in the withdrawal of the managerial autonomy granted under the self-management legislation.

Student and youth centres in Yugoslavia of this period were characterized by the close collaboration of artists and curators and their joint efforts to change the conditions of art production. Artists were experimenting with form and techniques, but one of their main concerns was to challenge the strategies of exploitation of the work of artists and radically democratize processes of production. The nature of new art practices and the artist–audience relationship was addressed by artist Slavko Bogdanović in his text “*Art (Today), Artist (Creator), Participant (Author)*”:

Art (today) ceases to be commercial; it has increasingly stopped producing objects that could be manipulated... That space (of art) must seek the viewer's activity, which means their willingness not only to complete the artist's idea but to expand it, correct it, make it more perfect. Such art requires the viewer to become a participant... The position of the artist–creator, the originator of the idea, remains the same: they are no longer the author... The activity of the ‘real author’ is reduced to the role of an arranger, while the viewer has become participant and author.¹⁷

¹⁶ Јеша Денегри, “Језик уметности и систем уметности,” *Октобар 75* (Студентски културни центар, 1975). Authors' translation.

¹⁷ Slavko Bogdanović, *POLITIKA TELA: Izabrani radovi 1967–1997*, (Književni novosadski krug K21K, Prometej, 1997), 143. Authors' translation.

In his exhibition in the Student Cultural Centre in 1975, artist Attila Csernik offered propositions for the audience to navigate their perception: “On this sheet of paper, draw the letter you like the most; Imagine that everything around you is purple; Observe the clouds for three minutes. What shapes did you perceive? Try to consciously register the visual experience unfolding before you as you analyze the form of your left hand”.¹⁸ The same year, in the Youth Centre in Novi Sad and a year later, within the *April encounters* at the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade, Katalin Ladik organized an action entitled *ExchangeArt – Art of Exchange, Alteration, and Change*. Under the slogan *Free Art*, displayed on the gallery wall, she created an open marketplace within the gallery space, as a place of direct exchange between artist and audience. A series of instructions set the framework of the action, including the following:

- Exchange Art does not aim to become a new “-ism”;
- The art of exchange is the oldest invention of humankind;
- You encounter the art of exchange at every step;
- With the art of exchange, you will become richer;
- With the art of exchange, you will become poorer;
- Unconsciously, you participate in the art of exchange daily and often against your will;
- This is a chance to consciously choose the object and the person with which you want to carry out the exchange;
- This is a chance to refuse (to break) the object of exchange;
- This is a chance to express your opinion;
- This is a chance to change your opinion;
- This is a chance to adopt someone else’s opinion;
- This is a chance to participate in the most direct communication;
- This is a chance to, for once, not participate in anything;
- This is a chance to remain indifferent to art¹⁹.

Ladik tested the potential for free communication, and the object of exchange became a motivator for communication, for acceptance or refusal, for a horizontal economy. The gallery became a place where all existing hierarchies were dismantled, whether they related to the relationship between the goods and the consumer or between the artist, the artwork/labor and the audience.

The examples presented so far, together with numerous other works and experiments of Yugoslav artists and curators active around student and youth centres of this period, demonstrate the potential of the self-management logic within the art institution, and its possible democratic consequence on institutional management and art

¹⁸ Miško Šuvaković, *Csernik Attila* (Muzej savremene umetnosti Vojvodine, Vujičić kolekcija, 2009), 85–86. Authors’ translation.

¹⁹ Каталин Ладик, “Пројекат за акцију – ИКС ЧЕНЦ АРТ – уметност, размене, измене и промене,” 7. *Билтен*, 5. априлски сусрет (Студентски културни центар, 1976), 4–5. Authors’ translation.

production. The logic of art production was not dependent on specialized education or privilege and the artwork was not fixed by material outcome but was practiced through diverse experiments, encounters, exchanges, situations, experiences. The avant-garde alternative, shaped by students through the practice and exploration of the potentials of self-managing socialism, posed a threat to the established power relations that were not to be questioned. This is precisely where the specificity of the Yugoslav cultural policy lies: it provided the required infrastructure for the development of youth culture, but then, once it demonstrated its creative capacity, it tried to suppress the alternative (in case of Novi Sad) or to neutralize it within the existing institution of art (in case of production of student centres in Zagreb and Belgrade).

