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FEMININITY AND FEMINISM IN ART PRACTICES IN SERBIA: 1970-2010

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Abstract

The research subject of this PhD thesis is femininity and feminism in art practices in Serbia: 1970-2010. The study is dedicated to art production of the authors from Serbia taking into consideration both theoretical and practical knowledge and sources. This thesis will contribute to the literature from the domains of art theory and art history of international and Serbian resources primarily because of its multidisciplinary approach. It will also help spreading the knowledge about the topic because it is realized in English as the official language of academic research thus making it material available for future studies outside the borders of Serbia. The theoretical contribution of this thesis addresses issues of construction of femininity in Serbia and analyzes the visual language of artworks relevant for the topic; it also provides an overview of art practices connected to the themes; besides that, it offers an insight into local feminist tendencies. In addition, what is also important is that it supplies interviews realized with the artists as the source for future research and study. Furthermore, theoretical and analytical methods are applied for selection and interpretation of the representative artworks and for the analyses of texts from the various fields of studies. The set objectives in this thesis have been confirmed through research results and their conclusions that underline local specificities on one side and follow general characteristics in art practices in Serbia on the other. Male dominance in patriarchal societies is maintained by cherishing gender stereotypes that are obvious in the dynamics that objectify woman but also in her positioning in the art world. In the domain of anthropological research, even though there are local specificities, it can be said that femininity in art reached the more general, "omnipresent" tendencies in representations of feminine identity. Speaking from the point of view of historical particularities, ideology and politics have actively and continuously participated in the construction of "femininity" (and "masculinity") that reflected on the art production of a more radical, original, and distinct character. As the media are mirroring social relations and gender inequalities, in conjunction with the dominant ideology, also transition and globalization influenced the topics and visual strategies of Serbian artworks.

Keywords: art, femininity, feminism, artwork, art practice, Serbia, performance, visual, image, representation, identity, gender, popular culture, woman, socialism, ideology, stereotypes, mythology, interview

Abstract (Castellano)

El tema de investigación de esta tesis doctoral es la feminidad y el feminismo en las prácticas artísticas en Serbia: 1970-2010. El estudio se dedica a la producción artística de los/as autores/as de Serbia teniendo en cuenta los conocimientos teóricos y prácticos. Esta tesis contribuirá a la literatura del área de conocimiento de la teoría del arte y la historia del arte de los recursos internacionales y serbios principalmente debido a su enfoque multidisciplinario. También ayudará a difundir el conocimiento sobre el tema ya que se realiza en inglés, idioma oficial de la investigación académica, por lo que el resultado estará disponible para futuros estudios más allá de las fronteras de Serbia. La contribución teórica de esta tesis aborda cuestiones de construcción de la feminidad en Serbia y analiza el lenguaje visual de las obras de arte relevantes relacionadas con el tema. Además, ofrece una visión general de las prácticas artísticas que se pueden englobar en el ámbito de estudio, ofreciendo una visión de las tendencias feministas locales. Cabe destacar la parte dedicada a las entrevistas realizadas a las artistas que son un posible punto de partida para futuras investigaciones y estudios. Se han aplicado métodos teóricos y analíticos para la selección e interpretación de las obras representativas y para el análisis de textos de los diferentes campos de estudio. Los objetivos establecidos en esta tesis se han confirmado a través de los resultados de la investigación y sus conclusiones que subrayan las especificidades locales por un lado y siguen las características generales en las prácticas artísticas en Serbia por el otro. La dominación masculina en las sociedades patriarcales se mantiene en los estereotipos de género que son evidentes en la dinámica que objetualiza a la mujer, pero también en su posicionamiento en el mundo del arte. En el campo de la investigación antropológica, aunque existen especificidades locales, se puede decir que la feminidad en el arte encaja con las tendencias más generales, "omnipresentes", en las representaciones de la identidad femenina. Hablando desde el punto de vista de las particularidades históricas, la ideología y la política han participado activa y continuamente en la construcción de la "feminidad" (y "masculinidad") la cual en la producción artística refleja un carácter más radical, original y distinto. Mientras que los medios de comunicación reflejaban y producían también las relaciones sociales y las desigualdades de género, junto con la ideología dominante, lo mismo sucedía con el periodo de transición del comunismo al capitalismo y la globalización que influyeron en los temas y estrategias visuales de las obras de arte serbias.

Palabras claves: arte, feminidad, feminismo, prácticas artísticas, Serbia, performance, visual, imagen, representación, identidad, género, cultura popular, mujer, socialismo, ideología, estereotipos, mitología, entrevista

Abstract (Valencià)

El tema d'investigació d'aquesta tesi doctoral és la feminitat i el feminisme en les pràctiques artístiques a Sèrbia: 1970-2010. L'estudi es dedica a la producció artística dels autors i autores de Sèrbia tenint en compte els coneixements teòrics i pràctics. Aquesta tesi contribuirà a la literatura de l'àrea de coneixement de la teoria de l'art i la història de l'art dels recursos internacionals i serbis principalment degut al seu enfocament multidisciplinari. També ajudarà a difondre el coneixement sobre el tema tenint en compte que es fa en anglès, idioma oficial de la investigació acadèmica, de manera que el resultat estarà disponible per a futurs estudis més enllà de les fronteres de Sèrbia. La contribució teòrica d'aquesta tesi aborda qüestions de construcció de la feminitat a Sèrbia i analitza el llenguatge visual de les obres d'art rellevants relacionades amb el tema. A més, ofereix una visió general de les pràctiques artístiques que es poden englobar en l'àmbit d'estudi, oferint una visió de les tendències feministes locals. Cal destacar la part dedicada a les entrevistes realitzades a les artistes que són un possible punt de partida per a futures investigacions i estudis. S'han aplicat mètodes teòrics i analítics per a la selecció i interpretació de les obres representatives i per a l'anàlisi de textos dels diferents camps d'estudi. Els objectius establerts en aquesta tesi s'han confirmat mitjançant els resultats de la investigació i les seues conclusions que subratllen les especificitats locals per una banda i segueixen les característiques generals en les pràctiques artístiques en Sèrbia per una altra. La dominació masculina en les societats patriarcal es manté en els estereotips de gènere que són palesos en la dinàmica que objectualitza a la dona, però també en el seu posicionament al món de l'art. En el camp de la investigació antropològica, tot i que existeixen especificitats locals, es pot dir que la feminitat en l'art encaixa amb les tendències més generals, "omnipresents", en les representacions de la identitat femenina. Parlant des de el punt de vista de las particularitats històriques, la ideologia i la política han participat activa i continuament en la construcció de la "feminitat" (y "masculinitat") la qual cosa reflecteix en la producció artística un tarannà més radical, original i diferent. Mentre que els mitjans de comunicació reflectien i produïen també les relacions socials i les desigualtats de gènere, junt amb la ideologia dominant, el mateix succeïa amb el període de transició del comunisme al capitalisme i la globalització que varen influir en els temes i estratègies visuals de les obres d'arte serbi.

Paraules clau: art, feminitat, feminisme, pràctiques artístiques, Sèrbia, performance, visual, imatge, representació, identitat, gènere, cultura popular, dona, socialisme, ideologia, estereotips, mitologia, entrevista

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY AIMS

The research subject of this thesis is femininity and feminism in art practices in Serbia within the time frame between 1970 and 2010¹. It can be said that the importance to do the research on this topic lies in the fact that it has not been sufficiently studied either locally or internationally and that it also deserves an academic preview that would serve for further research and study on the themes that stem from this work. As we speak about the previous studies, it should be emphasized that Serbian bibliography, literature and publications mainly offer scarce sections and/or chapters related to this research subject that are inserted into art history and/or art theory materials of the broader topics. It must be also pointed out that almost all of them are materials available solely in Serbian and even more importantly that most of them are still not available in an electronic format. On the other side, to speak about research that was conducted outside of Serbia and that refers to femininity and feminism in Serbian art practices, most often it was presented as a part of larger entities for example, exhibitions about Eastern Europe or Balkan art or as specifically targeted and limited projects. Therefore, this thesis also aims to supply a deeper and broader perspective through the research of the subject in question.

The rationale for studying the research subject of this thesis for me as a female artist was to create the work that addresses the problem of femininity and feminism in visual arts. It is a question that has been previously treated extensively not only from the point of view of gender studies, but also in the history of art and artistic practice, as well as in sociology, anthropology, psychology, etc. On this occasion, after the introductory chapter dedicated to feminism(s), I focus my research on the stereotyped image of the objectified woman. Then, I investigate the influence of specificities of Serbian environment and cultural context in relation to women and women as artists. The local situation in Serbia is treated from the point of view of its historical, political, cultural and social particularities in the construction of Serbian female identity. This research is also an opportunity to study and present artworks created between

¹ The reasons for choosing this exact time frame are several. Firstly, after students' protests in 1968 in Belgrade, the first visible signs of feminism in Serbian art began to show in the beginning of the 1970s. Also, as 1970 approximately coincides with the author's year of birth, it promises a direct, first-hand insight into conditions from these spaces. As this research began soon after 2010, that year was the first time-determinant to round the decade as the beginning period of this millennium with its specificities already defined.

1970 and 2010 of Serbian artists who work or have worked on the topic of feminine identity, looking for similarities and differences between them, all with aim to search for possible directions and future trends in contemporary art that deals with the subject.

The main objective of this work is to review the existing art practices in order to examine and explore the development of the theme of femininity and feminism focusing on Serbia in the period from 1970 to 2010. This thesis intends to address issues of construction of female identity in Serbia and to come to know the visual language of artworks relevant for the topic. Through the analysis of the works of the artists who have worked in the same area, this thesis aims to reach a reflection on the achievements and scope of contemporary art that deals with the issue concerned. I would like to mention that this paper also analyzes male hegemony and local Serbian patriarchal order with the purpose to explore cultural and anthropological concepts that have influenced the image of female identity as the stereotyped object and/or identity. One of the goals is also to orient the research towards the artistic expression dedicated to this subject from the feminist point of view that represents the transition of the feminine identity from object to subject. In addition, the goal is to examine international and Serbian feminist theories and how they reflect, if they do, in contemporary Serbian art. Besides that, one of the specific objectives of this work is to search, analyze and classify works by artists working on the theme (from 1970 to 2010). Then, this work also aims to explore texts and artistic practices in order to develop a theoretical and practical corpus of interest for the topic of study. Besides that, this research intends to check whether the theory and the praxis of Serbian artists form a conceptual unit of an original, specific and coherent artistic body.

As far as methodology is concerned, throughout this thesis the methods of literary revision, cultural analysis and analysis of works of Serbian art production will be adopted in order to proceed with the research. In addition, artistic perspectives related to the subject will be developed as an analytical strategy to explore deeply the signs, symbolic meanings, gender awareness and femininity represented in the works of Serbian artists. The materials that will be analyzed come from a variety of sources and also include Serbian libraries and research centres with information from specific bibliographic sources (books, articles, doctoral theses, academic papers, catalogues, monographs, exhibitions, etc.) published in Serbia. These materials will be perused in order to interpret textual and visual data. In addition, internet resources will be used as a source of knowledge as well as the interviews that I realized with Serbian authors. It must be emphasized that the interviews will

provide first-hand information coming from the artists themselves. In relation to methodology, it must be also pointed out that this work treats artworks of sculpture, painting, photography, video, and performance. The focus on performance is not purposeful or intentional because this thesis does not aim to concentrate on, and/or dedicate to, a particular art discipline or medium as the principal subject of study. The truth is that performing live in front of the audience has more impact; and performance can be recorded or broadcasted, it exists in video, on the Internet, on TV, or in photographic documentary. It is the fact that performance is interrelated with other media and with popular culture. Nevertheless, in this thesis performance is a reflection of a potentially very significant tendency which is to “recontextualize” it as a form of politicized art practice sometimes employed by practices of artists who seldom consider themselves feminists.

When speaking about the theory, it is necessary to comment the dynamics of how works of Serbian authors that are dealing with the relationship between art and gender issues are usually structured in order to define their theoretical limitations and also give some different perspectives on the subject. Firstly, and this goes for the academic publications² as well, the huge part of such works relies primarily on foreign theories – feminist theories and gender studies. Secondly, there is almost a flagrant overuse of the quantity of those materials that are quoted throughout texts as if the purpose was to prove author’s familiarity with and knowledge of the (foreign) theoretical standpoints. Next, when that overload of the “dense”, imported information (that is accompanied with some interpretation) finally ends, it can occupy up to two thirds or even more of the entire research. More often than not, such works somewhere near their end finally but forcibly apply the aforementioned quoted theories onto the artworks – for example, in the texts of Olivera Erić which are quoted in this thesis it is obvious how this mechanism of the so-called research writing functions. However, even those interpretations are often done in superficial and manipulative ways; so, the final impression is that the appearance of artworks simply “dangles” from the theoretical material. What is even worse is that in such texts very often images and visual materials of the commented artworks are even completely omitted from the work (this also refers to Erić’s academic works listed here). As far as contemporary feminist theory editions are taken into account, Adriana Zaharijević’s books are a good example of the author’s command of English language and successful translations so much that her works seem to be compilations of purposefully chosen

² Please, see academic works listed in the bibliography

foreign texts. Meanwhile, on the other side, writings of Žarana Papić which bring out sparkle and originality in the domain of feminism and gender theory are often unjustifiably forgotten and largely ignored. For instance, *Introduction to Gender Theories* is a compilation of various authors edited by Ivana Milojević and Slobodanka Markov. Those articles and texts are to be treated as a review of foreign gender theories (mostly American and French) as adapted by Serbian authors within an academic milieu. Therefore, such a concept of study and treatment of bibliography, materials, resources, and methodology do not promise much development in this kind of work because it largely relies on reproduction, appropriation and imitation instead of genuine interest, research and production. In short, such working methods do not give any chance to substantial research and thus they hugely hinder any further emergence, development and ramifications of possibly original Serbian theories that deal with the topic of gender, feminism and art.

To comment on literature resources from the domains of Serbian art history would mean to speak about relatively recent editions. In reference to the previous studies of art history about femininity and feminism in art practices in Serbia, it should be emphasized that Serbian literature and publications usually supply scarce sections and/or chapters related to this research subject as parts of the broader topics. In the case of Serbian art historian Ješa Denegri, editions quoted in the bibliography are dedicated to temporal decades of Serbian art history; and within each one, he separately presents artists, groups, and art scene phenomena. Even though Denegri does not clearly identify specific topics that stem from gender theory, he gives a lot of attention to critical, argumentative interpretation of artworks. It can be concluded that Denegri's knowledge and objective argumentation make a very helpful source of information for research some of which would not be otherwise available. Besides that, *History of Art in Serbia XX Century* (in two volumes) by Miško Šuvaković offers a broader perspective on Serbian art coming from a variety of authors from different spheres (sociology, philosophy, political science, anthropology, etc.). It must be noted that in Šuvaković's concept matters of femininity, feminism, gender theory, and queer are openly introduced into interpretations of the artworks which are sometimes treated as cultural "by-products" of their historical and political momentum, in both art history and life. One of the authors who took part in that project was also Nikola Dedić, who was listed here in the bibliography. Apart from being a follower of Althusser's philosophy, in his own publications Dedić also wrote several chapters about feminism in Serbian art as a part of art practices in socialist and post-socialist

era commenting on artworks of Marina Abramović, Milica Tomić, Tanja Ostojić, and other artists.

For the purpose of defining the theme of this thesis, it is necessary to discuss not only the topic of its research but also its methodology in reference to its selection of artists and artworks. The central problem to work on is how femininity is present and presented in the artworks and whether or not feminism issues exist in art practices in Serbia (for the period between 1970 and 2010). It becomes necessary to define more closely what *Serbia* (or *Serbian*) signifies as an ontological category in this thesis, and to narrow the picture of where *art practices in Serbia* come from. Therefore, *Serbia* here conveys the territory of Serbia within its borders as of today (which coincides with its borders during the period when it was the part of Yugoslavia except that today it is without Kosovo). During the first part of the time frame of this thesis, Serbia was part of Yugoslavia (from 1970 till 1991 when the war began) but, just as other Yugoslav states, had its own identity (language, habits, religion, traditions, etc). The question of the nation state, and how it relates to a particular identity, is a complex one in general; and in the case of Serbia it becomes even more complicated – the supposedly “natural” link between a nation or people and the state has been challenged. Therefore, Serbian artists are *Serbian* because they were born on the territory of Serbia. This signifies that today they still might or might not hold Serbian citizenship but also that nowadays they live in Serbian geographic area and/or abroad. Consequently, this thesis analyzes artworks (of the authors as defined above) that were created within the time frame between 1970 and 2010 in Serbia and/or abroad. It should be also mentioned that I have considered the work of artists who were born in Serbia but are not Serbian – for example, Katalin Ladik who is of Hungarian nationality. Specific questions that will be investigated are related to diversity of issues that stem from the local Serbian environment and that influence formation of female identity; those are the issues that are significant not only on the local level but that exist as parameters internationally. They are criteria caused by historical events, political climate, tradition and customs, religion and beliefs, culture, art, etc. that shape femininity and colour gender issues. On the other side, it would be impossible to speak about feminism without mentioning not only specificities of Serbian patriarchy and its local misogynist views but also women groups and NGOs. Even more importantly, in relation to the abovementioned matters, the resulting practices that were realized and strategies that were applied in Serbian artistic production will be commented, analyzed and interpreted with aim to overview the artworks relevant for the topic.

The starting hypothesis to be studied in this research would be that due to its uniqueness and complexity in matters of history, politics, legislatives, religion, tradition and customs, it would be a natural course for Serbia to have specific, and therefore particular and original approach in issues of femininity and feminism and the same would go for art on those issues as well. This thesis intends to analyze particularities of the formation of femininity and of “living a female experience” and how they are expressed and employed in art practices in Serbia. If we speak about other research going on around this topic in the Serbian academic milieu, the research that has been done at art faculties is mainly for the purpose of creating a theoretical study in order to defend and justify students’ production.

The originality of my research project comes from its multidisciplinary approach because besides art history and feminist theory it also applies theories from anthropology, history and political studies, philosophy, hermeneutics, literature, psychology, etc. In addition, this thesis promotes works of internationally less known artists from Serbia and theoreticians from these spaces (including former Yugoslavia). Such an approach can offer a more complete and coherent insight into the complexity of the topic and also bring broader perspectives on it. However, purposefully there are no comparisons and juxtapositions with international (foreign) artworks/artists – firstly, in order not to overstretch and lose the focus and secondly, with aim to supply an objective and concentrated view on Serbian art production and to contemplate it as an entity for itself.

This research was also done with a goal to establish a comprehensible presentation of Serbian authors and their artworks as a stable and justified corpus (but not as a closed and rigid structure). The contribution of the interviews that were conducted with Serbian authors will provide the direct view into attitudes, visions and motivations of artists on various topics and it can be added that those interviews are materials that could also serve as the basis for further research. In fact, this thesis will contribute to what is already known by more detailed and direct insight into the specifically oriented theory and practices of art in Serbia. It is essential to emphasize that not only academic research will benefit from this investigation but also professionals and diverse readers interested in the subject in the sense that they will be offered new information, specific knowledge, resources, and bibliography about the topic of this research.

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY AIMS (Castellano)

El tema de la investigación de esta tesis es la feminidad y el feminismo en prácticas artísticas en Serbia dentro del marco temporal entre 1970 y 2010³. Se puede decir que la importancia de realizar la investigación sobre este tema reside en el hecho de que no ha sido suficientemente estudiada a nivel local o internacional y que también merece un avance académico que sirva para más investigación y estudio. A medida que hablamos de los estudios anteriores, cabe destacar que la bibliografía, literatura y publicaciones serbias ofrecen principalmente secciones escasas y / o capítulos relacionados con este tema de investigación que se insertan en la historia del arte y / o materiales de teoría de arte de los temas más amplios. También, hay que señalar que casi todos los materiales están disponibles únicamente en serbio y, lo que es aún más importante, la mayoría de ellos todavía no están disponibles en formato electrónico. Por otro lado, para hablar de la investigación realizada fuera de Serbia que se refiere a la feminidad y al feminismo en las prácticas artísticas serbias, la mayoría de veces ella fue presentada como parte de entidades más grandes, por ejemplo, exposiciones sobre la Europa oriental o el arte balcánico, o en proyectos específicamente focalizados y limitados. Por lo tanto, esta tesis también pretende proporcionar una perspectiva más profunda y más amplia a través de la investigación del tema en cuestión.

La razón para estudiar el tema de investigación de esta tesis para mí como artista femenina fue crear la obra que aborda el problema de la feminidad y el feminismo en las artes visuales. Es una cuestión que ha sido previamente tratada extensamente no sólo desde el punto de vista de los estudios de género, sino también en la historia del arte y en prácticas artísticas, así como en la sociología, antropología, psicología, etc. El capítulo introductorio fue dedicado al feminismo(s), mientras que el siguiente centré en la imagen estereotipada de la mujer objetivada. Luego, investigo la influencia de las especificidades del ambiente serbio y el contexto cultural en relación con mujeres y con mujeres como artistas. La situación local en

³ Las razones para elegir este marco de tiempo son varias. En primer lugar, después de las protestas de los estudiantes en 1968 en Belgrado, los primeros signos visibles del feminismo en el arte serbio comenzaron a aparecer a principios de los años setenta. Además, como 1970 aproximadamente coincide con el año de nacimiento de la autora, eso promete una visión directa de primera mano de las condiciones de estos espacios. También, como esta investigación comenzó pronto después de 2010, ese año fue el primer determinante de tiempo para redondear la década como el período inicial de este milenio con sus especificidades ya definidas.

Serbia se trata desde el punto de vista de sus particularidades históricas, políticas, culturales y sociales en la construcción de la identidad femenina serbia. Esta investigación es también una oportunidad para estudiar y presentar obras de arte creadas entre 1970 y 2010 de artistas serbios que trabajan o han trabajado en el tema de la identidad femenina buscando similitudes y diferencias entre ellos, con el objetivo de descubrir posibles direcciones y tendencias futuras en el arte contemporáneo que se ocupa del tema.

El objetivo principal de este trabajo es revisar las prácticas artísticas existentes con el fin de examinar y explorar el desarrollo del tema de la feminidad y el feminismo centrado en Serbia en el período de 1970 a 2010. Esta tesis pretende abordar cuestiones de construcción de la identidad femenina en Serbia y conocer el lenguaje visual de las obras de arte relevantes para el tema. A través del análisis de las obras de los artistas que han trabajado en la misma área, esta tesis pretende llegar a una reflexión sobre los logros y el alcance del arte contemporáneo que se ocupa del tema en cuestión. Me gustaría mencionar que este trabajo también analiza la hegemonía masculina y el orden patriarcal serbio local con el propósito de explorar conceptos culturales y antropológicos que han influido en la imagen de la identidad femenina como el objeto y / o identidad estereotipada. Uno de los objetivos es también orientar la investigación hacia la expresión artística dedicada a este tema desde el punto de vista feminista que representa la transición de la identidad femenina de objeto a sujeto. Además, el objetivo es examinar las teorías feministas internacionales y serbias y cómo las mismas se reflejan, si existen, en el arte serbio contemporáneo. También, uno de los objetivos específicos de este trabajo es buscar, analizar y clasificar obras de artistas que trabajan sobre el tema (de 1970 a 2010). A continuación, este trabajo pretende explorar textos y prácticas artísticas para desarrollar un corpus teórico y práctico de interés para el tema de estudio. Además, esta investigación pretende comprobar si la teoría y la praxis de los artistas serbios forman una unidad conceptual que es original, específica y coherente.

En cuanto a la metodología, a lo largo de esta tesis se adoptarán los métodos de revisión literaria, análisis cultural y análisis de obras de la producción artística serbia para continuar con la investigación. Además, las perspectivas artísticas relacionadas con el tema se desarrollarán como una estrategia analítica para explorar profundamente los signos, los significados simbólicos, la conciencia de género y la feminidad representada en las obras de los artistas serbios. Los materiales que se analizarán provienen de diversas fuentes e incluyen bibliotecas serbias y centros de investigación con información de fuentes bibliográficas específicas (libros, artículos, tesis doctorales, trabajos académicos, catálogos, monografías,

exposiciones, etc.) publicados en Serbia. Estos materiales serán examinados con el fin de interpretar los datos textuales y visuales. Además, los recursos del Internet se utilizarán como fuentes de conocimiento, así como las entrevistas que realicé con autoras serbias. Hay que destacar que las entrevistas proporcionarán información de primera mano de las propias artistas. También hay que señalar que este trabajo trata de obras de la escultura, la pintura, la fotografía, el vídeo y el performance. El enfoque en performance no es intencional, porque esta tesis no pretende concentrarse en, y / o dedicarse a una determinada disciplina o medio artístico como el tema principal de su estudio. La verdad es que actuar en vivo en frente de la audiencia tiene más impacto; y el performance puede ser grabado o transmitido, existe en video, en Internet, en la televisión o en el documento fotográfico. Es el hecho de que el performance se interrelaciona con otros medios de comunicación y con la cultura popular. Sin embargo, en esta tesis performance es un reflejo de una tendencia potencialmente muy significativa que es de "re-contextualizar" performance como una forma de práctica del arte politizado a veces empleado por las prácticas de artistas que raramente se consideran feministas.

Al hablar de la teoría, es necesario comentar la dinámica de cómo las obras de los autores serbios que se ocupan de la relación entre el arte y las cuestiones de género suelen estructurarse para definir sus limitaciones teóricas y también dar algunas perspectivas diferentes sobre el tema. En primer lugar, y esto se refiere también a las publicaciones académicas⁴, la gran parte de estas obras se basa principalmente en teorías extranjeras – teorías feministas y estudios de género. En segundo lugar, hay casi un uso excesivo flagrante de la cantidad de esos materiales que se citan a lo largo de los textos como si el propósito fuese probar conocimientos del autor sobre los puntos de vista teóricos (extranjeros). A continuación, cuando esa sobrecarga de la información “densa”, importada (que se acompaña con alguna interpretación) finalmente termina, ella puede ocupar hasta dos tercios o incluso más de toda la investigación. Aquí, tales obras en algún lugar cerca de su final, finalmente pero forzosamente, aplican citadas teóricas a obras de arte - por ejemplo, en textos de Olivera Erić citados en esta tesis, es obvio cómo este mecanismo de la denominada “escritura de investigación” funciona. Sin embargo, incluso esas interpretaciones se hacen a menudo de manera superficial y manipuladora. Así, la impresión final es que la aparición de las obras de arte simplemente “cuelga” del material teórico. Lo que es aún peor es que en tales textos

⁴ Por favor, vea los trabajos académicos enumerados en la bibliografía.

muchas veces las imágenes y los materiales visuales de las obras de arte comentadas son incluso completamente omitidos de la obra (esto también se refiere a los trabajos académicos de Erić enumerados aquí). En cuanto a las ediciones de la teoría feminista contemporánea, los libros de Adriana Zaharijević son un buen ejemplo de conocimiento del idioma inglés que la autora emplea para realizar traducciones exitosas tanto que sus obras parecen ser compilaciones de textos extranjeros elegidos a propósito. Mientras tanto, en el otro lado, escritos de Žarana Papić, que acentúan la originalidad en el dominio del feminismo y teoría de género a menudo se olvidan injustificadamente. Por ejemplo, *Introducción a las teorías de género* es una compilación de varias autoras editada por Ivana Milojevic y Slobodanka Markov. Esos artículos y textos deben ser tratados como una revisión de las teorías de género extranjeras (en su mayoría estadounidenses y francesas) adaptada por las autoras de Serbia dentro de un entorno académico. Por lo tanto, este concepto de estudio y tratamiento de la bibliografía, los materiales, los recursos y la metodología no prometen mucho desarrollo en este tipo de trabajo porque ese se basa en gran medida en la reproducción, la apropiación y la imitación en lugar del interés genuino, la investigación y la producción. En resumen, tales métodos de trabajo no dan ninguna oportunidad de investigación sustancial y por lo tanto, dificultan enormemente cualquier emergencia adicional, desarrollo y ramificaciones de las teorías serbias posiblemente originales que tratan el tema del género, el feminismo y el arte.

Para comentar sobre recursos de la literatura de los dominios de la historia del arte serbio significaría hablar de ediciones relativamente recientes. En referencia a los estudios previos de la historia del arte sobre la feminidad y el feminismo en las prácticas del arte en Serbia, se debe enfatizar que las secciones y / o capítulos de la literatura y las publicaciones de Serbia son generalmente escasos y relacionados con este tema de investigación como parte de los temas más amplios. En el caso de Serbia, historiador del arte Ješa Denegri, ediciones citadas en la bibliografía se dedican a décadas temporales de la historia del arte de Serbia; y dentro de cada uno, se presenta por separado artistas, grupos y fenómenos de la escena del arte. A pesar de que Denegri no identifica claramente los temas específicos que se derivan de la teoría de género, se da mucha atención a la interpretación crítica y argumentativa de obras de arte. Se puede concluir que el conocimiento de Denegri y la argumentación objetiva hacen una fuente muy útil de información para la investigación. Además, *Historia del Arte en Serbia en siglo XX* (en dos volúmenes) por Miško Šuvaković ofrece una perspectiva más amplia sobre el arte de Serbia procedentes de una variedad de autores de diferentes esferas (la sociología, la filosofía, la ciencia política, la antropología, etc.). Debe tenerse en cuenta que en materia en

el concepto de Šuvaković la feminidad, el feminismo, la teoría de género, y queer se presentan abiertamente en las interpretaciones de las obras de arte que a veces son tratadas como “subproductos” culturales de su impulso histórico y político, tanto en la historia del arte y como en la vida. Uno de los autores que han participado en este proyecto también fue Nikola Dedić, que aparece en la bibliografía aquí. Aparte de ser un seguidor de la filosofía de Althusser, en sus propias publicaciones Dedić también escribió varios capítulos sobre el feminismo y el arte de Serbia como parte de las prácticas artísticas en la era socialista y post-socialista comentando obras de Marina Abramović, Milica Tomčić, Tanja Ostojić y otras artistas. A los efectos de definir el tema de esta tesis, es necesario discutir no sólo el tema de su investigación, sino también su metodología y referencia a su selección de artistas y obras de arte. El problema central en el que trabajar es cómo la feminidad está presente y presentada en las obras de arte y si existen o no feminismos en las prácticas artísticas en Serbia (entre 1970 y 2010). Es necesario definir mejor lo que *Serbia* (o *serbio*) significa aquí como una categoría ontológica en esta tesis, y para reducir la zona que se refiere a prácticas de arte de Serbia. Por lo tanto, Serbia aquí transmite el territorio de Serbia dentro de sus fronteras a partir de hoy (que coincide con sus fronteras durante el período en que era la parte de Yugoslavia, excepto que hoy es sin Kosovo). Durante la primera parte del marco de tiempo de esta tesis, Serbia era parte de Yugoslavia (desde 1970 hasta 1991, cuando comenzó la guerra), pero, al igual que otros estados yugoslavos, tuvo su propia identidad (idioma, costumbres, religión, tradiciones, etc.). La selección de artistas Serbios se refiere a tener Serbia como el lugar de nacimiento. Esto significa que en la actualidad todavía ellos tienen o no tienen la ciudadanía de Serbia, sino también que hoy en día viven en la zona geográfica de Serbia, y/o en el extranjero. En consecuencia, esta tesis analiza obras de arte (de los autores definen como antes) que fueron creados dentro del marco de tiempo entre 1970 y 2010 en Serbia y/o en el extranjero. También hay que mencionar que he considerado la obra de artistas que han nacido en Serbia, pero no son de serbios como por ejemplo Katalin Ladik de nacionalidad húngara. Las preguntas específicas que se investigarán están relacionadas con la diversidad de temas que se derivan del ambiente serbio local y que influyen en la formación de la identidad femenina; esos son los temas significativos no solamente a nivel local, sino que existen como parámetros a nivel internacional. Son criterios causados por acontecimientos históricos, clima político, tradición y costumbres, religión y creencias, cultura, arte, etc., que configuran la feminidad y que pintan las cuestiones de género. Por otro lado, sería imposible hablar del feminismo sin mencionar no sólo las especificidades del patriarcado serbio y sus puntos de

vista misóginos locales, sino también los grupos de mujeres y las ONG. Aún más importante, en relación con los temas antes mencionados, se comentarán, analizarán e interpretarán las prácticas resultantes que se realizaron y las estrategias que se aplicaron en la producción artística serbia con el objetivo de dar una visión general de las obras de arte relevantes para el tema.

La hipótesis de partida que se estudiará en esta investigación sería que debido a su singularidad y complejidad en materia de la historia, política, legislación, religión, tradición y costumbres, sería un curso natural para Serbia tener una especificidad y, por lo tanto, un enfoque particular y original en las cuestiones de la feminidad y el feminismo y lo mismo iría para el arte en esos temas también. Esta tesis pretende analizar las particularidades de la formación de la feminidad y de "vivir una experiencia femenina" y cómo se expresan y emplean en las prácticas artísticas en Serbia. Si hablamos de otras investigaciones en torno a este tema en el ámbito académico serbio, la investigación que se ha hecho en las facultades de arte tiene como objetivo principal la creación de un estudio teórico para defender y justificar la producción de los estudiantes.

La originalidad de mi proyecto de investigación proviene de su enfoque multidisciplinario, ya que además de la historia del arte y la teoría feminista también se aplican teorías de la antropología, la historia y los estudios políticos, la filosofía, la hermenéutica, la literatura, la psicología, etc. Este enfoque puede ofrecer una visión más completa y coherente de la complejidad del tema y también traer perspectivas más amplias sobre el mismo. Sin embargo, a propósito no hay comparaciones y yuxtaposiciones con artistas / artistas internacionales (extranjeros), en primer lugar, para no estirar y perder el foco y en segundo lugar, con el objetivo de proporcionar una visión objetiva y concentrada sobre la producción artística serbia y contemplarla como una entidad por sí misma.

Esta investigación también se realizó con el objetivo de establecer una presentación comprensible de los autores serbios y sus obras de arte como un corpus estable y justificado (pero no como una estructura cerrada y rígida). La contribución de las entrevistas que se realizaron con los autores serbios proporcionará la visión directa de las actitudes, visiones y motivaciones de los artistas sobre diversos temas y se puede añadir que esas entrevistas son materiales que también podrían servir como base para investigaciones futuras. De hecho, esta tesis contribuirá a lo que ya se conoce con una visión más detallada y directa de la teoría y las prácticas específicamente orientadas del arte en Serbia. Es esencial destacar que no solo la investigación académica se beneficiará de esta investigación, sino también profesionales y

diversos lectores interesados en el tema en el sentido de que se les ofrecerá nueva información, conocimiento específico, recursos y bibliografía sobre el tema de esta investigación.

1. FEMINISMS

*Feminism advocates social, political, economic, and intellectual equality for women and men and defines a political perspective; it is distinct from sex or gender.*⁵

Feminism, or better feminisms, is a concept that does not refer to a consensus, it is a multitude of often mutually different theoretical directions and accesses to the basic problem – subordinate position of women in given social conditions. Although these approaches differ, they are not mutually exclusive, nor does one supersede other; they represent basic strategies for guiding research, legislation, and policies. Many people in Europe, in the United States, and elsewhere practice feminism without self-identifying themselves as “feminists.” For it can be stated that actually vast majority of Europeans and Americans are feminists, meaning that they are in favour of equality and professional opportunities for women that is to say at least in theory. Liberal feminism, based on equality approach, has been the leading form of feminism in the United States and much of Western Europe with aim to guarantee women major legislation in equal rights, education, pay, and opportunity. On the other side, liberal feminism has been criticized for not recognizing or defining sex and gender differences.

Seen as social movement, theory and personal commitment based on the fact that women have unfavourable position in society at the end of the 20th century, feminism became a controversial project. For that reason, this chapter is dedicated to diverse feminist theories at the global level first and, in the continuation, within its peculiarities of the local Serbian geopolitical area so that various concepts of femininity and feminist ideas present in artworks of Serbian artists can be analyzed in more depth and detail in the following chapters. This introductory chapter also aims to follow and represent feminism movement in Serbia since its beginning in order to show how it developed and modified over time, to emphasize its own ways in defining and forming women’s consciousness and awareness on their identity, position and experience that have reflected in creative endeavours of Serbian authors. There are some

⁵ See <http://genderedinnovations.stanford.edu/terms/feminism.html> (accessed on July 16, 2014)

universal patterns referring to feminism to be noted as well as specific characteristics due to its historical and political uniqueness taking into account that Serbia is the state with a short history of independence due to its past stemming from the union of former Yugoslav states. For the most part, this chapter intends to introduce basic phenomena of feminism, its reflections and specificities in the Serbian ground that will be elaborated further through the concepts of femininity and feminism in the art practices.

1.1. Suffrage

The first-wave feminism refers to the period of feminist activity during the 19th and early 20th century throughout the world, particularly in the United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands and the United States. It focused on legal disabilities, primarily on gaining women's suffrage (the right to vote on the same terms as men). As a matter of fact, with the first-wave of the feminist movement women fought for political and economic freedom, in other words – the right to education, the right to political vote, and the right to work. It can be also pointed out that the question of political right to vote became the issue that represented a unifying factor among various feminists regardless of their religion or nation.

Suffragist groups and other women's organizations launched strong campaigns to get women political right to vote. After gaining political rights (the right to education and the right to vote), there was a struggle for the attainment of economic freedom (right to work). During the First World War and the Second World War, a large number of women were employed in weapon factories to replace men who had been drafted; women took on tasks that were previously "reserved" for men. For the moment, differences between men and women were put aside at least in the domain of work. But as soon as men returned from war, their female companions were left without jobs and economic support because there was the need to involve demobilized soldiers into the labour market again. Western governments advocated the concept of society in which there was no room for the development of the potential of women because their primary task was to meet the needs of the reproduction of society.

During the war, society engaged women for its purposes, it used them in production and army, and when there was no longer need for them, they were sent home. Once utilised for the purpose of war machine, woman was expelled from the labour market and again subjected and limited to housework, procreation and childcare. But, nevertheless, women did not give up the already achieved economic freedoms gained during the war. More importantly, in the peacetime period, they continued to require the right to equal pay, as well as the opportunity to perform same jobs as men.

1.2. Liberalist and Marxist Views

Liberal feminist theory was linked to the political theory of liberalism and the requirement of the first-wave of the feminist movement to grant women political freedoms – the right to education and the right to vote. Liberal political theory was developed in Britain and France in the 18th and 19th century as the tyranny of kings, church and nobility, based on hereditary privilege, revolted the mid-18th century enlightened thinkers who highlighted the view that humans, as sentient beings, are equal and, therefore, have equal rights. Arguments that all members of society are free and equal led the early feminists to argue that woman herself a human being is equal to man and, therefore, has the same and equal rights. Therefore, liberal feminists insisted on freedom and equality of women as equal members of society because liberal feminist theory emphasized equality of women with men as its foreground principle.

In 1791, *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (French: *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*), written by French activist, feminist, and playwright Olympe de Gouges intended to expose the failures of the French Revolution in the recognition of sex equality though without any influence on the direction of the Revolution. Accused and convicted of treason, de Gouges was executed together with the Girondists in the Reign of Terror (she was the only one executed for her political writings). Though it cannot be viewed as a manifesto of the women's movement of the late 18th century, it is important because it pointed out a set of feminist issues that reflected the goals of many French Revolution activists. A year later, in 1792 *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by Mary Wollstonecraft was the work in the field of liberal feminism that opened many doors which had been closed for centuries. It formed the basis of feminism because it demanded to end the double standard for male and female behaviour and required for women the right to education, self-employment, public and political life. She argued that women are not naturally inferior to men but only appear to be so because they lack education. She suggested that both men and women should be treated as rational beings and imagined a social order founded on reason. Wollstonecraft here sought to refute the claims of Jean-Jacques Rousseau who in his book *Émile, or On Education* (1762) supported the education of boys and the development of their intellect to its full potential. For Rousseau, the girls should be disciplined to obey the

orders of men and should be educated to be men's accessories in order to adorn their lives and raise their children. Contrary to the opinion of Rousseau, Mary Wollstonecraft believed that one cannot invoke the "feminine nature" with a view to the role of women reduced to the housework and pampering their husbands thus concluding that if women had the same education and opportunities as men, they would be equal to men in every respect.⁶

Mary Wollstonecraft's claim for the right of women to education conceptually joined the requirements of the same nature of Harriet Taylor Mill and her husband John Stuart Mill. Their work *The Enfranchisement of Women*, published in 1851, when commenting the positioning of women in society, says that "one half of the human race should pass through life in a state of forced subordination to the other half"⁷. Therefore, they fought for the right of women's political voice and for the right of women to work outside home, and thus become economically independent. Given that men and women have the same ability to reason, these theorists argued that women should not be excluded from presenting their skills in a professional work and political life. Women have the same rights as men to educate, to express their political interests through voting rights, to access to public affairs and to own property.⁸

Marxist feminist theory was derived from political theory of Marxism and the requirement of the first-wave of feminist movement to give women economic freedom – the right to work. Sources of Marxist political theory could be found in the new social relations that accompanied the Industrial Revolution and in the rise of capitalism in the 19th and early 20th century. Karl Marx pointed out that capitalism ruling class (the bourgeoisie) owned the means of production and was purchasing the work of the working class (the proletariat). The influence of the ruling class was mostly visible in the formation of the perception of social reality as being "natural" due to determining the development and circulation of knowledge and values. The members of the proletariat who accepted such social order as natural were literally living in a state of false consciousness that prevented the perception of their own interests. Even though they were constantly taking part in an alienated work process, the members of the working class were not aware of the fact that they were actually the factors of social change. Marxist theorists did not believe that it was possible to use this "nature" or

⁶ Erić, Olivera, *Theory of Feminist Art at the End of XX Century*, Univerzitet Umetnosti u Beogradu, Beograd, 2006, p. 9. Please, note that I translated all materials originally written in languages other than English.

⁷ See <http://www.laits.utexas.edu/poltheory/jsmill/diss-disc/eow.html> (accessed on July 18, 2014)

⁸ Ibid.

biology to explain social inequality and justify oppression of one group perpetrated by another. Consequently, the nuclear family of the capitalist society was seen, by Friedrich Engels, as a huge mirroring of macroscopic social structures where husband takes the position of the bourgeois while wife is put in proletarian position. In *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884), Engels developed an analysis of women's oppression under capitalism suggesting that women should refuse to be held within the boundaries of private domestic work. In the same fashion, he claimed that the housework, as a hidden and thus denied form of work, was the way to sustain the capitalist reproduction itself and support patriarchal system as a way of social relating.

Economic factors and relationship between class oppression and women's oppression were the central problem for Marxist feminists. They pointed out that the reason for the oppression of women under capitalism was in gender division of labour that directly kept men's interests which indirectly were the same as interests of capitalism. Women were limited to the private sphere of home, of the unpaid work, where they were responsible to care for the family while men were devoted to the public sphere of paid work. In that way, capitalist society did not pay reproduction of labour force that it depended on. For Marxist feminists women's liberation from exploitation was in the inclusion of women into production which would ensure their economic independence. The entry of women into public life of production would make domestic work and childcare public while housework would become more visible and thus turned into collective responsibility. Therefore, one of the demands of the first-wave feminism movement was for women to gain economic freedom and independence – the right to work in the public sphere in order to improve their previously unfavourable economic situation which was one of the causes of the general oppression of women in capitalist society.

It is to be concluded that while liberal feminist movement was concentrated on obtaining women's rights to vote and to educate, Marxist feminism fought for economic independence of women. Furthermore, for Marxist feminists the essential issue was subordinated position of women in capitalist society seen as a combination of male domination and class exploitation. That is why Marxist feminists emphasized the importance and relevance of feminist struggle within the general movement for the liberation of the oppressed. Later that was the exact reason why Marxist feminism was criticized as being more Marxist than feminist in its character.

1.3. Cultural Feminism

Radical feminist theory is the term coined to refer to the feminist trend in the United States – it is related to existentialist, psychoanalytic, poststructuralist, postmodern and postcolonial theory and requests of the second-wave feminist movement to give women sexual freedom or the right to freely dispose of her body. Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophical concept of existentialism, in *Being and Nothingness* (1943), introduced the concepts of the “being-for-itself” and “being-for-others”, which led to the second problem which is to consider the concept of the “other” (otherness). Thus, Sartre also presented the category of “gaze of the other” or the phenomenon of “the look”; it is about the gaze of the other that abolishes our choices so that we are as others see us. As a result, it is a theory about objectification of the other and about being objectified, the concept that very much influenced the vision of woman and her objectification executed by man. It is also essentially important to mention that such a theory has a lot to do with the positioning of male subject, female objectification, and with active and passive roles assigned to sexes along the gender stereotypes scale.

Continuing consideration of Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir came to the conclusion that patriarchal culture in which men dominate presents the world as primarily masculine and, consequently therefore, woman is determined in relation to man. The second-wave feminism started in the 20th century in the beginning of the 1960s at times when human rights politics, anti-war movement, and student movement for the democratization of society began. It can be stated that symbolic announcement and assumption of the second-wave feminist movement but also a starting point for the radical feminist theory arrived with Simone de Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex* (1949). In this book, she pointed out that patriarchal culture portrayed woman as negativity, as insubstantial deviation and aberration. When compared to man, woman is treated as “other”, as inferior to man who logically represents “the first sex” and as such is the matrix for defining woman by comparison. The idea of women's otherness was prevalent because it is exactly them who have accepted otherness and inferiority as their own traits meaning that they actually internalized the image imposed to them. Obviously, Simone de Beauvoir emphasized the theory that it is not nature that limits the role of women but rather a bunch of cultural prejudices, customs and outdated laws. Claiming that woman's otherness is a metaphysical idea and a myth upon which men built the society, Beauvoir

claimed that woman's becoming is a singularly lived experience. Neither physiology of having a womb can define woman nor can mythological constructions of femininity determine what woman is. The influence of *The Second Sex* on feminist gender theory can hardly be overestimated. Many scholars today acknowledge that Beauvoir's study of the phenomenological and existential meaning of sexual difference is her main philosophical contribution: in so far as one agrees that "perceptual experience and the body is fundamental for human existence, a serious consideration of subjective becoming must take into account the possible constitutive meaning of sexuality and sexual difference for this becoming"⁹. It can be said that cultural feminism emphasizes the positive aspects of what is considered to be female character or feminine personality; actually it could be defined as a feminist theory of difference that advocates the positive aspect of women. Cultural feminism developed from radical feminism even though they have some opposing views. However, it is a theory of a "female essence" or "female nature" that aims to reassess what cultural feminists consider undervalued female characteristics; it also acclaims the difference of women from men. Since cultural feminism rests on an essentialist view of the differences between women and men, it directed feminists to concentrate upon individual "life-style" rather than upon practicing public politics.

Following the philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir, second-wave feminism activists initiated their battle for sexual freedoms by setting requirements for the right to abortion and the legalization of birth control through the right to use contraceptives. Thereafter, the struggle for the legal empowerment of women victims of domestic violence and sexual assault began. With the help of advocates, feminists made a draft law according to which rape is considered a serious crime against women. In addition to the request to separate sexuality from birth through the right to use contraceptives and abortion rights, feminists also demanded that women have the right to pleasure. However, for that purpose, it was necessary to demystify the image created by men about women's sexuality and show that there was a substitute for relationship with man.

In demonstrations in which just and only women participated, the goal of radical feminists was the construction of world of women and of female culture for the purpose of replacing the then existing world of men and of male culture. In order to achieve that, radical

⁹ Björk, Urlika, *Paradoxes of femininity in the philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir*, Continental Philosophy Review 43, 2010, 39-60, p. 40

feminist theory, in addition to the concept of the other (otherness) developed the concept of diversity. "For radical feminists, women have a different way of expression, a different physiology and different experiences of love, work, and family than men."¹⁰ The novelty this time was that common identity of women as a group was different from common identity of men as a group. It can be said that "the earlier feminist theory of women's equality with men is now replaced by a new feminist theory of the radical diversity between sexes. That is, feminist demand for equality is removed and replaced by request for difference"¹¹.

While the difference of the 1960s marked the distinct identity of women (understood as a single group) with respect to the identity of men (also understood as a single group), the difference at the end of the 20th century indicated the existence of different identities within the group of women. Thus, early attempts at representation of women as a caste, class, or homogenous group, were dismissed by representation of women who differed among themselves by class, nation, race, sexual orientation, age, abilities, etc. At the same time, the academic feminist theory, influenced by psychoanalytic, poststructuralist, postmodern and postcolonial theory, began to declare that the category "woman" is neither neutral nor essential, but socially constructed. In the beginning of the 1990s, diversity, rather than equality, was pointed out by many theorists, like for example Rosi Braidotti and Judith Butler, claiming that the second-wave feminism was over and that post-feminism era of the third-wave feminism began.

¹⁰ Mršević, Zorica (ed), *Dictionary of Basic Feminist Terms*, Žarko Albulj, Beograd, 1999, p. 129

¹¹ Erić, Olivera, op.cit., p. 13

1.4. Feminism and Postmodernism

The term post-feminism appeared already in 1919 but became widely applied during the conservative 1980s. Susan Faludi considers that it is the term continuously propagated by media and that it refers to consumerism culture and celebration of personal narcissism. Media is launching the idea that women can be post-feminists because they are already “liberated”, meaning that they can turn themselves into sex objects without losing their real power. Moreover, advertisement and promotion of their bodies can actually bring women power even though it is accordant with the sexism of patriarchal society where female power and influence are exclusively reduced and bound to their sexuality.¹² Another author with similar arguments is Adrienne Levy who believes that the second-wave feminism movement “failed” mostly because the contradiction between sexual revolution and female movement of the 1960s was never actually resolved. According to Levy, in her book *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch culture* (2005) that gap is responsible for the appearance of the vulgar culture at the end of the 20th and at the beginning of 21st century, also criticized by Faludi. It can be added that both Faludi and Levy reproach raunch culture in popular media for a negative effect on women’s self-image, this especially referring to young girls.

In the 1990s, the period of the third-wave feminism also characterized the fact that the sexual objectification of the female body became again the subject of debates – this time with the difference that many proponents of the so-called sex-positive feminism (e.g. Carole Vance and Gayle Rubin) triggered their critique not against patriarchal sexual objectification of woman but against the puritan character of the second-wave feminism. The new generation that includes Rebecca Walker expressed disagreement with many of the conclusions and strategies of the second-wave movement, for example, when it comes to issues such as professional success, the importance of motherhood, body, sexuality, and pornography. Walker, for example, argues that the dominant second-wave feminism swapped the one-dimensional image of woman as mother and homemaker for yet just another one-dimensional picture of successful woman.¹³ To put it differently, it stripped away housewife image to pull on construction of oversexed dramatic body. The weapon of choice was to empower woman

¹² *Introduction to Gender Theories*, ed. Ivana Milojević, Slobodanka Markov, Univerzitet u Novom Sadu, Novi Sad, 2011, p. 34

¹³ *Ibid.*

with the superficial one-dimensional vision in order to be able to compete with man and become publicly visible and successful.

At the end of the 20th century, feminism became a two-sided project concentrated around the dilemma: Should feminism be closer to essence or (de)construction, to the universal or to the relative? Should it represent similarity or difference, sameness or otherness? Does it strive to understand or to change the world? Should it be political practice or should it be philosophy? At the time being, while some are pointing to feminism as a part of modernism, others are insisting that feminism in the late 20th century belongs to the field of postmodernism. As such, it is close to (de)construction and the relative, representing the diversity and otherness. It doubts the truth and the law, it tends to understand the world, and it is more philosophical than political. During this time, there are some “who attempt to find a common point of view that will combine the strengths and eliminate the weaknesses of these two opposite sides and points of view”¹⁴.

Theorists Jane Flax, Barbara Creed and Chantal Mouffe advocated an alliance between feminism and postmodernism. They pointed out places of convergence such as “absolute scepticism about the universal claims about the existence, power of reason, progress, science, language and subject”, which shows that “large or dominant narratives of the Enlightenment era lost their legitimate power”.¹⁵ Both feminism and postmodernism have shown that the application of the universality, in fact, refers only to men of certain culture, class, and race. Western representation – whether in art or theory – is not the product of truth but of power, which thus allowed only the perception given by the male subject. Therefore, it is to be said that both feminism and postmodernism criticize binary power relations, opening up space for many differences. What once originally was difference between separate entities (of men and women) is now dismissed to be replaced by difference between/within the very entity of women and later on by difference within each woman individually.

In the late 20th century, the term “difference” included both heterogeneous groups of women, who differ by class, race, nationality, age, sexuality and “woman” as subject herself. Chantal Mouffe pointed out that position of each subject is constructed within unstable discursive structure and, therefore, is subject to a variety of articulatory practices that constantly undermine and transform it.¹⁶ Therefore, there is neither a position of the subject

¹⁴ Erić, Olivera, op.cit., p. 15

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 16

whose linkages with other subjects are ever (finally) established nor a social identity that is totally and permanently acquired. Thus, the identity category of “woman” does not correspond to any unifying essence and, consequently can no longer expect to be discovered and defined. For that reason, in many social relations at the end of the 20th century, gender/sexual difference became insignificant and feminist theories were reduced to postmodern theoretical assumptions of discovering and understanding how the subject (“woman”) is constructed within different discourses.

This alliance of feminism and postmodernism, according to which feminism was not seen as particular form of political practice to achieve the interests of women but rather as pursuit of feminist goals and objectives within the context of broader articulation of postmodern requests, was questioned by theoreticians Sabina Lovibond and Nancy Hartsock. They emphasized the fact that the essential identity deconstruction made feminist political action impossible. In other words, these theorists believed that if women did not see their identity as coherent, there was no possibility to establish political movement in which women could come together to formulate specific feminist demands. Therefore, according to them, women have to be united by establishing forms of political movements and activities. For example, Donna Haraway pointed out the fact that it is important to build affinity among women rather than identity, and that our desire to define oppositions should be replaced by creation of affinities¹⁷. On the other side, for Rosie Braidotti, who defined herself as “subject in transit”¹⁸, feminists of the 1990s needed to replace their naïve belief in global sisterhood with a new kind of politics based on temporary and mobile coalitions, and hence the affinity. It means that the political coalition based on affinity would give the right and competence to its subjects to define their views.

According to Ivana Milojević, it is also important to reiterate that although none of the three waves of feminism is monolithic, it is possible to notice some patterns, as well as the dominant theoretical orientation, thematic, ideological and political priorities within each wave. Three waves of feminist movement do not appear during the same historical periods and are not universal to all societies; therefore, the analogy is most relevant and refers to western societies, especially the United States and Britain. The analogy of waves is nevertheless significant at the global level because they do not relate only to historical period

¹⁷ Erić, Olivera, op.cit., p. 19

¹⁸ *The Routledge companion to Feminism and Post-feminism*, ed. Sarah Gamble, Routledge, London, 2006, p. 162

but also to a certain approach to the theoretical consideration of gender relations.¹⁹ In the continuation, Milojević also argues that even though in many non-Western societies the division into three waves remains irrelevant, when it comes to historical periodization, most theorists of non-Western societies use the terms first and second wave in order to distinguish between identity as essence (the first wave) and identification as a political strategy (the second wave). Terms such as post-feminism or pro-sex feminism are almost completely irrelevant in the context of non-Western societies, while the term third-wave feminism does not apply to theoreticians of gender relations in that sense.

¹⁹ *Introduction to Gender Theories*, op. cit., p. 35

1.5. Feminism in Yugoslavia(s) and Serbia before the 1990s

Although one could assume that the former Yugoslav countries, with their internal wars and political discontinuity, and because of their cultural and intellectual history were in a marginalized position to developments in Europe, the facts are exactly the opposite at least when it comes to the feminist scene. Nevertheless, it does not mean that countries and societies of the former Yugoslavia followed at the same time and with the same quality and intensity women's movement which was taking place in more developed Europe and the world; it was not possible due to the fact of "non-comparability of important social, economic, and cultural parameters of the position of the female population and the profound differences in its experiences"²⁰.

On the other hand, the truth is that Yugoslav societies always had interest and showed high ability and strong motivation for developments such as feminist movements and, consequently therefore, imported those novelties into their own ground contributing to them with the original peculiarities of their own regions. When it comes to feminism and the feminist movement, the seed was planted in the 19th century when the first claims and actions for gender equality emerged. In the countries that would become a unified Yugoslavia in 1918, the movement for women's emancipation began at the end of the 19th and early 20th century in regions with greater numbers of working women. These women joined trade unions and workers' parties hoping to become more economically independent. However, the past proved that because of historical discontinuity, women's activities and experiences remained forgotten or repressed in each subsequent awakening of the interest in feminism and/or in resurgence of the problems of women in society. At the same time, it seems that in these spaces, feminism, nationalism, and war were interconnected not only in the 1990s but throughout the history of the unified Yugoslavia as well.

Sociologist and feminist Andjelka Milić assumes the role of the reminder in order to make visible exactly such

...forgotten stories and covert histories, characters, intellectual ventures, activities, public appearances, publications, intentions and motives of the beginners, all with aim

²⁰ *Introduction to Gender Theories*, op.cit., p. 51

to close the gate behind the discontinuity, oblivion, marginalization, belittling and misogyny with which official public, and cultural, political and intellectual elite, in all times and circumstances related to these efforts and their holders, thrusting them into an archive folder of failure, eccentricity and maladjustment, thereby explaining that basic and general silence, oversight, oblivion, and absence of even a single symbolic mentioning of those individuals, their deeds and social actions that were initiated.²¹

After all, when speaking about this historical silence and circumstances that led to the fact that these people and their activities were ignored and pushed into oblivion and non-existence, it should be noted that to such a condition partly contributed women themselves, and this also refers on occasion to the participants in the first feminist initiatives. Not that it justifies their act but the truth is that women in general, for a variety of personal reasons gave up feminist movement. Some of them, in the later phases of life, completely abandoned these first feminist incentives and action while others changed either as a result of ideological and political opportunities or because they gained new life experiences, and for that reason entirely abandoned feminist intentions. Whichever the reason might be, the responsibility for the oblivion and historical silence on feminist activities at least partially rests upon women themselves.

For the purpose of beginning this research in feminism in Serbia itself, it is necessary firstly to turn back to the past and reach into the historical facet of the period of formation of the “first” Yugoslav state after the First World War. The brief but dramatic interwar period of historical, political and social changes, which shook not only European but also Yugoslav scene, included women’s struggle for equality and emancipation. The first feminist wave in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s in the 20th century already experienced its own immersion in corresponding structures and ideological views. When commenting the feminist scene of Europe, there was a clearly visible division between women. On one side were those who opted for the Soviet revolution, Marxism and communism – they were trying to implement their feminist goals and projects into the framework of ideological and political platforms. On the other side still existed strong, but unconsolidated and fragmented civil, liberal feminist movement, especially present and renewed in the circles of university educated women, women with artistic background and positive orientation.

²¹ *Introduction to Gender Theories*, op.cit., p. 52

1.5.1. Models of Emancipation

Many women from this region, who were educated abroad in Europe (mainly Switzerland) before the First World War and returned to their native land, brought with them the first feminist incentives and thoughts to Yugoslav territories. Of course some of them, under the influence of new developments in the Balkan turbulent area, would set aside their new convictions, but others would persist in their efforts to at least bring a breath of freshness that European feminist thought of the times introduced.

In the event that the newly formed country was facing the consequences of war exhaustion and effects of economic underdevelopment, the situation for the population was worsening especially keeping in mind the category of women who were economically dependent, socially unprotected, without political or civil rights, mostly uneducated and, as a matter of fact, completely excluded from social life.²²

Despite this, the number of women, especially factory workers, who worked instead of men who died in the war, steadily increased, and there was also a rise in the number of qualified and even highly educated women who gaining qualifications began to abandon traditional female activities. In line with these changes, there was an evident need for a new definition of the position and role of women in society, in her duties, obligations and rights. It can be added that those changes in Yugoslav society were accompanied by upsurge of interest in women's issues and global awareness about the topic. On one hand, there were those public figures, scientists and politicians who felt it necessary to make profound social reforms that would include the new treatment of women and the exercise of their civil rights, while on the other, another group believed that it was important to keep women within their traditional role and thus keep them out of the political and public life. Although the views were completely polarized, lectures and public classes, newspapers, magazines, and publications were expressing the social interest in women's destiny. Various women's associations were formed, some conservative and other feminist, all with aim to improve the position of women. "In the period between the First World War and the Second World War, there were numerous

²² Malešević, Miroslava, *The Female: Ethnographic Aspects of Woman Position in Serbia*, Etnološka biblioteka, Beograd, 2007, p.12

women's associations founded, established and reformed".²³ Following the unification of social democrats from Serbia and Croatia, in April 1919, as part of the Socialist Workers (Communist) Party, Secretariat of Women Socialists (Communists) was established. In all Yugoslav countries at the time, previously established women's associations renewed their efforts. Serbian National Women's Alliance (founded in 1906) initiated its first congress in Belgrade, when National Women's Alliance of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (refers to women) was founded. This Alliance brought together all national, educational and humanistic group members, about 200 of them, in a broad platform that included work on development of human, ethical, cultural, feminist, social, and national issues. There were also other associations that disappeared or transformed like for example Yugoslav Women's Association, Belgrade University Students Association, Small Female Entente, Association of Academically Educated Women, League of Women for Peace and Freedom, Youth Section of the Women's Movement.

In 1919, in Belgrade, Association for Edification of Women and Protection of their Rights was founded as one of the first women's associations with civil and feminist orientation also well known for its journal with the title *Women's Movement*. It was the first (and one and only) feminist monthly journal. From 1927 to 1932 it was published even twice a month, and it was continuously edited till 1938. Association for Edification of Women and Protection of their Rights claimed at the beginning of its activity that it would accept all women regardless of their class, political convictions, religion or nation, with purpose to fight for a more dignified position of women in society. Such a standpoint was due to the settled conviction that there was a universal disfranchisement of women which therefore calls for women to identify with their group, i.e. with all other women, and unite into their own female organization in order to obtain their rights and realize their interests.

Association for Edification of Women and Protection of their Rights expanded its tasks and changed its name into Women's Movement. In 1923, together with women's unions from Ljubljana and Zagreb, it organized the Assembly of feminist societies in Ljubljana when Alliance of Women's Association was established on a state level with aim to fight for the political rights of women, to implement reforms in previous laws, and to adopt new ones in order to achieve full equality between men and women. Therefore, the first demand of Alliance was the right to vote; then recognition of mothers and housewives as a productive labour force; it

²³ See <http://www.womenngo.org.rs/zenski-pokret/istorija-zenskog-pokreta/219-nekoliko-osnovnih-podataka-o-zenskom-pokretu-u-jugoslaviji-izmedu-dva-rata> (accessed on July 24, 2014)

also requested economic independence of married woman, equal recognition of custody of children for both parents; support of mother and child by the law. Alliance also wanted to amend inheritance law in favor of women, within general insurance to involve better insurance of both mothers and female labour force; it also wanted to introduce free promotion and advancement of women in their posts and their free access to political life, and to include women as labour inspectors. In addition, it actively collaborated with International Alliance of Women (IAW)²⁴.

One of the activities of feminist movement was also initiating a political party named Women's Party (1927). There are very few facts about the work of this organization apart that it is known as the origins for the party of the same name which was founded in Belgrade in 1991 and which shared the same destiny – a quick shutdown. This party as well as the previous one, Yugoslav Association of Academically Educated Women, aimed to obtain the right to vote for women. With the advent of monarchic dictatorship and then with the beginning of the Second World War that question was put aside (at least till 1945 when women officially voted for the first time in Yugoslavia).

“Women's issues are not just a question of economic and legal character but also a question of customs and ethics”²⁵ stated “Women's Movement” journal (1920). Evidently it was the period when models of emancipation imported from abroad were not enough for this region to succeed in its feminist intentions. Clearly, education, jobs, forming unions and political parties, publishing feminist journals in fighting for equality did not bring the expected improvements and changes to the women in Yugoslavia. What they wanted and what was evidently necessary was to change the official climate and atmosphere towards their needs, existence and position. Women wanted to be treated differently and equally to men, they tried to be free and responsible; what they actually needed was development of consciousness and knowledge about their own liberation from tradition and prejudices.

²⁴ See <http://www.womenngo.org.rs/zenski-pokret/istorija-zenskog-pokreta/219-nekoliko-osnovnih-podataka-o-zenskom-pokretu-u-jugoslaviji-izmedu-dva-rata> (accessed on July 24, 2014)

²⁵ Malešević, Miroslava, op.cit., p.15

1.5.2. Rural Woman versus Modern Woman

Generally speaking, during the interwar period (1918-1941) in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia), women stood somewhere between private reservation and conquest of public life. Fighting for emancipation which started in Serbia in the 1970s in the 19th century, when the first women's associations were established, flowed with certain ups and downs during the entire interwar period. On one side, feminist aspirations were met by fierce attacks from conservatives while, on the other, liberal intellectuals were in their favour. In Belgrade, under the influences from abroad brought mainly by educated women, in the ambience of powerful internal changes a new, modern and often self-confident woman was being constructed trying to redefine her role within marriage, family and society. "Sexuality, free love, birth control, prostitution were no longer taboos but often issues discussed in the press and stands, debated in intellectual circles and in the streets"²⁶.

Away from Belgrade, inside Serbia which at the time was a primarily agricultural country, situation was completely different. Reactions of traditionalists were entirely against emancipation, they believed that woman was still solely destined for roles of housewife and mother which, according to them, were women's only reality. The fact that was visible significantly in the areas on the outskirts of cities, in villages and rural regions. In the village population, lifestyle, customs and social awareness were entirely disconnected from the city consciousness especially when talking about the existence of private life and public scene.

Over time, in cities participation of women in all forms and manifestations of public life became increasingly important receiving more and more attention. Women who had hitherto usually belonged to the private sphere commenced entering into the public life previously reserved exclusively for men. In other words, women began to perform most of the jobs which until then had been the exclusive privilege of men (for instance, teachers, nurses, doctors, etc.), and for that reason started to be involved in social life. During the 1920s and 1930s in Belgrade, in a relatively short period of time a new type of woman was created – "she could wear short hair, put on makeup, wear a short skirt and high heels, play sports and smoke, and

²⁶ *Private life of Serbs in the XX Century*, ed. Milan Ristović, Clio, Beograd, 2007, p. 132

of course she could discuss feminism"²⁷. This image of modern Belgrade woman did not differ from what Western fashion magazines of the time offered.

At the same time, as in a parallel reality, there was another Serbian woman who represented the majority of female population of the period. She lived in small communities of villages, little towns and rural areas in the ways that still reflected previous times. Rural women were entirely subordinated to the family, sentenced to life at home never questioning the role of housewife, mother and labour force. Therefore, it is equally important to emphasize that they were completely disenfranchised and invisible when compared to modern urban trends of the time. What is necessary to point out is that the so-called liberation of urban woman actually happened only at the formal level meaning that the essence of women's position was not semantically changed in a significant way. At that point, both people's attitudes and institutions should have followed the way of resistance and emancipation of women.

A society such as Serbian, largely considered patriarchal, could not accept the fact that women were abandoning traditional roles while getting position and roles in society destined for men. Consequently, their fighting for the right to vote, the right to education, sexual freedom, changes in fashion, all encountered resistance. It is for these reasons that in their new social engagement women encountered relentless criticism, and sometimes cynicism and mockery of traditionalists who would, just like in the times of Ottomans, prefer to put woman on a short leash attached to the doorstep. So, they were convinced and openly claimed that

Women should not be taken seriously; they are vain, pitiable creatures, fickle and capricious, dishonest and histrionic, endlessly curious and superficial; at best, only a pseudo scholarly and pseudo emancipated, unable to approach any task in a thorough and reasonable way; they could get heartily interested only in makeup and fashion or, at best, in recipes.²⁸

The most obvious and most direct in confronting the slightest sign of female emancipation was the Serbian Orthodox Church, which in particular was trying to protect the old patriarchal order according to which woman is subordinate to man so that, in the opinion of most Orthodox theologians, woman's place was in the family and home. It can be said that the true example of the position of women in Serbia during the interwar period is to be sought not in the urban but in the rural. There, all diversity, backwardness and anthropological

²⁷ *Private life of Serbs in the XX Century*, op.cit., p. 147

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 148

peculiarity were put on the show in the communal life or, depending on the facets, lurking behind closed doors. By confronting rural woman with urban woman, it becomes clearly obvious to what extent ideas of emancipation were absolutely incomprehensible and completely abstract to the majority of the population at that period.

In the first place, for rural woman there is no category of private sphere versus public life for she exists solely within the terms of family, as a member belonging to either her parents' or her husband's family and, logically thus qualified, she will appear in communal life and activities. Therefore, getting married for her represents the act of initiation. For that reason, related to wedding there are many various customs bearing the whole range of meanings. Many of those customs, that actually border on or are ritual and magic, are introducing the bride into a whole new set of roles that she, as a daughter and sister previously did not perform. Marriages were mostly "arranged" between groom's and bride's families meaning that usually, at the moment of getting married, the two are strangers. Moreover, it signifies that the institution of marriage in the community served for "familiarizing"²⁹, meaning for forming kinship relations between families otherwise without bloodlines. Generally, without their compliance, girls were "promised" to be married to what for them were unknown men; cases of rebel were extremely rare and as a rule severely punished. The bride was symbolically bought by the groom's family, and had to have bridal trousseau.

So, just as goods in the market circulate, woman exchanged her owner, a male one of course, and went from her father to her husband. Into her new family, bride arrived literally into the lap of her mother-in-law for the purpose of ritual. Here we have the case of senior woman with an important position, she is already a mother herself, she is older and experienced. For that reason it is the mother-in-law who through rites of contagious magic symbolically accepts the new member of the family – her son's wife and transmits fertility to her daughter-in-law. Through the set of rules, she guides the bride allowing her to enter into the family. The truth is that for the order of hierarchy and positioning, within the groom's family, the bride is subordinated to his mother. But the fact is that at the ontological level it is a woman who introduces another woman into her new position and roles (just like long time ago she a bride herself was conducted by her mother-in-law). That is to say, the social circle of the family is at the same time completed for the mother-in-law and reinitiated and opened for

²⁹ Hofman, Ana, *Socialist Femininity on Stage*, Evoluta, Beograd, 2012, p. 44

the newcomer³⁰. In the marriage custom, while men in the visible sphere of public exchange trade the bride, women are responsible for rites, magic, pagan and occult and thus stay in the space attributed traditionally to them. Even for the purpose of uniting man and woman, female and male roles of the participants remain clearly divided and separated; and therefore indirectly the division between them is kept intact.

Besides her trousseau, the greatest “gift” that the bride brings into the groom’s household is her virginity. Female relatives from the groom’s side, usually his mother or godmother, were obliged to check the sheets used on the wedding night with purpose to prove whether the bride is “clean”. If she is found to be “unclean”, she is to be publicly humiliated. For the girls who had any prior sexual experience it was extremely difficult to get married; “they were doomed to marry older man or widowers”³¹. When relating to customs of female body representation within family, it is characteristic for women in the rural environment to wear kerchief on her head in order to veil the hair. Many of the women believed that it was obligatory to hide their hair, feet and hands so that male family members cannot see them. Some of them would stay with the kerchief on their head even in the presence of the husband. Besides that, Serbian word used to refer to woman wearing a kerchief over her head is *zabuljena* which etymologically dates from the term *bula* proving the direct connection to the concept coming from Islam as the cultural heritage from Ottoman Turks.

All these examples of rural woman experience primordially differed from what modern urban woman in Serbia between wars lived and how she perceived herself. Žarana Papić, a feminist theoretician, claims that social conditions of woman’s emancipation are usually considered to be already attained even though her “submergence” into the family still remains her primary determinant while the structure of her behaviour and understanding of herself and her powers almost completely dwells within the limits of patriarchal position. Negligence of these subjective, interior aspects of woman’s position, which are surely equally important as the objective aspects, leads to the incomplete and distorted view of the totality of the problem thereby limiting that understanding of emancipation. It is necessary to add that social conditions of emancipation refer only to women’s position within the family which proves that it is still her primary role. Papić also points out the fact that theoretical considerations of the roots of women submission together with founding principles of emancipation usually ignore

³⁰ Ritualistic aspects of wedding and fertility are further elaborated in Chapter 3

³¹ Hofman, Ana, op. cit., p. 46

one very significant area – that of woman’s interior experience, of how and in which terms she experiences herself³². The same author introduces the concept of distinction between man and woman within family with the theory of Nicole-Claude Mathieu, saying that sociology of the family is the only spot in sociology where the category of gender is analyzed and researched. Sociology, just like society itself, reserved and bounded all problems in gender relations exclusively to family problems. Therefore, in sociology the place for women was fixed solely to sociology of the family, and thus obviously in the structure of sociology itself the dominant ideology of gender roles was applied again. Papić also quotes Ann Oakley, saying that even though women did not have their place in many aspects of sociology, at least they firmly hold their “heaven” in the family where they are on “their own terms”, where they *are* family³³.

³² Papić, Žarana, *Texts 1977-2002*, Artprint, Novi Sad, 2012, p. 52

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 132

1.5.3. Liberated Socialist Image of Femininity

As it was already pointed out, woman's body in rural society was considered and treated as ritual body that had to be under constant supervision either of supernatural powers or patriarchal norms. In the event that it was marked as body overflowed with sexuality, its social function and task were to provide the expected level of fertility. This rule of male disembodiment over female corporeality was achieved by using various taboos and prohibitions that were part of the cultural practices in rural areas³⁴. On the other hand, body in socialism was designed differently, as a classless, worker's body which was able to remove the differences between social classes. Representation of the body in public discourse was based on unification and deleting individual differences all with aim to equalize urban and rural areas. Sameness was the prevailing dress code in educational institutions, workplaces, factories, and other state institutions in order to equalize urban worker's body with the body of labour force from the countryside fields.

The massive, somewhat autonomous, women's organization created during the Second World War and the National Liberation Struggle was the Women's Antifascist Front (AFŽ). It had a huge role in the war, and in the period immediately after the war also for attracting masses of women to be politically active, but it was abolished in the 1950s. This was done despite the fact that the Yugoslav army at the end of the war counted over 100,000 women in the front lines while it is estimated that about 1,000,000 women took an active part in the Partisan resistance movement.³⁵ Communists in Yugoslavia became puritans during the 1930s; this puritan moral was applied hypocritically meaning that it did not refer to everyone, for example to some of them who were "more equal than others" like higher rank party officials. There existed the concept of illegal marriage made formally in order to protect from the police. Little is said about Partisans' sex life except some data about strict punishments of "immorality" that apparently referred to illegitimate sexual relationships (outside of marriage). Chetniks' propaganda heavily attacked partisans' debauchery and immorality while their own "women's politics" was based on traditional and patriarchal values. In the symbolism of partisans' poems and songs, an important characteristic of the emancipatory promise for

³⁴ Hofman, Ana, op. cit., p. 129

³⁵ *Introduction to Gender Theories*, op.cit., p. 54

youth and women can be noted³⁶ (a message especially honoured by young girls). After the war, and their rise to power, partisans formally kept their promise about emancipation when in 1945 women for the first time got the right to vote, although at the non-democratic elections, but they also became equal to men in their civil rights and rights on property.

Liberation of woman was mostly only formal; as far as her roles are concerned, in the first years following the war partisans represented woman as a worker and a mother. The image of the new post-war woman on front pages of the magazines usually portrayed her as a working mother (perhaps rarely as a student or as an artist). In any case, if there was a picture of a beautiful woman she had to be placed in some socially useful context³⁷. Women were included in National Liberation Struggle when they proved their courage and sacrificed for the liberation of their country, and finally gained their rights but it does not automatically mean, that because in those unusual circumstances when women for a moment “stepped out of the tradition”³⁸, there was a final goal realized. The problem was that for ideology of the time, new woman had no reason to fight for her freedom anymore because she was already liberated; therefore, her only task was to vindicate her freedom through hard work and dedication. It is impossible to ignore the fact that obviously, women did not really win their freedom or realized their emancipation; it was rather “delivered” to them – it was done only for the purpose of implementing political party policy. Given these points, the changes were more formal and superficial than essential and meaningful.

The second-wave feminist movement appeared in Yugoslavia (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) as connected to the period of socialism and it took a lot of time for it to finally grow but it was in time to accompany international tendencies from abroad that were happening in the United States and Europe reaching its peak sometime in the middle of the 1970s. If the situation of women from Yugoslavia at the time would be compared with positioning of women from other communist countries, it can be stated that feminist awareness and activities here appeared much earlier. The least to say, they got its space within the Communist Party. As already stated, in the 1950s Women's Antifascist Front was abolished and in Yugoslavia of the 1960s there was no form of independent female political activity. Instead of Women's Antifascist Front, Conference for Social Activity of Women was established (1965-1974), an organization which operated on pure automatism by elaborating party tasks while being completely disconnected not only from women but also from their massive party

³⁶ *Private life of Serbs in the XX Century*, op. cit., p. 123

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 124

³⁸ Malešević, Miroslava, op.cit., p. 58

membership. In 1976, in Portorož, two Marxist centres from Croatia and Slovenia organized the conference on “The social status of women and family development in socialist self-managing society” when for the first time, at the level of highest party nomenclature, it was discussed about communist influence within the family sphere and changing position of woman in society. The novelty this time was that international feminism was taken into consideration together with its experiences and attitudes that were developing in the sixties in the West. The second important manifestation took place in Belgrade in 1978 at the international feminist meeting called “Comrade Woman. Women’s question: a new approach?” at the Students Cultural Centre (SKC). It happened to be the first autonomous second-wave feminist event in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, still believed to be a landmark of feminist history in Yugoslavia.

The most important names of the international feminist movement namely Helen Roberts, Parveen Adams, Jill Lewis, Diana Leonard-Barker, Naty Garcia, Christine Delphy, Catherine Nadaud, Catherine Millet, Françoise Pasquier, Nil Yalter, Ewa Morawska, Judit Kele, Lovas Ilona, Dacia Maraini, Carla Ravaioli, Chiara Saraceno, Anne-Marie Boetti, Manuela Fraire, Annabella Miscuglio, Ida Magli, Adele Cambria, Alice Schwarzer, Dramušić, Rada Đuričin, Dragan Klajić, Anđelka Milić, Miloš Nemanjić, Živana Olbina, Borka Pavičević, Vesna Pešić, Milica Posavec, Vera Smiljanić, Vuk Stambolović, Karel Turza, Ljuba Stojić, Dunja Blažević, Jasmina Tešanović, Biljana Tomić, Danica Mijović, Žarana Papić, Goranka Matić, Bojana Pejić, Ida Biard, Gordana Cerjan-Letica, Nadežda Cacinović-Puhovski, Slavenka Drakulić-Ilić, Ruža First-Dilić, Božidarka Frajt, Đurda Milanović, Vesna Pušić, Lidija Sklevicki, Jelena Zupa, Mira Oklobdžija, Slobodan Drakulić, Katalin Ladik, Nada Ler-Sofornić, Zoran Vidaković, Silva Menžarić, and Rada Iveković took part in this meeting that although was of a more promotional character still had far-reaching consequences in terms of initiating feminist consciousness in then young educated women. The period from the late 1970s to the late eighties, in Yugoslavia and Serbia, was a time of intensive and meaningful activities of numerous women who for the first time participated in the feminist processes. This climate of feminist activity led to expansion and promotion of feminism. In the period from the mid-1980s to early 1990s, within various forms of casual semiformal and informal cooperation, feminists in Yugoslavia intended to be tightly linked through feminist meetings in Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Belgrade where in 1990 participants from Croatia and Slovenia refused to sign a declaration on the future democracy of the common state, prepared by Serbian participants. As earlier, this time again political events and overall climate adversely affected women's

solidarity and feminist connecting.³⁹ That was the step that signified an introduction to the events that would follow – the beginning of the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

All things considered, Yugoslav socialism characterized by traditional view of gender relations, considered that woman's issue was “authentically resolved”. Not only that woman's issue was not resolved because Yugoslav socialist system was not devoid of traditional patriarchal attitudes towards women, but it also highlighted some of its bourgeois aspects (in particular, concept of normality, standardization and normalization of separate spheres that “befit” women on one, and men on the other side). “What was needed in accordance with the strong feminist spirit was transformation of culture in human relations in general.”⁴⁰ In the spirit of late 1970s and early 1980s, liberated socialist image of Yugoslav woman proclaimed femininity in terms of a new modern woman represented as beautified, constructed sex object. Commercials, consumerism, advertising style imported from abroad, namely from the Western societies, created the image to equate to her newly founded freedom. Allegedly liberated, woman found her new style and shopping choices as proofs of emancipation. These new concepts of identity were a prolongation of patriarchal culture where the tradition of objectification of women was deeply rooted. Object for sex and reproduction, new Yugoslav woman supposedly dwelled in her new found freedom, the concept that could not be further from the truth.

