



The City as a Space of Plastic Happening: From Grand Proposals to Exceptional Gestures in the Art of the 1970s in Zagreb

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Abstract

In the period of the late 1960s and early 1970s, a number of Zagreb-based artists, critics, and curators advocated the idea that art should leave the museum and engage in a direct encounter with the city and its inhabitants. Starting with the 1971 Zagreb Salon and its “Proposal” section titled *The City as a Space of Plastic Happening*, art took to the streets in a series of exhibition projects at the same time as Yugoslav students did so in protests that began in June 1968 in Belgrade, and continued in other cities, including Zagreb, where they were then followed by their ideological antagonist, the “Croatian Spring” movement in 1971. The notion of plasticity was a central discursive tool in the critical and theoretical accounts of the time, and the city was both the stage and target of the artistic gestures of “plastic” transformation. The article reads these projects and the discourses surrounding them as critiques of the Yugoslav socialist city, and by metonymical extension, of the failure of the Yugoslav state to live up to its promise of a just socialist society.

Keywords

Yugoslav art and art criticism, 1968 in Yugoslavia, socialist city, exhibitions in the urban sphere

“The myth of Art as a sacred practice sealed within the cold rooms of museums and galleries has finally been dispelled (to some degree),” proclaimed art historian Zvonko Maković in his review of the *Proposal* section of the 1971 Zagreb Salon, the first exhibition in Yugoslavia to take artistic interventions into the urban sphere as its central theme.¹ Although admitting only a partial debunking of what he also referred to as “bourgeois art,” Maković’s statement reflects the zeal with which, in the period of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Zagreb-based artists, critics, and curators declared the idea that art should leave the museums and make a transformative impact in an encounter with the everyday life of the city and its inhabitants. The *Proposal* exhibition, titled *The City as a Space of Plastic Happening*, was only one in a series of exhibition projects in Zagreb in which art took to the streets at the same time as Yugoslav students did so in protests that began in June 1968 in Belgrade, and continued in other Yugoslav cities, including Zagreb, where they were followed by their ideological antagonist, the “Croatian Spring” movement in

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1971. I will consider these exhibitions both as actors in the historical perturbations in the midst of which they occurred, and as reactivations and continuations of the international and domestic quests for socially transformative art, driven by revolutionary politics. Featured in the title of the *Proposal* exhibition, the notion of plasticity was a central discursive tool in critical and theoretical accounts of the time, and the city was construed as simultaneously the stage and the target of artistic gestures of “plastic” transformation. I will propose to read these projects and the discourses surrounding them as critiques of the Yugoslav socialist city, and by metonymical extension, of the failure of the Yugoslav state to live up to its promise of a just socialist society, based on equality and solidarity. The exhibitions discussed here can thus be said to embody the transition from the moment of renewed enthusiasm and belief in the power of individual and collective agency in the 1960s, toward a mood of irony and resignation that is evident in later examples of art interventions in urban space throughout the 1970s, as well as art historical accounts of the late 1970s. As will be shown, these critical accounts retroactively viewed the exhibitions in urban space as failures, resulting from a flawed idea that art could merge with life and be embraced by society.

The New Artistic Practice in Yugoslavia

The idea, of course, was neither new, nor endemic to the Zagreb art scene. Under the aegis of the “democratization of the arts,” it appeared already in the proclamations of the Soviet avant-garde, which, together with the 1968 student movements and the reactivation of leftist politics, became a source of inspiration for artists active within the emerging transnational network of the “new art” of the 1960s and 1970s.² In the Yugoslav context, such art practices became known as *nova umjetnička praksa*—new artistic practice, which was also the title of the exhibition that documented and historicized them at Zagreb’s Gallery of Contemporary Art in 1978.³ New artistic practice was informed by an attitude of resistance towards the modernist understanding of art as an autonomous field, as well as an opposition to the bourgeois idea of art as a source of aesthetic enjoyment. Instead, it called for a decommodification and democratization of art, a critique of institutions and the art system, and active engagement of art in social processes and ideological discourses. It also abandoned conventional artistic media in favor of performative actions, ephemeral gestures, and the use of inexpensive, everyday materials.

Some of its best known Yugoslav protagonists—OHO Group, Gorgona Group, Sanja Iveković, Mladen Stilinović, Goran Trbuljak, Braco Dimitrijević, Tomislav Gotovac, Marina Abramović, Raša Todosijević, and Goran Đorđević—started their careers at the Student Centers in Zagreb and Belgrade, or amateur cinema clubs, both of which were hubs of alternative cultural activity.⁴ But so were some bigger institutions, such as the Zagreb Gallery of Contemporary Art, and the Belgrade Museum of Contemporary Art, whose curators exhibited, theorized, and collected the “new art.” This is why in the case of Yugoslavia it is impossible to speak of the divide between “official” and “unofficial” culture, which has served as a cornerstone of interpreting the art of former socialist countries along the lines of the resistance of “unofficial” artists to the totalitarian regime.⁵ In fact, the exhibitions that I discuss here were all institutional endeavors, and in some cases, their curators were more radical in expressing demands for a revolution of the arts and the art institutions than the artists themselves.

“From the Totality of the Urban Tissue to the Ornament of Human Steps”

The City as a Space of Plastic Happening project was itself part of an attempt to reform the conventionally structured institution of the Zagreb Salon. Established in 1965, the Zagreb Salon was a yearly survey exhibition of visual and applied arts. In 1971, the Salon was reinvented and

assumed what Lidija Butković describes as the “temporal structure,” consisting of three sections that brought together the past, the present, and the future.⁶ “Situation” gave an overview of contemporary artistic production, “Critical retrospective” reevaluated a selected historical artistic phenomenon, and “Proposal”—with its emphasis on ideas, regardless of the (im)possibility of their immediate realization—was defined as the “domain of the future, domain of the possible.”⁷ *Proposal* was an intervention into the traditionally static nature of the Salon: instead of a neutralized space where art is merely showcased, it imagined art as a catalyst of social transformation, citing at the same time the “social responsibility” of the Zagreb Salon as a “social institution.”⁸ As already noted, there was nothing unusual about this in the era of the 1960s and 1970s, when avant-garde notions about the transformative power of art were revived to become a signature trait of what was enthusiastically proclaimed the “new art.” However, *Proposal* was the first curatorial event in Yugoslavia to focus exclusively on the urban sphere, recognizing the “problematics of the city and its functioning as a local and global priority.”⁹ It invited painters, sculptors, architects, designers, photographers, and anyone interested to submit their ideas for reshaping the city, because the “realization of the humane living environment is a common possibility and a common task,” in which “plastic activities” often play a crucial role.¹⁰

Although the notion of “plastic activities” used in the text is simply a reflection of the critical discourse at the time, in which the term “plastic” was used as an alternative to the more conventional term, “visual arts,” and the disciplinary divisions it implied, the text opened up a way toward further theoretical potentials of the notion of plasticity, as it proposed a vision of the city as a collectively coordinated body immersed in an ongoing “plastic happening”:

[T]he domain of plastic happening extends from the totality of the urban tissue to the ornament of human steps, from the performing stage of the city square to that of the window shop, from the screens of the facades to those of the placards, from the programmed light-effects to the accidental reflections.¹¹

Words such as ornament, performing stage, screen, and light-effects indicate that the city was imagined as a kind of spectacular *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a collective work-of-art-in-progress, created both “programmatically” and “accidentally,” without a clear division of roles between performers and audience. The routine steps of passers-by were an integral part of this ongoing urban performance, just as much as the carefully designed window-shops. Although in its English translation the word *zbivanje* in the original title of the *Proposal* exhibition (*Grad kao prostor plastičnog zbivanja*) coincides with “happening,” an emergent artistic form that dissolved the boundaries between art, author, and audience, here it implied a continued flow of a diverse range of phenomena, events, and occurrences in the city.

The Coming Out of Art

And there certainly was no lack of “happening,” as *Proposal* took place at the peak of a series of political rallies and protest movements that had shaken up Yugoslavia in the late 1960s and early 1970s. According to Boris Kanzleiter, the 1968 student protests in Belgrade were only “the most visible event in a protest cycle, which began in the mid-1960s and lasted a whole decade, until the mid-1970s.”¹² Already in 1966, Belgrade students had clashed with the police in protests against the war in Vietnam and Yugoslavia’s ambivalent politics toward the United States.¹³ Two years later, students rebelling in June 1968 in Yugoslavia—most notably, in Belgrade—criticized the hypocrisy of the Yugoslav state, accusing it of preaching one thing (socialism), and practicing another (capitalism).¹⁴ It was on the basis of identifying themselves not as opponents but rather as true believers in the authenticity of the Yugoslav socialist project, including the politics of socialist self-management and Non-Alignment, that they demanded changes and the democratization of

society. At the same time, in Zagreb, the quest toward Yugoslavia's democratization gained a nationalist emphasis, as the leadership of the Croatian League of Communists spoke out against unitaristic tendencies and what they perceived as the economic and cultural inequality of the Socialist Republic of Croatia within Yugoslavia. The Party's political rallies were supported by a growing student movement that placed itself in opposition to the leftist "1968-ers" and became part of what came to be known as the Croatian Spring, culminating with mass demonstrations in late 1971, which Tito finally brought to an end by dissolving the Croatian political leadership and arresting the prominent members of the student movement.¹⁵

Even if most Zagreb artists and curators of the new art practice did not—at least not explicitly—identify with the demands of the Croatian Spring, it is reasonable to assume that this explosion of unpredictable mass "happening" on Zagreb's streets strongly influenced the "coming out" of art into urban space, reinforcing the idea of art's democratization, that is, of bringing it closer to the people.¹⁶ Vladimir Gudac, a founding member of the Group TOK (Group "Flow"), which started its activities precisely around this time, recalls this context as crucial for the group: in 1971,

things constantly happened outside . . . there were demonstrations, lecture halls were occupied . . . banners were paraded . . . what today is called embodied space was literally taking place at the time; the city was constantly blocked, the roads were empty . . . someone would always stop you and ask for an ID.¹⁷

Curator and director of the Student Center Gallery, Želimir Košćević, himself an initiator of a number of urban art actions and interventions (including his participation in the organization of the *Proposal* section) grants an analogous relevance to 1968, stating that it resulted in an "eruption of youth energy in Zagreb, Belgrade, and Ljubljana . . . After 1968, it was clear that something completely different was going on."¹⁸ One of the most famous works of Group TOK directly emulated protest culture: in a street action carried out in the summer of 1972 in Zagreb, and later in Graz and in Belgrade, members of the group carried canvases filled with geometric forms typical of abstract painting in the place of banners with political slogans. Maja Fowkes interprets this action as a "conscious comment" on the public protests and the right-wing demands of the Croatian Spring of the previous year.¹⁹ She also cites Gudac's understanding of the antagonism between the "so-called extreme leftists and the new rightists" as mirrored in the artistic antagonism between abstract (internationalist) and figurative (nationalist) art.²⁰ The canvas procession was thus at the same time a provocation of this conflict and an ironic comment on the trend of art in public space, which claimed a socially engaged agenda in its interpellation of the ordinary citizen, but remained bound by the formalist criteria of an art object, albeit a more avant-garde object of abstract art.²¹

"Molestation by Unconscientious Citizens"

Such a failed encounter between the citizens and the art manifested itself in the case of one of the best remembered interventions presented in the first edition of *Proposal*, Ivan Kožarić's sculpture *Grounded Sun*. A two-meter fiberglass sphere painted in gold was installed on a pedestrian island in the city center, only to receive violent reactions from unidentified citizens. After it was attacked with black paint and, on another occasion, almost set on fire, the city council ordered the removal of the work, as it "had become a target of molestation by unconscientious citizens, who cover it with various paints, fire and texts . . . which altogether makes the environment very ugly."²² The unconventional nature of the work is usually cited as a reason for hostility: it was the first noncommemorative public sculpture in Zagreb, and it was confusingly both abstract (a sphere) and figurative (as much as it represented the Sun).²³ However, video footage shot in 1971 by Ivan Ladislav



Figure 1. Ivan Ladislav Galeta, *sfāira 1985-1895* (1971-1984), 16 mm/35 mm, b/w, silent, 10 min. Video still. Courtesy of Karlo Galeta.