Precarious art labor

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world was gradually shifting toward the complete domination of the interests of capital in all aspects of society. Yugoslavia underwent this transition through a devastating strategy of war-driven destruction of the state and its dismantling into a series of smaller, national units. Disagreement with war politics, as well as a need for direct confrontation and engagement, led certain art collectives and artists, such as Led Art, Škart, Magnet, Saša Marković Mikrob, and many others, to work in the public space as a platform of social struggle. Motivated by political resistance and revolt, artists intervened in the social sphere using a variety of tactics.

Magnet group carried out a series of performances during 1996 and 1997 as symbolic actions in front of the institutions representing power and oppression (the performance *Last Supper* in front of the Academy of Arts and Sciences where seven performers were eating bread and drinking red wine on a long table in the street, or the performance *Revelation* where artists broke televisions in front of the National Television during the broadcast of the Evening News. In words of the artist Miroslav Nune Popović, those performances represent “[...] a form of resistance against mass paranoia, and a way of struggle for a different kind of consciousness – one necessary for awakening from the nightmare and creating a new society in Serbia.”²⁰

Actions, performances, happenings, situations, acts of giving, and site-specific interventions are just some of the artistic strategies used by different collectives and artists. Involving citizens in playful encounters and performing acts of *giving* are tactics shared by Saša Marković Mikrob²¹ and the Škart²² group. And while Marković was giving out ludic hand-made masks to incidental participants of his street performances, Škart produced a series of *Sadness* poems printed on cards which were given to the citizens from 1992 to 1994 at various locations: the *Sadness of Potential Vegetables*

²⁰ Miroslav Nune Popović, “Falus revolucija za novo društvo,” *Nune Popović i grupa Magnet, Živela sloboda* (Muzej savremene umetnosti Vojvodine, 2011), 18. Authors’ translation.

²¹ Darka Radosavljević (ed), *Zbogom andergraund Saša Marković Mikrob* (Remont, 2013).

²² Seda Yildiz (ed), *Building Human Relations Through Art: Škart collective (Belgrade), from 1990 to present* (Onomatopoe, 2022).

was distributed at marketplaces, the *Sadness of Potential Travellers* at train station, the *Sadness of Potential Consumers* in front of almost empty-shelved department stores, the *Sadness of Potential Return* was mailed to acquaintances who had left the country, the *Sadness of Potential Rifles* was packed in humanitarian aid boxes sent to Bosnia and Herzegovina. As gifts to a stranger, an acquaintance, or an anonymous recipient, *Sadness* poems created micro-cracks in the system, interspaces of civic solidarity, understanding, and empathy.

These practices fundamentally challenged the status of the artwork and its potential for commodification. Works, focused on the event, process, exchange, communication, or short-term interventions in public spaces, were temporary in nature and linked to direct experiences whose outcome cannot be anticipated and whose result cannot be objectified. This type of production was mostly self-financed or supported (on the level of logistics and production) within the network of civil society cultural organizations, such as Soros Centre for Contemporary Art, Cultural Centre REX, Centre for Cultural Decontamination or Art Association Remont.

At the turn of the century, a significant number of art collectives, artists and self-organized groups emerged, dedicated to process, interdisciplinary approaches, work with communities, collective authorship, and social engagement. Škart continued their practice whilst initiating new collectives and platforms for collaborative work and participation, such as choirs *Horkeškart*, *Proba*, *Hor-ruk*-choir for youth and elderly, *Poetrying* festival, embroidery group for men or *Non-practical Women* collective. Art collectives initiated by numerous artists and curators, such as MiniPogon, kuda.org, Hop.La!, Belgrade Raw, Matrijaršija, Šok Zadruga, Group for Conceptual Politics, and many others, operate within the frame of the independent cultural scene, self-organized collectives dedicating their work, knowledge, experience and initiatives toward the sphere of public good. As such, they are the ones to critically approach both governments and businesses, trying to rethink the notion of the work of art, its nature, function and values in contemporary society. The vitality of this scene manifests itself on the level of content, by critically exploring topics such as ecology, health, social justice, migration, Yugoslav heritage, nature of democracy, community engagement, participation, and minority rights but, just as significantly, by redefining ways of organizing, working and creating together, rethinking self-organized structures and working conditions of artists. This interest and struggle have led to new paths toward institutional transformation.