³⁹ *Introduction to Gender Theories*, op.cit., p. 58

⁴⁰ Papić, Žarana, op.cit., p. 101

1.6. Woman and War Iconography

*All of us have the body (and soul) hacked to death, and we all (whether we know it or not) are refugees forced to flee their homes – our inner beings for which we naively believed belong to us only. Nation took them away. Why and where? It is unknown, just as we cannot even imagine the future but only suffer the present that spreads death and destruction.*⁴¹

In 1991, when the war in the former Yugoslavia began, women as mothers of sons serving in the Yugoslav army protested and in turn were labelled as traitors. Therefore, they were threatened until they transformed into supporting agents to assist official politics. Nationalist propaganda transformed women's identities to those of citizens of a particular nation-state. There were various types of responses of women to their leaders; some of them, usually urban, being more educated and independent and less traditional, rejected these calls trying to hide and save their sons. Needless to say, most of them did not succeed in that.

Žarana Papić in her text *Women in Serbia: post-communism, war and nationalistic mutations* writes about position of women during the war in this region saying that rape became the key model for the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina as systemic war strategy against women. Mass rapes committed by Serbian army and its paramilitary units were consciously used as an instrument of accelerating ethnic cleansing. But, in her other texts from that period, in the effort to clearly articulate devastating effects of discrimination and violence against women caused by nationalistic ideology, Papić often forgets differences between women; her definition of the "patriarchal paradigm" of the 1990s borders on the binary model of male and female identities where one identity suffers the discrimination perpetrated by the other⁴².

Some interpretations of Žarana Papić are debatable, especially when they concern the key issues of our history⁴³. Politics of aggressive and militant nationalism she attributed exclusively to political and military elite whose responsibility is surely indubitable but the truth is that, without larger support, nationalism in Serbia would not have such devastating

⁴¹ Papić, Žarana, op.cit., p. 14

⁴² Ibid., p. 26

⁴³ See ibid., p. 24

consequences. In that spirit, she claims that it could be argued that Serbian nationalism was not nationalism from below, but nationalism conceived and established “from above”. In the long run, blaming exclusively the officials in power could mean that in a way collective conscience and individual responsibility are simply washed away. It must be also remembered that in building nationalistic ideology, the Serbian Orthodox Church played an important role.

How was it possible that a country, with multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities which officially opted for modern, civil and democratic society, defined its identity by regressing into religion and ethnicity (or better said to Orthodoxy⁴⁴ and “Serbdom”)? Already in the 1970s, there was a boost of Serbian nationalism, because of the situation in Kosovo and Croatia, when it was not important “how religious one is but how ready he is to fight for the interests of church and Serbdom”⁴⁵. Economic and political crisis in the mid-1980s and beginning of the 1990s was characterized by identity crisis, post-socialist normative deconstruction and reaffirmation of nation and nationalistic values. Previous socialist values like brotherhood and unity, atheism, etc., were slowly disappearing while conceding space to values of nation, independent state, traditions of religion and church⁴⁶. All of that was happening in the times of collective trance in the 1990s but not without political and media instrumentalization.

As a result of men’s decisive role in terms of political and reproductive control over women in post-communism, such societies were often marked as “male democracy” or “new patriarchy”. On the other side, what happens to such a masculine identity in a strictly hierarchical society? When on the top of the power pyramid can be only one, “there is a high probability of structural demasculinization of male power”⁴⁷. In such hierarchy and with such order and consequences, a trauma to male ego was inevitable. His complexes had to be calmed down; the easiest way to relieve the tension was in the battlefield and all that it meant for the unleashed hordes of soldiers, often out of control and in a position to commit various crimes related to genocide, rape, robbery, and a series of crimes against humanity all based on the alleged “natural right” to defend territory and national identity.

Like in a video game, men were playing on the territories they considered theirs. While very “patriotic”, patriarchal and traditional (including their attitude on venerating motherhood) when in their own lands, those men now were raping women of other

⁴⁴ from Greek *orthos* (“right”, “true”, “straight”)

⁴⁵ *Private life of Serbs in the XX Century*, op. cit., p. 685

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Papić, Žarana, op.cit., p. 26

nationalities and religions, Catholic and Muslim. Such sexual act without permission and with the use of force was the proof of masculinity and virility, of conquer and domination. War, fighting, anarchy and impunity in acts of competition and rivalry were spiced up with hypocrisy and double moral. Those were the roads to preserve the image of endangered male identity fertilized by fear and abuse, in all its sickness and inhumanity in acts of numerous mass rapes. "Boys will be boys" while girls will get depressed, clinically insane, physically, spiritually, and emotionally devastated. Raped to become mothers of enemies' children, women reacted in different ways – some aborted (in case it was possible) while others gave birth, some kept the child while others gave it for adoption⁴⁸. Whichever decision they made, they suffered immensely and were stigmatized. The worst probably was the interior war between woman's instinctual love for the child and her learnt hate for the enemy – it was the clash that some of them paid with their sanity.

The beginning of the 1990s, when the war in the former Yugoslavia started, coincided with the third-wave feminism in this region. In Serbia, there was also some realignment of the feminist scene, however, it should be noted that among the second-wave feminists there was no division that engulfed the entire society like in the age of Slobodan Milošević's regime⁴⁹, I mean that women were divided into those who advocated aggressive national policy and war strategy of Milošević authorities and those who stood on the opposite positions wanting to stop war violence and renew negotiations with tolerance for all nations and ethnicities in Serbia and Yugoslav spaces. In this respect, feminists in Serbia were honourably represented through internationalist, anti-militarist, libertarian and emancipatory feminist positions that oppose all forms of domination and violence against other people. Local feminists did not have enough time to develop their own theoretical and ideological knowledge, other than general acceptance of certain basic premises of feminist engagement, but they also had to enter into active engagement in the public arena, where they confronted aggressive and selfish interests of powerful domination from the authorities.

There was a distinction between women who were closer to radical feminism and women who were more liberal-minded. The radical ones were more concerned with the issues and problems most closely related to the female existential issues i.e. threat of male violence, especially in our circumstances, therefore establishing forms of solidarity oriented towards those women (SOS lines, shelters for women who were abused, therapy centres, refugee

⁴⁸ See Nikolić-Ristanović, Vesna, *War, Nationalism, and Mothers in the Former Yugoslavia, The Women and War Reader*, Ed. Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin, New York University Press, New York, 1998

⁴⁹ *Introduction to Gender Theories*, op.cit., p. 58-59

camps, etc.). On the other hand, women with more liberal orientation were interested in a variety of forms of political activities in order to organize critical and oppositional influence towards not only the ruling regime in Serbia, but also towards the democratic opposition which then formed and started to act more strongly in public. These groups of women also spawned the first contemporary forms of women's political activities such as Women's Parliament, Women's Lobby and Women's Party, as a feminist form of political acting at the turbulent political scene in times of the first democratic elections and government. In that period, preparations for the establishment of women's studies in Belgrade also began.

When the war in the former Yugoslavia ended in 1995, there was a strong influence of individual feminist groups, lobbies and orientations coming from the Western countries that, in some cases in the spirit of solidarity, were trying to lobby Serbian groups and impose certain political attitudes and directions⁵⁰. In the anthology *Towards Visible Women's History. Women's movement in Belgrade in the 1990s* (1998), edited by Marina Blagojević, the complexity of women's movement in Serbia since the mid-1990s was confirmed in different ways: there were political and anti-war groups, groups for combating violence against women and children, groups for feminist education, support groups for marginalized women, legal groups; by the end of the 1990s, new groups for economic initiative were established: group of women entrepreneurs, women's groups organized within the trade unions to fight for women's labour rights, and also some projects for the establishment of financially independent women's groups were started and finally, lesbian groups formed and began to appear publicly.

⁵⁰ *Introduction to Gender Theories*, op.cit., p. 60

1.7. Serbian Feminism in the Beginning of New Millennium

In the end of the 1990s, in Serbian cities there was a project established with aim to form network of women's groups in order to achieve decentralization of feminist activity which was mainly active in Belgrade. The results of such action would not only deprive the capital from the exclusive position that feminism in this region had from its starting days but it would also cover more wider spaces in order to involve diversity of women with different backgrounds. For that reason, it would be possible to establish a stronger movement capable to make real changes in issues of equality and in the right to be different. These innovations in organization of female groups caused changes that occurred in their status and independence. What is also very significant is that new trends in relations among women started to emerge. Furthermore, feminist concepts naturally became the part of the cultural life and art scene of Serbia.

The project of forming network of women's groups had its positive effects in 16 cities in Serbia and Montenegro, where until the end of the 1990s, women's groups started their activities animating women about the feminist goals. Till then, in twenty years long feminism history in Serbia, most of its activities concentrated in Belgrade mainly organized by educated women. Now with groups in various other cities, it was possible to involve women from various social backgrounds. In time, weaknesses of the network of women's groups appeared to be defined. The truth was that they were neither organizationally not financially independent, they were relatively present in the media while being completely politically ineffective. On the other side, at least they brought some important experiences to women on their individual positions, i.e. these groups offered new knowledge and skills to women and thus changed their attitudes. Perhaps those were the most important role and influence that women's groups of that period gave to women⁵¹.

Generally speaking, another important conclusion is about how these women's groups related to their environment and vice versa. The good news was that there was no obvious animosity directed to these groups but, on the other side, it can be also added that these women's activities were not met with any special interest or motivation to understand their

⁵¹ *Introduction to Gender Theories*, op.cit., p. 61

work and goals. At the same time, there is another very significant phenomenon to emphasize – it refers to how the local women who did not belong to those groups related to them. For instance, it can be said that there was deep mistrust between women's groups and women who were socially and professionally renowned female figures from the social scene. Well-established women often look at women from female groups as factors that could undermine their hard-won positions while, on the other side, activists see them with a dose of mistrust or even complete indifference when it comes to the possibility of joint action. In the beginning of the third millennium there was still a great division that in time became even more pronounced. Women politicians show ambivalence when their identity as women and as representatives of the parties in parliament is concerned. They see themselves primarily as members of a particular party and not through the lens of being women. Consequently, they show reservations and discomfort about the idea that as politicians they are supposed to represent women and their specific interests. In other words, it confirms that women's groups did not transform into a democratic force and women politicians feel more loyalty to the party even though it harms not only their own affirmation but also women's interests.

From the year 2000 onwards, partially institutionalized women's groups, and completely independent associations of individual women gathered around singular actions, were transformed into a range of legalized sector organizations. These NGOs operate on their own terms and independently from one another. It seems that feminism as social movement with radical requests and agent of social change was tamed to become neoliberal business of NGOs.⁵² The fact is that there is almost no communication between these groups and as such they do not represent any kind of a critical mass or opposition force. Therefore, in Serbia legislation relating to the protection and enhancement of the female population and their rights was late, but at least there has been some progress related to certain issues (e.g. violence against women and children, sexual violence, etc.). As we mention domestic violence, it should be taken into account that according to *Praxis*, in 2006 it was recognized as a criminal act while the system of protection from domestic violence was established under Family Law in 2005⁵³. Nevertheless, there are indications that sentencing of perpetrators of domestic

⁵² See <http://www.uzbuna.org/en/journal/conversations-new-feminism-and-art/taming-feminism-or-why-feminism-no-longer-social> (accessed on July 30, 2014)

⁵³ See *Serbia: Domestic violence, including legislation, recourse, state protection, and support services available to victims* (2012-2015), <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5568179d4.html> (accessed on January 16, 2017)

violence in Serbia is too lenient while support for the victims depends on Social Welfare Centres, NGOs and shelters.

Feminist identity has been constructed in different cultural activities, mostly at the individual level, rarely in groups. The primary improvements were made in the written word and publishing. It can be also added that in the last twenty years, great progress was made in the first place in the domain of literature; there have been numerous editions of novels, essays, poetry, drama and even biographies of important women published. There are even several publishing companies specialized in editing feminist literature of various genres. In the mid-1990s female theatre groups had an aim to gather women artists but also to work in a systemic way in raising awareness on women's issues. In visual arts in general there appeared an interest in feminism not only among artists but also art critics and museologists. It is also important to realize that there are the same reactions in many artists like in politicians considering link with feminism. In circles of artists and various authors, there is the same phenomenon that some (female) artists openly reject and refute any connection with feminism while others at any cost simply avoid declaring any direct interest in it. In general, even though there were many turbulences and problems that characterized women's and feminist organizations in Serbia, it became evident that at least in art activities and cultural sphere there were some changes and improvements.

2. STEREOTYPES OF FEMALE IDENTITY

*The main resources of stereotype are metaphor, sayings, adjectives and metonymy; stereotypes have the double-edge and can cut both ways – meaning that a positive stereotype can generate a negative shadow that reminds us of the duality of clichés.*⁵⁴

Gender stereotypes are strong obstacles for women to be considered in an equitable manner as worthy of all that is granted to men in various aspects of social life: family, work, politics, art, sport, access to technology, science, etc. That unequal treatment prevents harmonious relationships between men and women from being fully maintained, and therefore limits the full contribution of both to the desired development of society⁵⁵. According to male stereotypes men are efficient, reasonable, intelligent, active, courageous, tenacious, judicious, etc., while female stereotypes signify that women are emotional, submissive, fearful, weak, tender, intuitive, needy, dependent, etc. Stereotypes are unfair because they are not accurate and have negative effects for the life of stereotyped group, in this case, women. In order to “fight” them, firstly one has to be aware of their existence, consequences and of course of negatively stereotyped groups, and secondly, through knowledge, learning, and awareness rising know the reality and be able to expose the gender prejudices.

“The contempt of men towards women is based on a psychic trend to belittle them, a trend rooted in man's psychic reactions to certain biological facts, as it would be expected in the case of a mental attitude so widespread and so tenaciously maintained”.⁵⁶ The idea that children and women are emotional creatures, and as such incapable of responsibility and independence is the product of the male tendency to justify that attitude by stating that great number of women actually fit that description. Also certain fixed ideologies may appear about female nature meaning that they are limited in their ability to work independently and/or that they are unable of autonomous thinking. It is quite obvious that these ideologies serve not

⁵⁴ Suarez Villegas, J.C., *Estereotipos de la mujer en la comunicación*, p. 11
<http://www.mujeresenred.net/IMG/pdf/estereotipos.pdf> (accessed on September 16, 2014)

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Horney, Karen, *Psicología femenina*, Alianza Editorial, S.A., Madrid, 1990, p. 166

only to reconcile women to their subordinate role and to present it as inalterable, but also to implement the idea that it is the role that represents the realization of the pursuing of an ideal which is commendable and desirable for them to reach. Such theories also imply that the erotic possibilities of women depend on their conformity to the image of what constitutes their so called "true nature". "They are qualities, such as emotional dependence on sex (doglike fidelity), the absorbing "love", the inhibition of expansive and autonomous development, etc., which are considered very desirable in women but are subject to scorn and ridicule when in man."⁵⁷

In short, the stereotypes of gender identity are here firstly analyzed in terms of overall stereotyped female image and then as present within geocultural specificities of Serbia and in the Serbian art. As it is the complex phenomenon with variety of facets and meanings, it is commented through various stages in the art practices of painting, sculpture and later performance as well where mostly female authors give their comment upon the structures that are trying to control women's image and roles in the patriarchal society of the former Yugoslavia and Serbia. Even though for a long time women were represented as passive, almost faceless beings dwelling only in their private spaces, in time they started to reject openly that picture and create new liberated and more active identity, independent and ready to use radical practices in order to fight for the equal place in the art world as well.

⁵⁷ Horney, Karen, op. cit., p. 267

2.1. Phenomenon of Stereotyped Image of Female Identity

*Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time. An open coalition, then, will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purposes at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure.*⁵⁸

By all means, for a long time, until the 1900s, the model for feminist research was reduced primarily to a white heterosexual woman from a middle-class while gender studies were mostly revolving around issues of feminist epistemology or how we know what we know in terms of belonging to a specific sex. It means that the subject of these studies was very limited from the point of view of both model and approach. When taken into consideration that gender stereotypes for their omnipresence have enormous importance in constructing identity in both men and women the ever-changing image of gender continues multiplying in all its complexity.

When speaking about what constitutes “personal identity” within philosophical accounts, Judith Butler raises questions about “the extent to which “identity” is a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience and how the regulatory practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible notions of identity”⁵⁹. It leads us to the notion that categories that refer to the identity, such as “coherence” and “continuity” are also socially constructed and therefore made to follow the norms that must be maintained. Into these features, gender stereotypes fit as one of the vehicles for keeping together the image of identity as well controlled, coherent, stable, unchangeable, and socially accepted projection of “male” and “female” all within the limits of their expressive attributes. The cultural matrix to

⁵⁸ Butler, Judith: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York, 1990, p.

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⁵⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 23

which stereotyping serves facilitates intelligibility of gender identity and acts like a filter that automatically places its members into already defined roles of a certain social milieu.

Linguistic categorizations in media largely influence objectivity and consciousness of perception and experience in both male and female subjects. Etymologically speaking, the old English word for *man* referred to both man and woman meaning *human being* but also to mental abilities of *thinking* and *intelligence*. On the other side, the word *woman* originally signified the concept of *woman-man* as *female human* but also *female servant* while *man* referred to *hero, servant, and vassa*⁶⁰. Though it seems that the morphological root for words like *human* and *woman* is *man*, it could also conceptually signify that woman, for her power of giving a birth, can conceptually “convey” man within herself (just like the word *woman* contains the word *man*). Nevertheless, the English word *womb* might be linked to woman morphologically also for its ontology, the truth is that its adjectival denominator has to do with hysteria (from Latin *hystericus* “of the womb” originally defined as a neurotic condition peculiar to women and thought to be caused by a dysfunction of the uterus⁶¹). In fact, even in the original linguistic formation of signification of sexes, man and woman had already been defined for their abilities and characteristics. As shown above, man is the matrix for human race (woman included) and he can be not only a servant like woman but also a brave hero who has faculties of thinking and intelligence. On the other side is woman, an individual who is servant, hysterical and unstable because of her biology. As such, she is not eligible to be considered a person but rather gender only. Given these points, coherence and continuity of female identity are built by and on the basis of man since woman herself is not destined to be the matrix because of the categorizations attributed to her since always already in the very etymology related to sexes.

One of the ways to consider stereotypes of any kind is that they are the threat to cognition and, for that reason their consequences can be devastating at all levels of their influence. “The relationship between the concepts of “stereotype”, “prejudice” and “discrimination” is very close. They are to be taken into consideration as closely linked to the concept of attitude as a phenomenon consisting of three components: cognitive, affective, and behavioural”⁶² which means that comprehension influences feeling and thus also acting and

⁶⁰ See *man* and *woman* in *Online Etymology Dictionary* <http://www.etymonline.com/> (accessed on August 20, 2014)

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, see *womb*

⁶² Gonzalez Gabaldon, Blanca, *Los estereotipos como factor de socialización en el género*, Temas 12, Sevilla, 1999; p. 79-88., p. 79

experience. The phenomenon of stereotyping can be understood within the broader context of categorization as a response to the need for simplification of ordering our environment and social situations; humans tend to resort to generalization that will facilitate understanding of the world in a rather simplistic manner. In that task, uniformities are sought in the environment involving the form of economizing and saving analyses. By employing processes of simplification and generalization of the significance of terms and concepts, stereotyping results in categorization leading to classification. Categorizing is the way to learn but unfortunately is not the vehicle to comprehend. Therefore, it becomes easier to judge than to understand because it takes time and effort to do so. Social construction of reality refers to reality shaped by societal norms that also include stereotypes as the unspoken rule. “Just like other stereotypes deeply rooted in society, sex stereotypes lead to overestimation of uniformity; each and every one of the individuals in the group, man or woman, “are” seen as their groups and act and feel like their group.”⁶³ In fact, stereotypes serve as the factor of normalization (“my group is more regular than the other one”) that through the process of identification equalize the individual identity to the norms of the group. By trading personal for collective, by giving up acting as a singular identity, one reaches for the security of belonging to the group that liberates from individual responsibility.

There are various terms to refer to and describe concepts of “sex stereotypes”, “sex role stereotypes”, “gender stereotypes”, etc. Moreover, an extensive research on gender differences and similarities is necessary for several reasons.

First, stereotypes about psychological gender differences abound, influencing people’s behaviour, and it is important to evaluate whether they are accurate. Second, psychological gender differences are often invoked in important policy issues, such as single-sex schooling or explaining why, in 2005, there were no women on the faculty in mathematics at Harvard.⁶⁴

Correspondingly, if for example a woman does not follow the picture of stereotyped female image, if she is dedicated to her work, if she is independent, she is seen as “masculine” and vice versa – the same goes if a man does a “female” job. In the first place, the gender similarities hypothesis states that males and females are similar on most, but not all,

⁶³ Gonzalez Gabaldon, Blanca, op. cit., p. 82

⁶⁴ Shibley Hyde, Janet, *Gender Similarities and Differences*, The Annual Review of Psychology, 2014, p. 373-398, p. 374

psychological variables; in the same fashion, according to the sociocultural theory focused on power inequalities and the division of labour by gender, gender differences are.

When gender well-being and psychopathology are in question, relying mainly on meta-analysis and equivalence testing, some psychological disorders show lopsided gender ratios and henceforth cannot be ignored as criteria in understanding influence of stereotypes on individual male and female subjects, both on the level of unconscious internalization and, consequently, on behavioural patterns as well. For example, “twice as many women as men are depressed, roughly 90% of anorexics are females, and depending on the study, boys with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder outnumber girls by 2:1 to 9:1”⁶⁵. This serves as an illustration about gender differences in depression, rumination and self-esteem, that all can be closely connected to gender stereotypes. Already, by the age of 13 to 15 there is a raise in depression in girls when compared to boys while in adulthood twice as many women as men are depressed. Here, it is necessary to rule out hypothesis based on biological, physiological and primarily hormonal differences in females and males, usually attributed to psychological disorders, in order to point out that there is a strong possibility of close correlation between psychological well-being and stereotyping. In the first place, anorexia and bulimia mostly appear in girls at the fragile adolescent age which significantly corresponds to the phase of intense body awareness when depression also appears. Why is rumination more often in women than in men? Are negative repetitive thoughts more characteristic and responsible for depression too? What does self-image and being self-conscious have to do with self-esteem? Does lack of attention coupled with hyperactivity disorder influence the level of being superficial, immature, self-centred and egoistic? Or is it vice versa?

Some of the answers could dwell in the fact that girls and women (just like boys and men in their case) from the early age unconsciously internalize stereotypes of gender identity as their own ideals to epitomize and follow which obviously can result in depression because the discrepancy between the real self-image and the imposed picture is often present and obviously difficult to avoid. That female stereotyped image usually refers to the physical appearance – typical “female attributes” as attractiveness, sexiness, staying forever young and beautiful. That is to say, it can be also juxtaposed to the “bigger, better, faster” image related to male stereotypes just in a reverse coin side. So, while females are starving, vomiting, and being depressed, superficial and self-centred males (due to their attention deficit and need for

⁶⁵ Shibley Hyde, Janet, *op. cit.*, p. 387

constant stimuli and activity) are playing their game that females have to fit in. It is necessary to point out that responsibilities are certainly on both male and female sides. In contemporary patriarchal societies and practices, not only men are to be blamed for the existence of female stereotypes but also women for following them blindly. Nevertheless, it seems easier said than done. As it has been already argued, man is the matrix to construct woman but on the other side it is notable that gender stereotypes can be understood as the set of ideas derived from previously established social norms or cultural patterns. As such, they belong to the collective imagination and are presented as pure and objective unquestionable reality. Therefore, linked and deeply rooted in social structures, they obviously transcend society itself. For the same reasons, regardless of the sex that one belongs to, in the first place it is a very complex phenomenon to be aware of and, secondly it is extremely difficult to establish individual personal path to avoid, control and reject gender stereotypes in identity formation and expressive patterns.

It is possible to distinguish different female stereotypes among which the most important for this research are to be elaborated later: “the housewife, the object-woman (the adornment-woman and the showcase-woman), the complement-woman, the fatal woman, the woman-girl and the union of the two previous models”⁶⁶. Nevertheless, it must not be set aside that combinations of female stereotypes quoted above are also possible. These are the stereotypes that in their specific way objectify woman because they define her mostly through her appearance, reproduction, her household function and her relationship with/to man in terms of belonging and serving the purpose in patriarchal society.

Several studies on masculinity revealed that there has been especially obsessive construction of male identity as aggressive, arrogant and manipulative. Owing to such stereotypes, men are associated with aggression, independence and competitiveness. “The image of man represents the authority, wisdom and experience”⁶⁷ and in the same fashion, if woman is represented as purely visual image of appearance that has to remain forever young and beautiful, for the exact same logic, man does not need to worry about his physical attractiveness hence enjoying the liberty to look, appear and age in whatever manner. In addition, he gets more “charming, attractive and promising” with age because it is assumed that in time he gets more authority, wisdom and experience. In such an unbalanced picture, gender roles are easily preconceived and automatically matched. It might be interesting to

⁶⁶ See Suárez Villegas, J.C., op.cit, p. 7-9

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 10

mention that the situation is changing a bit when it comes to a today's young men who are also being objectified now.

If power, aggression, authority, control, manipulation and arrogance characterize men what remains to women is their looks, household, motherhood and of course pampering their men. To put it simply, she exists for him and is socially invisible if alone. Woman is defined according to the basis of serving and belonging otherwise, she is seen as odd, useless, futile and therefore, dangerous to the society. To return to stereotypes and gender identity, it must be emphasized that psychologically produced sex differences are prone to changes and that everybody is equal in his or her right to be different. There is also a long road to adhere in order to draw the clear line and objective definition between gender stereotypes and sexist stereotyping.

What must be remembered is that objectification of female identity, by both men and women, directly influences male and female cognition, experience and behaviour and therefore influences their relating in the long run. The reason to highlight the topic of female objectification in this thesis lies in the fact that it is mainly responsible for the violence against women (that at a household level also includes violence against children for they are often seen as the prolongation of their mother). That violence does not refer only to beating and rape as forms of physical abuse, it also includes psychological and emotional ill-treatment, and surely trafficking, prostitution, pornography, sexual harassment, forced labour, sexual discrimination, and all other wrongdoings that violate human rights of women for belonging to the female sex. In most cases, all those acts are performed on women by male perpetrators (sometimes with help of other women who do not sympathize with their women victims; therefore, they are the true "pillars" of patriarchy for they help men abuse other women). In order for this argument not to spin out of its frames because the topic is growing in its complexity, it is necessary to emphasize clearly that female gender stereotypes objectify woman – they reduce woman's identity to appearance, usefulness, reproduction, servitude, and dependence. For that reason she is seen, and can be treated, as the real "object" without any rights which is the exact point where any form of abuse can escalate because "men are persons and women are gender".

Media texts and images actively participate in constructing and reproducing "femininity" and "masculinity" depending on what kind of gender relations is "desirable" in a certain social and historical context. If we speak about the stereotyped media representation of gender it is important to search for the causes that stem from patriarchal cultural tradition

in which woman is submitted to man but it is also essential to bring out that media reflects social relations and also creates them. In addition, media is responsible for keeping the status quo in gender relations by transmission of patriarchal, stereotypical values. For example, in the 1970s in Serbian magazine *Bazar* advertisement represents woman as an object, a model without clear social role, while in 2014 in the same magazine woman appears as an object but also as a subject with obvious social role which is placed more often in a public than in a private sphere⁶⁸. Looking back, in Serbia in the 1970s stereotypical representation of femininity in the media was stereotyped in the way that woman was objectified as passive, humble yet designed as sensual and seductive. In the next decade, the stereotyped image represented her as more active, less dependent and more of as a consumerism representative. With the beginning of the 1990s, with the nationalistic tendencies already brewing and the war beginning, she became a “prolongation” of her man – an eroticized version of herself, but at the same time, as the war propaganda required, she was represented as a mother and hearth protector. In the new millennium, stereotype of Serbian woman reached a raunch culture stereotype of woman as strong, as being not only an object but also a subject. The truth is that what it takes is to be aware that these representations, though they are stereotyped but give images of a supposedly “independent woman”, are examples of a formal emancipation only because it is the model constructed in the way that actually has supported the male matrix and patriarchal structure till nowadays.

⁶⁸ See the research results by Vujović, Marija, *Comparative Analysis of Advertising Photography and Gender Representation in Socialist and Transitional Serbia*, Univerzitet Umetnosti u Beogradu, Beograd, 2016

2.2. Geo-cultural Specificities of Serbian Femininity

Woman becomes Man in the Balkans

René Grémaux

Important to realize is that fundamental interactions between sex, gender, and sexuality were inevitably the focus of attention of feminist theories not only because of the character of such interaction but also because of the consequences thereby generated. In order to research geo-cultural specificities of female identity in Serbia, the approach will refer to the concepts of socio-cultural phenomena directly arising from this region. Due to their special character the examples of analysis of the inversion of gender in cases of Balkan “sworn virgin” and in the seasonal ritual of *Revena* may serve to define peculiarities of local gender stereotypes. The idea is to study deviations with aim to search for originalities and confirm similarities with the overall female stereotypes with the purpose to offer contributions and definitions as stands and starting points for further investigations on the topic.

When talking about customs, laws, and tribal origins of the Balkan mountains it is certainly necessary to mention the phenomenon of “sworn virgin” which could be considered as an example of the so called sexual dimorphism, the third sex or the third gender that Mildred Dickermann in her paper also calls a “cross-gendered female role”⁶⁹ and “it concerned crossing gender identities rather than merely cross-dressing, since individual assumed the male social identity with the tacit approval of the family and the larger community”⁷⁰. This traditional female-to-male transgender is a status, role, and identity (almost always held for life) by which genetic females become social men. Reported in travel accounts since the early 1800s, in mountain areas of South Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Albania, “sworn virgins” still existed in the 1990s. Nevertheless, it must be noted that it is too early to

⁶⁹ See Dickermann, Mildred, *The Balkan Sworn Virgin: A Cross-Gendered Female Role. In Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*, ed. Stephen O. Murray, Will Roscoe, New York University Press, 1997, p. 197-203.

⁷⁰ Grémaux, René, *Woman becomes Man in the Balkans. In Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*. Ed. Gilbert Herdt. New York: Zone, 1994, pp. 241-281., p. 242

conclude that this institutionalized cross-gendered role no longer exists in the new manifestations of this phenomenon so deeply rooted in tribal patrilineal life.

There were various social reasons for the appearance of “sworn virgins” – “two standard rationales are given for the allocation or assumption of this role: one is the need of a patrilineal family group for a surrogate son, no sons having been born or all having died in childhood; the other is the desire of a young woman of marriageable age to escape an arranged marriage with an undesirable groom”⁷¹. In the continuation, the same author Mildred Dickermann quotes how Christopher Boehm, in his work on *Blood Revenge* from 1984, summarizes the situation of the local social reality (in Montenegro concretely):

The classic patrilineal treatment of women, secluded if possible and always strictly sex-segregated, their premarital virginity and marital fidelity enforced through the death penalty, their betrothal as children and marriage by sale without their consent, their heavy and constant physical labour and continual childbearing and rearing, the deference demanded of them by all men and especially by their fathers and husbands, enforced by frequent beatings, while men lounged, smoked, drank and gossiped, plotting and singing of feuds, all undoubtedly motivated some women to prefer a masculine life.

I myself, having a Montenegrin second name and lineage ancestors, was named after my father’s father in an attempt of my parents to at least somehow please him for not providing him a grandson and consequently, my being an only child made my father childless in the family genealogy. Needless to say, my grandparents for no particular reason occasionally used to call me by a male version of my first name. In Serbia, there is another habit present in addressing children usually by parents – it is “unconscious” error to call a daughter *son* (but never vice versa to call a boy *daughter*). Only sons are considered children it seems, and what are daughters then? Would-like-to-be-sons? It evidently makes a girl wish to be a boy from the early age, meaning to have been born a boy, or become one, or epitomize one somehow; or an adult woman to desire to be like a man in having equal positioning and freedom in social terms.⁷² We are talking about radical practices in the region where females are ready to trade their sexuality for a lifelong virginity and celibacy, live in dissimulation and illusion, reject their

⁷¹ Dickermann, Mildred, op. cit., p. 198

⁷² See the documentary video *The Last Montenegrin Virđžina Stana Cerović* (2 min, 48 sec).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kroi8YNtFGw> (accessed on August 26, 2014)

bodies and live behind constant mask. Specifically, inscriptions of the male way of life, experience, grooming, and total eradication of any femaleness, in time transform a “sworn virgin” into a man in appearance. What happens is that bodily inscriptions of the male identity win over the female body; here gender overflows sex so that she or better said he becomes outwardly man and, therefore, it becomes difficult to discern his/her exact sex. Nevertheless, it is more probable that women, rather than men, would be more prone to detect and sense at least a certain level of “oddity” in this rare type of “man”.

Strangely neglected by anthropology “sworn virgin”, locally called *Virdžina*⁷³ is in its etymology obviously associated with virgin, virginity, and celibacy. The fact is that most of the descriptive literature does not openly comment on the sexuality of these men-women, supposing that most of them were probably chaste. Nevertheless, there are reports on occasional heterosexual activity. The truth is that tradition prescribed burning or stoning to death as punishment for such relations. The first researcher to directly address sexuality of *Virdžinas*, René Grémaux, reports some expressing sexual attraction to women without consuming their desires. The fact not to be ignored is that just like men, many shared the misogynist views customary in these extremely male dominant societies.

Moreover, for Grémaux:

virginity is inherently an extremely ambiguous and ambivalent human condition, for it is considered to be neither a masculine nor a feminine quality, but rather a peculiar combination of both. [...] Virgins challenge common concepts of femininity, of which motherhood and dependence on men are basic traits, and moreover they threaten the clear-cut demarcation of both genders. In transvestite Balkan virgins, we see this inherent ambiguity and ambivalence substantially reduced by their classification as “social men” as well as by “prescriptions and restrictions concerning their sexual behaviour”⁷⁴.

In order to serve as enhancer of patriarchal society, the identity of “sworn virgin” is usually a lifelong condition because she may never revert to her birth gender, and therefore it represents an extreme case of cross-gendered female role. Different from this example of gender inversion, is the one that is temporary because it lasts for only one day in a year. *Revena* is a female ritual practiced in Serbia on the so-called “clean Monday” as the carnival feast marking the beginning of the period of Lent. Mainly celebrated up to the 1980s, it is the

⁷³ See the film *Virdžina* directed by Srdjan Karanović, 1991

⁷⁴ Grémaux, René op.cit., p. 245-246

custom still active in some parts of Serbia (mostly in Banat, Vojvodina). As the illustration, it is researched in terms of its symbolical discourse, meaning, and function that fulfilled its purpose in the specific sociocultural conditions.

On the day of *Revena*, from ten to twenty women (mainly neighbours and cousins) would gather in the house of one of them with plenty of food and drink. The presence of men is strictly forbidden, except for the possible male musician band (those men were paid for playing, could consume food and drink but should not share any details about the feast outside of it). In case a man would appear at *Revena*, he could get an aggressive assault from this female collective or get mocked in songs and jokes with erotic content and humiliated by obscene sexual remarks. In any case, “the amount and type of group ritual aggressiveness could not be predicted”⁷⁵ because *Revena* is the day when women freely enjoy behaving like men. Such an attitude of theirs in other situations would be considered “improper” or “unreasonable” but now, when those whose presence binds to specific rules of behaviour imposed by patriarchy are absent from the temporary social landscape, women’s cheerful and, the least to say, unusual acting also implies even drinking significant amounts of alcohol which obviously has a huge impact on women averse to alcohol since at least in public life they rarely consume it.

For the purpose of *Revena*, there was a small “theatre” where the alternate scenes improvised at the spot took turns. In that “theatre”, women are both audience and performers playing both male and female roles: playing cards, sexual play between “men” and “women”, stripping, mourning, shaving the genitals, etc. By the rule those plays are always variations on the theme of sexuality and relationship between sexes. The atmosphere is heated not only by the songs, poems and jokes of “naughty” content and drinking but also by the constant physical contact like hugging, touching and pinching among “men” and “women” which again produces outbursts of laughter and obscene words and actions. In this inverted reality from which man was completely ostracized emerged a powerful, ruthless, self-contained collective of equal women. These are the typical features of the so-called ritualistic transition when liminal stage of the transformation of the status or situation occurs. *Revena* also means the transition from free diet habits to the Easter Lent period and indicates a much older pagan transition of the seasons and the beginning of the field work, harvest, etc. To emphasize this, it is important to point out that girls and young women do not attend *Revena* but only *babe* –

⁷⁵ See Malešević, Miroslava, op.cit., p. 75-85

middle-aged and older women who already proved through their sexual maturity and reproduction and thus in the ritual they embody the production of life, birth, and growth in nature. In addition to that, plenty of food and beverage serves for the purpose of the imitative magic that evokes bounty and blessings for the common good of the whole community. *Revena* is only once a year and therefore such behaviour and practices in the given context, that otherwise would be seen as “immoral”, are treated as the part of social obligations with magical-religious justification.

First thing to remember is that liminal situations are manifested as an inversion of existing social structures and relationships, and provide that the ones from lower positions, here women, can release accumulated dissatisfaction. Not only that *Revena* does not endanger the stability of the existing patriarchal structure but it rather strengthens it. The fact is that there is an estimated time (specific day), place and rules to invert the architecture of the totality of the social structure. Thus, accumulation of tension and frustration is avoided because all is arranged and organized with the appropriate purpose. In the same manner, through this ritual every possibility of conversion of the liminal form into everyday life is excluded. In *Revena* communion man is banned which generates a sense of community, solidarity, empathy and belonging among women hence creating the sense of group identity. “The exclusion of man as unworthy partner, feelings of self-sufficiency, unbridled joy, all create an image of a powerful archetype of a strong, active, free, independent woman complete without her male counterpart.”⁷⁶ But it must be kept in mind that all of that is just once in a year.

As Judith Butler argues, according to Foucault bodies are constituted within the specific nexus of culture or regimes, there is no materiality or ontological independence of the body outside of any one of those specific regimes and his theory nevertheless relies on a notion of genealogy which conceives the body as a surface and a set of subterranean “forces” that are, indeed, repressed and transmuted by a mechanism of cultural construction external to that body⁷⁷. Applied to the case of “sworn virgins”, it would mean that extremely patriarchal environment traces inscriptions on female body and converts it into a social role of man without woman’s consent for she represses her sex. Thus, through the cultural construction

⁷⁶ Malešević, Miroslava, op.cit., p. 81

⁷⁷ Butler, Judith, *Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscription*. In *The Journal of Philosophy*. Eighty-Sixth Annual Meeting American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division. Vol. 86, No. 11, 1989, pp. 601-607, p. 602

external to that female body, she becomes defeminized and masculinized. In the “forced” transgendered person social overcomes genetic. As for Butler “the culturally constructed body would be the result of a diffuse and active structuring of the social field with no magical or onto-theological origins, structuralist distinctions, or fictions of bodies, subversive or otherwise, ontologically intact before the law”⁷⁸. “Sworn virgins” are not to be considered female “victims” of patriarchy because in some cases they consciously and willingly chose to become social men, they decided to turn the “natural” hierarchy of patriarchal tribe and invert their “genetic role” with aim to obtain a status that socially transfers them into the male system of rules, laws and most importantly rights. The process of that transgender inversion must be known only to them, for the coherence of psychological, mental, experiential, and bodily modifications and/or mutations belong to the individual plane. The self-perception and self-experience of those women-men, though they remain biologically female, belong to the category of cultural convention and categorization. In other words, there is the possibility of “treating the masculinity of “sworn virgins” as a “mask” rather than a “forgery”. As it is well known among anthropologists a person wearing a mask during a ceremony takes on the identity represented by the mask⁷⁹.

In the case of *Revena*, male social status that conveys freedoms and rights denied to women albeit fully enjoyed by men is substituted in the female ritual; and it signifies two basic inequalities between sexes: right to violence (verbal and physical) and right to expression of sexual needs. Patriarchal structures grant man the freedom of decision making and movement that is to be respected and obeyed by woman, otherwise he has the right to discipline and punish her (including physical violence). The same social code based on patriarchal morality strictly regulates love and sex life namely sexuality is justified just and only within marriage and for the reproduction purpose. Woman’s right to sexual pleasure simply neither exists nor is mentioned or uttered. For that reason, girls are taught from the early age to be humble and submissive because otherwise they are “slutty”. As already mentioned, patriarchy is responsible for the polarization between “mothers” and “whores”. Sexuality of mature woman in this tradition does not exist because it would jeopardize the venerated cult of mother. Consequently, in patriarchal culture, while still in her reproductive age woman is already vulgarized to the derogatory “rank” of *baba* which is pejorative for old woman that in its meaning also conveys nuances like *ugly*, *bad*, *witchlike*, etc.; *Baba-devojka* is another one that

⁷⁸ Butler, Judith, *Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscription*. op.cit., p. 607

⁷⁹ Šarčević, Predrag, *Sex and Gender Identity of “Sworn Virgins” in the Balkans*, p. 12 <http://www.udi.rs/articles/genderPS.pdf> (accessed on August 25, 2014)

refers to *spinster* meaning *old woman-girl*. Reduced to the reproduction and to the object in service to her husband to whom she belongs, woman has no right to enjoy her sexual life for it seems that maternity and sexuality are mutually excluded, or better said sexuality exists for the purpose of maternity and that is where it should stop because outside of that context sexuality belongs to men and men only, and if woman expresses it, she is considered “lustful”, “dirty”, “slutty”, in other words – “whore”. To keep male freedoms intact, female rights are strictly defined by humiliating categorizations and limits. Therefore, *Revena* custom serves as the vent to release accumulated frustration, it is the opportunity to cross the limits of being female at least for a day, express feelings and needs through playing, and feel the relief for sharing the destiny common to other women.

Though cultural stereotypes of patriarchal woman are threatened by phenomena such as “sworn virgin” and ritual of *Revena*, it becomes equally important to mention that they do not erode the social structure but nevertheless are its by-products. Even though she is not forced to officially accept the male social role in order to sustain patriarchy, that same patriarchy makes woman also long and regret not being male. To want to be born male, to be like a man, to live like a man, to reject one’s sex, to transform gender, etc., all points to such extreme patriarchal limitations that impel woman to wish to avoid female destiny in any way, to directly escape her traditional role at the cost of renouncing her sex, sexuality and gender for life or at least for a day. On the other side, the cult of mother that is about culture making woman prematurely asexual releases woman’s true hidden nature at *Revena* catharsis. But already on the following day, she is ready to return again to her eternal position of submission and serving. The atmosphere of biological “hierarchy” and social categorization of woman into young (useful for reproduction) and mature/old (barren, useless, futile) results in immense rivalry and unbearable competitiveness among women.

Reduced to reproduction, women vehemently defend patriarchy by accepting and reflecting female stereotypes, especially the one referring to appearance and womanliness for they serve the purpose of motherhood. The undercurrent hostility is interwoven in relating not only between young and mature women but between women in general and is also generated through interaction between sexes. Starting from the social nucleus, very strongly in mother-daughter relationship, conscious and unfortunately mostly unconscious, competitiveness lurks thus colouring the family relating between all its members. Especially, overtly sexy image of a very young girl inevitably clashes with the picture of her mother who, still at her reproductive age is considered by society (and often by her husband) old and unattractive. Animosity

dynamics from the home front easily exceeds family ground and continues into all other spheres of life through relations with both women and men thus creating a vortex of the tug of war atmosphere. The obvious influences of Serbian geography, Orthodox religion and church, tradition, war heritage and foreign impact (in particular centuries of Ottoman Turks as Moslems) made the social structure significantly harsh, rigid, strict and closed. The patriarchal society and the female identity stereotypes together cause and convey some of the phenomena like “problem of female masochism, overvaluation of love, neurotic need for love, mistrust between sexes, negation of vagina, dread of woman, etc”⁸⁰ and it is up to each individual how she/he will experience and deal with those influences and consequences.

⁸⁰ See the table of contents of *Psicología femenina* by Karen Horney, op. cit.

2.3. Femininity in Serbian Art before the 1970s

Throughout history, culture and art have influenced the formation of gender roles and relationships through their mechanisms such as art heritage, archetypes, stereotypes, and the like. Arts and gender are linked in many ways – it is the fact that eventually became even more apparent in time. One of the issues in contemporary art is gender recognized as socially and culturally constructed categories of masculinity and femininity as contrary to essentialist claims about biologically determined sexuality. Therefore, this social character of gender is becoming increasingly more important in art.

Already at the beginning of the 20th century, due to the struggle of the first feminists, women started to educate at art academies and participate in competitions, international exhibitions and art fairs. The first exhibition of the drawings made by only women artists was held in Amsterdam in 1884 and also later in Paris in 1908 and 1913. However, only few arrived to become art professors and members of the Academy of Sciences; just some of them sold their art but rarely, and they were barely commented in professional art texts and critique. Woman artist remained a solitary phenomenon, poorly recognized by her colleagues, theorists, critics and art institutions. Art and feminism were not practically and theoretically linked until the second wave of feminism, and in some cases much later. Art was also often tied to a particular dose of elitism – the artists usually came from artistic families or upper class. In addition, it is the fact that until half of the 20th century the art itself was rather indifferent to the social reality and changes. The same refers to Serbia where up to the 1950s and early 1960s feminist and women's art remained unnoticed.

When talking about Serbian art in the beginning of the 20th century, it can be said that the real woman's role, shaped by standards of public morals and placed outside of main social trends, is to be seen on the canvas as well. Even though art does not necessarily reflect social relations, it can, often unconsciously, imply and reproduce patriarchal ideology that limits woman's movement, dwelling and existence. Except when it comes to portrait or nude, the so-called "women's spaces" represent them usually occupied with some kind of activity that is nevertheless always justified and verified as exclusively female (she does needlework, knits, sews, works in the kitchen or cleans). Spaces in which women are represented strikingly emphasize isolation and commitment to the "desirable" activities. The lack of communication

personifies humility and obedience as glorified female virtues accentuated by model's eyes lowered or watching into the distance as will be seen in the examples of artworks that are to follow.

In accordance, the composition shows the face from profile or from behind, rarely from the front. What is interesting is that this type of treatment is identical in both male and female authors. There is a melancholic and contemplative posture of the model; an observer can peer into the environment carefully kept intimate together with its dreamy atmosphere. Female spaces are those where femininity is lived within position of discourse and social practice, and as such are the product of the real feelings of social status, of mobility and visibility in the spirit of social relations of seeing and being seen. In painting, stereotyped image of female identity tucked into a homely atmosphere where she dwells, works and daydreams limits her outside existence and appearance. In such a way, the real world of public life is freely left to men liberated from any possible competition coming from women's part.



Beta Vukanović, *Summer Day*, 1918/1919



Natalija Cvetković, *While Dressing*, 1912

These scenes were not only shaped primarily by the view of the author but also by a social framework with its own way of seeing. Organized representations place them immediately into the category of genre scenes where one can decipher opportunities and limitations as a sort of chronicle of the epoch. Under those circumstances, on canvases of Vidosava Kovačević, Ljubomir Ivanović, Borivoje Stevanović, Natalija Cvetković and later Beta Vukanović, Marko Čelebonović, Stojan Aralica, Ivan Tabaković, Petar Dobrović, we see women captured in the atmosphere of a limited imaginary area of loneliness, of general hibernation

and immobility in space. In the same gender-defined environments, women are often presented in the intimate rituals of rest, embellishment, combing or dressing. Although the aforementioned areas and items are universal in their purpose, their banal narrative does not correspond to the projected perception of male space. Politics of presenting functioned as an image of social stereotypes about male and female spaces, interests, objects, rules of behaviour, and rituals. Those, selectively chosen fragments of the social matrix, authentically testified who belonged where. Important to realize is that the most noticeable thing missing was the logic of the active female gaze.⁸¹



Borivoje Stevanović, *Girl with a Book*, 1906

In the spirit of the established division, there was a noticeable difference in the experience of the representation of men and women while reading, essentially based on historical and gender structure in the perception of intellectuals. Out of the multitude of images of women reading, several essential similarities can be derived as types of female reading: reading as resting, reading as pose and reading as activity in nature. Their common denominator is the atmosphere of leisure, rest, passivity; those are scenes that do not give the impression of engagement, cognition or awareness.⁸² The truth is that women were represented as if they had been on the verge of falling asleep. Not only were the female protagonists immersed in the atmosphere where the time stands still but the underlined immobility and immutability encapsulated and “froze” them; captured in limited space without

⁸¹ *Private life of Serbs in the XX Century*, op. cit. p. 698

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 700

time, women were represented as powerless, uninterested and passive. On the other side, as a contrast of a more direct sexist style, in Sava Šumanović's *Drunken Boat* (1927) there is a group of four sailors with two naked girls. Men represented dressed and in greater number obviously control the situation and are in for some fun thus making objectification visible on this canvas where women seem quite shameless and eager to please.



Sava Šumanović, *Drunken Boat*, 1927

What must be remembered are the examples of women artists significant for their contribution to Serbian art, primarily for their stepping out of the stereotyped visual imagery both in their lives and work. Firstly, Nadežda Petrović (1873-1915), Serbian most famous impressionist and fauvist of the period was the most important female painter at the time also known as the first woman war photographer. She studied art in Munich and exhibited her work in many cities throughout Europe and was in contact with the most important art figures of the international scene (mainly men). Petrović also taught in the women's school of higher education in Belgrade, moreover she helped organize the First Yugoslav Art Exhibit, and the First Yugoslav Art Residence. She continued being politically active when in 1912, she volunteered to become a nurse following the outbreak of the Balkan Wars. She continued nursing Serbian soldiers until 1913, when she contracted typhus and cholera. With the outbreak of the First World War, she again volunteered to become a nurse with the Serbian Army, eventually dying of typhus in 1915.



Nadežda Petrović, *Self-portrait*, 1907



Milena Pavlović-Barili, *Self-portrait*, 1938

Another Serbian artist with international career and national relevance was Milena Pavlović-Barili (1909-1945), a painter and poetess who like Nadežda Petrović studied art in Munich. In the early 1930s she left Serbia and returned only for brief visits. During her stays in Spain, Rome, Paris and London, she socialized with Jean Cocteau and André Breton, and was influenced by many western artists, notably by Giorgio de Chirico. Specific sensitivity and system of personal symbolism formed a magical, private metaphysics of expression and meaning with authentic oneiric based iconography. There are four phases in Pavlović-Barilli's work: Belgrade and Munich period (1922-1928), stage of schooling; Parisian-Roman period (1931-1936), a magical linear style, lyricism based on personal mythology; "Renaissance" metaphysical period (1936-1942); American period (1939-1945), marked by contrasts: commercial fashion design, portraits of figures from high society with metaphysical overtones and mystical, religious compositions.

After the Second World War ended, Serbia, like the rest of Yugoslavia, was influenced by the strictures of the official Stalinist cultural orthodoxy of socialist realism.

The Yugoslav experience with socialist realism, just like the Yugoslav experience with post-communism, is different and more ambiguous than the experience of other "Eastern Block" countries in the time period from 1948, until the fall of the Berlin wall (1989), and the Yugoslav civil war (1991). Due to a change in political interests, SFR Yugoslavia early got rid of socialist realism as the official art, and further forms of repression in culture evade a precise detection. The official censorship intervened only in a couple of cases, but the principle of self-censorship has been perfected instead, as well a principle of art surveillance. Still, in the post-war Yugoslav history, socialist

realism kept its twisted continuity – not through the visual arts language, but as a dominant factor of the cultural policy, a *modus operandi* of the state and cultural establishment. Actually, we do not know what happened with the socialist realism, just as we do not know what happened with communism.⁸³

What we know is that in the post-war atmosphere of Serbian art following the Second World War in socialist realism, as functionally narrative art, women were represented as monumental – as soldiers, partisans, workers, mothers or peasants working in the fields, more often in group scenes and rarely alone. Therefore, those monolithic robust appearances followed the cultural norm of the time; with their force and presence they were promising reconstruction, progress, and development, i.e. the new bright future.

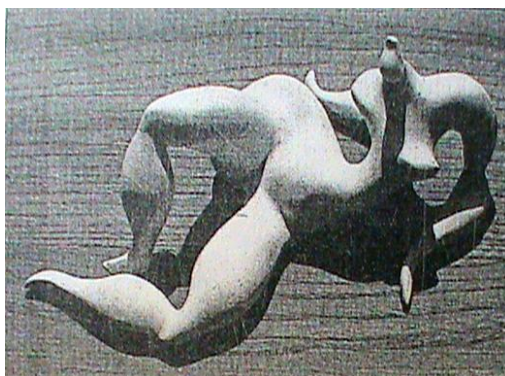
From the careful reading of critical writings about the Belgrade modernist sculpture from the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s, primarily in women authors, it is noticed that their sculpted modernist work was identified in terms of autonomy, universalism and aestheticism of high western or socialist modernism. Questions about “eroticism”, “sexuality” or “gender identification/non-identification” were only sporadically suggested or entirely neglected. It is about stressing the emancipation of woman creator who turned into master artist equal to man. Because of that, many of them proudly proclaimed “I am a sculptor” and not “I am a sculptress”. The relationship of men creators – sculptor masters, for example Toma Rosandić and Henry Moore, towards young female authors is seen as the ratio of unidirectional influence of the great masters of Westerners in relation to young women artists from the province who should transcend their gender/sex in order to reach the universal canon of the above- or super-sex of the “sculptor”.⁸⁴ In case of sculptresses, as opposed to the male genre of act, distinct and rhetorically exaggerated “sexualization” of vital or associative forms that represent the body appeared. The term “sexualization” involves plastic-sculptural emphasizing of the *epistemological fantasy* of pronounced sexual effects of moulded materials of sculpture where pronounced form of sexuality and not eroticism is a theme.⁸⁵ As we can see in the sculptures of Ana Bešlić, Olga Jančić and Milica Ribnikar, the dynamics between the inside and the outside is not only within the dynamics between woman and man but within relationship between woman and woman, mother and daughter, between woman and the world, and also

⁸³ See Merenik, Lidija, *The Yugoslav Experience or What Happened to Social Realism*, Moscow Art Magazine N°22, 1998 <http://www.guelman.ru/xz/english/XX22/X2218.HTM> (accessed on August 15, 2014)

⁸⁴ Šuvaković, Miško, *History of Art in Serbia XX Century 2. Realisms and Modernisms about the Cold War*, Orion Art, Beograd, 2012 p. 655-656

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 656

towards herself and for herself which means that it is an *epistemological phantasy* of femininity that assumes its own and obvious sensory appearance.⁸⁶



Rada Ribnikar, *Nude*, plaster, 1960

In conclusion, femininity in the 20th century Serbian art before the seventies underwent several phases which corresponded with social and political norms of the period. Stereotyped image of Serbian woman represented in visual arts moved from the passive model blocked within limited closed women's spaces, or even objectified naked image, to bulldozer-like creature produced by the official cultural policy of social realism. In terms of international influences, there also appeared rare women artists who, mainly under foreign impact, stayed in touch with art tendencies outside Serbian patriarchal society and brought new visions of female identity in both formal and conceptual terms. Later, in sculpture especially, appeared women artists who, for the sake of being equal to men authors, did not declare themselves as *sculptresses* even though their work screamed out with sexualized female forms. In the moment when in a prohibited movie directed by Dušan Makavejev "Mysteries of the Organism", main protagonist Milena shouts "Death to Male Fascism, Freedom for Female People!"⁸⁷ art of the 1970s could officially begin.

⁸⁶ Šuvaković, Miško, *History of Art in Serbia XX Century 2. Realisms and Modernisms about the Cold War*, op.cit., p. 661

⁸⁷ Makavejev, Dušan, *Mysteries of the Organism (Wilhelm Reich)*, 1971.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bVkkJAju-0> (accessed on August 15, 2014)

2.4. Real Woman and Imagined Woman

Another very important factor in this situation is that women adapted to the wishes of men believing that in that adaptation they have found their true nature. Namely, they see or have seen themselves as their men's desires demanded; unconsciously, they have abided by the suggestion of masculine thinking.⁸⁸

As artistic practices also rely on the real life facts, it can be seen in the case of Surrealist male artists that female image formed by man is the reality that for him acquires its consistency and entity. For Surrealist male artist, woman was not independent but enigmatic; without man woman did not exist, it was a being or perhaps better said a creature yet to be discovered and deciphered by him. If there is no man to lay his sight on woman, she is merely invisible⁸⁹. Woman was and is a source of inspiration, a muse, but by the same token she is just a complement to man's creativity (mostly "granted" exclusively to males only) and an erotic object. Needless to say, that same, imagined woman was basically constructed as an image of a passive being.

In *Soluble Fish* (1924), a sophisticated poetic novel which is one of the first works of Surrealism albeit yet another misogynist ode to sexism from the artistic point of view, André Breton defines women as slaves to weakness and to felicity, constructing the image of a woman wrapped into emotions, and dependent on man's love⁹⁰. The identity of that imagined woman dwells on her dependency because Breton also affirms that female independence is nothing but theoretical thus throwing her into the private life where she plays a second-fiddle to man. Furthermore, the same author claims that all female actions are because of men, and due to female thinking about man; all women's most intimate feelings, experiences, hopes and dreams rotate around male in general. In the same fashion, Breton's images used to describe women are evocative and suggestive implying desire for them; thus woman is reduced solely to her body. For him women use tricks to lure men, like decoration, flowers, etc.; this imagined

⁸⁸ Horney, Karen, op.cit., p. 60

⁸⁹ Caballero, Juncal, *La mujer en el imaginario surreal: figuras femeninas en el universo de André Breton*, Publicaciones de la universidad Jaume I, Castellón, 2002, p. 71

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 101

woman is placed in bed, in situations and movements where everything is aimed to excite imagination and lust of male readers.⁹¹

If woman is really such a poor little creature, dependent on man and made of mouldable content, then why is it necessary to control that image so vehemently? If man designs the image of woman according to his desires and she for that same reason is “inferior” to him, why would he be afraid of her? The paradox remains as well as the question – why would man be afraid of something inferior to him? Such a condition of fear and anxiety represents the root of the mistrust between sexes and, consequently the reason for their battle. Male fear of women and female masochism related to sex and motherhood are closely related and interacted through the stereotype of the imagined woman certainly created by man himself and obviously internalized by female. For what is imagined is a rigid picture of identity for the woman to follow blindly thus facilitating the tracing and controlling of her behaviour by the patriarchy; it is the image based on making her dependent and fixed to man as the only source of her meaning and purpose.

When talking about the wisdom of marriage in terms of economics, Michel Foucault refers to “free men”⁹² who dominate the society stating Demosthenes’ *Contra Neera* formula of courtesans, concubines and wives where man is granted absolute freedom that condemns woman to total judicial inequality. It is the society that brings into play “the principle of one legitimate wife, but on the other hand, clearly locates the domain of pleasure out of the conjugal relationship”⁹³. Marriage will know the sexual relating only within its reproductive function while the sexual relationship itself raises the question of pleasure solely out of the wedlock. Laws and legislations, crime, punishment, and social treatment built on judicial classification of women can be derived from yet another author like Cesare Lombroso who writes about “delinquent woman, prostitute and “normal” woman”⁹⁴. According to him, the delinquent “gene” of the female offender was possible to spot already in woman’s appearance and distinguish her from a “normal” one; it was the concept based on the immense scientific inconsistency that nevertheless could fertilize misogynist views hence supporting limitless male freedoms while at the same time depriving women of theirs.

⁹¹ Caballero, Juncal, op.cit., p. 103

⁹² Foucault, Michel, *Historia de la sexualidad, 2. El uso de los placeres*, Siglo XXI Editores, S.A., Madrid, 1987, p. 132

⁹³ Ibid., p. 133

⁹⁴ See Lombroso, C. and Ferrero, G., *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale*, Roux, Turin, 1893



Marina Abramović, *Role Exchange*, performance, Amsterdam, 1975

In her performance *Role Exchange* Marina Abramović (1946) challenges our sense of identity by exchanging place with an anonymous prostitute for four hours (the prostitute attends exhibition opening while for that time Abramović sits in a red-lights district show window). In this case, woman prostitute as an erotic object is equalized with woman artist. Here, the role exchange is the role play - who is real and who is imagined? Both are real and both are imagined within their impersonating roles. Sitting in the window like a motionless doll destined to be seen and watched by males, posing and smoking, the artist is in a passive position as if slightly absent and distant reflecting that emptiness and desperation of the human condition associated with prostitution. Here, she is the imagined woman while as a real person she is the artist. The real prostitute comes to the position of being an artist; thus she could be associated with the “intellectual prostitution” of female artist necessary in order to enter and survive in the art world ruled mostly by men. The question of the level of authenticity of this performance remains in terms of whether Abramović only “exhibited” herself or she also delivered services to the “customers”.



Marina Abramović, *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful*, performance, Copenhagen, 1975

Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must be Beautiful is Marina Abramović's performance in which she brushed her hair simultaneously with a metal brush and metal comb until her face and hair were damaged while loudly repeating the words of the title of the performance. This whole ritual like trance of violent combing and rhythmical repetition reached the degree of the brain-wash mantra of her own (the part of *artist must be beautiful* through time evolved into *artist must be erotic*⁹⁵) thus achieving the dynamics and the aura of the illusory and trivial act. The stereotype that objectifies female identity and limits woman to her appearance (she must be beautiful in order to allure and attract) is here directly criticized by vehement intent to be beautiful for it is an obligation. This image is connected to the concept that art must be beautiful and that it is its main purpose, therefore art itself has nothing to do with any form of activism but rather serves for the decorative aims just like woman herself "ornaments" man. Thus she argues that both art and artist (woman, female artist, performer, "owner" of the body) if objectified are equally superficial.



Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 0*, performance, Naples, 1974

Given the explicit feminist orientation of the performances analyzed above, when talking about objectification and performance, Marina Abramović's earlier piece *Rhythm 0* must be mentioned. It can be associated with the initial masochist phase of her performances characteristic for the mid-1970s where process is more important than the result and performance matters more than the objects which appear in it. She offers 72 objects to the public with the instructions that she is the object and that the audience can do whatever they

⁹⁵ Abramović, Marina, *An artist's life Manifesto*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTH4wYhWH54> (accessed on September 7, 2014)

want with/on her because the performance is her responsibility during the following six hours. The process developed from peaceful interaction to violence and aggressive treatment performed on the artist.

In the beginning, public was nice with her, kissed her, gave her flowers, then they cut her and drank her blood, carried her around, put her on the table, later they even gave her the pistol to see whether she will shoot, they cut her clothes, put rose thorns into her skin. As the performance came to its close, when Abramović started to be herself again and not just the object, the audience simply ran away because they could not confront her as a person.⁹⁶

In this case, if she is passive, there is no rhythm for her because she is “zero” active. This is the only performance when she surrendered the control over the performance to the public hence challenging the concept of spectatorship, public, audience involvement and individual responsibility of the spectator. Needless to say, never again has she allowed herself such an experimental “luxury”. If here the artist gives up her powers and handles the control to the public, does it perhaps lead us to the idea of delivering the burden of freedom of choice to another? Passive-aggressive behaviour, body as the object of performance, the issues of power and control, artist-servant as the disguised master of the ceremony, all lead us to the notion of her switching the roles and turning the tables – this time to liberate the author from her public responsibility and focus on the questions of the “uneasiness” of the freedom of choice.



Marina Abramović, Bojan Brecelj, and Irwin, *Namepickers*, photography, 75 x 66 cm, 1998

⁹⁶ Abramović, Marina, *Rhythm 0*, <http://vimeo.com/71952791> (accessed on September 8, 2014)

Namepickers is a series of three exactly same photographs, each signed by one of the participating artists (Marina Abramović, Bojan Breclj, and Irwin) and priced according to their price ranges. In this image, reflecting an absent look while posing passively in bed, objectified and erotic, immersed into that female passive/male active role play, aimed to excite male imagination, Marina Abramović is surrounded by a group of men who seem to be actively interested in her just like Surrealists would be in their muse. While she seems to be pensive, her admirers on the contrary are very involved with her, studying and analysing her, perhaps picking a name for her just like artists titling their artwork. For that same reason, she seems to be a model, an imagined woman, a creation of men. Conceptually speaking, the fact that there are three identical photographs signed by the authors and offered for public online sale is about reproducibility of artworks, relativity of the artwork uniqueness, issues of copyrights, auctions and matters of art value and evaluation. Accordingly, now this female artist, even though very passive in this “scene”, has an opportunity to gain the same share for the same art piece like her companions if not even more for being that exact Marina Abramović who in reality is more famous than the male artists here concerned.

The Painting is focused on exposing this oddity of an intimate moment but it also became a statement about the medium of painting itself – even more, about appropriating/hijacking that image from a product manual that has been stripped down of any corporeality and giving it unwarranted attention to a point that it becomes voluptuous, intimate and personal again.⁹⁷



Jelena Radić, *The Painting*, oil on canvas, 200 x 337cm, 2001

⁹⁷ See *Interview with Jelena Radić* in the Annex

The contemporary culture is characterized by short circuits or corridors between art and culture which mean the mutation of “poetics” into “cultural policy”⁹⁸. Jelena Radić (1978) in her untitled work deals with the concept of “bleeding Eve”, the imagined stereotypes about the period, where the “act” of incorporation of a tampon into a female body is an excuse to produce a raw, direct, graphically technical representation of female genitalia. The truth is that this is the image where the topic of menstruating connected with the phallic like object here introduces the notion of “plugging” the vagina. Besides that, the way of incorporating theme, representation and style together here reminds us of a screen painted image rather than a painting. Hence, the image suggests technical instructions for use of a product thus pushing this picture further into the context of mass production and consumerism (with its direct critique that probably originates from the excessive presence of advertisement of feminine pads dedicated to women as indubitable consumers). For the consumers accustomed to the images that represent interior female organs of already (rightly or wrongly) placed tampon, this picture brings a slight shock the least to say referring to the female anatomy and the way it is showed because it stirs some unpleasantness and ambivalence in the viewer. The “rawness” also comes from the fact that this image treats vagina tissue like a mechanical structure. What is interesting is that it bluntly awakes spectator’s attention on the topic of the conscience about imagined vagina; one cannot help but anatomize it into detail with aim to see how it is represented.



Aleksandrija Ajduković, *Tigresses*, photography, Belgrade, 2004

⁹⁸ Šuvaković, Miško, *History of Art in Serbia XX Century 1. Radical Art Practices*, Orion Art, Beograd, 2010 p. 816



Aleksandrija Ajduković, *Fashion*, photography, Belgrade, 2004



Aleksandrija Ajduković, *Serbian Fashion Journal*, photography, 2008

Aleksandrija Ajduković (1975) is a photographer who in a documentary and journalistic style approaches the “real” women in public spaces dressed in a certain manner or patterns. In her series *Tigresses*⁹⁹ the neutral, objective quality of the images is the result of the fact that it does not seek to uncover the hidden “inner qualities” of the women, but to document their appearance and social identity. Dress code in this case represents a semantically unifying principle, which is reflected in the formal approach to the “tigresses” photographed frontally, always from approximately same distance. The observer is directly confronted with models who are posing in a self-conscious manner. Seriousness and systematic approach that adopts

⁹⁹ Ajduković, Aleksandrija, *Tigresses*, <http://ajdukovicaaleksandrija.com/node/5> (accessed on September 8, 2014)

Ajuković contributes to the establishment of the typology that enters the wider connotations of a kind of sociological research.¹⁰⁰ In *Fashion*¹⁰¹ series, the artist adopts the same frontal approach representing quotidian people, women and men (mostly older persons) to comment on the concepts of fashion, trends, and brands. On the other side, in *Serbian Fashion Journal*¹⁰² women are represented in groups wearing similar models; clothing here serves as the means of identification and unification (as belonging to the certain group) but also of classification and stereotyping. The possible feminist connotations when talking about Aleksandrija Ajduković's production in question are not an aggressive critique of aesthetic stereotypes dominant in the advertising and fashion industry; it is actually her attempt to offer an alternative method of representation of femininity which according to the phenomena of everyday life does not take ironic but a specific affirmative attitude marked by benign humour.



"Beaten Bride", 2004, print on pillow, 40x 40x 6 cm, 5 works

Antea Arizanović, *Beaten Bride*, print on pillow 40 x 40 x 6 cm (comprises 5 pieces), 2004

I think that violence is primarily the result of poor education. Now being a parent myself I see that violence is very present in our society. Violence is something that we learn at home as a method of solving problems.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Muhr, Paula, *Games of Seduction*, <http://ajdukovicaleksandrija.com/node/5> (accessed on September 8, 2014)

¹⁰¹ Ajduković, Aleksandrija, *Fashion*, <http://ajdukovicaleksandrija.com/node/20> (accessed on September 8, 2014)

¹⁰² Ajduković, Aleksandrija, *Serbian Fashion Journal*, <http://ajdukovicaleksandrija.com/node/7> (accessed on September 8, 2014)

¹⁰³ See *Interview with Antea Arizanović* in the Annex

Antea Arizanović (1978) finds motives for her art in social stereotypes often represented as pop icons with minor “irregularities” where by deliberate jest the stereotypical view becomes “displaced” so that the entire image gets a different, or contrary to the obvious, meaning. Consequently, the theoretical assumptions concerning the “woman victim” and the “woman seductress”¹⁰⁴ make that work simultaneously interpreted as an evocation (display) and as a provocation (undermining) of social stereotypes¹⁰⁵. The motive of victim is epitomized in *Beaten Bride* which explores the traumatic fate of Balkan woman, here in the role of the bride traditionally imagined as happy. This stereotype of bride is the concept that Arizanović contrasts with beating thus deconstructing the idea; the imagined happiness is shattered by the real menace. In predominantly patriarchal societies, women are expected to be obedient and silent, otherwise every disobedience could be punished by beating; dependent on her husband, by getting married woman belongs to him. Therefore, instead of hopes and dreams of happiness the bride gets battered. The prints are on pillows for they symbolize dreams of future, desires of happiness but also a place where tears remain, a place where not only dreams but also fears and nightmares are instilled. This vision of hidden suffering and pain of Balkan woman remains occult as she is a subordinate, wretched object that agonizes in private.



Antea Arizanović, *Icons*, mixed media 26 x 20 cm, (comprises 12 pieces), 2006

¹⁰⁴ See Gubern, Román, *Estereotipos femeninos en la cultura de la imagen contemporánea*, Análisi, Núm. 9, 1984, p. 33-40., p. 34

¹⁰⁵ Erić, Olivera, *Is Woman Today More Respected and Loved than Before?*, Pro Femina, 46/50, 2007-2008, p. 175-180., p. 178

“The relation of women with the condition of “being watched” is an indicator of her inability to establish her own subjectivity because she is “inscribed” into the order that subjugates and turns her into an object”.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, in *Icons* Arizanović plays with the pictures of gender stereotype of seductress found in Playboy “bunnies”, or better said the stereotype idea of what the attractive woman (in sexual terms) “should be like”. “This work was created more than 10 years ago and the situation has not changed”¹⁰⁷ says the author. These contemporary “saints” are painted on the uniform background of golden colour following the icon painting canon as contrasted with black faceless figures represented within contours of hollow emptiness and obscurity. Deprived of their identity they are posing in an affected and lascivious yet exaggerated and caricature manner all with aim to be supposedly alluring. Even though the imprinted face of the Balkan bride left on the pillow was exchanged by yet another hidden female identity, namely Playboy “bunny”, it means that the positioning of woman did not improve essentially over time no matter whether hers is the assigned role of a victim or of a seductress.



Antea Arizanović, *Bunny*, photography series, 2006

The example that ageism and sexism go hand in hand is Antea Arizanović’s photography series *Bunny* where she made portraits of the Slovenian actress Lenča Ferenček costumed in the usual *Playboy* “bunny” uniform. This aged “bunny” questions the stereotype

¹⁰⁶ Erić, Olivera, *Is Woman Today More Respected and Loved than Before?*, op. cit., p. 175-176

¹⁰⁷ See Interview with Antea Arizanović in the Annex

that female beauty is treated solely as an object material meant for the male view¹⁰⁸. Nevertheless, purposefully the way the model is posing here does not seem to be “forced” or exaggerated in any way. Perhaps, it suggests that with the experience and maturity women do not compete that much but rather “play” it in a more relaxed and natural way. There is no notion of the so-called “forever young and beautiful” image that aims to fetch at least the popular “youthful” look as a form of self-consolation in absence of the real youth. There are images of the whole figure but also portraits that are cropped. Therefore, we can see this “bunny” from all sides and in detail including her wrinkles that are pointing out the existence of visions of female beauty other than the stereotyped ones.

All things considered, what gender stereotypes inevitably epitomize is the notion of the parallelism and/or the clash between the “real” and “imagined” identity, or of what one internalizes and desires to reflect, or of what one assumes but deludes. Therefore, space and directions for manipulation of roles, exchange, play, and inversion of meaning are limitless. On the other side, stereotypes that are more general, referring to female anatomy or clothing or social roles are also the rich material to process, analyse and criticize. Especially through the means of performance that so proudly and suddenly rushed into the Yugoslav art scene of the 1970s, the first steps in treating body as an independent medium, process, artwork and its own purpose were made. As shown above and will be argued in continuation, performance art served to subsequent authors as an incentive to treat topics of femininity with their own approach through other media whilst not abiding to the male constructed imagery of female identity.

¹⁰⁸ Erić, Olivera, *Is Woman Today More Respected and Loved than Before?*, op. cit., p. 179

2.5. "Femme fatale" and Woman-girl

*The woman in the role of muse is the image of inspiration for Surrealist man and his salvation. That image has been polarized: on one side, as virgin and girl; on the other, as erotic object or "femme fatale".*¹⁰⁹

When talking about female gender stereotypes it was already mentioned that there are several typical images of female identity one of which is very closely associated with beauty and it conveys three typologies: the "femme fatale", the woman-girl, and the union of the two previous models¹¹⁰. The "femme fatale" can be described as mysterious, voluptuous, and flirtatious seductress who stirs anxieties and fears in men (her assumed perversity fades with age). The second, the woman-girl is a nymph that bears childlike features surrounded by an aura of innocence and purity (her seductress powers are not obvious and/or conscious). The last type would be the union between the two previous ones; it is the woman that is innocent yet seductive. These gender stereotypes were not the source of inspiration only for Surrealist men but also for other artists, female as well, in their attempt to strip off those superficial, rigid, and predictable auras assigned to women.

As it was already argued, on one side, personal and legal vulnerability of woman can push her into the "victim" role; this vulnerability, fragility, lack of experience, pronounced "inferiority" is to be connected also to the image of a young beautiful girl, nymph or the woman-girl stereotype. On the other side, woman's "sexual attributes" could turn her into "femme fatale" position of a seductress (the same one which in psychoanalytic jargon is called "castrating" woman¹¹¹). Consequently, man's perception of woman shifts between two poles – between "the offered and desired woman and antagonistic phallic woman"¹¹². In Christian theology, Eve represented as the great temptress is guilty of the fall of man and loss of happiness and for that reason resentment and anxiety have been jeopardizing the

¹⁰⁹ Caballero, Juncal, op. cit. p. 80

¹¹⁰ Suárez Villegas, J.C., op.cit. p. 9

¹¹¹ Gubern, Román, op. cit., p. 34

¹¹² Ibid. p. 35

relationship between the sexes from the earliest times until today. Man's fear of woman is deeply rooted in sex, as evidenced by the mere fact that the more sexually attractive woman is, the more man is afraid of her (because of his ardent lust) and therefore he intends to keep her enslaved¹¹³. When speaking about "the dread of woman", Karen Horney questions men's secret fear of women also emphasizing it as a surprising fact that women themselves have been ignoring it for so long. "The man has very obvious strategic reasons to hide his fear but also to try by all means to deny it himself. For that reason, the efforts to which I have alluded are proposed with aim to "objectify" it in the artistic and scientific creative activity."¹¹⁴ There are various ways that man can use in order to mitigate his dread of woman including by seeing her as an irrelevant, inferior creature, lovable in its appearance yet unable to imperil him in any way. This dread of woman is especially pronounced in case of "femme fatale" and therefore is one of the possible reasons for which men have the soft spot for "girls" – young girl, adolescent, young woman, nymph, nymphet, and all that the stereotype of woman-girl within the diversity of its shades of meaning can signify involving the image of sexually precocious and desirable girl. Surely, in terms of man's relating with young girl/woman, there must be significant pleasure and satisfaction to elaborate one's "Pygmalion complex" of working on, creating, and shaping a personality of another, namely of an inexperienced girl, as an easy and mouldable material. Up to what extent that exact type of relating is a rich bud based on fixations, early conditioning, complexes, and traumas to the ego, and up to what level it can reach the full bloom inclined to the overtones of psychopathological symbiosis are the aspects that should be left to other sciences but nevertheless must not be completely dismissed. The allure of being the creator, of "creating the other" cleverly wrapped into a "love story" context often dwells in relationships that have to do with imbalance (as between "superior and inferior"), for example, age gap, intellectual difference, economic inequality, etc.

That very man's dread of woman triggered his aggression against her which was very obvious especially in the media of word and image that together with the substrate of the pre-existing misogyny brought the "femme fatale" or vamp woman to the level of peculiar and anecdotal.¹¹⁵ Misogynist and sexist authors like Lombroso certainly contributed to such vision claiming that "the lack of maternal sentiments in prostitutes makes them twin sisters of born criminal women"¹¹⁶ where one of the fundamental characteristics of "femme fatale" is

¹¹³ Horney, Karen, op. cit. p. 128

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 155

¹¹⁵ Bornay, Erika, *Las hijas de Lilith*, Ediciones Cátedra, 1ª ed. Madrid, 1990, p. 89

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 88

generally being seen as sterile. Popular misconceptions against woman through the history also facilitated man's interest and passions for young girls as the symbol of virginity, purity, innocence, inexperience, and so on. The general association of a young girl with virginity might be a dubious misconception that reduces the concept of "virginity" to the absence of defloration thus, intentionally or unintentionally, ignoring possibilities of oral and anal practices. Albeit, the main vision of a woman-girl is narrowly connected with objectified image of what is recognized as "girly" features in woman that are supposedly identified as light, harmless, attractive; it is more of a promise than a real picture. The male passions for virgins and girls directly influenced formation of the woman-girl stereotype. Furthermore, it must be noted that it is a kind of a double image in itself because

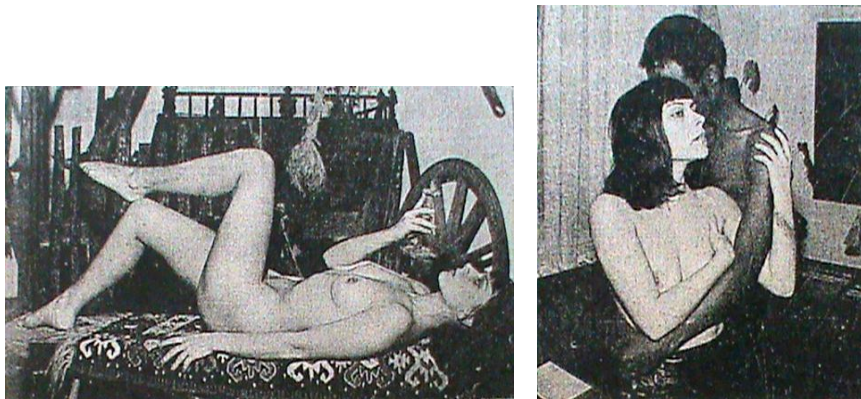
...the border for strict admiration of a girl, as a pure being, not yet corrupted by society, and a murky and elusive sexual attraction, appears as an uncertain edge, full of unacknowledged guilt, hesitation and hypocrisy. There they are, countless plastic images that, should they cause any perplexity in the one who contemplates them today, to make a record, and to know that most of their contemporaries, in an implicit acceptance of the double morality that society had imposed on them, ignored the meaning of them.¹¹⁷

On the other hand, the third type of the stereotype that results from the association of woman with beauty is a hybrid between "femme fatale" and woman-girl that could provoke various responses meaning a certain kind of ambivalence for the possible discrepancy between the "form" and the "content" which could exclude one another mutually. It means that a sensual, curvy appearance of a woman could collide with her allegedly "innocent" behaviour. Correspondingly, largely present are the attempts to epitomize that girly, youthful, sweet, and inexperienced impersonations which is understandable for they basically project the picture of a "woman as a girl". That is the image less "threatening" than the one of "femme fatale" and as such for man more "acceptable" and easier to manage. The understandable level of pretence, play, and manipulation depends on the reasons and type of manifestations. Needless to say, in that type of image possible deviations could occur of an infantile, vulgar, grotesque, caricature, comic and/or pathetic character.