Galeta and later incorporated into his experimental film *sfāira 1985-1895* (1971-1984) testifies to a cautious curiosity, rather than aggression, as the typical reaction of passers-by toward the sculpture (Figure 1).²⁴

The sphere must have appeared as a foreign body fallen from the sky, a sun deciding to ground itself on the busy Zagreb asphalt. The gold was deceiving, suggesting that the sculpture was made of bronze, when it was in fact made of much cheaper fiberglass. Passers-by approached it, looked at it for a while, then touched it, carefully examining its materiality; they knocked on it to hear the sound it makes, and some tested their own strength by attempting to roll it forward. All this ritualized activity created a constant flow of improvised choreography around the sculpture, its spherical shape repeatedly reaffirmed by people circling it in order to inspect it. As per *Proposal's* recipe, *Grounded Sun* was truly a catalyst of plastic happening, an unpredictable flow of program and accident, of admiration and aggression, coinciding with the historical moment at which the prospect of youth-led radical political transformations suddenly flashed on the horizon, only to be extinguished, or “grounded” the next day. Rather than “ordinary citizens” unable to understand “abstract” art, it is more likely that the aggressive clash between the “grounded sun” and “unconscientious citizens” might have after all been, as is in any case suspected, an intra-artistic clash, not quite one between the “internationalist” abstraction and “nationalist” figuration art, but rather between proponents of the new art and those who tried to protect its traditional boundaries (which in Yugoslavia already included nonfigurative painting and sculpture).²⁵

At the same time, the “ordinary citizen” became the star of another art project realized during the first *Proposal* exhibition: Braco Dimitrijević's *Passers-By I Accidentally Met at 11:15, 16:23 and 18:11 in Zagreb*. Large-format photographic portraits of people the artist had met in the

streets were placed on facades of several buildings located on three central squares in the city, including the Square of the Republic, the main square where political rallies were traditionally held. As Maja and Reuben Fowkes note, on May 7, 1971, merely a day before the opening of *Proposal*, a mass political rally was held on the square, with Savka Dabčević-Kučar, the leader of the Croatian League of Communists and of the Croatian Spring, addressing the masses while standing in front of the same façade where Dimitrijević's works were later installed.²⁶ After seeing Dimitrijević's portraits of casual passers-by the following morning, citizens were thus justified to "wonder whether there had been a change of government."²⁷ Dimitrijević's unrealized proposal was to hang Japanese flags all over the city for the duration of the exhibition. Both projects identified chance, with elements of the absurd, as a factor of historical and political transformation, reflecting in this way the social and political turbulence of the moment and the uncertainty of the future. Just like in his 1969 work in which car drivers accidentally "became artists" by driving over a package of milk that Dimitrijević had set up in advance, so here random people could be perceived as important by having their portrait hung on city facades. In the context where democratization was passionately summoned within the political, activist, as well as artistic discourse, Dimitrijević's works invoked what Jacques Rancière identified as the disturbing but potent core of democracy: the threatening idea that *anyone*—whether citizen or stranger—could potentially take over, or become a protagonist of historical change.²⁸

Duty toward the "Living Past"

Only a minority of *Proposal* contributions were realized; others were exhibited at the Student Center Gallery exactly as proposals, or, according to Butković, "a repository of ideas for some future time."²⁹ Still, despite the organizers' emphasis on the future and on shifting the boundaries of the possible, most submissions presented rather prosaic interventions, such as making urban space more attractive or pleasant by inserting fountains, flowers, or public sculptures.³⁰ A few, predictably those by architects, included plans for new neighborhoods and buildings. The breadth and diversity of the submitted material, however, reflected the desire of the organizers to break through the confines of individual disciplines and artistic genres, and foreground instead the collective effort toward social change. This made *Proposal* a perfect fit for the Salon's "Critical Retrospective" section, which took as its theme group *Zemlja* [Land], a leftist association of architects, painters, and sculptors active from 1928 to 1935, when they were ultimately banned in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia due to their political views.³¹ *Zemlja* advocated socially engaged art, and one that would be adapted to local needs, rather than copy Western trends. Democratization or "popularization" of art was among their central ideas, realized in practice by their leading member, painter Krsto Hegedušić, who initiated a painting school among talented peasants in the North Croatian countryside, from which a style of "naïve painting" developed.

The choice of *Zemlja* as a theme for the historical segment of the Salon was certainly not an accident, but rather another indicator of the social and political upheavals in the midst of which artists, critics and curators reactivated and reaffirmed the avant-garde idea of the social and political power of art. The introduction to the catalogue of the *Proposal* section explicitly defined the relation between art and what it called the "contemporary moment." According to its vision, the task of the Zagreb Salon was to assume a "wholesome attitude" towards the "contemporary moment," which means that it had to take into account "the living past that endures in the contemporary moment" and to embrace the "duty" to "always again define our relationship towards this past."³² By the same logic, the present was also seen to contain the "seeds of the future," and thus required our active involvement.³³ This identification of the debt of the present toward the past and future is among the most powerful aspects of *Proposal*. It embodies the saturated character of the "contemporary moment" in which the exhibition took place and in which both art and politics turned toward the artistic and political revolutions of the past in order to draw from there

a sense of direction toward the future. Maja Fowkes reads the Salon's emphasis on "social responsibility" as an example of "socialist curatorial practice," which she describes as having declared freedom of artistic expression while at the same time enacting "self-control" and assuming an "instructive" approach toward the artists.³⁴ If such an ironical reading were to be accepted, the engaged temporal investment of the Salon cited above could also appear as nothing more than a routine, "socialist-curatorial" reproduction of the usual, "official" rhetoric about the debt toward the communist, revolutionary past as a pathway into the future. However, I view this coincidence of the Salon's curatorial discourse with state ideological discourse not as an Ironic, but rather as a Romantic gesture—in the sense of Northrop Frye's archetypes³⁵—that was in sync with the way in which the 1968 protesters appropriated the historical ideals of the Yugoslav socialist revolution, precisely because they saw them to be betrayed by the state.

In fact, the work of the *Zemlja* group was first exhibited in Belgrade in 1969, a year following the 1968 protests, as part of the exhibition *Nadrealizam – Socijalna umetnost 1929-1950* [Surrealism—social art 1929-1950].³⁶ The exhibition brought together interwar artistic movements that were once on the opposing sides of the legendary "conflict within the literary left," with Belgrade surrealists and the Zagreb writer Miroslav Krleža on one side, and proponents of "social literature," and later, socialist realism, on the other. The Belgrade exhibition reactivated the forgotten history of this conflict, at the same time as the conflict was being narrated in Zagreb by Stanko Lasić in his famous book *Conflict on the Literary Left*, published in 1970, and first presented in a lecture at the Zagreb Philosophical Faculty, the hub of the Zagreb "1968-ers" as well as the academic home of the influential philosophical group Praxis.³⁷ In his 1969 review of the Belgrade exhibition, art critic Božidar Gagro affirmed the rationale of the organizers in bringing these different artistic phenomena—including also the art of the Narodnooslobodilački rat (*NOR* / People's Liberation War during World War II)—by stating that, despite their differences, they were all driven by the idea of engagement in art, as an opposition to the "unique stylistics of bourgeois painting cultivated according to the fine tradition of the Paris school."³⁸ It is this renewed quest for engaged art that imposed once again the "duty" to reevaluate the past.

"The City as Accumulation of Construction Material"

For our purposes here, the relevance of *Zemlja* for the "contemporary moment" resided also in the fact that it was the first example of an artistic collective in Yugoslavia to join together painters, sculptors, and architects, under a common program. The genealogy of the Zagreb "plasticians," that is, those who "explored a new plastic language," was usually traced back to the EXAT 51 Group (1950-1956), and the New Tendencies movement (1961-1973), both of which, in different ways, advocated for a socially transformative art, with EXAT 51 specifically claiming the synthesis of the visual and applied arts as one of its aims.³⁹ But now *Zemlja* could be added to that genealogy, and with it, a reflection on the period that preceded socialist Yugoslavia and during which socialist and communist ideas were relegated to the underground, but could now be seen as seeds for the revolution to come.⁴⁰ However, such a reflection could spark nostalgia for what was no longer there, like in a short text by Željka Čorak, published in the journal *Život umjetnosti* [Life of art] in 1971. Meditating on the park "Zrinjevac"—part of a system of squares and parks built in the late nineteenth century in the Zagreb city center—Čorak identified the contemporary state of this "beautiful, inherited space" as an example of "active indifference" toward the city, which, despite growth and population increase, preserved its urbanity only in the city center (that is, its presocialist core). By contrast, "the new parts of Zagreb" (that is, those built in socialist Yugoslavia) were marked by "emptiness" as they were "devoid of any content that could create a feeling of community."⁴¹ If we take into account that Čorak was one of the organizers of the 6th Zagreb Salon, in fact the initiator of the *Proposal* section and author of the idea of "plastic happening," her critical meditation on the state of socialist urbanity—which also

warned that the “questions of urbanism, urbanization and urbanity” could not be resolved by simply building and destroying, but by paying attention to seemingly minute details—must be viewed as the subtext of the *Proposal* project.⁴²

So, even if *Proposal* itself did not feature an open critique of the socialist city, but referred quite neutrally to the local and global relevance of achieving a “humane living environment,” such a critique underlied the very initiation of the project. In the 1969 issue of *Život umjetnosti*, the journal where Čorak’s text was published, two other contributions expressed similar concerns: Žarko Domljan warned of the discontinuities with the prewar architecture caused by the revolution, and the weight of the ideological dictate governing postwar developments.⁴³ In another reflection on postwar Croatian architecture, Eugen Franković pessimistically concluded: “We are facing the danger of a city that is an accumulation of construction material, rather than a functional core of the urban formation of space, of urban civilization.”⁴⁴

In the period of 1969 to 1972, during which major artistic interventions into the Zagreb urban sphere took place, the journal *Život umjetnosti* regularly featured discussions on architecture, urbanity, and the “environment” by domestic and foreign authors, alongside presentations of spatial explorations of the “Yugoslav plasticians.” Beginning with the already discussed review of the Belgrade exhibition by Božidar Gagro, the journal also engaged in a critical evaluation and presentation of the documents related to the *Zemlja* group.⁴⁵ Because of this, and also due to the fact that some of its contributors were at the same time among the organizers of the Zagreb Salon, the journal itself must be counted as an integral part of the “plastic happening,” or the coming out of arts into the public sphere in Zagreb in the late 1960s and 1970s.