The Cultural Centre Magacin in Belgrade, constituted by the practice of its users (artists and art collectives active within the independent cultural scene), is one example of possible institutional alternatives. It is organized as a self-managed space, horizontally governed by the users, without any curatorial or editorial restrictions, available to all on the basis of an open calendar. Without stable funding, Magacin still operates outside any legal status, as a space occupied by artists and art collectives. The space has been open for users for more than 15 years and is one of the most vital infrastructural resources for the Belgrade art scene. It is used for rehearsals,

exhibitions, production and as a co-work space, for public performances, festivals, and workshops.²³ *Probate (Ostavinska)* gallery, which operates as a part of Magacin centre within the same open access logic, in the first two years of its establishment (2016-2018) was led by artists Ana Dimitrijević, Jelena Mijić, Marko Dimitrijević and Luka Knežević-Strika. As a temporary collective, they experimented with the presentation and exhibition formats, exploring the role and function of the gallery space outside the commercial and market dictates (*Your 15 Minute Opening, Space for Mistake, Probate Conversations*, etc.).²⁴ One of the members of the team, artist Jelena Mijić, defines their experience as follows:

„I think we have played a lot with the events around us, not only those concerning daily politics or cultural and political issues. In that moment many new galleries and spaces appeared. We looked at them all and found them infinitely boring. So we reacted to how the gallery functions as a gallery. We sought answers to it with a touch of humor, but also questioning certain rules such as selection or representation.²⁵

Within the independent scene, new practices of empowerment, solidarity, care and support have been developed, which have proved to be especially important during times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the whole sector, being at the forefront of the critique of cultural elites and their capitalist institutional logic, remains exposed to precarious working conditions, unrecognized labor, and continuous economic and social instability. Project logic still dominates artistic production, making it dependent on imposed priorities, limited time frames and schedules, and exhausting administration.

Conclusion

While artists and collectives are trying to create alternatives and figure out ways to operate within the hostile environment of the capitalist and corrupt state apparatus, a new social movement is being shaped by students in Serbia. As mentioned at the beginning of this text, as part of the movement, students occupied and reclaimed the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade, which, during the past 30 years of incompetent and inert management, had become inactive and irrelevant, housing mostly commercial programs and sublet spaces. The exhibitions, actions, and counter-festival programs that students initiated in the liberated Student Centre, including the revival of

²³ More on the institutional model of Magacin see in: Iva Čukić and Milica Pekić, “Magacin as a Common Good,” in *Magacin: A Model for Self-organized Cultural Centre*, ed. Iva Čukić, Ana Dimitrijević, Lana Gunjić, Luka Knežević-Strika, Jelena Mijić, Milica Pekić, Aleksandar Popović, Sanja Radulović (Association Independent Cultural Scene of Serbia, 2019), 6–17.

²⁴ More on *Probate (Ostavinska)* gallery at: <https://kioskngo.net/ostavinska-galerijaluka-knezevic-strika-ana-dimitrijevic-jelena-mijic-i-marko-dimitrijevic/>.

²⁵ Ibid, 13:47–14:34

the *April Encounters*, one of the most radical art manifestations of the 1970s, clearly point to the avant-garde traditions students are reclaiming. Numerous art actions, exhibitions, performances and interventions in public spaces, initiated by students within the protests, are transcending disciplinary boundaries and divisions, recognizing the potential of the art practice to intervene within the field of social relations. Forms and techniques used, such as choir performances, arts and crafts, and public interventions, recall works of many of the previously mentioned art collectives. Students' re-enactment of the performance *Heart Object* from the 1970s by artist Bogdanka Poznanović, when a large object, in the simple shape of a red heart, was carried by the artist and her colleagues from the bridge in Novi Sad to the Youth Centre (Tribina Mladih) gallery,²⁶ points to the artistic values they nurture. Their art practice is openly linked with the larger social movement they initiated and is situated within the values such as togetherness, solidarity, collective work, democratization, and the empowerment of all. The art tradition being referred to in students' works and the logic displayed in their actions continue from and build on the experiences and experiments presented in this brief introduction.

And here again we are faced with the subversive potential of art to take an active role within the process of social transformation. The struggle of artists, art historians and curators to challenge the bourgeois autonomy of art, to confront the capitalist logic of the dominant art institution and its criteria enabling exploitation of the work of artists, to change the ways we understand and value the labor of artists, to transform language and terminology used to discuss transformation of the nature of art work, has unfolded continuously for many decades. Although the effects of these efforts, faced with the current conditions of work, could be understood as failure, the new developments, led by the students, restore hope. The subversive potential of artistic experiments, it seems, is not exhausted by failure, institutional neutralization or systemic marginalization. On the contrary, each of these experiments continuously reclaim a space of freedom and emancipation, reshaping, along the way, our understanding of the ethics and aesthetics of artistic work.

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²⁶ Sanja Kojić Mladenov, *Bogdanka Poznanović – Contact art* (Muzej savremene umetnosti Vojvodine, 2016), 39.

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