The representation of woman as sexual object is the most common form of her representation in works of art from the distant past to the present. As the creators, patrons

¹¹⁷ Bornay, Erika, op. cit., p. 144

and collectors were mostly men and belonging to the patriarchal, religious and anthropocentric cognitive framework, therefore in the artworks woman obtains a place of usually naked and/or eroticized object. Throughout history, the situation is changing due to the increasing presence of women in the arts adopting new ways of representation of women with the critique of the existing models. One of the first such examples in the art of Serbia in the late 1960s is the conceptual artist Katalin Ladik (1942) “whose goal was sexual liberation of women through bodily expression, deconstructing the established art system and the promotion of women authors, free of all social and artistic stereotypes in the spirit of second-wave feminism”¹¹⁸. She is the poetess, performer, experimental artist, and actress; her work includes collages, photography, records, performances and happenings in both urban and natural environments.



Katalin Ladik, magazine *Start*, Zagreb, 1970



Katalin Ladik, magazine *Start*, Zagreb, 1978

¹¹⁸ *Introduction to Gender Theories*, op. cit., p. 433



Katalin Ladik, *The Screaming Hole*, performance, Novi Sad, 1979



Katalin Ladik, *Pseudosculpture*, 1982, photography: Varga S. Tibor

I did not deny either my femininity or my biological role, and I did not want to become a stereotype of attractiveness, but I did not want to neglect myself like some women I saw in America did. I think that sexual game is a ritual, that one side must like the other and vice versa, and in that game sometimes I accepted the active role which terrified most men. Double moral was against me at all levels, from the family over photojournalism and newspapers to socio-political level.¹¹⁹

“The literary and artistic activity of Katalin Ladik shows a strong feminist component dealing with issues such as eroticism, bisexuality, patriarchal society and spirituality, and her inspirations range from pagan legends to Christian stereotypes, folklore, Surrealist or Dada

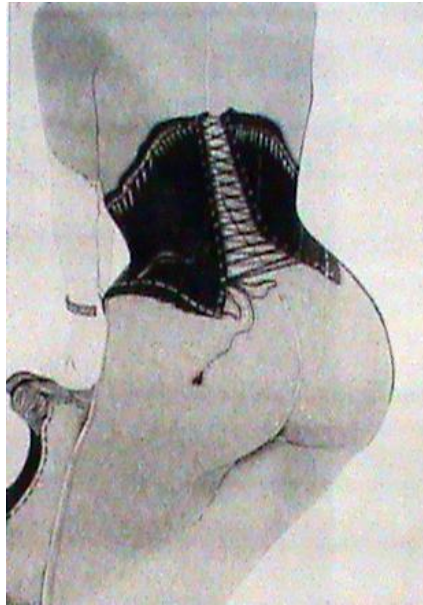
¹¹⁹ See *Interview with Katalin Ladik* in the Annex

principles.”¹²⁰ Katalin Ladik’s performances, erotic and powerful, are characterized by their avant-garde approach. The influence of liberal feminism is present in these works by emphasizing the equality of women in the work and in the freedom of making art. But it can be also said that the gynocentric feminism is close to the aspirations of this author who by total control over her body also points out its differences, power, and freedom. Therefore, Ladik’s diversity of artworks can be considered as revolutionary because in addition to other aspects of social life, they certainly contributed to the sexual revolution and women's liberation. Katalin Ladik can be seen as a many gifted “Renaissance” female artist of Yugoslav Neo-avant-garde. She started in the late 1960s and continued into the 1970s fighting for her equal status and visibility of her artwork and actions, and the radical artistic concepts that provided the best alternatives. Needless to say, as it would be expected from an author of her profile, Katalin Ladik is still active, nowadays living and working in Hungary.



Rada Selaković, *Untitled*, Plexiglass series, oil and glass paint on plexiglass, 50 x 70 cm, 1985

¹²⁰ MACBA on Katalin Ladik, <http://www.macba.cat/en/the-yellow-bolero-3587> (accessed on September 10, 2014)



Rada Selaković, *Untitled*, Plexiglass series, oil and glass paint on plexiglass, 70 x 50 cm, 1985

Rada Selaković (1952-2008) is a painteress who worked within the variety of completely dissimilar registers of postmodern and non-narrative painting among which are also the introspective self-erotization, heterosexual seduction as well as the motives connected to fetishes.

What makes her painting different from the context of “postmodern female painting” is the rigorous accuracy and narrative accentuated representation of “erotic” and “sexuality”. Female painter appears like a “voyeuress” – instead of “voyeur” – concentrated on the view that arrogates erotized/sexualized body. She appropriates “the body of the other” but also realizes the projected body of her “phantasm”. The seen and the phantasmal overlap and create the illusion of the “eerie absence” of what the one longs for (plexiglass series, 1984-85).¹²¹

For instance, what is specific about these body “portraits” is that besides being creepy in the atmosphere, even though they intend to represent eroticism in the general sense, they also seem disturbing. The overall impression though fixed on the female body that with the fetishes it wears should excite, makes the body “untouchable”, distant and ethereal; instead of seducing and alluring, it creates an inverse image where the content does not directly support the meaning. If a painteress becomes a “voyeuress” she takes the active part, the one assigned

¹²¹ Šuvaković, Miško, *History of Art in Serbia XX Century 1. Radical Art Practices*, op.cit. p. 627

to man officially, to male spectator, male artist. Here, the categories related to “active” and “passive” sex role division are inverted and thus criticized. Therefore, what stereotypically sexy female body should be is here transformed into a cold and imponderable fetish identity. If a woman takes an active part in representing female body, she is in the position to comment on the predetermined sexual behaviour where female is predestined to be “passive” and male is privileged to be “active”. The social relating between sexes reflects in sexual relating dynamics as well – just like in the hierarchy in positioning in the coitus man is dominating woman. For the same logic, does it mean that for her being “passive” woman is automatically also predestined to be raped? If man is “naturally” supposed to be “active”, does violence against woman come naturally to him as well?



Tanja Ostojić, *Be My Guest*, performance, Rome, 2001

In the series *Strategies of Success/Curator Series* (2001-2003) Tanja Ostojić (1972) “uses the body to express criticism of the hierarchy, the stereotypes and the institutionalization ruling the art world through the prism of gender studies and feminist theories”¹²². In the performance *Be My Guest* (2001), Ostojić rearranges the gallery Pallazo delle Esposizioni in Rome, places a bathtub full of water with foam in the middle of the space, and invites the public to the show as an informal gathering with drinks and snacks. However, when the guests arrive they find Ostojić naked sitting in the tub together with the show curator Bartolomeo Pietromarchi both of them engaged in a play of a sexual character. This “theatrical” performance offers a fantasy where different roles are played between Ostojić as

¹²² Kristberga, Laine, *The body as a political instrument and platform for art in the works of Tanja Ostojić*, <http://www.studija.lv/en/?parent=1131> (accessed on September 11, 2014)

an Eastern European artist, the performance curator from Western Europe and the spectators. The gallery and the curator are the art world “officials” (institutions) in the simulated sexual act, but Ostojić and the audience have the chance to “blend” into one, becoming the *Other*; thus she is placing the public to identify with her own specific position of being a female artist from Serbia. When art critic Ludovico Pratesi joins Ostojić and Pietromarchi in the tub, the boundary between the artist and the critic is shattered by the entrance of just another art world “official”. It is still not exactly clear what would have meant if someone from the public had got naked and entered the bath-tub – whether it would have created a misbalance in an already established stereotype about relationship between female artist and male representatives of the art institutions. Or perhaps, the audience would have the chance to “blend” into one with the artist and thus make an intervention into culture politics. In that situation, the relationship of power would certainly depend on the fact whether an “intruder” from the public is a female or a male. However here, for her as a Serbian female artist, the strategy to reach international “success” is by using her body, thus directly and ironically she flirts with the ancient concept of woman as reduced to her body – meaning “prostitution”, to reach her ends.



Tanja Ostojić, *I'll be Your Angel*, performance, Venice Biennial, 2001

Concerned with the critique of the social construction of gender inequality, in her several-day performance *I'll Be Your Angel* (2001) performed during the opening of the 49th Venice Biennial, Tanja Ostojić represented the “escort girl” of the curator Harald Szeemann hence “implying a possible sexual relationship between artist and curator, namely the artist who comes from the margins of Europe, at the time of the devaluation of her origin in the wider European context”¹²³. As a sex object immersed in the artistic elite, dressed in a

¹²³ *Introduction to Gender Theories*, op.cit. p. 433

Christian Lacroix dress and high-heeled shoes, she consciously chooses the role of the starlet, of an unconditional shadow, following Szeemann to all the ceremonies, press conferences and parties. Watching him intently and constantly nodding in approval, with parody and provocation with aim to criticize, Tanja Ostojić has made the social inequality more than obvious, implying that “inequality is conditioned by the social context. This performance of Ostojić, as well as many other similar works created during the past two decades, shows the criticism of contemporary woman who consciously becomes a sex object. When considering the reception of this performance in national and international environment it must be noted that it is often mentioned in the press and scientific literature with mixed reviews for it caused various controversies on account of the concept that deals with the relationship of female artist and her curator(s). In this performance Tanja Ostojić is more of a promise than a real image for she exudes this “femme fatale” aura but is placed in a slightly, the least to say, weird role. This sense of the displaced image or blurred identity is constructed in order to direct our attention to the relation of general inequality between woman artist (even more pronounced by her origin) and art institutions, dominated mainly by male directors, curators, and of course male artists thus introducing the topic of the Other that exists within relating of not only female and male but more precisely and profoundly also between the Eastern Europe and Western Europe as the poles of political and social gender identities as well. Through the means of irony and provocation, Ostojić’s performances aim to comment and criticize the dynamics of culture politics, gender power relations, art institutions, female artists’ position, and place of a woman from Eastern Europe in reference to living and working in Western Europe.

I think “practicing” our gender roles as part of the instalment of the heterosexual normative from the early childhood is universal for all patriarchal cultures. The intensity and sheer extent of what that “training” includes differ, depending on social context one lives in and the relations they maintain... Serbia has its fair share of gender role practice which is heavily influenced by historical context and all aforementioned relations.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ See *Interview with Jelena Radić* in the Annex



Jelena Radić, *Little Red Riding Hood*, video still, 5:35, 2007

Eagerness that dominates the picture that is of getting a man, or rather, pulling him away from the destiny no matter what; and to do it while giving evidence of one's own weakness, dependence and helplessness. This "plan" is always entirely unconscious, but that is exactly why it is pursued with great obstinacy; and what apparently had no sense is revealed as a planned and deliberate eagerness towards a defined objective when considered from the point of view of this unconscious expectation.¹²⁵

The "overvaluation of love", "installing the concept of asexual maternity"¹²⁶ and "false choice" are the topics rising out of the video *Little Red Riding Hood* of Jelena Radić. In the style of the typical Freud's psychoanalytic denominators of the "roles" (Ego, Super-Ego, and Id¹²⁷), the guidance discourse in a theatre-like play is represented through the narration that instructs the young girl's actions. It is the male voice that actually guides the girl on how she should act and grow sexually in order to be socially accepted and successful. The intrusion of parents is also metaphorically involved in order to speak about the early influence of the family on matters of girl's sex and gender. What is the missing definition is the symbolism of the red hood which should stand for the menstruation meaning that it refers directly to the age of puberty and becoming sexually active in terms of possibility of getting pregnant.

Since the concept of "femme fatale" is seen as in contrast with the motherhood and even directly connected to being sterile, prostitute, criminal, etc., in order not to become outcasts, girls have to reach "asexual maternity". It means that maternity and sexuality

¹²⁵ Horney, Karen, op. cit. p. 242

¹²⁶ See Radić, Jelena, *Little Red Riding Hood*, video, <http://vimeo.com/78491461> (accessed on September 11, 2014)

¹²⁷ See Freud, Sigmund, *El yo y el ello*, Alianza, Madrid, 2006

mutually exclude one another; the highest aim for girls (besides grabbing a man) is becoming mothers. During the video we can see the girl playing with make-up, clothes, beauty products, jewellery, all with aim to “hook” a man. Already in the video title entrance, Jelena Radić calls this concept false; she openly names it as a “false choice”, even though there is the whole list of mother’s narrative instructions. For example, in other initiation taboo situations mother is the one introducing the girl into puberty (the role of the initiator of the girl into the next stage of her life is through the older, experienced and a mother herself already confirmed woman). Sent from the mother to visit the grandmother (who she herself is asexual for being already barren) the girl has to take care of her sexual drive with aim to reach, as the story goes, “the concept of monogamous heterosexual relationship in which her role is set to maternity”. These instructions obviously serve in order to “save” girls from the libidinal chaos of possible bisexual and/or homosexual tendencies by directing and fixing solely on the motherhood and all that it requires. Free sexuality expression is forbidden to the one who has to juggle between her Ego, Super-Ego and Id, in order to satisfy her parents’ expectations and become socially accepted. The road of self-betrayal is based on the idea of rejecting one’s sexuality that is traded for security and acceptance, which is exactly what following gender stereotypes from the early age brings. It is the path that fortifies patriarchy where woman is restricted to motherhood, heterosexuality and monogamy; educated from the childhood to be mothers, girls internalize and follow those stereotypes as their own (Super-Ego with the significance of unconsciously internalized system of social values).

In summary, even though the stereotypes of the “femme fatale” and woman-girl were and are treated by numerous artists, what is characteristic for the authors commented above is that, besides being male artists’ muses, these two female stereotypes are treated in a rather ironic and critical way meaning that female authors feel the need to directly deal with the images imposed to them for their being personally touched by the topic. Therefore, some in order to defy the positioning of woman artist in the art world did performances to pronounce their freedom while others, the more contemporary, have made more radical shifts in identity manipulations in order to speak about gender inequality. Man as artist, critic, curator is the matrix for the art world official institutions, so “femme fatale” type of identities could menace him, like in the myth about the “castrated genius” where the “serious intrusion of woman into the art would be an incurable disorder”¹²⁸. To add, if she is active, woman is seen as

¹²⁸ Bornay, Erika, op. cit. p. 377

“castrating”; therefore to put her into an active role means to jeopardize man by inverting upside down the already fixed male hierarchical positioning.

On the other side, when speaking about woman-girl stereotype concept and context that involves picture of a nymphet, it should not be dismissed that it implies significance that can be closely associated with the existence of possible deviations, perversity, vulgarity and the variety of similar meanings. For that reason artists intend to treat them in accordance with that, namely with an ironical display of meaning that are connected to that same vision. As the nymphet identity and woman-girl stereotype are largely present, in literature, in movies and of course in life, they give a possible broad perspective into the details about that socially and culturally constructed stereotype. Besides that, the heterosexist views are also epitomized in the education of little girls from the early age therefore supporting the entire structure of that stereotyped image alive and functional. Thus, heterosexist upbringing directs sexuality and gender roles in order to control them with aim to enhance and sustain patriarchy. In addition, in time “femme fatale”, woman-girl, or nymphet female identity has grown into man’s sexual gadget that decorates, accompanies, and advertises products in the market, the fact that Serbian female artists cannot ignore.

3. FEMININITY IN SERBIA WITHIN THE FRAMES OF ARCHETYPES AND MYTHOLOGY

Given that specific femininity concepts in arts can be also viewed through the lenses of archetypes and local mythology, it is necessary to define the lines this part of the research is conducted along. Firstly, archetypes of gender in Western culture play a certain part in current stereotypes about woman and secondly, there is local, specifically related mythology – here Serbian and Balkan, that hugely colours interpretations of gender positioning through some works of art. Anthropology, philosophy, gender studies and hermeneutics are some of the disciplines, along with others, to employ in this chapter. In this case, my interest in Serbian mythology and folklore is with aim to pay attention to the folk-belief category which conveys a wide variety of beliefs, expressions, and behaviours some of which are reflected here in some artworks dedicated to femininity. As folk beliefs include magic, superstition, taboos, old wives' tales, charms, omens, and folk medicine, they can represent a fertile ground for the research in identity. The attempt to study the influence of local folklore on artistic production does not intend to accept or to reject its impact but rather to involve it as a specifically oriented activity that manifests as certain uniqueness in art practices.

Carl Gustav Jung refers to archetypal images as unconscious contents of modern man that resemble the products of the mind of ancient man¹²⁹. Consequently, such imagery also becomes closely related to the process of stereotyping genders on the basis of archetypal vision of man and woman as supposedly stemming from the “collective unconscious”. With or without an obvious excuse, gender stereotypes built on the archetypal and the mythical are deeply rooted culturally. Here, the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy symbolized in the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur (where the Athenian hero kills the mythological creature hidden in the labyrinth) can serve as an illustration. In this myth, the labyrinth itself, in all its complexity, illogicality and entanglements, with the perilous Minotaur lurking within, represents female mind. There are numerous archetypes about the feminine and the masculine. For example, “the masculine was considered to stand for light, Sun, time, impulse, order, externality, cold, objectivity, reason, aggression, fighting, violence, significance, clarity,

¹²⁹ See Bozal, Ana, *El papel de los arquetipos en los actuales estereotipos sobre la mujer*, Temas 11, Sevilla, 1998; p. 96

etc.”¹³⁰. Given these points, as compared to the male matrix, the feminine was considered to represent “depth, intuition, night, shadow, interior, nature, earth, heat, feeling, passion, chaos, vitality, responsiveness, gentleness, quietness, conservation, defence, etc.”¹³¹.

Though largely polarized, masculine and feminine in archetypal images of man and woman were visibly interwoven through mythology in all their clearly defined distinct and predictable features. Therefore, there are parameters to compare various deities, gods, goddesses, mythological creatures, religious personifications, etc. in order to underline messages that construct the patriarchal mind. Just like Virgin Mary is compared to Eve, Eve herself is to be juxtaposed to Lilith for example (only when Lilith rebelled and abandoned Adam did God create Eve). Female deities, goddesses, mythological beings and creatures like Lilith, Venus, Medusa, Ishtar, Proserpine, sphinxes, sirens, nymphs, and many other were and are closely related to representations that are alluring and powerful yet destructive, treacherous, merciless, dangerous, revengeful, devious, animalistic, primitive, etc. It is essential to emphasize the fact that the mythological subjects mentioned above also received the same negative treatment in arts in order to fertilize the overall misogynist attitudes. Ultimately, the morphology of beauty is in a beast or “animality” – “Sphinx, Medusa and Siren are three Beauties that Mythology degraded by covering them with morphological characteristics of beast and, converted into monstrous hybrids, they will seek the downfall and ruin of hero-man”¹³².

Some of the famous archetypal representations of women throughout history have been: mother, daughter, wife, sister, witch, virgin, siren, hetaera, and wise woman. According to Jung, archetypal representations are an instinctive perception of oneself, as we critically observe, if we take into account that the archetypes are guided by the values and standards of the patriarchal system.¹³³

Therefore, up to the present time and for the same archetypal logic of female identity, woman has been associated with motherhood, birth, earth, land, soil and nature; e.g. the primeval goddess Gaea (Gaia or Gê) – Mother Earth was portrayed as inseparable from her native element earth in the ancient Greek mythology. Even then, woman in the role of deity was deeply rooted into nature, bounded and coalesced to the soil. As it can be seen, in this case,

¹³⁰ Bozal, Ana, *El papel de los arquetipos en los actuales estereotipos sobre la mujer*, op.cit., p. 97

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² See Bornay, Erika, op.cit., p. 276

¹³³ *Introduction to Gender Theories*, op.cit. p. 431

the ancient images of femininity personified woman as static, immovable and/or passive and, for that same conditionality, coercively faithful and loyal.

Given these points, feminist interventions in the archetypal criticism are exploring those mythical notions of the collective unconscious that are subversive or at least different from the prevailing patriarchal archetypes. In the long run, various efforts are undertaken to locate time points and to decipher structures in history and/or culture that are responsible for establishing gender hierarchy. In Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralist anthropology theory, the problematic nature/culture distinction is included; it served some feminist theorists to "support and elucidate the sex/gender distinction: the position that there is a natural or biological female who is subsequently transformed into a socially subordinate "woman", with the consequence that "sex" is to nature as gender is to culture. The fact is that positioning culture and nature into a binary relationship of hierarchy means that culture is actually free to inflict meaning on nature thus placing and defining it as "Other", while preserving that model of domination intact.

Woman, so often associated with nature for the reasons mentioned above, both in archetypes and mythology, is stuck in the whirlpool of misogynist dialectics fortified through that nature/culture discourse where man stands for the active, abstract, masculine agency capable of scientific and cultural achievements and progress, while woman herself remains "awaiting signification from an opposing masculine subject"¹³⁴. When anthropologist Sherry Ortner discusses whether female is to nature as male is to culture¹³⁵, we can also question whether perhaps "nature and culture are ahistorically separate entities"¹³⁶. Žarana Papić suggests that "anthropology in its ahistorical approach, together with other disciplines, is responsible for superficial and irresponsible treatment of these issues. According to her, Ortner, in that opposition between nature and culture which is present in all societies, tried to locate explanations about universal and pancultural fact – second-class status of woman"¹³⁷. In continuation, she argues that man in almost every culture belongs to a higher, transcendent realm of culture, while women and femininity remain in the sphere of natural and "less developed". In almost all societies, woman is defined as "closer to nature as opposed to men" because her body and her life are much more tightly bounded to the natural processes of the

¹³⁴ Butler, Judith: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, op. cit., p. 48

¹³⁵ See Ortner, Sherry B. 1974. *Is female to male as nature is to culture?* In M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds), *Woman, culture, and society*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 68-87.

¹³⁶ Papić, Žarana, op.cit., p. 81

¹³⁷ Ibid.

reproduction of the species. All of her activities are indicated as lower in the order of things, drowned in the natural functions and, therefore, culturally inferior and deprived of social power. Papić claims that Ortner believes that “contradiction of all cultural systems lies in the fact that the role of woman in her emergence from natural was neither considered nor marked a powerful factor in cultural processes”¹³⁸.

On the whole, if culture is the dominion of men and nature is reserved for women, is it not supposed that culture should research nature and not so readily try to invade and control it? Here is an attempt to understand radical art practices employed by some authors with the aim to process specificities of female identity from the point of view as directly related to the issues stemming from the concepts of archetypes and myths. As local characteristics of Serbian customs, religion and tradition imply, there are points of overlapping between South Slavic folklore with that of other nations.

¹³⁸ Papić, Žarana, op.cit., p. 82

3.1. Special Characteristics due to the Local Origin

The former conceptualization of the body is inseparable from the binary construction of gender relations, whereby man and spirit on one side, and woman's body on the other, are positioned as mutually polarized categories. Feminist theorists criticize this approach based on essentialism, naturalism and biologism, according to which the body is the product of the raw, passive nature, and interpreted as a biologically given, non-cultural concept.

They believe that body is a "living" concept and a variable cultural product, a site of constant social, political, legal, medical and geographical inscriptions. For them, body is not only constructed through social practices, but at the same time located in the centre of their production. Female body is certainly a major symbolical space for the production of different concepts, and accordingly for the creation of narratives and representations in most cultures.¹³⁹

What Ana Hofman calls "ritual body"¹⁴⁰ when she refers to woman's body in rural areas in Serbia bears a very strong ritual meaning. Many of the customs observed by ethnologists confirm the strength of the female body as an essential element in the protection from unclean forces and weather. Stages through which the female body goes (such as menstruation, pregnancy or menopause) were considered phenomena during which woman does not have complete control over her body and is in a special relation with magical powers and "the other world". According to such beliefs, during those periods woman is ritually "unclean" and "dangerous" to man and other members of the community. The concept of the female body in the rural community was conditioned by sexuality, and therefore interpreted as an agent that provides fertility to the community i.e. as socially useful. Cultural practices in traditional society permit male "immateriality" to dominate female "corporeality" through a series of taboos and prohibitions. It is about cultural norms that are a part of a wider system of representative cultural practices that articulate the role of women in patriarchal society. "Symbolic activities governing body politics in rural areas are not a universal phenomenon, but are a part of the historical and political context, and as such, discursive practices for the

¹³⁹Hofman, Ana, *Public Manifestations and Representations of Female Body in Socialism, Body and Clothing*, Univerzitet u Nišu, Centar za naučna istraživanja SANU, ed. Dragan Žunić, Niš, 2009, p. 189-199., p.190

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

production and maintenance of the existing power relations.”¹⁴¹ Establishing a new political identity and social relations with the advent of socialism destabilized taboos related to woman's body that were present in the rural community. Socialist emancipation of women in the former Yugoslavia was primarily formal equality, while their pre-war social role still remained at the level of wives, mothers and homemakers. It is obvious that women have a representative, symbolic role in the socialist system of power, and that gender equality was understood, but obviously proclaimed only politically. However, as we shall see, the body remains one of the main grounds on which, in one way or another, socio-political power relations are constructed and maintained.

Ritual female body

As if woman had a direct connection to sources of the eldritch, the supernatural and the transcendental, she as the “representative” of nature in binary definition of sexes is the one that becomes active in the rites and rituals that are linked to procreation, fertility, death, as well as in other so called transitional phases that are social in their character, such as, getting married, which in patriarchy is woman’s utmost achievement – for it is the act of initiation by which she is entering a new cycle of her communal life. Therefore, in Serbia her role in all the “mysterious” doings was never negotiable but obligatory, while man insisted to stay away from it all in order to remain intact, scientific, cultural and civilized. So, it can be seen that women who are otherwise socially invisible become very active and prominent agents in manifestations of what is believed to be customs, rituals or even magic. For that same reason, in the rites of marriage, fertility, agrarian magic, burial customs and funeral, in other words, in all “transitional” life cycles phenomena, women are subjects and initiators and, probably for that reason, are often believed to have the natural irresistible pull towards such and the like activities and actions connected to magic and the occult.

¹⁴¹Hofman, Ana, *Public Manifestations and Representations of Female Body in Socialism*, op. cit., p. 192

As it was already mentioned in section 1.5.2., when commenting on the rites of the wedding ritual in rural areas, women – the bride and her mother-in-law play a major role; the young one for it is the ritual of her initiation into an adult female life and the experienced older one in order to structure a family hierarchy, to transmit fertility to her daughter-in-law through rites of contagious magic¹⁴² and to accept the newcomer to the home hearth. It can be also added that their actions thus continue the pattern which repeats itself from generation to generation. What is especially interesting is the fact that in the situation of welcoming the bride, the groom's mother (and not his father) is the official representative of the family; she is "the supreme authority that inaugurates the bride into the married status"¹⁴³. The case is that there must be a kind of unity and cooperation between groom's mother and his bride in order for them to live and work together, taking into consideration that the bride often gets more closely linked to the female circle of her husband's family than to her husband. The other reason is that his mother (bride's mother-in-law) actually symbolizes the house itself because in the patriarchal stereotype she stands for home, she is the bearer of life in the house.

When speaking about the role of women in the rites of the Balkans, it is necessary to mention not only ritual female body, but also the specific corporeal theory as represented from the historical perspective. From antiquity to the present, rituals that surround death requested involvement and active participation of women¹⁴⁴. The task of women was to prepare the deceased for burial, mourn the dead and most importantly to lament publicly. All those activities of the funeral rituals that enabled the deceased to leave this world included some type of necessary contact and communication with the dead which led to "ritual impurity" called miasma – it's the same idea of "impurity" that follows the birth, contact with pregnant women, new mothers and newborn babies. For woman, it is an ambivalent position to perform the rites because, on one hand, they endanger her by miasma while, on the other, they confirm her competence and power. This is evident in the case of laments. Those who are silent in public life now in the private domain of the ritualistic become the most visible

¹⁴² In South Slavic wedding customs, mother-in-law hands over her traditional apron to bride when she arrives to the house which symbolizes the transfer of her generative functions (actually generative function of her gender, family and house) to a new wife who will enable further existence of that community. See Čausidis, *Nikos, Skirt between Woman and Earth. A Diachronic Overview of the Semiotics of Covering the Lower Part of Female Body, Body and Clothing*, Univerzitet u Nišu, Centar za naučna istraživanja SANU, ed. Dragan Žunić, Niš, 2009, p. 201-233, p. 206

¹⁴³ Malešević, Miroslava, op. cit., p. 94-95

¹⁴⁴ See Stevanović, Lada, *The Role of Women in the Rites of the Balkans: Active Participants vs. Victims, Theories and Politics of Gender*, ed. Tatjana Rosić, Institut za književnost i umetnost, Beograd, 2008, p. 235-243, p. 235

subjects. Establishment and differentiation of gender roles in the ritual affect creation of different gender-constructed narratives and consequently, in the case of public expression of mourning, grief, pain, lamentation, men are less in touch with their emotions and more distant because of the fear of death. On the other side, at funerals women can penetrate into the public sphere which is otherwise closed to them. The cemetery is a kind of public space where women predominate, in the face of death, female voice is heard by the wider community. However, it does not mean lamentation is a completely spontaneous form - it is a kind of expression and controlled grief that carries a message, thus representing subversive communication model¹⁴⁵. Even when the medieval church introduced requiem, hymns, prayers, and psalms, customary practices of wailing over the dead were not eradicated.

To explain the specificities of the ritual female body in the Balkans, it is essential to mention the example of the concept of the victim as well. In the beginning of the 14th century, in Serbian epic poetry, the poem *The Building of Skadar* appeared, which describes the building of a fortress on the Bojana river at Skadar (Albania). In order to ensure the successful construction, one of the builders' wives was built alive into the fortress¹⁴⁶. As she had a baby, her breasts remained free to be able to breastfeed and there were also openings for her eyes to see. Bricked woman's body in this poem is simultaneously present and absent. The sacrifice was necessary for the benefit of the community and, to this purpose, neither a virgin nor a girl was elected, but a woman who, as a mother, already contributed to the society and continued to do so even though she was turned to stone. And here is the female body devalued again – because it is always associated with the body which is presented as the belittled side of the binary couple.

As Freud claims, for us, taboo presents two opposite meanings – one of the sacred or consecrated and the other one of the disturbing, dangerous, prohibited or impure¹⁴⁷. As such, it carries the notion of the reserve manifested through prohibitions and restrictions. He also calls taboo the “sacred fear” that causes emotional ambivalence in us. For its active presence in rites and rituals, for its direct connection to transitional phenomena in society (as associated

¹⁴⁵ Stevanović, Lada, op. cit., p.236

¹⁴⁶ The perplexity of the scene and the imagery is something that I still remember very vividly as a shock that I experienced when analyzing the poem in primary school (and even now the feeling I get is much the same). At that tender age, the idea to brick a woman alive appeared disturbing, morbid and disconcerting. But at the time being, the difference between boys' reaction and girls' reaction was already defined – while girls felt puzzled, uneasy and disturbed about it, boys were making jokes “menacing” and teasing us with the idea.

¹⁴⁷ Freud, Sigmund, *Tótem y Tabú-Obras completas*, volumen XIII, Amorrortu Editores, Madrid – Buenos Aires, 2005, p.29

to transience and nature), ritual female body bears mystifications that undoubtedly provoke interpretations similar to those of taboos. Occult, subconscious, uncontrollable aspects of female body bring ambivalent meanings of active and passive, of subject and sacrifice, of prohibited and desired as “an interior necessity ignored by the conscience”¹⁴⁸. The ambivalent attitude towards female body and its function in the rituals is reflected in the fact that it simultaneously awakens contradictory emotions because of its “powers” – respect on one side and, on the other, fear mixed with contempt and disgust because of miasma. In short, too complex from the patriarchy point of view, female body in this context is all too readily pushed into representations of the chthonic, the pagan and the primitive and, therefore, consequently, interpreted and treated.

In conclusion, the taboos that surrounded female body in the Serbian rural community were largely destabilized through state-controlled public activity as part of a strategy of establishing a new identity in politics and social relations. That ritual female body became a canvas for socio-political lines to be engraved; it transmuted into a battleground to express relations of power. As already noted, the socialist emancipation was primarily focused on the formal equality of women, thereby retaining their former roles. In a socialist system of power, woman is only a representative member, she actually has a primarily symbolic role; the concept of “gender equality” was part of the official party propaganda or political program.

South Slavic mythology

Slavic mythology is a branch of the polytheistic religion that was practiced by the Slavs before Christianization. That old Slavic religion evolved for over a thousand years. Serbs as South Slavic people have their mythology that shares similarities with other Slavic mythologies. The Christianization of the Serbian lands took place in the 9th century and Serbia (the Serbian Principality) is considered Christian as of 870. The identity of ethnic Serbs was historically based on Orthodox Christianity to the extent that some people claimed that those who were

¹⁴⁸ Freud, Sigmund, *Tótem y Tabú-Obras completas*, op. cit., p. 45

not Orthodox were not Serbs and also, by the same token, the period before Christianity is historically considered to be a pagan, polytheistic period.

In general, what Christianization brought to all the lands was the religion based on miracles and, as such, it required the capacity of abstract thinking. In order to understand how miracles “work”, for a new believer it was necessary to understand symbolism and interpret metaphors. The fact was that the Slavic pantheon was already teeming with myriad of deities and demons. At the same time, it meant that the mind that was entangled with fertile mythological personifications had to deprive itself of multitude of imagery and meanings of what was considered to be divine in the pagan sense in order to redirect to the monotheistic principle. The process of evangelization was meticulously designed to offer new content of Christian teachings, but in the form of worshipping that was pagan so that no immediate resistance would occur. The new religious content was served in the old form. That all led to the “switching” of the old for the new as it was impossible to root out completely all the pagan cosmology from beliefs, customs, superstitions and rituals.

When speaking about South Slavic mythology of Serbs, we can say that the traditional demonology carries its specificities thus differentiating a peculiar mentality, a special psychological makeup as referring to nature, others and the world in general. There are many demons¹⁴⁹ that are categorized in various ways – by their origin, by their habitat, by their functions, by their moral characteristics, or by their exterior form, but those categories are not clearly defined and, therefore, should be treated and interpreted individually. Serbs used to believe in vampires, witches, *mora*, fairies, fates, dragons (*ala*, *aždaja* and *zmaj* are all demons derived from dragon, but with different characteristics, appearances, powers and habitats), *zduhači*, giants, plague (*Čuma*, *Morija*), angels, devil, disease demons, winds, etc.

First thing to remember here is that we shall concentrate on the most prominent female representations in Serbian mythology and, therefore, it is necessary firstly to mention Baba Jaga¹⁵⁰ who in Slavic mythology represents old witch woman from the forest. Notorious in all Slavic traditions from folk demonology, witch¹⁵¹ is a combination of woman and demonic creature, she is wise and possesses a higher knowledge and wisdom, and is capable to transform into animals, objects and other persons; she can cast spells on nature, crops and

¹⁴⁹See the chapter on demons in human and half-human forms, p.203-320. Čajkanović, Veselin, *The Old Serbian Religion and Mythology*, SANU, Srpska Književna Zadruga, Beograd, 1995

¹⁵⁰*Slavic Mythology: Encyclopedic Dictionary*, ed. Svetlana M. Tolstoj, Ljubinko Radenković, Zepter Book World, Beograd, 2011, p. 11

¹⁵¹*ibid.*, p. 77

domestic animals; witch causes natural disasters and can produce rain. Her powers are usually inherited from her mother or obtained by intercourse with the devil. The connection between human and demonic is usually described as a type of soul dualism, having two souls in one, meaning that in one woman her soul and that of a demon both reside. Usually, a witch is imagined as an old, ugly woman with hooked nose, with long gray hair, humped and limping.

In beliefs and folklore of South Slavs, fairy¹⁵² is a female mythological being that has primarily positive characteristics, but nevertheless can seek revenge if offended or attacked. Fairies dwell in nature in all its forms – near rivers, lakes, seas, forests, mountains. They are mortal and have a stable anthropomorphic form – they are tall, very beautiful, with long usually light hair. It is believed that fairies like to sing, dance, cook and weave. They keep their habitat secret from humans, protect it and punish those who discover them. In South Slavs, nymph is a fairy¹⁵³ and, for some authors, *rusalke* are Slavic nymphs, goddesses of waters and forests. Beautiful and alluring, *rusalke* tempt men in order to kill them. In mythological sentences, *rusalka*¹⁵⁴ is a fairy creature that dwells in water, she is naked with very long hair and fish tail. Majority of authors even equalizes *rusalka* with fairy and can associate her, just like fairy, with evil creatures. Also, *rusalke* are very often connected to the agrarian magic and rituals. In short, *rusalka* is a complex mythic personality and today is mostly seen as water, forest or crops demon. For Serbs, besides being young beautiful girls, *rusalke* are redheads who dance in secret places to lure and attract men.

The contradictory attitude towards that female ritual body, the ambivalence of female role in the rituals as an active agent and sacrifice victim, can also be continued and connected with visions and characterizations of South Slavic Serbian female demons and deities. Female deities are archetypal symbolic expressions of higher states of consciousness that represent concepts considered to be feminine attributes. Here for instance, in the most prominent personifications of traditional demonology – witch and fairy, an obvious duality and dichotomy of character can be discovered in both. In the witch concept, it is believed that she has a kind of a double soul – one of her own and another of a demon. On the other side, fairy is experienced as basically a positive being, but, nevertheless, can be also revengeful, perilous and merciless. Though alluringly attractive, she has a dark side as well and, for that reason, can also be interpreted as double-faced and consequently more diabolical (when compared to the

¹⁵² *Slavic Mythology: Encyclopedic Dictionary*, op.cit., p.80-82

¹⁵³ Petrović, Sreten, *Serbian Mythology: in Beliefs, Customs and Rituals*, Narodna knjiga – Alfa, Beograd, 2004, p. 530

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 531

witch who is obviously negative). The fact here is that the image of woman is notoriously defined as unstable, changeable, uncontrollable and out of reach. By all means, such a concept seems to be very explicitly associated with the idea of the *Id* in Freud or by other means to the *unconscious* by Jung. As for the latter, when speaking about conscious, unconscious, and individuation, he claims that “in the unconscious of every man there is a female personality and vice versa – in every woman there is a male personality”¹⁵⁵. If the possibility of the so-called *shadow* (*anima* as personal unconscious) is added to this picture, the situation reasonably evolves into the realm of psychiatry. Needless to say, even though archetypes and mythology often portray female personalities negatively as well, what must be taken into account is that here it is obviously the mystified “female power” that frustrates male who wishes to passively distance himself from “nature” and all that it means.

¹⁵⁵Jung, Carl Gustav, *Los arquetipos y lo inconsciente colectivo*, Editorial Trotta, S.A., Madrid, 2002, p. 266

3.2. Magic, Rites and Religion

To begin with, it is necessary to criticize the traditional (and false) association of male with objectivity which denies the possibility and even the right to subjectivity, emotions, and apparently reserve it for women. As we know, the culture-nature dichotomy reappears in many other forms in the Western dualistic thinking. This series of dualisms is one of the first targets of feminist criticism of the conceptual framework of modern science. If the focus has historically been on the binomial man-culture, in this new version it is its primacy over the woman-nature concept, and scientific-male production would not be anything but the result of man's eagerness to deny his own nature. While man is defined by his achievements in the world of social institutions and, therefore, is associated with the cultural, woman obviously lacks her profile in the world and is "stuck" to her connection to nature. Woman's status stems from her age, her life cycle, her biological functions and her existing or non-existing association with man. "A typical mechanism of hegemonic ideologies in the West represents social relations of power as natural. Thus, the presentation of women as nurturing and passive beings and men as active aggressive beings ensures complementarity of the sexes in the heterosexual union."¹⁵⁶

When speaking about the feminist critique of the late socialism, there is a significant need to mention how Dubravka Đurić defines feminist art: 1. feminist art in the narrow sense, 2. female art, and 3. decentred artistic practices (e.g. *parler femme*, womanspeak)¹⁵⁷. Interpretations of "female" and/or "feminist" art practices as critique of socialist ideology can be seen in the theory of Marina Gržinić, Bojana Pejić and Miško Šuvaković. As Marina Gržinić claims, socialism can be treated as phallogocentric patriarchy in the form of ideology. As such, it is the system that artistic practices deal with in their own way; artists of the 1970s started using analytical conceptual art, video, performance, etc. What is noticeable is that the traditional means of expression turned to action: happening, event and performance. On the other side, as the work of art in the literal sense is dematerialized, the attention is turned to

¹⁵⁶ Osborne, Raquel, *La construcción sexual de la realidad*, Madrid, Cátedra (Feminismos), 1993, p.73

¹⁵⁷See Dedić, Nikola, *Towards a Radical Critique of Ideology: From Socialism to Post-socialism*, Prodajna galerija "Beograd", Beograd, 2009, p.126-127

artist's body as the means of expression, which inevitably raises theatricality in the performance.

Looking back to the early works of Marina Abramović, there is bareness and literalness into them which arouse great interest and numerous interpretations from both art historians and performance theorists.

For Šuvaković, her early performances are:

on one side extremely simplistic and literal, while on the other they produce complex and far-reaching consequences and conclusions. Here, their existentiality, empty of meaning, were solved by theorists by adding symbolic, feminist, anti-communist, mythological, fetishist etc. layers of meaning. In the interpretative sense, that is legitimate and correct to some extent. However, the greatest value of those performances of Marina Abramović is not in their meaning, but in the existentialist nakedness of the exhibited body as the site of the "naked life".¹⁵⁸

If so, does it mean that the sole body is the only topic of her early works and as such it is a sufficient corpus of meaning in the existential philosophical sense? Does the sex of that body matter, or is it "only" a body? However, in various phases and periods of Marina Abramović's work, body politics of her performances was questioned (by theorists, her audience and her colleagues – by the public opinion in general). The fact is that over time she went back and forth to anthropological performances that stem from philosophy, religion, spirituality, Eastern teachings and dialectics, etc. In this case, there are performances that border on ritualistic and magic. There are many magic rituals with purpose to defend against the unusual and dangerous tendencies of the unconscious. "The unusual fact that the dream represents, on one hand, the voice and the divine message, and secondly, an inexhaustible source of sorrows, does not bother the primitive spirit".¹⁵⁹ In the examples of the "triptych" performance – *Freeing the Memory*, *Freeing the Voice*, and *Freeing the Body* (all three from 1976), the idea of purification is prominent. These performances, all three of them, are different acts that seek to empty the memory, the body and the voice. In *Freeing the Memory*, she spoke out words aloud for an hour and a half, until her mind went (allegedly) completely blank; in *Freeing the Body*¹⁶⁰, she danced naked for eight hours to the rhythm of an African drum until collapsing;

¹⁵⁸Šuvaković, Miško, *History of Art in Serbia XX Century 1. Radical Art Practices*, op.cit., p. 476

¹⁵⁹Jung, Carl Gustav, *Psicología y religión*, Ediciones Paidós Ibérica, S.A., Barcelona, 1991, p. 38

¹⁶⁰Abramović's face was concealed – her body was "without a face"; the audience was denied any connection or interaction that could arise from seeing it. Possibly it was covered because thus it was easier for her to relax and ignore the public during the performance; or it might emphasize the body in

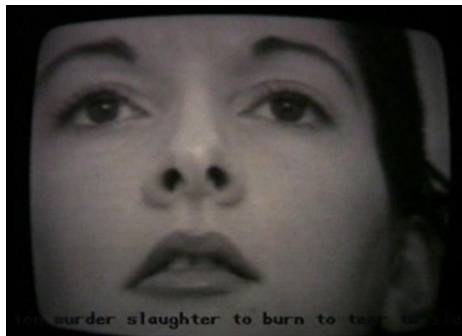
and in *Freeing the Voice*¹⁶¹, she screamed for three hours until she lost her voice completely. Ideally, those seem to be performances designed and realized as rituals and ceremonies that aimed at a higher level of consciousness that here is defined as a kind of void, to reach harmony between mind and body.



Marina Abramović, *Freeing the Body*, performance, Belgrade, 1976



Marina Abramović, *Freeing the Voice*, performance, Belgrade, 1976



Marina Abramović, *Freeing the Memory*, performance, Belgrade, 1976

favour of the individual (facial) identity in order to debate over exposure and identity that the feminist body art of the time called into being.

¹⁶¹ On one side, the position of her body and the whole corporal cramping very much remind of Arthur Janov's sessions of primal therapy while on the other, in tantric/yogic traditions opening and activation of the throat chakra by specific breathing and vocalization purify voice and strengthen ability to speak truth, hear and understand others, empathize and communicate.

In all of these performances, Marina Abramović reached a moment of a breaking point, a crisis, an agony – as her words disappeared, her voice wore off and her body collapsed. Each performance is exhausting in its own way for to “clear” oneself the way she did is a kind of “self-exorcism”. To reel off all the words that one can remember, to voice out a sound, to dance and move in the rhythm and to do it for hours with aim to reach a void; and then, when it is all over, what to do with that condition? Fill it again? Reenergize it? What is one without memory and knowledge, without words, voice and communication, without movement of the body? That *tabula rasa* promising condition seems very alluring like an option to reset oneself. If these performances that seems to have ceremonial and ritualistic character are taken into consideration from the wider, more anthropological, point of view, then they are to be associated with processes of purification, disenchantment, healing and strengthening in the spirit of primitive tribes for whom “natural” and “supernatural” are not separate¹⁶²; (one of the reasons to connect it to the tribal is also the sound of African drum which Abramović chose to dance to in order to free her body). In each of these three performances, there is a point of trance, repetition, climaxing agony as if she wanted to discard that what is conscious in her. The burden of the verbal, thought and memory together with her voice and her body are what the artist wants to liberate herself from. As if corrupted by experience and by the needs to communicate with voice and body, she attempts to purify from that “filth”, heal and strengthen ritualistically thus reflecting the primitive sublime spirit¹⁶³.



Marina Abramović, *Dragon Heads*, performance, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, 1990

¹⁶² Levy-Bruhl, Lucien, *Le Surnaturel et la Nature dans la Mentalité Primitive*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1963, p.273

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 289-290

In the performance *Dragon Heads*¹⁶⁴, which was documented in videos¹⁶⁵, Abramović, motionless and expressionless, is sitting while constrictor snakes are slithering over her body. There is a kind of “border” between her and audience made by ice blocks. In her earlier works with Ulay (*Three*, 1978 and *The Lovers*¹⁶⁶, 1990), she already worked with the theme and symbolism of snake and dragon. She claims that this performance is a kind of sculpture for her and that it was done with aim to prove that snakes move along the energy lines of Earth/her body, to overcome her fear of snakes and serve as an example to the audience to face their own fears¹⁶⁷. Besides its “therapeutic” aspect, this performance also plays on the fear of the participants with the imminent danger that emanates from snakes. Though the performance employs snakes, it is nevertheless titled by dragons and refers to the performer’s head as the body part and therefore, possibly corresponds to the image of Medusa. Otherwise, the title and the act together correspond to the picture of mixed mythologies – lunar mythology represented by snake (Serbs believe that snake as the chthonic demon is the Moon's sister¹⁶⁸) and solar mythology that dragon stands for. The answers should also be searched in both Christian and pagan imagery, as well as in local South Slavic Serbian beliefs, superstitions and customs.

The only innate fears are of loud noise/sound and of losing equilibrium (falling). It means that all other fears are learnt and, accordingly, fear of snake as well. It is an internalized fear probably stemming from negative representations of snake as a *beast* – the Biblical representations of Satan for example. When speaking about the beast, it is called “the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the Devil and Satan*”¹⁶⁹.

In Serbian mythology dragon is:

a mythological being of extraordinary strength and with both serpent and human characteristics; it can fly and transform into various forms. Serbian name for dragon is

¹⁶⁴ *Dragon Heads* is the series of performances that actually consists of the same performance realized several times at various locations between 1990 and 1994

¹⁶⁵ See the performance fragment, <http://www.li-ma.nl/site/catalogue/art/marina-abramovic/dragon-head-no-5/8556> (accessed on June 8, 2015)

¹⁶⁶ Hear how Abramović comments on snake, energy lines and dragon, *The Lovers*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaso0j9x098> (accessed on June 8, 2015)

¹⁶⁷ See how the author speaks on this piece at 34:40 of the following video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Abk44swuaro>, available on June (accessed on June 8, 2015)

¹⁶⁸ Čajkanović, Veselin, op.cit., p.336

¹⁶⁹ *The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments: The New King James Version: translated out of the Original Tongues and with the Former Translations Diligently Compared and Revised*, Thomas Nelson, New York, 1983, Revelation 20:2, p. 1072

of the same origin as the name snake and soil. Dragon appears in beliefs and folklore of all Slavic nations as well as in many cultures of the world.¹⁷⁰

In Europe, for example, in Anglo-Saxon epic "Beowulf", dragon stands for the guardian of treasure, but also symbolizes suicidal ethics of the Heroic code (old Germanic aristocratic system of moral values). No matter how fantastic this creature might be, it is connected to the image of flying snake with magic powers. For Serbs, snake is a vermin; "its most important characteristic is its chthonic nature; within itself snake fuses feminine and masculine, symbolism of water and fire, of positive principle and negative principle. "Snake has inherent apotropaic and damaging properties; it is poisonous and medicinal, it is unclean creature, the source of evil but, at the same time, it supplies man with amazing abilities and protects him".¹⁷¹ Serbs also believed that snake was a protector of the hearth and house, and there were wide beliefs that it had magical powers of healing (its head especially and its slough as well). As the home protector, snake is seen as some kind of a "good" demon and even in association with dragon. Folk beliefs say that snake, and especially snake head, can provide and enhance human clairvoyance, free spirit from body, enable communication with dead ancestors. There is an evident dichotomy because snake symbolizes a protector of home and fields/crops, but can also be dangerous and sinister.¹⁷²

In this series of performances, through ritualistic freeing from fear of snakes, Marina Abramović also creates the sculptural aspect of the imagery – seated with a crown of snakes on her head, she becomes a vivid iconography. Is she Medusa, a monarch or a living icon? The contrast between her stone-like motionless monumental presence and the mass of heavy shiny rubber-like endlessly twitching muscles breeds anxiety and terror into the spectator. That dragon-snake from the underworld possesses powers, omniscience and magic of the dead; that chthonic snake expresses the violent power of the gods of darkness, it is the enemy of the Sun and of all the solar spiritual powers. The snake is an obstacle that must be overcome in order to reach the level of the sacred; it is the beast within that a good Christian must try to win. Even though snake stems from the biblical scriptures, its morphology and metaphorical significance are deeply rooted in the archetypal and mythological, in the unconscious and pagan. Here, the author vividly combines rich symbolism of snake and dragon in the picture that is close to a figure. Furthermore, she looks like a three-dimensional Tarot card or a sculpture entangled into the visceral imagery. For a moment one feels the

¹⁷⁰ *Slavic Mythology: Encyclopedic Dictionary*, op. cit., p. 206

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 211

¹⁷² See Petrović, Sreten, *Mythology, Magic and Customs*, Prosveta, Niš, 1992, p. 318-320

coalescence of overlapping images of pagan, royal and sacred. At the same time, she reminds of Medusa with the presence of a ruler, and moreover she is the icon of both empress and saint.

Another significant key point important to analyze would be the relationship between magic and religion, as well as to take into consideration whether the forces that rule the world are conscious and personal or unconscious and impersonal. Religion assumes that the aforementioned forces are “conscious”, while for magic and science they are unconscious and impersonal. Consequently, according to religion, those forces, God or gods, are conscious and the way they operate and behave is up to a certain degree unpredictable and, therefore, they need to be propitiated.

Frazer concludes that in the evolution of our race magic originated before religions. Firstly, man had tried to subdue nature to his wishes only by chanting and magic before he tried to persuade and appease reserved, moody or irascible deity through adulation by prayers and sacrifices.¹⁷³

In the work of Milica Mrđa (1960) there are videos of rituals where she performs rites and communicates with nature and soil wanting to connect to them. It can be said that in her videos she seems to be completely distanced from civilization and dedicated to her own “magic”.

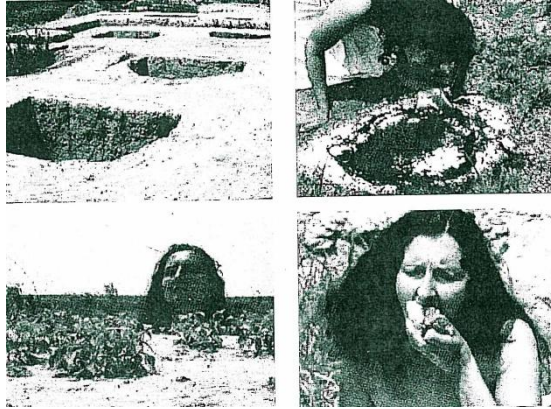
Only when she is acting as the first person, physical energy of this artist surpasses everything that she can close in the art object: then as if running away from herself in everyday condition, she reaches her other self in ecstasy of happening that almost escapes control and she attains previously unknown hidden spaces where she reaches and achieves self-identification that cannot be found rationally but can be possessed somewhere deeply only irrationally, instinctively, utterly uncensored in her own body.¹⁷⁴

In her works “Body, Pigment, Water” and “Rituals of Body and Soil”, Milica Mrđa Kuzmanov sees herself as symbolically and inextricably linked with nature. Through the pagan, through the mythical symbolism, she is presenting her performances in a manner similar to rituals. Her works also represent one of the first artistic experiments in Serbia that explore the relationship of women and nature through modern artistic language and media.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Petrović, Sreten, *Mythology, Magic and Customs*, op. cit., p. 31

¹⁷⁴ Denegri, Ješa, *Serbian Art 1950–2000. The Nineties*, Orion Art, Beograd, 2013, p. 216-217

¹⁷⁵ Kojić Mladenov, Sanja, *Archetypal Representations of Woman in Contemporary Art in Serbia*, 2009, <http://sanjakm.blogspot.com/2012/05/ahetipi.html> (accessed on June 16, 2015)



Milica Mrđa Kuzmanov, *Body, Pigment, Water*, video still, 1989
 Milica Mrđa Kuzmanov, *Rituals of Body and Soil*, video still, 1990

When talking about the archetypal representations of women in the contemporary art in Serbia, Sanja Kojić Mladenov defines several types: partisan, martyr, sexual object and goddess¹⁷⁶. Since it is highly debatable to what degree partisan, martyr and sex object can be called archetypes, in this particular case and point of this investigation, it would be necessary to focus on the last one of goddess. The archetype of goddess in Serbian art is not very visible and it starts coming out at the end of the 1980s throughout videos and performances. Creating new mythology and cosmology is also characteristic for video installations of Anica Vučetić (1962). In her video installations *Messenger*¹⁷⁷ (2005), *Compression*¹⁷⁸ (2006) and *Pledge*¹⁷⁹ (2007), she represents herself as the goddess or fairy of rivers, waters, air and cosmos; in the spirit of Pantheism she believes that God dwells in the nature and that woman is primordially connected to it. Therefore, it can be said that woman herself is not only a part of nature, but nature herself and goddess as well. The atmosphere of symbiosis of woman with nature is presented through the contemporary technology in order to create the imagery that is not that much ritualistic, but more of merging and dispersion, of pictures that are dreamlike and melting.

¹⁷⁶ Kojić Mladenov, Sanja, op. cit.

¹⁷⁷ Vučetić, Anica, *Messenger*, video installation, 2005

<http://anicavuc.wix.com/anicavucetic#!messenger/c1p3d> (accessed on June 16, 2015)

¹⁷⁸ Vučetić, Anica, *Compression*, video installation, 2006

<http://anicavuc.wix.com/anicavucetic#!compression/c1lkh> (accessed on June 16, 2015)

¹⁷⁹ Vučetić, Anica, *Pledge*, video installation, 2007

<http://anicavuc.wixsite.com/anicavucetic/pledge> (accessed on June 16, 2015)



Anica Vučetić, *Messenger*, video installation, 2005



Anica Vučetić, *Compression*, video installation, 2006



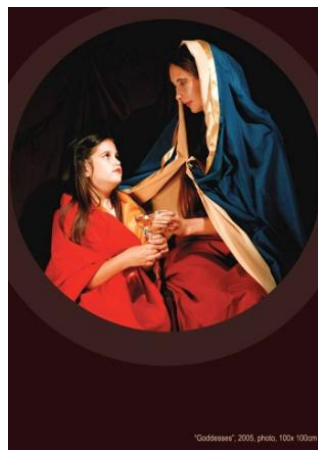
Anica Vučetić, *Pledge*, video installation, 2007

Both Milica Mrđa Kuzmanov and Anica Vučetić are artists who in their works want to deal with the issues of adaptation to culture and civilization to which they belong and to grasp the strong pressure of patriarchy towards women and nature.

Seeking alternatives to the use of historical, artistic and mythological forms of ancient civilizations, polytheistic beliefs, Slavic tradition, observation of nature and women as

holy, of spirit and body as inextricably linked, they are close to eco-feminism attitudes, especially spiritual eco-feminism.¹⁸⁰

It is evident that those authors link the oppression of nature to the oppression of women in post-socialist society comparing their dissatisfaction with social environment to the exploitation of women in capitalist societies. Notably, their appearances on the artistic scene coincide with the beginning of socio-political upheavals and wars during the 1990s in the region of former Yugoslavia. It can be stated that in such conditions artists seek solutions to their own spirituality and empathy towards the oppressed. Also, their work indicates the existence of the strong tradition of Slavic (pre-Christian) cults and mythology, but also their knowledge of spiritual traditions of other cultures. Unfortunately, none of these artists has printed monographs or solid catalogues devoted to their work. The unobtrusiveness of these works of art made them very poorly visible in Serbian art scene and it is evident that the topics they dealt with were considered too universal without recognizing their radical criticism of the existing social system.



Antea Arizanović, *Goddesses*, photography, 100 x 100 cm, 2005

In this staged theatre like atmosphere in photography, Antea Arizanović makes changes in one of the holiest Christian images – the most famous play of the Mother of God with Christ. In terms of composition, it is based on a circle which is the symbol of perfection and for that reason the image seems more “iconic”. Here, Mary instead of Christ is holding a little girl who is holding a glass in which a goldfish is swimming.

Olivera Erić suggestibly rises following questions:

¹⁸⁰ Kojić Mladenov, Sanja, op.cit.

If Christ had been a girl, what history would have been like? Would the world be the same if God first had created Eve? How would the world look if Adam was Eve, and if Christ could change his sex? Would women be more respected in such a (different) society?¹⁸¹

Certainly, there is more to be added to this wishful thinking and speculations. In the first place, inversion of sex in this image is playing a certain role of iconoclasm that directly violates the dogma about Christ identity (dogma about Christ in wider sense not only the one that refers to his Passion and Resurrection). Also, in the very title of this image, *Goddesses*, it is clearly implied that both are goddesses, not only the “girl-Christ”, but Mary as well. Such a concept not only pushes Mary to the level of Lord that in Christianity is clearly represented as a male deity, but also openly suggests the idea of matriarchy, polytheism and paganism. Even though, the two personalities are dressed or garmented in the typical Christian iconography code style, the symbolism of the title does not follow the Christian doctrine. The small detail of fish swimming could or could not correspond to biblical symbolism of this animal; it could again stand for a goldfish that fulfils wishes or perhaps is just another slightly pagan detail in the whole picture. Nevertheless, here Arizanović proposes (impossible) possibility of a totally different perspective of Christianity, monotheism and patriarchy. Besides the “what if” aspect, this “icon” in the first place glorifies female deities and powers regardless of a particular religious formula or orientation.

As can be seen, the “ceremonial” aspect of performances and other art practices in Serbia that were documented in photography and videos had not only different “styles”, but primarily differed in their concept and purpose. Some authors use their “ritualistic” performances as rites to both purify and liberate the body, and overcome fears in order to grow. In that case, it can be said that the ritual body is a reference to itself in the processes of self-purification, healing and fortification; it is an independent, self-centred unity. On the other side, there are artists for whom mythology is the way to connect to nature, and the “rituals” they use are with aim to follow their feminine relation to nature – body becomes the continuation of the soil and of the natural. They “cooperate” with nature, and the ritual body serves as a medium to dialogue and to renew archaic links between woman and natural forces and to reflect ancient beliefs in female omnipresent strength. Some younger authors nevertheless play with the religious imagery to offer new vision of the divine, of the idea of

¹⁸¹Erić, Olivera, *Is Woman Today More Respected and Loved than Before?*, op.cit., p. 179-180

female deities and holiness as iconoclasm that suggest possibility of a female Saviour. All things considered, when talking about body politics in this sphere of art practices, female body as a ritualistic subject emerges still as a taboo, there is a sacred fear of female body and its “powers” – firstly, for its self-sufficient independence and the ability to heal and grow on its own and secondly, for its mystical relations with nature.

3.3. Woman between Witch and Shaman

According to the media I was labelled as “the first lady of provocation”, my performances through the rituals of fertility potentiated sexuality, and the photo of me in a shamanic costume from which one breast was peeking “disobediently” in the circles of the conservatives mostly provoked condemnation and rebuke for violation of morality.¹⁸²

Katalin Ladik

In the Middle Ages, we find the cult of the Virgin at the same time as the burning of witches, the worship of “pure” motherhood (completely devoid of sexuality), along with the cruel destruction of sexually seductive woman. Also, here is an underlying anxiety involved because the witch is in communication with the devil. Nowadays, with our more humanitarian forms of aggression, women are burned only figuratively, sometimes with hatred declared, other times with apparent cordiality¹⁸³. Moreover, throughout history great mother goddesses brought both death and destruction given that the one who gives life can also take it away. To boost this apparent anxiety caused by the archetypal and mythological perceptions of woman as a mixture of mother, seductress, destructive force, etc., woman was adorned with the shadow of witch and diabolical creature. Witch in terms that she could function and operate at the margins of culture and language together with hysterical and insane women and therefore, she was seen as a carrier of uncontrollable power and instability factor. To put it differently, witchcraft in ancient history was known as “the craft of the wise”, but as alchemy was reserved for man only, such knowledge was to be controlled and consequently forbidden for woman (just as she should be kept away from science and culture).

All things considered, the notorious witch hunt from the Middle Ages refers to the belief that “witches” used magic, divination, witchcraft and necromancy (in order to influence

¹⁸² *Interview with Katalin Ladik* (see the Annex of this thesis)

¹⁸³ Horney, Karen, *op.cit.*, p. 129

personal well-being – to increase life and wealth, win love, etc.). For that reason, the process of demonization of woman was another pillar of patriarchy where Christianity imposed practices of exorcism as a kind of sieve to filter the good from the bad and the obedient from the diabolical. While the “witchcraft”, namely, the “ritualistic” in artworks are the doings of the individual on the margins of society that are echoing a kind of asocial behaviour, the “shamanic” aspect of art performances or body art events transforms the cultural views. In this case, the example of male artist Joseph Beuys would serve the purpose to comment on “individual mythologies” because for him an art piece is a certain type of addition energy¹⁸⁴. The basic concept of sociability is established on utopian visionary work, alchemy, occultism, spectacle system (performance, theatre, happening, event, etc.) throughout the relation of a hermit who acts in front of the audience with aim to give a lesson as a kind of “preacher”. In the case of this charismatic teacher and his students, a kind of “seductive social practices” is structured where learning is at the same time a process of seduction and demystification. In short, what can be seen as ritualistic ceremonial aspects that resemble witchcraft rites in the artworks of primarily female authors, can also be seen and researched from another point of view. It is not primitive self-absorbing worship, magic or therapeutic self-release of pain and fears in the performances, but the need to raise awareness and deconstruct myths and archetypes that fertilize stereotypes, prejudices and preconceptions on genders and their roles.

When speaking about a critique of late socialism,

Nikola Dedić defines the work of Katalin Ladik and Marina Abramović as:

the feminist post-avant-garde because they both based on the experience of body art, procedural art, cultural anthropology and mystical learning in order to realize a critique of moderate and high modernism as a predominantly male/patriarchal cultural formation and, for the first time, directly problematize issues of female subjectivity and female culture.¹⁸⁵

In the domain of radical post-avant-garde feminist art, Katalin Ladik realizes artworks in the spirit of visual poetry, body art and performance; there is a transition from woman as a passive object of artistic reflection into the role of woman as an active artistic subject. Ladik uses phonic and visual poetry; in the beginning, it was a classical lyrical poem that later transforms into a phonic poetry; in those songs, she worships female sexuality and through a

¹⁸⁴ See Šuvaković, Miško, *Epistemology of Art*, Orion Art, Beograd, 2008, p. 74-75

¹⁸⁵ Dedić, Nikola, op. cit., p. 127

contemporary code uses strategies of folk lyrical poetry, incantations and surrealism. In the classical and modernist tradition, it was the male individual whose lyrical voice sang about female sexuality, now it is she the subject and author expressing female sexuality. Ladik also uses mystical archetypes and ritualistic procedures, and emphasizes nature in order to eliminate culture.

She says:

In the world of myth and archetype, I reached the destruction of poetry to its essential elements. I wrote “absurd” folk stories and drama texts deriving motifs from folk art. Into my creation, I brought not only Vojvodina cultural heritage, but also the elements of the folklore of Asian nations.¹⁸⁶

According to Miško Šuvaković, Katalin Ladik’s performances are orchestrating a “folkloristic universalism”, a nomadic subject full of gender connotations, facing alienation of the civil subject of the time; and starting from the universal “legibility” of mythological and folkloric layers, to bring out their utter somatic, erotic and gender transgressive instantiation¹⁸⁷.



Katalin Ladik, *Summoning*, performance, Novi Sad, 1970

Working in the field of excessive and subversive performances and body art, Katalin Ladik in her actions and work raises issues about sexual, political and cultural identities and about frames of understanding the status of male/female artist within socialist society. What is characteristic is a kind of “poetic text” in her oral or theateralized body art events and

¹⁸⁶ See *Interview with Katalin Ladik* (in the Annex of this thesis)

¹⁸⁷ Šuvaković, Miško, *History of Art in Serbia XX Century 2. Realisms and Modernisms about the Cold War*, op.cit., p. 779

performances. The performance *Summoning* (Novi Sad, 1970) is represented as a naked erotic ritual body in which she addresses the audience (or the other). Scantly dressed and wrapped up in furs with her protruding naked body parts, Ladik was singing, dancing, playing bagpipes and performing her poetry, moving in such a way as to allure, call and summon the audience. This performance very much resembled not only ritual invocations of gods or of natural phenomena, but actually summoned the audience to follow her. Her stage musical event *R-O-M-E-T* (Novi Sad, 1972) was mounted by Ladik and Janez Kocijančič at Youth Tribune. In one segment of the performance, Katalin Ladik performed rituals of beautifying – actions of manicure and cosmetic interventions on Kocijančič's body as an object of aestheticization. "That was one of the first intentional self-critical female performances in Serbia which takes on the characteristics of the feminist attitude."¹⁸⁸



Katalin Ladik, *R-O-M-E-T*, performance, Novi Sad, 1972

For some theorists like Luce Irigaray and H  l  ne Cixous, the category of female sexuality can be researched and represented through female written/spoken texts¹⁸⁹. That would mean that, by the processes of writing and speaking as a female activity, measures and procedures would be established to undermine the phallogocentric concepts of control not only in theory, but in practice as well. Through her text, woman makes herself visible in the outer world and moves through history¹⁹⁰.

¹⁸⁸Šuvakovi  , Miško, *History of Art in Serbia XX Century 1. Radical Art Practices*, op.cit., p. 471

¹⁸⁹See Eri  , Olivera, *Theory of Feminist Art at the End of XX Century*, op.cit., p. 52

¹⁹⁰Cixous, H  l  ne, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, Chicago Journals, The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 875-893., p. 877

Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man; not the imbecilic capitalist machinery, in which publishing houses are the crafty, obsequious relayers of imperatives handed down by an economy that works against us and off our backs; and not yourself.¹⁹¹

As can be seen, for Cixous, woman's position to speak throughout history has always been suppressed, and therefore, she must seize the opportunity to speak, to write and also to express publicly. On the other side, individually, by writing woman will return to her own body which was confiscated from her and censored just like her speech was. What Irigaray calls *parler femme* or *womanspeak* in Serbian is called *žensko pismo* (female letter/alphabet), and this is how Ladik comments on that topic in her work:

Although some commentators were probably maliciously trying to discover "femininity" in my poetry, when they did not find it in the usual sentimental-confessional form, they attributed it some erotic qualifiers. The truth is that in my poetry there are some aspects of sensuality present, but it is not sensuality derived from the fixed sex of one being, it is rather the universal sexual and even thought variability.¹⁹²

Ladik does not want to possess a penis, she wants to be phallic in terms of social empowerment, and at least to achieve equality if not excel in power. It can be said that she had to write through her body and invent the impregnable language¹⁹³ that would at least shock and slightly shatter the phallogocentric Serbian art scene of the seventies that was so well tucked into the socialist milieu of the time. In her poetry and performances, underneath the avant-garde layer in poems, there is a traditional religious layer hidden, so that she is actually a poet who sings from the centre of the tradition that is fading away¹⁹⁴.

¹⁹¹ Cixous, Hélène, p. 877

¹⁹² See *Interview with Katalin Ladik* (in the Annex of this thesis)

¹⁹³ Cixous, Hélène, op.cit., p. 886

¹⁹⁴ *Interview with Katalin Ladik* (see in the Annex of this thesis)



Marina Abramović, *Balkan Erotic Epic*, video still, 2005

Unlike the Gnostic system of religious philosophy which claims to understand nature and God completely, Marina Abramović chose to “flirt” freely with the uniqueness of the Balkans spiritual and mythological space. Here in this video, on which she claims she had been working for two years, *Balkan Erotic Epic*¹⁹⁵, Abramović allegedly did an anthropological research of the folklore, customs, superstitions and beliefs of the Balkans to represent them in short video sequences. In this video (called film), she is dressed in a minimalistic way (in black on black background) with reading glasses; she appears scientifically precise and reads explanations of what is to be represented. Video sequences of the “rituals” are filmed or animated. One by one the scenes pass, which Abramović describes announcing the piece as the film about male and female sexual organs used “against sickness and evil forces” (throughout the video she calls repeatedly male organ “phallus”). Also in the introductory note, she repeats “etc. etc.” as if she does not know what to say or as if the content was irrelevant.

Just as the indigenous considers the disease not only as a physical disorder, but as a result of some kind of curse, which is why not only a patient must be treated for a particular symptom, but the general defilement he has incurred must be removed¹⁹⁶, Abramović here speaks about the processes of purification, protection, healing and curing; it is obvious that contagion heuristic magic plays a great part in this case. Therefore, here we can see how in the Balkans genitals are used in magic rites to protect domestic animals and crops, to ensure soil

¹⁹⁵ Abramović, Marina, *Balkan Erotic Epic*, video, 13:06, 2006, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4cjgcsri0> (accessed on June 13, 2015)

¹⁹⁶ See Levy-Bruhl, Lucien, op.cit., p. 273

fertility, to cast spells to attract (by the rule, always heterosexual) love, to facilitate difficult child birth, to protect from enemies and evil eye, to preserve sexual potency and virility. In fact, magic and semantic functions of those “rituals” together with Serbian folklore clothing and songs establish iconography of the specific ornaments in ethnography of Balkan symbolism. Additionally, strong biological, instinctually motivated relationship between human emotions and genitalia could not be negated. This relationship was more emphasized about female genitalia for two reasons – firstly, because of its morphology, of mystery of the “hidden” and secondly, due to its functional explicitness and expressivity (menstruation, coitus, child birth)¹⁹⁷. Therefore, archaic cultures created a strong metaphysical attitude towards female genitalia, and that attitude, which proved to be unconscious and mysterious, needed rationalization. In the very forms of covering, hiding and closing female genitalia, the ways of mythical-symbolical and magic conceptions coming from female genitalia may be discovered, for example: incubation of power, unwanted transfer of power, fear of someone else's view (evil eye), and the undesirable entrance¹⁹⁸. And it must be added that covering female genitalia was also a protection measure against spontaneous realization of coitus. Returning carefully to the video, one can notice scenes which deliberately were neither commented upon nor explained: man masturbating himself in the rain, women touching their breast in the field, women running and showing their vaginas in the rain, dressed men with erected penises and the last scene of a female naked torso hitting herself with a skull into her solar plexus.

What does all that multitude of female naked bodies (in all life stages – from 15 to 85 years old) in this video stand for and symbolize? Marina Abramović appears as a scientist, as a shaman who guides the spectator through the world of magic of her homeland; she is the teacher who deciphers the rituals while leaving blanks intentionally, the guru who serves images but the most important definitions remain purposefully omitted as they were meant to fascinate a non-Balkan receptor who knows nothing about it. When speaking about *Rusalke* in Serbian ritualistic practice¹⁹⁹, spring agrarian cycle, sexual freedom and games, erotic licentiousness in the fields, are characteristic for agrarian rituals with the aim to provoke nature to procreate which presented magical procedures. For that purpose, nude girls and women were allowed to freely move along the village area of crops in the form of a collective procession in the middle of the night. Nowadays, the remains of this ritual are in the form of

¹⁹⁷ See Čausidis, Nikos, op.cit., p. 209

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 209-210

¹⁹⁹ Petrović, Sreten, *Serbian Mythology: in Beliefs, Customs and Rituals*, op.cit., p. 533

practice of erotic freedom between young women and men as a part of the ritual to promote fertility when, in the spring, they go to the river to make wreaths of special herbs. There are also rituals to arouse and stop rain, one of the most famous is *Dodole*, which is usually in the form of a procession of a group of girls (age 8 to 12), one of whom is completely naked but enveloped into green grass and herbs, with symbolical songs involved addressing the Slavic god of rain Perun in order to arouse and supply rain for season. In general, in various cultures, sexual relations and freedoms accompanied by a certain level of licentious behaviour are part of the ritualistic fertilization of the soil, plants and crops, “they bring good fortune, they are purifying, and necessary as a rite”²⁰⁰. In one of the interviews, Abramović explains the ritual of stopping the rain in her video. Namely, by showing vagina to God who is afraid of it, woman makes the rain stop²⁰¹. Though this explanation seems jovial, needless to say, it must be emphasized that the sources of her alleged research for this video still remain mysterious.

First, it is unavoidable to analyze the title of this piece. What is fascinating is how generalized the term *Balkan(s)* in this context is because it conveys various territories and nations, diverse cultures, religions and traditions, but here it is treated as one coherent whole, a compact union. Besides that, it very much appears to be Serbian because of the folklore costumes and songs. However, clear connections to any specific Balkan nation would imply a certain level of authenticity in terms of verifiability and therefore, consequently the questions of author’s responsibility would emerge. When speaking about *Erotic*, there is no eroticism or sexual seduction, it is not sexually arousing or alluring – there is only nudity. In the same fashion, when talking about the title of this video, *Epic* here perhaps stands for free interpretation or improvisation. Secondly, it is unavoidable to comment on the style of presentation. It is obvious that banalization together with mystification was employed because it was made for the non-Balkan, primarily American, foreign audience. Simplifying the meaning so that it is comprehensible, but also mystifying the narration with aim to make it more esoteric, occult and spiritual reached comical and unconvincing point, and together with the title, it all achieves a commercial level of Americanized advertisement. As neither Abramović’s English accent nor her English grammar much evolved in the previous thirty years abroad (1975-2005), the content which she vocalizes because of the way she speaks appears blunt and rude. Also, as she uses the Present Simple Tense – it sounds as if the rituals were contemporary everyday practices in active use nowadays too. The choice of tense also adds

²⁰⁰ Levy-Bruhl, Lucien, op.cit., p. 362

²⁰¹ *Artist Talk: The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7lff1vdBJg> (accessed on June 13, 2015)

drama; it strives to seem like Universal Truth (and therefore is a certain and undeniable fact), but it also resembles magic recipes. All in all, one could imagine the Balkans (in this video in its oversimplified and generalized meaning) as an extremely primitive, undeveloped, and regressive space; it becomes something to mock about in the already recognizable Abramović style of superficial interpretations merely for the purpose of just another self-promotion.



Marina Abramović, *The Kitchen: Homage to Saint Therese de Avila*, photography/video, 2009

*Every Christian ascetic, martyr and sacrificial tradition glorified the sacrificial aspect of the gift, eroticizing to the maximum physical as much as moral pain and suffering.*²⁰²

The Kitchen is a series of videos and photographs realized in Spain, in the abandoned premises of the kitchen (with an extraordinary architectural design built during the Franco regime) in a convent of Carthusian nuns, who fed more than 8000 orphans when the convent was still active. Although the concept directly refers to the homage to Saint Teresa of Avila – who in her writings tells of an experience of mystic levitation in the kitchen – it becomes also Abramović's autobiographical work, considering that, as the artist herself states in the interview²⁰³, in her childhood her grandmother's kitchen was the centre of her world, etc. Here, the concept of the kitchen becomes a kind of mythological space where the symbolism of the kitchen itself merges with the stories of the female saint and the artist's personal

²⁰² Kristeva, Julia, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, Svetovi, Novi Sad, 1994, p. 161

²⁰³ See *Marina Abramovic - The Kitchen: Homage to Saint Therese de Avila*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37GtB4hMINY> (accessed on June 13, 2015)

memories and past. Probably the most prominent image from this series is Marina Abramović “levitating” in front of the window in the kitchen. Other images represent her sitting pensive on the floor surrounded by cooking pots, “cooking”, holding a dish, touching a skull, etc. In the variety of photographs from this shooting, there are visual metaphors where in one and the same image one can see other forms, other images and shapes. While in the previously commented artwork, the video ends with a nude female hitting her torso with a skull as if she had been trying to immerse it into the body in order to accept death as inevitable and immanent end, here the skull seems more ethereal and less earthy in the sense of its connection to death and mortality.

Obviously, there are some issues to be commented upon as far as the symbolism and semiotics are concerned. For example, she chose a prominent Roman Catholic saint and not an Orthodox one that would logically be closer to her because of her origins (and also because her grandfather was a Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church). Then, in this case the choice of the space mostly colours the overall atmosphere, light and effects. While, for example, in *Anima Mundi* realized with Ulay (1983), a direct connection to the Christian symbolism (of Pieta) is made, here though Christian iconography is present, there are certain “decorative” elements induced by the space itself and mixed with the Christian doctrine. There are numerous saints to whom the ability to fly or levitate has been attributed, and as we know, flying or levitation was also associated with witchcraft. The fusion of religion, mysticism and spiritualism cannot be ignored, as well as the earthy associations with the kitchen, cooking, feeding, nurturing, home intimacy, childhood memories, food for the spirit, etc. In the end, habituated to “body drama” in her pieces, one should come to discuss the ethics of aesthetics here: there is a heavily glamourized, processed, theatricalized picture of homage to a female saint. The question remains whether this series is dedicated to the kitchen, to the artist’s own “saintliness” or to what the concept of the kitchen represents for the author personally (because in the images Abramović seems absent and entangled into some interior monologues). The romanticized version of a religious concept creates the contrast between the polished style and the ultimate effect of sterility, coldness and absence of time. It is the space where time stands still and brings the ontology of spiritual vacuum and void. At the same time, the kitchen as the typical female space plays with the feeling of melancholy and the nostalgia of the lost object, of emptiness and something missing. What lingers in a spectator’s memory is the image of Abramović’s body positioned in the air in the form of cross

as the levitating sublime erotic object, that ephemeral beauty induces sadness. But here, there is no pain or suffering, there is only void and cold seductiveness.