“A Pure and Open Contrast to the Perfectly Ordered World”

Proposal was not the only art event to proclaim the streets to be the artists’ brushes, and squares their palettes, as Vladimir Mayakovsky famously exclaimed in 1917, when the Moscow avant-garde artists exercised their own attempt to bring art to the people and back into life. If *Proposal* paid the duty toward the past by reconnecting with *Zemlja*, Student Center Gallery’s director Želimir Košćević did so by paying homage to the Soviet avant-garde. In 1967, he curated an exhibition titled *October*, in which he showed reproductions of works of Russian avant-garde artists, and in 1970, he organized *Total Action*, which consisted of pasting over the existing street advertising with minimalist, black-and-white posters, while handing out a *Draft for a Decree on the Democratization of Art*.⁴⁶ Inspired by the Russian Futurists’ *Decree No. 1 on the Democratization of Art* (1918), Košćević’s text called for the abolition of all existing art disciplines, a ban on art history and art criticism, as well as canceling all exhibition activities in galleries and museums.⁴⁷ Art venues—and, generally, all indoor spaces—should be used only in the case of “bad weather”; culture, history, science, and art should be reexamined according to new criteria, and all that is ultimately deemed useful for society should be “brought out onto tram stops, open markets, esplanades, disco-clubs, factories, and department stores.”⁴⁸ The text closes by warning that the “struggle taking place on almost all relevant fronts of our society” is not adequately reflected in the arts; in fact,

the monstrous creation of Yugoslav contemporary art, made up of thousands and thousands of paintings, sculptures, prints . . . stupid architectural and urbanistic ideas and realizations, and even more stupid “critical interpretations” . . . increasingly appears as pure reactionary work in a society that more than ever necessitates the ideational power of art.⁴⁹

Three years earlier, in 1967, Košćević curated the exhibition *Hit Parade* at the Student Center Gallery, which he (self)historicized as the beginning of the “transformation of space into environment,” which eventually led to full-blown artistic interventions in the city.⁵⁰ Four artists—Mladen

Galić, Ljerka Šibenik, Ante Kuduz, and Miroslav Šutej—created sculptural environments that provoked interaction with the audience. These artists belonged to the generation associated with the Zagreb-based New Tendencies movement, rather than the emergent “new artistic practice.”⁵¹ The *Hit Parade* exhibition thus testifies to the link between the New Tendencies and the “new art practice,” or the two generations of Yugoslav artists who shared the belief in the transformative power of art, and who both based this belief in affirming the legacy of the historical avant-gardes. However, the quest for social transformation of artists belonging to the new art practice was no longer based on constructive and rational principles—as the approach of the New Tendencies, and its predecessor, EXAT 51, was characterized⁵²—but rather on a more ludic and rebellious spirit of (post-)1968, which was, in fact, reflected already in the *Hit Parade* exhibition. According to Koščević, installing the works in a gallery was just an experiment, a test-drive, because “we envision [these objects and ideas] in the urban space, in the real flow of life . . . This is merely an initiation of the problem.”⁵³

In his book *Examining the Interspace*, drafted in 1974, Koščević theorized and historicized examples of the work done by international and local artists to make art a factor of this society-wide struggle, focusing specifically on art in the urban sphere. The book is also a historical account of the projects he himself devised or curated, as well as a manifesto that summarized his own ideas about art as an agent of social transformation. What makes art in the urban sphere so powerful, he wrote, is the fact that when art takes to the streets, it can no longer be ignored.⁵⁴ The key word he used throughout is “action,” which he opposed to deification and aestheticization of art. Action is a “duration of a certain state of emergency . . . which counters reality with a simultaneous mix of estrangement, creation and insight, instead of a hedonistic, functionalist and profit-driven enjoyment and manipulation of art.”⁵⁵ If understood as action, art transforms itself into “work of agitation, a pure and open contrast to the perfectly ordered world.”⁵⁶

“A Narrow Passageway”

With his insistence on agitation, indeed, the idea of a permanent “state of emergency” and opposition to a notion of an “ordered world,” Koščević certainly exposed himself to the risk of being labeled an “anarchist,” a classification used by party officials and the press at the time to denounce the rebelling Yugoslav youth, including filmmakers and artists. In one of their statements, Belgrade students denied that they ever advocated for the “anarchistic destruction of all existing institutions”; rather, the students’ ideal was “democratic socialism.”⁵⁷ Such a stance was in line with the Yugoslav-1968 logic of struggling not against socialism, but for more socialism, or a better one. However, Koščević’s position is more ambivalent, and I bring attention to it in order to argue for its affinity with a certain “style” of many works produced in the urban sphere in Zagreb—and, more broadly, its affinity with the Yugoslav new art practice in general. Koščević opens his book *Examining the Interspace* with a poetic statement: “I go. On each side a huge building. Glass and concrete. Institution. . . . There remains but a narrow passageway: left and right . . . I go left because I’m left-handed. I go, because I believe—left.”⁵⁸ The author seems to have decided on which metaphorical turn to take, however, just a couple of lines below, we are no longer sure whether he had really turned anywhere:

In front of me and behind me—as much as I can see them—my friends walk into [the buildings]; some walk through doors on the left, others through those on the right. Then they wave to each other from the windows, they yell out something that I don’t understand and they spit onto the narrow passageway that is my path. Sometimes, in front of me or behind me, from a window of the building on the left or on the right, they drop some toothless corpse of some familiar character. I am in-between, and I move. I go.⁵⁹

This fidelity to moving forward alongside a narrow passageway in-between loud proclamations from both left and right is surely meant as much more than a comment on the concurrent social and political situation in Yugoslavia; however, it is also an insightful poetic reflection on the deep split in the Zagreb student scene between the “1968-ers” and “*prolječari*” (supporters of the Croatian Spring), evoking at the same time the deep crisis of Yugoslav state and society, balancing between a unified socialist project and increasingly stronger (nationalist) identity politics.⁶⁰ While most artists of the “new art scene” were certainly not “dissident artists” and, like Koščević, would prefer to “turn left,” they were still critical of the society they lived in, and insistent in voicing out calls for the transformation and the estrangement of the seemingly ordered reality—without, however, necessarily knowing or suggesting exactly what kind of transformation they were seeking. This lack of concrete political orientation is what indeed situates them more on the “anarchist” political spectrum, to which some of them, such as the members of the Group of Six Artists, more or less explicitly claimed alliance.⁶¹ Thus, as Antonia Majača and I have suggested, the oft-cited illegal night action at Savska Street in Zagreb in October 1974, in which artist Željko Jerman pasted an advertising board with a large banner stating “This is Not My World,” should not be read simplistically as a dissident negation of the Yugoslav socialist state; rather, its transgressiveness lies precisely in the fact that, unlike the loud parading of the slogans of both left and right, the artist does not pretend to know where he is headed or what the alternative to “this world” could be.⁶² The statement is also not a mere negation, as it immediately incites us to think of potential other worlds, setting us off on a search for alternative perspectives, through the narrow and quiet passageways of the in-between.

The same is true of another illegal night action, *Red Peristyle*, performed in January 1968 when the central square within the ancient Roman Diocletian Palace in Split was painted red by a group of artists.⁶³ Without a clear statement on the part of the participants, the meaning of this action has become an object of speculation of a number of urban myths: the red color was interpreted as establishing a direct link of Peristyle to Moscow’s Red Square, while another reading claimed that the original idea was to use not red but orange as a symbol of Buddhism; the action was framed as a radical protest or, on the contrary, as a mere act of urban beautification. However, the “truth” is ultimately irrelevant, or rather, the truth is that the action was a “plastic happening” par excellence, or, in Koščević’s terms, a creation of a “state of emergency.” Almost as a kind of prophesy of May 1968 in Paris and June 1968 in Belgrade that were yet to happen, the splashing of color onto the monochrome city square, transformed the ordered, ossified monument of the past into the space of living action.

“Common Good for All Citizens”

Seen from the perspective of these spontaneous and self-organized actions—which were increasingly occurring in the period of late 1960s and early 1970s—events such as *Proposal* seem conservative, to the extent that they attempted to preserve and perpetuate such art by means of an organized institutional framework, but more importantly, because they tried to give it a programmatic character of constructive social transformation that it did not necessarily possess. If *Proposal* was, in Butković’s reading, a way to “stimulate social and artistic activity in creating a common living environment”⁶⁴ and an expression of a “will towards a focused work on humanizing the human environment,”⁶⁵ then its most successful artistic actions, such as Kožarić’s *Grounded Sun* or Dimitrijević’s *Passers-By*, were effective precisely because they went against, and not along with, such harmonizing ideas on the relation between art and human (and humanist) life. In the place of harmony, these works provoked conflict, and, like *Red Peristyle*, embodied excess, rather than coordinated “focused work.” At the same time, with the idea of a city as an unforeseeable “plastic happening,” *Proposal* itself surpassed—or contradicted—its supposedly rationalist agenda.



Figure 2. Sanja Iveković, *Passage*, neon-lights installation, 1971. Courtesy of the artist.

By contrast, the exhibition *Possibilities for 1971*, which took place in the summer of 1971, immediately after *Proposal*, remained within the dry rhetorics that theorized art in urban space as a “common good of all citizens.” Curated by Davor Matičević and organized by the Zagreb Gallery of Contemporary Art, the exhibition focused on “enriching and reshaping” the oldest part of the city, Gornji Grad (Upper Town).⁶⁶ The relevance of the exhibition is primarily historiographical, as it reaffirmed the trend of interventions in urban space as a generational phenomenon of the “Zagreb plasticians (*zagrebački plastičari*),” who turned their art to “immediate reality” and the “needs of everyday life.”⁶⁷ In retrospect, the exhibition also reveals the inherent tension between the desire that art be a tool for social change and the simultaneous insistence on its uniqueness and autonomy. As its central theme, Matičević identified the artists’ quest for a “solution to the basic problem: the link of art with life” which is why the artists “start rationally from actual needs of the public for organized, formulated and planned space.”⁶⁸ This, however, reads more as a description of the responsibilities of architects and urban planners, rather than artists whose interventions, such as Gorki Žuvela’s placing of a multicolored plastic tube on the old funicular rails, were as a rule not driven by an organizational or rational agenda, but rather the idea of poetic estrangement of the city. Recent reflection by Sanja Iveković on her own work presented during the same event testifies to this tension between the simultaneous desire for functionalism and the autonomy of art. Iveković placed a series of neon arches in a narrow passageway leading up to the Upper Town and was surprised to see a journalist misrecognizing her artistic gesture for an intervention by the city’s Secretariat for Municipal Affairs (Figure 2). The journalist praised the city’s decision to illuminate the dark passageway, where young girls have been known to have “unpleasant encounters.” The fact that her work was confused for a mere instance of public

illumination made the artist question her approach as well as abandon for the time being the practice of art in urban space.⁶⁹

This “misunderstanding” with “the people” to whom the work is addressed casts an ironic shadow on the prevalent discourse of the democratization of art, according to which, as per Davor Matičević, artists were to present “communicative” and “simple” ideas, “understandable” to all, for the works to be “close and accessible to everyone” and for them to be “a common property of all citizens” in the “socialist society [which] should promote and sponsor such art.”⁷⁰ According to the semiotic reading performed by this successfully targeted, ordinary socialist citizen, neon lights were a simple and communicative enough signifier of city illumination beneficial for society, but, ironically, the artist seems to have had a more complex and less transparent signification and social contribution in mind.