The shamanic aspect of the performances analyzed above stems from the fact that the authors evolve from the stereotype imagery connected to the negative aspect of rituals as connected to magic, witchcraft, etc; they go beyond what could be considered ritualistic body politics and interfere in another sphere. Writing, poetry, singing, chanting, creating lyrical and epic contents, as well as dancing and performing on stage, turned into a theatre with a message. On the other hand, the authors were also changing roles and moving towards the borders reserved for men only. While Ladik performed her phonic poetry and beautified her male object, Abramović presented the system of beliefs and religion in her own interpretation all in a very convincing “scientific” self-righteous mannerism (just like a man would). The authors are not any longer just active performers and interpreters, they show, they demonstrate, they teach and preach the “learning” like shamans. They are less of witches and more of wizards or shamans setting their own philosophy, their own religion to preach and impose.

All things considered, the binary friction between nature and culture where woman stands for nature and man for culture, together with an ambivalent attitude toward woman as an active subject in customs and rituals of great social importance, and with the dichotomy of good and evil (fairy and demon) in beliefs about female identity, all represent a very fertile ground for artists to explore. If local specificities are added, including the historical upheavals of the time, it can be said that femininity in artworks of Serbian artists functioned within the frames of mythological, but in the form of distant “menacing goddesses”. One should also take into account the fact that culture considers semiotics of magic and rites as of lesser, marginal importance and, therefore, it is necessary to remember the theory of Julia Kristeva considering Symbolical and Semiotic as transferred onto the social system. There is the tension because the centre of the official artistic circles resists the pressures of what is seen as sporadic marginal efforts of individual artists to draw attention to the way female identity links to the archetypal and the mythological. Luckily, the waves from the margins reached the centre without allowing to be ignored any further. Though the semiotic margin will never destroy the power of symbolic centre²⁰⁴, the centre is always aware of the presence of the influence of the margin which, just as the collective unconscious is lurking in the dark, occasionally at least in dreams overpowers the conscious.

²⁰⁴Erić, Olivera, *Theory of Feminist Art at the End of XX Century*, op.cit., p.99

4. LOCAL HISTORICAL CONTEXT BEFORE 1990 AND ITS IMPACT

To achieve the utopian also means to end it, because it reveals new paradoxes, new forms of totalitarianism and new disharmonies in humanity. The realized utopian ideal of new technology at the same time means a better life, social standard, new forms of expression and communication, but also new forms of state control, restriction of human freedoms, new form of exploitation of human labor and alienation of individual previously unknown to the world.²⁰⁵

Just as monotheistic religions are based on the idea of the existence of only one god, single-party states dwell on the concept that its citizens have to believe that there is only one political and social option to follow blindly. Visual culture of socialist realism can be seen as a deliberate ideological project of constructing visual identity of the revolutionary society which from the national liberation struggle and revolution enters into the phase of reconstruction, development and industrialization of the country²⁰⁶. Therefore, to speak about such a society and its culture would mean to use the terms of “totalizing” party and government implemented modernization. It can be noted that visual culture of socialist realism treats socialist object as a hypothetical opposition to the so called “bourgeois” object which was addressed to as an individual obsessed with consumerism. Consequently, consumer in capitalist society was an instrument which, by manipulation, created the illusion of being in the real world. For the same logic, therefore, socialist object was supposedly to relieve the effects of that illusion and transform “possessory” into “social”²⁰⁷.

In fact, the culture of the Yugoslav socialist community ruled by the Communist party was a utopian idea that resulted in dystopian consequences. The bubbly imagery and shining bright surface covered the underneath systems of control and political torture; therefore, socialist realism was an illusion on its own. So in that event, one must not forget the phenomenon of political prisons as a characteristic measure of “taming” of public opinion. For

²⁰⁵ Šuvaković, Miško, *History of Art in Serbia XX Century 1. Radical Art Practices*, op. cit., p. 348

²⁰⁶ See Šuvaković, Miško, *History of Art in Serbia XX Century 2. Realisms and Modernisms about the Cold War*, op. cit., p. 824

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 825

example, *Goli otok* (literal translation: barren island) is a barren, uninhabited island of the Yugoslav political prison in Croatia. In 1949, the entire island was made into a high-security, top secret prison and labour camp run by the authorities of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; and the nearby *Sveti Grgur* island was a similar camp for female prisoners. Both prisons were in use to incarcerate political prisoners. These prisoners included not only Stalinists, but also other members of the Yugoslav Communist Party or even nonparty citizens accused of exhibiting sympathy towards the Soviet Union. Also it could be added that many anti-communists were incarcerated there. In this political prison, death penalty was applied; and among the prisoners were not only politicians, but also writers, intellectuals and other “dangerous” citizens of various Yugoslav nationalities. *Goli otok* prison was in operation from 1949 to 1989 with a total of approximately 16,000 prisoners who served there.

As we speak about the period before the 1990s, it is essential to mention typical attitudes towards women's issues in Yugoslavia. Since the late 1970s, Yugoslav public started to read, watch and listen about women's issues more than ever before (issues of women's suffrage, reproductive rights, legal rights, property rights, bodily autonomy, medical rights, and marriage). A new and strong impetus for such a change was primarily given by the international panel discussion entitled “Comrade Woman. Women’s question: a new approach?” that took place in Belgrade, at the Students Cultural Centre (SKC), in 1978 (this event was already mentioned in Chapter 1). It could be stated that since then to talk about women's issues in Yugoslavia included taking a stance on feminism. According to Vjeran Katunarić²⁰⁸, typical attitudes on women's issues within the elite were mostly unfavorable or they had different theoretical or ideological starting points. It means that those attitudes are not opposing women's issues in the same way. As a matter of fact, this author summarizes five basic attitudes towards women’s issues:

- 1) *False universalism* is a well-known rhetorical figure of “general human emancipation” for which we reach when it comes to women's issues stating that there are no “women’s issues” but “human” or better said “social” issues.
- 2) *Instrumentalism* is a type of attitude that reduces women's issues to other social development issues, i.e. is treating them as a means for solving some of the developmental goals of society.

²⁰⁸ See Katunarić, Vjeran, *Female Eros and the Civilization of Death*, Naprijed, Zagreb, 1984, p. 238-242

3) *Conservatism* – the main conservative attitude in which men are naturally and culturally superior to women may vary in several directions, for example: reactionary-fascist ideology, pseudoscientific hypothesis, ironic literature, but also desperate, anthropological or social pessimism. It means that there are more ways of sharpening up or mitigating the basic attitude.

4) *Silence* is a characteristic attitude of most of the patriarchal-authoritarian frameworks of society.

5) *Feminism*.²⁰⁹ Pro-feminist works and public forums have caused much greater attention especially among members of the silent majority.

These attitudes seem to be the proof that no matter which actions or events have happened officially, no significant changes really occurred considering the true improvement of woman's position in Yugoslavia. If women's issues are generalized and treated as "universal" problem, and/or if women are used as an instrument to solve social progress questions, and/or if women are humiliated by overall asymmetric relating to men, and/or if their issues are simply ignored and silenced, then the pro-feminist works draw little attention, produce unnoticeable feedback, and consequently make no important changes on a larger scale of things.

"Art after the Second World War, in the period from the late 1940s to the end of the 1960s, can be described as the epoch of realization of *concrete utopias*, but also as the epoch of *the last utopia*."²¹⁰ What followed was the new art of the 1970s or the "new artistic practice" which are concepts that comprise the whole range of expressive language and operating procedures with aim to dematerialize the art object (artwork). Furthermore, the new art of the 1970s meant the preponderance of mental over visual in the work of art. The question still remains of how to comprehend the historical interval of the late 1960s and early 1970s when that unexpected and unrepeatable release of emancipatory potentials occurred among young people. And when speaking about art of that period, what to say? Did that potential soon turn into the market mass media of liberal capital potential? Did fascination with new freedoms and sensibility become "trendy" as a highly experimental "artism"?

Video art came into existence during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Massive video culture is a significant factor contributing to the global historical process of visualization of our individual and our social existence, of our cultural models and our ways of perceiving and/or

²⁰⁹ The reception of the second-wave Western feminism, already establishing itself towards the end of the 1970s in Yugoslavia, was a result of the consistent anti-Soviet policy of Josip Broz Tito, it was distinguished by its greater openness towards the West.

²¹⁰ Šuvaković, Miško, *History of Art in Serbia XX Century 1. Radical Art Practices*, op. cit., p. 348

understanding a human being. Femininity in the music business has always been a point of interest and constantly inspirational “fresh goods” because in romanticized/sexist variations, woman is often (if not solely) represented as cultural and sexual object of male fantasy (for example songstresses Silvana Armenulić, Olivera Katarina, Esmā Redžepova, Slađana Milošević, etc.). With this in mind, there may be at least two tendencies in those representations. One is to follow stereotypes of traditional passive femininity subjected to active masculinity which is probably the most frequent and prevalent tendency. On the other side, there is another possibility which is to explore alternatives that would serve to deconstruct the still dominant asymmetric model of masculinity and femininity. In this second tendency (which will be further elaborated in the last section of this chapter), in most cases it is a woman from the show business world (usually music).

...with a new motive and shift, they access conscious interplay with visual elements of female weaknesses and strength by freely using the entire “inventory” of classic femininity as a means of ironic distance towards that same classical tradition. Consciously paradoxical, this tendency is one of the “softened” echoes of the feminist critique of the cultural sexism...²¹¹

Accordingly, media and popular culture play an essential role in the construction of reality and denying the existence of mediation relies on the behavioural model which argues that the media directly affects people. It would automatically mean that women are uncritical recipients who devour and internalize visual representations offered by the mass media in order to construct their self-image. The claim that the media directly influences the way women see themselves and how they behave mistakenly assumes that the relationship between the media and their users is completely consequential.

Local historical context of the society of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia gave birth to the first generation of artists (the “post-war generation” mainly born in the 1940s) who will be one of the most important factors in the art scene in/from Serbia in the 1970s. Visual culture of socialist realism together with political prisons can give enough food for the spectator’s imagination. Since it is hard to transfer and/or verbally transmit experience, only those who actually *were* there can more or less completely comprehend the feeling of living there at the time being. New art of the 1970s also brought out new media (like video for example) and new topics for artists as well because they became concerned with the

²¹¹ Papić, Žarana, op.cit., p. 143

treatment and position of the artwork and the artist. While the new emancipatory potential was unfolding, the social illusion was slowly rolling to its downfall as the 1980s arrived – the state machinery was greatly heated up when the country lost its supreme leader and remained “headless” when Tito died in 1980. As in every state of emergency or critical condition, new stars suddenly flashed and the ascent of new icons began. Here, the analysis of the specific Yugoslav figure of “female star” aims to point out the significant relationship with political changes, circles of power, social turmoil but also with the reconstruction of gender positioning.

4.1. Ideology Needs Slogans

One of the main principles in which the fascist system works is aesthetics. It creates a show, it creates a parade, an event, a myth, it creates a performance and it fascinates you as the mass, and what you see are men in uniform but what you see is the loss of singularity, the creation of a unity of all people. There is only One in the fascist system – the leader, and the rest is superfluous.²¹²

On the condition that socially significant ideas cannot survive without their proper symbols and mysticism, Yugoslav socialism as the system based on the rule of the Communist Party (Marxist Communism), is yet another form of social organization with propaganda which relies on the apparent presence of slogans. To put it differently, in this case it is necessary to mention the relationship between ideology and ideographs, the identification of fact and the negation in cultural analysis, and the process of indoctrination in totalitarian regimes. It is of a significant importance to discuss rhetorical impacts of political slogans on transforming ideology. There is an indication that political slogans are coined to meet the changing need of social conditions as well as the need of authorities to establish control. Moreover, the pervasive use of the slogans altered the face of culture and affected the thought pattern. Since the Second World War ended many years had passed before artists even started to try to break out of the political and ideological structures imposed in the post-war Yugoslavia.

By all means, the rhetorical strategies and techniques employed by the Yugoslav Communist Party obviously closely resemble those employed by totalitarian regimes. The truth is that generations and generations of uncritical recipients slowly but surely have internalized mottos and expressions that were served to them from the early age; those were the sayings they neither doubted nor examined. There was the ideology of the Communist Party in the socialist society of the Yugoslav Federal state, there was the machinery carefully structured to

²¹² See Griselda Pollock's conference: *Concentrationary Cinema, Concentrationary Memories, Concentrationary Imaginaries: Totalitarian Legacies and Cultural Resistance* at IVAM, Valencia, 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDinv4jLQC4&feature=youtu.be> (accessed on December 20, 2016)

use slogans with aim to direct and control. When speaking about Louis Althusser's theory on ideology and ideological state mechanisms, Dubravka Đurić states that according to him our entry into the symbolic order of language, and thus the constitution of us as subjects, is the effect of the work of ideology²¹³. For Althusser, ideology works through interpellations, strategies which call individuals to become subjects, transforming them so they take their subordinate, servile positions. That is a statement that in a way proves Althusser's anti-humanism especially because for him the subject is not viewed as a self-constructing agent but as the product of the structure.

When commenting about Althusser's vision on ideology, Đurić states that ideology is a lived experience but it can be also understood as elaborate set of significations which actually gives the meaning to the world but it does it in the manner which misrepresents power and class relations. Ideas and conceptions have material existence and ideology exists in social apparatuses and their related practices. According to Althusser, church is the dominant pre-capitalist ideological apparatus of the state, and in the context of capitalism it replaces the system of education which is embroiled in ideological and physical reproduction of labour power and social relations of production²¹⁴. Ideology is more effective means of maintaining class power than physical force is. On the other side, in the case of Yugoslav socialist system, education not only transmits general ideology which justifies and legitimizes socialism, but it also reproduces the attitudes and behaviour in labour division and consequently consumerism "rights". The truth is that ideology masks the real exploitation by shifting the emphasis from production to consumption. Ideology emphasizes that people are individuals (who own purchasing power) and thus the concept of class is fragmented so that those people live in the illusion of being free individual consumers living in a classless society. It can be said that ideology securely connects individuals, by placing them again in an imaginary coherent whole community as passive consumers, or it equalizes and unifies them by the ideas of a single nation. Althusser considers that there is no society without ideology²¹⁵. The state of things is necessarily presented through symbolical structures of that talk about how one experiences the world. The owners of the means of production, for example, produce an ideological narrative of the general freedom that allows them to keep subordinates in bondage. Communist symbolism represents a variety of themes, including revolution, proletariat, peasantry, agriculture, or international solidarity.

²¹³ Đurić, Dubravka, *Discourses of Popular Culture*, FMK, Beograd, 2011, p. 54

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 57

Playing it on the concept of a single nation or placing individuals in an imaginary coherent community of consumers, slogans were built to make Yugoslavs feel equal in a classless society. “All for one – one for all” is one of the mottos that surely structured the overall feeling of belonging and unity; it created the belief that *one* does have meaning but as a part of *all* (and, therefore, felt protected as well). The *fetishization* of the working class as the bearer of social transformation in the workers’ self-management society was also a strong pillar of the socialist ideology. The idea that workers in the factories are the same as farmers in the fields, and vice versa, established a broad vision that urban and rural are equal. The dominant norm was definitely determined with the slogan “Tito – Party – Youth – Army” mostly employed by the Youth Movement of Yugoslavia where the ruler of the country is the supreme commander of the armed forces, is the icon and the symbol of the local Communist Party and the model for the youth to adore and follow. Placed between party and army, in this slogan the youth is the motor that represents Communism values and the vehicle of force that the army stands for. “Death to Fascism, Liberty to the People”, then Tito’s doctrine “Live as if we were in for a hundred years of peace and prepare as if tomorrow a war would break out” or later after his death “And after Tito, Tito (again)” are just some of numerous slogans and mottos used for the continual brainwash on a daily basis interwoven through media, public speeches, group activities, meetings, events, and of course at the rallies so very inevitable in most totalitarian regimes. It must be pointed out that rallies organized to worship Tito were the demonstration of power, force and readiness and the visible living proof of dedication and solid trust surrendered blindly. The vision of reality and the world outside of the borders was represented as *we* and *they*, as *we* and *others*, but also as *others* among us (the traitors) and *others* as capitalism, alleged enemies and phantoms of threats. Obviously, the lingering shadows of menaces were necessary in order to breed and keep the undercurrent state of psychosis, paranoia, and tension – the condition that facilitates overall manipulation.

Analyzing the conceptual art, Miško Šuvaković points out the difference between the Western European and American art scene on one side, and its asymmetrically opposite East European axis on the other²¹⁶. Firstly, he states out that conceptual performance art differs from the futuristic performance artistic practices because the latter deals with consideration of artistic institutions, the status of the artist, the characterization of artwork, etc. However, East European conceptual performance deals with another issue – it was an act of resistance to

²¹⁶ Šuvaković, Miško, *History of Art in Serbia XX Century 1. Radical Art Practices*, op.cit., p. 466

socialist realism, to moderate modernism, to bureaucratization and ideologization of art, and in a broader sense it often formed a clear provocation and social expression of artist's discordance with the repressive social order of the time. Socialist system is a system based on the idea of philosophical and social unity and it can be said that feminist art of late socialism primarily concentrates on the phenomenon of (female) body in the way that body is observed with regard to sexuality and in reference to it as a socialist "political body".

In the first place, history is observed in connection to politics and, consequently, social turmoil is interpreted from the historical point of view as emanating from politics. In fact, Bojana Pejić interprets ideological formation of late socialism in the context of power relations, body and space²¹⁷. Even though there was a transition from communism to post-communism, political life in Eastern Europe still remained a masculine activity – in other words, the concept of public space was virtually unchanged and, therefore, it remained *menspace*. Feminist art of the late socialism directed its ideological criticism to the inspection of the issue of male space(s). The fact is that it concentrated on dealing with the politics of representation and questioned the system of representation of woman within the socialist institutions of power. Accordingly, in arts there was a shift from that process of creating the work of art and turning it into action, happening (event), and performance. Another phenomenon that also appeared in feminist art of the time was that the strategy of subject made a transition towards the tactics of the identity (where the category of gender is recognized as social and ideological construct)²¹⁸.

In the new art of the 1970s, it is inevitable to mention multiple pioneering artistic activities of Bogdanka Poznanović (1930-2013) and speak about "her artistic processes in action in the public galleries, installations, visual poetry, mail art, the use of photography, film and video, which she herself called art as interpersonal communication"²¹⁹. In the domain of action and performance, the most important work²²⁰ of Poznanović was her action *Heart-Object* (Novi Sad, 1970) and, from the sphere of mail art, her *Feedback letter box, information-decision-action* (1973). In Poznanović's *Heart-Object* action a huge model of the heart, lined with red vinyl, was carried by the participants of the performance from the Danube quay to

²¹⁷ Dedić, Nikola, op.cit., p. 128

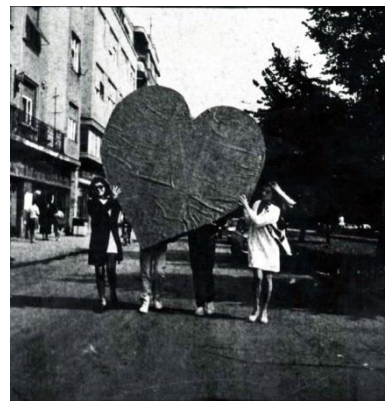
²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 129

²¹⁹ Denegri, Ješa, *Serbian Art 1950–2000. The Seventies*, Orion Art, Beograd, 2013, p. 49

²²⁰ To see more work from this author, please visit

<http://www.avantgarde-museum.com/hr/museum/kolekcija/4567-BOGDANKA-POZNANOVIC/>
(accessed on July 8, 2014)

the gallery of the Youth Tribune in Novi Sad where the object was fixed and then a metronome that was ticking rhythmically (like a heart) was incorporated into it. In this performance action, the artist involves group activity into the street and creates collaboration between public open spaces and gallery, initiating the idea that the “artwork”, here the heart object, is a transfer between the society and individual, between open public spaces and closed art institutions like galleries for example. The "girly" aspect of the stereotyped object like heart is diminished by its huge size and the fact that in gallery space it is (ironically) “revived” with the help of a metronome.



Bogdanka Poznanović, *Heart-Object*, performance, Novi Sad, 1970

Feedback letter-box, information-decision-action was a significant work in mail art of the time. The artist sent the copy of the photography of her mailbox to other artists around the world, with whom she had already had communication. Poznanović required the reference answer – she asked them to reply within the time frame of one year with the photography or drawing of their own mail boxes; thirty-eight out of forty-five artists replied. It can be said that this work tackles the issue of communication and connections within the system of contemporary art. Part of its title called “information-decision-action” represents art as a decision, as a conscious, responsible action and reaction; it also represents the world as a kind of a global village where everyone from every corner of the world can connect with anyone.



Bogdanka Poznanović, *Feedback Letter Box, information-decision-action*, 1973

In those same years, Marina Abramović realized her public performances *Rhythms 10; 2; 5; 4; 0*; and in her performance *Rhythm 5* (1974) in the space of SKC (Student Cultural Centre) in Belgrade an exquisite art happening was accomplished. First, the artist constructed a five-pointed star on the ground and set it on fire and then she made a walk around it. Then she cut her hair and her toe nails and threw them into the fire – ritual of burying would mean "to become one with the Mother Earth" but the act of burning them can carry diverse significations from taboo and black magic to purification and resurrection. At the end, she entered the star and lay down in the centre of the star to "coalesce"²²¹ with it as she planned in the description of her action. Surrounded by fire, she was motionless for several minutes, and when the flames reached her she did not react. Only then did the spectators, fellow artists, realize that Abramović lost consciousness because fire consumed the oxygen around her; she was "locked" within the star and they pulled her out of it.

Ješa Denegri comments on this performance:

Ritual acts of enormous symbolic and psychological power (cutting hair, cutting nails and throwing them into the fire), and also the symbolic effect of fire or danger to the health and life of the artist who lying in the flames of the star began to lose consciousness.²²²

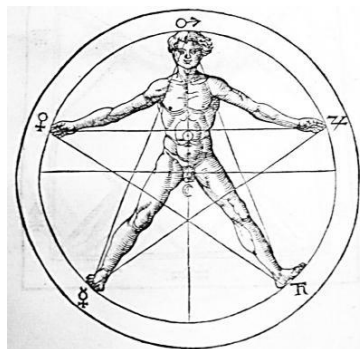
²²¹ Denegri, Ješa, *Serbian Art 1950–2000. The Seventies*, op.cit., p. 137

²²² Ibid.



Marina Abramović, *Rhythm 5*, performance, Belgrade, 1974

The possible symbolism of the star is too wide to be analyzed in detail here. Nevertheless, it is necessary at least to mention some of the variety of meanings this five-pointed symbol transfers. In the first place, this five-pointed type of star is used in flags that originate from European or Western heraldry but more locally, star stands for freedom in the Yugoslav flag of the time; and is used today by many socialist and communist parties and organizations across the world as the symbol of communism as well as broader socialism. The image of pentagram also contains ten points (the five points of the star, and the five vertices of the inner pentagon) thus carrying the association with the double image of the exterior and the interior spaces. Star is present in occultism, in astrology, and is also the symbol of a modern pagan witchcraft religion called *Wicca*. In East Asian symbolism it represents cyclic transformation and material aspects of five elements of fire, earth, metal, water and wood. Furthermore, star form recalls anthropomorphic shape and naturally calls for “insertion” of human body into the five-point diagram just like man inscribed in a pentagram in the image bellow (in the *Renaissance esoterica* image found in Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, Chapter 27 *On the Proportion Measure and Harmony of Man's Body*).



Cornelius Agrippa, *On the Proportion Measure and Harmony of Man's Body*, 16th century

As has been noted, early actions and performances of Marina Abramović were considered to have ethical-mythical character as in them there is a kind of higher principle that in the art one must go to the end, to push the limits. Indeed in most of her art, then and later, Marina Abramović worked with full and unreserved involvement, without routine and/or repetition, and with convictions that everything done in the name of art should be performed with complete surrender to the sublime vocation of the artist. To burn the star and almost die within it was an act of an iconoclast who symbolically exaggerated the obligation of self-sacrifice for the country but with aim to defeat it. She wanted to come to grips with the partisan heroism of her parents, Tito's comrades, members of the "new class", and to face the mythology of Yugoslavia, but primarily to face herself²²³. Even if politics was on the surface of this piece, below were many layers of a more transcendental and pristine motivation. Where majority saw communism in this star, she saw an archetypal symbol with multiple ancient religious and mystical associations. For Abramović, *Rhythm 5* was only a stage in a desperate quest for personal rather than political liberation, and it can be said that in this piece she made a transition from subject to identity.

In the concrete examples of Bogdanka Poznanović and Marina Abramović, it becomes visible that these authors had their own "ideology" that they wanted to "launch". The first one treated the social position of the artwork and of the artist while the second one dealt with the concept of identity within totalitarian regime. To displace the art object, to push it into the streets of group activities, to make it mobile and alive-like action meant to destabilize the conservative vision of the artwork – the action became more important than the object. On the other side, to contact foreign authors around the world at that time signified the desire to connect to fellow artists, to communicate and to exchange, or better said, to overcome borders and reach *the other*. With this in mind, the attempt to symbolically liberate oneself through actions of iconoclast searching for personal identity, very much resembles the acts of a "prison break". On the whole, obviously there was the need to escape and step out of the gallery conservatism and overcome limitations and rigidity of beforehand rules of artist's positioning. In fact, in some radical art practices of the time, the artistic quest for personal identity freed from the constant intrusion of indoctrination literally becomes the matter of life and death for there is an almost unconditional need to liberate from the shackles of ideology.

²²³ Westcott, James, *When Marina Abramović Dies: A Biography*, Plavi Jahač, Beograd, 2013, p. 79

4.1.1. Strategies of Brainwash

*Since Hitler's day a great deal of work has been carried out in those fields of applied psychology and neurology which are the special province of the propagandist, the indoctrinator and the brainwasher.*²²⁴

*...when we think of the growing power of culture to control us by seduction or coercion, we must be glad and not sorry that some part of our fate comes from outside the culture.*²²⁵

When speaking about control and manipulation in this context, it could be appropriate to mention Foucault's vision of discipline when analyzing Jeremy Bentham's design of institutional building called Panopticon saying that "Bentham set the principle that power has to be visible and non-verifiable"²²⁶, and that it is mandatory to create an ever-present awareness that one is being watched. The concept of the design is to allow a single watchman to observe all inmates of an institution without them being able to tell whether or not they are being watched which is similar to the atmosphere in the so-called single-party rule which is the evidence of an authoritarian government. Here, in case of Yugoslavia, a kind of dictatorship in disguise or better say a "soft" Westernized version of it is an issue. The overall occult totalitarian shadow comes from the fact that there is one and only, overly visible and present, supreme leader and seemingly faceless party that go hand in hand. Therefore, the slogans as mechanisms of indoctrination are just a mere reflection of the social collective consciousness which prevails. For us, the "inmates", it becomes easier to follow the rules and utter readily mottos and formulas than risk trying a road less trodden, especially when one constantly dwells on fears of imaginary enemies and feels being observed. In short, that is how generations were "disciplined" to be the vehicles that maintained the state and its system.

²²⁴ Huxley, Aldous, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1984, p. 286

²²⁵ *Lionel Trilling and the Critics: Opposing Selves*, ed. John Rodden, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1999, p. 264

²²⁶ Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Prosveta, Beograd, 1997, p. 227

Needless to say, there were very few disobedient outcasts and, consequently, their deviation from the “norm” was seen as social anomaly that had to be punished.

One needs to stop for a moment and ask: was Yugoslavia just a decorative lacy fragment in the lining of the Iron Curtain? Was it porous and, if so, why? Why was this supposedly “independent” (neutral) spot located here and not somewhere else? Is this a shadowy, cowardly option of not taking a side, of avoiding responsibility of choice or stand? Is this an ambivalent flirting with two “different” opposing worlds? Is this a global point of dichotomy and duality or simply hypocrisy? Is this an idealistic attempt to be free? Are there any really logical explanations from the point of view of history, politics, geopolitics, local territorial strategies, etc.? Is it always someone else’s fault so that we are entitled to take the position of victim? *Lionel Trilling* believed that politics needed the imaginative qualities of literature and for him the ways to break an individual were by coercion or seduction. The perfect example of coercion is Orwell’s *1984* as direct, obvious, prison-like discipline that controls and directs individuals, and it stands for more of the “Eastern option” of control while the “Western way” of breaking individual is the type of seduction that numbs the senses in the society where individual is allegedly free and attracted to pleasures just like in Huxley’s *Brave New World*. It can be said that Eastern is the hard while Western is the soft method. To be on the line of the Iron Curtain and to juggle between two options while playing the role of “independence” and “freedom” felt very much like Humpty Dumpty sitting on the wall of *Nowhere Land*. Was the idea of freedom and independence a kind of ideological *Soma* that helped us sustain that exact position for so many years?

While *1984* is anti-utopia or dystopia, *Brave New World* is literary utopia. There was visible totalitarianism, in Russia and in Eastern Europe; but there was also the invisible totalitarianism of the so-called “free world”. When people talk about Big Brother, they generally mean a system of covert surveillance and manipulation, oppression in democratic disguise (unlike the system in Orwell’s novel, which is overt). *1984* taught people to imagine government as a conspiracy against liberty. The truth is that Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, because of the way it was artificially constructed and coined as a state, was indeed a kind of impossible country, a utopian idea, *Nowhere Land* that with the disappearance of the Iron Curtain had to be dismantled and shattered. Coercion, force, compulsion, constraint, etc. were served in an acceptable manner, as a more Westernized version of an iron fist in a velvet glove. Therefore, it can be said that Yugoslav society is conceptually a mix between *1984* and

Brave New World. Compulsory party membership, mandatory committee meetings, obligatory participation in social activities and party activism were just some of numerous models of behaviour that were not doubted or rejected. For Foucault, methods of good “dressage” are absolutely necessary in order to discipline individuals and obtain obedient herd. To start with urban architecture projects that maintain hierarchy structure of surveillance not only for institutions (schools, hospitals, asylums, prisons, etc) but for workers’ settlements as well²²⁷, but the same goes for working places and factories. Reorganization of primary school education also became a kind of specific activity where surveillance is a part of pedagogical work²²⁸ just like the processes of disciplinary cases in both school and real life, through the systems of examination, scrutiny, and inspection. Discipline is instilled from the early age – school becomes a kind of mechanism for continual questioning which runs parallel to the process of teaching. Very rarely there are competitions between two groups of students to measure their strengths; what increases is constant comparison of each student with all the others which allows the measurement and sanctioning of individuals²²⁹.

“The mind that judges and desires and decides – made up of these suggestions. But these suggestions are our suggestions – suggestions from the State...”²³⁰ is how Huxley describes the work of hypnopaedia “the greatest moralizing and socializing force of all time”²³¹. The brainwash and shaping of individual consciousness is based on endlessly repeated suggestions (just like slogans are), inspirational whisper and sleep-teaching that are just some of the techniques used to discipline. Radomir Raša Todosijević (1945) used the imitative form of police like (or party like) scrutiny or inspection in his work on what is art *Was ist Kunst?*²³² (1977). This artist was another member of the Belgrade group *Šestorica*²³³ (together with Marina Abramović, Zoran Popović, Neša Paripović, Gergelj Urkom and Era Milivojević) who by all means exerted to affirm his own vision of art since the beginning of the seventies; for him art was the matter of decision.

According to Ješa Denegri, for Todosijević:

²²⁷ Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, op. cit., p. 195

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 199

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 211

²³⁰ Huxley, Aldous, op. cit., p. 348

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² An excerpt from the performance with Marinela Koželj, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rKb4GxK1a4> (accessed on July 12, 2015)

²³³ An appropriate translation would mean six but as “six men”.

artist is a complete person who by his decision, therefore by the conscious act behind which he stands with all his artistic and life experience, his ethical stance, determines propositions of his own activity; it is the artist who establishes and decides on those propositions instead of receiving them from others.²³⁴



Raša Todosijević, *Was ist Kunst Marinela Koželj?*, performance, Vienna, 1977

In the series of performances realized in various cities between 1976 and 1981 with the same title *Was ist Kunst?* (*What is art?*), Raša Todosijević investigates what art might potentially be; and for that purpose, he addresses different female persons depending on the performance (Marinela Koželj, Patricia Hennings, Farideh Cadot, etc.). *Was ist Kunst?* sounds like a slogan or a motto that the artist ceaselessly repeats shouting; it resembles a military order or a command in the police investigation. The fact is that what happens with his voice is that the utterances rhythmically pulsate (accelerating or decelerating) which means that the artist is cyclically conscious and unconscious of his automatic repetitions. What makes it sound more extreme or drastic is that it is pronounced in German; the ultimate question is always posed to a particular female who, of course, gives no answer. The whole performance consists of the endless repetition of the question “what is art?” with the close up frontal female portrait with the face which he touches, stretches, taps, slaps, strokes, or smears paint over it. Highly expressive or better said rather repressive tone of his voice suggests that this is a performance in the context of the global review of the character and artistic phenomena at

²³⁴ Denegri, Ješa, *Serbian Art 1950–2000. The Seventies*, op.cit., p. 178

the level of theory that conceptual art itself raises. What the audience in every city where he did this performance over the years would probably want to know is why only women were “objects of interrogation” taking into account the fact that Todosijević could have chosen for that purpose any male “object” (for example a colleague from the group he belonged to). Does this performance also work on the topics of oppressed position of women in general, or women in the art world dominated by men? Most probably it introduces new “treatment” of the body politics in conceptual art, performance, happening, event, etc. Perhaps it unintentionally (or intentionally) draws attention to gender violence perpetrated by man or it can be that it indirectly speaks about male unwillingness to be harassed or humiliated not even in the name of art (so that, for this purpose, women would “naturally” wilfully succumb to that role). Whatever the case might be, the truth is that the brainwash repetitive question imposed by man to woman considering the origin of art even with the aid of violence obtains no response. If for Raša Todosijević decision is art, and he treats art as a conscious choice, and option, then this performance directly undermines the idea of modernism. As a concept, with its unrefined, raw, and direct way, it breaks taboos thus demystifying the basic components of the theory of art. The fact that remains is that spectators most probably do not desire to see again this performance for its disturbing and visceral tone, and its plain and striking imagery, but mostly because of the futility of the quest for a response so thoughtfully avoided.

In Yugoslavia since my early childhood I was confronted with the communist star in different ways. This symbol was printed on my birth certificate, my passport, was to be seen in every official building, on flags, etc. In 1975 I decided to cut this symbol in my own stomach (reverse with two points pointing upwards) showing its negative aspects.²³⁵



Marina Abramović, *Lips of Thomas*, performance, Innsbruck, 1975

²³⁵ Abramović, Marina, *Artist Body: Performances 1969-1998*, Charta, Milano, 1998, p. 188

Named after her lover from that period, Thomas Lips, *Lips of Thomas* was another performance of Marina Abramović where she challenged again her concept of physical limits. Naked, first she ate a kilo of honey and drank a litre of red wine out of a glass. Then she broke the glass with her hand, incised with a razor blade a reversed star in her stomach with her belly-button in the centre, and then whipped herself until she “no longer felt pain”. In the end, she lay down on an ice cross while a space heater suspended above caused her to bleed more profusely. About half an hour later, probably quite drunk, Abramović was freezing and bleeding; Valie Export could not take it anymore and with help from the audience moved away the ice blocks and thus ended the performance. In the end, this performance did not have much to do with the actual Thomas Lips. In the biography of Marina Abramović, James Westcott calls it her “most violent and baroque work” saying that this “confusing, disturbing and disruptive performance was an unconscious accumulation of religious, political and pathological symbols which had primal power over Abramović”²³⁶. Red wine, as the symbol of Holy Communion, and the use of honey, as powerful and symbolical matter and a kind of homage to Joseph Beuys from whom she inherited it, were used to start this performance as the means of both literal and symbolical intoxication in order to put Abramović in the state where blood will traverse body boundaries. The symbol of communism for which Marina Abramović's parents fought, the five-point star, is carved into her body in a reverse manner as an occult diabolical pentagram. Dealing with her culture, heritage, and of course personal fears (blood phobia) and body limits that the artist challenged with cutting, whipping, bleeding, heat and cold to suffer on the ice crucifixion signified that she was still going through her “Yugoslav phase” during which to be a female artist for her meant to prove that she is stronger and better than man; it meant that she needed to compete to be man-like in order to survive as the female artist in the art world of Yugoslavia.

The works analyzed above show examples of resistance to the system and to the art world aesthetic formalism. While Todosijević investigates the origin of art implying that art is a decided conscious action, for Abramović resistance is fanatical and reflected in extreme “methods”. Like typical members of generations disciplined in the style of 1984 regime in their poetics they are radical, obvious and direct, ruthless and harsh just like the system that they grew from. The topics of torture, suffering, sacrifice, pain, mental isolation and physical abuse inevitably emerge in these works. Again, we are to remember that seduction and/or coercion

²³⁶ Westcott, James, op. cit., p. 94

are measures applied to discipline us. Somehow, we can only hope that at least some part of our destiny emanates outside of it. We are praying that we are capable of breaking away knowing that it is up to us to resist strategies of propaganda, indoctrination and brainwash. Though it is easier said than done, at least we are lucky enough to have such artists that are constant reminders echoing stories of Yugoslav Panopticon that must not be forgotten.

4.2. Corporeal Politics and the Uniform

*Systems of dogma without empirical foundation, such as those of scholastic theology, Marxism, and Fascism, have the advantage of producing a great degree of social coherence among their disciples.*²³⁷

First thing to remember about the performance, or appearance in events, photography or video, is that it is a certain kind of corporeal policy for the artist firstly to present materiality of the body. It means to decide how the author is to define physical presence through the election to wear a certain type of clothes (or to stay naked for example). Whatever the choice might be, it is conscious just as much as the strategy to be naked or dressed is not a coincidence to start with. It also probably means that, by the automatism, one either can or cannot be and act naked in front of the audience, as it is not a skill to be learnt but a matter of self-consciousness. "Surface" politics of the body is reflected in its garments or their absence, through clothes or nakedness. "To be naked is to be without disguise"²³⁸, therefore, to wear any kind of uniform bears a particular kind of introduction of a certain kind of "typology" of identity that the uniform itself signifies. It also means to maintain an inevitable level of stereotyping. It can be added that being naked, in the performance for instance, is also a kind of "uniform" but with other connotations. Clothes (uniform) or nakedness is a starting point of the identification which means that here uniforms of workers, partisans, pioneers, military, police, special forces, etc. are chosen to "push" a viewer into a ready-made set of a supposedly created and, at least partially, defined identity.

Uniform serves to uniform (standardize), unify, simplify, and generalize as it invokes automatic recognition of the identity of the wearer. Wearing any kind of uniform as a group member creates the mirroring effect with others of being equal, of having the same goals. It makes one feel a part of the group, protected and safe, but also by the same token, as it diminishes the experience of one's own individual identity, it compels to follow orders and to

²³⁷ Russell, Bertrand, *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell, 1903-1959*, Routledge, New York, 2003, p. 466

²³⁸ Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing*, BBC and Penguin Books, London, 2008, p. 48

obey. As a matter of fact, uniform produces unity with aim to create mass identity – herd mentality susceptible to control. That pluralism is based on the “need to belong” at the expense of eradicating individual differences and simplifying significance through the meaning of the uniform. The task of the power of disciplining individuals is to “train” them with final aim to collect and gather more from them. “Discipline “fabricates” individuals; it is a specific technique of a particular model of governance in which individuals are both goals and means.”²³⁹

Groups are capable of being as moral and intelligent as the individuals who form them; a crowd is chaotic, has no purpose of its own, and is capable of anything except intelligent action and realistic thinking. Assembled in a crowd, people lose their powers of reasoning and their capacity for moral choice. Their suggestibility is increased to the point where they cease to have any judgement or will of their own.²⁴⁰

It can be stated that uniform as the means to equalize its wearers refers to grouping of the individuals by their “profession” or by their convictions. As far as Yugoslav particularities about this concept are concerned, it can be added that the most prominent specificities stem from the area of history and politics or better said concept of partisans and pioneers as reflections of anti-fascist past and communist system hierarchy. The so-called unwanted unofficial or “independent” subgroups uniforms would be for instance *chetniks’* code. The fact is that whatever the case might be, both partisans and pioneers uniform bear the red star on the cap which share the same design except that the partisan uniform is green for its mimicry in the woods while pioneer is more of a ceremonial type; being a pioneer was not a choice but obligatory option in the course of education and growing up and appearance of this type of uniform in artworks of the artists usually correspond to commenting on the imposed values that were instilled into generations as important mandatory aspect of childhood and breeding.

Depending on the context, in contemporary art of Serbian female artists partisan uniform stands for what Sanja Kojić Mladenov calls “archetype of *partizanka*”²⁴¹ and this author also states that partisan imagery was used in appearances and projects only staged abroad. But nevertheless, what must be pointed out is not only the space (outside of Serbia) but also the time dimension when those symbols were used which is after Tito’s death. Of course, this time reference was not a coincidence but the fact that should be remembered

²³⁹ Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, op.cit., p. 193

²⁴⁰ Huxley, Aldous, op. cit., p. 289

²⁴¹ Kojić Mladenov, Sanja, op.cit.

because it is an emphasis of how important and obligatory was to keep the “sacred” partisan imagery intact. *Partizanka*, a female partisan in Serbian, over time in media, books, (more importantly) school textbooks, and popular culture during and immediately after the Second World War, represented a model of self-sacrificing, courageous woman, a revolutionary, a representative of the working class that struggles against imperialism, fascism and defends her nation and country. For example, Marina Abramović used the uniform of *partizanka* to stress the importance of a specific social context for the development of her artistic work.

The concept of her work often focuses on exploring her own family and the ideological story, which is based on the conflict of religion and communism, bolstered by a strong duality present in her growing up. The author points to the importance of the individual identity of the artist and its own national and imposed history as a primary impulse in the creation of the artwork.²⁴²

Important to realize is that Abramović’s use of *partizanka* image is mostly for the purpose of storytelling within tracing back into her autobiography. Besides that, we can also see her performing naked but with *partizanka* cap as well as in the full partisan uniform in Robert Wilson’s version of the staged biography of Marina Abramović *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović* (premiered in 2011).

To return to Bertrand Russell’s saying, and remember the paradox, that though fascism and here communism are systems of dogma without empirical foundation, nevertheless they produce high level of social coherence among their disciples²⁴³. Such theory would directly induce interpretation based on the analysis of human nature which is to be perceived as malleable and too easily dominated by ideology. As members of two different nations – one characterized by communism in Yugoslavia and the other by fascism of prewar Germany, Marina Abramović and Ulay did their homage to this topic. This androgenic couple of “non-biological twins” realized performances that together constitute the *Relation Work* series as “research of relationship between female principle and male principle”²⁴⁴. Actually, in their work they deconstructed the image of “femininity” and the image of “masculinity” by freeing themselves from what was inscribed into the body in the European culture²⁴⁵.

²⁴² Kojić Mladenov, Sanja, op.cit.

²⁴³ See trailer for Marta Popivoda’s film *Yugoslavia, How Ideology Moved Our Collective Body*, 62 min, 2013, <https://vimeo.com/66241966> (accessed on January 23, 2017)

²⁴⁴ Dedić, Nikola, op. cit., p. 134

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 135



Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Communist Body/Fascist Body*, Amsterdam, 1979

Ulay and Abramović share birthday on November 30th, and in 1979 it was the starting point for this work. Eleven guests were invited to come to the artists' loft in Amsterdam at a quarter to midnight. The guests were their acquaintances who knew that their birthday would begin at midnight. When they entered, they found Ulay and Abramović covered with a red blanket lying on a mattress on the floor; they seemed asleep. There were two tables placed some ten metres in front of the mattress, parallel to each other. On the tables there were glasses, champagne and caviar served. "Ulay's" table was more stylish and luxurious while "Abramović's" was covered with newspapers and had Russian champagne. The birth certificates of the hosts were displayed on another table; on Ulay's document was a swastika on the seal and on Marina's was a star. Three weeks later, Ulay and Abramović inquired their guests on how they had experienced *Communist Body/Fascist Body*. The conclusion was surprising – each of them had a rather different opinion about it. It seemed that each of them somehow projected personal vision of it onto the overall performance experience. Together with the images recorded that evening, the reactions of the guests were incorporated into the end result of this piece meaning that in the latter presentations of this work interviews with the audience were included as the supporting material of this performance.

This performance "shows origins by similarity presented in different forms"²⁴⁶. To start with the title that uses slash to "separate" bodies means that they are already equal as if saying "this one or another or whichever". While Ulay does not really hide his origins but also would rather prefer not to know where he comes from, Abramović, as the course of time and her later work will show, sees her origins as something very special to her. Similarly, while during the performance Ulay was sleeping all night, Abramović did not get a wink of sleep till

²⁴⁶ Abramović, Marina, *Artist Body: Performances 1969-1998*, op. cit., p. 216

the morning, she spent the night pretending to sleep while listening to every sound the audience was making. In this performance it was up to the audience to take the course of action in this “celebratory” act where the celebrators chose to remain passive, distant and cocooned as if they decided simply to ignore the official “differences” between them that come from their different backgrounds and origins. They just stayed wrapped in red colour cover, immersed into their own experience; red is the colour present on both red star and around swastika in fascist imagery. To take it from the wider context in hermeneutics, both swastika and star are symbols of movement and cycle. In the end, the inscriptions into the body by the culture seem irrelevant, they are just drawings and it is us who give them meaning; it is individual personal experience of this performance event that matters not communism, fascism or any ideology.



Milica Tomić, *Remembering*, performance/photo installation, 2 c-prints, 2000/2001

The following example of representation of women as a partisan fighter in contemporary art is a project of Milica Tomić (1960) *Remembering* (2000) or *Erlauf* named after the Austrian town where a significant historical event took place – a meeting of American and Soviet Army which marked the end of the Second World War for Austria. The artist dressed as a young *partizanka* appears in the midst of the social-realist monument dedicated to the meeting of the two armies, in a symbolic space between two soldiers, American and Russian. It refers to the historical role of the artist’s country of origin, of Yugoslavia as the symbolic crossroads of East and West, through its emphasis on the individual, on the local identity. Here, we return to the point that the uniform on its own automatically produces associations and “significance” – it is enough to put it on to produce some meaning. Therefore, all in all, the final result remains on the surface – she is starring *partizanka* between two sides which were in conflict, she is the third party, another option in the middle. This image is

actually sending mixed messages in visual terms. It should probably resemble a kind of *tableau vivant* where she, alive “partizanka” is with two other soldiers (here, very “dead”, dark bronze sculptures) but the accent inevitably fixes on her so that they remain irrelevant in the background. The masquerade effect comes from the incongruence – while Tomić on one side is wearing only upper part of the uniform as if authenticity did not matter, on the other, to make her appearance more “authentic”, she is wearing fake braids to achieve that effect of stereotypical partisan female. Therefore, besides those discrepancies, there is a certain type of sterility in the visual style and poetics and the observer remains indifferent to the image.

On the other side, it is obvious that Tomić as usual develops whole theory around this project as often in her case her works need plenty of verbal explanation because they are visually unconvincing:

It is dedicated to the rediscovering of the emancipating politics of socialism. Today’s simplification of the history of socialism and the reduction of the entire corps of socialist modernism to totalitarianism erases and pushes into oblivion the emancipatory politics of socialism. By reducing socialism to totalitarianism annuls the politics of anti-colonialism and anti-fascism, gender equality, industrial democracy, and introduces instead politics which negate the outcome of the Second World War, anti-fascist movement. I reminded to the emancipating potential of the People’s Liberation Struggle by confronting it with today’s politics of restoration, which redefine the outcome of the Second World War in Europe.²⁴⁷

As we are firstly observers and not readers because firstly we see the image, we should remain suspicious and doubtful about long philosophical explanation that seems far way too cumbersome in order to force the meaning into these images. Or to say it in a simpler way, there is a huge discrepancy between the imagery and the intended meaning; or better point out that *Remembering* should be justified as what it really is – only remembering the past.

²⁴⁷ See Milica Tomić on *Remembering*, <https://milicatomic.wordpress.com/works/remembering/> (accessed on July 16, 2015)



Milica Tomić, *Milica Tomić and Roza El-Hassan Driving in the Porsche and Thinking About Overpopulation*, 2000, billboard, 3 x 9 m

In another Milica Tomić's Austrian project we can see her again in *partizanka* ensemble; here is the way that the artist commented on this work:

...a project that gathers artistic statements by Austrian as well as international artists commenting the political situation in Austria. For this project we used a press photograph which attracted much attention in Austria, it was used in billboard posters advertising the Austrian weekly magazine Profil: Wolfgang Schüssel as the passenger sitting side by side with Jörg Haider, who is in the driver's seat of a Porsche. It was exposed on the billboards all over the city as a black and white photo. We used the original color photograph, but we changed the passengers. Who are the once that are excluded from the representation of a political power, and how do they appear in a space made just for two?²⁴⁸

What firstly comes to mind is the overall jovial atmosphere in this photography which makes us conclude that this "team" from the Porsche does not give a damn about overpopulation or any other contemporary topic that humanity is agonizing about. If so, it is a direct critique of capitalism as inhuman and self-absorbing. And if it really speaks about exclusion from the representation of a political power, Milica Tomić seems very much "stuffed" into the picture also for the uniform she is wearing. It is also important to mention that it also used to be official military uniform of ex-Yugoslavia, not only the partisan uniform inherited from the World War II. The final effect is that it was an episode of mindless posing when the author was in a good mood but nevertheless bored one afternoon – the observer cannot discriminate the actual intention. Did she actually had some real idea on her mind or was just paid to do whatever? Posing around in this uniform, abroad, seems like exporting a

²⁴⁸ See Milica Tomić on *Milica Tomić and Roza El-Hassan Driving in the Porsche and Thinking About Overpopulation*, <https://milicatomic.wordpress.com/works/overpopulation/> (accessed on July 16, 2015)

brand that outside of its original context still looks “exotic”, brings back memories and associations, and for that same reasons makes it easier to obtain public attention and reaction for the project in question.

What is striking in the existing examples is that image of partisan woman, *partizanka*, appears in the works of artists from Serbia, but only presented in a foreign environment²⁴⁹. At exhibitions in Serbia, there was no representative example of this artistic practice, except in cases of re-interpreting the above mentioned works of Milica Tomić. Known stereotypes treat Serbia and the Balkans as a militaristic ground. But what happened is that the real social, nationalistic climate of the 1990s caused artists from Serbia to move their artworks to foreign art scene; after all the unfortunate events, they are questioning symbolic questions about who they are, where they come from and what they think. Does the use of partisan uniform draw to radical feminism? Sending a subtle message that after all women are different from warrior men, though supposedly males are biologically more prone to destruction. In the spirit of postmodern feminism, women imparity stands out through their specific, multiple identities, but with the right to be equally free as men. To wear a uniform in artwork means firstly to play with the fire of conservative public that still lives in the beloved past. Secondly, it is also a double-edged sword because the scripture of uniform on the body is automatically transmitted to the audience. Just like in philosophy every idea is either prolongation or negation of the earlier thought, here also to put on a uniform is seen either as critique of the system or as taking a political stance; and for a female artist to dress as a worker, pioneer, partisan, warrior, etc., could mostly signify deconstruction of patriarchal values of a male dominating totalitarianism.

²⁴⁹ Kojić Mladenov, Sanja, op. cit.

4.3. Transition from “Titoism” to Neofolk

*Mindlessness and moral idiocy are not characteristically human attributes; they are symptoms of herd-poisoning.*²⁵⁰

*A songstress belongs to everyone and to no one.*²⁵¹

*Artifice and non-sense, they are the idol's esoteric face, its mask of initiation. The seduction of a face purged of all expression, except that of the ritual smile and a no less conventional beauty.*²⁵²

Generally speaking, any aim and/or intention to write about the past could easily turn into a double-edged sword or a tricky ambition. The time distance does not really serve to achieve the obviously desired objectivity because one's personal subjective experience of the moment in question more often than not tends to blur the vision. Is remembering the past nostalgia or subversion? It also raises the denial of the past on one side and feeling nostalgic on the other (especially when looking back on the days of Yugoslavia and on what the rest of the world assumed it was). Thus, the standing point is a shaky ground for the author where the exterior image and the interior picture could collide or, even more challenging, it might be the spot where a hopeless tendency to beautify the past could emerge. Nevertheless, citizens of what used to be called Yugoslavia very clearly remember the historical moment of Tito's death (1980), so much that probably everyone still carries a vivid memory of where he/she was exactly at the moment of hearing the news about it. What followed were the 1980s coloured by the new phenomena of worship (that was actually very much alike the rallies devoted to Tito) and alas, the turmoil in the state that lost its supreme leader exchanged its old communist idol for the “folk” music stars – to put it differently, the new era was to begin.

²⁵⁰ Huxley, Aldous, op.cit., p. 293

²⁵¹ From the film *And God Created a Pub Songstress* directed by Jovan Živanović, 1972, <http://www.navidiku.rs/video/domaci-filmovi/i-bog-stvori-kafansku-pevacicu>, (accessed on August 22, 2015)

²⁵² Baudrillard, Jean, *Seduction*, New World Perspectives, Montreal, 2001, p. 96

To begin with, in this section of this chapter, research in the folklore and Neofolk music has two goals. Firstly, it intends to define female role and its positioning on stage and in public in order to comment on how women moved through folklore into socialism. And then, secondly, through the study of Neofolk emergence, I would like to demonstrate how that newly discovered female image evolved and mutated in the media. With these intentions, visual production defined here is not related to folklore as the source of cultural or economic production significant for this thesis, but it rather imposes that Neofolk as a popular phenomenon played an important part in formation of the new found feeling of freedom that women experienced during the 1980s in Serbia of the time (which was additionally fortified by the rising concept of consumerism as a false “proof” of prosperity). Therefore, that “liberated” female identity of the 1980s, which later slowly strolled jauntily into the 1990s and the war, could not be ignored by (female) artists, sociologists, and anthropologists.

When we speak about the history of unstable relations, it must be taken into consideration how women “evolved” through folklore into socialism.

Defined as “knowledge about people” or “knowledge from people”, in socialism folklore was the knowledge constructed as a myth about the anonymous creator without gender and without ethnicity but interpreted within class premises; by tacit agreement all that is universal and neutral was equated with masculinity. So, for example, the specificity of women's creativity in the traditional village culture was subservient to male representational forms of expression.²⁵³

To put it differently, folklore as a practice in which women play a significant part, assumed their usually anonymous presence in the processed versions of the socialist spirit of the people but also covered up for the preservation of patriarchal myths of male exclusivity. Otherness of women in patriarchal national culture is reflected in two ways – firstly, as a symbolical representative of the wider community responsible to appropriate behaviour which supports ethical code and, secondly, it treats women as liminal and potentially dangerous (and, consequently, subject to regulatory disciplinary procedures). For example, in the classification of vocal traditions and folk poetry by Vuk Karadžić, there are male (heroic, epic) and female (lyric) songs; however, while women are allowed to sing only lyric poetry, men can sing both

²⁵³ Šuvaković, Miško, *History of Art in Serbia XX Century 2. Realisms and Modernisms about the Cold War*, op.cit., p. 771

epic and lyric songs. Also, there is another distinction on the stage where men are instrumentalists (but can also sing) while women are vocalists.

As already analyzed, the role of woman was emphasized in agrarian fertility rituals, thus she was identified with immutability of tradition. On the other hand, “socialist woman” was characterized by the antagonism between her former role of the representative of atemporal traditional world and her new active participation in progress. With the arrival of self-management socialism and the enthronement of the imperative of social progress, folklore arises as biopolitics of the local rural identities. Instead of the nationalistic forefront tensions, class premises mattered – the peasant culture in official discourses was seen as “unspoiled” as opposed to the city tradition of “bourgeois decadence”. Folklore becomes a social spectacle which articulates desirable version of the recent past with aim to construct socialist iconography. Female identity through agitprop posters of representations of femininity sets the figure of working woman and comrade. New forms of narrative and visual display of a “strong” female identity served the communist ideology to attract its supporters. The image of woman-hero in the art of socialist realism takes place in two fields – revolution and work. A “strong” woman is “equal” to man for the purpose to manipulate her body with aim to establish grandiosity and to maintain utopian spectacle about the unity of “nations and nationalities”. However, the fact is that if a woman transgresses gender framework imposed to her or performs actions (incantations, rituals, etc.) that are considered specifically “female” in a negative sense, consequently she is seen as anachronistic and therefore marginalized.

Visual narrative of the female body in socialist public manifestations

Here to be considered is the discourse of the female body within public appearances, manifestations and representations in socialism. Visual elements of public performance are the significant holders of social legitimization of cultural practices where the performance itself is the form of social activity. Within such frames it is necessary to speak about visual narrative of female body at public manifestations where women took part in drama and

folkloric groups – at least symbolically such participation of theirs would mean an “entrance” into social life (and public scenery) that was reserved primarily for men. “Stories of songstresses confirm that peasants considered their musical performances undesirable and inappropriate, gossiped about them and considered them as ridiculous and rude.”²⁵⁴ In this context it would also be interesting to mention the fact that Serbian word for songstress *pevačica* also has a widely used form *pevaljka* with pejorative meaning (the signification carries whole range of meanings that vary – cheap, without talent, vulgar, trashy, “easy”, etc.) that often usually refers to female singers in *kafana* (a kind of a typical Serbian pub/restaurant). Female performers who took part in groups slowly left behind their traditional folkloric costumes. Metaphorically speaking, those public appearances and performances of women would in a way also signify liberation from the conservative positioning of women. Nevertheless, though new ideology insisted on abandonment of traditional clothes in public performances especially in young women, their position was not essentially improved socially speaking.

In the history of the former Yugoslavia, the phenomenon of industrialization and modernization is also closely linked with the emergence of “neofolk” music, a historical predecessor of “turbo-folk” music genre, which was the first target of the socialist sociologist and cultural studies of the time. Terms like “kitsch” and “trash” arrived from television about the end of the 1960s. The “official” popular music in Yugoslavia after the Second World War could be heard on the radio broadcasting old music and recorded authentic interpretations of “rock”, and also mainly French *chansons* and Italian *canzone*. Of course, classical music was mandatory but actually it can be said that the first real pop craze was felt throughout the entire country with the appearance of adapted versions of Mexican songs and also of Greek folk music. However, a far greater commercial success had singers of the so-called “neofolk” music. While pop and rock music was designed for high and medium high-class, neo-folk was aimed at rural audience, at nascent working class and suburban population. During the 1980s, in this type of popular music were increasingly prevalent trends of Orientalization on one hand, and technological modernization on the other. As music tendencies modified through the course of time so did the visual narrative of a songstress. From female groups of singers dressed into traditional folk costumes who performed at rural events, “emancipated” army of solo songstresses rose over the course of time; they performed not only at pubs and fairs but

²⁵⁴ See Hofman, Ana, *Socialist Femininity on Stage*, op.cit., p. 134

also at public (rural and urban) events, sang on the radio and finally appeared in TV shows and movies. Slowly but surely, the performative female body discourse reached a new twist. The once covered hair became visible now, the skirts got shorter and shorter, make-up and all the arsenal of “masquerade” came into play. Once hidden, inappropriate, ridiculed, and controlled, bodies suddenly flashed as sexualized singing and dancing entities. Given these points, the new social and cultural phenomenon was about to be born.

And God Created a Pub Songstress is a Serbian movie produced in 1972 that already in the introductory scene demonstrates that a pub songstress is a kind of a liminal being and as such is potentially dangerous. In the middle of nowhere, a songstress sings to entirely male “audience” in the pub (*kafana*) and there is a spontaneous fight in which she herself also gets hit and (of course) is blamed for all of it. Here, we can see clearly that female public performance turns a woman into a disruptive element which raises two inalienable and exclusive male “rights” that man is entitled to – the right to freely express sexual desires and the right to violence (including gender violence). When she gets hit and all of them start to humiliate and blame her demanding an explanation from her (that in the given situation seems a completely absurd scene), her only defence are the words she murmurs saying: “What I would tell you, you would never understand”. And in the split of a second, the brink between the songstress and her male “public” turns into an implacable abyss – there is no communication or understanding, no hope as if the discord between sexes was innate and natural. In the continuation, her “manager” reminds her that there are unwritten rules of conduct for her because a songstress belongs to everyone and to no one, thus directly stating that female singer is not free but rather objectified – she has to exude the air of being available to everyone while in reality she is not allowed to have a private life (connected to man). In short, it can be said that her individual identity is diluted into her audience while she needs to keep the distance in order to avoid her own possible disruptive influence; or better said, she is “dehumanized” with the goal of not provoking chaos within the male herd.



Milica Tomić, *Alone*, double-sided DVD installation 2 channel projection, loop, 2001

Two projections present two sides of the local, Serbian, public fe/male representation: famous female turbo folk-singer on one side and three anonymous men playing cards on the other. This male type of community is never represented in media, reflecting the way in which the dominant power is reproduced on the micro social level. The singer is never present in their community as a real person; she exists only in the media. Media constructed female body is a man's phantasm construction, in which a female body is the surface, screen with a double function.²⁵⁵

This is the way how the author Milica Tomić describes this piece that she did in 2001 at the time when the so called "turbo" folk already existed. The reason to comment this work here is its connotation considering not its temporal meaning (the moment when it was created) but its more general significance referring to songstress and her male public. Though Tomić in her suggestive explanation insists that this installation is allegedly about female body within globalization expansion, it must be emphasized that the singer Dragana Mirković (1968) who appears in this video started her career in the 1980s as a "neofolk" performer; also the way the relation is put into separation through two screens suggests positioning that can be placed at any time and not in a specific era. The title *Alone* also suggests that although she is the only female in the scenery, and she has the "audience" and is performing, she is basically separate, and expelled from the main action. The dynamics unavoidably suggests that the function of a songstress is to entertain, but nevertheless she is essentially alone (just like in the film *And God Created a Pub Songstress*). In the male world of hidden and illegal actions behind the

²⁵⁵ See Milica Tomić, *Alone*, <http://milicatomic.wordpress.com/works/alone/> (accessed on August 25, 2015)

curtains, she remains a passive decor because “men act and women appear”²⁵⁶. Evidently, there is the parallelism – on one side, the image of female body that is openly “shining” and, on the other, the herd of anonymous men from the darkness (as if her obviousness and visibility aimed to draw spectator’s attention away from male underhanded activities). It could be said that Tomić also refers to the circles of private and hidden male power where women are actually only posing. This work is an example that can be compared with the film commented above because it underscores the distance and emphasizes the division between sexes within the context of female performance and her (male) audience. Although “she” as alone and “them” as the group of men are placed on two separate screens, the boundary between private and public, between visible and invisible, between “powerful” and “powerless” is neither really sharp nor clearly defined in the real world. So, on the whole, the responsibility for such positioning and mutual relating lies on both sides.

Gendered production of neofolk diva

In the event that one can lose neither the past nor the future but only try to grasp them through memory and imagination, to write about the historical (and therefore personal) past inevitably induces some regret, responsibility and most of all probably denial. For Tito’s pioneer like me, at the time rallies devoted to him were intoxicating and fascinating spectacles that shined with happiness, strength, youth and unity but now I feel them as false, pathetic exaggerated, and disturbing. That is perhaps because my local historical threshold tolerability has been buried under the psychic garbage of political “new consciousness” during the last quarter of a century. Point overlooked is that Tito was almost universally hailed as the last great Second World War leader, the first communist to successfully challenge Stalin, and the founder of “national communism” and above all else, he was praised as the creator of a modern state, the leader whose wisdom and statesmanship had united Yugoslavia’s historically antagonistic national groups in a stable federation. In that context when speaking

²⁵⁶ Berger, John, op.cit., p. 41

about slogans, one cannot forget the popular “And after Tito, Tito (again)” which understandably after his death obviously signifies that he was the personification of ideology, the icon of local communism and the symbol of socialist system.

As Huxley explains through *Brave New World Revisited* (1958) the symptoms of what he calls “herd-poisoning” come from uncritical acceptance and/or unconscious internalization of propaganda taking into consideration that herd-mentality or crowd psychology needs a leader and is prone to obey within conditions of totalitarian system and dictatorship. Rallies are one of the typical characteristics of manifestations of the “culture of power”; they are demonstrations of collective obedience and are the form of reconfirming it over and over again. Once Tito disappeared, the habituated way of sustaining the already deeply rooted form of “worshipping” and strengthening the propagated ideology needed to be kept at any price. Just as pagans, when they received Christianity, kept the same old form of worship but with a new concept to follow, the poisoned herd needed its dose of euphoria, enthusiasm and collective trance. Socialism went on, rallies devoted to the dead leader continued (though understandably with less euphoria) and the “Tito after Tito” menagerie seemingly functioned. The state leaders deliberately forced the “neo-folk” – folk was mixed with pop and rock and aspects of rural culture and urban culture began to merge. What happened was that the stage performance was to be redirected to new ideology as the same year when Tito died the greatest “queen of folk” of Yugoslavia arrived in Belgrade and began her career.



Lepa Brena (1980)



Lepa Brena (2011)

Lepa Brena (Fahreta Jahić, 1960) is a meaningful political phenomenon of the former Yugoslavia, something like a peaceful communist authority. When speaking about the “double

presence” of women in mass media, Žarana Papić comments on the dual image where women are represented both as strong and weak saying that “socialist queens of folk skillfully talked, represented and articulated the dominant political language and code of political functioning of those times”²⁵⁷. According to her, Lepa Brena (with her stage name where *lepa* means beautiful) was playing identification/ironization of the stereotype of a beautiful woman as she played “reincarnation” of the myth of a beautiful Serbian woman²⁵⁸. It can be said that Lepa Brena is the most important representative of the specific Yugoslav phenomenon of the so-called female star. Additionally, she was also playing with what Papić calls “double female presence”²⁵⁹ – on one side, she is among the first to begin using all the attributes of female sexuality in all layers of the typical feminine seduction but on the other side she acts as an independent person, free to express her political, professional and personal attitudes. It is the image of the female “free entrepreneur” who is wealthy and followed by the team of people (mostly men). Here, the achievement of woman's economic independence, her power to survive in business is intertwined with symbols of what is considered to be “traditional femininity”. With Lepa Brena, in socialism suddenly emerged the image of independent successful woman who at the same time follows the stereotype of a sexy blonde but what was special about her was the accent of humour that stirred up that same cult of femininity. As can be seen, it is exactly that playful parody that saves her from falling victim to that same stereotype. The way women in the music business are parodies of traditional femininity undermines the view that there is still a dominant and ever binding “eternal” femininity. The intertwining of weakness, power, and ironic distance in the new visualization of femininity points out that traditional femininity (and all that it entails) is no longer what it was (while it must be kept in mind that we are still talking about the 1980s in Yugoslavia).

It can be also added that traditional femininity had lost its compulsory character and became more transparent as the social construction of female sexuality linked to those social relations in which patriarchy dominates and that nowadays, despite the fact that patriarchy has not lost its social/cultural basis, it is no longer the only principle and law, but what one has to be aware of is the interrelation between media and consumerism, between our greed and our hunger to devour the “products” (cultural ones as well). As for Jean Baudrillard “seduction of our modern idols is cold, being at the intersection of two cold mediums, that of the image

²⁵⁷ Papić, Žarana, op.cit., p. 366

²⁵⁸ See *ibid.*

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 145

and that of the masses”²⁶⁰. It becomes definitely necessary to take a critical distance and to filter media influence about that “imagery of femininity” especially about and around female performers and stars because “the great stars or seductresses never dazzle because of their talent or intelligence, but because of their absence. They are dazzling in their nullity, and in their coldness – the coldness of makeup and ritual hieraticism”²⁶¹. Neofolk music stars were the 1980s vanguard of the 1990s social and cultural phenomenon of “turbo-folk” which introduced apocalyptic “femininity” that was about to step on the stage of the soon-to-disappear Yugoslavia.

²⁶⁰ Baudrillard, Jean, op.cit. p. 95

²⁶¹ Ibid., p. 96

5. SERBIA AS THE BRIDGE AND THE WALL

*Bridges are passages, dangerous spaces for transit and voyage between two foreign territories, open places where the wind blows...*²⁶²

*Memorial places, old cities, objects in museums should speak of time when identity, under contemporary assumption, was clear, simple and straightforward, even though it could have never actually been such. However, from today's perspective, earlier periods seem understandable and uncomplicated while keeping their tracks has become one of the presumed prerequisites of understanding (ourselves) in the present.*²⁶³

*Another, even more present, but unfortunately less visible type of "immurement" of women is possible to identify in victims of rapes which were organized crime during the Yugoslav wars. These women, usually discussed as representatives of nation, are often forgotten and abandoned even by their own communities. Confined in the body which suffered violence and was marked and conquered by the enemy, they were walled up alive somewhere between the enemy and their own society in the "bridge" which "raises the wall" not wanting to know about their experiences, needs, problems.*²⁶⁴

Fascination with the past of what used to be Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and what is left of it within the borders of Serbia as unsettled and unsettling, a historically unstable territory, was often based on pathetic justifications of the concept of its "heroic" nation, its pride, and "saving territories" within and outside its borders. The overall everlasting psychosis was carefully fuelled through hate which mostly emanated from fear. At the same

²⁶² Abramović, Marina, *The Bridge/El puente: exposición retrospectiva*, Direcció General de Promoció Cultural, Museus i Belles Arts: Consorci de Museus de la Comunitat Valenciana, Valencia, 1998, p. 18

²⁶³ Gavrilović, Ljiljana, *On Politics, Identities, and Other Museum Stories*, Etnografski Institut SANU, Beograd, 2009, p. 28

²⁶⁴ Stevanović, Lada, op.cit., p. 241

time, the sudden transition Serbia underwent from internationally recognized Yugoslav state to a small Balkan country did not largely modify its conflicting role on the map.

The economic and political crisis during the mid-1980s and early 1990s was accompanied by crisis of identity, deconstruction, and post-socialist normative reaffirmation of nation and the national. Old (Yugoslav) social values such as brotherhood and unity, atheism, etc., slowly gave way to new values like independent statehood, traditional religion and church. It turned out that Orthodoxy reintroduced by Serbian Orthodox Church returned to the social scene together with its project of building the national state in the post-communist Serbia that favours Orthodoxy as its essence after more than four decades of socialist, secular and atheistic Yugoslavia. Serbian Orthodox Church openly welcomed the emergence of Slobodan Milošević on the political scene and its policy of “solving the Serbian national issue”. Additionally, Serbdom was openly equated with Orthodoxy. Representatives of the new allegedly democratically elected government sought to express appreciation to the Church by attending religious gatherings and liturgies. With the full support of both the state leadership, and all nationalist parties, the Church won a prominent place in public and political life. In 2001, confessional religious teaching was introduced (again) into the public education system and soon became a compulsory subject. Nevertheless, the implicit and/or explicit role of the Serbian Orthodox Church in nationalism formation (and thus in the war from 1991 to 1995) remains a controversial and censored topic to comment on. It is seen as a taboo territory which pushed Serbia into an impenetrable yet rigid “wall” position. Obviously, in nationalist concepts, religion is a solidifying amalgam that simplifies the self-image of national identity. Though, by default, religion should refer to spiritual realms based on tolerance, in this case it breeds ego inflation, hate, and violence causing further division, separation, and isolation.

Despite interpretations of primitive and regressive components of this war, returning to rural self-sufficiency and xenophobia, of course, cannot be neglected. However, though it may sound paradoxical, since its inception, this war was modern and technologically developed because the media was its primary lethal weapon. Serbian media as the main extension of the state power served as a crutch that contributed to the nationalist dogma. The fact is that, historically speaking, the geographical location of Serbia can be characterized as dualistic and controversial. Previously, Yugoslavia was a state which grew out of the ruins of the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian empires; also it can be said that as a country Yugoslavia served as a political “buffer” zone between the East and the West. Therefore, depending on the point of view, Serbia can be seen as a bridge that connects and/or as a wall

that separates. Nevertheless, wall can be bridged but a bridge itself is a breaking point; bridge can be a spot of division between two entities, between “us” and “them”, between *one* on one side and *many* on the other. To invoke the image of the bridge would mean to refer to Serbia not only as a territorial whole but to search into the threshold of the Balkans – “a cultural and ethnic space between East and West; a land of transit, of danger; a land swept by the winds of war and extreme feelings; a passage and corridor where survival is extremely difficult...”²⁶⁵. To speak historically and geographically of Serbia as the Balkans point of crossroads would mean to try to comprehend the complexity of the coexistence of Roman Catholics, Muslims, and Orthodox Christians, and to understand tension, turmoil, and silent conflict. It is an untenable point where cultures of Middle Europe, the Balkans, and the Middle East intersect. It might signify the need to be able to dwell on the mix of influences spiced by not only various religions but by diverse traditions, customs, conquerors, and armies; it would be some sort of layers of ancient Roman and Byzantine but also Oriental ways of living amidst allegedly forgiven wars but actually never forgotten enmities on the soil soaked with blood, persecutions, centuries-old violence, and misery.

So in this context, to begin the debate about developments, trends and events in the last decade of the 20th century, Serbian art scene would mean firstly to identify the fact that along with the collapse of the so called “second Yugoslavia” a disintegration occurred of the area previously known as the Yugoslav art space. From then onwards, evidently a new phase of the history of modern art in each of the emerging countries and states began. Consequently, the Serbian art scene changed not only from within (due to the arrival of new generations of artists and their needs and ways of expression) but also because of the alterations in surrounding cultural context which then needed to perceive phenomena and events in the territory of Serbian contemporary art of the time. After the breakdown of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, Serbia had a change of cultural in addition to ideological paradigm. The previous point of the dominant ideological context of self-managing socialism turned towards the idea of restoration of the national state; the cultural model of self-government ideology was replaced by the concept of national culture. What appeared was what some critics immediately named “national realism”, that is renovation of artistic language that fully rests on traditionalism, looking for models that are nationalistic, intimate or fantastic. Serbia became a closed space not only for art and culture, but for one limiting and

²⁶⁵ Abramović, Marina, *The Bridge/El puente: exposición retrospectiva*, op. cit., p. 18

highly insecure society where some artists chose to ignore reality and use their creative processes as a form of escapism while others blossomed due to their radical art practices that closely dealt with what the growing feeling of isolation, claustrophobia, and “incarceration” brought.

Linguistic trends coined in the nineties to introduce the prefix “ex” to numerous terms in order to signify the connection with the “expired past” (e.g. “ex-Yugoslavia”) served Žarana Papić to write critically and ironically about gender and “ex-masculinity and ex-femininity”²⁶⁶. War brought out women’s groups, NGOs, actions, street activism, as if finally women had felt that their actions were justified by the extreme conditions of the war itself. “Women in Black”²⁶⁷ from Belgrade was the most hated women’s rights NGO in Serbia and is still, 25 years later, “disturbing” for the public. As if they had been the only ones who cared, this NGO was the only one in 1991 to react against the trend of the so called “new normality” that was based on ignoring, distancing and eliminating the *Other* with hate.

This is closely linked to the issue of the pledge of “former” femininity and its passivity and silence, but also to the new “femininity in exile”. When now filtered by a radical feminist perspective as potential victims of rape (in the war), women in this new national order appear as multiple victims. Those new femininities and masculinities do not belong to men and women but are an integral part of the war machine.²⁶⁸

With war, new women groups appeared that were classified as “anti-nationalist” or “nationalist” feminists, as presented in the literature²⁶⁹, and it seems that even in such an abnormal situation and war conditions, women were not able to find the terms to unite. Petty issues divided them – for example, who is more “mother of the nation” oriented or who is a more radical lesbian-like trend follower. The war was raging for years, and an open feminist activism finally surfaced, but the question is how much of an influence it actually achieved.

²⁶⁶ Papić, Žarana, *Women as Ex-Citizens in Ex-Yugoslavia*, Sociološki pregled, br. 1-4. 1992: p. 79-88.

²⁶⁷ See the official website *Žene u crnom (Women in Black)*, <http://zeneucrnom.org/>, accessed on July 19, 2016

²⁶⁸ Papić Žarana, *Texts 1977-2002*, op.cit., p. 179-180

²⁶⁹ *Feminist Forum of the Faculty of Philosophy: Selected Works of Gender Studies*, ed. Nada Sekulić and Marija Radoman, Institut za sociološka istraživanja Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu, Belgrade, 2016, p. 188

5.1. Closed Spaces and Insecure Societies

*Everybody is equally inferior, that becomes the parody of democracy. And, that kind of society – watch out for it – it turns in a quick kick into fascism because of its terror of the outsider.*²⁷⁰

*External destruction of a socio-cultural identity system in the war is the most brutal form of deconstruction but life in conditions of internal malignant mutations may be equally disastrous because it systematically undermines and degrades basic human values...*²⁷¹

In the first place, as they become closed spaces from both outside and within, war zones start to be more “untouchable” territories and therefore more entitled to build their interior “independent” system of values that can easily spin out of control because of isolation. Basic material for production and targeted functioning of murderous hatred and violence in the shameful war in the 1990s is construction of a certain “type of masculinity”. It is the type of masculinity which serves as self-image of national identity – a crucial pillar of war machinery that imposes meaning and, correspondingly, as we are about to see in those conditions, women are “naturally” irrelevant and invisible except in the role of mother and patroness.

One of the “epic” moments of documentary genre of the early 1990s was *See You in the Obituary*²⁷² that not only witnessed Serbia of the time but was also an instructive reading for generations of “new masculinity” and young criminals. This documentary, in the form of an extended news report, speaks of emerging Serbian mafia clans, criminal activities, and sub-cultures that proliferated due to notorious quantity of illegal weapons in the streets but also because of the overall lack of control. That situation was notably fortified by close connections

²⁷⁰ Watts, Alan, *Insecure Societies and Hermits*, video, 9:50, 1976, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADVBZtHvURM> (accessed on February 15, 2016)

²⁷¹ Papić, Žarana, *Texts 1977-2002*, op.cit., p. 308

²⁷² Knežević, Aleksandar and Tufegdžić, Vojislav, *See You in the Obituary*, documentary, 35:16, 1994, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JRDuRP_NGE (accessed on February 15, 2016)

between state power circles, police, army and local criminals. Obviously, it all very much seemed like video games where everyone can do anything without being caught or punished. Ordinary citizens were unimportant and irrelevant in any context because this parallel underworld of chaos and cruelty had no mercy. New breed of “idols”, most of who were killed in the meantime, at that time emerged to “shine” for new generations of young boys and men. The time of war, as a black economic zone justified by external sanctions, was a ground for illegal operations of all kind. The real problem lies not in identifying economic interests that sustained Slobodan Milošević but in providing a concrete analysis of how such obvious and obscene power permissiveness could provide effective ideological and social cohesion. In the country where criminals’ and politicians’ actions go hand in hand while the war is raging, there is not much hope for an ordinary citizen (especially if young at the time) to take a critical stand and objective distance. The growing claustrophobia of living in the closed society was heated by constant feeling of danger and insecurity.

When speaking about this new type of masculinity Žarana Papić calls it the most significant and unavoidable “basis” among numerous causes for the war tragedy and says:

That decisive precondition is targeted "manufactured" aggressive, criminally "virile", and prone to all kinds of violence type of masculinity, that every violent nationalist ideology in its political, militant strategy is constructed, fundamentally based and dependent upon. This type of masculinity (which, luckily is not the only one) is the basic and most important "recruitment centre" of men capable of all conceivable and unthinkable atrocities.²⁷³

While war machine media was promoting this “specific, fascistic, nationalistic and totalitarian manipulation of masculinity”²⁷⁴, the most frequent victims of war were women, children and old people. The truth is also that women chose to remain silent because of the fear of their “heroic” husbands, brothers, and fathers who might consider them as “traitors”; that fear was not invented but real and induced by an aggressive and murderous masculinity. “This unleashed and raw aggression finds women to be its favourite target – their own *wives*, or *unknown women* for collective rapes in the battlefield as ‘deserved’ reward.”²⁷⁵ On the other side, the prevailing psychologization of social life which was trying to convince us that the road to a happy life should be sought in ourselves, in our mental maturity and self-

²⁷³ Papić, Žarana, *Texts 1977-2002*, op.cit., p. 188

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 190

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

discovery was a mask, or a form of illusion; it was its opposite as the proof of the growing disintegration of real psychological dimensions of authentic personal experience and personalities. “In that programmed action of reviving the old, patriarchal “order of things” comes out all the cynicism of the nationalist manipulation of the basic, historical, and human standards and values.”²⁷⁶

*What is specific about totalitarianism is that everything is possible, that there is no logic. The infinity of possibilities starts marking the end of our humanity as that system controls everything.*²⁷⁷



Biljana Đurđević, *Dentist Society*, oil on canvas, 230 x 320 cm, 1996-1998

The identity drama has been documented in the domain of figurative paintings in large formats of Biljana Đurđević (1973), one of which was the *Dentist Society* series. In the canvas of large dimensions, she introduces a group portrait of men with no specified personal identity except of a “guild” (dentist) but which greatly resembles a group of butchers. The format is filled with flesh so that the composition appears to nearly come out of the painting’s edges. The dominant male bodies are leaning over the viewer, thus expressing a kind of static aggression an anticipation of a certain type of violence with particular “male” gestures and positions. This image is a young woman’s personal testimony about a social context that imposes a permanent sense of fear and vulnerability, unearthing one of the key origins of

²⁷⁶ Papić, Žarana, *Texts 1977-2002*, op.cit., p. 300

²⁷⁷ See Griselda Pollock’s conference: *Concentrationary Cinema, Concentrationary Memories, Concentrationary Imaginaries: Totalitarian Legacies and Cultural Resistance*, op. cit.

threatening violence that has defined the Serbian environment. It reveals the Serbian patriarchal order of society in which the manifestation of masculinity is unlimited and uncontrolled; and to place this image in the medical context makes it even more satirical. However, the author leaves no hope saying that “the world of ‘butchers’ is not behind us, I think that today the 1990s are global – it is just that now our hell has become interminable”²⁷⁸.



Biljana Đurđević, *Summer Time is Over*, oil on canvas, 195 x 300 cm, 2005

A decade later this author offers another group portrait of men in the series *Paradise Lost*, this time with another element of iconography of danger added – dogs. Before this painting, she already purposefully chose “bloodthirsty” breeds of dogs for her models (*Bambi is Dead*, 2000). *Summer Time is Over* places men in a more decorative background yet not in a more “pleasing” manner. The wall ornamentation resembles vintage wallpapers that could be associated with a cosy atmosphere, yet the men seem relaxed, indifferent, and distant. We know nothing about them except that there is a “wall” between these men and a spectator. This barrier is made of aggressive dogs so that men look untouchable and somehow stay undefined. When one is afraid of the dog, the dog’s owner becomes invisible and irrelevant because the one who is scared forgets that there is a master behind the animal. Although there might be an unspoken tension or secret within this group, it remains silent and remote –

²⁷⁸ See *Interview with Biljana Đurđević* in the Annex

it is “a guy thing”. It seems that dogs serve as a masquerade – for example, as a method in the strategy of concealment and protection of perpetrators of any sort of crime or violence.



Biljana Đurđević, *Living in Oblivion*, oil on canvas, 210 x 220 cm, 2006

Biljana Đurđević continues to represent identity deviations of the closed society by calling on its short memory in *Living in Oblivion* series. In particular, the interesting aspect of her paintings is her choice of spaces and backgrounds where she places her “models”. Often it is a “neutral” space, public bathrooms, pools, all covered with tiles – places that seem clean but are subtly suggesting a disturbing possibility that also any crime can be easily “washed away” and concealed there. These are the premises that remind us of hospitals, morgues, and waiting rooms. A spectator sometimes does not know whether a depicted subject is asleep or dead – we all very much feel like we are in a waiting room unaware of whether we are dead or alive. This artist does not only deal with portraits of adult men and women but she depicts groups of bodies of children and old people. She gives us notions of the fragility and vulnerability of young souls in their stages of development in addition to the emotions of insecurity and shame of old, helpless terminal patients (*Seven Deadly Sins*, 2004).



Biljana Đurđević, *Synchronized Swimming*, oil on canvas, 208 x 370 cm, 2007-2008

In *Living in Oblivion*, there is a group portrait of girls kneeling on the floor and, while some are facing the wall, others are watching towards a potential spectator or perpetrator. This scene pressures spectators about the following questions: Is this an abuse scene? Are these girls punished and, if so, why? Is this human? Am I just a “passive witness”? In other paintings from this series, Đurđević exposes children (both boys and girls). She “offers” their bodies as victims, sacrifices, and examples of humiliation and abuse. On the other side, there is not much to hope for in the *Synchronized Swimming* painting from the same series. In the ironically titled image, girls are placed on the floor of an empty pool. Indifferent, sad and lying on their backs, some are holding hands – they are very much “synchronized” in their passivity. This abyss between images and spectator is gaping in silence causing uneasiness and claustrophobia. In order to survive, the victims continue living in oblivion by trying to forget but witnesses cannot and must not forget. Here the positioning of the spectator is equated with the perpetrator’s view; and this bareness and stillness directly addresses our awareness and responsibility. Girls are educated from the early age that they should be obedient otherwise they will be punished. They are taught that suffering and humiliation are “natural” to them-- in other words, that they “deserve” them. This author pushes us towards the topics that are largely avoided and ignored (both consciously and unconsciously): abuse and violence, gender role formation, aggression perpetrated under the veil of educational and medical institutions, fear of our own transience, and disintegration of human values and community norms. For instance, everyone can feel very much exposed and vulnerable while gazing into the huge formats of her canvases. Their “presence” makes them unavoidable – they are

impossible to ignore or forget; vivid and clear colours allure spectators, but the entire imagery atmosphere leaves them disturbed. It can be said that Biljana Đurđević's paintings are relevant reference to the experience of figuration in Serbian art of not only the 1990s but until the present day.

5.2. From Local Utopia to National “Fascism”

Much more than simply a “false consciousness” or outdated irrationality, nationalism is portrayed as a potent source of self-awareness and identity that drives humans to think and behave according to their national membership. As several older sources of identity lost their credibility, nationalism gained the power to motivate and mobilize people (elites and semi-literate peasants alike) to act on its principles – often against competing institutions such as the family, the church, the government or the tribe.²⁷⁹

The baroqueness of the Balkans is in its extreme love, extreme violence, extreme tenderness, extreme legend or sacrifice, in its contradictions: hate, love and all possible situations. And that’s why nobody even understands the war or how it is. It’s a mixture of so many elements reflected simultaneously.²⁸⁰

As it was already stated, the stability of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was mostly the result of Cold War geopolitics. Correspondingly, the fall of the Berlin Wall exacerbated the turmoil of already growing nationalist tendencies in Yugoslavia so that its image of utopian community finally began to disintegrate. It culminated in the fratricidal wars of religion and nationalism (1991-1995). Then, at the end of the last decade of the 20th century, once again, Serbia had its share in historical events. This time it was in conflict in Kosovo (1998-1999) that was supposed to end by two and a half months long NATO bombardment of Serbia that included civil targets as well. It can be said that the 1990s of the last century will forever remain a soft spot where bitterness, shame, guilt, fear, and rage melt into a vortex of memory that no one from this geographical space really wants to face. Generally speaking, the experience of reality of that time was characterized by nightmarish

²⁷⁹ Mandić, Danilo, *Making Serbs: Serbian Nationalism and Collective Identity, 1990-2000*, Princeton University, Princeton, 2007, p. 8

²⁸⁰ Abramović, Marina, *The Bridge/El puente: exposición retrospectiva*, op.cit., p. 56

shadows of surrealist pictures that are constantly spinning beyond comprehension. One part of the art production of the 1990s consisted of works of ultra radical poetics that dealt with Serbian reality by pondering into collective guilt.

The collective revival of Orthodoxy in Serbia began in 1989 (with the anniversary of Battle of Kosovo celebration) when the Serbian Orthodox Church started to “educate” people about what a “good” man and a “good” woman meant. To “be a Serb” was a kind of vocation – it signified readiness to become a victim and to sacrifice because Serbs are actually a “heavenly nation”. What media, especially television, continually proclaimed was a narrative model of “lack of understanding of the injustice towards Serbs”. In such conditions, victimized but fearless as a “heavenly nation”, “true Serbs” were ready to sacrifice in battles for Serbian hearths across Serbian borders so, given these points, local Orthodox “jihad” could begin. It was the decade when Serbia fought its wars for the “salvation” of Serbian populations in areas of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and, later, Kosovo. With this in mind, Serbia turned from “bridge” into “wall” – for example, it became a closed space with highly controlled borders, like an isolated forbidden ground, while for its citizens it turned into a kind of “prison”. In 1992, Serbia experienced what the New York Times called “the most sweeping sanctions in history” not to mention that since 1993-1994 it still holds the record for worst episode of hyperinflation in all of history. Between 1992 and 1995 occurred a radical “homogenization” of public opinion characterized not only by traditionalism and nationalism but primarily by authoritarianism. Such environment became a fertile ground for crime and corruption; some political assassinations and murders of journalists still have not been resolved. Demonstrations and civil unrest in 1996 (because Milošević’s party stole votes and elections) very much resembled the beginning of a civil war episode. At the time, multiple political, economic, social, and media chaos and turmoil seemed endless. It was the moment when artworks needed to interfere with a clear political engagement, direct action and “mirroring”.



Marina Abramović, *Balkan Baroque*, performance, Venice Biennial, 1997

In 1997, when Marina Abramović obtained the Grand Prix at the Venice Biennial for her *Balkan Baroque*, she had already shifted art context to the theatre stage with *Biography* (started in 1992) and *Delusional* (1994) elaborating her own autobiographical scores. The multimedia project *Balkan Baroque* included installation and video projection into the performance as she incorporated new technical solutions into her work by experimenting with the latest visual possibilities in order to create more theatrical spaces. In the dark ambience, together with image projections of her mother, her father, and herself, Marina Abramović dressed in a white dress, wet and bloody, was sitting surrounded with thousands of cattle bones still with remains of meat on them. “Obsessive, autistic, and lost in herself”²⁸¹, Abramović was singing, and crying while scrubbing the bones and washing the leftovers of carnage with a wire brush. Impressiveness and expressiveness of her appearance and actions reflected an archetypal monumentality of Pietà. It can be added that an overall visual scheme exuded the metaphor of “cleaning”. As in her case, “shamanic” performances usually have therapeutic intentions – this one was a kind of purifying and liberating ritual which cleans physically and renders mentally. Here, it becomes almost irrelevant whether the author is truly expressing her pain and compassion because the true essence of performance reaches its ontological status – its irreproducibility; a visitor is “devoured” by the entire experience and is visually, mentally and emotionally involved in the “scenery”. Ješa Denegri states that this piece reflects superficially defined word “Balkan” thus creating an impression that here there is some specific, local/regional conditioning while it is actually a universal artistic statement

²⁸¹ Abramović, Marina, *The Bridge/El puente: exposición retrospectiva*, op.cit., p. 26

about some fundamental existential realities²⁸². In fact, it can be added that *Balkan Baroque* remains one of the most suggestive artistic features that characterizes an extremely difficult and fatal historical epoch as the immediate trigger for the development of this artwork. All things considered, if we speak about *Balkan Baroque* as a time specific project which implied an act of self-purification, and therefore, self-sacrifice, then it can be said that at the time Abramović represented the country which was mainly responsible for the Balkan war that ended in 1995.

Marina Abramović is the first artist of the East – West who received this prestigious award and thus also a symbolical acknowledgment that recognizes her role as a mediator and a “bridge” between different cultures and sides of the world, exactly with the very meanings that are inherent to her work, beliefs and wishes to be an artist-bridge.²⁸³

To speak about “bridging” would also mean not to forget what “Balkan mind” signifies for the author as she characterizes it as “Baroque” and, therefore, as an “allegorical mind”²⁸⁴. The first thing to remember about *Balkan Baroque* is that its video projections are placed as a triptych. In the central part is the life-size self-portrait of the author and on her sides are video portraits of her mother and of her father. Both her parents broke with the religious background of their Christian Orthodox families, went to the partisans, joined the Communist Party and took part in the National Liberation War (1941-1945). Though it might seem autobiographical, what remains on one side is the direct connection between her parents’ biographies and, on the other, the collective responsibility of a generation of Tito’s followers when having formed a country like Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, that also indirectly implies not only our collective historical participation but also our individual guilt and awareness.

As we speak of video projections of Abramović herself, they portray her dual self – in the first part as a scientist-zoologist who tells the story of the creation of the “Wolf Rat”²⁸⁵ and in the second as a typical Balkan tavern songstress who amuses her (male) audience dancing frantically to a folk melody. As the former, she stands for a cold rationale – a scientific explanation (or justification) of the warrior mind depicting militarism and survival in the Balkans. As the latter, she is the female role in the whole picture as a superficial and completely unaware entertainer showing that a woman is a man’s support as an accomplice

²⁸² Denegri, Ješa, *Serbian Art 1950–2000. The Nineties*, op. cit., p. 198

²⁸³ Marković, Nataša, *Marina Abramović, Heroine of the Culture of Narcissism*, op.cit., p. 127

²⁸⁴ Abramović, Marina, *Artist Body: Performances 1969-1998*, op. cit., p. 36

²⁸⁵ Abramović, Marina, *The Bridge/El puente: exposición retrospectiva*, op.cit., p. 202

and a pillar to that same warrior mentality. To leave the video triptych in the background, performance places a sculpture like image into a theatrical atmosphere – the “icons” are left behind so that the allegory of Pietà emerges. It actually introduces a metaphor of Mother as a symbol of Nation. Abramović placed herself sitting amid a mound of animal bones singing in her native language and due to exhaustion it obtained a mantra quality. Thus, she becomes more “distant”, incomprehensible, and “autistic-like” and reflects that acts of grief are personal. Her cleaning the bones and the purification “to the bone” become an individual act of mourning. That “presence” pushes us into the realm of time and being and holds them still; that image of her surrounded with a myriad of bloody bones while she is singing, crying, and scrubbing them offers various female allegories that raise questions. What is a role of woman in war – to give birth to warriors, and to mourn the dead? Is it to “save” warriors (in the battlefield)?²⁸⁶ In the end, the ultimate feelings revolve around inevitable issues of individual responsibility versus collective guilt as well as that it is simply impossible to just “wash away” the innumerable consequences of any war.

“Fascism(s)”

*Consider gender, for instance, as a corporeal style, an “act”, as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where “performative” suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning.*²⁸⁷

In Serbia, fascist tendencies are manifested in many ways. One part of this fascism is involved in the organized denial or relativization of the criminal past, both in the more recent period of the 1990s and the period of the Second World War (for example, the legal equalization of Partizans and Chetniks). Other parts of the neo-Nazi and neo-fascist groups’ activities include publicly voicing the crudest forms of hate and the establishment of more

²⁸⁶ In Serbian epic poetry woman appears in the battlefield (as mother, wife, sister, daughter – meaning always within her family function) to save warrior, to help, to nurture like mother would do. It could be added that this performance of Abramović also introduces folk tradition – for example, it may be related to *The Kosovo Maiden* epic poetry but also to the rites of mourning already elaborated in Chapter 3.

²⁸⁷ Butler, Judith: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, op.cit., p. 177

*serious and extremist of organic movements (such as fascist totalitarianism). The fall of the dictatorial Serbian regime on October 5, 2000 did not alter the ideological system or the cultural paradigm that produces war; hatred of 'the other' and those of different ethnicities, religions, sexualities and opinions continues.*²⁸⁸

To employ the term *fascism* certainly imposes necessity to define it and here it would refer to not only the historical concept of fascism of the Second World War but also to the rule of terror and the ideological paradigm that induces conflict in general (and hence war). It could also be stated that among women groups and associations that emerged in Serbia in the 1990s, the term *fascism* was largely used in order to criticize local war hegemony and to comment on the national patriarchal rhetorics of "hate speech". Overtime, as the illusion of a local utopia that Yugoslavia was built upon crumbled and gave way to fratricidal war, there appeared an incredible penetration of documentary elements in some artists' works. Moreover, through artistic creation, otherwise unavailable or officially censored, some information emerged. Such an example is the autonomous activity of Milica Tomić whose work reflects a kind of a corrective observation of ideological structures, and in a way is a subversive answer to the power of mass media. It becomes obvious that she is the artist who feels responsibility for the picture of reality or, it can be said that, she serves as a reminder disclosing the fact that there are many sides to "one historical truth".



Milica Tomić, *Belgrade Remembers*, magazine *Prestup*, photo-performance, Belgrade, 2001

²⁸⁸ Women in Black, *Antifascism*, http://zeneucnom.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16&Itemid=19 (accessed on April 2, 2016)

When the editors of *Prestup* magazine asked Milica Tomić to create an image of her imaginary identity for the October issue in 2001, *Belgrade Remembers* was made. On August 16th 1941, Nazis hung five members from the People's Liberation Movement at Terazije Square, in the centre of Belgrade, as a retribution for sabotage and attack on the German army personnel. Tomić decided to reconstruct that historical event and appear as one of those five hanged people. The idea to do a re-enactment would be a declaration of continuity with the People's Liberation Movement which at that time was doing radical acts of rebellion and since then stood as a symbol of antifascist struggle and freedom. However, this collage image was not especially polemical for the media or public opinion. Like in a time loop in which periods of time are repeated and re-experienced by the characters, after the wars in the 1990s and political subversions in 2000, Milica Tomić refers also to the fact that our memory is short and oblivious to our recent past. According to her, Serbian society forgot antifascist symbols but also did not liberate itself from the remains of terror and *fascist* attitudes.



Milica Tomić, *One day, Instead of One Night, a Burst of Machine Gun Fire will Flash if Light Cannot Come Otherwise*, photo-performance, 2009

The title of *One day, instead of one night, a burst of machine gun fire will flash if light cannot come otherwise* is a fragment from Oskar Davičo's poem. The strategies of reconstructing the suppressed memory of traumatic events are this time employed through the video²⁸⁹ that was made of over a two-month period in autumn 2009 when Milica Tomić visited sites of successful anti-fascist actions that were originally carried out by members of the People's Liberation Movement against German occupation during the Second World War. It can be said that the photos taken of her document and map out sites that are not part of the public memory of the city of Belgrade. Walking and running with a

²⁸⁹ It is possible to find online numerous images that the video is made of but the video is still unavailable.

weapon around the city is a continual action and movement, it is the ongoing struggle that never ends. Perpetual activity is also suggested by the montage technique used to mount photos into the video in which the distance between places is irrelevant. These aesthetic strategies however question temporal and spatial coincidence of revolutionary events and because of that seemingly antifascist front is everywhere and the struggle continues all the time. The war on terror goes on in this performative excess where the author carries around weapons together with a bag from the supermarket where the manner of holding a gun defines its purposefulness. What is alarming is the fact that in Belgrade people did not express reactions towards a person, here a woman, who was moving around city areas while carrying a machine gun as if it had been a normal situation. From the position of a rebel, assuming an active position, she does not refer to the position of a victim. In the interview with Milica Tomić²⁹⁰, she claims that in the 1990s in Serbia there were about a million veterans; that every man was linked with a weapon in some way (whether it is about those who were volunteers, or those who left the country because of the war in order not to use weapons, or those who happened to be soldiers at the time). Though it may seem a normal scenery to see weapons in the streets of Serbia's capital¹⁴⁾²⁹¹, for her we are in permanent war against terrorism ("war on terror"), and therefore each of us is either a terrorist or a counter-terrorist but we also must be aware that every country, ours as well, has armed forces standing out there with these same weapons ready to be triggered and launched.

To return to Judith Butler's words above and consider gender as a corporeal style, or an "act" where "performative" implies the construction of meaning, one should take into consideration that the examples introduced here refer to highly reflective suggestions that intend to "work" on the issues of awareness and responsibility, collective memory and individual conscience. To reconstruct, to re-enact, to revive, to stage, to act, to perform are the means introduced by artists in order to "insert" the spectator into a time loop while flagging direct metaphors and radical reminders. It would mean an immense, and primarily unjust, simplification to claim that women were only victims, accomplices or even aggressors and that consequently, they represent the aftermath of the real regional wars and political tensions. Those "residual bodies" produced as the consequences of war were more than ever before

²⁹⁰ See *Interview with Milica Tomić* in the Annex

²⁹¹ To make it more real, in 2016 it has been estimated that there are still about 200.000 to 900.000 illegal weapons in Serbia which is a high figure when taking into consideration the number of its inhabitants.

ready to finally accentuate the role of the bridge in artistic endeavours. They were bridges between the past and the present; bridges between the local interior and the outside world, and they were witnesses who called upon the long time forgotten hope and humanistic values.

5.3. Concept of the Other

*In the history of the macro politics, the war has always played an important role and in them, the men have received all the honours, however, one might ask what has been the role of women in the battle. Were they simply "others", those who stayed in the rearguard?*²⁹²

*The essence of an epoch can be most easily summarized if, instead of the most distinctive features that define its social and ideological structure, the focus is on repressed spectres that haunt it, the spectres that dwell in a mysterious space of nonexistent entities but which nevertheless persistently last and exert influence.*²⁹³

One of the stereotypes about the Balkans is that it is continuously haunted by its notorious "ghosts of the past" while in the meantime the rest of the Europe is concentrated on its process of globalization. Although this may be partially true, there is a paradox of the Balkans because "in the eyes of Europe the Balkans itself reaches the status of spectre that haunts Europe"²⁹⁴. Yugoslavia itself very much resembled an idealistic image as a multicultural dream that turned into a nightmare. It could be stated that the very changeability of its borders makes the Balkans the spectre for Europe as an impending factor of instability and a possible disruptive force. Besides that, the Balkan ghostly dimension is perhaps magnified by the fact that it is not clearly defined in either geographical or psychological perception. It is always elsewhere – it begins a bit further, somewhere there, there in the South-East or so, thus simulating a spatial black hole of dark secrets and twisted truths. Namely, it is experienced as being located "somewhere there" and, therefore, as something where "others" dwell. Nevertheless, considering everything into account, it could be said that while the Orient

²⁹² *Genealogías feministas en el arte español: 1960-2010*, ed. Juan Vicente Aliaga/Patricia Mayayo, This Side Up, Madrid, 2013, p. 65

²⁹³ Žižek, Slavoj, *Less Love, More Hatred!*, Beogradski krug, Beograd, 2001, p. 152

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

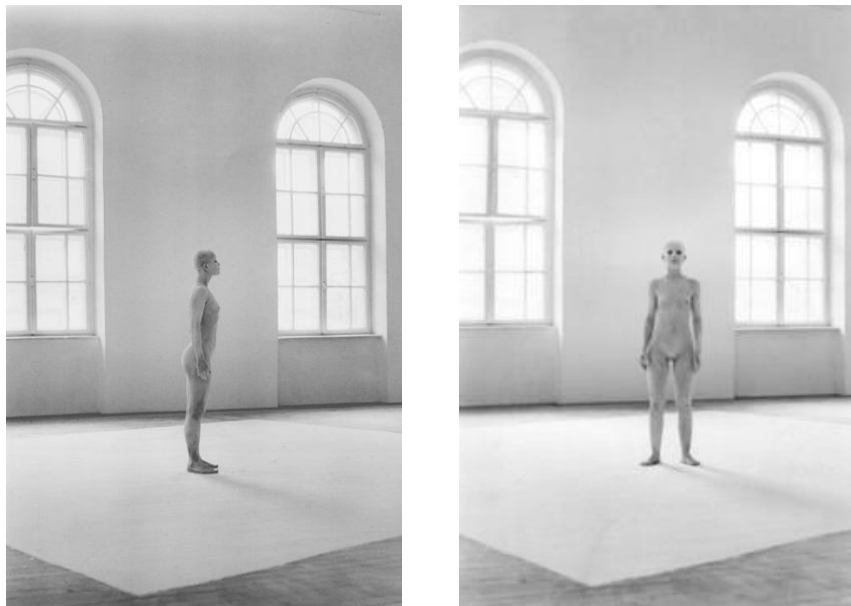
is assumed to be the “opposite” of the West, the Balkans is something “in-between” the West and the East and for Europe it is its barbarian *Other*.

It seems that after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Eastern Europe found itself in a terrible intermediate position while being transformed into Europe’s inseparable rest, a point of no substance, a dead reality. On the other side at the local level, the dominant taboo in political and social life of Serbia for years preceding the war that began in 1991 was the taboo of respect towards the *Other*. “In post-communism, some kind of traumatic real bursts through the surface of works”²⁹⁵ which “promises” contents of artworks that supposedly could stem from some sort of “traumatic experience”. It is crucial to emphasize the fact that the “trauma aspect” exclusively arises from its relating to a particular category of geographical space and of historical time – that is to say it is directly connected to the author’s origin. That spatial and temporal criteria colour perception of artworks as well as their interpretation. Nevertheless, traumatic experience, as any experience in general, closely links to a system of representation, and what remains is to define specificities of how the “otherness” is defined, perceived, and represented. Politically constructed aversion towards (bodies of) *Others* was what largely built nationalism. It was the generation that was born around 1940, meaning at the time of the Second World War, which obviously lacked their self-image of national identity and hence wholeheartedly and fanatically accepted Milošević’s chauvinistic politics that began to grow in the second half of the 1980s. No matter whether they traditionally belonged to “Chetniks” or “partisans” family orientation, Milošević’s supporters craved for the building of a self-image that would belong to that great “Serbdom” which very clearly emerged at the time. My father and most of his generation were men who supported the “glorious” entrance of Milošević into Serbian political scene, and by doing so they chose the leader who will send their sons to war. To put it another way, it was the generation of men who traded their children's lives and future in order to get their ego inflation.

²⁹⁵ Gržinić, Marina, *Avant-garde and Politics: Eastern European Paradigm and the War in the Balkans*, Beogradski krug, Beograd, 2005, p. 271

Otherness

Without doubt, the phenomenon of “othering” is the mode to differentiate Self by relating and comparing it to *Others*; and undoubtedly is also used to distance the *Other* by placing “it” at the societal margin. Gender, sexuality, race, nation, class, and religion are some of the elements used as a form of othering. In the patriarchal matrix woman is the *Other* in relation to man but, nevertheless, as Others both women and children are also targets of abuse, exploitation and neglect. Identity of the *Other* is blurred and irrelevant, it is secondary and insignificant, it is “just another” someone, whomever but not me, but not us. The *Other* is “faceless” and also often considered as deviant, lesser and/or savage. Therefore, to maltreat her or him is easily justified and that is where excuses for violence, conflict and genocide come from.



Tanja Ostojić, *Personal Space*, Young Artists Biennial, performance, Vršac, 1996

In 1996, at Youth Artists Biennial, Tanja Ostojić realized her performance *Personal Space* naked, completely shaved, and covered with a layer of marble powder. She was calmly standing with her hands relaxed for two hours without any motion. This *tableau vivant* was facing the audience and introducing a legacy of traditional sculpture. In the history of sculpture

(and painting) female nude is a common theme, and here is an example where the artist moves from art object to her own body as a means of expression (besides that, by vocation Ostojić is “officially” a sculptress). By treating her body as objectified sculpture, by turning it into an almost otherworldly creature, she resembles a ghostly vision that actually de-objectifies female body and therefore the female nude theme. Furthermore, taking into consideration that this performance followed the year when the war in ex-Yugoslavia ended, it can be added that this type of direct exposure is connected with all kinds of truth that regimes tend to hide. “Each historical period has its own model of exposure because each has a different truth that needs to be covered up”²⁹⁶, so, in this case, the exposure in itself is the way of turning attention to the fact that there is something “concealed”.

In this performance there is no real “personal” space because the line between individual (private ritual), and public does not exist. This performance introduces questions of expressing and operating of personal freedoms, rights, and responsibilities which are closely tied to the boundaries between private and public which separate but also overlap. Also, if we look at this work in the context of Serbian art of the time it refers to the positioning of the subject in a hostile political and social environment. Sterility and coldness of appearance of the artist’s body that resembles a marble sculpture is the question of nakedness reduced to a non-human object. It is difficult for the personal and intimate to “enter” into a public space that is characterized by (post) war atmosphere, fear, injustice, isolation, images of killing, rape, torture, etc. Tanja Ostojić’s *Personal Space* witnesses the indisposition of an author within a hostile environment of a time characterized by isolation of a possible subject in opposition. It criticizes representations of woman’s body in art history as an object of manipulation and stereotypes.

²⁹⁶ Gržinić, Marina, *Avant-garde and Politics: Eastern European Paradigm and the War in the Balkans*, op.cit., p. 239



Milica Tomić, *I am Milica Tomić*, video installation, 1999

In the domain of radical critique of post-socialist ideology of nationalism, rethinking female identity comes naturally to Milica Tomić. *I am Milica Tomić*²⁹⁷ is an impressive work (video, video loop, and installation) with extremely sensitive topic of disclosing author's ethnic, gender, and subjective identity. In this video, the artist is "identifying" herself in 64 languages by saying different national identities but retaining every time her real name. She is positioned in an unchangeable pose like a rotating monument or a "living sculpture" peacefully turning. Her head is slightly elevated and resembles television presenters as she slowly turns toward the camera. In her negligee like dress and with a fake braid, her girly image mimics stereotype models, and mannequins. As she is rotating with each turn of national identity and testimony traces of violence suddenly appear on her as if to be an entity with a name belonging to a certain nationality means to be a possible victim of violence. The consequences of violence are not visible at first but they start to appear at the moment when Tomić's vocalization becomes more automatic. The actual acts of violence are purposefully omitted and as such they point out the fact that violence (torture) is often indirect but also that there is a social stigmatization of victim. In reference to violence against women, it exists regardless of their national identity and identification – that is, the discourse of nationalism has been marked by gender. Both gender and nationalism are social constructs, and their symbiosis creates powerful socially desirable stereotypes that threaten other constituents of identity.

To treat the concept of identification and problem of identity, Milica Tomić uses strategies of imitation, simulation and misrepresentation in order to reverse the process of identification and undermine the expected positive narrative models. This video considers the

²⁹⁷ See *I am Milica Tomić*, video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1kagFMbQ5k> (accessed on May 6, 2016)

paradoxes of the act of stating one's identity in terms of name and nationality statement, and how it attaches the individual to the ethnic collectiveness. At the same time, at a more general level it also reflects that there are different models of today's racism: first there is the old-fashioned, openly rejecting the Balkan *Other* in the name of authentic (Western) values, and then there is a reflective, political racism. Better said, there are invasions of violent immediacy that do not show anything but pure and naked hatred towards the *Other* (irrelevantly of race and/or nationality).



Jelena Radić, *Crossover*, installation, Gallery FLU, Belgrade, 2006

Crossover is Jelena Radić's installation mounted to accompany her theoretical thesis for Master studies named *Real and Representation – Use of Images in Cultural Constructions* at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade. For that purpose, this exhibition conveyed a painting, a video projection, floodlights (arbitrarily switched on and off), sound (Benny Benassi's song *Satisfaction*), and five newspaper articles in which a specific photography was published. The starting point for *Crossover* was a photographic image published in various newspapers in Serbia and abroad as a visual representation of information used several times in a very "problematic" way. Evidently, it was information that media usually plays and/or generates within the dominant cultural model which is the case with the selected image. The photography named "Prostitutes 2" shows five women in the interior (probably a night bar), of which three girls are standing frontally facing the camera, the other two are in a sort of half profiles – all five trying to hide their faces from the camera lens. Published in several newspapers across Serbia and abroad, one and the same photographic image refers to Serbia, Kosovo, Spain, and Mexico within articles that in a very superficial and stereotypical way deal with prostitution issues. Allegedly referring to real situations and conditions, using the same

image articles aim to represent topics about Kosovo prostitution network, inform about the draft law on the legalization of prostitution in Serbia, represent arrest of foreign women engaged in prostitution in Spain, and write about shelter for elderly prostitutes in Mexico, etc.

Radić then transfers this image on canvas and paints it in coats with short strokes and energetic pointed movements. “The purpose of presenting this content using oil on canvas, as the medium, is production of excess that is commonly recognized as the “aura” of art.”²⁹⁸ By highlighting material aspects of the painting, such as the visible brush strokes and paint layers, the author was aiming not to allow eroticism views but separate representation from the object. The assumption that a particular social phenomenon may be socially acceptable or unacceptable largely depends on the manner in which it represents reality. It can be stated that there is a disproportion that occurs through this difference in representation and perception, as between reality and its performance. The installation *Crossover* conveyed photographic image, painting, and examples of newspapers accompanied by additional visual and audio elements. The occasional inclusion of strong reflectors, which takes only a few short moments, mimics bright lighting of photographic flashes while the sound recording of Benny Benassi’s song *Satisfaction* is another constitutive element that creates a disco like atmosphere. The choice of song because of its lyrics suggests issues of sexual intercourse, masochism, sadism, etc., that can be largely applied with the topic of prostitution. In the dark space, occasional flashes are offering only glimpses into the images meaning that it is a hard and complicated task to see behind media images and differentiate significance and connections between object and representation, between real news and invented stories.

Examples of the use of photographic image “Prostitutes 2” accentuates the power of media to “abuse” image in order to produce and impose targeted meaning. It is as if “the text itself is loading the image”²⁹⁹ in order to supply full picture of an incident. Needless to say, it is the type of sensationalism discourse when the text was produced by using the necessary cultural models in order to fit moral expectations of society. Radić choses to deal with the image that publicly presents women as nameless and faceless masses of flesh. This very generalized “problematic femininity” type of otherness not only degrades the female gender on a wider level but persistently continues to be present in media and internet. If persons are primarily named, qualified, and categorized by a socially “threatening” occupation like prostitution (or other situational social positioning, e.g. “prisoner”) they are no longer seen or

²⁹⁸ Radić, Jelena, *Real and Representation – Use of Images in Cultural Constructions*, Univerzitet Umetnosti, Beograd, 2006, p. 10

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8

treated as individuals with biography or aspirations; hence for the same reason, they are stripped of their humanity. Therefore, in the language of patriarchal misogynist media, such representations fuel violence against women that is supposedly justified by the fact that they are not only represented as prostitutes (a claim that may or may not be true) but as “others”. At the same time, it should be noted that the lack of sensitization to this type of violence (present everywhere and at any time) is transmitted through education as well. “Othering” in this case functions by the mechanism of a spectator’s “distancing” from the subjects because of the input of “criminogenic” characteristics in hidden faces of nameless collective identity. Jelena Radić juxtaposes the “real” and its representation to criticize media manipulation of public opinion on femininity which directly brings awareness about serious issues of violence and abuse but also of sex trafficking and slavery.

Marina Gržinić’s theoretical feminist interpretation of the *Other* develops the idea of “Other as Two” which refers to a woman (woman's experience) and the area of Eastern Europe who, through practice of de-realization, over-identification, and incarnation, jeopardizes the power of One established by the empire of global capitalism³⁰⁰. According to her, the *Other* should not be seen as a replica of the One but as a parallel entity; the focus is not on the difference between the One and the *Other* but on the difference that already exists in the core of the *Other*. It is important to realize is that the artistic practices analyzed above deal with different “types of otherness” – in the cases of Tanja Ostojić and Milica Tomić, though they are individual self-portraits, identities are perceived as sculptural, monumental, and still, as an overall dehumanized image. Alienated and disturbing, they are like spectres that haunt us; they are like ghostly visions that persistently last. On the other side, in case of Jelena Radić’s critique of media policies the spot is on female identity within the group where the picture, though overloaded with textual information, remains clouded and undefined yet the effect is gloomy. As Gržinić claims “Other should not be taken as One, but as Two, and even more, as Two at the same time”³⁰¹. Thinking about “the Other as Two” offers the possibility of other worlds and views which are outside of the Western capitalist world. The fact is that as a product of such articulation instead of Otherness we get what Gržinić calls “Other space” that is productive but with absolutely different opinions and actions. The difference between the *Otherness* and “Other Space” is essential because *Otherness* is something that functions as an

³⁰⁰ Erić, Olivera, *Representation of Women in Digital Media in Serbia at the End of XX and in the Beginning of XXI Century: Issues of Contemporary Feminist Theories of Interpretation*, Univerzitet Umetnosti u Beogradu, Beograd, 2010, p. 289

³⁰¹ Ibid., p. 290

incomprehensible difference or disorder, while “Other Space” is a “strategically built different paradigm of thought and action, which is a powerful re-politicization matrix of a possible different structure”³⁰².

³⁰² Erić, Olivera, *Representation of Women in Digital Media in Serbia at the End of XX and in the Beginning of XXI Century: Issues of Contemporary Feminist Theories of Interpretation*, op. cit., p. 290

5.4. Geography as Destiny

*On some accounts, the notion that gender is constructed suggests certain determinism of gender meanings inscribed on anatomically differentiated bodies, where those bodies are understood as passive recipients of an inexorable cultural law.*³⁰³

*The immigrant woman is treated like a person without identity, recognized by her nationality or other generic traits which blur her individuality.*³⁰⁴

Though human social life is culturally not biologically determined, the “uterus theory” of female inferiority based on the “biology-is-destiny” formulation of woman’s fate inevitably reduces her primarily to her reproductive “functionality”; it is the fairly widespread theory which controls and directs both conscious and unconscious female behaviour. On the other side, as we speak of cultural conditioning of immigrant women social inferiority, it can be stated that geography is destiny because both culturally and socially it requires intimate confrontation with the past, with historical, geographical and political moment that forms woman's personality and, therefore, her fate. Is it possible to avoid the burden of influence that geographical origin imposes on an individual? Or after all, is fate a fatalistic inevitability based solely on conditionality and “bodily inscriptions”³⁰⁵? Being an immigrant is definitely the experience of being the *Other* in the neoliberal imperial order. Capitalist market that feeds on its own affirmation integrated the issue of the “politics of difference” in the growing capitalist system in a time of crisis with the same rules applied to the capitalist art market. The feminist positioning in times of global migration has to deal with colonialist representations and the analysis of stereotypical visualizations of the *Other* but it also underlines the political consequences of that kind of work. Colonialist, nationalist, misogynistic, racist and other

³⁰³ Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, op. cit., p. 12

³⁰⁴ Suárez Villegas, J.C. (2013). *La mujer inmigrante en la cultura patriarcal y su reflejo en los medios de comunicación*. Sphera Publica, 13, vol. I, 77-94., p. 78

³⁰⁵ See Butler, Judith. *Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions*, op.cit.

discourses are what artists are facing in order to address issues of “integration principles” for immigrants.

The vulnerability of women immigrants is obvious in the fact that they are treated as a “no man’s land” – being rejected from both their community of origin and their destination society because of patriarchal and nationalist prejudices. Namely, her community of origin sees her as a loser and a traitor while her destination land views her as helpless³⁰⁶. As we speak of possible situations of administrative irregularity of immigrant women, it leaves them more liable to become a victim of sexual blackmail by men who perceive her as a subject without identity, as a simple woman reduced solely to her physical condition. Because of such a situation, an immigrant woman’s true identity is often blurred and largely ignored. Just as a foreign woman in general is seen as “different”, meaning “exotic”, strange, or mystified, an immigrant woman is even more interesting and more exposed to the preferences of male desire (of desires that stem from the need to conquer and dominate). Accordingly, this explains in part the increase in cases of gender violence towards immigrant women since their suffering because of the legal abandonment is also accompanied by social neglect. In such a scheme of things, women from Eastern Europe in general are tacitly but with an obvious significance referred to as not only “exotic” in sexual terms but also socially problematic, “dangerous”, and exploitative.

As an illustration to the fact that one of the means for a woman to live and work freely abroad in terms of legality would be to marry a man with a “valid” or better say “useful” passport. The term “mail-order bride” is used in popular discourse to refer to a woman who connects and corresponds with a man from another country (the one that is presumably more affluent than her own), and marries him. What captures attention is the fact that instead of “wife”, the word “bride” is used, as if to invoke images of a young, inexperienced and virginal woman with aim to set the stage for male fantasies of domination. Important to realize is also that the expression “mail-order” entails goods transport as if women were products purchased from a catalogue suggesting that they are just passive articles. To speak about stereotypes about “mail-order brides” would also mean to mention the picture of evil women who enter these marriages in order to exploit and victimize men – namely, that they are purposefully using their charm and sexual availability for manipulation in order to go after their victims’

³⁰⁶ See Suárez Villegas, J.C. (2013). *La mujer inmigrante en la cultura patriarcal y su reflejo en los medios de comunicación*, op.cit., p. 80

wealth. The conceptual paradox in this situation dwells in the picture where the supposedly inexperienced “bride”, who is imported as a product, transforms into a deceptive menace.



Tanja Ostojić, *Looking for a Husband with an EU Passport*, ad, photo: Borut Krajnc, 2000

In 2000, Tanja Ostojić made an online internet ad in order to find herself a husband with an EU passport. After publishing it she exchanged more than 500 letters with numerous applicants from around the world and after about a six-month long correspondence with a German man K. G. Ostojić arranged their first meeting as a public performance in the field in front of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade in 2001. A month later they married and she applied for a visa. After two months she received a three-month entrance family unification visa for Germany and moved to Düsseldorf. The *project Looking for a Husband with an EU Passport* includes such items as her original ad, some of the emails and photos she received from men, her marriage certificate, a film of the pair’s first meeting, and a 2005 invitation to her divorce party.

As can be seen, here marriage is highlighted as a strategic instrument – from the author’s position it is the means to realize freedom to move and work outside the borders of her native land. What is mostly striking and memorable where this project is concerned is of course the way this “bride-to-be” presents and “offers” herself to her future husband. In the ad photography, Ostojić scrupulously removed all of her hair to produce an “anti-femme fatale” image of herself as a desire-less and undesirable wife-object, thus “foiling common expectations of sexual allure and seductiveness normatively expected of someone marketing

herself as a potential wife”³⁰⁷. It can be stated that the ad itself received diverse responses and comments upon the resemblance of the figure in the photo to a concentration camp victim, a prisoner or a refugee. The provocation also emerges from the fact that association with female pornography could stem from the image of the shaved vagina but nevertheless, since Ostojić’s overall pose is everything but seductive, it could comment on the prejudices towards immigrant women that stereotype them as purposefully seducing men in order to exploit them for their own means. It could be noted that this type of “nakedness” that is cold, sterile, almost inhuman suggests that immigrant women, “stripped” of their selfhood and reduced to imported foreign “goods”, go abroad and marry whomever in order to obtain legality are more prone to fall victims to human trafficking and sex slavery. Ostojić here clearly employs her body as a political instrument causing the strange simultaneity of solicitation and repulsion; it is a body not only naked but completely shaved and exposed in detail. What remains significant is also her face without expression – there is only void as if there was nobody behind those eyes. The atmosphere of “remoteness” and indifference are simply abounding thus while she is seemingly at the viewer’s fingertips she actually remains untouchable. Disturbing and repulsive, concretely this imagery of a woman offering herself online as a “bride” to trade herself for EU “papers” points to innumerable cases of desperate readiness to head blindly towards any possibility that would “save” a woman from her native location and “send” her to an allegedly “better” destination. Therefore, such an uncritical positioning places immigrant women into a situation of helplessness and passivity where they are at the mercy of situational conditioning that can often brim with violence and abuse. This project also includes a 2005 invitation to her divorce party as “a postlude to her account of her unmemorable “mechanical” wedding ceremony seems to suggest a reversal of agency: a clinical, unsentimental exercise of choice by an otherwise objectified, choice-less subject”³⁰⁸.

Conceptually, in this case Tanja Ostojić is just a trespasser passing from Serbia (a closed, sanctioned, isolated, war camp like country) to yet another “prison” of EU laws that is supposedly more “civilized” ground than the “barbarian” Balkans sphere. In order to generate confrontations and push the spectator into awareness about certain social, existential, and political issues, she as an author has to sacrifice her private space and intimacy. The truth is that laws are discriminatory for migrants who are abstracted by the media and treated as alienated groups and, therefore, Ostojić attempts to satirize her own situation in order to

³⁰⁷ Zare, Bonnie, Mendoza, S. Lily, *Mail-order brides in popular culture: Colonialist representations and absent discourse*, *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 15 (4), 2011, p. 365-381, p. 373

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 373-374

obtain her own rights and be able to move, live, and work freely in various locations. EU laws are discriminatory and depriving and therefore she chooses to trick the legal system and “smuggle” herself into forbidden territories by the means of marriage. For her, though art cannot quickly change social or political reality, it is important for art not to be apolitical³⁰⁹. In conclusion, Tanja Ostojić's project *Looking for a Husband with an EU Passport* was her own way to perform a transgressive act of subverting normative expectations about women's sovereignty (or lack thereof) in marriage by questioning the power structures that intend to control global migration. In this context, one cannot help but wonder whether marriage can be seen as an institution that promotes prostitution by controlling with whom and where and for how long one is obliged to live as “married” in order to become a “legal” citizen – all with the aim to achieve the basic rights to move and work freely. Equally important for her art practice is the fact that Ostojić chooses to avoid the production of “one-off” artworks in favor of developing a series of strategic projects. Such a positioning offers her the opportunity to involve herself in a coherent way and achieve continual and much more consistent analysis and development of the questions that she wants to tackle. Given that, in 2000 (the same year of *Looking for a Husband with an EU Passport*) she did other performances, e.g. *Illegal Border Crossing* and *Waiting for a Visa* that deal with the issues of “impermeability” of (EU) borders as well as address questions of situational conditioning of being a non-EU citizen.



Tanja Ostojić, *Untitled (After Courbet: L'origine du Monde)*, poster, 2004

³⁰⁹ Zare, Bonnie, Mendoza, S. Lily, op. cit., p. 374



Billboard of Tanja Ostojić's *Untitled (After Courbet: L'origine du Monde)*, 300 x 216 cm. Vienna, 2005,
Photo: Ursula Mayer

In 2004, Tanja Ostojić made a photography image named *Untitled (After Courbet: L'origine du Monde)*, later called *EU Panties*. It depicts a female model (here the author herself) dressed and posing very much like in Courbet's original painting here with the difference of wearing blue "panties" with the EU symbol placed where the vagina is; and the image became a poster that was exhibited in Austrian billboards in 2005. This artwork was presented on the rotating billboards within an EuroPart exhibition in the public space in Vienna and was removed after only two days due to an enormous media scandal at the time when the Austrian Prime minister was about to overtake the chair in the EU. It seemed as if Ostojić, in her provocative style, uses her non-EU body to allude to the "origin" of an European Union birth wrapped in its own panties-flag and, most importantly, through the legs of an immigrant. The body of the woman here belongs to somebody that does not belong to the EU and it is a position that speaks from migrant women perspective that has been discriminated because of being outside of that "elitist" political and economic area.

To speak about *EU Panties* would mean to begin with the purpose for which it was made and, therefore, to take into consideration the fact that it was aimed to be exhibited at an international exhibition that was supposed to show contemporary European art production at the time. It seems that it was also an opportunity for Ostojić to use this image in order to speak about not only emancipatory role of art in society but also in a way to invite artists to muse upon the issues of changing European geopolitics; they should reflect individual standpoints and for that goal openly take radical and critical positions. To use such a "continental" and vastly used symbol as the flag of the EU as panties between a woman's widespread legs in its own way represents more than clear provocation. Though not only that a non-EU woman is wearing them but this passive position is clearly not "giving birth" as in

Courbet original painting thus directly turning attention to sexual connotations that stem from prejudices about immigrant women's connection with prostitution, sex slavery or abuse. Does a non-EU individual, here specifically woman as more vulnerable, have to "prostitute", humiliate, and betray oneself in order to be accepted and integrated into European Union? There is no direct answer to this question but without a doubt it is censorship that shows real dangers for the future of arts – especially in the case of art with political content and removing or covering serious political content from public eyes. Ultimately, *Ostojić's EU Panties* speaks of critical art, women artists, and position of artists from outside the EU territories; and the fact that it was removed from the rotating billboards in Vienna generated much turmoil and reactions particularly in art circles in Austria. The paradox is that its removal made the work even more visible and present on the internet, in publications and digital media. Hence, a counter effect was made because an attempt to hide it resulted in even wider public dissemination of the "problematic" artwork which at the end brings us to the absurdity and hypocrisy of the artwork's removal for moralistic reasons.



Aleksandrija Ajduković, *Chi Jin*, photography, Belgrade, 2008

To speak about geography as destiny would be incomplete without turning to the side of the "host" country and introducing (women) immigrants who came to Serbia. Aleksandrija Ajduković created something of a photo diary-scrapbook where she represented Chi Jin, a Chinese immigrant, who at the time lived in Belgrade³¹⁰. She made various images of Chi Jin at

³¹⁰ Ajduković, Aleksandrija, *Chi Jin*, Beograd 2008, photography, Belgrade, 2008, <http://ajdukovicaleksandrija.com/work/chi-jin-beograd-2008/> (accessed on July 17, 2016)

the Belgrade street market where she worked accompanied by her comments in Serbian (which she spoke). The comments vary from situation on the market to her private life, horoscope sign, friends, boyfriend, etc., and are very simple and of a “telegram” style. One would say that there is a kind of alienation present but at the same time such an interpretation could be attributed to the so called “cultural” differences. Ajduković is a photographer who prefers the shades of documentary in her work and as a storyteller shows us a foreigner woman, an immigrant of faraway origin as a local economic entity but also as an object in the age of globalization and immigration.

Whereas Ajduković claims³¹¹ that the “model” was very friendly and easygoing when they were making photos, later when her parents were at the market Chi Jin pretended that she did not recognize the artist who wanted to make the video of her. This striking and unjustifiable change in her attitude could not pass unnoticed; it could be interpreted as double standards that Chi Jin has in front of her family. Although apparently this girl seemed interested in representing herself, her verbal comments were general and superficial, and Aleksandrija Ajduković made a collage like images that remind us of a contemporary photo-novel. Without any “beautification”, the surroundings and background are a typical Ajduković’s raw imagery in which this artist “inserts” her models. Chi Jin thus remains, just as any other Chinese girl working illegally at the Serbian market, only a part of the globalization landscape of migration and nomadic shenanigans. Whether because of the rumour that in 1998 Slobodan Milošević “imported” 50,000 Chinese immigrants to offer them citizenship with the aim to obtain their votes for the elections or because of the prejudices around this “foreign” mass, this young woman even though purposefully represented is still an enigma and a spectator who can only hope that there is someone really human and individual behind all that remoteness, “dryness” and “hardness” in appearance of what is supposed to be a kind of scrapbook photo album. Again, Aleksandrija Ajduković pushes the image to the fore so that it cannot remain ignored and suddenly makes us aware of all those silent, “invisible”, “colourless” innumerable Chinese women immigrants working (most probably illegally) around the world in crowded markets and stores of colourful items and stinky plastic; though they are obviously physically present, the aura of their presence actually gives away the atmosphere of “absence”.

³¹¹ See *Interview with Aleksandrija Ajduković* in the Annex

If we speak of the idea that geography is a destiny that shapes and conditions one's life and future, whether an immigrant or not is in question, the need to escape karmic connections to one's origins and soil in search of a "better life" (or of what it should be) stubbornly persists. This especially refers to historically unstable territories that until recently were, or still are, raging with conflicts, tensions, and violence. Those are the dark entries into patriarchal structures that extrude female artists and directly push them to deal with their "geographical" heritage and inscriptions that it left on their bodies. Therefore, one could turn to Marina Abramović's theatre performance *Delusional* (1994) or Milica Tomić's video *Portrait of My Mother* (1999) and research how generations of women, mothers, and daughters, were lineally "inscribed" by Yugoslavia and later by Serbia. Even, in the case of Tanja Ostojić and her lectures and performances in *Integration Project* (2000-2005) and *Misplaced Women?* (2009-2012) there is a very clear idea that for a non-EU woman it is impossible to really integrate into Europe and become an equal citizen. It can be added that after the nineties, a Serbian woman is not only geographically the *Other* but more than ever before she is seen as a social threat as an immigrant, illegal worker, sex slave, etc. because of all that the country went through in the meantime. In short, the impact of the "Serbian 1990s" on the global vision of Serbian woman identity, besides being stereotypical, is generally humiliating and devastating. Though it might seem discouraging, women have been trying to bridge the abyss of being misunderstood for ages now but the walls have been rebuilt again and again.

6. FROM OBJECT TO SUBJECT

*If gender attributes, however, are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal. The distinction between expression and performativity is crucial.*³¹²

*... in the new media culture of the era of image, it is much more important to seem than to be, to look that to be, so people (active subject) have simply converted into public (passive media subject).*³¹³

As it was already previously commented in the second chapter dedicated to stereotypes, one of the modes of stereotyping female identity emerges from objectification which considers woman to be of a “passive” or of a “lesser” nature when juxtaposed to man. Besides that, feminine identity is treated through social and cultural objectification largely based on sexist and ageist views which again represents her as man’s “belonging”. As related to this, it is obvious that mass media, mainly visuals of television and the Internet, are indubitably constantly imposing “standards” that women are supposed to follow – those criteria depend on their close environment expectancies. Taking into consideration that here we are concentrated on the local situation in Serbia, nevertheless it can be said that it very much relies on common topics but also involves some specificities of this ground stemming mainly from its historical and political climate. Accordingly, themes of this chapter will research beauty standards (involving diet and anorexia as habits of the “tyranny of beauty”³¹⁴), phenomenon of female economic dependency of a gold digger, polarization of woman roles through imagery of motherhood and sexuality. It must be underlined that these concepts listed here derive one common factor – corporeality, in this case as being physical body of a female sex and how it is designed, treated, represented and manipulated. To emphasize, it is the “burden” of female body in contemporary culture

³¹² Butler, Judith: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, op.cit., p. 180

³¹³ Gubern, Román, *El eros electrónico*, Taurus Pensamiento Grupo Santillana, Madrid, 2000, p. 53

³¹⁴ *Genealogías feministas en el arte español: 1960-2010*, ed. Juan Vicente Aliaga/Patricia Mayayo, op. cit., p. 69

– how it expresses its features and how performative powers of corporeality are not only realized through (imposed) gender roles but also channelled and poured into the artworks.

It must be noted that the significance of performance as art practice can be influential because it can be publicized and disseminated. It happens when it is connected to the popular media in terms of the possibility of being recorded, reproduced and/or broadcasted as “action” (by the means of TV, video, the Internet and photography) while here the concept of performativity refers to corporeal “powers” as body aptitudes related to a certain gender identity. Here, performance is not a primary sample of choice, since other visual production is also involved, but it should be emphasized that socially and culturally it is often seen as the most prominent form of visual “activism” which is why it can be associated with “politicized” art practices, and consequently interpreted in reference to that vision. Accordingly, this chapter is dedicated to the aspect of expression of gender and its performativity accentuating the impact of media in the formation of female self-image of identity in Serbia.

The most compelling evidence of the breakthrough in use and aggressive distortion of information launched in media occurred in this region in the late 1980s with the onset of nationalistic tendencies and in the early 1990s with the beginning of the war. In particular, war machinery has formed a picture of the “new” Serbian man (warrior), and accordingly of his companion (and accomplice) Serbian woman. Until then, the media image that related to gender issues in Yugoslavia mostly followed global trends without any special deviations or obvious exaggerations. The brainwash effect of these new male and female identities of public figures appeared with their extensive presence in the media. What they proclaimed was mainly the new womanliness of the carefully designed appearance of hypersexualized video clips, advertisements and the so called “personal image” that ironically achieved a uniformity of its own. “Television establishes a meritocratic hierarchy between events and people that does not depend on the substance of such facts or people, but on the frequency and intensity of their appearances.”³¹⁵ More appearances mean more value, regardless of the intrinsic worth of the subject. Well-known principle that derives the corollary of iconocracy, i.e. that what is seen exists and that the more it is seen, the more it exists and the more important it becomes. The surface was valued while the content became irrelevant. The superfluous stage appearances of Serbian songstresses (turbo-folk stars as Svetlana Ceca Ražnatović, Jelena Karleuša, Seka Aleksić, Dara Bubamara to name but a few) soon became a trademark of expression of TV presenters and public figures. Needless to say, those values and

³¹⁵ Gubern, Román, *El eros electrónico*, op.cit., p. 53

contemporary visual culture code of the 1990s came to stay till nowadays only to exacerbate over time due to the aesthetic surgery “miracles” and photography manipulation “magic” or, in other words, due to artificial image that serves the purpose of designing of what a woman “should” be (like). For man “female body is programmed for domination, *locus* of passivity. And the woman is the *other*, the one who is desired but also the one to distance and above all to differentiate from.”³¹⁶ Therefore, in the course of self-protection from the *other*, meaning woman, man carefully designs the “desired woman” that he, as a male, will clearly and tacitly differentiate himself from.

Women in our society are forced daily to compete for male approval, enslaved by ludicrous beauty standards that we ourselves are conditioned to take seriously to accept. The most compelling evidence of how far these “standards of desirability” have gone is that embracing raunchy, vulgar, overly sexualized culture has done an incredible job at making the raunchy girl the cool girl. The raunchy “style” is a cultural phenomenon which promotes overtly sexual representations of women, as through the acceptance of nudity, stripping, pornography in advertising, etc, especially when it is encouraged by women. In particular, it can be defined as highly sexualized culture in which women are objectified, objectify one another, and are encouraged to objectify themselves. On the other side, even more interesting and significant is the paradox that this transition through raunch “phase” achieves. Due to all its vulgar exaggeration and almost caricature endeavour to sexualize female object, it actually slips into paths of ostensible transgressive aesthetic models. When speaking about Serbian case, the appearance of songstresses who, together with their songs lyrics in which violence is often mentioned, act neither submissively nor peacefully seems like some sort of grotesque emancipation from male domination. However, the truth is that female turbo-folk subjects remain in the “male shadow”. The rhetoric of violence (as in criminal activities or aggressive and arrogant behaviour, in psychological, mental, and emotional abuse of women, etc.) present in the lyrics and suggested in the visual representations does not call for a revolutionary change in male-female relationships but rather represents radicalization of male-female negotiations as means of manipulation which are symbolically inviting men to fulfil their traditional, conservative roles. Aggressive, assertive, and above all manipulative female subject as a desirable social model is radicalizing conformist approach to the concept of

³¹⁶ Aliaga, Juan Vicente, *Bajo Vientre. Representaciones de la sexualidad en la cultura y el arte contemporáneo*, Colección, Arte, Estética y Pensamiento. Generalitat Valenciana, 1997, p. 29

community, family and society which gained momentum in the post-Yugoslav homogenization of Serbian society.



Jelena Karleuša, 2000



Svetlana Ceca Ražnatović, 2016

Gender circumstances in which the central personality of turbo-folk themes is designed for position of “sponzoruša” (gold digger who builds her social status through connections with socially prestigious men) are inevitably based on conservative, conformist heteronormative societal demands. As we speak of turbo-folk songstresses, their way of dressing, iconography, teasing lyrics and rhymes as well as their occasional provocative statements in the media nevertheless do not exceed the limit of radicalized hierarchical, strictly divided gender roles of men and women. Though some of them were even known for showing weapons in public, and mentioning motives of violence in their songs, this radicalization of the submissive role of women poured into a glamorous appearance that combines overemphasized femininity together with masculine elements of rudeness and aggressiveness represented as a part of turbo-folk image. What, at first glance, may look like some transgression, is actually a kind of radicalization of the conventional role of a woman who is manipulative; she adapts and submits to a man as a holder of the leading role in family and community. Those representations of female potentials remain in harmony with the social demands of the post-Yugoslav Serbia as the society where the greatest power belongs to men who possess capital of doubtful origin and where popular culture becomes a convenient everyday expression through which such power will further strengthen as a general social value. In short, female public identities on stage express a unified conformist tendency of Serbian society that, in its manipulative way, inclines towards the current centres of power, and perpetuate the existing gender and social dynamics of everyday life.

This chapter intends to research into the phenomenology of femininity within its “positioning” of object/subject, corporeality, and expressivity and performativity from the point of view of Serbian art practices. If gender attributes, however, were not only expressive but performative, cultural intrusion and requirements would be destabilized and therefore,

their influence in diminishing female self-esteem would be reduced. For that reason a question emerges of how much woman progressed from object to subject, from passive to active, from expressive to performative – she only *appears* to be subject, she really *is* subject or, in fact, she is *subjected to* something or someone. On the whole, the path goes from object to subject and back with no clear distinction or direction in-between.

6.1. Erotization of the Female Post-war Image

*The prefix "turbo" refers to the specific mixture of politics, culture, "psychic power" and the pauperization of life in Serbia: the mixture of rural and urban, pre-modern and postmodern, pop culture and heroes, real and virtual, mystical and "normal", and so on. This prefix, even in its naive or innocent meaning, still exactly corresponds to the classical fascism.*³¹⁷

*Women are said to "be" the Phallus in the sense that they maintain the power to reflect or represent the "reality" of the self-grounding postures of the masculine subject, a power which, if withdrawn, would break up the foundational illusions of the masculine subject position.*³¹⁸

In the first place, shaping of female role in visual mass media projection is not and should not be difficult. Woman's roles are either family or sexual – it is just that they are interpreted in accordance with trendy demands of the moment and, therefore, they range from romantic to lascivious. The purpose of that entire mission is that woman, despite the possible variations, is closely monitoring the fate of her own body while exposing it to the forefront. At the same time, expressions appearing on the face are limited with aim to reinforce the impression of what is in the foreground – emotional states caused by the current position of the body and its closeness or distance from a man or a child. Most compelling evidence of that "melancholic" look on female faces when posing or modeling is actually unconscious parody of longing and waiting for Him. That is evident in the fact that woman "appears" to be the Phallus through masquerade, the effect of a melancholy that is essential to the feminine position as such³¹⁹.

Another quite possible scenario is the so called "body without face" – a corporeality deprived of the individuality induced by facial features; thus, it is reduced to an object that

³¹⁷ Papić, Žarana, *Texts 1977-2002*, op.cit., p. 356

³¹⁸ Butler, Judith: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, op.cit., p. 58

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 59

demands minimal effort needed for interpretation from the imagined spectator. For this reason, vulgar erotization of female image which began in Serbia during the war in the 1990s and that has continued till nowadays, in this extremely patriarchal, one would say regressive, environment was an easy attainment taking into consideration the “complicity” of its both female and male subjects. In the 1980s, in Yugoslavia (as a matter of fact primarily in Serbia of the time) with the onset of “the new wave” of songstresses of popular folk music, began to crystallize the idea of a female public image of “diva” that epitomized an independent, successful and “emancipated” woman or of what she should be. It was the picture that involved for the time scantily clad, seductive, and sexy appearances and performances. Thereupon, with the beginning of the war in 1991, when everything escalated and became “turbo”, occurred clear but more extreme formation of both male and female images. The fact is that the more aggressive, nationalistic and virile man was, the more primitive, vulgar and sexualized his female “shadow” (escort) became. As public appearances of female stars emerged throughout the war years, they promoted violent lyrics accompanied by blatant bouts. Another key point is that “to some extent, sexual prostitution does not avoid occupations of women who exhibit their bodies in the public arena where they are mass-reproduced through photography and film”³²⁰. For example, everywhere there are biographies of famous actresses, including the embellished autobiographies as well, which indicate that in order to make a successful career, at least as far as women are concerned, sexual relations with influential men are necessary, and it is the fact that these relations are often concealed by marriage or better said by the fact that the individuals in question are already married (to someone else).

Proudly knowing by heart entire lyrics of their turbo-folk idols, generations of teenage girls embraced those vulgar and raunchy examples of “success” and “happiness” to follow. Serbian social and cultural climate in the 1990s that preceded the new millennium attempts of transition, globalization, and consumerism, set abroad the fertile ground to plant the seeds of prejudices against woman from this region. Therefore, that “Serbian 1990s” impact on the global vision of Serbian female identity produced prejudices which mostly revolve around imagined sex toy stripped of humanity and reduced to the secluded “other”. With this in mind, this construction that brought and produced a hyper-sexualized publicly praised diva (together with all the vulgar erotization of female image in Serbia) largely dwelled on exaggerated

³²⁰ See Katunarić, Vjeran, op.cit., p.174

“beauty standards” which do not shun plastic surgeries and other visual “prosthesis” because the ways of appearing are what is essential. All that in turn could not be ignored and therefore inspired artists and authors to react with irony, sarcasm, and criticism.

Artistic “Anti-erotization”



Vladislava Đurić, *Saint Ceca*, acrylic on wood, lights, 42 x 30 x 2 cm, 2010

While she was a student, Vladislava Đurić (1985) for the subject of Serbian brand (as a study project of a typical Serbian product) portrayed Serbian folk star Svetlana Ceca Ražnatović as an icon of the Holy Mother of God. Using the traditional wooden board as a base, she imitated the pattern of painting Byzantine icons. Placed in the centre and surrounded by a halo together with traditional inscriptions that show the name of the saint, this “icon” is holding a microphone and wearing a religious headscarf (the symbol of chastity and modesty) while at the same time her cleavage is exposed. Ceca is often referred to as a “Serbian mother” – she is a synonym for a person who is a patriot, martyr, widow, single mother, etc. In short, speaking from her biography, in reality she is the typical product and representative of the “Serbian 1990s”, a very influential public figure of hyper-sexualized femininity image, the female pillar

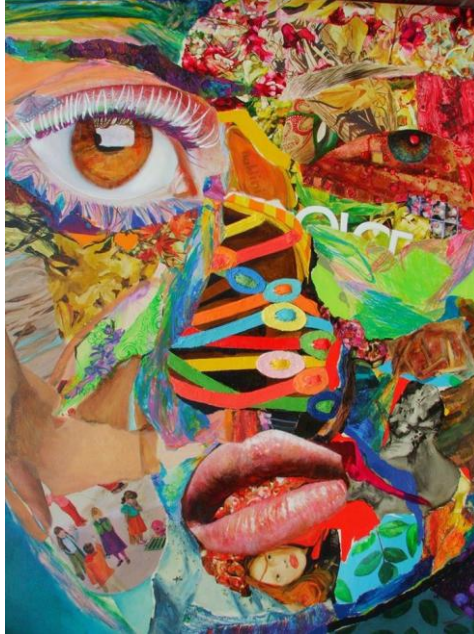
of patriarchal society, nationalism and chauvinism. It can be said that the final impression (especially with additional New Year's bulbs) is that is an imitation, fakery or distortion while in fact Đurić's idea was that a portrait of the folk icon presented as a holy painting reflects the quality of Serbia's culture at the time. This relation between turbo-folk, religious iconography, and national identification shows how closely they are actually bonded and, therefore, interdependent but also this picture could be a reference to the public elevation of turbo-folk songstresses into symbols of public veneration. As Byzantine icons were believed to have magical or supernatural "powers" (especially the healing ones), Ceca as an "icon" together with its social background and cultural consequences might have deserved an "Iconoclasm" of its own kind. Nevertheless, this Đurić's work at the time when it appeared did not get special public reception which might be attributed to the fact that at the time it simply belonged to her study research as a student of art and that it was not accompanied by sufficient media interest.



Ivana Smiljanić, *Imprint*, photography, 30 x 40 cm (x2), 2005

The diptych that constitutes the work *Imprint* of Ivana Smiljanić (1980) shows the same feet in the so called "before and after" situation. The first one is showing female feet standing in high heel, "gold" strap sandals and the following one is representing the exact position of the same feet but with the sandals "imprint" on them. The bare feet image makes the spectator aware of their actual positioning when in sandals, straps leave marks and there is also something of a "pig hoofs" effect in the very pose – they look unnatural besides being "marked" by the dress code "beauty standards". This work clearly deals with the consequences that fashion has not only on woman appearance but on her health as well. Incorporated by women through the process of identification again it is the appearance that is of primary

importance. However, it is essential to clarify that femininity does not correspond to any natural essence, and what woman seems to result from are discursive ideas and practices about femininity, which vary in their meaning in different times and societies.



Marija Petković, *Portrait of Past, Present and Future*, oil on canvas, 150 x 120 cm, 2006



Marija Petković, *Portrait of Any Girl*, mixed-media on canvas, 150 x 140 cm, 2006

For her exhibition *Disclosure*, that took part at Gallery of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade in 2006, Marija Petković (1978) painted big size portraits. For this purpose, she made

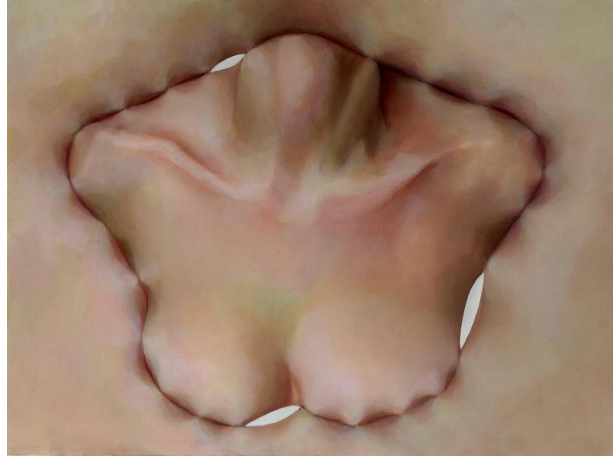
female portraits by using different techniques and materials in the sequence created from a live model and with aim to fill the whole format. Petković created collages combining her paintings with clippings from magazine advertisements which highlight images of the “desirable” female appearance. Surfaces, which connect with each other harmoniously but also clash dissonantly, then served as models to paint in oil on canvas. The image itself passed a transition from original drawings and collage into painting. The final outcome of the work process, in which the drawing-collage turns into an oil painting, was guided by the idea of a “visual pun” because the canvas simultaneously gives an impression of a collage while being actually a painting. What is visually puzzling the spectator is the fact that what is firstly recognized as the constructed collage is a painted canvas. However, that is the moment when begins the process of decomposition and dismantling of images that represent huge “oddly” recomposed faces so that the “disclosure” can start.

As has been noted, beauty magazines propose standards that for the most women are impossible to fulfill; and, therefore, to compress the concept of collage and painting into one surface and in such big portrait compositions disturbs and awakes claustrophobia. Marija Petković’s vision of female faces reminds us that women can be designed and redesigned, that their self-image can be “butchered, patched and chopped” over and over. Perhaps identity is not that stable at all and it continually depends on mirroring in order to reflect the imposed, the expected, the “standardized”. Fragmented identities, fragmentary images, and partial understanding of the whole are a reminder that more and more we are interchangeable, moldable mass of features, organs and details which sounds horrifying in the era of plastic surgery, artificial image and virtual reality. Nevertheless, the intention to follow models or the attempt to resist them are becoming equally utopian and dehumanizing as much as internally clashing.



Maja Milovanović, *Magazine – Foundation*, oil on wood, 29 x 21 cm; *Blush*, oil on wood, 29 x 21 cm;
Eyeshadow, oil on wood, 29 x 21 cm, triptych, 2001

In this triptych from 2001, Maja Milovanović (1977) paints female portraits that imitate beauty magazine advertisements for make-up. Deliberately with rather scarce shades in her palette, she represents faces that seem like masks together with words that name the type of products but not any actual labels. Unlike the usual advertisements of this kind that glow in order to dazzle potential consumers, here pale and cold “models” exude sterility, rigidity and remoteness which repel spectators. For instance, even though faces and product names are visible, there are no product images on the paintings and it can be added that not only that products identity is omitted but also even more significantly the effect of the make-up is lacking. The expressive features on these three portraits are minimized and mainly featured through the eyebrows typology thus leaving these faces, as if they were of mannequins or dolls, to remind us of dehumanized and “lifeless” models. In this case, Maja Milovanović painted her own version of beauty magazine models as motionless, statue-like and with unnatural white complexion. However, besides that, there is a certain type of discrepancy between the meaning and the content. To put it another way, the words that are naming the type (but not brand or label) of beauty products lose their significance and are deprived of any meaning not only because there is no picture of products but because these faces create the effect of “anti-advertising”.



Maja Milovanović, *Shape*, oil on canvas, 60 x 80 cm, 2007

In this image, the same author mapped a specific part of the body and painted the upper part of female torso, skillfully avoiding inclusion of the portrait and/or the nipples (or entire breasts). *Shape* represents the fragment of realistically painted section of body that seems to be “stitched” to yet another surface that both in its complexion and texture very much resembles skin but is flat in its form. The line where these two surfaces meet is not fully closed – there are some small openings, visually it is the concept that the shape of the torso is not completely fitting the base thus implying that the connection is forced or discordant. The “stitching” contour reflects a kind of pressure in the line and its shades. It seems that this “shape”, though it is eagerly trying to, cannot fit in and meet expectations. A slight feeling of claustrophobia and confinement are hard to escape as this very feminine and fragile form seems to want to break out. Even though, the body fragment is delicate and sensual, there remains the feeling that its position is imposed, that it is something taken away from the context, torn away from its original body and then “patched” wherever. The least to say is that the final effect of this image is bringing uneasiness and dread because it is “homage” to plastic surgery and its disasters. On the other side, this painting can also refer to female inability to fit in the imposed criteria about physical appearance which is why so many women willingly embrace “solutions” offered by plastic surgery. To make it more ironical and tragic, the paradox remains – after the surgery, they do not feel really better. The truth is that the new, the changed, the redesigned body part that the mind is accustomed to is now perceived by brain as “erroneous” image because it differs from its habitual appearance. For this reason, Maja Milovanović offers a reminder that “shape” is just a shape, and that form and

appearance are superficial and overrated. Needless to say the “visuals” significance depends on how much value we “stitch” to it.



Maja Rakočević, *Body Parts (Pretty or Ugly)*, 8 images series, 2000, photography: Ksenija Tikvicki

As plastic surgeries are offering but a psychological “crutch” for one’s self-esteem and we are speaking about “chopping”, “stitching”, “patching” and “botching” parts of female body, it is necessary to take into consideration photography series of the sculptress Maja Rakočević (1975) named *Body Parts (Pretty or Ugly)*³²¹. This series that contains 8 images (the model is the author herself) shows parts of body on which lines are drawn with a marker that reminiscent the process of preparation for surgical procedures. As here the artist analyzed her own body in relation to the “preferred” model of beauty, she mimicked fragmenting the body into parts as desirable and undesirable, as beautiful and ugly. The fact is that in the subtitle of this work there is a dilemma and it refers to the body parts in question: are they pretty or ugly? Again “cutting” the whole could not be avoided and this time it is with the purpose to question whether what is there is pretty or ugly, or whether to change it would make it pretty or ugly. Or perhaps, whether fragmentation of body is what is ugly (in the sense that it is dehumanizing concept and artificial process) and therefore, in a way a humiliating procedure. Placed within the categories of time and space, corporeality does not undergo temporal and spatial parameters without consequences. There is an evident fragmentation of the body – the “before and after” interpretation of its characteristics as in a reference to a certain point in

³²¹ See more at <http://majarakocevic.com/radovi/delovi-tela-lepo-ili-ruzno/> (accessed on November 11, 2016)

time but also in space by treating the body as the “territory” that can be fragmented into parts. Fragmentation of the body image and of corporeality contains inability to look at the bigger picture because cultural pressures cause interior split and conflict that blur the concept of the whole, of the very possibility of “completeness” of the body.

Appearing, Becoming and Being are concepts largely researched and analyzed in philosophical works. Here they can be viewed as processes that are culturally imposed and defined in reference to media and gender. As it is proclaimed by media, it is not that much important to *be* but at least to reflect and *appear* so, that one can take the form of “masquerade” and play the social game (which indubitably raises the identity layering of the “interior” with its “covers”). In terms of being and having, again man possesses Phallus while woman *appears* to be “Phallic” because in order to *be* Phallus, she must *become* precisely what man is not³²². Such misogynist definition and hypocritical proclamation are giving shivers to feminists because the “technicalities” of differentiation between genders at all costs are neither promising nor optimistic. Besides that, both object and subject belong to the same symbolic hierarchy and paternal law mutually defining one another but what is not clear is whether woman can “escape” the destiny of an object and really become a *real* subject. Under such circumstances, general vulgar erotization of the female image goes with the flow of current trends of cultural “fashion” of gender roles.

³²² See Butler, Judith: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, op.cit., p. 58

6.2. Devouring the Void

*An anorexic subject not only “does not eat anything” but actually actively wants to eat the very Nothingness (void) which is the ultimate aim/cause of desire.*³²³

When we talk about diet as a contemporary mass neurosis, it is necessary to emphasize the fact that nowadays women, before they even entered their adulthood, already when they were girls by their behaviour showed that they properly understood and adopted the imposed cultural requirements – those were the requirements to learn to curb appetite, and to resist wishes of the body. For example, according to Susan Bordo cultural requirements associated with the symbolic potential of female hunger in myths and art of different epochs and cultures were a metaphor for the untamed (sexual) power and desire³²⁴. Eating is not only a metaphor for the sexual act but the sexual act, if it is initiated by women, is imagined as the act of eating and destroying the object of desire. Therefore, woman's sexual appetite must be controlled because it threatens to sap and destroy the body of man (the misogynist myth of the “vagina dentata”). The archetype of devouring and castrating woman (including woman as mother as well) is built on the imagery that food consumption, meaning opening the mouth, chewing and swallowing even though are physiological and quite mechanical processes of eating, can be somehow equated with the sexual activity and sexual act itself. Exactly those female “gluttony”, “insatiable hunger” and “starvation” are unjustifiably necessary prerequisites for curbing natural impulses of various kinds in women as if only men were allowed to be not only expressive of their desires but also performative in the realization of their physiological needs.

³²³ Žižek, Slavoj, op. cit., p. 32

³²⁴ See Malešević, Miroslava, op. cit., p. 135



Maja Milovanović, *Magazine – In the Name Of...*, oil on wood, 29 x 21 cm, 2001



Maja Milovanović, *Magazine – Apple Pie*, oil on wood, 29 x 21 cm 2001

In her *Magazine* series of paintings, Maja Milovanović dedicates four pieces (here two are represented) to deal with the topic of food, the “decorum” of dishes and plates and the “holiness” of nutrition. Correspondingly, in these paintings, she uses irony to comment on the “sainthood” of food in our culture. At the time of her life when Milovanović started living alone and taking care of herself, she realized how important our relation to food is. Skillfully, she made “pages” that remind of advertisements where she paints small “windows”, actually

collaged pictures of tastefully decorated food and dishes, and combines them with the images of saints. *In the Name Of...* is the example of several plates which were depicted with very vivid colours together with the image of Virgin Mary with Jesus in the upper right corner. The “floating” squares of pastel shades are puzzling until we realize that “in the name of” is actually referring to our relation to food, nutrition, health issues, “fasting” and finally religion. In Orthodox rituals, food is very present and above all very significant – for example, in religious feasts dedicated to family protector saint (called *slava*) which are specifically characteristic for Serbia region; the same goes at celebrations, weddings but also at funeral rites and throughout procedures of mourning semiotics. Without a doubt, nowadays there is a dominant trend of “healthy” eating habits, dieting, “starving” for beauty, and moreover, an obsession of how to prepare and decorate meals. It seems that it all happens in the name of beliefs, with the preoccupation of consumption and ingestion of food as if it was “holy”. Nevertheless, there is also the paradox – while food preparation and decoration are respected, adored and treated as a fetish, food itself actually remains “forbidden” because it “fattens”. For that reason, it can be said that food is a fetish and a “taboo” at the same time.