Crisis of the Grand Proposal

Although certainly the most representative and the most financially demanding event to present urban art in Zagreb, *Possibilities for 1971* can at the same time be seen as an expression of crisis of the “grand proposal” according to which art was to rationally and constructively transform society, to the benefit of all its citizens in need of art’s mediating hand. Artists continued to work in urban space throughout the 1970s, but outside of this “constructive” and institutionally organized scheme, as the curators seemed to have abandoned the initial zeal for merging art with life and improving society. Without the constructive vision of “socialist curating,” Zagreb artists continued with the ludic tradition of *Red Peristyle* and the individual, exceptional gestures such as Jerman’s earlier-cited renunciation of the world. In the second part of the 1970s, Group of Six Artists programmatically made the streets and open-access spaces into their exhibition venues, even if their initial impulse had to do with their (initially) outsider status in the context of the new art, and the need to find their own way to exhibit.⁷¹ In the period from 1975 to 1979, they organized twenty-one “exhibition-actions,” and the very choice of this name indicates a detachment from conventional exhibition forms, and their recalibration toward action (Figure 3-4).

Group of Six Artists explored the potential of the city, ostensibly a public space par excellence, to become a stage for private, even “intimate” significations. Thus, Mladen Stilinović joined the explosion of banners and slogans during the 1975 May Day celebration in Zagreb, by inserting hand-written banners that expressed love for his partner, Stipa (art historian Branka Stipančić) (Figure 5). He presented this work in an artist book that documented the city covered with May Day decorations and slogans, among which his “Ađo [Mladen] loves Stipa” and “Branka loves Ađo” stood on a par with banners proclaiming “30 years of freedom” and faithfulness to “Tito in war and peace.” Stilinović’s use of deliberately messy handwriting is another means by which he inserted the virus of personal “design” into the usual May Day aesthetics of the city. “Bad” handwriting at the same time represented his lifelong dedication to amateurism and vernacularism, or, more specifically, what he called “the aesthetics of the marketplace,” inspired by simple, handmade cardboard signs citing prices of potatoes, salads, and other products at the farmers’ market. He used photography to document amateur-designed advertisements for various small shops and services, as yet another intervention that went against the grain, or simply, extended beyond the scope of top-down city design. His series documenting the self-made ads for meat-shops and restaurants that offered “lamb on a spit”—whose authors, as if belonging to some unified artistic movement, regularly attempted to realistically draw this (in)famous local meat specialty—is a precious vernacular monument to Yugoslav self-management.

These ads—together with Mladen Stilinović’s own artistic aesthetics—were indeed a far cry from the sleek, constructivist aesthetics promoted by the New Tendencies movement in the 1960s. Its key theoretician Matko Meštrović described New Tendencies as the “plastic-visual research that strives to determine objective psychophysical bases of the plastic phenomenon and



Figure 3. Group of Six Artists, *Exhibition-action at Republic Square, Zagreb, 1975* (with work by Sven Stilinović). Photo-documentation by Mladen Stilinović. Courtesy of Branka Stipančić.

visual perception, thereby excluding any possibility of involving subjectivism, individualism and Romanticism.”⁷² The further one looks into the seventies, the more subjectivism, individualism, and Romanticism we note in Yugoslav contemporary art practice, perhaps best embodied in the works of Tomislav Gotovac and his provocative urban actions, such as *Zagreb, I Love You*, in which he walked naked on tram rails, while bowing down to kiss the pavement. If there was any idea of “plasticity”—the rather vague term used by both New Tendencies and promoters of new art practice in the urban sphere—left, it was the poetic plasticity of *Proposal’s* “plastic happening,” bound to the unexpected interactions between the city and the artists’ body, or its written and visual indexes, while abandoning the assumption that art could enact transformation on a larger scale.

Melancholic Histories

By 1975, when Koščević’s book came out, and by 1978, when the *New Artistic Practice in Yugoslavia* exhibition was mounted, the ecstatic encounter of “plastic art” and the living urban environment was already a matter of history. In 1970 and 1971, writes Davor Matičević in his survey essay on the new art practice in Zagreb, “the most discussed subject among the Zagreb artists and theoreticians who espoused progressive art trends was the work of visual artists in shaping the urban environment.”⁷³ He cites *Proposal* as the first major realization, but places its



Figure 4. Group of Six Artists, *Exhibition-action at the Sava Bathing Resort, Zagreb, 1976*. Photo-documentation by Fedor Vučemilović. Courtesy of Branka Stipančić.

beginnings in the television broadcast *Urban Painting (Urbano slikarstvo)*, which included painted façade interventions by artists Julije Knifer and Boris Bučan, and was conceived by art historian Vera Horvat-Pintarić. Matičević, however, does not discuss any art historical or theoretical references that might have influenced such a turn toward the urban environment, or those that might have formed its integral part. It is interesting that he places two institutionally organized projects at the origins of this turn even though, as he himself was surely aware, there were artistic interventions in the city that preceded these events, such as *Pictorial Knot* by Boris Bučan and Josip Stošić—a long, monumental, abstractly painted plastic hose they placed in the yard in front of Galerija Centar in 1969, or street actions by Braco Dimitrijević and Goran Trbuljak in the same year. This privileging of initiatives by curators and art critics is another sign of what I argue to be a particularly institutionally driven character of the Zagreb version of the “grand proposal” according to which art could change society by reaching out to the people on the streets. Artistic urban interventions also took place in Ljubljana and Belgrade during the late 1960s and 1970s, however, it is only in Zagreb where they assumed a decidedly programmatic character thanks to the curatorial projects discussed here.

Perhaps the (albeit short) sway of the “urban” curatorial trend in Zagreb could be related to the legacy of the earlier mentioned “art of the constructive approach,” as critic Ješa Denegri theorized the work of EXAT 51 group and the New Tendencies movement.⁷⁴ What characterized these movements was not only their neo-avant-garde, transformational drive but also their pronounced interdisciplinarity. Active in the first half of the 1950s, EXAT 51 were the pioneers of geometric abstraction in Yugoslavia, and its members included a diverse company of painters,



Figure 5. Mladen Stilinović, *Ado Loves Stipa*, 1975. May Day Street Intervention. Courtesy of Branka Stipančić.

sculptors, designers, and architects, advocating for abstract art—in place of socialist realism, which, never gained a strong footing in Yugoslavia due also to the Tito-Stalin split in 1948—and for the synthesis of visual and applied arts in shaping the human environment. The New Tendencies movement (1961-1973) turned toward the relationship between art, science, and technology, while keeping alive the idea of the potentially transformative impact of such transgressions of the boundaries of “pure,” object-based art, and its venture into “plastic-visual research.”⁷⁵ Although curators of the “plastic happenings” of the early 1970s did not cite these precursors, their legacy was recognized by contemporary critics, and perpetuated in their own version of the attempt at shattering the conventional notions of art.

These attempts, however, were ultimately historicized as failures by some of the very people who initiated them. Davor Matičević, curator of *Possibilities for 1971*, wrote that urban interventions of the period were “the last and most radical attempt of artists’ participation in social engagement . . . part of the illusion of a possible constructive relation that never received unreserved support in practice.”⁷⁶ Marijan Susovski referred to the “euphoric state of artists and theorists at the beginning of the the 1970s, who wished to completely link art with life” but did not manage to go beyond initial principles.⁷⁷ Both art historians see “society” and its lack of support for utopian ideas as the primary reason why such art remained only an illusion. According to Susovski, the artists “saw their place in society but they could not realize it,”⁷⁸ or, in a defeatist conclusion by Matičević, “no matter how dangerous art was (or still is) society overpowers it.”⁷⁹

However, perhaps Grupa TOK were closer to the truth when they criticized the trend of urban projects as claiming social engagement but remaining within the confines of exclusively artistic preoccupations with the art object—regardless of the changes that this object underwent within the aesthetics of the “new art.”⁸⁰ Aside from marginal comments on actual architectural, urban,

and social problems of Yugoslav society, such as Koščević's already cited reference to "the stupid architectural and urbanistic ideas and realizations,"⁸¹ the artists and curators of this period rarely pointed to any actual problems of life in the city, or their potential solutions. It seems as if for Koščević architecture was simply dismissed altogether as a potential space of experimentation and transformation, while art was presumed to be able to successfully compensate for its impotence. However, there was no compensation, as artistic and curatorial interventions remained mostly preoccupied with reproducing—and relishing in—the avant-garde slogans of the merging of art and life. In the same way, the artist groups and initiatives of the 1970s no longer reflected the desire for the synthesis of the arts, and no longer brought together artists, designers, and architects, as was the case in the 1950s and 1960s. The last example of such a synthetic, transformative vision was the 1972 meeting of young theorists and practitioners of "open art" in Šid (a small town in Serbia), who agreed to make Šid a testing ground for

selective orientation towards a humanly designed environment, all based on understanding the city as a total (and not only plastic) happening, which would result in [to quote the conclusions of the meeting] "the engagement of not only architects and urban planners, but also industrial and graphic designers, art pedagogues, film experts, performers, urban interventionists, sociologists, and psychologists joined in a team work which the town of Šid would readily embrace."⁸²

This final grand proposal of *total plastic happening*—which, again, resurrected the Soviet avant-garde by titling the project *Public Festivities*—remained an unrealized vision, with which the chapter of the ecstatic evocation of the city as a stage where art and life merge in a spectacular, revolutionary *Gesamtkunstwerk*, came to an end.

In a Postscript to the second edition of his *Theory of the Avant-garde*, Peter Bürger situates the origin of his book in the "historical constellation of problems that emerged after the events of May 1968 and the failure of the student movement in the early seventies."⁸³ He critically refers to the unfulfilled "hopes of those who believed at the time (without a social basis) that they could build directly on the revolutionary experiences of Russian futurism, for example," but also, more self-critically, to the hopes of those, like himself, who believed in the possibility of "more democracy."⁸⁴ We could say that the ambitions of the Yugoslav New Art Practice and, in particular, its venturing out into the streets, to the people, embodied both of these hopes at once. Bürger's critique is particularly important in its identification of the uncritical appropriation of the (Russian) avant-garde, and the belief in the change that stems directly from art "without a social basis." This lack of concern for the social basis is reflected also in the work of most "new art" artists and curators, whose commitments ultimately remained bound to the sphere of art, which ultimately is the sphere they wish to revolutionize. The very fact that the curators of *New Art Practice* blame "society" for the failure of the potential of artistic urban transformations reveals to what extent they themselves perceived (and reproduced) the two realms as separate.