Continuing the same tendency of the design for food advertisement, in *Apple Pie* Maja Milovanović paints to combine two images – as the title says, one of a plate with apple pie, and above it, she directly applies her version of *Saint Thomas* by Caravaggio. Since at least the 5th century, in art the scene formally named “Incredulity of Saint Thomas” has been frequently depicted and through time reflected a huge range of theological interpretations most of which are dealing with the Apostle Thomas as the so-called “doubting Thomas” – a sceptic who refuses to believe without direct personal experience. The least to say, his “digging” into the Christ’s wound creates uneasiness, and for the believers probably some kind of disturbance. On the other side, here Milovanović combines this subject with the picture of food, more precisely apple pie on a plate. In the light of religious conundrums, it would be impossible to go to further interpretation with certainty and claim that in this case the choice of fruit for the pie is purposeful because of its possible Biblical references (the role of apple in the original sin). What is certain is that visually this piece of food that should supposedly be a pie is made of piled parts of “something” that does not necessarily share attributes of pieces of fruit but rather some organs floating in some sort of a bloody jelly. Surely, that leaves doubts about the content of this “dessert” and automatically redirects attention to our relation to food issues perception, food preparation and so on. And not only that, but this painting reminds us of

some eternal burning questions – what is a woman to cook? And even more importantly – what is a woman to eat?

As can be seen, eating disorders bulimia and anorexia are serious physical and emotional illnesses and it must be taken into account that there is a close interconnection between the cultural ideal of the female body and those disorders. For example, unlike hysteria, which produces an imaginary anatomy, although this affects functions, anorexia engages the real body: it is a high-risk psychosomatic pathology.

The body is not only the scene of conflicts that do not access the discourse of the subject, but that it intervenes in the body (diets, purges, vomiting) and therefore it is also pathology of the act: what cannot be said is what is done.³²⁵

Nevertheless, it must be noted that in both bulimia and anorexia exists the central role of “orality” but with one particularity: although a libidization of the nutritional function has been produced, this provoked an intense repression which deprived the self-preservation function of the narcissistic libidinal component necessary for fulfilment³²⁶. Therefore, eating disorders can be also seen as basically a “nihilistic” concept where one believes in nothing and wants nothing. Obviously, there is negation of desire present and a form of emotional and physical self-punishment and self-denial where the very corporeality becomes a battleground.



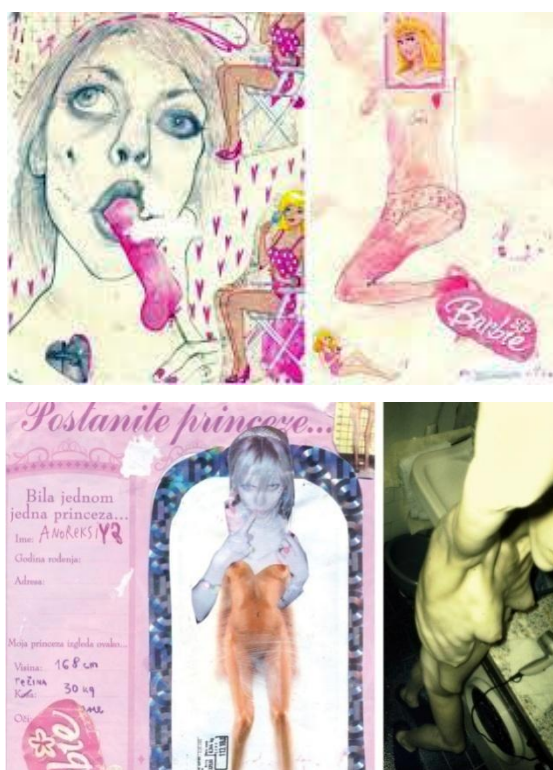
Antea Arizanović, *I Be(eat) Anorexia*, 80 x 135 cm, print, 2007

Placed in a small stage wrapped in stylized camouflage background that reminds of military pattern design, two girls are arm wrestling. That is how in the image named *I Be(eat)*

³²⁵ Tubert, Silvia, *Los ideales culturales de la feminidad y sus efectos sobre el cuerpo de las mujeres*, Quaderns de Psicologia 2010, Vol. 12, No 2, 161-174., p. 164

³²⁶ Ibid.

Anorexia Antea Arizanović represented the topic of this disorder that so many girls and women of all ages are suffering from today. Noticeably, both girls are wearing tiaras that probably correspond to beauty pageant dress code or perhaps are openly addressing popular and widespread “princess” stereotype. Whatever the case may be, the girl on the left, the more curvy and “corpulent” one is evidently winning, or as in the title she is “beating” anorexia. It must be mentioned that there is a slight effect of mirroring because both are blonde girls with tiaras and dressed in rose (except, of course, for the “size” difference between them). As for facial expressions, it might be added that the winner on the left is assertive while the other one seems to be surprised by the defeat. Besides that, the title itself suggests that linguistically speaking, the verb *to beat* morphologically contains verbs *to be* and *to eat*. It is not entirely clear whether anorexia is seen as a physical illness that can be “cured” by gaining weight and therefore physical “strength” or whether the two girls are not real opponents but two conflicting personalities within the anorexic patient – the “hungry” one and the one who denies desires. However, the interior battle is what is mostly noted in cases of this illness as well as inability to take the distance and see one’s actual reflection as it really is in the mirror.



Marina Marković, *C'mon Barbie Lets Go Party*, diary, 2006-2007

Marina Marković (1983) is a “post-anorexic” artist who allures spectators into her universe by her specific poetics, autobiographical elements, and ways in which she combines

visuals in order to deal with her own body. Within the time frame of a couple of years, from 2006 to 2008, this artist devoted to her personal story of anorexia with several artworks. To begin with, it was *C'mon Barbie Lets Go Party*, her diary that documents the period of her life when the very onset of anorexia began – it was the phase that included her starvation and obsession with food that brought her to hospitalization and to assisted recovery. She used the form of diary to document every day of her sickness – for that purpose she made drawings, collages, and also photographed her body. There are also her food lists and calorie charts together with the medical records of her treatment for anorexia that lasted for six months and took part at the Institute of Endocrinology in Belgrade. This diary conveys the multitude of images that are disheartening and disturbing – for example, Marković's photographic self-portraits of fragmented body combined with advertisements from beauty magazines or with her own drawings. Rose and pink colour shades that should revive the “Barbie” atmosphere are abundantly employed together with messages in text (e.g. “Become a Princess”) or with various collages. To put it another way, these confessions in pictures are a document of how it *feels* to be anorexic from day to day but they could be also witnessing the distortion in self-perception so much characteristic for this illness. What can be added is that there is a notion of “captivity”, helplessness and surrender particular for this type of disorder. Caricatured and expressive self-portraits with ironic messages make us feel empathy because her story is real yet authentic and even though she does not ask for sympathy, it is impossible not to be moved by this “Barbie” and her diary.



Marina Marković, *Anorexia / Before and After*, lenticular print, 2007/2008

For the purpose of addressing directly her own anorexic issues, in *Anorexia / Before and After*, Marina Marković deployed lenticular printing technology to create images which offer an illusion of depth (or the ability to change or move as the image is viewed from

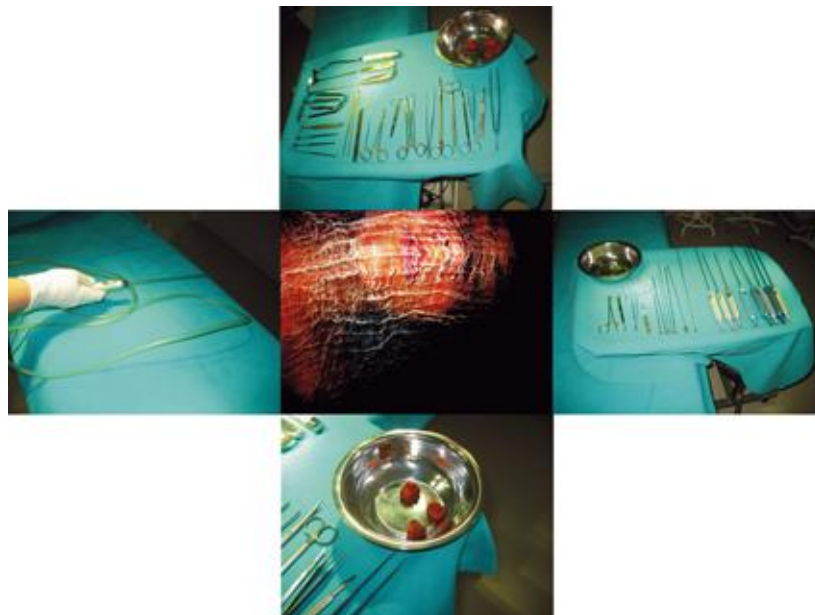
different angles). Here again is Marković's personal document on the beginning and the end of the one-year long period of her healing from anorexia. With that aim, images immersed in cold yellowish gamma are juxtaposed for comparison just like in any "before and after" example. What is interesting in this work, besides that it gives hope that anorexia can be cured, is that her body is treated and showed as a sculptural material because she is both the subject and the object. Her face is skilfully "omitted" probably in order to avoid possible communication with the spectator and to avoid personalization of the "model" because in that way this case is not a personal, isolated example but the omnipresent phenomenon. In fact, it is also interesting that she "staged" the same details around the mirror in both images probably to state that things did not change but that she, her body, did. However, though this artwork serves as a sarcastic comment on the common "before and after" images of beautification, it reminds us of a silent interior clash which most probably exists in patients who suffer from illnesses that they inflict on themselves. Whether it is because of the negation of desire (for food and/or satisfaction), or because the image in the mirror is distorted in the mind of the viewer (here anorexic), these images, though they should supposedly document the healing, bear the element of subversion because there *is* a body but it is the body of a gaping void.



Marina Marković, *Oral*, light boxes, 2008

The fact that cannot be ignored when anorexia is researched is the huge role which "orality" is playing here. Naturally, in order to deal with her pathological relation to food consumption, this artist did not avoid this aspect in her creative endeavours. In *Oral*, Marina

Marković made self-portraits where she seems to be “violated” by the cutlery as if forks and spoons were feeding “weapons” for her. There is no appearance of or relating to food itself in this piece but the vehicles for eating are liberally used in her expressive self-portraits where she is widely opening her mouth, licking, stabbing her lips, etc. However, the “orality” aspect of anorexia stems from the fact that mouth has a double meaning and that it is the dichotomy in the meaning of it that brings the abyss and the paradox. Mouth is not only the medium for self-indulgence in the taste and the form and the opening for self-expression, speaking, and communicating but what is significant is that it is also the vehicle for self-denial, self-deprivation and self-punishment. Though here the mouth is the central motif, it is also the source of frustration. Firstly, for an anorexic, psychologically and physically mouth is the primary point to control food consumption and monitor all that is ingested. Secondly, and more importantly, mouth is the gate to body and soul, mouth is the entrance and the exit; therefore, it can be said that mouth is a passage for “consumption”. In this case, Marković rejected to be a consumer so, she spent days and days lying prostrate on a scanner doing these images that may seem to be offensive but actually they are not. *Oral* is speaking of anorexia as insatiable gluttony of the bottomless void; and it is telling tales of a girl, a devouring martyr, staring at Nothingness.



Jovana Dimitrijević, *Instant Venus*, digital collage, 2007

The voyage through the eating disorder of bulimia began for the artist Jovana Dimitrijević (1979) at her tender age of fourteen and lasted for about a decade. As far as her

symptomatology is concerned, it began with vomiting and later continued with binge eating. In time as her condition escalated, around the year 2002 she decided to employ corrective surgeries to reshape her body believing that it can become what she calls a “machine” – powerful, strong and indestructible. Her first surgery was actually a liposuction which she immortalized in the photographic images of the surgical instruments, hoses, tubes, and gauze pads with iodine used in the actual procedure that she underwent. Later in 2007, these images were combined into a digital collage named *Instant Venus* that in the form of a horizontal cross documents her own “passion” and “crucifixion”. It should be mentioned that in the centre of this composition is Dimitrijević’s self-portrait covered with gauze and, though it is very light, it nevertheless blurs her face which surrounded by the dark seems to be rising. Whether or not in this case this cover shares some connotations with the Holy Shroud, this sacrifice of hers for the beauty shows no remorse though surely only she knows how hard and painful her recovery from liposuction was. Not only that, but in time Jovana Dimitrijević became a fan of plastic surgeries and decided to remodel her body a couple of times more until she was “sure” that she was pleased with her image.



Jovana Dimitrijević, *Stitches Removal*, digital photography, 2003



Jovana Dimitrijević, *Body Lift*, digital photography, 2004

In the years following her liposuction, Jovana Dimitrijević performs another type of corrective surgery on her body, the so called body lift, and she does it twice. For the first surgery, she documents it in the post-surgical phase making photographs of the scar with the stitches in *Stitches Removal* while the second surgery is recorded through the image of the actual procedure simply called *Body Lift*. Obviously, the artist concentrates on technicalities and process of medical intervention rather than her own interior representations of personal experience. For example, the removal of stitches is the image that reminds of “re-tailoring” her body as if she was a puppet mannequin made of fabric that needs correction. In the case of the second surgery, Dimitrijević prefers to do the direct “inside” photography during the surgery itself – the image of her gaping flesh so that the spectator can see the interior tissues and blood. In both cases, it seems that she is more fascinated by the surgical procedures than interested in her own perception and experience of the surgeries, and that is how she accentuates basic alienation that patients with eating disorders have with their bodies. In both *Stitches Removal* and *Body Lift* Jovana Dimitrijević is both an object and a subject – she is the object of surgeries but also the subject in control. What should be emphasized is that she

offers a kind of a corporeal “portraits” lying prostrated on a surgical table where she is like a pile of flesh waiting to be redesigned. However, it is not clear whether female corporeality is a burden that expresses its “deviations” through eating disorder symptomatology while what is performative about femininity is the decision to undergo a surgery in order to liberate oneself from the “disease”.

In the long run, interrelation of woman as an object and woman as a subject is mutually dependant because her positioning is constantly shifting like a pendulum. In case of eating disorders, she is the object of her own treatment, the dynamics that obviously happens in self-inflicted conditions, while at the same time being the active subject in that situation. How much contemporary beauty standards can influence the distortion of self-image is visible in examples of eating disorders that witness to what extent self-perception in combination with “diet” can really eventually distort not only the image in the mirror but the real body. Artists who worked on this topic created disturbing images that are documenting their life periods when they were perversely obsessed with their body image. Though alienation and interior split were hanging in the air, they stubbornly continued to deprive themselves of their desires while at the same time accurately recording their “fall”. Consequences of eating disorders are visible in artworks of female authors around the world just proving how omnipresent these illnesses are. It seems that artists feel the need to keep their diaries and use artistic practices at hand to document and keep the traces of that interior clash and bottomless void that made them sick. In the end, various eating disorders are but a contemporary cultural phenomenon that former patients can only hope will never come back. The truth is that there is no certainty or security that they are forever cured, but perhaps their records might serve as reminders to save them from themselves.

6.3. "Sponzoruša" or Phenomenon of the Serbian Gold Digger

In the course of changes caused by political and economic crisis due to the war in the 1990s, there was a significant increase in both physical and financial insecurity in Serbia at the time. It was the period of formation of new gender dynamics that was largely defined by the onset of economic dependency and poverty on one and the rise of the so-called new Serbian "elite" on the other side. In the social climate where corruption and nepotism flourished, close connections of politicians with police, army and criminals enabled the networking between institutions, "mafia" and government. At the same time, in various social circles, there was a sudden appearance of men with finances and riches of dubious origin most often associated with war profiteers, illegal activities of weapon and drug trade, and economic shambles. As men were becoming more aggressive and financially powerful, women were more willingly accepting the passive role thus becoming objectified. Naturally, the rise in ageism and sexism tendencies became even more apparent. It was the time when "sponsor" and "sponzoruša" appeared in Serbian vocabulary to describe the specific type of relation between man and woman characteristic of the symbiosis which both sides were responsible for. Even in terms of linguistics, it is obvious that morphologically "sponzoruša" is made by adding a suffix to "sponsor" meaning that she is just an extension of him, and it is used as a pejorative term to describe a female.

It must be noted that in "sponsor" and "sponzoruša" type of relationships, the more men demonstrate power over women, the more they are treated like "trophies" or "fetishes" belonging to men. However, in such a dynamics, the aim is in the mirroring effect – woman is actually only the reflection of her man's power. Therefore, besides continually attending and feeding his ego, her purpose is to help her man establish his status more firmly into the new, even more extreme, Serbian patriarchal order. In return, from him she gets the needed protection and financial aid that at the same time puts her in disposition because, like any object of trade between men, she *is* indeed disposable and replaceable. The specificity of the Serbian gold digger is that she appeared at the time of the war turmoil together with the changes that it brought. "Sponzoruša" is not only the symbol of the unscrupulous social ladder climber that belongs to a "sponsor", but she is also connected with the male criminal circles

where she is often an accomplice. Thirsty for status, she is tacitly associated with prostitution or, better said, is the phenomenon that signals the tendency that a girl or a woman is “selling” herself (as physical, psychological, emotional “prostitution”) for various benefits in return.



Antea Arizanović, *Be My Sponsor*, photography, 40 x 40 cm (3 works), 2005

With aim to comment on the phenomenon of “sponzoruša”, Antea Arizanović made series of self-portraits with the obvious title “page” named with the text *Be My Sponsor*. For this purpose, she imitated famous icons of pop culture Marilyn Monroe and Madonna both of whom had created works dedicated to the concept of a gold digger. One of the most famous Hollywood icons, Monroe, as the blonde searching for a millionaire, was singing “Diamonds are Girl’s Best Friend”. Some twenty years later, Madonna (the blonde version dressed as Monroe with diamonds) made her own version of the gold digger in her song “Material Girl”. Singing and dancing with the group of well dressed men, Madonna was in the centre of attention – the diva carried around the stage, she was treated as the richly decorated fetish. In Arizanović’s *Be My Sponsor* she is wearing the same dress and style as Monroe and Madonna; and her images represent the blonde who is in a way offering herself to the spectator asking him to sponsor her. If applied to the art world, “this work says that today art demands money, audience and adoration as well as artist-actor who must “offer” and “sell” himself/herself in the (art)

market”³²⁷. Here the artist is smiling in affectation, posing in a stereotype “feminine” way in order to allure the viewer. She is only a beautified image of a seductive girl, nothing more, and that is where the story ends because there is nothing much to see or offer except the “image”, the appearance, the surface. It can be said that there is no much interaction either because of this superficiality thus indicating that the relationship between the sponsor and his “sponsoruša” is superfluous, it is but a charade, a pose or an act. The posing self-advertisement of Arizanović also speaks of the position of an artist in the art market who in a way “prostitutes” herself in the manner that she has to betray herself and become more “commercial” like any goods in the market with aim to be evaluated, valued, and, more importantly, finally sold.



Antea Arizanović, *I Beg You*, mirror, 100 x 70 x 0,8 cm, 2006

In her work *I Beg You* Antea Arizanović uses mirror as the reflection surface to make a silhouette image that represents a woman kneeling and begging. The figure is very suggestive with the face upwards, long loose hair and the breast that comes out in space. Even though this representation should be of a beggar woman, still it is not clear what her exact condition and intention are. By the title it might mean that she is begging for money, for help or for

³²⁷ Erić, Olivera, *Is Woman Today More Respected and Loved than Before?*, op. cit., p. 179

protection. Yet the picture is puzzling because there is a slight seductive touch and “eagerness” in her body language position – if so, it could signify potential search for a “sponsor”. If this work is to be seen from sociological or art market interpretation point, it might mean that in today's society, everyone must sell (himself/herself) not only in search of a better life but first to survive in general. Thus the subordinate position of the beggar woman reflects (just like everyone can reflect in this silhouette) all our lives that in today's global society and the capitalist transition are reduced to “survival”, “selling” and “begging”. Certainly, there is some public humiliation, subordination, vulnerability and social exposure that characterize beggars but it must be remembered that here this beggar woman is mirroring spectators to return their personal attention inwards. *I Beg You* brings not only empathy but also awareness about the rules of market, economy, finances which are dehumanizing and degrading because they reduce humanity to products proclaiming the belief that everyone is for sale and “has his/her own price”.



Marina Marković, *Consumer Whore*, installation, 2008

To comment on Marina Marković's installation *Consumer Whore* and to return to speak about her “post-anorexic” artworks would mean to remember the relation between not only the artist and her anorexia phase, but also to refer to the relation between food consumption and consumerism. In contemporary society, to spend money on clothes, cars, cosmetics, and the like is acceptable, and even desirable, but to spend a lot on food and consume it in large quantities is highly “dangerous” and unacceptable which proves how difficult, or even impossible, it is to treat body as a fashion product. One might think that

hopefully such a huge propaganda against getting fat is actually coming from the real care for human health by which contemporary medicine is rejecting interests of society dedicated to profit – it is the trend based on the tendency to sell everything in as large quantities as possible.

Posing as to imitate women in sequences of TV commercials, and surrounded by the neutral shades of light blue and rose background, Marković is offering various scenes of the basic beauty treatments of what is supposedly the everyday female “grooming”. Hair, nails, body hair, and skin are “processed” in order to maintain standards of what a women should look like. So, combing, dying and curling hair, waxing, feet care, weight control, dressing women’s lingerie are represented as rituals of the girl who must consume in order to look “decent” and more importantly beautiful. The title of this work is somewhat puzzling because it redirects attention to the term *whore* thus implying that to be a consumer is to betray oneself, or that consumerism means becoming a product in a way, or that to beautify oneself is with aim to “prostitute”, or that to advertise is a form of commercialism, etc. In the case of *Consumer Whore*, the ordinary beauty treatments are visually sterile to say that they are imposed and obligatory part of consumerism and a part of daily routine for most women. The question is whose standards are followed or more precisely whether women perform beauty treatments primarily for themselves or perhaps they do it because it is men who expect them to look the certain way. Undoubtedly consumerism, as the main principle of capitalism, is actually just a quick fix that distracts woman from paying attention to her real existential problems.

The history of Serbian gold digger is speaking about particular historical moment when the term “sponzoruša” was coined. Those were the days that more than ever before “nurtured” a certain type of female and male dynamics which dwelled upon the intensified female economic dependency and the need for protection. It seems to be the trend that shall never be eradicated while the truth is that responsibility for such a situation lies on both sides. What artists do is use criticism in order to direct attention to woman as a dependant creature who offers herself, begs, sells herself (and not only symbolically), consumes, becomes a passive product-like brand. Equal rights about working policies and salaries for both man and woman are still but a formality. There is the need to be conscious, stay conscious and proactive about economic independence and freedom that are more often than not forgotten. In case one takes the easiest path, she should just find a sponsor and let her hair down, if only that would not make her his helpless property.

6.4. Polarization – Woman/Mother and Woman/Whore

*Female sexuality also arouses anguish, as it becomes a signifier of sexual difference, of otherness, which threatens masculine narcissism in the patriarchal symbolic order; consequently, imperative discourses represent the woman as mother.*³²⁸

Sharp polarization between “good” and “bad” girls, as between “good” and “bad” women, rests on the same stereotype, on the same false dualism of “good” and “evil”, of “witch” and “saint”, which treats female sexual experience in a way that has little to do with the contradictions of the real life. To put it simply, “bad” or “easy” girl is the one who with her overall behaviour shows her sexual desire. According to the heteronormative matrix, the public knows only two types of women – the sexy women, i.e. those who serve to calm male desires, and those who are not sexy. At the same time, ambivalent messages that girls get about sex and about violence mean that society does not leave much free choice for them. What should be also noted is that patriarchal structures, though they are largely misogynous, hypocritically place an immense emphasis on the veneration of motherhood. The “cult” of the mother is based on motherhood as the main “manufacturer” of life (giving birth to male “warriors” as protectors of religion and nation). On the other side, there is the other type of woman – the one who is needed in order to entertain and satisfy man sexually. But what is interesting and significant is the fact that while man is allowed to express aggression and sexual needs without restrictions, woman is prohibited to manifest such desires. In case she gets aggressive and violent, such behaviour is considered to be highly “unfeminine” and degrading. Therefore, male sexuality expression is considered as positive and desired while the very signs or signals of female sexual needs are to be avoided at all costs.

It can be said that apparently there are basically two “types” of woman images constructed with aim to serve men in patriarchy and that those two kinds should be kept

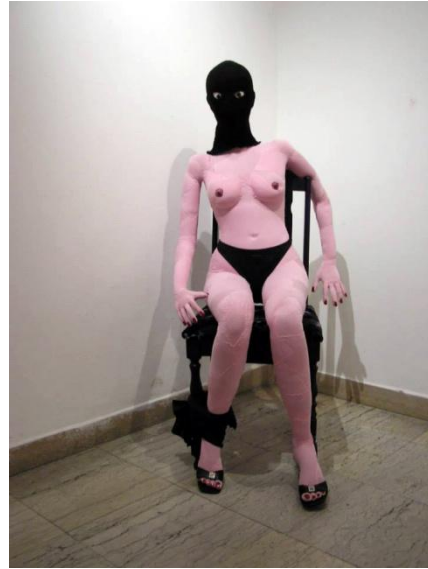
³²⁸ Tubert, Silvia, op. cit., p. 169

separated and mutually exclusive. Woman/mother is a woman whose primary sexual function serves for reproduction and, once she becomes mother, is therefore seen and treated as the family keeper, as the guardian of the house and children. The symbolic inscription of motherhood as essential allows us to leave aside the question of female sexuality as a non-sexual mother. For this reason at the opposite pole, there is a sexy woman, who fulfils male sexual desires and the like – it is woman/whore and it must be underlined that there is a sharp distinction between the two. What also happens are paradoxes linked to this polarization – for example, once a woman becomes mother she is deprived of her sexuality and reduced to her roles of motherhood and family “orientation”.

To demonstrate the general absence of respect for women, and traces of polarization between woman/mother and woman/whore, it is sufficient to mention examples of linguistic semantics considering not only the meaning but also the use of words that refer to woman in the everyday Serbian vocabulary. For example, the word *žena* in Serbian can be used to signify both *woman* and *wife* (like *mujer* in Spanish for example) which is the fact that could be obviously interpreted as equalling the term *woman* as a biologically female (adult) human being with the term *wife* as a spouse – married woman. It would mean that in the female case, there is no differentiation between categories of sex and gender – they are one and the same thing. While in case of man in Serbian language there is no equating term to use in order to refer to both *man* and *husband*. Already linguistically speaking, man is more differentiated as the bearer of meaning while woman is stripped of meaning, subordinated and reduced to serving to man (as the matrix) and to family. Most compelling evidence of the misogynist views expressed through Serbian language semantics is also the term *pička* colloquially used with the meaning of *girl* or *woman*. *Pička* could bear the same connotations as the word *cunt* in English (because it is a vulgar word for female genitalia used as a term of disparagement). This derogatory expression considered to be the offensive way to refer to a woman, is present in everyday vocabulary especially to refer to young girls “in general” as if this term was not pejorative at all. As it is to be expected and not at all surprising, in Serbian there is no use of a word with the significance like *dick* (or anything similar) with the meaning of *boy* or *man*. Again, if a derogatory term for vagina is the word used to speak about girls and women in everyday communication, it would automatically mean that to belong to female sex is both metaphorically and symbolically degrading.



Gordana Belić, *Doll*, mixed-media, life size, 2003



Gordana Belić, *Doll*, mixed-media, life size, 2003

The sculptress Gordana Belić (1966) speaks of female roles by using the form of life size dolls which she made of styrofoam coated with fabric. “Camp” aesthetics serves here to make these sculptures appealing because of their bad taste and/or ironic value, but applied on the works that represent woman as headless mannequin and faceless dummy, this style also emphasizes the symbolism of the doll for this topic. In the case of woman/mother, there is an appealing mannequin doll; it is red with white spots – quite cute and girly pattern, and it bears the shape of a pregnant torso. Except for the belly and breasts, there are no other important anthropomorphic characteristics here since this doll is headless, without arms and legs so that the entire accent is placed on her reproductive function. Obviously, as this is the type of doll used as a model for sewing, this becomes an ironical representation of what is a supposed model to follow – mandatory maternity. The other doll speaks of sexuality in terms of being a sex doll but within the frames of sadomasochism. This sculpture is wrapped in fabric of a rather irritating pinkish shade combined with black details. She (the doll) is sitting tied to a chair partially nude and wearing a mask so that her identity is hidden. That detail of faceless doll might refer to the forbidden ground of sexuality that sees woman as a whore; however, it could also refer to being trafficked and/or a sex slave. While the red doll, though it brims with irony, is even “attractive” in its appearance, the second one seems appealing because of its bad taste effect. Nevertheless, it does not speak only of female sexuality, about being objectified and treated as a sex toy, but it also criticizes predetermined gender roles in a sexual play.

Woman/Mother

*A single operation, the woman = mother equation, reduces female sexuality represented as a capacity for absolute enjoyment and, at the same time, devalues motherhood by defining it as natural, while paternity is conceived as symbolic.*³²⁹

Motherhood establishes the equivalence of all women and with this in mind it is necessary to point out that it has to do with what could be called a “mandatory maternity” as a normative role for women. That is the argument that also presupposes that the right of women to have no offspring is virtually nonexistent. Everywhere there is a negative stereotype concerning the characteristics of a woman who voluntarily has no offspring and for that reason those women, who made conscious decision not to become mothers, feel stigmatized to some extent by their unpopular decision to avoid their biological reproduction. Breaking the norm in this case means to be characterized as socially futile and useless, and those women are considered as bearing the unfavourable traits such as of being “abnormal, selfish, immoral, irresponsible, immature, unhappy, unrealized and non-feminine”³³⁰. As we speak of artists here, since they are female authors, their work on this issue mainly stems from their personal reference to the topics of pregnancy and motherhood. These are the themes which also include issues like abortion, miscarriage, infertility, and the like that are otherwise tacitly avoided as topics for discussion even among women themselves because they are seen as too personal, painful and hurting.

For fear of not fulfilling her role as a mother, woman’s awareness of her own “failure” in the eyes of the patriarchal order is forcing her to focus more intensely on her corporeality, physiology, impermanence, and above all on the emotions of social “futility”. It is the situation that is being constructed and present all the time; for example, there is an element of “deficiency” because women who are not mothers are defined as “childless”. That results in fluctuations in attitudes towards the topics of motherhood, pregnancy, and reproduction in a wider context. Even when woman is considered to be socially accepted and considered professionally “successful”, there might be an obvious conflict in feelings about motherhood

³²⁹ Tubert, Silvia, op. cit., p. 169

³³⁰ Osborne, Raquel, *La construcción sexual de la realidad*, Madrid, Cátedra (Feminismos), 1993, p. 141

and career as mutually exclusive lifestyles. For example, Marina Abramović openly stated that in her past she had abortions because for her to be a mother would clash with her artistic ambitions and that she clearly never had any doubts about her decision on that issue³³¹. Nevertheless, there are female artists who are very conscious of the motherhood role and want to deal with it in their own way (by becoming or not becoming mothers) and they even derive the current inspiration from that theme. The *kudos* of becoming a mother, being a mother and of motherhood as a phenomenon in general turns around the concept of the so called “unique experience” – personal experience, lack of experience, imagining experience... To illustrate how much that experience can be mystified and/or banalized serves the example that in Serbian language there is an expression *drugo stanje* for being pregnant meaning *other condition*. Consequently, there is a great deal of the sense of self-identification with motherhood and with how to deal with the pregnancy which by and large spreads awareness on the topics of new roles and changes that occur and which concern the connection with a newborn, woman’s self-image, her body, her new social positioning, and so on.

³³¹ See *Marina Abramovic: I Had Three Abortions Because Children Hold Female Artists Back* by Guelda Voien, <http://observer.com/2016/07/marina-abramovic-i-had-three-abortions-because-children-hold-female-artists-back/> (accessed on January 27, 2017)



Bojana Stamenković, *Woman*, still image of the video animation, 2010

Bojana Stamenković (1986) created a video animation *Woman*³³² as animated needlework on transparent photographs with every pinprick photographed in order to make the thread movement. The image in the video represents female torso in transparent black and white photographs with the line of red embroidery moving in circles to make the form of the pregnant uterus. At the same time as the needlework is growing, the hands are continually moving and caressing the rounded belly in order to connect more profoundly to that part of the body. However, Stamenković's choice to combine photography animation with embroidery drawing makes the fragmentation effect – the narration is fragmented making spectator's attention begin and stop continually thus pushing him/her to concentrate on the "bigger picture", on the entire image. Moreover, the idea to use the needlework as the medium of drawing makes *Woman* even more "female" work just like the handicrafts are supposed to be. As the lines are repeatedly growing in number, the oval, egg-like shape is becoming more and more prominent on the body. This female figure seems distant and silent (it is dark and without a sound) yet "lulled" in her own cocoon linking to the body part where the new life is

³³² See Stamenković, Bojana, *Woman*, video, 1 min 54 sec, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6jGrNBGCFY&feature=share> (accessed on November 26, 2016)

dwelling. Here, the absence of the embryo or baby definition within the uterus mystifies and blurs the identity of what is to come. While the whole image is focused on that special part of female body where the new life can grow, the uterus, the absence of the image of a baby within that belly visually makes it a bit a balloon-like void. Though the future mother is fondling and holding her pregnant belly, what is really inside remains enigma (at least until the labour) what might be interpreted as female readiness to love the unknown – a promise, a possibility. There are no shades of anxiety or uneasiness of any kind present, only the gentle warmth and the vision of a story about how during pregnancy woman is connecting to her “new” and growing body and, even more importantly, to what is to be imagined to be living and becoming within her.



Maja Milovanović, *About the Cross*, oil on canvas, 165 x 136 cm, 2005



Maja Milovanović, *Moon*, oil on canvas, 200 x 100 cm, 2005

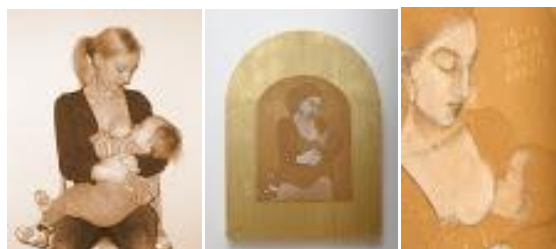
In her paintings *About the Cross* and *Moon*, Maja Milovanović is representing the female body as a “portrait” of a belly indicating metaphors that derive meaning from the concepts of symbolism often connected to femininity. In *About the Cross* she puts the full frontal image of the female belly in the center with shadows of the breast and the hip to frame this “portrait”. Undoubtedly, in this case this could be any female belly but because of its “bump” it reminds of a pregnant one and makes a spectator pay attention to its verticality and seated position of the horizontal mass under the navel. The softness and tenderness give a certain vulnerability to this rounded form while shadows of the breast and the hip are in contrast and seem like thorns, dark and hard. This corporeality almost reminds of the Renaissance representations of the flesh, with pinkish shades and vivid light, the shape seems tactile and warm yet the “cross” in the title could introduce connotations of the meeting of the vertical and the horizontal, of the divine and the ephemeral. There could be also the religious

meaning like, for example, “carrying one’s own cross” (the destiny is to be lived) and woman’s destiny and purpose is to bear children. Though the viewer could visually “tuck” into this cozy portrait of the female body, at the same time the ultimate impression is that it remains somewhere distanced and chilling.

On the other side, in *Moon* Milovanović speaks of the more recurrent symbolism that often links femininity with lunar mythology and connection of woman with the Moon phases, astrology, spirituality, etc. First thing to notice is that the composition “fills” the very elongated vertical format. It can be said that this “Moon” is a very special one – on the completely black background from the upper corner there is the circular shape mass that looks like a loaf of skin hanging; moreover, there is an impression that out of the darkness the perfectly rounded form is looming over the viewer. This “Moon” consists of various bellies and one cannot but stare at their navels which are positioned in different directions. At first these navels might look similar to buttons on upholstered leather chair, but then they are navels facing various sides, each one of them specific and personal in its own manner; they are more like the miniature “mouths” immersed in flesh. As the rounded form in the dark, similar to the planet, this surrealist belly is mystical yet disturbing. In either case, it is like the eternal portrait of the Moon watching us from the sky and capturing our fascination and wonderment because it brings questions on issues about corporeal identity, uniqueness, multiplicity, physiology, cycles, fertility, and certainly female peculiarity.



Maja Rakočević, *The Dictionary of the First Words for the Mother and the Infant*, drawings on diapers, 35 x 35 cm (series of 5 pieces), 2009



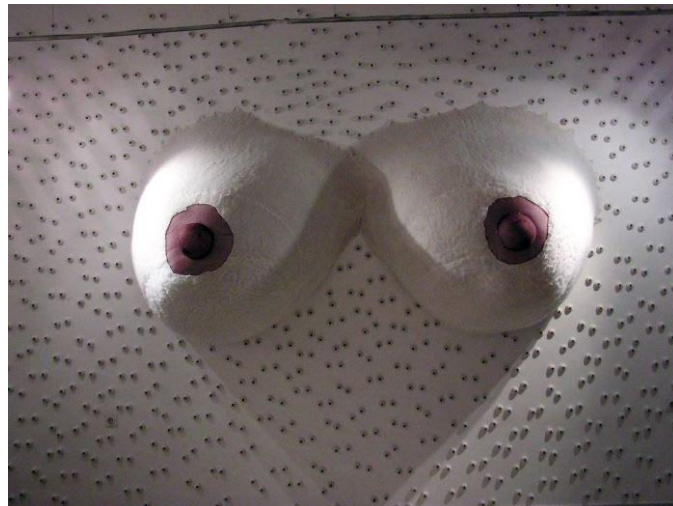
Maja Rakočević, *The Last Breastfeeding*, print on wooden board, 60 x 40 cm, 2009

For Maja Rakočević her personal experience of becoming a mother and her motherhood offered new situations that she wanted to share through her artworks. As she is a sculptress, her awareness of the new objects that became mandatory was the reason to create *Dictionary of the First Words*. This work comprises 5 drawings that represent the basic “tools” necessary for the upbringing of a baby and they are present both in terminology and practice from the very first day, and these are: the mother’s breasts, baby wipes, baby cream, pampers and tetra diapers. Just like becoming a mother for the first time is a new, uncorrupted, “naïve” experience, Rakočević chose to do simple, minimal style of drawings taken from language dictionaries and first reader books. In the other work from this phase, *The Last Breastfeeding*, Rakočević decided to pose and take a picture during breastfeeding in the so-called “archetypal” image similar to those depicted in religious imagery of Mary with Jesus from the traditional iconography. To imitate visually the canon of icon painting, the image was then printed on a wooden board. When breastfeeding is concerned, it can be said that one of the specifics of relating between a mother and an infant lies in this biological bond of feeding and nurturing. What is interesting is the fact that it is a daily procedure, a ritual, a habit for both the mother and the baby that at the certain point in time has to stop. This point of biological “separation” is significant for both the mother and the baby and therefore it gets the form of a “sacrifice” for both of them. The awareness about the very moment of the last breastfeeding is what this artwork is dealing with because it is an eternal decision that separates mother and baby thus depriving them of feeding as their primary biological connection.



Maja Rakočević, *Before Baby / After Baby*, torso casts with bed sheets and diapers, 2010

Before Baby / After Baby is an artwork that stems from the context of physical changes that woman has to undergo in order to carry out a pregnancy and how they affect her sense of self-awareness during and after her postpartum period. For this purpose, Maja Rakočević created two plaster casts of her – one “before baby” in the seventh month of her pregnancy and another “after baby”. She used gauze diapers to do the casts thus blurring the exact features of the face and the belly. These two torsos are exhibited together juxtaposed in order for the viewer to compare them. While in the one where Rakočević is pregnant she is positioned holding her belly, in the second one her body seems shy and vulnerable. The “before and after” in this case primarily refers to the physical changes that pregnancy implies indicating worries of how to lose the extra pounds and, if possible, how to return to the pre-pregnancy condition. On the second level, this artwork speaks of the change in social positioning that becoming a mother brings and, correspondingly, this new role also means embracing new identity. A mother cannot behave or be treated like a “girl” anymore because motherhood involves high level of responsibility that was previously unknown. The “after baby” situation involves more vulnerability and stress because not only that female self-awareness is increased, but the “new” postpartum body together with the new role of motherhood and responsibilities collide with the interference of the imposed, inherited, and internalized codes of children upbringing.



Gordana Belić, *Tits*, installation, mixed-media, 4,5 x 6 m, 2004

Another sculptress, Gordana Belić decided to tackle the issue of her “after baby” condition this time the one stemming from the consequences of breastfeeding and created a

huge installation titled *Tits*. The dimension of the “breasts” is 1,5 x 3 m; the sculpture is made of wire construction, sponge, batting, and wool and pairs of eyes attached to the wall were done in plaster. The choice to realize *Tits* in the size much bigger than the natural breasts automatically establishes the question of importance of this part of female body. Here, the effects of the materials used to create this form are associated with vulnerability and fragility. The mass of the sculpture is soft and “swollen”; it is obvious that the nipples are sore and their edges are almost torn. The whole image of the breasts gives away the impression of something “overused”, of the “worn and torn” component of the corporeality which in the female public who had the experience of breastfeeding probably causes at least some uneasiness. The central sculptural piece is accompanied with numerous pairs of eyes that are attached to the wall around. Those are the reminders of the public conscience of patriarchy that is watchful in order to “monitor” woman now in her new role of mother. In short, it can be added that this installation is about physical changes of postpartum period and how they affect woman’s sense of self-awareness. However, this work also deals with the public opinion and the role of mother that at the same time conveys self-sacrifice and social conditioning.

Woman/Whore

*Pornography depersonalizes sexual relationships and has nothing to do with sex but with violence against women. However, the most important thing is the mechanism of causality by which pornography constructs woman, defining what it means to belong to the female sex and the sexuality of women.*³³³

The first thing to remember about the polarization of woman into mother and whore, is that while the first one is primarily defined by becoming and being a mother and as such is a supporting pillar of patriarchy, the second one is labelled as a *whore* (but not in terms of being

³³³ Osborne, Raquel, op. cit., p. 141

a prostitute) because she has not properly “reined in” her sexuality which makes her a potential menace to patriarchal order. For heterosexuality proclaims motherhood as highly desirable and almost mandatory option for women, sexuality employed for non-reproductive purposes is not only futile but is also a possible source of female sexual experimentation and “straying” into lesbian tendencies; that is why it should become useful and purposefully aimed at satisfying male sexual needs and thus support patriarchy. Besides that, concepts derived from pornography and prostitution are spontaneously and freely attached to what it means to belong to female sex. For that same reason, artists who worked in Serbia on topics of sexuality and female sexual “ready-made” roles, dealt with questioning personal options, pornography stereotypes and even artist/curator relationship thus commenting on cultural clichés about women sexuality.

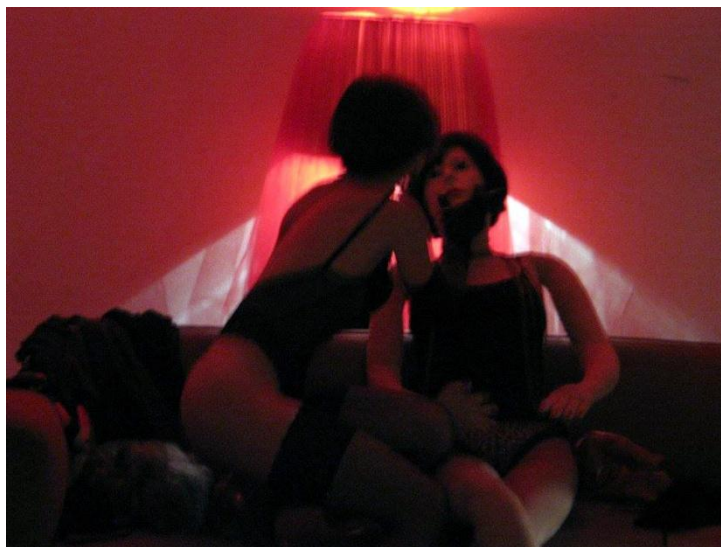
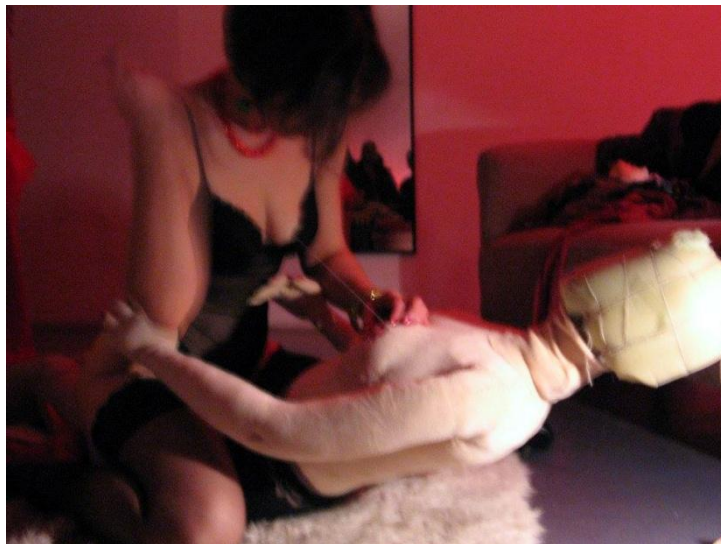


Maja Milovanović, *Our Matter*, oil on canvas, 200 x 135cm, 2004

In her double self-portrait painting *Our Matter*³³⁴, Maja Milovanović created an almost closed composition made of two profiles surrounded with the background that looks like white bed linen. With mouth wide open, these two portraits are pointing in the direction of breast

³³⁴ Interpretation of this painting is based on an informal conversation about this work that I had with the author

nipples. They seem ecstatic in their close connection and communication only known to them. Unaware of everything outside of its format, this intimate image leaves out the spectator to himself/herself. *Our Matter* portrays the author with herself in a monologue that echoes with some self-reflection about self-pleasure and about how it is easier to love somebody similar (as of the same sex). However, this painting perhaps reflects author's soul-searching on the topics of lesbianism, homosexuality, and sexuality in general as the form of communication with oneself. Nevertheless, maybe at a certain period in life there comes a time when such type of "conversations" (monologues) bear more urgency in order to link with one's potential true nature and needs. Though suggestive in its character, this double self-portrait neither rejects nor concludes any possibility but rather leaves the situation about sexuality issues open.



Gordana Belić, *Every Woman is a Harlot*, performance, Gallery Kontekst, 2008

The doll is an “alter ego”, the opportunity to communicate with yourself but there are two things as well: the doll is a mirror, the possibility to visually perceive yourself, and in that reference to sexually excite yourself. This performance introduces autoeroticism which is, in my opinion, the key to proper understanding of female sexuality. A woman must firstly like herself in order to be appealing to the rest of the world.³³⁵

For this six hours long performance Gordana Belić created a life size doll replica of herself (doll had a wig and its facial features were painted during the performance; clothes and shoes on it were what Belić had worn at her wedding). Procedures of interaction with the doll lasted for hours and included various activities – for example, beautification and grooming of the doll, holding, fondling, playing with it, etc. The “fornication” in this performance was literally the act of seduction of the audience through the process of self-seduction. What is interesting is that during this performance the author had her audience full attention and enjoyment, even fascination; it was the opportunity to introduce other elements of the “game” with the doll. The fact is that Belić played with her alter ego mannequin as she would with a doll by trying to teach “her” to walk and move. But she also attempted to interact with the doll in the ways as if it was a living being by the acts of hugging and acceptance, they exchanged clothes, played, “had fun together”. It seemed that Belić was actively trying to make the doll happy, to please it and get close to it. What happened was that those were the moments when “the contrast between a living woman and a dead doll was the most visible, and the possibility of identification and exchange of their roles gave away the impression that some spectators described as creepy”³³⁶. Naturally, this game of the artist’s self-seduction was also the demonstration of “designing” woman’s role in her sexuality. The author was also stitching, making, and modeling the doll during the performance, and at the moment when she was dissatisfied with the results, she even kicked the doll thus showing that the process of formation of female sexuality includes even pains. This erotic monologue dialogues with different aspects of female sexuality with aim to emphasize the contrast between active and living woman and passive, accepting doll to indicate the fact that it is up to woman how she will behave sexually – whether she is active or passive, whether she is “dead or alive”.

³³⁵ See *Interview with Gordana Belić* in the Annex

³³⁶ Ibid.



Jelena Radić, *Needlepoint*, embroidery, 42 x 24 cm, 2002

*In sexual behaviour, there is a role that is intrinsically honourable and that is valued rightfully: it is that which is to be active, to dominate, to penetrate and thus to exercise its superiority.*³³⁷

In Serbian and Balkan traditional culture, weaving, knitting, embroidery, sewing, and similar works, in which female creativity is present, are transferred matrilineally and through intergenerational networking. These “archetypal” *womanspeak* forms of expression are seen as typical female activities of “creating” something useful and decorative as the way of passing time or dwelling in oblivion of repetitive manual work. This kind of handiwork usually means that there is a kind of design or pattern to follow or that there is a procedure of “counting” pinpricks in order to make a picture. For the design of her “Needlepoint”, Jelena Radić chose a scene of fellatio. This embroidery that represents the act of a very intimate and active interaction between a female and a male won the Award of 43rd October Salon in Belgrade in 2002. However, it is also important to mention that outside artistic circles this work was neither sufficiently promoted nor it encountered significant interest in Serbian media.

³³⁷ Foucault, Michel, *Historia de la sexualidad*, 2. *El uso de los placeres*, op. cit., p. 198

In this case, through the provocative blend of traditional technique and pornographic content, Radić chose to use the scene of a pornographic character in order to comment on stereotyped manner used to depict male and female sexual role-play. In pornography, to exercise his superiority man is active and dominant. On the other side, woman is inferior, she “surrenders”, is passive “by nature” and that is exactly how pornography can promote violence against women in general (not only sexual violence). “The predominant visual focus of the camera in pornographic films is repeatedly oriented towards two centres of main interest: towards the faces and genitals related to the cause-effect link.”³³⁸ Most cameras focus on the faces in pornography, it is the female facial expression that is accentuated and more present while man is more of a “doer”. In this example of fellatio that the artist chose to transfer into embroidery, female is in an active role while male is a passive recipient. Except for switching stereotyped pornography roles, by choosing the technique of handiwork, this painter wanted to give another perspective to the awareness about patterns that are to be created, saying that designs are only patterns, ready-made pictures to reproduce. It means that women should be aware of their activity and involvement not only in their artistic endeavours but also in their sexual behaviour – in their expression and performance.



Jelena Radić, *Appropriate Cultural-Artistic Program*, still image, digital video, 2004

³³⁸ Gubern, Román, *El eros electrónico*, op.cit., p. 181

The work was kind of a statement about the art scene of that time and more specifically about art production revolving around any big group exhibitions. The *Appropriate Cultural-Artistic Program* was presented at the Vršac Biennial in 2004, the event curated by Siniša Mitrović, Ana Nikitović and Jelena Vesić, and followed by “behind-the-scenes scandals” mainly related to financing and production of the exhibition. The optimistic and ambitious curatorial crew, with high hopes and dreams, ran hard into a wall of Serbian sleepy-town reality. I thought that showing a composition of two ready-made amateur lesbian scenes done in local production was appropriate.³³⁹

In Yugoslavia there was the coined term for a particular type of TV shows called “appropriate cultural-artistic program” which at the time served to describe a large variety of programs that had to do with culture, art, entertainment, popular music, and so on. For her short video, that nowadays is no longer available but which was exhibited at the Youth Biennial in Vršac in 2004, Jelena Radić found pirate edition of materials. In order to make this work, she used selection of homemade porn videos; she cut sequences, mounted her own video and entitled it “Appropriate Cultural-Artistic Program”. The two scenes from this work are of “lesbian sex” (in quotation marks because it is obviously designed for male view). Picture and sound are original but the text in Cyrillic alphabet was added saying “culture” and “art”. It was an attempt to comment on the Serbian art scene of the time, the interaction between the artist-curator, and the overall chaos in culture and art institutions at that moment. To speak about the artist-curator relationship, Radić used porn video in order to give an exaggerated effect, to shock, and attract attention about how counterintuitive, strained and affected that contact usually is, but that it is also often hidden from the public eye for whatever reason that might be. In this case, pornography is a kind of rude poetics with purpose because if artist has to “prostitute” artworks or personal convictions in order to become accepted and famous, if cultural climate is a pure “perversion” in terms that it is in total turmoil, then it is high time to apply radical bluntness and porn eyesore in order to call for attention and even more importantly action.

All things considered, the topic of polarization of woman into roles of mother and “whore” is another type of simplification of identity and generalization of meaning similar to stereotyping. With aim to categorize and control, the male matrix even linguistically attributes

³³⁹ See *Interview with Jelena Radić* in the Annex

significance to everyday terms that most often are not coincidental but rather maliciously constructed to breed misogyny. The question of whether or not female roles can be clearly cut, organized and kept into strict lines is highly debatable. Motherhood, reproduction, family, sexuality, sex, pleasure are but categories that nevertheless cannot be mutually exclusive and clinically disinfected in case they get into contact because the state of such sterility is unnatural and unattainable. On the other side, female corporeality is a highly expressive entity impossible to control but in a good way. Attempts to dominate woman by labelling her roles and polarizing her is pushing her into a schizoid state of mind that could result in her alienation from that same corporeality and from all that it means for her personally.

Decisions about whether to procreate or not, whether to be heterosexual or not, how to express sexuality and seek pleasure, as well as innumerable options of the kind are and should be the question of personal choice which of course would be ideal but is highly unlikely because Serbia, and the rest of the world, is still heteronormative and patriarchal. Female artists locked in their own bodies and pressured by the imposed roles deal with creative ways to express matters of corporeality as “corpo-reality” – reality of the body. Well aware of the limited options that patriarchy is offering, they know how to perform their own biographies in both life and art. The dread of the “before and after” conscience which says that life divides into life before and life after becoming a mother, awareness about corporeal changeability, fragility and instability that are confining and frustrating cannot be ignored or forgotten. Stories about sexuality, pornography, and prostitution as the most “disturbing” ones used to stir public opinion especially in a highly patriarchal regressive environment as Serbia are areas to act and strike. In short, culturally speaking, limited vision of the diversity of corporeal possibilities is a destabilizing factor for gender performativity, and it requires further research in individuation and objectivity within creative process in artists/authors of all genders.

7. NEW MILLENNIUM TENDENCIES AND DEVIATIONS

Being the last one this chapter aims to bring together the works of artists who deal with different issues in various ways that up to now over the previous chapters have not entered by subject matter in the sense that they do not belong to the earlier themes but that they date after the year 2000. What is also important is that here not only trends and deviations are discussed but also the femininity that is not an end in itself but is a means of expression whose purpose is to treat issues other than those which stem from being a woman, living a female experience, etc. In addition, based on the interviews that I have pursued, I shall speak of contemporary Serbian authors' thoughts about feminism in art as well as whether they are capable to express their opinion on the subject. Of course, in the closing section there are materials that attempt to bring closure and completion of my work on this thesis not only until but also beyond the year 2010 with a goal to offer more recent events and tendencies from the Serbian art scene.

Up to now, in earlier chapters were commented other works that also date beyond 2000; to name but a few, they comment on stereotypes, magic, rites and religion as well as corporeal politics in reference to the uniform. There were also examples of expressions of femininity within the historical frames, historical turmoil and political specificities in Serbia as a closed space. Besides that, some artworks also dealt with *otherness* and confinement of belonging to a certain nation. Matters of corporeality, expressivity and performativity were discussed from a point of transition from object to subject. The above-mentioned examples mainly refer to thematic phenomena that overlap through various temporal periods since 1970 to 2010 while here in this chapter are some works that belong to this millennium that nevertheless cannot be "forced" to any category. Those are the pieces that without much subtlety actually become eye-catching mostly due to their being kind of "eyesore".

It appears that female artists have been coming to their senses more profoundly in their awareness about their social positioning and conditioning imposed by their environment and most interestingly about cultural politics of institutions of art. Expressing a wide range of attitudes towards personal declarations about being feminist and about feminism in Serbian art, the authors did not reflect much hope on the matters in question. Fortunately, their works

remain to speak of issues of no less interest, importance or humanism. In summary, procedures of theorizing were never a hindrance to creative processes especially if they intend to criticize, puzzle, entertain or simply play for their own sake.

7.1. Femininity as Medium

In the age of the expansion of kitsch and trash, it becomes essential to reach for some heightened awareness with aim to obtain and/or regain the so-called critical ability. Kitsch as an excessive desire to be liked combined with limitless possibilities of plastic surgeries and virtual imagery (especially oversaturation of contents from internet social networks), trash as mental and real pollution, hyper-production of images, visual residue of mass production, advertisement, consumerism, entertainment, etc. have been shaping our perception, understanding and judgement for a long time now. Therefore, it becomes inevitable to search for the answers about the twilight of creativity, taste, culture, and art in our world but also to question a variety of “new art practices” related to the ideology of inartistic deconstruction of the artwork and aesthetics in favour of “concept”, “reason”, “politics”, and curatorial projects. To speak about the “artistry” of the authors would take a separate chapter indeed, therefore it is to be emphasized that there is visibly more complexity added to the topics. Thereupon, some aspects are harder to grasp at first sight probably because femininity in particular is becoming a tool to speak about “something else” rather than being a living experience reified through visual means.

To put it differently, femininity as a medium in the artworks indicates diversity of topics commented and expressed through the means of visual qualities and issues; they are basically connected to femaleness but with a purpose to speak about something else other than femininity. For example, pink and rose are stereotypically feminine colours but here they are employed to spread the “climate” of oddity that disturbs in order to deal with eerie adult “games”. Possible symbolism of dolls, bunnies, toys does not serve to talk about “girly” themes but to spread dissatisfaction with the institutions of art and criticize bluntly state cultural politics. Sexiness of representations of female corporeality could be the means to commercialize cultural models of the time but also speak about the contemporary models of emancipation. On the other hand, visual interactions of femininity and representatives of not only secular but also ecclesiastical entities debate about the role of state and religion in the formation and education about matters of sex and gender related issues (not to mention the impunity of church and clergy in cases of their abusing position and power). In continuation, it

is possible to witness phenomena of creations that border on inventions as well as sculptural reifications that formally can be linked to female identity but actually turn attention to concepts of gender equality and sexuality. While there are sculptural installations that might be appealing to the eye, they aim to initiate revision of perceptual abilities in the viewer and challenge methods of observation and understanding of the visual architectures and concepts of thinking. As we speak of a female interrelating within her environment, it is possible to share some thoughts on the feeling of being “monitored” by the society and thereby responsible for woman’s own “radar” in order to “keep her head above the water”.

Bunnies and Barbies



Marina Marković, *Nasty Tulumba Cakes Still Want My Death*, drawings series, watercolour,
30 x 30 cm, 2006-2012



Marina Marković, *Nasty Tulumba Cakes Still Want My Death*, drawings series, watercolour, 35 x 35 cm, 2006-2012

*Nasty Tulumba Cakes Still Want My Death*³⁴⁰ is the series of drawings that Marina Marković was creating during the period of several years that represents her highly intimate observation of the topics that she would be dealing with in her projects and performances. To start with the title itself – tulumba is a special kind of cake, a heritage from the Turkish confectionery, which “wants Marković’s death”. The choice of this dessert is probably because it is extremely sweet and heavy and its consumption is like eating a sugar “bomb”. When related to the topic of Marković’s personal anorexia story, the title speaks of a certain type of “helplessness” or “surrender” considering her relationship with food.

In this series, over the long period of time the author created a coherent corpus of drawings in watercolour technique which is in its way a “fragile” and very sensitive medium. In fact, Marina Marković constructed her own imaginarium. Bunnies, teddy bears, kittens, stuffed dolls intermingle with ghostly representations of girls, crosses, hangman loops, and gloomy landscapes. Even though rose and pink shades typical for Marković’s work appear, her key terms are dialectically opposed – for example, toys are transferred into the realm of adult sexuality. “Rabbit hole” or “down the rabbit hole” is a metaphor for an entry into the unknown

³⁴⁰ See more from this series at <http://www.marinamarkovic.com/en/nasty> (accessed on December 21, 2016)

and reminds us of its use in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as disorienting and/or mentally deranging experience. There is an oddity that does not intend to allure but rather disturb by its means of representing concepts like sickness and death through the world of child play. There is no innocence or hopefulness but inversions questioning the relationship between childhood and maturation. That sweet, girly, childlike universe of bunnies, dolls and play turned into eerie games about very "adult" themes of sexuality, anorexia, consumerism, growing up, and conditioning where girls are nothing but puppet dolls.



Ana Nedeljković, *Rabbitland*, installation, Gallery of the Cultural Centre, Belgrade, 2010



Ana Nedeljković, *Rabbitland*, installation detail, Gallery of the Cultural Centre, Belgrade, 2010

...happier than Barbie – Brainless Rabbits represent the most perfect stage of evolution so far. They can be identified by a hole in the head where the brain should be located, by the intense pink colour and frantic eyes. Their intelligence does not interfere with anything because its quotient is the lowest ever measured.³⁴¹

Ana Nedeljković (1978) exhibited her installation *Rabbitland* in 2010 when she situated this “settlement” of “brainless rabbits” as she calls them in the Gallery of the Cultural Centre in Belgrade. This over the top pink composition in combination with black colour is a system that imitates a certain model of community with aim to make a sarcastic comment on the conditions in Serbian society. *Rabbitland* has many aspects of spaces and premises like for example “war zones, illegal buildings, natural disasters, unsanitary slums, anti-utopias and cartoons, holes, walls, fences, partitions, barbed wire, bandages, dirt, pink outsides and small dark insides of their homes, endless queues”³⁴²; there is even East Rabbitland / West Rabbitland Wall. In this case, rose and neon pink colours are saturating the space but with the inclusion of the contrasting black so that this supposedly “girly” and cute stereotype of Barbie-like space offers a heavy and quite cartoonish imagery. Though everything is mostly pink, the atmosphere is dark – rabbits with open holes in their heads are brainless. They are wandering around, queuing, voting every day – they are stupid and happy in their own way but the situation in their land seems sad and hopeless. This typically caricature dynamics seems to “flirt” with the “Barbie aesthetics” purposefully with aim to construct a dystopia that harshly criticizes indifference and passivity of the citizens of Serbia who accept everything and are headed for disaster. They seem to be a myriad of dehumanized inert creatures that live by the rules which they voted for. In short, it can be said that this “ideal” world of brainless rabbits gives no hope. To make it more ironical, the real example of hopelessness goes even further into the story. Two years later, in 2012 in collaboration with Nikola Majdak, Ana Nedeljković had created short animated film *Rabbitland* which in 2013 was awarded at Berlinale Festival. After their return from Berlin, the authors were shocked to find out that for the year 2013 in Serbia budget there was 0% (zero percent) allocated finances for film production. Whether *brainless* in such conditions also means *intellectually blind* and *culturally insensitive* remains a rhetorical question.

³⁴¹See more about this installation at <http://www.ananedeljkovic.com/projects/rabbitland-exhibition/> (accessed on December 21, 2016)

³⁴² Ibid.



Biljana Cincarević, *The Star*, oil on canvas, 100 x 95 cm, *Carpe Diem* series, 2004-2009

Since her beginnings, Biljana Cincarević (1975) has been a paintress dedicated to creating female portraits (including her self-portraits), and group portraits of girls/women. In a more or less convincing way, she was persistently building her own style which at some stages began to remind of pop art. In *Carpe Diem* series she is dealing with the topic of what she calls “an independent woman as a support to feminism”³⁴³. For her, that independence reflects in female freedom to go out, travel, attend parties, smoke marijuana, drink alcohol, enjoy sex with other women, etc. Spaces and backgrounds in her paintings are simplified in order to accentuate figures; and, to put it another way, an overall atmosphere is like in comics, posters, and propaganda materials. With an obvious intention to be more likeable and sexy, scantily dressed in bikinis or in the latest fashion clothes, her “models” (or subjects) are posing provocatively. Without a single worry in the horizon, “immersed” into the careless mood of

³⁴³ Cincarević, Biljana, *Spirituality, Feminism and Art*, presentation, Vršac, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xxjs4DcZ-ig> (accessed on December 23, 2016)

their own, those dancing bodies seem to be blissfully unaware of anything. This proposal of a “liberated woman” in *Carpe Diem* series that Cincarević is showing is probably alluring to some even though technically those images are more often than not unconvincing in their drawing and painting approach (primarily in their definition of shape and space) so much that they border on the almost “naïve” and “flat” image with poster or propaganda materials effects.

Undoubtedly, what is fascinating is the fact that this paintress stubbornly continues to paint in the same fashion, works on the same topic, and becomes famous in the Serbian scene, so that in the course of time, she transforms into a public figure with an aura of “icon”. It seems that either the “laws” of Serbian almost nonexistent art market prefer likeability of the topic to visual quality or, that at the time being, there was no other artist to fill that “gap” in the quotidian “taste in art” – so, she simply just “jumped in” there. However, the stereotype of women liberation and freedom that promotes identity of a licentious party girl which is offered here does not have a lot to do with the real emancipation or feminism, but rather adversely supports patriarchal norms. Nevertheless, bunch of girls on the beach, sexy bodies or easily detectable stereotypical themes are what the public desires. In any case, this artist is an example of how the interaction between commercial cultural models of the time and audience needs secures author’s fame and public “success”.



Biljana Cincarević, *Lord, Have Mercy*, prints, part of the exhibition at Belgrade Youth Centre, 2009



Biljana Cincarević, *Lord, Have Mercy*, prints, part of the exhibition at Belgrade Youth Centre, 2009

Conceptual exhibition devoted to criticism of the clergy – a corrupt clergy who do not perform their duties in accordance with job description, but abusing their position are

subject to corruption, immorality and fornication, deal with the politics and stirring up nationalism, hide and support crimes and criminals.³⁴⁴

Elements of Biljana Cincarević's exhibition *Lord, Have Mercy* convey photographs, installations, and performance. In this analysis, you can see some of the photographic prints (originally there are ten of them) that belong to this work which she exhibited in Belgrade in 2009 all of them showing a priest as the main protagonist. Besides prints, there was an installation of a hanging cross and a short performance of masked men singing Serbian national anthem. The title of the anthem is *Lord, give us mercy* and, performed in this context, clearly alludes to the hypocrisy of those who preach morality while they themselves are first to be corrupted and immoral. This project of Biljana Cincarević aims to criticize not only Serbian Orthodox Church for its various corruptions, but religion and its clergy in general because this artist in her statements proposes that the Bible, the Talmud and the Koran are written works that humiliated woman and, therefore, are responsible for her unjust positioning while on the other side they glorified man³⁴⁵. She also suggests that it is necessary to liberate from religious influences in order to be more aware of gender roles and be able to fight for women rights and emancipation.

The title of this exhibition is inviting Lord to be merciful to those who are corrupted thus redirecting attention to the clergy who, claiming to be the human "link" between God and believers, consequently assumes to be outside of the reach of "God's justice". Moreover, clergy in general is a "protected species", and is hardly ever sanctioned for its evil doings (e.g. the phenomenon of pedophilia in the church, abuse, personal enrichment "behind the scene", corruption, connections with politicians and criminals, clandestine activities, promotion of nationalism and chauvinism, and spreading of misogynist and homophobic views thus breeding anger and hatred, interference in state affairs, etc.). Though this exhibition of Biljana Cincarević came as a shock for the public opinion, it was a courageous step for her as the artist though it can be said that it was a kind of critical artwork that Serbia "deserved" on this topic a long time ago. The question is whether it brought any real change into the situation that we are already well informed about. Perhaps, this artistic attempt of liberation somehow skipped "safe" dungeons of local religious circles and, at least for a moment, brought a glimpse of

³⁴⁴ See more about this exhibition at <http://biljanacincarevic.com/index.php/conceptual/lord-have-a-mercy> (accessed on December 23, 2016)

³⁴⁵ Cincarević, Biljana, *Spirituality, Feminism and Art*, presentation, Vršac, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xxjs4DcZ-ig> (accessed on December 23, 2016)

awareness to some. What is interesting are reactions and some rather harsh comments coming from the clergy that were directly attacking the author even calling her a witch and the “fan of the god of phallus”³⁴⁶. In addition to that, some Serbian right-wing organizations and groups threatened Cincarević. Because of the risk of attack by rightists, police required from her to close the exhibition as soon as possible (besides that all the time in the Youth Center, where the exhibition was set, there were police officers on duty).



Biljana Cincarević with the main character of *Lord, Have Mercy* exhibition, 2009

³⁴⁶ See the news about this exhibition at <http://www.naslovi.net/search.php?q=cincarevi%C4%87&start=151> (accessed on January 29, 2017)

Sculptural Reifications



Milica Ružičić, *Chastity Belt for Men*, metal, satin, two prints, sculpture dimensions 50 x 45 x 35 cm,
2005-2007



Milica Ružičić, *Untitled*, artificial hair and glue on canvas, 100 x 80 cm, 2008



Milica Ružičić, *Kissing Machinery*, mixed-media (wood, metal, plastic, latex), 24 x 11 x 9 cm, 2005

Milica Ružičić (1979) is a sculptress who, besides paintings and other sculptures, also created several works that could be defined as a specific type of reifications by turning certain terms into real objects, some of which bring out surprise and confusion. For example, her *Chastity Belt for Men* comes as a surprise because chastity belt was originally invented and used to keep women chaste. This sculpture is actually a real wearable object with purpose as the prints that accompany it show. Male model on the prints serves as a seductive mannequin who imitates the usual “iconography” of advertisements that represent female lingerie models. By making chastity belt for men, Ružičić turned the tables thus pointing out the absurdity of this object that is meant for one sex only (no matter which one). By universalizing this “model”, she makes it a “unisex” term, and equalizes sexes saying that if a woman has to be “chaste”, the same goes for a man. In the case of *Untitled* there comes a puzzling representation of “something” black and furry. This sculpture could be a beard, a cover, a skirt, or vesture, or even all those things together, but what can associate it with female pubic area is the fact that it is of a triangular shape. Nevertheless, its size (100 x 80 cm), and the quantity of hairs, here indicate a furry mass that, though it is alluring in its appearance, sends some uneasiness because of its undefined title and nature. On the other side, *Kissing Machinery* is quite concrete – a reification that borders on an invention. It is a machine, with female lips wearing lipstick, that does kissing. By turning the handle, the user can get “kissing” – kiss and

be kissed. This demystification can be also regarded as almost offensive for kissing is supposed to be a very intimate activity but it is also amusing as an idea of object for use. It must be taken into consideration that it is a “female” machine meaning that it speaks of objectification of woman as well. In conclusion, Milica Ružičić invented some objects which can be purposefully used for certain aims but their visual and artistic qualities were created in order to question concepts of gender equality, explore sculptural organicity versus gender identity, and point out the “mechanical” side of intimacy, sexuality, and gender relating.



Olivera Parlić, *Pendant*, carbine, chain, clout, pins, rubber pump, 100 x 20 x 8 cm, 2008

In the case of sculptress Olivera Parlić (1971), the feeling of physicality in her sculptures firstly intrigues at the level of the material. Her choice of the material speaks of the body resulting with forms that are made of ready-made objects, and factory manufactured pieces that provide eroticism. That means that the spectator firstly falls into a trap of trying to decipher materials, and even more importantly some details of the sculptures. The following step is taking a distance and realizing what it actually is. Obviously, these art pieces are not “catchy” in the usual meaning of the word, but after the initial pull, they actually push the spectator away. That momentary remoteness supplies the time to review what is seen and felt, and to contemplate it. Over the course of her artistic production, Parlić created a very coherent corpus of works which she defined as “sculptural forms of reified feelings”³⁴⁷.

³⁴⁷ Parlić, Olivera, *Eros of Impossible Encounters – Sculptural Forms of Reified Feelings*, Univerzitet Umetnosti u Beogradu, Beograd, 2014

Undoubtedly, in her case tactility and texture of her sculptures and installation structures are what captivate and hold attention. Beautiful and alluring, yet cold and distanced, these forms “conjure” to be touched while at the same time they disquiet and repel. What happens is that the very deconstruction of the object causes the feeling of “hot and cold”. In the end, it does become a reified emotion which does not linger on the surface, but actually speaks of something else. For Olivera Parlić, “things are best perceived when contrasted”³⁴⁸; and perhaps that is why in her work different principles are so often opposed. She also claims that “identity develops through conflict and confrontation and that uncertain and unstable area generates the best things that an individual can make”³⁴⁹.



Olivera Parlić, *Marble Balls*, metal hangers, nylon stockings, marble balls, variable dimensions, 2007

³⁴⁸ See *Interview with Olivera Parlić* in the Annex

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*



Olivera Parlić, *AA*, glass bottles, synthetic yarn, a group of objects on the table, variable dimensions,
2008



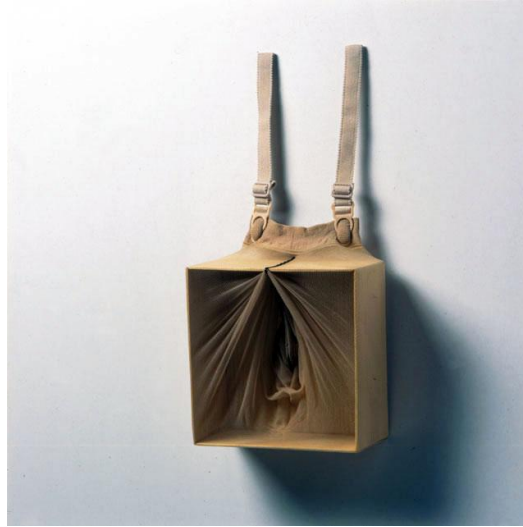
Olivera Parlić, *There is No Help*, porcelain, nylon stocking, clout, \varnothing 13 cm, a chain of variable length,
2003



Olivera Parlić, *Purse*, wallet mechanism, chain, nylon stocking, 16 x 35 x 3 cm, 2003



Olivera Parlić, *Makeup*, wooden crates, terracotta coated with liquid make-up powder, satin cushion,
30 x 40 x 18 cm, 1998



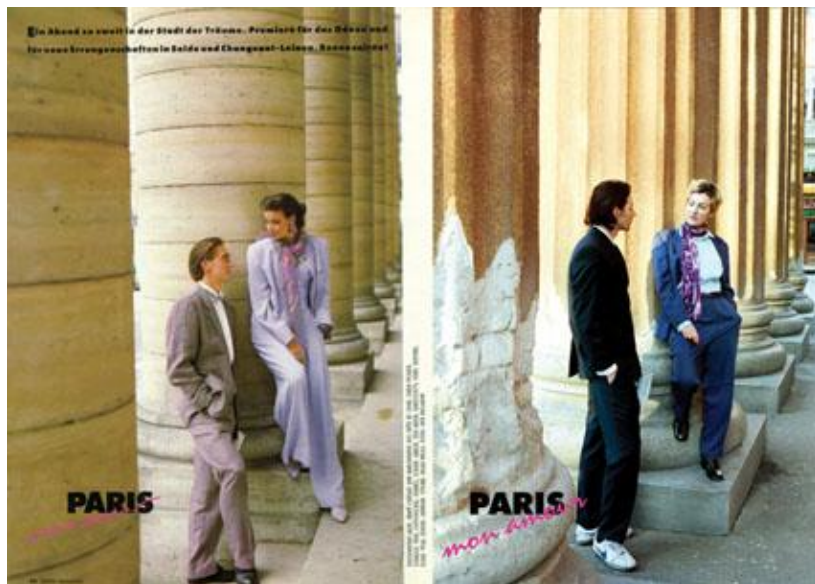
Olivera Parlić, *Boxhalter*, box of veneer, nylon stockings, hairclip, garters, 11 x 11 x 5 cm, 1997

It can be added that the materials which Parlić chooses, and the treatments she uses to deal with them, with aim to express a particular concept are very personal and thoughtful processes and interventions. Collecting, recycling, and ready-made interventions are just some of the procedures that she employs in her work. They seem to be only “technicalities” in comparison to the complexity of the topics that she deals with. For example, Eros is a huge issue and there is a sexual drive in most of the objects. Although there are elements that at first glance seem to bring to conclusion that her work is based on motifs belonging to this topic, the aspect of eroticism actually comes from the attitude towards materials and objects that she uses. What largely determine Parlić’s work are the instability and the possibility of transformation of the body features and corporeality. The vital centre of her work also comes from the interweaving of the two systems – one is our everyday perception of objects and the other is how they are assembled to create wondrous objects of art. By the mechanism derived from Gestalt psychology, these sculptural reifications create perception of objects as carriers of more spatial information (than is actually present). To make it clear, it becomes obvious that the goal of her work is to pose questions. While they might be appealing to the eye, the function of these sculptures is not only to give pleasure to the viewer with their beauty, but to shake inertia and initiate revision of certain issues for it is always possible to “scratch” behind the banality of everyday objects to discover new layers of meaning that question the stereotypes.

Interrelations



Maja Rakočević, *Lucky Couples*, 30 digital prints series, photography: Ksenija Tikvički, 2002/2003



Maja Rakočević, *Lucky Couples*, 30 digital prints series, photography: Ksenija Tikvički, 2002/2003



Maja Rakočević, *Family Compositions*, 14 digital prints series, 30 x 40 cm, 2007,
 photography: Ksenija Tikvički



Maja Rakočević, *Family Carousel*, sculpture installation, mixed-media, life size of family members, 2009,
 sewing: Senka Ivković

As we speak of woman's interrelating within her environment, her social milieu firstly "filters" and judges her through her family ties – relation of woman to man, woman to child, and woman to family – meaning whether she is single or in a relationship (or married), whether she is a mother or "childless", and how well she relates to her family and functions within it. Therefore, being aware of her positioning, Maja Rakočević could not ignore those topics, and worked on them on several occasions. In her photography series *Lucky Couples*, she poses within a couple to create parody of the idea of female identity as incomplete without a male partner. There is a social prejudice that only within the so-called "happy ending", woman can realize her own complete potential, personality, and even more importantly her "social usefulness". Therefore, Rakočević creates images of couples in romantic situations and scenery that can attain the level of advertisements which promote ideal couples as if it was possible to advertise love. The fact that love is an overrated "brand" is represented through clichés of images of couples who are simply posing, and who seem very shallow in their relating. Evidently, by imitating the already existing advertisements, series *Lucky Couples*³⁵⁰ aims to criticize ideology of consumerism culture that imposes stereotypical gender roles and pushes woman into further dependency in her interrelations.

As the natural continuation of this topic, comes autobiographical phase in Rakočević's life introduced by her own motherhood role. In her *Family Compositions* series, shots seem to have an almost documentary effect emphasizing the importance of the so-called "maintenance" scenes that are everyday routines and rituals which are repeated in order for a family with a child to function. From feeding and dressing up the child, playing, bathing and bedtime routine to going to the playground, shopping in a supermarket, cooking, cleaning, etc. the maintenance continues. It can be noted that all activities flow almost as if by inertia, and all of them must be performed this way or another. This photography series wonders how to be a mother, a wife, and a housewife without giving up profession. Even more significant is the question whether there are limits to the burden which those so-called "natural" instincts instilled through motherhood impose.

Two years later, already an example of mother in the family with two children, Maja Rakočević is ready to explore more of the family dynamics – in her sculpture installation *Family Carousel*, with her realization that children are the centre of the family, and that actually

³⁵⁰ To see more from this series, visit <http://majarakocevic.com/radovi/srecni-parovi/> (accessed on January 29, 2017)

everything pretty much spins around them. Therefore, she created sculptures of parents and two children as life size puppets, and hung them to make a carousel that the spectator can view while lying on the mattress which is on the floor. She accompanied the carousel with the music that reminds of a lullaby with aim to “pacify” spectators. In lying down and watching the carousel, there is an illusion for a spectator who feels like an integral part of the installation composition. It can be said that this carousel also intends to create an atmosphere of tranquility of carefree mood where everything is peaceful and nice (in short, space is subordinated to children) all with the idea to emit the concept that epitomizes the ideal family environment (that is to say – ideal for children).