The Power of the Uninitiated

This is not to say that we should also judge these projects as failures, nor dismiss even the political potential of their aesthetic and poetic visions. But they are indicative of a sort of withdrawal of art, right at the moment when it claimed its spectacular entrance. This is also evident in the absence of significant theoretical formulations of the art in public space in Yugoslavia. Besides Koščević's elaboration of the poetics of the "interspace," or the "narrow passageway in-between," which successfully captures the underlying spirit of the Yugoslav new art, there is no significant theoretical account of this encounter between art and the city, and especially not one that would make references beyond art history. While New Tendencies theorists referred to scientific, cybernetic, philosophical, and sociological ideas, the absence of references to contemporary theories

of architecture and urbanity is surprising, given that the city was consciously chosen as both the content and context of urban art interventions, and given the vivid intellectual exchanges between Yugoslav and international thinkers, most importantly thanks to the *Praxis* journal and the summer school they organized on the island of Korčula.⁸⁵

One exception is to be found in the writing of Vera Horvat-Pintarić, whose television project *Urban Painting* Matičević mentioned as a precursor of art in public space. Writing about the medium of television, she notes that its true potential had already been realized in the field of “plastic arts,” that is, in “environmental creations and in mixed media.”⁸⁶ In such works, she argues, the dogma of the “average” or “mass” viewer has been refuted:

Confronted with such works, “un-initiated” spectators respond much better than the so-called initiated public [. . .] When the “un-initiated,” average person enters such a changeable and transformation-open space, he accepts the offered challenge without inhibitions, surrendering to the surprise game and immediately accepting participation; thus, he soon discovers that he can influence the events around him, that he is becoming a protagonist, changing, prolonging and enriching these events.⁸⁷

By contrast, the so-called initiates are too bound by their preexisting ideas about art, which makes them refuse these new forms of aesthetic communication.⁸⁸ Horvat-Pintarić argues that models developed in these new forms of aesthetic communication should be applied to television, which she recognizes as a medium with much unused potential, especially within the context of socialist management.

As part of her refutation of the idea of the “average” viewer, Horvat-Pintarić cites Yona Friedman, among other “designers of macro-urban structures,” who similarly came to the conclusion that “the category of the average person simply does not exist,” which ultimately led to creating “open and flexible micro-models of future macro-urban structures.”⁸⁹ Still, her account is not really concerned with urbanity, but rather reiterates the mantra of plastic art’s initiation of the uninitiated citizen, albeit one who in this case lost his or her averageness and “ordinariness.” As Matičević and Susovski already concluded, however, the uninitiated, or society, were not necessarily interested in joining the religion. Group of Six Artists, who insisted on being present alongside their work in public space, to communicate its intention to the people, recorded the often negative and even aggressive reactions they received. This was true even in the case of their exhibition-action in the halls of the Zagreb Faculty of Philosophy, from whose students artists expected a more enlightened treatment and not what Jerman described as vandalistic and barbarian reactions.⁹⁰ During the two actions at the main Zagreb square, the Group recorded and collected comments of passers-by, creating a document that provides a precious insight into the feedback they received and a glimpse into the atmosphere in the Zagreb square.

International idiocy/Is this folklore/The wind should blow this all away!/This is fantastic/This is shit, really awful/It’s better than stealing/instead of cleaning up the square you’re piling it up with rubbish/they are just bothering people and preventing them from feeding the pigeons/how naïve/this has political connotations/what is this?/you’ve got to ask whether it’s a cow or a horse, that’s modern art for you/we don’t have time for this/why do they need this, why don’t they just beat their women at home/there’s worse bullshit than this around/this is wonderful/they are sick/let’s all be artists/a vaginal theologian/they are glad there are people around because they can talk to them/the newspapers mentioned an exhibition but this is just rubbish/they are simply amateurs/it is beautiful, not only beautiful but clever too/they are students, saving up for the seaside.⁹¹

Despite the diversity, and even the creativity of some of the comments, the general impression is still one of people’s alienation from the “progressive” ideas of art, exemplified by the Group’s work. The idea of art’s democratization, such as the protagonists of the new art practice, and their

international soul-mates, imagined it, seems to have remained rhetorical. Some artists toyed with this very ideal. In his 1972 performance *Referendum*, Goran Trbuljak staged a public vote in which passers-by were to decide whether or not he was an artist by circling the “yes” or “no” on the ballots he collected. Held under the slogan “The artist is the one whom others grant the opportunity to be an artist,” the work’s play with the absurdist idea of a democratically elected artist can be read as a satire of the movement to democratize the arts, as well as an irony of the very ideal of democracy, ultimately based on the randomness and volatility of public opinion.

“The Dark Underbelly of Socialist Urbanization”

Even if they contained no direct references to theories of space, urbanity, and architecture, the art interventions in the city were certainly part of the post-war, transnational trend of rethinking the city and the human agency within it, such as in the work of the artist group *Situationiste Internationale* and their psychogeographical urban explorations, Foucault’s theorization of heterotopia and Henri Lefebvre’s notions of everyday life, social production of space, and right to the city. *Proposal*’s articulation of the “domain of plastic happening” as extending

from the totality of the urban tissue to the ornament of human steps, from the performing stage of the city square to that of the window shop, from the screens of the facades to those of the placards, from the programmed light-effects to the accidental reflections⁹²

shows a striking correspondence with Archigram’s idea of the Living City, presented at the exhibition *Living Cities* at the London Institute of Contemporary Art in 1963. “When it is raining in Oxford Street the architecture is no more important than the rain, in fact the weather has probably more to do with the pulsation of the Living City at that given moment,” wrote Peter Cook in the special issue of the journal *Living Arts*, which accompanied the exhibition.⁹³ Or, in a programmatic text on the concept of “Situation”:

Cities should generate, reflect, and activate life, their environment organized to precipitate life and movement. Situation, the happenings within spaces in the city, the transient throw-away objects, the passing presence of cars and people are as important, possibly more important, than the built demarcation of space.⁹⁴

So, despite the lack of direct intertextual exchanges, the artistic adventure to join the plasticity of everyday urban life was part of a global trend, whose examples we find not only in the United States and Western Europe but also in other socialist European countries, besides Yugoslavia.⁹⁵ To what extent is it possible, however, to situate them more explicitly in the context of socialism, and read them as critical statements about the socialist city? As evident in Željka Čorak’s critique of the emptiness of the new parts of Zagreb, Matičević’s and Susovski’s disappointment with the support of “society,” and Koščević’s reference to “stupid architectural and urbanistic ideas and realizations,” such a critique certainly forms a subtext of artistic and curatorial public interventions. Maja Fowkes presents the work of Group TOK as a rare—and lesser known—example of direct engagement in the context of Zagreb “plastic” interventions.⁹⁶ The series of their urban interventions, produced in 1972, in the framework of the second edition of *Proposal*, problematized the lack of ecological consciousness in Zagreb, the presence of industrial pollution, the problems of urban living and social alienation. She also cites the group’s interest in the opposition between the public and the private, inspired by the reading of Gaston Bachelard and his book *The Poetics of Space*.⁹⁷

Discussing the public/private dichotomy, Fowkes relates it to contemporary critiques of local urbanization models, which created a division between working space and living space.⁹⁸ This

resonates with Čorak's critique of socialist urbanization and the creation of the New Zagreb, which was often cited as an agglomeration of sleeping units, without any organization of social and communal life. According to Vladimir Kulić and Maroje Mrduljaš, by the late 1960s, the "criticism of the anomie of new modernist neighborhoods" gained popularity, and was raised simultaneously by "sociologists and the public."⁹⁹ They do not cite specific examples of this critique, but they claim that "the dark underbelly of socialist urbanization," including unregulated developments, marginal social groups, and social pathology, which all contradicted "the promise of a just socialist society," acquired "considerable visibility in the public," through studies of sociologists, sensational treatment of the topic by journalists, and the films of the Black Wave.¹⁰⁰

As was already shown, neither the curators nor the artists confronted this "dark underbelly." In fact, most artistic interventions took place in the old parts of Zagreb, which were barely touched by socialist urbanization. Several projects, however, did happen in Novi Zagreb (New Zagreb), the major stage for socialist urban development in Zagreb, devised as the mirror project of the more monumental and representative Novi Beograd (New Belgrade).¹⁰¹ An exhibition-action by Group of Six Artists (in 1975) and Košćević's 1972 event *Public Festivities (Pučke svečanosti)*—again inspired by the Russian avant-garde—took place at the Sopot neighborhood, the latter involving an exhibition of works by inhabitants and their children, poetry recitations, and open-air film screenings. Both events attempted to animate the neighborhood and its residents, however, at least in the case of Group of Six Artists, the inhabitants were not particularly receptive.¹⁰² A more successful, and more original, concept was realized by artist Vera Fisher in 1978, in the form of an exhibition in front of the largest building in Novi Zagreb, popularly known as "Mamutica" (Mammoth). The artist invited twenty workers of the city's sanitation department to search trash containers for select items that the residents discarded, which were then exhibited, with the sanitation workers credited as selectors. According to art historian Branka Hlevnjak, the exhibition sparked great interest among citizens and the media.¹⁰³

"Not by Concrete, but by Mud"

However, this was all rather innocuous when compared with the social and urban reality shown in the films of this period, which feature explicit references to homelessness, poverty, and destitution, whose symbolic embodiment was in fact not the socialist city, but its periphery. As Owen Hatherley has argued, the target of critique in Yugoslav films of the 1960s and 1970s is not—as the stereotype of a dissident artist opposing socialist oppression would have it—the image of the alienated life of the monumental, gray, monotonous socialist housing projects, but rather their *absence*. Instead, "in the context of a massive modernizing project," the films show "the embarrassing persistence of grinding and usually rural poverty," and the shabby, amorphous, poverty-stricken settlements on the periphery of big cities, dominated not by concrete, but by mud.¹⁰⁴

Mud is another connective tissue with interwar Yugoslavia and the artistic group *Zemlja*, the historical counterpart of the *Proposal* exhibition. Miroslav Krleža used the motif of "Pannonian mud" to designate the state of backwardness, poverty, and the provincialism of the periphery, especially in relation to the subjugated political position of Croatia in Austro-Hungary. And he found this condition to be depicted with acute precision in the work of *Zemlja*'s member, painter Krsto Hegedušić.¹⁰⁵ Just like Krleža, Krsto Hegedušić was preoccupied by the peripheral position of local culture. Informed by European artistic modernism, and particularly inspired by the socially engaged painting of the German painter Georg Grosz, he at the same time inscribed in the program of *Zemlja* "a fight against foreign trends" and "independence of our expression."¹⁰⁶ In Hegedušić's work, Grosz's satirical dissection of the alienated life of the European metropolis was translated into a portrayal of life at the rural periphery of Croatia, still predominantly a rural territory, with its major center, Zagreb, still developing the outlines of a modern city. In other



Figure 6. *Živi bili pa vidjeli* [May We Live and See], dir. Milivoj Puhovski and Bruno Gamulin, 1979, film still.

words, there was no modernity to satirize. Similarly, in the films of the Black Wave, if we follow Hatherley's interpretation, there is no socialist city from which the artists can dissent. Rather, the mud of the periphery reveals the absence of the concrete core of the socialist modernization project.