Gordana Belić, *I think my spaceship knows which way to go*, sculpture installation, Gallery of the Youth Centre, Belgrade, 2007

In 2007, at the Gallery of the Youth Centre in Belgrade, Gordana Belić installed about a dozen sculptures of her legs around the space. First, she made negative casts of her legs, and then used them to create sculptures in papier-mâché. Those pieces were accompanied by huge eyes made in styrofoam all suspended from the ceiling. Together with this composition there was a video projected in the dark that showed stars moving towards spectators with David Bowie’s song *Space Oddity* in the background. *I think my spaceship knows which way to go* is Belić’s continuation of sculptural installations that deal with corporeality and female

identity within the frames of being “monitored” in the system of patriarchal vigilance that judges and sanctions women. From the author’s personal view, to be a woman artist in Serbia is not an easy position which, when accompanied by her being a single mother as well, bears a certain amount of stigma. Therefore, she continues her practice to assemble eyes to her compositions; here there are not pairs of eyes, but “single” eyes like cameras (or suspended “conscience”) that serve as reminders that one is constantly being monitored, and thus also indirectly controlled psychologically.

Vivid and striking colours of legs with high-heel shoes are metaphorically moving through the space in various positions. It seems as if the artist’s legs were running, walking, jumping, dancing, and flying all over thinking that “her spaceship” knows the direction. Though Belić believes that she is on the good track, nevertheless, she externalizes her own “radar” responsibility about the direction – by projecting it on a “spaceship”, and leaves some place for the self-doubt. The space is odd but not in a harsh way. It is more of an unexpected area where she relates to the social milieu by being aware that she is monitored and judged while, at the same time, she also refers to a bigger picture like universe and open space. This exhibition does stir some preconceptions of what is expected at the level of spatial organization within exhibition premises. To conclude, even though she might feel a bit chaotic or lost, it surely seems that here Gordana Belić does not need a spaceship for she is already in a universe of her own trying to tread her own paths.

It may be conducive to note that though femininity adopted the role of visual layer in contemporary artworks, authors of such pieces are no longer “naïve” but intentionally exert it to draw attention to the actual meaning of work. However, as a medium, femininity might only “float” on the surface while the theme may not be at all directly related to a concept that has anything to do with woman. Nevertheless, that creates more time to enhance the possibilities of deconstruction and subversion as the multifaceted dimensions of the visuals start to rise. In fact, that very colourfulness, sweet-talk, hilarity, superficiality and likeability, which are usually automatically associated with femininity, are what can surprise and cut deeper into the essence of things because they are in contrast with the logic of expected values and visual ethics that *should* accompany the feminine, or feminine-like, appearance. Therefore, capitalizing on femininity and sexual charisma could actually offer a lot of experimental play and creative manipulation of meaning for the artists so that they will continue to explore and exploit further options and more radical means of femininity as medium.

7.2. Feminism in Serbian Art

*Feminism is subversive only if it fights for equality, against poverty and against war at the same time.*³⁵¹

Adrijana Zaharijević

In the 1990s, in times of EU sanctions and isolation in Serbia, feminist movement achieved an important role as a means of resistance to war and became part of the NGO context. The fact is that Western foundations in order to establish conditions for the establishment of civil society in Serbia and to enable transition to neoliberal capitalism have funded NGO scene. With the new millennium, the so-called "political correctness" of neoliberalism aimed to depoliticize feminism so that its radical political dimensions were "tamed". Thus, feminism as a social movement actually turned into NGOs neoliberal business where the original radical requests of feminism mutated into gender identity politics.

Even though feminist research includes research on women and research for women with aim to emancipate them and improve their lives, there is a remarkable tendency of refusing any identification with it. For example, the use of the definition *feminist*, women from various milieus rejected including female politicians, public figures, famous personalities, and the same goes for performers and artists of both genders. On the other side, at the same time there is an obvious paradox that they even emphasize their orientation towards "gender equality" but still discard any connection or association with feminism. Perhaps, such tendency at least partially comes from the fact that there has been a significant "raise and praise" of elements of raunch culture recently but also a trend of vulgarization and pejorative connotations that are rooted in the term of feminism.

³⁵¹ See Nezirić, Azra and Vujica, Darko, *Interview with Adriana Zaharijević*, <http://www.prometej.ba/clanak/intervju/intervju-sa-adrianom-zaharijevic-feminizam-je-zbilja-subverzivan-samo-ako-se-istovremeno-bori-za-jednakost-protiv-siromastva-i-protiv-rata-2868> (accessed on December 29, 2016)

As we speak of artists, the situation is pretty much the same, which complicates further investigations and research in their motivation and real interests because they often clash with what they do. What remains are doubtful speculations about authenticity of some interpretations of their work but also questions that more often than not ponder into the matters of inconsistency, hypocrisy, liability, originality, and questionable outcomes of both their words and works that often lightly reflect discrepancies. No matter whether women who openly reject any identification with feminism belong to the public sphere, are famous, are artists, there are two main possible reasons for them to avoid being defined as feminists. One is coming from the old patriarchal attitude according to which feminism is a threat to established structures and a menace to male-female relationships. Therefore, women who openly assume feminist viewpoints are labelled with notorious stereotypes: ugly and full of complexes, unlovable man haters, amazons, lesbians, etc. In order not to stir smooth conservative waters of patriarchal order, many women feel uncomfortable with that, and whenever it is possible they are quick to emphasize that they are not feminists or even make it clear that they have absolutely nothing to do with any notion of feminism. Other possible reason for refusing any feminist identifications stems from the fact that there is the tendency to distance from the term feminism because the acts of women's groups who call themselves feminists as well as female NGO projects that are dominant have already deeply compromised feminism. Therefore, it should be pointed out that such a situation requires educational efforts coming from different strands of society with aim to challenge hatred against feminism.

Defining Borders

As feminism in Serbia lost its edge because its radical elements have been blurred and reshaped by the rush of neoliberal capitalism and the incoming wave of NGOs, and foreign sponsors, it mainly turned into politics – it became a tool for gender identity politics. However, even more importantly, at the same time at the art scene poetics mutated into cultural politics. Necessary to realize is that there is the need to be extremely cautious and conscientious in defining *borders* (or absence of borders) when using terminology related to *gender identity* and *culture*, and the same goes when we speak about *feminist paradigms* and

feminine continuum. Nevertheless, in this case before this topic is deepened, it must be added that this fragment will not go further into linguistic definitions or theoretical dubiousness but use actual examples.

Before gender identity politics and cultural politics reach the borders of necropolitics, it must be commented how conceptual frame and organizational criteria function nowadays at the level of art shows that deal with gender identity. Therefore, for that purpose, the case of the exhibition *Gender Check – Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* which was held at Museum of Modern Art in Vienna (November 2009/February 2010) is taken into consideration. Purposefully, this analysis is from the point of view that does not come from the side of curator(s), sponsor(s) or their assistants, but from the firsthand experience of a participant. The reason to choose Marina Gržinić's analysis of this exhibition lies in the fact that she is not only a participant, but also an established artist and theoretician who writes, exhibits her work, and does panels on it; she also has a considerable experience in shows and is already familiar with the previous work of curator(s) in question. This exhibition was curated by art historian Bojana Pejić who back in the 1970s and 1980s was an important Belgrade figure and who for the last two decades or so lives in Berlin.

In general, it is possible to be stated that one of the most obvious ways of working by Bojana Pejić that is repeated throughout her different engagements in curatorial projects over the last decade is a brutal evacuation and filtering of positions from the former ex-Yugoslav space.³⁵²

That is the fact quite visible in the artists she selected and the way they were represented; besides that, no matter how absurd it sounds but the invitation for the show did not mention one single name of the included artists which is something not possible in case when Western artists are taking part in the exhibition. In addition, it must be noted that *Gender Check* was an important opportunity to publish texts of seminal authors from ex-Yugoslavia from both old and new generations of feminists but they were omitted.

As Gržinić claims, even though the title of the show is *Gender Check – Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*, it was emphasized repeatedly during the exhibition that the show was not about East and West of Europe as they are not existent any more.

³⁵² Gržinić, Marina, *Analysis of the exhibition "Gender Check – Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe"*, <http://eipcp.net/policies/grzinic/en> (accessed on October 29, 2013)

Clearly, that is a paradoxical statement by the curator and sponsors but also for many speakers in the panel. That altogether questions the logic that organizes such a statement considering the title of the exhibition and declaring that borders are gone. If there are no borders, as it is claimed, there is no need to define *Eastern Europe*. However, nowadays the so-called *nationalistic Eastern Europe* and *neoliberal Western Europe* are still divided – “we witness a repetition of the neoliberal capitalist West (with all the prerogatives of consumerism and humanism) amidst the nationalistic East without the West consumerism/capitalist expropriation being really jeopardized”³⁵³.

Therefore, we are returning to the story of art poetics mutating into cultural politics. The longer we speak about how exhibitions work, how they are organized, how their concept is conceived, how curators function and decide, the closer we reach the point that touches sponsors who are producers of cultural politics (in this case “ERSTE” Foundation). Moreover, to reflect on this analysis done by Marina Gržinić, who notes that Bojana Pejić’s repetitive way of work shows a certain pattern of brutality in filtering positions of artists, here it becomes necessary to mention how Serbian authors were curated. It must be noted that, as far as the selection of artists is considered, Serbia was presented mostly with Pejić’s fellows from the 1970s (as if Serbian art practices for “gender check” had remained at that point in time and at that level). On the other side, Albanian artists from Kosovo (which is within borders of Serbia) for example were represented with solely authors from this millennium – clearly, interest in gender (art) in Kosovo appears for the first time in the 2000s because it obviously began with the arrival of foreign NGOs programs and projects funding. As long as matters of gender identity and feminism are a matter of trend and cultural “fashion”, as long as art poetics is forgotten and overridden by politics of institutions, curators and sponsors, there is not much to speak about when we analyze even big and “representative” exhibitions. It becomes futile to pinpoint who is doing what and why if curators and sponsors are executing and abusing their power – at the end, it is not an exhibition but more of a private circus and demonstration of the “will to power”.

Speaking from the opposite perspective that does not deal with the representative international shows, but with the local and more down-to-earth attempts to do a festival, I had a chance to collaborate as an interpreter at *Art Femine – Festival of Feminist Activism* that took part in Niš, Serbia in 2016. This festival organized and realized as the project of *Centre for Girls*

³⁵³ Gržinić, Marina, *Analysis of the exhibition “Gender Check – Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe”*, op. cit.

was funded by their sponsors. *Centre for Girls* is a local NGO; they claim that they work on “support for women victims of violence, prevention of women trafficking, women's health and art”. Guest “lecturers” and authors of creative workshops who participated at this festival were not artists but women entrepreneurs of small private projects. The so-called creative part for the participants conveyed short daily workshops of soap making, jewellery design, batik technique, etc. In the form of brief demonstrations, some artisanal techniques were taught in a very basic manner – for example, in the case of jewellery, it was beading. The final supposedly “artistic” results were less than symbolical or better say were more at a child’s play level. The last day of the festival culminated in what they call “action” – organizers from the centre, guests and women participants wrote messages of a very cliché type on paper, for instance “women must not be beaten” (so that “everyone could understand them”). Then, they were standing at the public square holding those rather illegible messages and taking photos of them – which is how most of their projects end, and also how their “actions” look like. The “climax” of this manifestation was at the end of the festival with a concert of a female band from Croatia held at a hidden location because girls are from LGBT community and public performance was not a safe option.

To conclude, there was no author from their local city or area – not any artist or female lecturer to take part either as a guest or a participant, and as a rule the same happened in the residence for artists that they later organized – that is to say there is no collaboration with local artists at all. Another thing is that what was supposed to be a festival of feminist activism turned out to be an episode of making new friendships, doing self-promotion and having paid vacations in hot July somewhere in a small city in Serbia. “Having a lot of fun”, “keeping in touch”, “nurturing female friendships” are slogans that support such manifestations that are sending wrong messages about feminism, activism and most of all art. There are numerous cases of NGOs like *Centre for Girls*, and their “artistic endeavors” connected to feminism as they would like to define it. On the whole, for them there are no borders, there is the system of unscrupulous exploitation of one and the same idea through numerous projects for as long as it is possible to get funds from their sponsors that would enable them to function. For Serbian NGO sector, the actual level and quality of the final results of art festivals and manifestations dedicated to feminism are borderline and irrelevant as far as expensive marketing and aggressive and lavish self-promotion are at hand due to exterior funding so that the process can go on and on as a perpetual continuum. It seems that “feminism” is using art in order to attempt to say some things from its own domain. On the

other side, such a concept could have negative consequences because, due to ideological support, many empty concepts may be “smuggled” into the sphere of art in public. As the final result, this kind of festivals resembles feminist fairs with colourful offerings that actually intend to be artsy-craftsy products.

Practices of Feminism-resistant Femininity

Most often *feminist art* is defined as art that includes women's artistic production which is identified with the ideology of the feminist movement or with the ideas of specific female creativity in art and culture while *female art* refers to works regardless of whether or not they represent and advocate feminist values, beliefs, views and meanings. It is indubitable that in case of most artists any identification, definition or association with the term *feminist* raises dilemmas, controversies, paradoxes and even panic. That is why talking about feminism, feminist(s) and feminism in art required a certain level of patience and understanding as well as respect from me in the role of interviewer. The moment I began doing interviews was when I realized that it could be the process that would involve quite a bit of “treading water” for me. It was simply because rationalizations and excuses to give direct and concise answers seemed to never end on the part of interviewees. Such a situation is the proof of how complex seems to be the topic of feminism for (female) artists, and how hard it is for them to comment on their possible identification with feminists. As any “ism”, feminism as well is often seen as a kind of ideology that stems from political sources. When faced with the question to say whether they are feminists, to give a “yes or no answer”, authors simply start swaying between relativizing, generalizing, and theorizing. What happens is that then start to emerge unnecessarily lengthy explanations in combination with various forms of wrapped pretexts. It can be also noted that what they do in practice often does not overlap with their theory and vice versa. In short, firstly it seems to be a problem to decide what terms *feminist* and

feminism actually signify³⁵⁴, though no artist interviewed made an effort to define what feminism is or should be, and then take a stand heading from there.

Most female artists of the older generation do not declare as feminists because in Yugoslavia they did not experience their position as unfavourable because for the most part of their lives since they were born they lived in the social system of communism/socialism in which woman acquired certain rights (e.g. Katalin Ladik and Marina Abramović). Younger artists do not identify themselves as feminists because they are not sufficiently familiar with the theories of movement and feminism and, therefore, cannot call themselves feminists. Nevertheless, what they do is agree to have their works exhibited in shows devoted to feminism because thematic exhibitions devoted to feminism often have sponsors who finance the costs of mounting the show. For them, it sounds as a good pretext to take part in projects that deal with feminism while otherwise they reject identifications with it, which is a contradictory attitude. The most significant example was Milica Tomić who does not belong to younger generation but who quite “elegantly” avoided giving any answer about being a feminist or not by simply requiring that question to be omitted from the interview. In other words, Tomić regularly participates at exhibitions dedicated to feminism, and accepts any chance for self-promotion at panels dedicated to it (e.g. “Global Feminisms” – the first international exhibition exclusively dedicated to feminist art from 1990 to the present held at Brooklyn Museum in 2007), but actually refuses to have anything to do with the term.

If we speak from the point of view of Serbia, some artists simply do not see themselves as feminists because basically they think that feminism movement, and its theories, cannot improve their lives which, for a long time, have been reduced to pure survival. For some, today’s feminism in fact represents single-mindedness and collectivism that obsesses about identity, race, gender, labour conditions, and class. Others avoid declaring to have anything to do with feminism because they clearly separate their art from it saying that their work is actually the means of documenting their personal “female” experience of life. They find woman to be more complex, visually attractive and generally more interesting than man, which is why she is the subject of their interest. While refusing to be identified as feminists, some think that feminism is limiting and that gender does not matter but the ethics in their work – therefore, they define their choice of themes as only a matter of interest. In addition, there is a significant tendency to think that to be a feminist means being a woman through

³⁵⁴ In this fragment some answers obtained through the interviews with artists are discussed. For more detailed information please, find entire interviews enclosed in the Annex.

political discourse. To be labelled as feminist means to be “reduced”, and that is considered unacceptable when it comes to complex issues but in case when topics overlap with those of feminist considerations, authors tend to define that as a “coincidence”. When that occurs, artists are quick to remind us that such works do not stem from feminist attitudes but that they were created out of necessity, and trying to understand their experience of being in the world today. Some find that today aggressive propaganda of contemporary feminism is more “anti-feminist”. Others admit that they stand for gender equality but emphasize that they do not belong to any organization, and seldom identify themselves as belonging to any group or orientation. In the final analysis, all of the authors who were directly asked in the interviews to declare whether or not they are feminists, for various reasons and with diverse explanations, refused to identify as feminists.

In the continuation of the interviews, questioning whether there is feminism in Serbian art, one of the answers was that contemporary art forgot all the fine aspects, and visual elements, and that it is quite unnecessary to go so far as to interfere with the theme of feminism. One of the comments also mentioned that what is needed is the “scene” for such a kind of art, and that only then feminist ideas could be presented and welcome. The truth is also that some think that feminism is non-existent, not only in art but in general because it is all talk and no action or application. In case that feminism in art is everything that artistically deals with women, it can be said that surprisingly few women artists in Serbia have dedicated their works to comment on their position, life and femininity. On the other side, there is also an opinion that it is truly hard to say what the themes of feminist art in Serbia are because it often seems not to deal with anything except perhaps with the issue of violence, which is prevalent in Serbian artists because it is probably the problem they encountered the most. In contrast, there is also an encouragement in the stance that all women are feminist artists because feminism could be viewed as the process of “observing reality from the position of woman” which is basically an unavoidable context for most women. As far as the contemporary feminist community is concerned, there is the belief that their art projects have strong financial support from philanthropic European funds. In this set of questions, Olivera Parlić preferred not to answer this question about feminism in Serbian art which is surprising, and a bit disappointing, because she works with students and teaches (she has been working for ten years now as a lecturer at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade). She is familiar with the Serbian art scene as an established artist and whatever her motivation to do so might be, most probably one of the reasons could be to avoid responsibility of taking a stand.

I never had anything to do with feminism. This comes from my Yugoslav origin, in our country female, the woman, is very strong, she is at the same level as the man... I think that all energy, all power is so much in the hands of women and it always has been genetically like that. I feel the complete opposite. I feel I have to help men.³⁵⁵

Marina Abramović is probably the most well-known example of artist who rejects the feminist appellation even emphasizing that artists who are feminists are “bad” artists. How much a point in time and the location in space can shift the perspective and twist objectivity is quite visible in her case because she speaks of times when she lived in Yugoslavia in the 1970s (since when she is literally *absent* from these spaces). On the other side, quite a few times she claimed that her strength comes from the fact that she originates from Yugoslavia where in order to succeed, woman must attempt to be as strong as man which, at the same time, represents a conflicting declaration that admits that women and men were not equal in Yugoslavia. Besides that, there is no need to utter that “...all energy, all power is so much in the hands of women...” for she seems to be completely blissful in oblivion while living in a parallel universe of her own. Respectively, her statement about a “Superwoman” species that is genetically superior to man so much that men need Abramović to protect and save them is bordering on bad taste. In the long run, Marina Abramović’s testimonies on the topic of feminism and feminism in art cannot be taken into consideration because her dramatizing, fabrication and amplification, intentionally or not, only tend to distract our actual attention from these serious and complex subjects.

If feminism is not subversive, if it does not fight for equality, against poverty and against war at the same time, then there is no need to deploy art as its “launcher”. Feminist paradigms are numerous, and they can find innumerable ways to be “showed” and “introduced” to a wider public by and through artistic practices, but true effects and final results of such representations can be extremely elusive and relative. Most artists in Serbia believe that there is no feminism in art but that there is art that speaks of feminine continuum and experience by attempting to capture and personalize them in an individual manner through the means of artistic practices. With more or less accuracy, I have mentioned here some of the viewpoints and attitudes concerning feminism that come from some contemporary authors to reach the conclusion that previously analyzed characteristics of art practices in Serbia could be described as “feminism-resistant femininity”. Surely, there are

³⁵⁵ Abramović, Marina, *The Bridge/El puente: exposición retrospectiva*, op. cit., p. 76

various options, and some are left open, that could further analyze and research feminism in art here but it would be counterproductive to continue stubbornly to search for the signs that prefer to remain undisclosed.

7.3. Year 2010 and Beyond

Since this thesis is formally limited to art practices within the time frame that dates from 1970 to 2010, it was necessary to be aware of this limit and dedicate the final word to its completion but certainly not to force its closure. It seemed important to round the first decade of this millennium by turning to this temporal boundary without ignoring the fact that looking back from now there are still a couple of years that passed since then. Otherwise, a time vacuum which refers to the period from 2010 till today would have occurred; since neither time nor artistic production have stopped in the meantime, emerged the idea to include here some works from the recent years. The reason for this is that more recent artworks, by their structure and themes, indicate how artistic practices continue and in which directions they could possibly trend.

To put it another way, criteria for the choice of artworks that are commented and analyzed in this section was mainly based on how work of some artists progressed in the meantime, but also the idea was to introduce some new tendencies because some concepts transformed, revived or recycled. Correspondingly, along with the needs of the artistic aspirations, it can be noticed that some themes continue in a somewhat altered form with new approaches as historical moment runs and modifies. For instance, the story of violence against girls and women, abuse of children, and aggression, does not come to stay and only raise consciousness on the topic. It does not dwell for too long on matters of responsibility, sanctioning or awareness but aims to bring out a clear necessity to resist and overthrow the victim stigma. On the other side, as we speak of contemporary consumerism we can see that there could be much less drama or tension about it but with a different result as well. To oppose that neoliberal capitalistic fashion of materialism, one could also use light irony to skip its shackles. At the same time, an intersectional field between biology and politics, biopolitics, has been gaining momentum not only in reference to ecology and medicine but in art as well. This complex concept, used and developed in social theory since Michel Foucault, reflects in artworks that create hybrid specimen and artifacts to examine the strategies and mechanisms of our everyday life and criticize futility of artificiality in contemporary lifestyle.

Furthermore, to speak of artificiality would certainly involve some contemplation of affectation – some trends from the expansion of narcissistic culture also deal with the upsurge

of images that propose self-portraits in the form of metamorphosis. Those feminine “entities” often link to short-lived effects of satisfaction that stems from the outcomes of plastic surgeries. Albeit, at least in the darkest corner of their minds, they are probably aware that those “idealized” pictures do not work for long and, evidently, cannot impress and deceive everyone, but nevertheless they endure to “mutate” visually. Other authors prefer to turn back to failed processes of transition or, better-said, “transition of transition” that neither ends nor succeeds but just advances to grind everything on its way; it is where its side-effects and residues interfere with our gender relating.

Biljana Đurđević, *Hotbed*, paintings series, 2010



Garden, oil on canvas, 53 x 200 cm



Red Ribbon, oil on canvas, 170 x 90 cm



Grass Will Cover All, oil on canvas, 205 x 130 cm

Two decades have passed since when Biljana Đurđević entered into the Belgrade art scene with her painting series *Dentist Society*. Since then, she created a coherent artwork of images which “engraved” into observers’ memory because of its subjects and poetics. In her series *Hotbed* she represented girls and young women in the middle of nature somewhere in the forests. Some of them are simply staring at us or are turned from the back or lying in the shallow water. Though they could imply a possible abuse or violence, those pictures do not really disturb or frighten. There is no real terror or aggression present in the atmosphere – there are just figures that are situated somewhere in the distant landscape. It might be added that though these young women might seem helpless, lost or abandoned, the images nevertheless do not deal with violence paradigm or any hidden violator/victim “symptomatology”. This author does not believe in victimization, she rather thinks that by being defined as a victim person actually becomes cut off any possibility other than to be seen and treated as one. In Biljana Đurđević’s painting series *Hotbed*, her main theme in the forest is not the victim but the ability or inability of a person/a main character of the story to resist. If we carefully look at the totality of her work, there is the development of that struggle and resistance and in the end there is a confrontation. Obviously, she does not concentrate on a victim or a sacrifice, but promotes the process of rising above the situation, the process of gaining power (of not being victimized and first of all of not becoming a victim)³⁵⁶.

Meanwhile in New York...



Marina Abramović, *The Artist Is Present*, performance, MoMA, New York, 2010

³⁵⁶ See *Interview with Biljana Đurđević* in the Annex

The Artist Is Present was a retrospective exhibition of Marina Abramović's work held at MoMA which for the first time ever organized a review of a career of a performance artist. As part of that exhibition, for three months from dawn to dusk she was in the museum – during the working hours, she was sitting at a small table in the vast atrium. She was the artist “exhibited” for her audience to come, sit and face her for a minute or so. What can be noticed is that most of the “sitters” were trying to watch Marina Abramović in the eyes, and thereby communicate with her. On the other side of the table, her usual “steely” presence was still and silent while unknown faces were coming and going. She was dressed in robes that covered her body completely in the way that makes her appearance more sculptural and monolithic but from the practical side, such clothes also served to protect Abramović from cooling due to her long motionless sitting position. All in all, such a physical feat was possible due to her extensive preparation³⁵⁷ that took six months to switch to a nocturnal regime in order to be able to halt diurnal physiological functions of her body and realize this performance.

To analyze this performance, it is necessary to take into consideration the audience experience because this was their “lucky chance” to be in the same space with the artist who was present, and even more importantly to try to interact with her. As it was before mentioned, most of visitors tried to communicate with Abramović by watching her into the eyes. Many of them shed tears in that situation – a phenomenon that could be also largely attributed to the mix of their excitement, long anticipation and tension. The paradox in such situations is that little did they know that the artist was only physically and formally present. Every time when it seemed that Abramović concentrated to view the one who sat across and establish a deep connection, in fact she could hardly see the eyes of the “sitter” on the other side because she was without her glasses (or lenses). The reasons for her not wearing glasses could be various, and the primary one is most probably vanity because wearing prosthesis on her face would shatter and destroy iconography of her as a “beautiful martyr” (while wearing lenses in that situation would not only cause eye dryness but also tire her out additionally). Hopefully, the reason might be less linked to her “ego tripping” attitude, and more connected to the possibility that glasses would seemingly interfere with a sense of establishing direct eye contact (for example, during their sessions some psychiatrists do not allow patients to wear glasses or lenses because they mask the real view and “protect” the wearer). Perhaps she believed that it was more important for the audience experience to get a chance to look at her

³⁵⁷ Marković, Nataša, op. cit., p. 215

eyes without any obstacles, and let them see whatever they wanted. To conclude, it seems quite possible that for Abramović it was irrelevant whether she could see her public, but that what mattered was that they could watch Her (and only for a minute the most). Continuing this type of commentary in lineal logic would probably achieve the point of sarcasm saying that she is a famous artist doing her performance so her audience can watch her like any kind of exhibit (just that this time it was that particular one at MoMA). Again, her emptiness survived and, as usual, it encouraged the mass exchange of energy thereby not offering anything in return from her part. Be that as it may, banal or not, as Abramović promotes the cult of the personality, her position is quite ambivalent, and it clearly deserves to be criticized.

The overall aesthetics of the artist's appearance present here cannot be ignored because so many visitors were staring solely at Abramović while waiting to get their own turn to watch this "exhibit" from a closer perspective. Surely, a close frontal look means getting a chance to observe fully artificiality of her facial plasticity. This contemporary art icon, bordering on unrecognizable because of her masklike physiognomy with the face that reminds of dough, fortunately has eyes and nose as her trademarks that remained unchanged by plastic surgeries. For some time now, it has become quite noticeable that there is a certain "masquerade" effect on this now seventy years old artist of rather "unidentifiable age". Over the course of time, ageism took a toll on her "mythical" image that mutated into an eerie monolithic subject – a frontal, monumental presence with the face like a rubber puppetry membrane. Her metamorphosis also reflects in the lack of her facial expression – her attempt to smile turns into a grimace. She is "problematically" swollen with a face that is less human, and more like a mortar made of flesh teeming with artificial "youth" so much that one cannot help but imagine that when she arrives home, when alone, before going to bed she can simply take off that mask-face. After all, Abramović's entire head, including that mass of black hair like mane, together with the tone of her voice creates an impression that very much resembles a ventriloquist dummy – as if there was someone else, or "something else", behind that facade, as if she was somewhere there "behind".

As we speak of Marina Abramović's metamorphosis, it must be noted that she gained a diva status, and became a star in the circles of the art world especially recently with her latest "Americanization" period. Obviously, she became more of a brand than an author of substance; she turned into a product, a one-woman show, a storyteller who fluctuates from authentic over commercial to banal. Also, an idol of young performance artists, nowadays she is the founder of MAI (Marina Abramović Institute situated in New York) with aim to use the so

called “Abramović Method” for various purposes. Though in practice sometimes there is no justified coherence or envisaged meaning in her work, nevertheless, her substantial success turned her into a star – the price she paid is that she betrayed her own ideas and principles. On the other hand, perhaps, she was a hypocrite from the start because there is an obvious discrepancy between saying and doing; she does not practice what she preaches which is why there is a tendency to call her “fake”. In Abramović’s manifesto, she claims that “artist should have more and more of less and less” which could hardly refer to her – for example, she admits that she is obsessed with fine things, fashion and designer brands. She turned into an aloof elitist posing for cover pages of fashion magazines dressed in the latest trendy exclusive clothes.

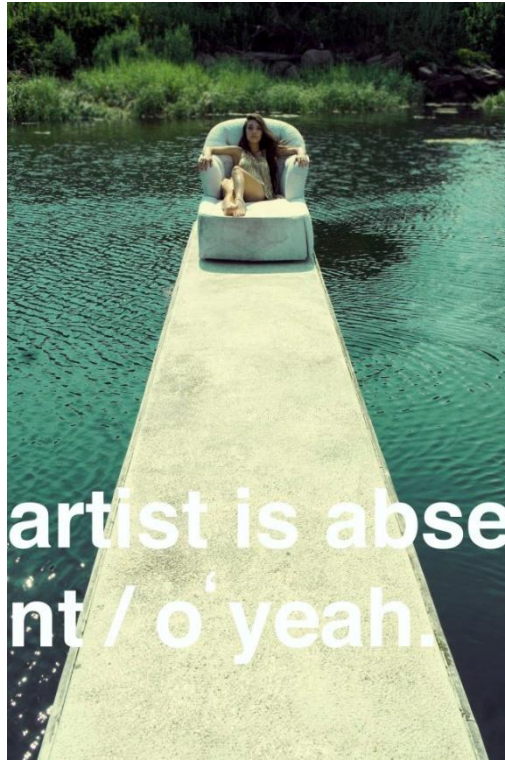
In time, she became a great narrator, a storyteller who more often than not offends our intelligence. Using soft-sell techniques for the “brainwash” of the audience in order to promote and advertise herself, she *is* her own commercial. Evidently, she is the representative of consumerism but as the latest typical product constructed by the world of American art market. To comment her rhetoric style, the way she speaks must not be ignored either – she sounds like a hypnotist. Her manner of speech is rather slow and theatrical. In addition, she speaks in a low voice to mystify the content and dramatize her role as the artist, all with aim to keep the attention and focus of the audience on her. Evidently, in her philosophy there is no doctrine but dialectics where everything seems to have everything to do with everything. However, on the other side, all things considered in the end it all comes to very simple and essential ideas spiced up with lots of her mystifications and drama. Publicly Marina Abramović easily launches very arbitrary and arrogant opinions³⁵⁸, and the same happens not only in her interviews but also in her written works. As far as her theoretical support goes, her alleged resources and supposed researches remain unknown, secret and undefined and, if any, information on them are overly scarce and general. Such mystification, if it does not serve to feed her narcissism, is actually raising suspicion that her resources and research are either not performed by her or are nonexistent and invented.

³⁵⁸ See the fragment from Marina Abramović’s memoir, titled *Walk Through Walls*, <http://hyperallergic.com/317708/marina-abramovic-writes-disparagingly-about-aboriginal-australians-theracistisresent/> (accessed on December 30, 2106)



Ulay and Marina Abramović, *Nightsea Crossing*, performances, 1981-1987

The closure of the story about Marina Abramović's retrospective exhibition *The Artist Is Present* arises in itself; it actually closes the full circle around this performance at MoMA by proving to be a story about credibility and "success" in art. It could be said that one surely remembers the dirty residue that lingers from this "case" in the more objective and less dazzled public eye. After so many days and hours of *Nightsea Crossing* (twenty-two performances) that Abramović had realized in collaboration with her at the time partner German artist Ulay over the period between 1981 and 1987 at galleries and museums all over the world, questions on various issues are inevitably rearing their ugly heads. All that has anything to do with originality, persuasiveness, and consistency of her *The Artist Is Present* performance has to be put under scrutiny. It must be emphasized that it is not solely a matter of credits and copyrights. It is the fact that about a dozen years of Abramović's career belongs to joint works and performances that she shared with Ulay, but which after their separation she propagated and launched as her own (not to mention that the artworks from that period also served as the "seeds" for her future creative endeavours). In short, Marina Abramović selfishly appropriated all their joint work – she exhibited it all over the world under her name; she built her fame and career on it but also, due to that appropriation, she has been earning substantial funds over the years. The message of this story of the contemporary performance diva has little to do with art but monstrously with the success built on unscrupulousness, power hunger, and greed.

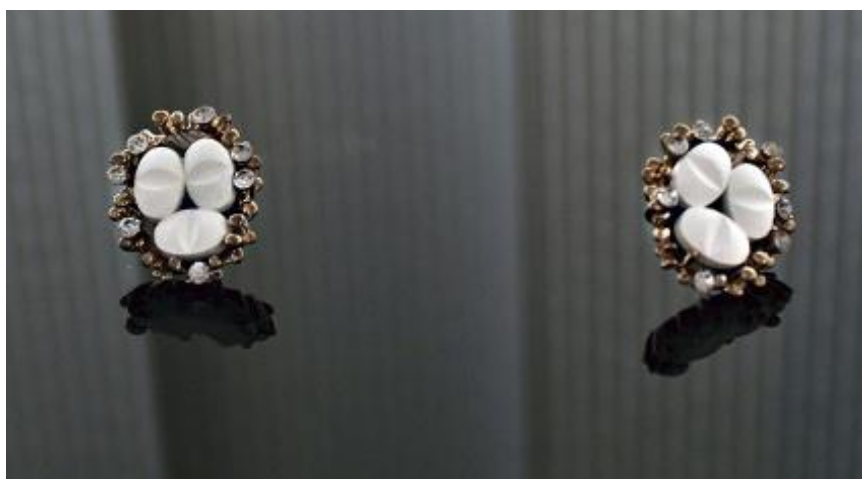


Marina Marković, *Artist is Absent*, photography, New York, 2012

Marina Marković's obvious reference to Marina Abramović's *The Artist Is Present* happened in 2012 in her portrait made in New York. Besides the fact that she and Marina Abramović are namesakes who share the first name, they are both female artists from Serbia currently situated in New York. In this image, Marković offers us the picture of what being an "absent" artist should look like. While reclining in a large armchair located at the edge of the pier on a sunny day, surrounded by water, Marković seems distant and peaceful. Indubitably, she looks relaxed and away from it all – being quite oblivious of the New York art scene, she projects a rather different picture of the (female) artist. With her laid-back attitude, she does not appear to be a contemporary consumerism representative. There is no pomp, "spasm", drama or tension; there are no viewers or audience in her picture. As the opposition to that rigid and "super sharp" aloof style of Abramović, Marina Marković in her light and ironical way simply dismisses that kind of "artist is present" paradigm.



Zorica Čolić, *Stylenomics*, glass showcase contains plastic wig, found jaw of animal, silicone breasts, necklace made of contraceptive pills, jar with plastic nails and eyelashes, 2012-2014



Zorica Čolić, *Stylenomics*, glass showcase with earrings made of antidepressant pills, 2012-2014



Zorica Čolić, *Stylenomics*, showcase with “pills” made of lipstick, and fake nails with eyelashes, exhibited on a mirror, 2012-2014

Zorica Čolić (1977) made *Stylenomics* installation of three pieces of work exhibited in showcases. This artwork dedicated to her research about biopolitics refers to various aspects of our daily habits and needs. Placed on the black background and protected with glass, this paraphernalia conveys wig, found jaw of animal, silicone breasts, necklace made of contraceptive pills, plastic nails and eyelashes, earrings made of antidepressant pills, and “pills” made of lipstick, and fake nails with eyelashes. These hybrid forms and “species” of objects speak about beautification but also about self-deception and the need for false sense of security. For instance, we are accumulating trivial and worthless things; there is inevitable saturation with objects of cheap value that serve to “clog” emotional emptiness at least for a moment. The fact is that capitalism values the monetary difference between the real and the fake; and through time it has created a very stable cultural structure. Nevertheless, it is the structure where it is possible to blur visually terms of originality and imitation, where the authentic and fake could seem equal, where cosmetics has reached the level of “masquerade” aesthetics.

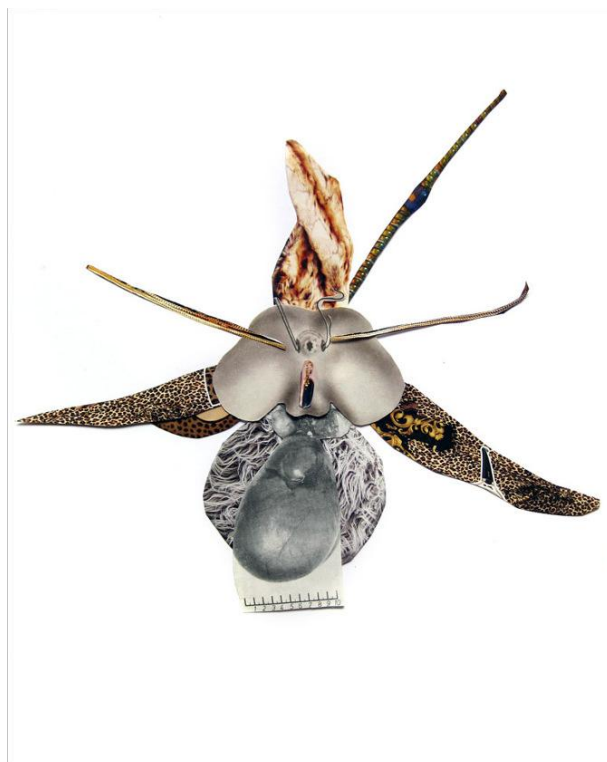
Moreover, some objects exhibited here were found while others were made. Besides that, the idea to exhibit them in showcases and put them under the glass introduces the irony that comments on our need to keep and obsessively treasure insignificant things. Jewellery made of contraceptives and antidepressants refers to “easy way out” strategies that we use to “embellish” reality. The pills used here to create earrings are from the SSRI group (Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) which should supposedly balance chemical metabolism of the brain. At the same time, there has been a significant controversy about their efficacy; however, in most countries they are still the most widely prescribed antidepressants. On the other side, the showcase with “pills” made of cut and remodelled lipstick, as well as of combination of fake eyelashes and nails, directs attention to the concept of “instant” beauty treatments based on “plastic” and “fake” procedures. Both earrings with original antidepressant pills and the “beauty pills” she made are intended to anesthetize us mentally and make us numb.

More importantly, “*Stylenomics*” installation also serves as “materializations” that are actually examining concepts, strategies and manifestations of materialism orientation. Absurd, meaningless, artificial, and dehumanizing are adjectives that could describe that very materialism because there is that mass of senseless, cheap, plastic stuff everywhere around us. They are artifacts that reflect apocalyptic attitudes towards our genuine needs but in a reverse way as the so-called “red herrings” that distract our attention and result in alienation. This

Zorica Čolić's artwork is the research about biopolitics that with a critical point of view has shed some light on contemporary lifestyles.



Zorica Čolić, *Andinia Schizopogon*, collage, 40 x 30 cm, 2012-2014

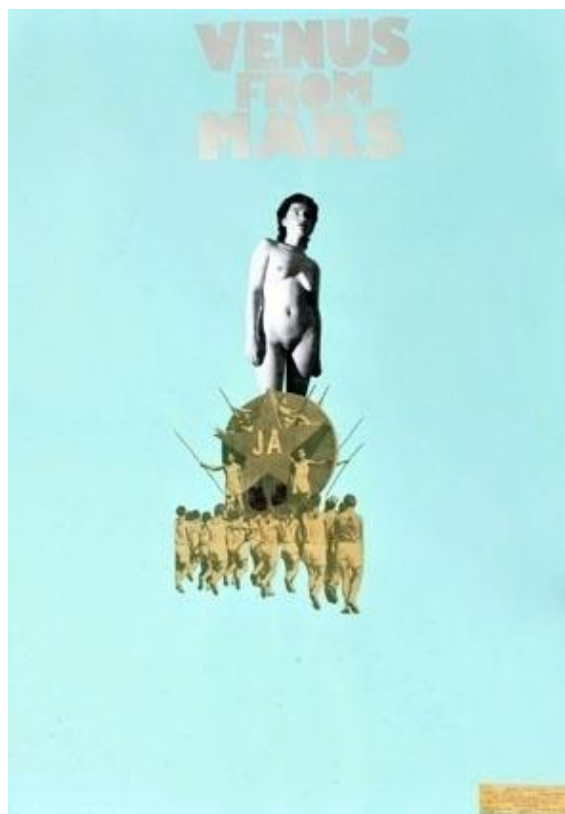


Zorica Čolić, *Muscarella Megalops*, collage, 40 x 30 cm, 2012-2014

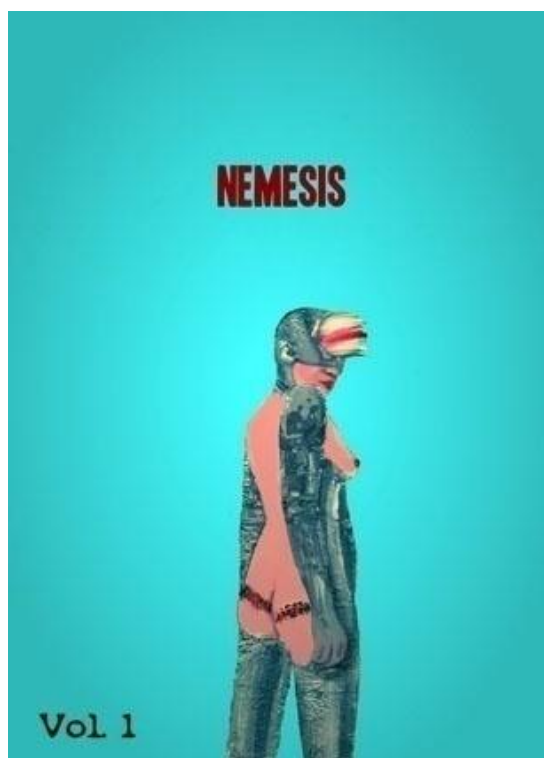
Carnivorous Orchids is Zorica Čolić's series of collages that establishes various images which could be viewed as bizarre, exotic, surprising, puzzling, and disturbing. These pictures created by combination of drawings and photography are actually images of tumours "decorated" with lavish jewellery and clothes. Together with the images from medical books (such as tumours, malformed organs and instructions for plastic surgeries) appear details from fashion magazines that together construct forms that resemble floral compositions of the rather fictional species. It could be noted that these "carnivorous orchids" also bear some traces that resemble insectile and reptilian shapes. The idea was to make pictures that at the first glance should be associated with something appealing but the envisaged final impact is actually quite opposite. This carefully architected organicism originally has very little to do with delicate and fragile orchids. After the first bout of curiosity that attracts to look closely into the details and structures of collages, a viewer suddenly has to distance for there are optical illusion and deception – in a split of a second, the collage falls apart and its integral elements are divulged. Overall, any embellishment and adornment become completely futile as carnivorous aspects begin to emerge.



Jovana Dimitrijević, *Starlet Star*, collage, 20 x 45 cm, 2013



Jovana Dimitrijević, *Venus from Mars*, collage, 100 x 70 cm, 2015



Jovana Dimitrijević, *Nemesis Vol. 1*, digital collage, 2015

Collages are one of the favourite techniques of Jovana Dimitrijević employed to make fragmented and patched imagery of various corporeal identities. For her, self-portrait never dies, and she reinvents it repeatedly throughout diverse creative circles. Her collages are sometimes completely produced by her (she paints and draws all the materials); often she combines her photography with pictures from newspapers; in her digital collages, she artificially creates the whole image. After all, on some occasions, she uses all possible combinations of imagery until the desired effect is achieved. *Starlet Star* is a series of Dimitrijević's self-portraits where she shows herself as both model and fashion designer. She made a small cardboard doll of herself that she dresses up in paper clothes that she designed for that purpose. Of course, this dollish aspect of herself is pure irony because she comments on the contemporary phenomenon of starlet who in order to be a star is just like a puppet or a mannequin for clothes. In *Venus from Mars*, she combines her photographic self-portrait with image from the newspapers that represents old socialist rally. Here she is on the top of the composition nude and beautiful like a goddess. This self-praising picture is a reminder for her to love and appreciate herself and her uniqueness or simply to be a "paramount". In her digital collage *Nemesis Vol. 1*, Jovana Dimitrijević is a mythological being or a hybrid species. With her breasts and back disclosed, and her face only partially visible (because her eyes as the essential identifier remain hidden), she proudly shows off her "details" of red lips, red nipples, and red scars from her plastic surgeries. It is unclear whether here nemesis is she as her own opponent or rival that she cannot overcome, or it is Nemesis as the goddess of divine retribution from the classical mythology; or, as it often happens in Dimitrijević's case, it is both. In conclusion, Jovana Dimitrijević uses collages to redesign, "deify", and hybridize her image just as she had used plastic surgeries to remodel her body and beautify herself, but also to leave the marks and scars as a document. Dimitrijević's media critique comes from her attempts to create her own corporeality and its representation. Therefore, she remodels her body through surgeries, designs her clothes (not only in her artworks but in her real life as well), builds her portrait through collages of various topics, and she constructs a "vision" of herself – all in order to reject the official media trends that so many follow blindly.

After all, the technique of collage that she chooses accompanies her philosophy on body politics that undergoes cropping, clipping, cutting, patching and botching. The procedures on the body go hand in hand with processes of artistic strategies in visualizing that same corporeality. In general, the power of collage technique comes from its ability to divert and deviate attention and perception in a viewer and, more importantly, cause a certain

manipulation of exchange. That concept is derived from the fact that visually collages can be multifaceted. Basically, they can “play” with our observation and understanding both consecutively and simultaneously thus challenging our mental processes of imagination and fancy. With aim to represent, and deal with images of identity, collages in general can be experimental and rich sources of subversion and deconstruction in visual arts.

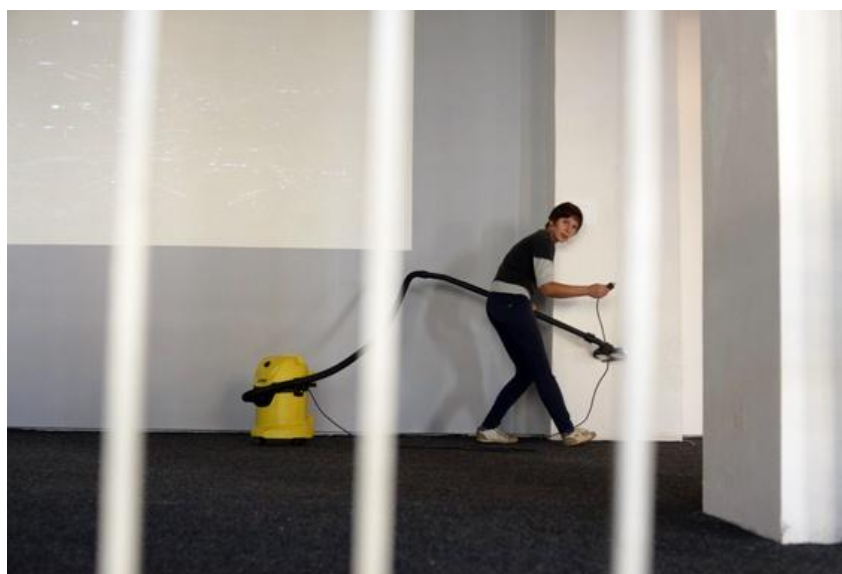


Maja Rakočević, *Couple in Transition*, bronze, 40 x 20 x 20 cm, 2013

This sculpture of Maja Rakočević cast in bronze displays a male – female relationship within a couple as a side effect of unsuccessful process of transition. The dynamics between those two is actually nothing new, and it might be even said that *Couple in Transition* is dedicated to the theme previously mentioned here. As a topic it is a kind of continuation of the phenomenon which appeared in the 1990s – the story about relationship between the so-called “sponzoruša” and her “sponsor”. The sculpture of a couple is composed with aim to expose them but in a caricature style; for that purpose Rakočević puts together two “hero” toys – for the female it is Barbie upgraded with breast implants and for the male it is Venom (antihero from *Spiderman*) here dressed in formal clothes. They are holding hands and standing together on a pedestal just like famous celebrities do.

It must be added that this artwork belongs to Maja Rakočević’s *Status Symbols* series of sculptures in which she modified children’s toys. In this case, interventions that she executed on toys were with aim to comment on our contemporary lifestyle and society but

also on our idols and value system. Disturbed human relations and regressive models of couple symbiosis are the by-product of the failed attempt of transition and as such, they are witnessing various degenerative processes within societal interrelations on a more general local level. This caricature couple, that seems to be in symbiosis, symbolises the materialism aspect in close relationships which emphasizes the need for common interests and economic security. This ideal continues after the 1990s and goes into the new millennium to this day. However, nowadays this tendency continues in a more diversified and unimaginable “combinations” of protagonists – songstresses and businessmen, models and criminals, starlets and dealers, public figures and politicians, “artists” and sponsors to name but a few. As has been noted, there is a certain mix of humour and sarcasm in this sculpture inasmuch as it is also in its own process of “transition” dynamics because couples symbiosis continues to change and mutate as a kind of residual side-effect of its times.



Gordana Belić, photography Aleksandrija Ajduković, Belgrade, 2013

If you ask me whether something in the art scene changed since then, I have to say that it has changed for the worse. Nowadays art is either politics or business or church. Even that part of the scene that is self-proclaimed as “independent” is more a political movement than the art scene.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁹ See *Interview with Gordana Belić* in the Annex

In 2013, sculptress Gordana Belić worked as a cleaner at the 54th October Salon exhibition dedicated to feminism which was named *Nobody belongs here more than you do* that was held in Belgrade. At the time, she was searching for employment and got that job through an agency that hires for cleaning services due to knowing a person who worked in the agency – in short, she needed the connection to get that job. In the beginning, she did not know that she would be cleaning the October Salon, but then as she realized it, she became curious. This time she was in a completely different position – she could follow from the technical point of view how the big exhibition was mounted. Her conclusion about that 54th October Salon is discouraging as she speaks of boring, vain, and distanced art production of participants who seemingly create not for the public or society but for curators. In return, curators elect those artists in order to meet their aspirations and ambitions of the career³⁶⁰, but also to fulfil the official policy of the institution that engages both of them – all of that has been the heritage of the past as we remember communism and its brainwashing.

Given these points, in the recent years, the above-listed artists are some of the protagonists who epitomized feminine continuum in their own personal ways and attempted to explain the contemporary occurrences that characterize positions of women (artists) as well. One after the other phenomena – struggle not to be a victim, metamorphosis and mutations caused by stardom, aspiration not to become a consumerism representative, artificiality and consequences of fashion, relationship to body, narcissistic tendencies, couple symbiosis, poverty and unemployment, as well as cultural politics of art institutions – stand for some of the extensive issues that are occupying attention of the authors of both genders in and from Serbia. Although the intention to predict upcoming developments and events in *our* art practices might seem too ambitious, it does suggest some directions that have been taken. Just like time is experienced as a relative category, and usually things seem much clearer from the distance, only future will tell what the present moment signifies in terms of defining real impact of tendencies and deviations of art production that has been dealing with femininity and feminism in art practices here and now.

³⁶⁰ See *Interview with Gordana Belić* in the Annex

CONCLUSIONS

Femininity and Feminism in Art Practices in Serbia: 1970-2010 is the research that studied the construction of female identity in Serbia and the visual language of artworks relevant for the topic with the goal to reach a reflection on the achievements and scopes of contemporary art that deals with the issue concerned. I would also like to mention that this paper analyzed influences of the local Serbian patriarchy with the goal to explore cultural and anthropological concepts that have influenced the image of femininity. Besides that, this thesis searched, classified, and analyzed works by artists working on the theme to reach a coherent overview of art practices in Serbia (from 1970 to 2010). In addition, texts and artistic practices were explored with aim to create the corpus of theoretical and practical knowledge that is of interest for the topic of this study and also for the future research.

As it was already claimed in the hypothesis, due to its uniqueness and complexity, it is natural to expect Serbia to have its own particular and original approach in issues of femininity and feminism. Nevertheless, the paradox lies in the fact that its feminism is actually imported from abroad and, as such, is reflecting the already existing theories coming from other cultures and geopolitical structures instead of dealing with the local specificities. It can be said that the overall underdeveloped attitude about feminist issues remains in murky territory where general public, women especially, abhors any premonition that has to do with the feminist movement. Unfortunately, the same goes for the artists and for the female ones as well. Is feminism in Serbia underdeveloped because of the strength and particularity of its patriarchy? We can no longer call upon feminist groups that had appeared with the onset of war in the beginning of the 1990s and later lost their edge or, even worse, just disappeared. The questions emerge from paradoxes and contradictions as we speak of Serbian art practices as well³⁶¹. It becomes difficult to draw a clear line between “women’s art” and “feminist art” or to know what logic of interpretation is at stake when an artist refutes any alliance with feminism but agrees to take part in “feminist” exhibitions on a regular basis. And finally, how to look at the position of a curator who intends to produce a “feminist” show but ends up including

³⁶¹ Please, pay attention to the answers in the interviews that refer to being a feminist and about feminism in Serbian art.

women artists who believe that their gender has no role in the production and reception of their work.

To extract the key aspects of the relevant literature would mean to emphasize the fact that this thesis aimed to peruse both local (Serbian) and international (foreign) authors. It was done in order to analyze art practices in a more objective and extensive manner; for that purpose, worldwide known theoreticians were accompanied with the local ones from Serbia and former Yugoslavia. That is to say, it was necessary to obtain perspective that is not only locally justified but also researched within the larger scale and criteria – just as no land can be completely isolated, no artistic territory is a closed space. The bibliography that this region offered can be justified for bringing a “local” view – an authentic, more objective, direct and firsthand attitude. It is also natural that art theory and art history of Serbia gave more profound perspective because traditionally they had followed artists’ work and art scene lineally and chronologically through the passage of time. Therefore, literature on Serbian mythology, ethnographic aspects, customs, beliefs, politics, art history, feminist theory, also academic works, etc. served as sources to reach better understanding and more comprehensive interpretation of theory and practice. What contradicted my research were local theoretical materials of feminist theory and gender studies that were overloaded with foreign theories so that in the process it was necessary to dissect them hoping to find at least some traces of originality. In addition, justification of the choice of bibliography also stems from the fact that this thesis is primarily intended for both international and Serbian public, and academic circles, which was the reason to supply materials coming from diverse sources.

The study limitations of the work partially originate from the practical reasons. For example, some of the most prominent authors and artists were not available to do the interviews for various pretexts. Besides some “justifications” of being too busy or not being interested in doing interviews, some of them even blackmailed me (to buy their books or to get the structure and contents of my thesis first before deciding on doing the interview). Other aggravating circumstances come from the fact that many visual materials that are mentioned in the theory of other authors were not available – either it was not possible to find good quality images or simply they were not preserved (not even by the artists). Another, this time linguistic, challenge of this research was from the point of view of translating resources of diverse terminology that occupied time which is completely understandable because most of the materials are in languages other than English. When limitations are taken into account, it must be also added that most of the local materials, both textual and visual, still do not exist in

electronic format. It means that it was necessary to look for them directly (mainly in libraries) to find them in the printed version only.

Some important facts that were not mentioned in the main body of this research can show how much local environment is actually troubled and troublesome when gender issues are concerned in general. In Serbia there is no real LGBT “scene” meaning that officially there are some NGOs but not actual activism and progress in the issues of LGBT community. For instance, until recently *Belgrade Pride* has been the battlefield for what is called “anti-gay riot” that was seriously threatening safety of the participants of the *Pride* (the most striking example was in 2010). Even though in the meantime the atmosphere has formally changed, meaning that in the last three years or so *Belgrade Pride* took place without evident outbursts of violence, on those occasions participants were protected by the police escort which largely outnumbered them. It should be also pointed out that many of those who joined the *Pride* were there only officially for the purpose of promotion because they were not representing their beliefs or orientation but political parties and NGOs. Needless to say, many of the true participants wore some kind of cover or mask to hide their identity – the fact which tells a lot about how ultraconservative and patriarchal Serbian society still is and how dangerous it is to express any view other than heterosexual. Consequently, it means that many people are still “in the closet” living double lives in an extremely unhealthy position and restrictive conditions. To continue this story, in accordance with such situation, the “results” of the interviews are not surprising either (though, to be honest, I secretly hoped for more radical, open-minded, and less orthodox philosophies to be expressed by female authors). Besides some originality, I discovered quite a bit of superficiality, disinterest (or perhaps unawareness) in matters of feminism, and also some kind of “ready-made” answers that are more or less useless for this occasion as much as, consciously or unconsciously, are actually the pillars that support the patriarchal order.

Looking chronologically, this research was organized to study first the trends in international feminism and in feminism in Serbia in the introductory chapter. There we could see models of emancipation after the Second World War, appearance of the first women groups, their activities and work. It was also possible to follow how socialism influenced formation of identity of rural and modern woman of the time, and how it offered the illusion of the liberated image of femininity. With the 1990s and war conditions, the element of urgency caused formation of women’s groups that became very active. Nevertheless, as the 1990s ended and NGOs emerged, that activism slowly but surely lost its edge. As we speak

about Serbian feminism in the beginning of new millennium, it can be said that in the age of transition and globalization, it turned into projects on gender politics led by NGOs and foreign foundations. That is to say, not only did local feminism missed the opportunity to be really radical and bring changes but even more importantly, it seems that the process of emancipation was only formal.

The phenomenon of gender stereotyping studied here is omnipresent, and to analyze it within the concept of “Serbian femininity” meant to pay attention to its geo-cultural specificities and also how they influence both identity formation and gender relations. Objectification of woman as one of the aspects of stereotyping is the factor responsible for societal dynamics between woman and man and also one of the chief reasons for the “justification” of gender violence in the patriarchal societies. We can see how artists began to use performance as the means to comment on stereotypes and deconstruct them. Also, through painting and photography, they speak about how woman is reduced to object in matters of sexism, ageism, and fashion. What is very interesting is that they also criticize positioning of female artist in the art world ruled mainly by men. In addition, it is represented how stereotyping is employed in upbringing of children – in imposing gender roles and instilling heteronormative values.

To do the analysis of how folk beliefs, religion, and customs influenced the image of femininity, and the way it is treated in art practices, signifies to highlight specificities of the local input. Nevertheless, it could be concluded that the artworks which were created in relation to the archetypal and the mythological revealed that they are of a “general” character. As such, they relate to the discovery of “female experience” as stemming from woman’s connection to nature and to magic, to supernatural, spiritual, and occult. Therefore, it resulted in performances of ritualistic character and also in the introduction of archetypal elements from nature (fauna, flora, soil, water, etc.) that were the aspects directly involved with the authors’ corporeality. In addition, issues concerning concepts of both polytheistic deities and Christian sainthood emerged to question origin of the divine. What is also significant is that artists shifted from stereotypical representation of woman as a witch and began to promote their own “shamanistic agenda”.

In the part of the research dedicated to the impact that socialist ideology had on political and historical conditions in Serbia and the former Yugoslavia, it is concluded that the strategies of brainwash were employed with aim to shape the public opinion, collective philosophy and mass identity. Therefore, it becomes understandable why feminist art in the

late socialism primarily concentrated on the phenomenon of (female) body in the way that it was observed with regards to sexuality and in reference to it as a socialist “political body”. For that reason, artists organized performances and actions with purpose to undo the systemic limitations and comment on the relationship between artist, public, and art institutions, and to communicate with other artists from abroad. On the other side, some artworks spoke about the symbolical images (star or swastika for example) in order to deconstruct identities attached to them. The uniform was also used in some works to manipulate identity and introduce a role-play. On the other side, the appearance of neofolk trend was the announcement of new cultural phenomena, new aesthetics and tendencies not only in art but in life as well. As socialist equality was replaced by nationalistic ideology, and the war began in 1991, Serbia became a “closed society” which reflected on its art production and its art scene. The aspect of the society that brimmed with violence, conflicts and turmoil could not be ignored. Femininity suddenly became visualized as a “prolongation” of masculinity – it became more obvious that woman served a purpose in patriarchy. On the other side, extreme changes brought by the war introduced topics of *otherness* in art practices which previously were not that much represented. Besides that, there was a new tendency in art that was explored in order to deal with the theme of collective historical responsibility. In addition, new artistic strategies were employed to avoid the shackles of local claustrophobia, and intend to live and work (abroad) outside of that system.

When the war and conflicts of the 1990s formally ended, cultural and media erotization of the female post-war image in Serbia caused more prominent “anti-erotization” in the local artworks of Ivana Smiljanić, Maja Milovanović, Marija Petković, Maja Rakočević, etc. Also, some artists, like Marina Marković and Jovana Dimitrijević, searched for the ways to deal with personal issues stemming from disorders like anorexia and bulimia. Antea Arizanović used her works to criticize social and cultural phenomenon of “sponzoruša” with aim to make woman more aware of her (economic) dependency. On the other side, the polarization of woman into mother and whore made art production in diverse mediums that are quite eye-opening and refreshing points of view on restrictions imposed by patriarchy (in the examples of Gordana Belić, Bojana Stamenković, Maja Rakočević, Jelena Radić, etc).

As we speak about the diversity of topics conveyed in the artworks from this millennium, many of them could not be rigidly “categorized” so they remained for the closing chapter. Painting, performance, installation, photography, and sculpture offered variety of viewpoints that are dealing with diverse concepts of woman’s experience. Some of them were

more critical, other ironical and sarcastic, but nevertheless, more often than not, they aimed to comment on and criticize contemporary dynamics of woman's position reflecting her through her relations, sexuality, social positioning, institutions, art world conditions, etc. Tendencies that date around 2010 and beyond showed that artists devoted to topics about femininity, position of a female artist, matters of biopolitics, surgically designed identities, contemporary stereotyping, and so on. Unfortunately, more importantly, there are the unavoidable and discouraging aspects of the still unchanged situation of woman's economic dependency and lack of working opportunities and labour equality.

It can be summarized that femininity and feminism in art practices in Serbia are expressed in different manners depending on the characteristics of historical period and art tendencies of the moment. Firstly, femininity that deals with feminine identity, with female experience and with the issues of the so-called "women's art" is visually represented in diverse styles and with different aims. Therefore, some artworks were made in accordance with local specificities and temporary tendencies while others reflected international trends. Some of the topics are more general (internationally present in arts) while others are more local and peculiar. For example, dealing with the topics of gender stereotypes, mythology, archetypes, and globalization offers artworks of a more general character. On the other side, themes that stem from the local political and historical materials result in a more specific art production – for instance, those that come from ideology, neofolk and turbofolk, the war and conflicts of the 1990s, transition, etc. With that in mind, it can be concluded that some trends from Serbian art production are distinguished as "locally-oriented" while others are more in tune with international art production. The "more Serbian" variety is more radical, extreme and ready to reassess the issues that influence it from within, and to analyze the residue that it emanates from. While as we comment feminism in art practices it must be emphasized that they are to be treated as sporadic trips that emerged as time bounded specific episodes. In the 1970s (female) artists were enjoying that feeling of creative freedom, doing spontaneous performances and actions (Katalin Ladik, Bogdanka Poznanović, and Marina Abramović). The artistic production was done without too much intellectualization or planning to consciously involve the shades of feminist ideas. Going with the flow continued in the 1980s with the late socialism when women believed that they realized their emancipation mostly due to the consumerism philosophy and accepting and internalizing the modern and liberated image from the Western cultures. Such a delusional condition had to be shattered as the 1990s followed with the beginning of the war – an ugly awakening brought formation of women's groups that

were active for some time. Therefore at the time, in Serbian art new, more radical and “painful” strategies were used to deal with what the reality brought (for example, in the artworks of Milica Tomić and Tanja Ostojić). However, it can be said that with the beginning of the new millennium, local political changes together with topics of transition process became more general. In art, they reflected globalization with its various side-effects. Feminist actions became a “pose” funded by foreign sponsors instead of being substantial activism so that feminism theories could turn into gender politics.

In conclusion, it is obvious that the purpose of the interviews which I realized was not to facilitate or justify interpretation of the analyzed artworks. On the contrary, even though some of the questions refer to the concrete artworks interpreted in the thesis, the goal was to get into the direct contact with the creators. It was done with aim to offer a closer look into artists’ motivations, attitudes, philosophy, positioning, awareness of femininity, and opinions about feminism, about Serbian art scene, etc. It must be emphasized that interviews as the form of collecting information can also represent a fertile ground for the further research which is one of the contributions of this thesis because it provides first-hand accounts by some of its main protagonists. I would also like to point out that the artists whom I interviewed had not been previously connected – they do not have collective projects on femininity or feminism. But now, they come together here in the interviews; through my work they are linked as the group of authors and they become “united” as female artists who share similar topics and interests.

To speak about the contribution of this thesis would mean to refer to various aspects of its objectives and their results. The thesis' original contribution to knowledge lies in the fact that it presents itself as the first comprehensive study of the topic, in which the entwinement between artistic production on one side, and political, historical, social and cultural aspects on the other, are considered. There was the need to realize the research on its topic because it had not been sufficiently studied previously (internationally or locally). Besides that, this work produces academic preview that would serve for further research and study on the variety of subthemes that stem from it. One of the achievements of this thesis, in my view, is that it supplies the review of the relevant artworks by topics through the reasoned and comprehensive presentation of productions little known and little studied. Its originality also proceeds from the inclusion of a great variety of artists, practices and media to provide a rather complex view of the intersection between gender and feminism in art practices in Serbia. Also, the originality of this investigation lies in the specificity of the practices studied,

and for that reason as well this thesis could represent a major contribution to the field of feminist art history. Moreover, it also introduces a closer insight into particularities that art practices actually owe to this region and to all that it, directly or indirectly, caused in terms of creativity and originality. For that reason, the implication of this work recommends the continuation of research in theory and art practices about femininity and feminism by accentuating the more specific and radical production. The contribution of my research project is that it constructed the body of theoretical knowledge that is of interest for the topic with aim to enable the basis for future studies both locally and internationally.

CONCLUSIONS (Castellano)

Feminidad y feminismo en las prácticas artísticas en Serbia: 1970-2010 es la investigación que estudió la construcción de la identidad femenina en Serbia y el lenguaje visual de las obras de arte relevantes para el tema con el objetivo de llegar a una reflexión sobre los logros y alcances del arte contemporáneo que se ocupa de esta cuestión. También, quisiera mencionar que este artículo analizó las influencias del patriarcado serbio local con el objetivo de explorar conceptos culturales y antropológicos que han influido en la imagen de la feminidad. Además, esta tesis buscó, clasificó y analizó obras de artistas que trabajaron sobre el tema para llegar a una visión coherente de las prácticas artísticas en Serbia (de 1970 a 2010). Aún se exploraron textos y prácticas artísticas con el objetivo de crear el corpus de conocimientos teóricos y prácticos de interés para el tema de este estudio y también para la investigación futura.

Como ya se afirmó en la hipótesis, debido a su singularidad y complejidad, es natural esperar que Serbia tenga su propio enfoque particular y original en temas de feminidad y feminismo. Sin embargo, la paradoja radica en el hecho de que su feminismo es realmente importado del extranjero y, como tal, está reflejando las teorías ya existentes procedentes de otras culturas y estructuras geopolíticas en lugar de abordar las especificidades locales. Se puede decir que la actitud globalmente subdesarrollada sobre las cuestiones feministas permanece en un territorio turbio donde el público en general, especialmente de las mujeres, aborrece cualquier premonición que tenga que ver con el movimiento feminista. Desafortunadamente, lo mismo ocurre con los artistas y las mujeres. ¿Es el feminismo en Serbia subdesarrollado por la fuerza y la particularidad de su patriarcado? Ya no podemos hablar de los grupos feministas que habían aparecido con el inicio de la guerra a principios de los años noventa y más tarde perdieron su ventaja o, lo que es peor, simplemente desaparecieron. Las cuestiones surgen de las paradojas y las contradicciones al hablar también de las prácticas artísticas serbias³⁶². Resulta difícil trazar una línea clara entre el "arte de la mujer" y el "arte feminista", o saber qué lógica de interpretación está en juego cuando un artista rechaza cualquier alianza con el feminismo, pero por otro lado acepta participar

³⁶² Por favor, preste atención a las respuestas en las entrevistas que se refieren a ser feminista y al feminismo en el arte serbio.

regularmente en exposiciones “feministas”. Y finalmente, cómo mirar la posición de un curador que pretende producir un espectáculo “feminista” pero termina incluyendo mujeres artistas que creen que su género no tiene ningún papel en la producción y recepción de su trabajo.

Extraer los aspectos clave de la literatura pertinente significaría hacer hincapié en el hecho de que esta tesis tuviera por objeto examinar a los autores locales (serbios) e internacionales (extranjeros). Se realizó para analizar las prácticas artísticas de una manera más objetiva y extensa. Con ese fin, los teóricos mundialmente conocidos fueron acompañados por los locales de Serbia y la ex-Yugoslavia. Es decir, era necesario obtener una perspectiva no sólo localmente justificada, sino también investigada dentro de la escala y los criterios más amplios, de la misma manera que ninguna tierra puede ser completamente aislada, ningún territorio artístico es un espacio cerrado. La bibliografía que ofrecía esta región puede justificarse para aportar una visión “local” –una actitud auténtica, más objetiva, directa y de primera mano–. También es natural que la teoría del arte y la historia del arte de Serbia hayan dado una perspectiva más profunda porque tradicionalmente habían seguido el trabajo de los artistas y la escena artística de forma lineal y cronológica a través del paso del tiempo. Por lo tanto, la literatura sobre la mitología serbia, los aspectos etnográficos, las costumbres, las creencias, la política, la historia del arte, la teoría feminista, también las obras académicas, etc. sirvieron como fuentes para llegar a una mejor comprensión y una interpretación más completa de la teoría y la práctica. Lo que contradecía mi investigación eran los materiales teóricos locales de la teoría feminista y los estudios de género que estaban sobrecargados de teorías extranjeras, de modo que en el proceso era necesario “disecionarlos” con la esperanza de encontrar al menos algunas huellas de originalidad. Además, la justificación de la elección de la bibliografía también se deriva del hecho de que esta tesis está dirigida principalmente al público internacional y serbio, y a los círculos académicos, razón por la cual se proveen materiales procedentes de diversas fuentes.

Las limitaciones de investigaciones para este trabajo originan parcialmente de las razones prácticas. Por ejemplo, algunos de los autores y artistas más prominentes no estaban disponibles para hacer las entrevistas por diversos pretextos. Además de algunas “justificaciones” de estar demasiado ocupados o no estar interesados en hacer entrevistas, algunos incluso me chantajearon (para comprar sus libros o para obtener la estructura y el contenido de mi tesis primero antes de decidir hacer la entrevista). Otras circunstancias agravantes provienen del hecho de que muchos materiales visuales que se mencionan en la

teoría de otros autores no estuvieran disponibles –tampoco era posible encontrar imágenes de buena calidad o simplemente no fueron preservadas (ni siquiera por los artistas)–. Otro desafío, esta vez lingüístico, de esta investigación fue desde el punto de vista de la traducción de recursos de terminología diversa que ocupaba el tiempo que es completamente comprensible, porque la mayoría de los materiales están en otros idiomas menos que en inglés. Cuando se tienen en cuenta las limitaciones, también debe agregarse que la mayoría de los materiales locales, tanto textuales como visuales, aún no existen en formato electrónico. Esto significa que era necesario buscarlos directamente (principalmente en bibliotecas) para encontrarlos solamente en la versión impresa.

Algunos hechos importantes que no se mencionaron en el cuerpo principal de esta investigación pueden mostrar qué problemático y rígido el ambiente local realmente es cuando se trata de cuestiones de género en general. En Serbia no existe una verdadera LGBT “escena” lo cual significa que oficialmente hay algunas ONG pero no activismo y progreso en los asuntos de la comunidad LGBT. Por ejemplo, hasta hace poco *Belgrade Pride* ha sido el campo de batalla de lo que se llama “disturbios anti-gay” que amenazaba seriamente la seguridad de los participantes del *Pride* (el ejemplo más llamativo fue en 2010). A pesar de que la atmósfera ha cambiado formalmente en los últimos tres años o más, y de que *Belgrade Pride* tuvo lugar sin explosiones evidentes de violencia, en esas ocasiones los participantes fueron protegidos por la escolta de la policía que en gran medida superaban en número. También debe señalarse que muchos de los que se unieron al *Orgullo* estaban allí sólo oficialmente con el propósito de promoción porque no representaban sus creencias u orientación, sino partidos políticos y ONG. Huelga decir que muchos de los participantes verdaderos usaron alguna clase de cubierta o de máscara para ocultar su identidad –el hecho que dice mucho de cuánto la sociedad serbia sigue siendo ultraconservadora y patriarcal, si es peligroso expresar cualquier opinión contraria a la heterosexual–. En consecuencia, eso significa que muchas personas todavía están “en el armario” viviendo vidas dobles en una posición extremadamente malsana y condiciones restrictivas. Para continuar esta historia, de acuerdo con tal situación, los “resultados” de las entrevistas no son sorprendentes tampoco (aunque, para ser honesta, yo secretamente esperaba filosofías más radicales, de mente abierta y menos ortodoxa, de las mujeres artistas). Además de alguna originalidad, descubrí un poco de superficialidad, desinterés (o quizás desconocimiento) en materia de feminismo, y también alguna clase de respuestas “hechas a la medida” que son más o menos inútiles para

esta ocasión tanto como, conscientemente o inconscientemente, en realidad son los pilares que sustentan el orden patriarcal.

Mirando cronológicamente, esta investigación fue organizada para estudiar primero las tendencias en el feminismo internacional y en el feminismo en Serbia en el capítulo introductorio. Allí pudimos ver modelos de emancipación después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, aparición de los primeros grupos de mujeres, sus actividades y su trabajo. También fue posible seguir cómo el socialismo influyó en la formación de la identidad de la mujer rural y moderna de la época, y cómo ofreció la ilusión de la imagen liberada de la feminidad. Con la década de 1990 y las condiciones de guerra, el elemento de urgencia provocó la formación de grupos de mujeres que se hicieron muy activos. Sin embargo, a medida que los años noventa terminaban y las ONG emergían, ese activismo lenta pero seguramente perdió su ventaja. Cuando hablamos del feminismo serbio a comienzos del nuevo milenio, se puede decir que en la era de la transición y la globalización, se convirtió en proyectos sobre políticas de género liderados por ONG y fundaciones extranjeras. Es decir, no sólo el feminismo local perdió la oportunidad de ser realmente radical y traer cambios, sino aún más importante, parece que el proceso de emancipación fue únicamente formal.

El fenómeno de los estereotipos de género estudiado aquí es omnipresente y analizado dentro del concepto de la “feminidad serbia”, destinado a prestar atención a sus especificidades geo-culturales, y también se muestra cómo los estereotipos influyen tanto en la formación de la identidad como en las relaciones de género. La objetivación de la mujer como uno de los aspectos de los estereotipos es el factor responsable de la dinámica social entre la mujer y el hombre y también una de las principales razones de la “justificación” de la violencia de género en las sociedades patriarcales. Podemos ver cómo los artistas comenzaron a usar el rendimiento como medio para comentar y deconstruir los estereotipos. También, a través de la pintura y la fotografía, hablan de cómo la mujer se reduce a se objetualizada en materia de sexismo, edad y moda. Lo que es muy interesante es que también critican el posicionamiento de la artista femenina en el mundo del arte gobernado principalmente por los hombres. Además, se representa cómo se emplean los estereotipos en la crianza de los niños, imponiendo roles de género e inculcando valores heteronormativos.

Hacer el análisis de cómo las creencias populares, la religión y las costumbres influyeron en la imagen de la feminidad, y la forma en que se trata en las prácticas artísticas, significa resaltar las especificidades de la entrada local. Sin embargo, se podría concluir que las obras de arte que se crearon en relación con lo arquetípico y lo mitológico revelaron que son

de carácter “general”. Como tales, se relacionan con el descubrimiento de la “experiencia femenina” como derivada de la conexión de la mujer con la naturaleza ya la magia, lo sobrenatural, espiritual y oculto. Por lo tanto, resultó en actuaciones de carácter ritual y también en la introducción de elementos arquetípicos de la naturaleza (fauna, flora, suelo, agua, etc.) que fueron los aspectos directamente relacionados con la corporeidad de los autores. Además, las cuestiones relativas a los conceptos de las deidades politeístas y la santidad cristiana surgieron para cuestionar el origen de lo divino. Lo que también es significativo es que las artistas pasaron de la representación estereotipada de la mujer como una bruja y comenzaron a promover su propia “agenda chamánica”.

En la parte de la investigación dedicada al impacto que la ideología socialista tuvo sobre las condiciones políticas e históricas en Serbia y la ex-Yugoslavia, se concluye que las estrategias de lavado de cerebro fueron empleadas con el objetivo de moldear la opinión pública, la filosofía colectiva y la identidad de masas. Por lo tanto, es comprensible por qué el arte feminista en el socialismo tardío y por qué se concentró principalmente en el fenómeno del cuerpo (femenino), en la forma en que fue observado con respecto a la sexualidad y en referencia a ella como un “cuerpo político” socialista. Por esta razón, los artistas organizaron actuaciones y acciones con el propósito de deshacer las limitaciones sistémicas y comentar la relación entre instituciones artísticas, públicas y artísticas, y comunicarse con otros artistas del exterior. Por otro lado, algunas obras de arte hablaban de las imágenes simbólicas (estrella o esvástica, por ejemplo) para deconstruir las identidades asociadas a ellas. El uniforme también se usó en algunas obras para manipular la identidad e introducir un juego de roles. Por otro lado, la aparición de *neofolk* tendencia fue el anuncio de nuevos fenómenos culturales, nueva estética y tendencias no sólo en el arte, sino en la vida también. A medida que la igualdad socialista fue reemplazada por la ideología nacionalista, y la guerra comenzó en 1991, Serbia se convirtió en una “sociedad cerrada” que reflejaba su producción artística y su escena artística. El aspecto de la sociedad que se llenó de violencia, conflictos y agitación no podía ser ignorado. De repente, la femineidad se visualizó como una “prolongación” de la masculinidad – se hizo más evidente que la mujer cumplía un propósito en el patriarcado—. Por otro lado, los cambios extremos traídos por la guerra introdujeron temas de alteridad en las prácticas artísticas que antes no eran tan representadas. Además, se ha explorado una nueva tendencia en el arte para abordar el tema de la responsabilidad histórica colectiva. Además, se emplearon nuevas estrategias artísticas para evitar los grilletes de la claustrofobia local, y la intención de vivir y trabajar (en el extranjero) fuera de ese sistema.

Cuando la guerra y los conflictos de los años 90 terminaron formalmente, la erotización cultural y mediática de la imagen femenina de la posguerra en Serbia provocó una “anti-erotización” más prominente en las obras de Ivana Smiljanić, Maja Milovanović, Marija Petković, Maja Rakočević etc. Algunas artistas, como Marina Marković y Jovana Dimitrijević, buscaron las formas de tratar problemas personales derivados de trastornos como la anorexia y la bulimia. Antea Arizanović utilizó sus obras para criticar el fenómeno social y cultural de “sponzoruša” con el objetivo de hacer a la mujer más consciente de su dependencia (económica). Por otro lado, la polarización de la mujer hacia la madre y la puta hizo que la producción artística se desarrollara en diversos medios que son bastante reveladores y refrescantes puntos de vista sobre las restricciones impuestas por el patriarcado (en los ejemplos de Gordana Belić, Bojana Stamenković, Maja Rakočević, Jelena Radić, etc.).