But although the Black Wave films show this underbelly of socialist modernization, they do not explicitly take architecture as the target of their critique. A lesser-known film, *Živi bili pa vidjeli* [May We Live and See], directed by Milivoj Puhovski and Bruno Gamulin in 1979, long after the glory era of the Black Wave films, does precisely this. *Živi bili pa vidjeli* tells the story of the rebellion of a young architect Janko, who—significantly—comes from the province to study architecture in Zagreb (Figure 6). He eventually gets a job in a successful Zagreb construction company, but it is the father of his girlfriend who hires him, and this origination of his own career in nepotism is the first symptom of the overall corruption that he will subsequently come to denounce. In the beginning, he is enchanted with the company, and its plan for a new urban development, which he finds to reflect all the virtues that socialism can offer to man. Even if his soon-to-be father-in-law, inhabiting an urban villa in the most elite part of Zagreb, is far from the embodiment of socialism, Janko is initially not bothered by his marrying into a markedly bourgeois family. As he starts working on the project, however, he witnesses the gradual disintegration of the original construction plan. Cultural and recreational facilities are discarded one after the other, in order to cut costs and feed corruption and private gain. Janko himself gets embedded in the corruption circle and unexpectedly receives a bribe, or an additional “reward,” by the business partner of his father-in-law. However, during a meeting when yet another change of plan was to be voted on—in yet another ironic portrayal of self-management democracy, where workers just raise their hands in approval to be able to go home as soon as possible—Janko bursts out into spontaneous, rebellious monologue. He warns his colleagues that “architecture solves the most crucial questions of human destiny” and that by removing the proposed content and leaving merely cubicles, “rooms to cry in, cells for loners,” they would remove all that “can give meaning to a life in one such neighborhood” and all that could “give dignity to our profession.” Having only irritated his colleagues, who worry about their time and salaries, he violently destroys the beautiful architectural model, which he had previously cherished so much. After this, he quits his job, and finds cheap, illegal housing at the city periphery, where he moves in with his wife and

newborn. Ironically, the next job he manages to get is in a company that demolishes illegal housing, and as can be expected from this allegorical narrative, he ends up tearing down his own home. Jobless and homeless, Janko and family move their furniture onto the Republic Square, in a gesture of stubbornly claiming their homelessness as a public problem, as well as claiming their right to inhabit space, both literally and symbolically, in the country with the system of societal ownership. After they eventually get expelled from the square, the film ends with Janko and his family riding the back of a tractor, moving toward an unknown destination, but with rebellious laughter.

At the end of the 1970s, at the same time as the Zagreb curators wrote their melancholic histories of failure of both art and society, *Živi bili pa vidjeli*—its title pointing (albeit with suspicion) to something that is promised but is yet to occur—narrates the failure of Yugoslav socialism as the failure of architecture, originally appointed with a prime role in the construction of the new society and the urbanization and edification of the predominantly rural country. After the initial economic and cultural growth, and the inauguration of the idiosyncratic Yugoslav project of socialist self-management and the foreign politics of Non-Alignment, by the late 1970s the political and economic crisis deepened, with architecture, just like the Yugoslav economy, increasingly in the grips of private interest and market demands.¹⁰⁷ With Tito's death in 1980, Yugoslavia entered the phase of so-called "decadent socialism," preceding its disintegration. Already in 1968 the student movement called out the Yugoslav leadership for abandoning the country's founding principles, and it did so not with an attitude of resignation, but the will toward change. Open spaces of the city became the ground for exercising such visions of change, both artistic and political, and the notion of plasticity, which dominated artistic discourse during this turbulent period, is itself a testament to the belief in the transformative potential of art. Even if the artists and curators of this period generally did not point to concrete social issues of city life, with their spatial interventions and their attempts to engage "the ordinary citizen," they reaffirmed both the aesthetic and social relevance of the urban environment and the way it affects people's lives.

Socialist Curatorial Practice

Recent interpretations of Yugoslav art and culture of the 1970s tend to point out that the critique of Yugoslav society they expressed was not dissident, that is, antisocialist but rather socialist, as it focused precisely on the antisocialist reality of the nominally socialist country.¹⁰⁸ This was the logic of the 1968 student denouncement of the "red bourgeoisie" and the "princes of communism," as well as the interpretative logic of identifying the lack of socialist spaces in the films of the Black Wave. The same can be said about the curatorial projects in urban space in the late 1960s and early 1970s, both in relation to their implicit critique of socialist urbanity (or rather, its lack) and in relation to their insistent denouncement of the bourgeois aestheticization of art. Željka Čorak's identification of precisely the inability of socialist architecture to incite a sense of community implies in fact that such architecture is not socialist. *Proposal's* alignment with the leftist project of the past, *Zemlja*, only confirms this attitude. *Zemlja's* manifesto, authored by architect Drago Ibler, stated that the artist "cannot defy the aspirations of the new society and stand outside of the collective . . . because life and art are one."¹⁰⁹ Želimir Košćević's passionate identification with the attempts of the Russian avant-garde to merge art and life and contrast the "perfectly ordered world," and Davor Matičević's rationalist discourse on art in the service of the "needs of everyday life" and the "actual needs of the public for organized, formulated and planned space," are just two opposite ends of the same drive toward social transformation. If Maja Fowkes referred to *Proposal* as an example of "socialist curatorial practice" with irony, perhaps we can conclude that these projects really should be theorized as examples of socialist curating, but without irony. Just like Janko's rebellious speech in which he tried to shake his colleagues out of complacency by reminding them of the social responsibility of architecture, the

socialist-curatorial call for the responsibility of art in shaping the collective environment lasted only for a brief moment, before they no longer felt—just like Janko—to have a place in society. The film *Živi bili pa vidjeli* can stand as an allegory of a whole decade of artistic quests for a place in Zagreb's social and urban fabric, from the moment of enthusiasm about their participation in a constructive contribution to building a just socialist society, to their disowning of “this world,” and pursuing uncertain paths through narrow passageways between loud proclamations, which finally led onto open roads, away from the “socialist” Yugoslav city.¹¹⁰

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Notes

1. Zvonko Maković, “6. Zagrebački salon” [6th Zagreb Salon], *Život umjetnosti* 17 (1972): 97. Own translation.
2. In his memoirs, Ilya Ehrenburg writes of the “Decree No. 1 on the Democratization of the Arts” that the Russian Futurists purportedly pasted around the walls of Moscow, and which called for the abolishment of Tsarist art institutions. Cuauhtémoc Medina traces back George Maciunas's ideas on anti-art, which formed the basis of the Fluxus movement that he originated in the 1960s, to his engagement with Ehrenburg's memoirs, as well as other documents of the Soviet avant-garde. At the same time, Camilla Gray's book *The Great Experiment in Russian Art 1863-1922* came out in 1962 and sparked a renewed interest in the Russian avant-garde. See Cuauhtémoc Medina, “The ‘kulturbolschewiken’ II: Fluxus, Khrushchev, and the ‘Concretist Society,’” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 49/50 (Spring/Autumn 2006): 231-43. “New art” is the term used, for example, in the landmark 1969 exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form*, curated by Harald Szeemann, which brought together artists who experimented beyond the limitations of the media of painting, sculpture, or architecture, and engendered new forms and philosophies of art making, such as land art, conceptual art, happenings, arte povera. See Christian Rattemeyer, *Exhibiting the New Art: “Op Losse Schroeven” and “When Attitudes Become Form” 1969* (Eindhoven: Afterall Books, 2010).
3. Marijan Susovski, ed., *The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1968-1978* (Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1978).
4. The Student Center in Zagreb was founded in 1957, and Belgrade's Student Cultural Center originated in 1968 in response to the student protests. Regardless of their different origins, their programs—divided in different “sections,” such as visual arts, theater, film, and so on—shared a similar orientation toward alternative culture and an experimental approach to art, in sync with analogous international developments and involving numerous international collaborations. On the Zagreb Student Center Gallery, see Darko Glavan, ed., *Galerija Studentskog centra – 40 godina* [Student Center Gallery—40 Years] (Zagreb: Studentski Centar, 2005). On the Belgrade Student Cultural Center, see Ješa Denegri, *Studentski kulturni centar kao umjetnička scena* [The Student Cultural Center as an Art Scene] (Belgrade: Studentski kulturni centar, 2003) and 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. In Ljubljana, a similar role in promoting alternative art and culture was played by the ŠKUC (Študentski kulturno-umetniški center) / Student Center for Art and Culture, founded in 1972, and the associated ŠKUC Gallery, founded 1978, which had a formative impact on the development of the Slovenian artistic scene of the 1980s.
5. One of the most monumental and well-known attempts to create this unified geopolitical vision of art, under the umbrella notion of art under totalitarianism, is Irwin ed., *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (London: Afterall, 2006), which has its roots already in Irwin's collaboration

- with Moscow artist in the early 1990s, within the *NSK Embassy Moscow* project. Such an approach is characteristic of the first postsocialist generation of critics, curators, and scholars, as they embraced the metaphors of dissidence and darkness as assets for finding a place for Eastern European art, and their own work, on the international art market, which opened itself up for the exotic value of geographical and historical diversity, following 1989. Recent work on writing the histories of art of socialist Europe is characterized by a more nuanced approach, in some cases also a direct critique of what is often called the “totalitarian paradigm.” See, for example, Jelena Vesić and Zorana Dojić, eds., *Political Practices of (Post-)Yugoslav Art: Retrospective 01* (Belgrade: Prelom Kolektiv, 2010). For a critique of the distinction between the official and unofficial, the visible and the invisible, especially in relation to Yugoslav art, see my contribution to the *Parallel Chronologies* exhibition archive: Ivana Bago, “Something to Think About: The Values and Valeurs of Visibility in Zagreb from 1961 to 1986,” <http://tranzit.org/exhibitionarchive/essays/ivana-bago-something-to-think-about-exhibiting-valeurs-of-visibility-in-zagreb-from-1961-to-1986/>.
6. Lidija Butković, *Sekcija Prijedlog Zagrebačkog salona 1971-2002. Zamisli i realizacije na polju javne skulpture* [Zagreb Salon’s Proposal section 1971-2002. Ideas and realizations in the field of public “sculpture”] MA thesis (Zagreb: Faculty of Arts and Humanities, 2007), 4. Own translation. The concise version of the thesis was published as Lidija Butković, “Sekcija Prijedlog Zagrebačkog salona 1971-2002. Zamisli i realizacije na polju javne skulpture grada Zagreba [Zagreb Salon’s Proposal Section 1971-2002. Ideas and Realizations in the Field of Public Sculpture in the City of Zagreb],” *Anali Galerije Antuna Augustinčića* 27, 7-74 (2008).
 7. From the introductory text/call for proposals signed by the “Organization board” of the 6th Zagreb Salon, reproduced in the catalogue of the exhibition: *6. zagrebački salon: prijedlog* [6th Zagreb Salon: Proposal] (Zagreb, 1971), n.p. Own translation. The organization board consisted of Kosta Angeli Radovani, Tomislav Butorac, Željka Čorak, Žarko Domljan, Božidar Gagro, Vasilije Jordan, Tonko Maroević, Zlatko Movrin, Andrija Mutnjaković, Mladen Vodička i Igor Zidić, but in her recent research, Butković suggested that the authorship of the concept of *Proposal*, as well as the introductory text, is to be attributed to Željka Čorak. Butković bases this on her interview with Čorak, in which Čorak retroactively “signed” the idea, the title, and the conception of *Proposal*, noting that at the time she had not feel the need to claim any individual authorship for something that was in effect a collective effort. See Butković, 5. Earlier sources cite Želimir Košćević as co-author with Čorak, for example, Davor Matičević, “The Zagreb Circle,” In *The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1966-1978*, ed. Marijan Susovski (Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1978), 22. In his interview with Vesna Vuković, on the contrary, Košćević stated that the idea for the *Proposal* section came from the architect Andrija Mutnjaković, who was the president of the Zagreb Salon. Želimir Košćević, cited in Vuković’s conversation with Želimir Košćević (see n. 18).
 8. *6. zagrebački salon*.
 9. Ibid.
 10. Ibid.
 11. Ibid.
 12. Boris Kanzleiter, “1968 u Jugoslaviji. Tema koja čeka istraživanje” [1968 in Yugoslavia. The Topic Awaiting Research], in *Novi društveni pokreti u Jugoslaviji od 1968. do danas*, ed. Đorđe Tomić and Petar Atanacković (Novi Sad: Cenzura, 2009), 39. Own translation.
 13. The antiwar protests were organized “officially,” by the Student Unions in Belgrade, Sarajevo, and Zagreb in late 1966. However, according to Boris Kanzleiter, some students and intellectuals posed the question of why the Yugoslav League of Communists condemned the war, while continuing to collaborate with the United States. A group of students during a Belgrade protest attempted to lead a protest parade to the building of the American Embassy and was violently prevented by the police from doing so, after which more unrest ensued. Kanzleiter, “1968 u Jugoslaviji,” 39.
 14. Students spoke out against the “red bourgeoisie” and the “princes of communism” and criticized the Yugoslav leadership for abandoning the legacy of the Yugoslav socialist revolution and the principles of socialist self-management. On student requests and the idiosyncratic character of 1968 in Yugoslavia in view of its position on the crossroads of East, West and the Third World, see Kanzleiter, “1968 u Jugoslaviji.” See also Boris Kanzleiter and Krunoslav Stojaković, eds., “1968” in *Jugoslavien. Studentenproteste und kulturelle Avantgarde zwischen 1960 und 1975. Gespräche*

- und Dokumente* (Bonn: Dietz Verlag, 2008) and Hrvoje Klasić, *Jugoslavija i svijet 1968* [Yugoslavia and the World] (Zagreb: Ljevak, 2012).
15. In the beginning, Tito had understanding for the concerns voiced by the Croatian Party leaders, as the idea of equality of the six Yugoslav republics was a cornerstone of the Yugoslav state, and the Yugoslav League of Communists had recently been purged of those prominent members seen to be promoting authoritarian and unitarist tendencies. However, the radical nature of the student movement and their more overt nationalist discourse were among the key factors that led Tito to suppress the whole movement. See Tihomir Ponoš, *Na rubu revolucije - studenti '71* [On the Edge of Revolution—Students in 1971] (Zagreb: Profil, 2007).
 16. For an analysis that sets Croatian art of the 1970s against the backdrop of the Croatian Spring, see Maja and Reuben Fowkes, “Croatian Spring: Art in the Social Sphere,” paper given at the Tate Modern conference “Open Systems: Art C. 1970.” Unpublished manuscript.
 17. Transcribed from a conversation of Vesna Vuković with Vladimir Gudac, radio broadcast *Stvarnost prostora* [The Reality of Space], HR3 (Croatian Radio Channel 3). Available at <http://www.radio-knin.hr/hr/ep/razgovor-s-vladimirom-gudcem/59789/>.
 18. Transcribed from a conversation of Vesna Vuković with Želimir Košćević, radio broadcast *Stvarnost prostora* [The Reality of Space], HR3 (Croatian Radio Channel 3). Available at <http://radio.hrt.hr/aod/razgovor-sa-zelimirom-koscevicem-1-dio/55066/>.
 19. Maja Fowkes, *The Green Bloc: Neo-Avant-Garde Art and Ecology under Socialism* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015), 143.
 20. Fowkes, *The Green Bloc*, 118-19.
 21. Although not officially accepted by the jury, this action was part of a series of urban interventions that Group TOK proposed and partly realized for the second edition of the *Proposal* section of the Zagreb Salon, which took place in 1972. As Fowkes shows, at the crux of these actions was an ecologically informed critique of the socialist city and its inhabitants, but she also reads them as critical comments of the interventions that took place within the 1971 *Proposal* section, and their inability to engage more directly with social reality. See Fowkes, *The Green Bloc*, 111-49.
 22. Cited in Maja and Reuben Fowkes, “Croatian Spring,” n.p. Translation modified.
 23. Butković, “Sekcija Prijedlog,” 67-68.
 24. The video is available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFFeudIw0HeU>.
 25. The artist group Biafra, whom the aforementioned Gudac counts among the artists-nationalists, is usually cited as a suspect of the destruction of the sculpture. See Fowkes, *The Green Bloc*, 124. However, the polemics that developed around *Proposal* went beyond the abstraction-figuration dichotomy, and was part of the clash between protagonists of the new art, who saw themselves at the forefront of progressive art tendencies that would revolutionize Yugoslav art, and the traditionalists, which by this time in Yugoslavia implied also late modernist art, including abstraction, as well as anything that could be related to object-based art and traditional, academic artistic skills.
 26. Maja and Reuben Fowkes, “Croatian Spring,” n.p.
 27. Nena Dimitrijević, cited in Maja and Reuben Fowkes, “Croatian Spring,” n.p.
 28. Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2009). To challenge the routinely made conclusions about the state suppression of critical art in socialist countries of Eastern Europe, and its free development in the democratic West, it is worth noting that Dimitrijević’s work was censored (taken down by the police) not in Zagreb, but in Paris during the same year, on the occasion of its presentation at the 7th Paris Biennial.
 29. Butković, “Sekcija Prijedlog,” 5.
 30. *Ibid*, 6.
 31. See *Kritička retrospektiva “Zemlja”: slikarstvo, grafika, crtež, kiparstvo, arhitektura* [Critical Retrospective “Land”: Painting, Drawing, Sculpture, Architecture] (Zagreb: Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 1971). In Croatian, the word “zemlja” can refer to the soil, the earth, including planet Earth, but also the land in the general sense of both ground and a specific country. In some translations the *Zemlja* group is rendered as “Earth,” but “Land” would be a more fitting translation, as “Earth” brings forth environmentalist and universalist references, while the group was rather concerned with its immediate social, political, economic and cultural context, including its engagement with the rural, i.e., agricultural, sphere.

32. 6. zagrebački salon: *prijedlog*, n.p.
33. Ibid.
34. Fowkes, *The Green Bloc*, 123.
35. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).
36. See the exhibition catalogue *1929-1950: nadrealizam, postnadrealizam, socijalna umetnost, umetnost NOR-a, socijalistički realizam* [Surrealism, Postsurrealism, Social Art, Art of the People's Liberation War], ed. Miodrag B. Protić, (Belgrade: Muzej savremene umetnosti Beograd, 1969).
37. Stanko Lasić, *Sukob na književnoj ljevici 1928-1952* [Conflict on the Literary Left], ed. Slavko Goldstein (Zagreb: Liber, 1970).
38. Božidar Gagro, "Nadrealizam, socijalna umjetnost 1929/1950 [Surrealism, social art 1929/1950]," *Život umjetnosti* 10 (1969): 152.
39. See, for example, Zvonko Maković, "Najmlađa generacija jugoslavenskih plastičara: novi ambijenti, siromašna i konceptualna umjetnost [The Youngest Generation of Yugoslav Plasticians: New Ambients, Poor and Conceptual Art]," *Život umjetnosti* 14 (1971): 55-66. On EXAT 51 and New Tendencies, see Jerko Denegri, *Constructive Approach Art: Exat 51 and New Tendencies* (Zagreb: Horetzky, 2004) and Armin Medosch, *New Tendencies. Art at the Threshold of the Information Age (1957-1973)* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016).
40. After winning almost 13% of the votes and fifty-nine seats in the parliament, the Communist Party was banned in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (from 1929 renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) in 1920, as well as all activity propagating communist ideas.
41. Željka Čorak, "Zrinjevac otuđenja [Zrinjevac Alienated]," *Život umjetnosti* 13 (1971): 77.
42. See, however, note 7 for different claims about authorship.
43. Žarko Domljan, "Poslijeratna arhitektura u Hrvatskoj" [Postwar architecture in Croatia], *Život umjetnosti* 10 (1969): 4.
44. Eugen Franković, "Grad kao agregat" [City as aggregate], *Život umjetnosti* 10 (1969): 79.
45. The Belgrade exhibition seems to have prompted the need of Zagreb critics to revisit the history of the *Zemlja* group, as Gagro does in his review "Nadrealizam, socijalna umjetnost 1929/1950," 149-167; This was continued in the following issue of the journal, which brought two new research contributions to the history *Zemlja*: Božidar Gagro, "Zemlja naspram evropske umjetnosti između dva rata [The Land group and European interwar art]" *Život umjetnosti* 11/12 (1970): 25-32, and Ivanka Reberski, "The Land group in word and time," *Život umjetnosti* 11/12 (1970): 33-79. The retrospective of *Zemlja*, organized as part of the 6th Zagreb Salon was a continuation of this effort, and as editor-in-chief of *Život umjetnosti*, and a member of the Salon's organizing board, Gagro was an important point of connection between the two endeavors.
46. The action was realized in collaboration with Boris Bućan and Davor Tomičić, who designed the posters.
47. The text of the *Decree* is reproduced in Želimir Košćević, *Ispitivanje međuprostora* [Examining the Interspace] (Zagreb, Centar za kulturnu djelatnost Saveza socijalističke omladine, 1978), 143-45. The *Decree No. 1 on the Democratization of Art* was published in the first issue of *Gazeta Futuristov*, in March 1918, by Vladimir Mayakovsky, David Burlyuk, and Vasily Kamensky.
48. Košćević, *Ispitivanje međuprostora*, 145.
49. Ibid.
50. Želimir Košćević, "Aspekti ambijentalizacije prostora [Aspects of transforming space into an environment]," *Život umjetnosti* 13 (1971): 55.
51. New Tendencies was a series of international exhibitions and conferences organized by the Zagreb Gallery of Contemporary Art in the period from 1961 to 1973. The project advocated the interaction between art and science, and promoted constructivist, lumino-kinetic and computer-based art, the core ideological presupposition being that art was an agent of social transformation. See Margit Rosen, ed., *A Little-Known Story about a Movement, a Magazine, and the Computer's Arrival in Art: New Tendencies and Bit International, 1961-1973* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011), Medosch, *New Tendencies*.
52. Critic Ješa Denegri characterized New Tendencies movement as part of "the art of constructive approach." see Denegri, *Constructive Approach Art*.
53. Košćević, *Ispitivanje međuprostora*, 133.
54. Ibid, 27-28.

55. Ibid, 28
56. Ibid.
57. In the text “3000 words,” published in the *Praxis* journal in 1971, participants of the Belgrade protests reflected on the political and ideological backdrop of the movement: “In contrast to the accusations voiced by the bureaucrats, [the students] did not propagate the pluralism of bourgeois democracy, nor the anarchistic demolition of all existing institutions, although they decidedly advocate for the abolition of all centers of alienated political power. In short, the students’ ideal is democratic socialism. They remain convinced that the realization of this goal is realistically possible in the given historical conditions. However, and thanks to the various conservative forces in our society, the gap between the proclaimed aim and reality, between theory and practice, is too great and is decreasing only too slowly. This is the key reason for the students’ dissatisfaction and revolt.” Cited in Kranzleiter, “1968 u Jugoslaviji,” 38.
58. Košćević, *Ispitivanje međuprostora*, 11.
59. Ibid.
60. For an elaboration of this tension, see Sabrina Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia, 1963-1983* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
61. Both Mladen Stilinović and his brother Sven Stilinović were both school dropouts, not because of their inability to finish school, but because of their resistance to institutional conditioning. A number of works by Vlado Martek contained slogans directly opposing or flirting with the opposition to the state (“Lie to the state,” or “I’m in love with the state; long live adultery”).
62. Ivana Bago and Antonia Majača, “Dissociative Association, Dionysian Socialism, Non-Action and Delayed Audience: Between Action and Exodus in the Art of the 1960s and 1970s in Yugoslavia,” in *Removed from the Crowd: Unexpected Encounters I*, ed. Ivana Bago, Antonia Majača, and Vesna Vuković (Zagreb: BLOK and DeLve, 2011), 294. The action was performed as part of a night intervention in which a number of other artists participated. It was repeated in Belgrade during the 1976 April Encounters; however, it lasted only a short while and was taken down by organizers, who were probably pressured to do so. A postcard with the statement was printed and distributed by Srećna Galerija (Happy Gallery) in Belgrade and Jerman remembers that it sold well, especially with soldiers.
63. Bago and Majača, “Dissociative Association,” 292-293. Pave Dulčić, Tomo Čaleta, Slaven Sumić, Denis Dokić, Radovan Kogej. The group was subsequently named *Red Peristyle*, or at least this is how it came to be historicized. This process of historicization itself is problematic, as it relied to a great extent on mythologized accounts of Vladimir Dodig Trokut, another artists associated with the group.
64. Butković, “Sekcija Prijedlog,” 1.
65. Ibid,
66. Davor Matičević, *Mogućnosti za 1971/Possibilities for 1971* (Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1971), n.p.
67. Matičević, *Mogućnosti za 1971*, n.p.
68. Ibid.
69. This anecdote is recounted here, based on the interview with Sanja Iveković by Vesna Vuković, for Croatian Radio Third Program, part of the *Stvarnost prostora* [The reality of space] series, and available at: <http://www.radiopula.hrt.hr/treci-program/aod/razgovor-sa-sanjom-ivekovic/56934/>
70. Matičević, *Mogućnosti za 1971*, n.p. Translation slightly modified.
71. The Group of Six Artists included Boris Demur, Željko Jerman, Vlado Martek, Mladen Stilinović, Sven Stilinović, and Fedor Vucemilovic. Except for the painter Boris Demur, none of them had an artistic education, and their backgrounds were diverse (film, poetry, photography) and mostly amateur-based.
72. Matko Meštrović, cited in Darko Fritz, “Nove Tendencije/New Tendencies,” *Oris* 54 (2008): 180.
73. Davor Matičević, “The Zagreb Circle,” 22.
74. Denegri, *Constructive Approach Art*.
75. Meštrović, cited in Fritz, 180.
76. Davor Matičević, “Uvod” [Introduction], in *Inovacije u hrvatskoj umjetnosti sedamdesetih godina* [Innovations in Croatian Art of the 1970s], ed. Marijan Susovski (Zagreb: Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, 1982), 12. Own translation.
77. Marijan Susovski, “Inovacije u hrvatskoj umjetnosti sedamdesetih godina [Innovations in Croatian Art of the 1970s],” in *Inovacije u hrvatskoj umjetnosti sedamdesetih godina* [Innovations in Croatian

- Art of the 1970s], ed. Marijan Susovski (Zagreb: Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, 1982), 31. Own translation.
78. Susovski, "Inovacije u hrvatskoj umjetnosti sedamdesetih godina," 21.
 79. Matičević, "Uvod," 16.
 80. Maja Fowkes interprets the work of Grupa TOK during the second version of *Proposal* in 1972 as an example of direct engagement, as well as an implicit critique on the interventions in public space of the first edition of *Proposal*. Fowkes, *The Green Bloc*, 111-149.
 81. Košćević, *Ispitivanje međuprostora*, 145.
 82. Susovski, "Inovacije u hrvatskoj umjetnosti sedamdesetih godina," 31.
 83. Peter Bürger, Peter, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 95.
 84. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 95.
 85. One of the regular visitors of the Korčula Summer School was Henri Lefebvre, whose works were also published in the *Praxis* journal. In fact, Lefebvre's presence in Yugoslavia was exceptional. His works have been continuously translated since the late 1950s, and his idea of *autogestion* is, according to Ljiljana Blagojević, significantly indebted to his contacts with the *Praxis* circle of Yugoslav philosophers and intellectuals, and more generally, to the Yugoslav ideological backdrop of self-management. "It can be said that Lefebvre's post-PCF [Parti communiste français] years and Yugoslavia's era of self-management were strongly related in the concurrent, if mutually diverging, search for a society with a difference," she concludes. Ljiljana Blagojević, "Novi Beograd: Reinventing Utopia," in *Urban Revolution Now: Henri Lefebvre in Social Research and Architecture*, ed. Stanek Łukasz, Christian Schmid, and Ákos Moravánszky (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 302. This brings to mind the artistic search for precisely such a society during the same time. However, despite his popularity, we find no references to his work in the artistic and curatorial conceptions of art in the city (but it should be noted that Lefebvre is an important reference for the New Tendencies theorist, Matko Meštrović).
 86. Vera Horvat-Pintarić, "Sredstvo i posredništvo / Medium and Mediation" in *Televizija danas / Television Today*, ed. Vera Horvat-Pintarić (Zagreb: bit international, Galerije Grada Zagreba, 1972), 180. Horvat-Pintarić certainly also has in mind not only art projects in urban space but also those pertaining to the kind of visual research and "mixed media" that was part of New Tendencies, with which she was close. The book itself was published in the series *bit international*, the journal of the New Tendencies movement.
 87. Horvat-Pintarić, "Sredstvo i posredništvo," 180.
 88. *Ibid.*
 89. *Ibid.*
 90. Željko Jerman, cited in Darko Šimičić, "The Group of Six Artists. Chronology, Commentaries," in *The Group of Six Artists*, ed. Janka Vukmir (Zagreb: SCCA—Institute for Contemporary Art, 1998), 256.
 91. Selections from "Comments of passers-by recorded during exhibition-actions at the Zagreb Republic Square, 25 October, 1975 and 17-19 July, 1978," reproduced in Šimičić, "The Group of Six Artists."
 92. From the catalogue introduction to *Proposal*, cited in Butković, "Sekcija Prijedlog," 5.
 93. Peter Cook, cited in Simon Sadler, *Archigram: Architecture Without Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 55.
 94. "Situation," cited in Sadler, *Archigram: Architecture*, 50.
 95. See Claire Bishop's discussion of the different ways that artists in Europe have developed and framed what she defines as participatory art practices, for which public space is only one possible arena, however, due to their orientation toward engendering social space, a crucial one. Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso Books, 2012). Especially relevant for the present discussion is the chapter on participatory art in socialism, which she describes as "perhaps the most complicated episode in the history of participatory art," due to the specific character of "the impulses motivating collaborative practice when collectivism is an ideological requirement and state-imposed norm" (129). Because of this ideological collectivism, "the participatory art of Eastern Europe and Russia from the mid-1960s to late-1980s is frequently marked by the desire for an increasingly subjective and privatized aesthetic experience" (129). While

- certainly applicable even beyond the cases she discusses, it is nonetheless problematic to confine this judgment to the Eastern European situation, as the Western artists of the time are similarly preoccupied with both reinventing the spaces of the social, as well as destabilizing the boundaries between the private and the public.
96. Fowkes, *The Green Bloc*, 111-49.
 97. *Ibid.*, 129.
 98. *Ibid.*
 99. Vladimir Kulić, Maroje Mrduljaš, and Wolfgang Thaler, *Modernism In-Between: The Mediatory Architectures of Socialist Yugoslavia* (Berlin: Jovis Verlag GmbH, 2012), 121.
 100. *Ibid.*
 101. Neither project, however, developed according to initial plans, and the major shortfalls concerned the failure to bring any relevant civic and cultural content to the area, besides those serving the immediate, basic needs of inhabitants. See the discussion of Novi Beograd and Novi Zagreb in Kulić et al., *Modernism In-Between*, 122-28.
 102. Mladen Stilinović, from a conversation with the author, March, 2015.
 103. Cited in Maja Hrgović, “Što sa stvarima umrlih dama?” *arteist*, 11 February, 2015, <http://arteist.hr/sto-sa-stvarima-umrlih-dama/>.
 104. Owen Hatherley, “Landscape, Urbanism, and Socialist Space in the Black Wave,” in *Surfing the Black: The Yugoslav Black Wave Cinema*, ed. Gal Kirn, Dubravka Sekulić, and Žiga Testen (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Academic, 2012), 201.
 105. Krleža’s “Foreword to Hegeđušić’s *Motifs from the Drava Region*” (1933), in which he discussed Hegeđušić’s work, started the aforementioned “conflict on the literary left.”
 106. “The Program of the Art Association *Zemlja*,” reproduced in *Život umjetnosti* 11/12 (1970).
 107. For one among interpretations of the economic liberalization of Yugoslavia see Gal Kirn, *From the Primacy of Partisan Politics to the Post-Fordist Tendency in Yugoslav Self-Management* (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Academic, 2010).
 108. This is, for example, the major presupposition of the collection of essays, gathered in Gal Kirn, Dubravka Sekulić, and Žiga Testen, eds., *Surfing the Black: The Yugoslav Black Wave Cinema* (Maastricht, Jan van Eyck Academic, 2012), and, arising as a response to the previously dominant “dissident artist” discourse, can be seen as part of a more general trend in recent interpretations of Yugoslav art and culture, including my own work.
 109. Manifest of *Zemlja*, published in *Život umjetnosti* 11/12 (1970).
 110. However, although abandoned by late 1970s, the practice of “socialist curating” has been resumed by the post-Yugoslav generations of artists, curators, and activists, who claim a stand against post-socialist privatization of the city as the basis for pursuing social justice. In Zagreb, the legacy of “socialist curating” is best exemplified by the activist platform Right to the City (www.pravonagrad.org), and [BLOK] (www.blok.hr), a curatorial collective whose engagements in the field of art in public space have, interestingly, been complemented recently by a research project that focused on the interwar group *Zemlja*, reactivating thus the legacy of this interwar group for the present moment, in much the same way that the curators and critics discussed in this text did in late 1960s and 1970s.

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