A medida que hablamos de la diversidad de temas transmitidos en las obras de arte de este milenio, muchos de ellos no podían ser rígidamente “categorizados” por lo que se mantuvieron para el capítulo final. La pintura, el rendimiento, la instalación, la fotografía y la escultura ofrecen una variedad de puntos de vista que se ocupan de diversos conceptos de la experiencia de la mujer. Algunos de ellos eran más críticos, otros irónicos y sarcásticos, pero sin embargo, con mayor frecuencia, intentaban comentar y criticar la dinámica contemporánea de la posición de la mujer que la reflejaba a través de sus relaciones, sexualidad, posicionamiento social, instituciones, condiciones del mundo del arte, etc. Las tendencias que datan alrededor de 2010 y más allá muestran que los artistas se dedican a temas sobre feminidad, posición de una artista femenina, asuntos de biopolítica, identidades diseñadas quirúrgicamente, estereotipos contemporáneos, etc. Desafortunadamente, y más importante aún, hay aspectos inevitables y desalentadores de la situación inmutable de la dependencia económica de la mujer y una falta de oportunidades de trabajo y de igualdad laboral.

Se puede resumir que la feminidad y el feminismo en las prácticas artísticas en Serbia se expresan de diferentes maneras dependiendo de las características del período histórico y las tendencias artísticas del momento. En primer lugar, la feminidad que se ocupa de la identidad femenina, con la experiencia femenina y con las cuestiones del llamado “arte de la mujer” se representa visualmente en diversos estilos y con diferentes objetivos. Por lo tanto, algunas obras de arte se hicieron de acuerdo con las especificidades locales y las tendencias temporales, mientras que otros reflejaban las tendencias internacionales. Algunos de los temas son más generales (internacionalmente presentes en las artes), mientras que otros son

más locales y peculiares. Por ejemplo, tratar temas de estereotipos de género, mitología, arquetipos y globalización ofrece obras de arte de carácter más general. Por otro lado, los temas que se derivan de los materiales políticos e históricos locales dan como resultado una producción artística más específica, por ejemplo, los que provienen de la ideología, *neofolk* y *turbofolk*, la guerra y los conflictos de los años noventa, la transición, etc. En la mente, se puede concluir que algunas tendencias de la producción artística serbia se distinguen como “orientadas localmente”, mientras que otras están más en sintonía con la producción artística internacional. La variedad “más serbia” es más radical, extrema y lista para reevaluar los temas que la influyen desde adentro y analizar los residuos de los que emana. Mientras que comentamos el feminismo en las prácticas artísticas, es necesario enfatizar que esas deben tratarse como viajes esporádicos que emergieron como episodios específicos del tiempo. En la década de 1970, los artistas (femeninos) disfrutaban de ese sentimiento de libertad creativa, haciendo actuaciones y acciones espontáneas (Katalin Ladik, Bogdanka Poznanović y Marina Abramović). La producción artística se realizó sin demasiada intelectualización o planificación para involucrar conscientemente sombras de ideas feministas. El ir con el flujo continuó en los años 80 con el socialismo tardío cuando las mujeres creyeron que realizaron su emancipación sobre todo debido a la filosofía del consumismo aceptando e internalizando la imagen moderna y liberada de las culturas occidentales. Tal condición de delirio tuvo que ser destrozado cuando los años 90 siguieron con el principio de la guerra –un despertar feo trajo la formación de los grupos de las mujeres que estaban activos durante algún tiempo–. Por lo tanto, en el arte serbio se utilizaron estrategias nuevas, más radicales y “dolorosas” para tratar lo que la realidad trajo (por ejemplo, en las obras de Milica Tomić y Tanja Ostojić). Sin embargo, se puede decir que con el comienzo del nuevo milenio, los cambios políticos locales junto con temas de proceso de transición se hicieron más generales. En el arte, reflejaban la globalización con sus diversos efectos secundarios. Las acciones feministas se convirtieron en una “pose” financiada por patrocinadores extranjeros en lugar de ser un activismo sustancial para que las teorías del feminismo pudieran convertirse en políticas de género.

En conclusión, es obvio que el propósito de las entrevistas que realicé no era facilitar o justificar la interpretación de las obras de arte analizadas. Por el contrario, aunque algunas de las preguntas se refieren a las obras concretas interpretadas en la tesis, el objetivo era entrar en contacto directo con las creadoras. Se realizó con el objetivo de ofrecer al lector la visión de primera mano sobre las motivaciones, las actitudes, la filosofía, el posicionamiento, la conciencia de la feminidad, las opiniones sobre el feminismo, sobre la escena del arte serbio,

etc. de artistas. Se debe enfatizar que las entrevistas como la forma de recoger información también pueden representar un terreno fértil para la investigación adicional que es una de las aportaciones de esta tesis, ya que proporciona información de primera mano de algunos de sus principales protagonistas.

Para hablar acerca de la contribución de esta tesis significaría referirse a diversos aspectos de sus objetivos y sus resultados. La contribución original de esta tesis al conocimiento radica en el hecho de que se presenta como el primer estudio exhaustivo del tema, en la que el entrelazamiento entre la producción artística, por un lado, y los aspectos políticos, históricos, sociales y culturales, por otra, se consideran. La necesidad de realizar esta investigación del tema proviene del hecho de que no había sido suficientemente estudiado previamente (a nivel local e internacional). Además de eso, este trabajo produce una revisión académica que serviría para la investigación y estudio sobre la variedad de sub-temas que se derivan de ello. Uno de los logros de esta tesis, en mi opinión, es que proporciona la revisión de las obras de arte relevantes por temas a través de la presentación razonada y exhaustiva de producciones poco conocidas y poco estudiadas. Su originalidad también procede de la inclusión de una gran variedad de artistas, y prácticas de los medios para proporcionar una visión bastante compleja de la intersección entre el género y feminismo en las prácticas del arte en Serbia. Además, la originalidad de esta investigación radica en la especificidad de las prácticas estudiadas, y por esa razón también esta tesis podría representar una importante contribución al campo de la historia del arte feminista. Por otra parte, también introduce una visión más estrecha en particularidades que las prácticas artísticas en realidad se deben a esta región y para todo lo que, directa o indirectamente, causó en términos de creatividad y originalidad. Por esa razón, la implicación de este trabajo recomienda la continuación de la investigación en la teoría y prácticas sobre la feminidad y el feminismo, acentuando la producción más específica y más radical del arte. La contribución de mi proyecto de investigación es que se construye el cuerpo de conocimiento teórico que es de interés para el tema con el objetivo de permitir la base para futuros estudios tanto a nivel local como a nivel internacional.

ANNEX

The interviews that are presented here were realized within the time frame from 2014 to 2016, and they convey conversations with Serbian authors done as written or recorded interviews.

A. D.: Taking into consideration that the main medium of your work is photography, and that there is a huge diversity in your interests, topics and models, how would you define your work?

A. A.: In the character, spirit and expression of my work, most of all there is the documentary aspect, as I am a documentalist by vocation. I mostly work in photography but now I do more and more documentary videos and films. My social and cultural engagement could be defined as cultural anthropology.

A. D.: The so-called “parallel spaces” like markets, flea markets, shops, goods, and sales are some of the topics that speak about the rules of the neoliberal trend. What is your motivation in dealing with those images?

A. A.: For me, that “gray zone” is interesting because it is the space suitable for creation of hybrids, brands and labels, where I represent “models” wearing certain products that are branded. The idea to deal with the shades of gray in my photography comes from the classes about photography, and how gray is present in black and white images; and markets are places where those shades of gray are very visible. That interest of mine began when I was a student and I continued to work on a portrait – I am anthropocentric. There is a big potential in those spaces which you call “parallel spaces” for new topics that appear.

A. D.: In your project *Similar* you decided to deal with fashion as a kind of “equalizer”. As we speak about fashion and trends as the means that diminish our originality and individuality, what do you think – is it limiting us, or can it be also the way to distinguish oneself?

A. A.: Consumption of fashion and “anti-fashion” arguments is interesting to many people and to me as well. It could be stated that now we are in the post-fashion era; and I am interested especially in the hybrid forms that are created by combinations of fashion matrices. In my work I intend to overcome the removability of fashion trends, and to try to accept the present conditions about it. My work does not attempt to promote trends or to criticize them; I believe that fashion has wonderful invigorating powers. What captures my attention in choosing my

models is that those are individuals who do not attract any attention because of their mediocrity; and they stay out of that system – as such they are very interesting to me.

A. D.: What is fashion for you? Is it simply a convention, is it just an unavoidable part of lifestyle that you try to document or are there some other meanings as well?

A. A.: In general, there is an ambivalent attitude about fashion. There are positive sides to it as well. For instance, people who cannot adapt to their environment use fashion for that purpose in order to function. To be honest, it is easier to function as an adapted individual because all of us have some form of “autism”.

A. D.: Your photo diary of *Chi Jin* in Belgrade from 2008 that you mentioned when we spoke about markets, women who work in the markets, immigrants from China as imported products, etc., is about woman as an economic subject but also about woman as object in the era of globalization. To me she seems as a Chinese girl who works in the market, she speaks about the market, about her life, and even though she is not represented in many details, it is possible to “feel” her alienation.

A. A.: Yes, you felt it well intuitively, what could be significant for your study is her case. For example, I met her several times in order to do the photos. Everything was fine, she came to my home to visit me, we ordered pizza, and it looked like a beginning of a nice friendship. But, later when I returned to find her because I wanted to record her in a video, she was there with her parents pretending that she had not recognized me. Obviously, they have different rules that we are not aware of. I have been working with the Chinese models, and it seems interesting to me that they come here. Maybe now something is different, but they are very “closed” and invisible, and the same goes especially for Chinese women.

A. D.: In your series *Fashion* Belgrade from 2004 women appear as models. Who are they?

A. A.: In this series models were retired older men and women from the retirement centre where I wanted to document the topic of how old persons are neglected in our society. I have a lot of empathy for older people because as a girl I lived with them, and I am very interested in that theme from the personal point as well. In that particular series are women who are beautiful in their specific way. For example, my mother is very specific – she is a scientist and she has a very particular style. But the fact is that she made no effort to look like that, she says that she does not think about it.

A. D.: As we speak about various fashion journals that you realized in different geographic areas, we should mention the stories of the “fashion trends” among *others* (immigrants, outcasts, “underdogs”, etc.).

A. A.: Uroš Đurić wrote about that *Fashion Journal from Vienna* and called it “articulation of the colonized identity” and it was actually my idea – to record people who came to Vienna from the spaces of ex-Yugoslavia and who live and work there and document the way they look (which is very special!). By their dress code in the clubs in Vienna you can see where they belong. The segregation is clear – Roma people are low, in the ground floor and the “whites” (Serbs for example) are higher at the balcony; and they remain separate.

A. D.: How would you define the position of women artists here at this moment? How do you see yourself in that context? And what does it mean to be a woman today in general in Belgrade and Serbia?

A. A.: Well, those feminist connotations are present in my work, but that is not my constant or primary interest. What is present in the way the art world is organized is that woman is discredited and discriminated. It is very symptomatic, and even when a woman does something, for example Maja Miloš with her movie *Clip*, she is not promoted by any prominent institution. Still, women occupy the same positions as men at work but are paid less.

A.D.: Your arrival from Slovenia to Serbia marked a period of your life and of your creativity which you dedicated to identity as a cultural formation, to gender stereotypes, to objectification of woman, etc. Did that geographic *transition* overlap with your new sense of identity to cause such a creative phase which at least partially stems from your autobiographical research and creative documenting of your “new” environment?

A.A.: During the 1990s when the war raged in my country, I was obsessed with the topic of the search for identity because it was my escape from reality when I was growing up. I could not accept the crimes that happened to and on behalf of my nations. As a child from a mixed marriage, I did not want and could not choose the side of my national identity. That psychological condition reflected in my work in the search of identity.

A.D.: What do you think about the effect of contemporary standards of beauty on the personal experience of the body? What is going on culturally and what is happening with you individually? Do you believe that it is possible to avoid this kind of internalization of stereotypes – about beauty, fashion, “image”, and more importantly, gender stereotypes?

A.A.: More beautiful things are more acceptable – it is the principle that functions. Today, *beautiful* does not signify only *attractive* but *healthy* as well which is *good*. Some people want to be liked so much that they are overdoing it. If we look at it historically, women belong more to that “marginal” group. Anthropologists will claim that women would undergo plastic surgeries to enlarge their breasts and lips in order to create voluptuous image associated with fertility and sexual maturity – the concept that very much resembles the Chinese tradition of foot binding for girls that nowadays we see as something terrible and as a huge sacrifice for the purpose of obtaining socially acceptable image of beauty.

A.D.: Diets, anorexia, bulimia, and other eating disorders are just some of the syndromes of the distorted body image. How is your work *I be(eat) Anorexia* commenting on this subject?

A.A.: Since my childhood the word *diet* was a part of my life at least in my case. It is a continual battle with oneself. *I be(eat) Anorexia* is about the madness that you experience with your own body.

A.D.: *Beaten Bride* is the series of photographs printed on pillows; it deals with the topic of objectification of woman as man's *property* – when getting married, she is an “object” transferred from her father to her husband so, she can become a victim of abuse and mistreatment. Do you think that this topic has been sufficiently treated in our art in order to draw attention to issues of violence against women?

A.A.: Violence is something that terrifies me immensely. I was more interested in how woman (bride) is handed over from father to husband – she is treated as a duty. To me, from today's perspective, it seems very anachronistic because women are equal to men in creating a home; our roles in family and society have changed. I think that violence is primarily the result of poor education. Being a parent myself, now I can confirm that violence is very present in our society. Violence is something that we learn at home as a method of solving the problem. Education and upbringing are the keys to this problem as well as to many others.

A.D.: How would you comment your series *Icons* as models and idols offered by the media?

A.A.: This work was created more than ten years ago and the situation has not changed yet.

A.D.: Besides sexism there is also the so-called ageism that promotes the idea that it is necessary to be forever young (or youthful) and beautiful. In addition, that trend also influences wider scopes of discrimination. Where did you get the idea for the series of portraits named *Bunny*, and do you think that such works can draw attention to this problem or influence (at least partially) the perception of the contemporary canons of beauty?

A.A.: *Bunny* is one of my favourite artworks – my model was now the already late Slovenian actress Lenča Ferencak who was one of the first women who got naked on film. Therefore, she was a really authentic model for that topic. As far as beauty is concerned, I believe that she is the most beautiful model that I have worked with.

A.D.: The phenomenon of “sponzoruša” with its specific meaning appeared in Serbia in the 1990s as a symptom of the new and very obvious kind of relationship dynamics between the sexes. It has not been eradicated in the meantime but perhaps it has just mutated into a less extreme version of the same thing. What do your self-portraits in *Be My Sponsor* reflect about this phenomenon?

A.A.: “Sponzoruša” is the type of girl that the society ridiculed and described as a social “bottom” or as someone who “over the bed” wants to achieve profit and success. At the time,

I was young when I realized that art market did not exist and that for my survival and for the survival of my work I needed a sponsor. At that moment, it sounded humorous, funny and cynical but the essence of that work was actually my cry for help.

A.D.: What about *Remake* as a brand? Is it an attempt to express your artistry through fashion, decoration, and promotion of certain aesthetic values?

A.A.: Unfortunately, there is no commercial art market and if you professionally work as an artist, one day you burn out. *Remake* is a story that began in a completely different way – it is everything that my art is not. It is about the beauty of life and the beauty that we have inside and share with others. I function within *Remake* as a paintress (with MA degree), I was educated to be a visual artist and to understand fine art as a medium. Simply, it all comes from the domain of my education and from the character of communication in both cases.

A.D.: How would you characterize the position of women artists here at this moment? How do you see yourself in that context?

A.A.: *Be my Sponsor* is the response to this question.

A.D.: Could you say for yourself that you are a feminist?

A.A.: At one time, professor Čedomir Vasić told me that I was a militant feminist and I was proud of that but I do not think that things are so simple. I am a visual artist and for me woman is visually more interesting – female body, the essence of woman is much more complex, visually more attractive and generally more interesting than man's. Besides that, I am a woman and because of that it is my path as well; somehow, women have always been more interesting primarily because their road was more difficult than men's.

A.D.: What do you think about feminism in art practices in Serbia? Is there any? If so, what are its topics and specificities?

A.A.: I believe that firstly we need a "scene" for it and that only then any kind of feminist "trip" would be welcome as such.

A.D.: How would you define the position of women artists here at this moment? How do you see yourself in that context?

G.B.: I am not sure that it is possible to talk about women as a group or profession. Even though population of artists is small, it is very diverse and everybody is specific in a way. In general, women are not that good in business as men are – it is an old hypothesis and I believe that it is really true. I have no bad feelings about such a situation either – I do not see it as a bad thing that men are better in doing business or that because women are more interested in family it influences their success in work. I am typical in that sense: half-mother, half-artist – it is a “neither Heaven nor Earth” situation.

A.D.: In our casual conversation, I told you that I would be writing about the polarization of woman into mother and whore. Could you comment about the means of Camp aesthetics in your works that you named *Dolls*? What is going on with the so-called *ethics of aesthetics* – namely, with the visual patching, cutting, joining, and redrawing of physicality and identity?

G.B.: My aesthetics is based on the continual processes of connecting, patching, and revival of corporeality that fell apart, died, disappeared... Cutting and cropping are not visible, but stitches show the eerie content intended to be hidden. During life, woman’s body undergoes traumas many times: in sexual act, during pregnancy, labour and breastfeeding, and all those types of aggressions and destruction are normal. In addition, every woman also undergoes additional traumatisations in the form of violence that, more or less, leaves permanent consequences even though they do not leave traces on the body. I believe, that woman’s life, as well as her physical and psychological integrity, are directly conditioned by her capability to overcome that traumatisations and come out restored like a new body, and different, healed soul.

A.D.: Your work *Tits* speaks about physical changes in pregnancy and postpartum changes but it also refers to the woman’s status obtained by her new role of motherhood. How much do autobiographical elements influence your topics of interest?

G.B.: The content of my topics and artistic interests is completely autobiographical. All my artworks are deeply experienced and then formed through the material. For me, motherhood is one of the most exciting and precious experiences, the unique opportunity for me to realize that my life was not as much valuable as I thought; it was the chance for me to dedicate to something completely, every day and every night I did it sparing no effort. If something improved my character and made me a grown up woman, then it was motherhood. *Tits* is the installation about the grandeur of motherhood, selflessness, and annulment of one's personality in order to help someone else grow. That is why its dimensions are huge; it is inspired by epic poetry that speaks of great deeds and it uses wool as a material.

A.D.: Do you think that the story about the *private* role of motherhood being in collision with the *public* role of woman artist is a stereotype? How do you unify those two roles?

G.B.: My private life, experiences and problems that I try to solve become themes of my works. Those works become public and thus the private and the public unify. In that sense, of course, there is no collision. On the other side, it is the fact that woman who is taking care of her children cannot function well for some time. Sometimes she makes a break from her art activities, she works less, or sometimes she completely leaves it. Is that collision? I think that it is femininity in the sense that you can switch your roles – one day you are one thing and the next day you are something else. If a woman dedicates her work to art, then she has to be a good artist just like if she decides to take care of children, she has to be a good mother. And, in no way should she ever repent about anything or question herself for the rest of her life whether she was consistent in one role or in the other (as other people do it). Women have to finally accept their “applicability”, in their emotions, and in their social roles. Otherwise, there is no purpose to fight for emancipation. In short, even if there was a collision, then it is only in women's heads – not in life.

A.D.: As we speak about your installation *I think my spaceship knows which way to go*, tell me is it about the feeling of chaos or searching, or perhaps of not belonging and unconformity (that gets intensified by the effect of being monitored)? How much does the system of values that we unconsciously internalized limit our movement, actions and decisions?

G.B.: You understood well this work. It is about chaos and lack of direction, about being lost in space, but at the same time there is an attempt to achieve self-control about it all and to trust in one's own mechanism for salvation. The attractiveness of female legs is the way to redirect

attention from their being “cut off” to their meaningless hovering around the space (this work was made in the period when I was brutally hurt emotionally. Back then, I suffered a lot and I had an impression that I had no ground under my feet – I thought that I was losing my mind). Perhaps, here I should mention that my aesthetics is also employed as the means to encourage healing and self-organizing mechanisms in me.

A.D.: *Every Woman is a Harlot* was your performance that lasted for six hours. The doll that imitates your form, format, and face was the One, the *other*, with whom you spent that time in your attempt to transfer from monologue to dialogue. Does that harlotry in this case have something to do with the transit from passive to active mode, or is it about certain stereotypical gender roles in sex? Or is it about the polarization between good and bad?

G.B.: The doll is an “alter ego”, the opportunity to communicate with yourself but there are two things as well: the doll is a mirror, the possibility to visually perceive yourself, and in that reference to sexually excite yourself. This performance introduces autoeroticism which is, in my opinion, the key to proper understanding of female sexuality. A woman must firstly like herself in order to be appealing to the rest of the world.

The harlotry in the performance is literally that – an act of six hours long seduction of public through play of self-seduction. As I was gaining attention and satisfaction of the audience, I was introducing different elements into play: I tried to teach the doll to walk, I attempted to bring her to life by embracing her, I exchanged clothes with her and made an effort to “please” her, I tried to amuse and to love her. In those moments, the contrast between a living woman and a dead doll was the most visible, and the possibility of identification and exchange of their roles gave away the impression that some observers described as creepy. In addition, in the process of making a puppet doll (on the spot, I further processed the doll, I sewed her nipples, I pressed “her” in order to shape her; on several occasions I kicked “her” because I was unsatisfied with the result). By introducing violence in the process, I wanted to remember that woman grows up and matures through suffering pain and shock, and that sexual pleasure is always on the verge of becoming sick, violent, and ranting.

A.D.: Could you say for yourself that you are a feminist?

G.B.: I am not a feminist. If I understood it well, to be a feminist means to be woman through political discourse. My femininity resists any framework which is the fact observed at many places and in different stages of my life. I think that I am too wild, although as a person I am

thorough, which means "brought into line". On the other hand, theorists have seen my work as a feminist, because I treat femininity and women, and I have nothing against that. Also, I am fine with being defined as doing Camp and gay art. I understand that art must be put in a recognizable framework, and under some theory, because only then works function when they are in the real world of the arts, on stage, in history, in society. But the artist as a person needs to maintain maximum independence, openness and the spirit of inquiry because only then art has the true content and value.

A.D.: What do you think about feminism in art practices in Serbia? Is there any? If so, what are its topics and specificities?

G.B.: If feminism in art is everything that deals with women in an artistic way, then it can be said that there is surprisingly small number of women artists in Serbia whose artworks are dedicated to the topics about their position and life, and about their femininity. On the other side, it would be wrong to suggest others to change themes because "it is better that way". We have to leave the space for other women artists and give them the chance to deal with something else in their artworks because, perhaps, they are happy with their position as women and are interested in something else. It is not impossible. Besides that, some unhappy women who were miserable and had hard lives and who tried to improve their position through feminism and education did not become any happier or less resentful. It is hard to say and define the exact topic of feminist artworks in Serbia because it often seems that they do not deal with anything. I would say that they mostly deal with the theme of violence because it is the experience and problem that most of the women artists had.

A.D.: How would you define the position of women artists here at this moment? How do you see yourself in that context?

J.D.: As I can see it, the position of women artists here in Serbia is necessarily linked to feminist movement namely NGO sector but I do not see myself there. I remember how resentful I was hearing Marina Abramović saying that “feminist ghetto” is not for women artists, but later I had to admit it that she was right. Besides that, I am not very similar to other women. I am an obsessive type. My thoughts are devoted to artistic ideas and to solving fine arts visual problems within my tight budget. In my work, men do not bother me while women do not help me. Feminists are fighting for women’s rights while they are degrading my profession. Art is not politically correct. It is coming from the darkest parts of consciousness, its character is chthonic. Women artists are sorceresses and not followers of any movement (including feminist).

A.D.: Could you say for yourself that you are a feminist?

J.D.: Yes and no. Contemporary feminism is actually collectivism. It does not matter what is good or what is true – what matters is single-mindedness. What is very interesting is the fact that collectively everyone is obsessed with identities, race, sex and gender. Somehow, they are grouped together while everyone is obsessed by himself/herself and that is their profession. Feminists from the 1920s and 1930s were freethinkers and realized in their professions like, for example, Katharine Hepburn, Marlene Dietrich, Mae West, Mary Pickford, Amelia Earhart, Josephine Baker, Lee Miller, and Dora Maar. Those are the women with whom I could identify myself as a feminist and who are feminist icons, and I believe that none of them was saying “I am a feminist”. They lived feminism. As I speak of contemporary feminists, I am one hundred percent with Camille Paglia, Christina Hoff Sommers, and Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

A.D.: What do you think about feminism in art practices in Serbia? Is there any? If so, what are its topics and specificities?

J.D.: What happened to the visual elements? Everybody forgot them, everybody except Maja Milovanović and Biljana Đurđević. I admire their work; when I look at their paintings I

recognize the dedication, their attention to detail and to the whole composition, wonderful colours and shades, full mastery of the material, harmony between an idea and its execution. When I look at Maja's shades I experience beauty. That is something that is missing from our art scene – beauty. Both Serbian and international art scenes are dominated by anti-art as art. But these two women artists are doing beautiful art.

A.D.: What do you think about the effect of contemporary standards of beauty on the personal experience of the body? What is going on culturally and what is happening with you individually?

J.D.: I believe that contemporary standards of beauty can influence the perception of one's body only in case when there is already a problem. I do not think that eating disorders happen because of runaway models. I suffered from bulimia and I cannot blame fashion models for that. The desire to control one's own body has much deeper origins than what happens on TV or what appears in fashion magazines. We are creatures of culture, we produce culture and it produces us. Therefore, I see no reason to blame culture because some women feel bad about their physical appearance. The concept of beauty exists for a long time now, and it has more to do with mathematics (the Golden ratio) than with patriarchy or sexism. And still nobody can define what is *beautiful*. What I do not like culturally today is the uniformity of the very artificiality. I am a big fan of the artificial but identical surgery procedures on women – the same cheekbones, the same lips, the same noses, the same asses, etc. are simply boring. The current feminist trend is remodelling culture, namely it is declaring culture as "sick" so that sick woman can feel "healthy" in it – I do not believe that such a trend has any positive effect on women with eating disorders. Feminism should consider whether it is *good* for women to *feel good* about everything, including about body.

A.D.: Diets, anorexia, bulimia, and other eating disorders are just some of the syndromes of the distorted body image. We could say that your most radical works are from the phase that was dedicated to documenting aesthetic surgeries that you went through. What do you think about those works from this time distance?

J.D.: Today I like those works. I did not like them when I was in feminist movement because feminists did not accept it. They were saying that I was a victim of the culture, that I was a victim of fashion and of patriarchy while I saw it as my triumph over the disease. In the period when I was doing those works, it was between 2001 and 2004, it was considered so radical and

simply awful, that the majority of people who saw it did not know what to think about it. Only a few knew something about eating disorders while plastic surgeries were still a taboo at the time. Feminists wanted a victim, doctors wanted a therapy, curators wanted Camp. I could not satisfy anyone.

A.D.: In the photo where you are documenting the removal of the stitches you look like a puppet mannequin made of fabric waiting to be processed, waiting for a treatment, or for some intervention. That *carnal art* namely your decision to have a *drawing* made of stitches (that you will probably leave) is fascinating because after so much “ironing” and “composing” you leave the scar perhaps as a *proof*, as an aesthetic tattoo that documents *reshaping* of your body.

J.D.: It is like some kind of scar that warriors want to keep; I stopped showing the scars because simply I cannot be a one-trick pony always doing the same trick with the scar. I cannot stay forever stuck in surgeries. I have already forgotten that I have that huge scar. As far as a “puppet made of fabric” and “documenting of body reshaping” are concerned, I myself would not explain it better. I always asked doctors and nurses to make photos, once I woke up from anaesthesia to remind them to bring the camera. For me, there is no greater miracle than human body.

A.D.: Could you name your most important performances that deal with femininity? What would you say about them?

J.D.: I have never entered into a performance with a conscious plan to make it feminine. In art conditions, body loses gender. It is called “Orlando” condition. Even though I am often naked, in performance I am the least feminine; then I am like some creature that emerges out of me and stand in front of the public. The performance “Paragraph 175” was realized four times within the period between 2008 and 2010 in Belgrade and Berlin. For me, it was significant because based on that legislative paragraph, the Nazis actually began the Holocaust. First they arrested homosexuals, mentally sick people, those who looked “insane”, Roma people, prostitutes, women who had abortion... I could easily identify with such people and when I saw that monument to homosexual holocaust victims in Berlin, a whole new world opened to me.

A.D.: The first series of your paintings that I saw was *Dentist Society*. What did you see in the 1990s that caused this series? How much that male “butcher” mentality and bloodthirsty dogs are still a part of our reality and aesthetics here today?

B.Đ.: That series is very important to me for various reasons, primarily because it was an act of initiation into the space of my painting world which is very much separated from the outside factors and I treasure it as my own. The world of butchers is not behind us, I think that the 1990s are global – it is just that our hell is limitless.

A.D.: Topics that you choose, your painting approach and aesthetic rhetorics that you use are very individual and specific in your case. What is also very important are the formats of your works that create, besides other effects, the feeling of the *presence* that is impossible to ignore. How do you experience the work on big formats?

B.Đ.: I want to emphasize the fact that from the ethical point, I have never used real models, real personalities in order to present a scene – it is against my beliefs. I think that if I had done that, I would have abused that person, and I could not be in peace with myself. As far as big format is concerned, it requires a lot not only physically but also psychologically; big format pulls me into the story, and I become a part of that space, as if I lived in the painting, and thus I experience the topic of the painting.

A.D.: Recently, in our casual communication, we spoke about the case of the misuse of your paintings for the purposes of online commercialization of conspiracy theories.

B.Đ.: Fortunately, it is not up to me to give suggestions to viewers of my work. In the case of the *false news*, it must be regulated because not only does it violate my rights as a person but it purposefully pulls the work out of the context and subordinates it to daily political squabbles, thereby negating any clear message that we artists are sending. In all other circumstances, when an observer or interpreter attempts to analyze what I wanted to say, I have no intention to get involved or to write a manifesto, otherwise I would not paint – what is the use of a visual artwork if it needs to be explained additionally?

A.D.: *Living in Oblivion* is the series that also speaks about scenes of interrogation, punishment, and control. Inhumanity, humiliation, manipulation and domination of basic human freedoms start already in childhood.

B.Đ.: The choice of the themes in my case comes from my need to fight injustice because I naively believe that it is the way to expose it. Besides that naivety, I think that it is the only real subliminal way for me to deal with the inevitable in reality as a part of growing up; you do not need to live long to meet injustice, it is always there in order to achieve various goals.

A.D.: Your paintings supply images that remain in the memory even involuntarily. It is impossible to forget them not only because of their themes or visual impressiveness but primarily because of emotions that linger after seeing them. These are the images that are somehow *complete* – they are real, dominant, vivid and strong. It can be said that they, in all their glory and subversion, remain to hover in the mind of the beholder.

B.Đ.: It is nice to hear something like that because once my works are finished I have no longer any attitude towards them, once a painting is complete, it disappears from my memory, and therefore the creation of the new one is always unknown to me. This is a process that takes over the whole of me and is therefore still interactive; it leaves deep scars during the work, and just like any other scars they are painful but once the work is finished they disappear.

A.D.: *Hotbed* is another series that this time represents portraits and group portraits of adolescent girls and/or young women whose exposure and fragility is saddening. What do you think about the relationship between *perpetrator* and *victim* where the culprit remains unsanctioned and how much is our society tolerant to all that?

B.Đ.: Without exception, every society has its own very flexible notions about victims and perpetrators, that relation can be misused when the standards are too loose. It happens when we as part of the system accept various forms of misuse and even take part in them, consciously or unconsciously, sometimes as those exact objects of the system where we were brought up. The main theme in the forest is not the victim but the ability or inability of the individual / hero of the story to protest. If you watch carefully at all my works as a whole, there is the genesis that unveils that battle, in the end is resistance. That is why I see no victim but the process of overcoming the situation, the process of gaining strength not to be a victim.

I believe that society very often makes the huge mistake by pointing out and labelling a person as a victim. That type of stigmatization contributes to the process of further abuse.

A.D.: How would you define the position of women artists here at this moment? How do you see yourself in that context?

B.Đ.: I think that the position of women in Serbia today is far worse than before the acquisition of the so-called “democratic rights” after the socialist society. Today, women are humiliated on many levels, and it has nothing to do with the profession. I think that only women artists are still protected as much as possible because unlike in other professions where women are obliged to do the same things as men but are valued differently, in arts it is still not the case. Artists are degraded when their gender, instead of their creativity, is underlined. No one has become immune to that. I see that even big publishers do not refrain from such labelling. When a woman creates and manages to be good at her job, she is labelled as ambitious, unscrupulous tomboy, while in the same situation man is identified as promising and accomplished – this is something which is typical in almost all domains.

A.D.: Could you say for yourself that you are a feminist?

B.Đ.: I think I am not. As far as themes are concerned, I work on things that are close to me, and it is understandable that they develop in a certain direction. Feminism is limiting in a way, and first of all I am a human; I am very proud of that fact and my ethics is always the most important to me.

A.D.: What do you think about feminism in art practices in Serbia? Is there any? If so, what are its topics and specificities?

B.Đ.: I think that it does not exist, not only in art but in general. It is full of theorization but there is no application and that is where it all ends. It is like art theory that became self-sufficient. Recently I have listened to the discussion of three art theoreticians who were talking for two hours without mentioning an artwork. Imagine how tiring was that conversation full of –isms and decorated with quotes of other art theoreticians.

Interview with Olivera Erić, 2016

A.D.: How would you define the position of women artists in Serbia since 2000?

O.E.: Since 2000, position of women artists in Serbia is very difficult because of social and cultural circumstances/changes that led to the decline of interest in fine arts. Due to the global economic crisis, in Serbia there are a lot of unemployed and poor people who do not have money to buy artworks. On the other hand, rich individuals are not interested to invest their wealth in art. Namely, in a consumer society, people's interest focuses on the purchase of goods in shopping malls while galleries and museums, as well as potential areas to introduce art, are no longer popular for visiting. Also, in the recent years, interest in studying at universities and academies of fine arts has visibly decreased.

A.D.: What is the difference between femininity in art practices and feminism in art practices?

O.E.: In my opinion, no matter whether it comes to artistic creation in Serbia or in the world, the difference is that, feminism in art practices means the conscious use of feminist theories and practices (both by the artist in the artworks and by the theoretician for interpretations), while "femininity" in art practice refers to the characterization describing artistic creation, which is not necessarily consciously motivated by some feminist attitudes. To a potential observer or interpreter of the work, "femininity" can be perceived as something different from the characteristic that can be labelled as "masculine".

A.D.: What is the reason why women from/in Serbia, including artists, do not want to or cannot declare as feminists? (That includes public personalities and also authors who regularly exhibit and promote their work at exhibitions and panels dedicated to feminism).

O.E.: Most female artists of the older generation from Serbia do not declare as feminists because they were born and spent most of their lives in the social system of communism/socialism in which they did not get any impression that they had to acquire any special rights. However, younger artists do not identify themselves as feminists because they are not sufficiently familiar with the theories of feminist movement, and therefore cannot define themselves and their work as feminist. Those women artists agree to have their works

exhibited at such shows because thematic exhibitions devoted to feminism often have the donors and sponsors who finance them.

A.D.: Do gender studies in Serbia primarily use theories and methods of foreign authors for their research and analyses? Literature dedicated to female issues is mostly reduced to successful translations of foreign theoreticians, saturation with foreign quotes or even “masked” copy/paste procedures. Why is it so?

O.E.: Gender studies, in Serbia and abroad, use research (citations) of other researchers, (particularly of the renowned authors published by large publishing houses) because writing a scientific paper/study includes reviewing earlier, already accepted theories. However, often out of personal insecurity, authors reduce their texts to copy/paste procedures and copy attitudes of their colleagues who have already experienced public recognition. The ruling order (the publishing house) deliberately promotes only selected individual authors. Therefore, the author who wants to publish a book often writes texts by adjusting the positions and opinions of the predecessors, whose publications are sold in large circulations. So, the researcher is faced with a choice – to devote his studies to yet unexplored areas of art and feminism (and to remain as unknown creator without published works) or to “indulge” the trodden path of his predecessors and become a publicly recognized writer (of already tested feminist theories that the ruling system approves and accepts).

A.D.: What do you think about the relation of institutions towards art practices that are dealing with femininity and feminism? In 2013, it happened for the first time that the October Salon officially paid attention to that topic. What is the relation between women artists on one side and cultural institutions, galleries, and museums on the other? And finally, what do you think about the relation between women artists and curators (or women curators)?

O.E.: I think that the employees in institutions of culture (cultural centres, museums, galleries) are open for thematic exhibitions that refer to feminism and art. However, I also think that we do not have curators who are educated enough to be able to realize ideas of femininity and feminism through art practice and theoretical interpretations.

A.D.: Could you say for yourself that you are a feminist?

O.E.: Although I graduated in Women's Studies and Cultural and Gender Studies, and have MA and PhD from the study of feminist theory, I do not see myself as a feminist. I think that

feminist movement and its theories cannot improve my life which, for a long time, reduced to survival in both literal and figurative sense. Therefore, depending on the current life circumstances, I can say that I am a communist or an anarchist. This mode of expression and thinking was largely influenced by the adverse environmental circumstances in which I find myself during many years – it is socio-political transition of Serbia to capitalism Serbia, as well as the memory of a happy childhood spent in Yugoslavia which was the communist-socialist and self-government state.

A.D.: What do you think about feminism in art practices in Serbia (1970-2010)? Is there any? If so, what are its topics and specificities?

O.E.: I think that in that period there was no conscious use of feminism in art in Serbia (in terms of pointing out women's disadvantages and searching for ways to improve the status of women). It was mainly political and social system of communism/socialism that by 2000 prevailed in Serbia, and in which women had a favourable position. Women were allowed to work and were paid the same as their male colleagues for the same work. It should be noted that, at the time, women could occupy more important positions in public companies, and that they were not members of the ruling Communist Party. All that contributed to the situation where women artists in Serbia, did not experience their position as unfavourable, and therefore their artistic activity was not feminism engaged.

One can say that artists in Serbia began to practice conscious accepting and creating feminist attitude through art much later. Unlike them, women historians and women theoreticians of art in Serbia became familiar with feminist interpretations earlier. It happened due to the nature of their work, which includes the study of various contemporary theories and practices. Also, a greater interest in feminist studies in fine arts has contributed to the interdisciplinary master and doctoral studies "Theory of Art and Media" at the University of Arts in Belgrade (which were established in 2002 and where Miško Šuvaković from the Faculty of Music was the teaching professor). Trying to interpret present and past works of women artists in a feminist way, referring to the ruling theories of feminism, these theoreticians and art historians have begun to publish texts from the catalogues and monographs consciously dedicated to feminist reading of the works of women-artists.

A.D.: Up to now, I have already written about you as a multitalented author of the Yugoslav Neo-avant-garde. Can you say how you did your transition from androgynous to highly “feminine” at our art scene during the 1970s?

K.L.: In my case, thinking about my sex identity began very early in my childhood when I discovered the difference between sexes. I was intrigued by that difference and wanted to know its essence. I wished I had not been born as a female and desired to be a male or a hermaphrodite. Since I was twenty, I was obsessed by the myth of having an ambiguous sexual identity; and since then, many of my poems have been dedicated to that topic. Perhaps, such a situation was a consequence of my dissatisfaction with the submissive position of woman in society, but of course there was no choice. I accepted the destiny of the vulnerable woman together with all the possibilities that female sensibility offers, and I used them in my struggle for survival, for my “place in the Sun”. As I used that biologically assigned sensibility, I began to discover new, unknown possibilities of my poetry and expressivity in general (for example, in my experience of motherhood). I felt that fertility, ability to reproduce, and motherly love offer the opportunity to prolong existence and oppose nothingness. It is not only fear of death; there I see the key to the gate of Nothingness. In my poetry, female and male subject take turns; sometimes, it is the voice of an angel or androgynous, sometimes, it is the voice of fauna – it transforms in order to achieve direct and new sensual contact with the world. If we speak about erotica, then there is the refusal to belong to one sex only (so, erotica gains another dimension). Perhaps, it was the problem that caused cynical comments and curiosity in our society. It is the fact that my poetry in its initiative and expression mostly bears signs of female sensibility.

Every attempt to realize woman’s individuality in the domain of creative work and her personality (that overcomes societal and moral norms) causes a certain kind of anxiety in her environment. If woman succeeds to at least partially ignore her surroundings, then her surrounding begin to be nervous and, consequently, starts to control and punish her. Unfortunately, just like many other women, I was not ready enough to take fierce opposition from my environment. Even though I was aware of my main goal as a creator, and that what was happening around me was only the by-product of my work, reactions of people and media

thirsty for sensations were tiring me out. Another part of my reaction was to rebel and go ahead. Some people called it courage, and sometimes I was characterized as a brave woman. For me, it was strange that they thought that I was courageous while I felt desperate. I did things out of despair, things that I probably would not have done if they had let me be. In fact, to be a mother of a different child means to be durable as Sisyphus, terrible as Cyclops, and pachyderm as Caliban to counter this and such a culture. Woman has to be fierce and tough in order to succeed, and looking back I probably gained those characteristics of woman-fighter.

A.D.: The Balkans is an independent and unique spiritual and mythological space. Speaking from the point of view of semiotics, does your relation towards folklore, elements of myth, and rituals, primarily concern the local or “universal” approach to archetypes?

K.L.: In the 1960s and 1970s, there was the feeling of freedom and symbolical exit into the world, while here in the Balkans there was the feeling of closure and hopelessness. Today, we are still thirsty for information just as we were back then, but to me it seems that nowadays avant-garde in the Balkans has two ways: it strives towards the outside world but also digs deeply into its roots. That two-way striving was what I was doing in the early 1960s and 1970s. In my artworks, I brought not only cultural heritage from Vojvodina but also elements of Asian folklore. Thus, I became exotic and modern for the international public, and I was also interesting for the local audience because I showed how the authentic and the archaic can be linked with the most avant-garde worldwide.

A.D.: What do you think – how much did *womenspeak* influence your multimedia work? And, how much is it important to you as a personal “filter” and expressive medium? Does it perhaps aim to communicate and differentiate you as an individual?

K.L.: My creativity was well understood by both women and educated men – though some of them attempted maliciously to discover some “femininity” in my poetry. When they did not find it in the usual sentimental-confessional mode, with some comments they attributed certain erotic qualities to my work. It is true that in my poetry there are some sorts of sensuality, but it is sensuality that does not come from the fixed sex of one being, but it comes from the universal sexual and thought changeability.

A.D.: Is the ritualistic aspect of your performances (folklore, lyric poetry, incantations, surrealist aspects, etc.) primarily oriented to achieve transition of woman as a passive object of

artistic reflection towards an active art subject? How much is your artistic “strategy” active and planned in order to shift attention from male active lyrical subject to celebration of love desire of heterosexual woman?

K.L.: In the first place, bisexuality in my poetry and performances refers to a chosen catalogue of sexual symbols, icons, and metonymies. Though bisexuality is the precondition for pleasure, nevertheless, sometimes I make parody about those forms of pleasure: fetishism, masturbation, sodomy, “adoration”, etc. I break taboos, I reaffirm corporeality and lust and I make parody by inscribing femininity into the text. Besides that, I replace the animal world for the human. Sometimes the relation between sexes is the relation of “buy and sell” in which obscenity is the sign of power.

In the world of myth and archetype, I have reached the level of poetry destruction to achieve its essential elements. I wrote “absurd” folk stories and drama texts dwelling on the motives from folk art. I think that in that sphere there are still big opportunities for poetry; and it takes only one step from the absurd world of folk stories to surrealism, pop-art, and happening. Though lyrical subject of my poetry is female, often it also happens that it is male, or that it is both female and male. That being is the sign of completeness, and of the unity of the external and internal. It is an archaic formula of co-existence of all the attributes, even sexual ones, in the divine unity or in the form of perfect human which I often implemented in poetry but also in other forms of artistic expression (happening, performance, theatre, etc.)

A.D.: Was your so-called “omnipresence” in various media (for instance, poetry, theatre, film, visual arts, and performances) with the purpose to use the postmodern strategy of deconstruction of phallogocentrism?

K.L.: In my poetry and performances, Eros and Thanatos get equal attention. Even though, in my poems there is “the joy of body and nature, but also of the spirit and soul” (as the editor Selimir Radulović said for my collection of poems “Shadow of Icarus”) “underneath the avant-garde layer in my poems there is a traditional-religious layer”, and therefore I am actually a poetess “singing from the centre of the tradition that is fading out”.

Provocative forms in creativity have always had reason to offer some new content, and art has always been a reflection of expansion of frontiers. For me, provocation has always been a form to express content. According to the newspapers, I was labeled as “the first lady of provocation” because of my performances (which employed rituals of fertility and intense sexuality). Because of my photos in the shamanic costume from which one “disobedient”

breast protruded, I aroused condemnation and rebuke for violation of morality in the circles of conservatives. Against all odds (and perhaps because of it), I became a legend of the avant-garde of the 1970s and the trademark of freedom, courage, and defiance. Also, judging by the comments on internet forums, I remained synonymous with provocation and degradation of phallogocentrism.

A.D.: Stereotypical identification of women with primitive, primal, animal and, therefore, diabolical and deviant is characteristic for the matrix of male logos of patriarchy. How did you deal with that all as a woman artist (especially at the time of your beginnings)?

K.L.: I had to bear a double burden: all responsibilities and destiny of both a patriarchal woman and of a woman who won her emancipation alone. It caused neurosis but that neurosis became for me a source of inspiration and creativity. Public, beautiful and erotic woman becomes sexual target, object and idol. For me that myth was a burden, and it was hard to bear it – it pushed me into loneliness. It was impossible to have normal contact with people because my every relation was characterized through that prism. I did not negate either my femininity or my biological role; I did not want to become an appealing stereotype but I also could not neglect myself either (like women that I saw in America). I think that sexual play is a ritual in which one side must like another and vice versa, and in that play sometimes I took an active part which horrified most men. Double moral broke on me on all levels – from family and newspapers to socio-political life.

A.D.: Do you think that your works play a certain role in the so-called transition from “witch” to “shaman”? Is connecting of feminine identity with nature, mythology, magic, religion, and spirituality doomed to be gender “stigmatized”?

K.L.: In my poetry and performances, I revived archaic origins and archetypes because they are the elements of life and human nature that change. Since the ancient times, we have felt and thought in similar ways. The desire for freedom, just like love or sexuality (and those are not characteristics of witches only), cannot be rooted out of humans. I can feel that today we are unhappy in a different way because we do not know how to live in family and community the way we want – we are lonely nowadays. Today in their loneliness not only women but also men are unhappy.

In my poetry and performances, nature is much more present than body and nudity. Hand-made objects also have an important role (for me, both Homo faber and Homo ludens matter).

However the most important are natural phenomena, forces of nature and creations of nature. I am interested in the unknown and incomprehensible. Wind, water and basic natural elements have always played an important role in my creative work. Human body is like wood or leaves – it is a raw material for creativity. Also items: scissors, knife, chairs, doors, windows are all symbols. Dream, pain, joy, and laughter do not occur only in the poems but also in performances. Laughter is a motif that is often repeated. Therefore, I use my voice not only to vocalize poetic contents but to evoke the voice of ancient people and the way they were singing-speaking. Onomatopoeic words, laughter and tears are present in my songs and they are not only means of expression but they are often the very content. For instance, a scream has a wide range of meanings in my performances (in phonic poetry and in written poetry). Scream for me is a condensed form of expression of feeling or gesture, sometimes even too dense expression. Repetitions, spells and rhymes to poets and shamans serve as symbolic ladder to act as a mediator between the individual and the higher powers.

A.D.: Could you compare position of women artists in Serbia (then Yugoslavia) at the times when you began your artistic career and today's position of female authors in Serbia?

K.L.: I opted radically for an artistic view of the world – my whole life has been a synthesis of performance, such as public stripping, announcing my own death, and random events. In all that, I never idealized myself, and I experienced all aspects and contradictions of it like for example, my nude photographs, and the need to keep for the audience an illusion of *femme fatale*, while in my real life in Novi Sad I lived in an apartment of 18 square meters, with minimum resources to support myself and my son. Simply, I did not allow much insight into my life. I think that's all that I was doing was socially, ethnically, and geographically justified, but if only I had been two hundred kilometres away in any other direction, everything would have been different.

I was fortunate to have aroused the interest of the people. Today, unfortunately, it is not an advantage to be different; it is even very big drawback because people exclude those who are different. Sometimes diversity caused curiosity in Yugoslavia, and for me to be Hungarian was an advantage. I fit in the multi-ethnic culture, and I lived in symbiosis with Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, Romanians, Russians and other nationalities – that environment inspired me to create.

A.D.: Some Serbian women artists refused to answer interview questions about feminism and to give a direct reply about being a feminist or not. What do you think about the fact that female authors from here stubbornly continue to reject any kind of identification with feminist issues? Could you say that you are a feminist and if so why?

K.L.: At the time, my artistic concept overlapped with the process of emancipation of women in Yugoslavia and today they often associate me with feminism. Feminists often put me on their flag even though I had my own battle for emancipation in my family, at my work and in society; I was never against men. My marriage was traditional, being a mother, work and studies occupied my time so much that I had no time to involve into the work of feminist and other avant-garde movements. I never negated femininity; I was struggling against the humiliation and oppression of a woman and an artist. When, because of the published photo from my performance and my "absence of self-criticism", I was expelled from the Yugoslav Communist Party, I realized that the profession of actress and performer was equated with the profession of prostitute.

A.D.: For some time now, you have been living and working between Belgrade and New York. Taking into consideration the distance, how do you see your work and Serbian art scene at the moment?

M.M.: This is my sixth year “jumping” between Europe and America; I am trying to balance between the desire to create art and the desire to deal with art professionally and not as with a hobby. New York is the epicentre of the art market, but definitely not what I had romantically imagined before leaving in 2011 when I got *Young Visual Artist Award* when I went to the ISCP residence. I have to admit that after New York, I began to value more our scene again though it has neither the infrastructure nor the market and certainly not the audience, but here are some crazy enthusiasm and certainly some things to be said.

A.D.: Could you say for yourself that you are a feminist?

M.M.: (Usually I do not answer this question and I find pleasure in following the analyses that intend to classify my work as chauvinist or as feminist). Feminist politics in my work comes more as a side effect. I proceed from the feminine *otherness*, I perform the process of becoming a woman in contemporary patriarchal and consumerist society. Through performative practices, I am trying to expose and display social pressure on women's bodies and to indicate that the issues of freedom and coercion of women are actually inseparable.

In the most recent video work *Womb*, which consists of recording pulsating ultrasound of the uterus without any narrative progression, dialectically opposed to the sound image, female voices polyphony of the matrilineal family members (great-grandmother, grandmother, mother) are speaking about female primary roles and responsibilities. In this case, I tried to place the focus on the economy of the female body within the economy of society, to display the pressure not only on the female body but on the very role of woman in society and to discuss the practices of resistance to patriarchy. In all my works, I try to leave the room for different interpretations – in fact, I play with the stereotypical girly aesthetics that is not very much inherent in feminist practice but the problematized content and my fight for the autonomy of female body certainly are.

A.D.: What do you think about feminism in art practices in Serbia? Is there any? If so, what are its topics and specificities?

M.M.: In the Balkans, the concept of a woman feminist still indicates a “sexless wreck” intellectual who does not shave, uses no makeup and despises men. Here, despite all the emancipation, woman’s place is in the kitchen but with the “upgraded” nails – she is still pushed only into the stereotypes of whore, mother or saint.

Feminist organizations and groups are not sufficiently strategically literate as a result of operating within closed structures, and of not being exposed to the criticism of public opinion, which protects them sometimes, and in some cases that can be counterproductive.

I often participate in feminist debates, exhibitions, festivals and, as much as I support them and I always will, every time as a rule I get into conflict with the views of the organizers or participants but I “console” myself knowing that most of the thoughtful and substantiated criticism of feminism came from among feminists themselves, and that some feminist currents resulted from the opposition to others. For me, an exhibition cannot be considered “feminist” just because participants are women doing needlework around their menstrual stain while the participation of transgender person at the show is prohibited. It is interesting that even though perhaps we skipped some stages in the development, the fourth wave of feminism very much “splashes” the Internet with the new generation of cyberfeminists.

A.D.: What is your opinion about the effect of contemporary standards of beauty on the personal experience of the body? What is going on culturally and what is happening with you individually? Do you believe that it is possible to avoid this kind of internalization of stereotypes – about beauty, fashion, “image”, and more importantly, gender stereotypes?

M.M.: My seven year long project *Pressure Me*, through different media (video/gif, sculpture, crafts, performance), tried to represent and investigate the social pressure on women's bodies through dealing with all the painful rituals of everyday life that women exert in order to reach/achieve/converge into socially constructed ideals of beauty. This was done by researching physical restrictions and pleasures in deprivation and by investigating obsessive desire to control such a complex system like body. Physical imperative of female body is constituted by validated values of society, while its implementation is taking part within private spaces, facilities, bathrooms, bedrooms and lounges. This produces an ambivalent attitude towards woman’s body that in the private area appears as inadequate, and it is only through working on it, like the creation of artistic practice, turned into something decent for

exposure. This phenomenon combines the simultaneous existence of specific shame and pride, contempt and satisfaction over the body as a canvas or a material object that changes from one thing to another but resists taking a final/satisfactory form.

A.D.: Diets, anorexia, bulimia, and other eating disorders are just some of the syndromes of the distorted body image. Your autobiographical works that deal with this topic in the form of artistic documenting offer various views of stages of anorexia. How much does such a condition blur the creative process and how much that very work is actually a healthy side effect that accelerates the healing? Are those artworks perhaps the *evidence* that there might be the possibility of healing or are they the reminders that protect you from a relapse?

M.M.: Problems with food are just a symptom of a much deeper emotional disorders while food and weight obsession are just symptoms. When I was little I suffered from anorexia, and later in college I tried to recreate it in the form of an artistic project *C'mon Barbie Lets Go Party* in which I documented each day of starvation, with the photographs of my body, tables with calorie values of food that would be eaten or not, medical reports. At the time, I literally existed as *alive* Barbie – as an exhibitionistic body art on heels and with a crown on my head. Of course, my hilarious plan got so out of control so much I could not stop myself. So, my weight reached 28 kilos, I lost my hair, my organs were falling apart and I was in a wheelchair. Since the doctors have already given up on me saying that I would not survive, it was the moment to think of a new project where I would turn corpse into a pin-up body. That process was documented in the work *Hospitalization* (very similar to the previous one where every day was documented through photos, medical reports, etc.) which covered the period of ten months long recovery. What is important to note is that in both processes, two Marinas are participating. One Marina who supervises, punishes and directs the entire work, and the other who sacrifices, who is a submissive body. The problem was that the same disorder sucked me into it but at the same time it also saved me – every time I had a crisis I would turn the camera on and then there was no suffering because I was doing it for my work.

My favourite work from this opus is *Anorexia: Before and After* which is a sarcastic comment on the standard “before/after” photos of my body before leaving the hospital (28kg) and after (51kg) so that my shape depends on the angle of view.

After the healing I started to work as a consultant for eating disorders at the Institute of Endocrinology, I launched an initiative for the establishment of online counselling service, and

continued to work on the topics about body control, deprivation and pleasure, consumption and consumerism.

A.D.: “Pink aesthetics”, saturation with “glazed” visual details, emphasis on “styling”, girly image, fashion, items of daily use for women, installations of objects, consumerism, gender stereotypes, numerous self-portraits, etc. are just some of the concepts that consistently follow your work in photography. Is there a danger that the effect of masking (masquerade) may become its own parody? Even though you built “recognizable” work, does it still manage to keep its critical and subversive power?

M.M.: Of all colours, pink has the most subversive potential. When I put a Barbie head on the photograph of the 28 kilos body placed between the calorie lists, medical reports and bold, rose, tinsel letters saying “fat pig” in a pink girly diaries of anorexia, or when I do the embroidery of statements of girls about pain and pressure on their bodies in a light rose thread on the light rose satin corset, or when I map my entire body in pink tattoos that represent tailoring meter on my boobs, waist, hips, and thighs to tie them up into the “ideal proportions”, it is clear that pink colour and its aesthetics I use as a “glaze” in order to conceal/disguise all that is painful, brutal and vulnerable and to force the audience to swallow that content. Perhaps, interpretation of my work is even more problematic because it is my own style and aesthetics since always, because both in my private life and in my art I *am* my work. It “turns me on” to look like Barbie, I like to exaggerate that feminine aesthetics and to bring it to the level of travesty so much that it becomes a parody and criticism.

A.D.: How do you see corporeality and its expressivity when compared to its performativity? What does your body, as a medium that you place in the forefront in various ways, represent for you? From physiology, beautification, starvation and eating disorders to being tattooed, posing and general *exposure*, expression and treatments of the body vary but what is it for you essentially – personally and artistically?

M.M.: Perhaps it is because I have body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) but since always I have treated my body as a toy – first, it was my dolly and later it turned into a medium. In my work, my body (female body) is the central motif and medium, subject and object. My research about body started with my anorexia problem and with the artworks about restrictions, body rejection and obsession to control it; then there are works about consumerism and distorted body image in media and also series about ideals of female beauty imposed by the society. I

see female body as a construct, as a product of repression of various social-political mechanisms that throughout my opus I want to unmask. Anorexic body, pin-up body or whatever body – it is about transformations; I do not care about the final outcome but I am interested in fluidity, in possible models.

In previous works, I treated the body as an object in the most literal sense while recently I have emphasized body practices and corporeal experiences in which I am investigating processes of de/subjectification (again) by performing activities that are gender related as female within the society.

A.D.: What is *The Third Belgrade*? What is its conception and what is your role in it?

M.M.: Unfortunately, *The Third Belgrade* does not exist anymore; it functioned for five years as independent artistic association founded in 2010 with the idea of testing the model of collective work. This free artists' cooperative was initiated by artists: Selman Trtovac, Milorad Mladenović, Anica Vučetić, Olivera Parlić, Radoš Antonijević, Marko Marković, Sanja Latinović and me; it was inspired by the model in which farmers associated their resources in order to make production more efficient. After the collapse of the old structures in culture, this was one way to mark the spot for artists and artistic activities and to investigate self-organization models of artistic autonomy.

The Third Belgrade was created because a group of artists wanted to react about numerous problems in art and society. It was the product of the need to create a new micro-utopia, a new dislocated and parallel world within the micro-political context, an artistic "shelter", with aim to network with similar artistic initiatives. In that way, there was a chance to overcome problems of fragmentation, arbitrariness, manipulation, instrumentalization of art by political elites with purpose of their self-preservation. Artists from *The Third Belgrade* questioned what an artist can, or what an artist has to do! What an individual artist is doing? This was the main reason for the clustering, networking, creating of new structures on the art scene, a new and different mental space for art and culture in general. That part of thinking about artistic strategy refers to the question of how the artist conquers a new space, where the space is located and what are the prospects of that space! Here we come to the issues of possible utopias that are an existential question.

"The Third Belgrade is a successful experiment that collapsed heroically" (Selman Trtovac)

A.D.: Diets, anorexia, bulimia, and other eating disorders are just some of the syndromes of the distorted body image. What do you think about those issues as a topic that some authors are dealing with?

M.M.: Those topics are very current at the moment, and it seems to me that every woman had to undergo contemplating them. Simply, it all seems to be a part of female nature or female defence mechanism; it is something that woman unconsciously experiences as the method of solving problems. I myself have already gone through all the phases of deliberations and situations about it all. I made my own defence system to protect myself from media influence and imposed aesthetic norms

I think that everything is fine when a woman is emotionally balanced and aware of it all; however, anorexia, bulimia, and overindulgence are extreme because what make a woman divine, besides beauty, are also divine and complex emotions. I believe that such struggle is natural for women just as ego struggle is normal for men. Of course, nothing can be that clearly defined between sexes but it is the fact that those are the problems that persist and that could be cured with love and harmony and not with media censorship.

A.D.: What do you think about the effect of contemporary standards of beauty on the personal experience of the body? What is going on culturally and what is happening with you individually? For example, in Magazine series you are dealing with the portrait in combination with the idea of product or consumerism.

M.M.: I think that today media are something completely different than what they should be by definition – they are simulacrum of fake public opinion, and on the other hand, the alternative are activists who fight against the content of the media but do not fight against the system of media abuse. Make-up titles in these paintings are the terms of “unconscious” changes. We believe that it is something that can be wiped like lipstick but painting (oil on canvas) as a medium is eternal, or at least it is done with such an intention. So, those terms contain meanings but also “anti-meanings”. In essence, meaning and “anti-meanings” are very important to me personally, and for the content of my work. I do not care that much about

visual artistry; what matters to me are visual narratives and playing with the meaning, symbolism and stereotypes.

A.A.: You said that there was a time when you began to think intensively about body and pain because body is the space that can be *penetrated*. Taking into consideration that you had already worked with space and void, you started to represent body as palpable space and void.

M.M.: I started to paint everything around trying to create some new appropriations, meaning and “anti-meaning”. All that happened under the influence of life circumstances, of a meditative process of painting, or of redrafting patterns. In fact, that was built on the basis of the canonical icon painting, of the so-called “Byzantine abstraction” which brought me to a complex emotional state which was actually the feeling that I wanted to achieve in the viewer.

A.D.: Contemplations about *corporeality*, about body as a restrictive category, about body as a dungeon occur in relation to the topic of reproduction, women's physiology and the imposed motherhood as woman's debt to patriarchy. *Around the Cross* and *Moon* offer a kind of portrait of the body where this first, resembling a Renaissance style image, makes the impression of fragility and curves while the latter, just as the planet itself, is enticing but also disturbing.

M.M.: Then, just like now, I am trying to use my paintings in order to pose a question, to create an emotion. I even wanted to avoid gender identity of the author, here myself, but it was impossible. I wanted those bodies to provoke but to be beautiful at the same time. For me, painting as a process in these cases was hard because I was trying to do make them technically perfect. *Around the Cross* is the image of female stomach; when I was doing it, I realized that I wanted it to look like a space and not like a mass or skin matter but nevertheless I wanted to keep the shape of the stomach. Actually, it is not a pregnant belly but some people experience it as pregnant because of the shape and composition. It represents both woman's fragility and vulnerability and motherhood and stomach as the space within that context.

Moon was created under the strong influence of my reflections on motherhood. I must say that I was a type of person who had never been interested in having children but after the abortion, it changed because I was concentrated on my body, on my female nature, both biologically and physiologically, and it was when I realized that I *did* have that need within myself. It did not happen because the environment pressured me; on the contrary, the pressure produced the previous resistance I had. Anyway, today I still resist any kind of

pressure that is imposed to me about societal norms just like I did twenty years ago. Woman has the right to do what she wants with her body, and that is an inalienable right. The question I wanted to make was “deep inside, what do you really want?” For women, it *is* a very complex and uncomfortable issue.

A.D.: *Shape* is the painting about body through treatments of cosmetic surgery and aesthetics, i.e. visual cropping and patching of physicality and identity. How would you comment on this group of works?

M. M.: That was a period when painting as a medium was not enough but at the time I was not able to recognize that. It was when all the archaic elements linked to be integrated into a single identity, so I simply decided to sew them on. In addition, I painted works about surgeries, metal implants, a man in bed like a cyborg with the implant hand, etc. I was too focused and eager to show the matter and create the impression of space.

A.D.: What characterizes your art besides other things are portraits and self-portraits. What I notice in them is a kind of stylistically “cold” treatment. Do you think that those self-portraits of yours bear a kind of the so-called *womenspeak* or, nevertheless, that they deviate from that genre?

M.M.: At that stage I was completely crazy about the early Renaissance and about Byzantine art. I wanted to connect it all to a single principle: the canonical procedure, introspection and realistic perception of nature. My self-portraits were meditation, the first conceptual approach to painting procedure, which I later applied in different forms. Portraits are frontal because ID cards photographs and frescos are exactly like that. The form that did not interest me, I just wanted to see what would turn out if I focusED on the process of transferring the same shape and build momentum by introducing various elements: from Botticelli’s paintings, packagings, different stylistic approaches to colours, etc.

A.D.: When we remember your exhibition *This is Not the First Time* (2013) which dealt with the question *What a woman artist can do?*, there is the text about the usual conditions in which an author is trying to realize an art project in Serbia. What a woman artist *has to do*? Could you comment on that *phenomenon* of the local art institutions?

M.M.: Unfortunately, I have to say that from today's point of view, I'm not too proud of that text. It does not mean that things are better, but it means that I was naive because I entered

into political games on the art scene and, after a while, I realized that I was cheated to write in favor of a particular community of interest. Our society, just like any other small provincial environment, is trapped in nepotism, political powers and huge chauvinism that are expressed through complexes and the desire to be someone else or exaggerating one's own importance. In such a society, if you do not support it, if you are alone, you are usually bypassed in all selections. Let's not kid ourselves, to a lesser or greater extent, it has always been the case. Immediately after graduation, I had to take a job in order to survive. On one hand, it takes away valuable time, but it gives me freedom and independence; my priority is to reach that position where I am independent. The only successful independent artist living from their work, and again she's a woman, is Biljana Đurđević.

A.D.: How would you define the position of women artists here at this moment? How do you see yourself in that context?

M.M.: We have a long tradition of emancipated women in arts. I could not say that women's position is systemically bad, but women by their nature are less corrupted, they are mothers, they have less time, and they think in a more complex way. Nevertheless, besides that all, we have great artists, founders of art movements and identities. Marina Abramović (as much as I do not like her theatricalization of performance and body art) is undoubtedly the best artist of the second half of the 20th century.

A.D.: Could you say for yourself that you are a feminist?

M.M.: Today feminism is completely different from my "myth" about it. For me, aggressive propaganda of contemporary feminism is more anti-feminist, it is against feminine nature and it only aims to gain male power positions. I think feminism was destroyed by the community of women with political ambitions. However, I recently met a colleague, beautiful, brave and free activist and artist Jovana Dimitrijević who pointed out a different thinking about feminism; primarily with her sincerity, she encouraged me to be confident in my views. That is why it is still necessary to fight for the preservation of certain values. Somehow, I believe that there are a lot of women who share our opinion but who (just like I used to) think that they are alone.

A.D.: What do you think about feminism in art practices in Serbia? Is there any? If so, what are its topics and specificities?

M.M.: If you ask me within the context of feminism which I cherish, I would have to say that all women are feminist artists. For me, feminism is “observing reality from the position of woman” and rare is a woman that could avoid such a context. As for the contemporary feminist community, I believe that an artist has to respond to the topic but in a politically correct way. The only thing I know is that such art projects have strong financial support from philanthropic European funds, but I do not follow that scene.

A.D.: Materials that you choose and the way you treat them in order to express a certain concept are very personal. What are your most important criteria when deciding what material and process you will use?

O.P.: The impulse towards a certain material is never a rational decision, it is more of an intuitive reaction; later, during the work I begin to realize why I chose that material. Surely, tactile characteristics and the possibility to model the material are very important as well but definitely they are never the “neutral” materials but those which offer possibility of transformation – they are “marked” or already contextualized. What attracts me is the challenge that they could be something else. For me, it was always important to have a spectator wonder about what has been done than to get an artifact or unchangeable thing. For some of my work, I could even say that they are “performative” objects.

A.D.: How do Eros, resistance and touch reflect in your PhD project? Where are their points of encounter and cross-section?

O. P .: Eros is a big topic although there are elements that at the first glance seem to conclude that my work is based on motifs belonging to this topic, I think that eroticism in my work actually comes from the attitude towards materials and objects that I use. It is also the quest for pleasure and I find satisfaction in Eros of lucidity. Resistance and touch are the principles that I use in practice, they are not only poetic components. I believe that everything is based on the laws of action and reaction, and that this is one of the ways of self-construction. The identity develops through conflict and confrontation. In this case, the conflicting relationship of touch and resistance is only an illusion; they have a common task which is to create new meanings.

A.D.: What do you think about the effect of contemporary standards of beauty on the personal experience of the body? What is going on culturally and what is happening with you individually?

O.P.: Standard is a kind of matrix where any deviation is considered undesirable. Things get even more complicated because they are established in relation to the personal territory-body

by eliminating subtle personal freedoms and exploiting it for the purposes of the entertainment industry and profit. The right to be different in such a system is abolished because it is easier to control a uniform mass. I have always been attracted to differences, deviations from the norm, transgressions, and mistakes. I can surely say that I cherish a kind of affection for such events and often in the broadest sense I question them in my work. Personally, I feel that social aesthetic norms were engraved into me and that what my body remembers of it gets manifested through my works.

A.D.: As far as your sculptures are concerned, how much of corporeality can be recognized in them?

O. P.: The items that we use are always designed in a specific way in relation to the body, but they say something about ourselves. Associative forms in the works certainly establish a clear link with the body, but the feeling of physicality and corporeality comes from the tactile properties of the materials used as well as from the way they were treated. Their primary function is suppressed; new circuits deserve attention not because of their function but because of their power to be something else. On the contrary, clear distinction between the meanings of the object and the metaphor does not exist.

A.D.: You have created a very coherent corpus of works which by natural inertia conceptually continue one to another. The beauty and attraction go together with the cold and distance; forms that allure to be touched at the same time upset and repulse.

O. P.: The best way to contemplate things is through contrast which is perhaps why in my work different principles are so often opposed. In addition, identity develops through conflict and confrontation and within that uncertain and unstable area the best things that an individual can make are generated.

A.D.: Even though there might be a tendency to interpret your works as *feminine* because of their visual qualities, they actually reflect a critical and subversive aspect that questions value systems of contemporary culture, of identity but also of gender stereotypes.

O.P.: I intend to make my works exist as questions and that need for questioning is actually an attitude. While they are appealing to the eye, their function is not only to give pleasure to the viewer with their beauty but also to disturb, to shake our inertia in order to initiate the review of what is questioned. Behind the banality of everyday objects, it is possible to discover new

layers of meaning to question the stereotypes. Sometimes people are not even aware of their being hostages of prejudices. For them it is just a routine to accept items that are used every day. If I manage to pull the viewer into this kind of research and examination, my quest succeeds. In this increasingly indifferent world, where we find less and less power to rebel, I wish my work to be perceived as an act of resistance and rebellion but also as a promise of hope.

A.D.: How would you define the position of women artists here at this moment? How do you see yourself in that context?

O.P.: To be an artist and to do art in Serbia today is almost “mission impossible” for us all regardless of gender. The budget for culture is at the level of statistical error with a tendency towards continual reduction. Facilities for cultural activities give way to those which are unscrupulously profit-oriented. There is neither a system to solve the issues of getting a studio nor artists are in financial position to gain some area for work, professional associations are in absolute disintegration, etc. In such aggravated professional circumstances women artists often get into a dilemma: profession or children. Of course that is a false choice because these two things are not mutually exclusive, and of course it is not an easy and simple way but if you are not able to provide personal existence it seems difficult to dare to have a child. That is a question for everyone and not only for women. Personally, I think that I am lucky – I teach, I have a child, and a husband with whom I share all obligations. In addition, the situation has improved compared to the time when I studied because now at the sculpture department we also have women professors which previously was not the case.

A.D.: Could you say for yourself that you are a feminist?

O.P.: Of all the labels, the only one that I could accept is the label of sculptress (and it does not necessarily mean that it will be forever). Labels are always reductions and therefore I consider them unacceptable when it comes to complex issues. Also, when we try to talk about feminism, we must bear in mind that radically opposed views are classified as feminist. My position could be described as resistance to discrimination and inequality that are based on sexual difference, also as resistance to gender stereotypes. I see myself as a part of the struggle for liberation from any form of exclusion of other creatures. Definitely, my works are critical of the issues that are also the subject of criticism of feminist considerations. Nevertheless, it is important to say that they are not illustrations stemming from feminist

attitudes. They were created out of necessity and attempt to understand my experience of being in the world today.

A.D.: You have been living and working in Costa Rica for some time now. Taking into consideration the distance, how do you see your work and Serbian art scene now?³⁶³

J.R.: I haven't been following events of the Serbian art scene for the past five years - partly, because of the remoteness of the current location where I live in and partly because of my decision to disconnect from the art world in general. Since the last video documentary I worked on (*State of Exception Proved to Be the Rule*), together with Eduard Freudmann, I had a notion that participating in or organizing any kind of art events in Serbia was, in a way, pointless. To agree to exhibit after what happened on the opening of the *EXCEPTION, Contemporary Art Scene from Priština* for me means to agree on denying the same right to someone else; and I cannot agree to that. After the initial collective support to influence government bodies to do something about the exhibition ban has worn off, I did what I saw as my last refuge. I moved out and focused on something else.

In 2015 or 2016 there was another scandal that shook the art scene with appointing unqualified person to run KCB (Belgrade Cultural Centre). This made some ripples and waves in the media, but after only a few months, everything was normal again. I don't see that anything can change until there is this minimum of solidarity amongst interested parties to support such basic rights. "It doesn't affect me" attitude is baffling to me. I'd rather not be part of the scene at all than agree to such a treatment (where the state operates above the law and in constant "state of exception").

A.D.: When we speak about the painting technique and the visual treatment that you use for the surface and image processing, in your painting and in your attitude towards representing, it is characteristic that you deliberately choose the type of realization in accordance with the theme and with the way you want to introduce it. What could you say about the creative aspect and about your relationship to painting?

³⁶³ This interview was originally done in English

J.R.: Painting IS a *techne*, or an acquired craftsmanship/art technique itself. It's one of many media one can use to convey their art. It may seem a bit remote, but I view a painting as an event, a unique event in the time/space continuum we all are part of. A painting is trapped in the given physical form and conveys metaphysical values that can be both intentional and unintentional. The message itself is more important than the medium (along with the context of where the message is being created, for whom it is meant, or reasons behind why it's being shared).

A.D.: *The Painting* which represents the insertion of tampon into vagina is the obvious comment on *cultural politics* and *aesthetics* of representing female anatomy for the purpose of advertisement. That directness and nakedness do not offend but make us concentrate unconsciously more into the anatomy and details. How do you comment on this work today?

J.R.: The awkward anatomy of the simplified graphic of the original image truly shocked me the first time I saw it. That happened while I was trying to grasp the concept of an applicator in a small bathroom of a hotel room I was sharing with few more girls while living abroad. I had a strong need to comment on it; blow up that image to megalomaniac proportions and reproduce it with "high fidelity". As I was trying to enlarge the image and prepare it for copying, suddenly the whole process of doing enlarging became important – the scan, the pixelization of the image, the print that I placed on an empty canvas and from which I reproduced every little pixel one by one.

The Painting, as I refer to it, is focused on exposing this oddity of an intimate moment but also became a statement about the medium of painting itself. Even more, about appropriating/hijacking that image from a product manual that has been stripped down of any corporeality* and giving it unwarranted attention to a point that it becomes voluptuous, intimate and personal again.

A.D.: *Needlepoint* is specific for many reasons, not only because you won the Award of 43rd October Salon in Belgrade with it, but also because it caused a great deal of attention. To what extent is needlepoint technique actually an ironical comment on the (female) handiworks and the "allowed" female creativity? What about the stereotypes of the so-called *womenspeak* in art for example? How does this work deal with the theme of women's passivity regarding their sexuality? Or is it about the pre-engineered gender roles not only in pornography but also in sex in general?

J.R.: *Needlepoint* was done immediately after *the Painting*, and became its antithesis. The (supposed) passionate sexual act recorded on a photo was dulled down into a precise scheme, and machine-like reproduced in a cold medium of a needlepoint. The comment is not so much ironical as it is truthful to its medium – there is minimum creativity involved in producing a needlepoint. In fact, the only way to be creative with Willers' needlepoints is to make a mistake while transferring the pre-coded colour scheme from paper to canvas.

Replacing the subject of idyllic winter scenes with a fellatio, the most common image found on the internet nowadays, brings to the front the issue of its outdatedness. Can such media be contemporary? If so, what can be an appropriate subject? Is machine-like reproduction of sex in porn its equivalent?

A.D.: Your video from the Art Biennial in Vršac, *Appropriate Cultural-Artistic Program*, is no longer available in the form of video and it is possible to find only a couple of film stills. In our informal communication, you already mentioned some details about that work and the whole situation about the biennial. What is your opinion about it now?

J.R.: Yes, I mentioned that the work was kind of a statement about the art scene of that time and more specifically, about art production revolving around any big group exhibitions. The *Appropriate Cultural-Artistic Program* was presented at the Vršac Biennial in 2004; the event was curated by Sinisa Mitrović, Ana Nikitović and Jelena Vesić, and followed by behind-the-scene 'scandals' mainly related to financing and production of the exhibition. The optimistic and ambitious curatorial crew with high hopes and dreams, ran hard into a wall of Serbian sleepy-town reality. I thought that showing a composition of two ready-made amateur lesbian scenes done in local production were appropriate.

A.D.: *Crossover* was your exhibition of the installation that dealt with the role of the media in formation of representations and prejudices about woman as the *other*. In this case, this *otherness* refers to the process of relativization of origin, profession and situational conditioning of the group of women. What do you think – how cultural constructions of stereotypes influence global vision of woman as the *other* and, consequently, in a way justify violence against her?

J.R.: The importance of media influence and how it shapes the views and opinions in the general public is becoming more visible nowadays, just by seeing what went down in recent US elections. As the proponents of "traditional values" are getting more and more vocal and have

better media coverage, gender roles are being outlined harder and separated further. (The topic of abortion in Serbia is currently in the focus of the public, a long-time established human right (post WW2) is all of a sudden being questioned by the political parties in power.) It's important to note that the violence towards women is relativized to a point of it being nonsensical and made invisible. Invisibility is the constitutional point of the violence. Justification is secondary, as violence is not perceived as such; it is internalized and pacified always having a different narrative in the focus.

A.D.: As we speak about the video *Little Red Riding Hood*, it could be said that it is about topics like for example overvaluation of love, false choice and installation of the concept of asexual motherhood. What could you say about this work?

J.R.: *Little Red Riding Hood* is a deconstruction of one of the oldest fairy tales/narratives that are shared across the European continent for centuries. Internalized by every child brought up in modern times since the age of five, the story is re-told with roles divided between theoretical constructs such as ego, id, superego, asexual maternity, and sexuality, in a form of a video.

It's an attempt to bring into focus the psychological mechanism in its background. The sharp division between the roles of the mother and of a whore (sexually liberated woman), always present in patriarchal societies, is preached through a cautious coming-of-age tale. The video gives a different point of view in which, this duality of the mother/whore is presented as two sides of the same coin and the choice between them is proclaimed as false.

A.D.: Do girls have to "juggle" between their Ego, Super-Ego and Id in order to meet parental expectations regarding the realization of their so-called heterosexual norms? Do you think that such a situation is pronounced here in Serbia or is it psychological protocol in patriarchal societies in general?

J.R.: I think "practicing" our gender roles as part of the instalment of the heterosexual normative from the early childhood is universal for all patriarchal cultures. The intensity and sheer extent of what that "training" includes differ, depending on social context one lives in and the relations they maintain. It can be analyzed on a general level, including influence of the state/country laws and customs, religion, language one uses, but it can be drilled down all the way to the neighbourhood they live in, and social circles they are part of, where often the unwritten/customary laws have more significance for the individual than the official ones.

Serbia has its fair share of gender role practice, which is heavily influenced by historical context and all aforementioned relations.

A.D.: How would you characterize the position of women artists here at this moment? How do you see yourself in that context?

J.R.: I really cannot relate to this role at the moment, but time and again I see that certain artists with very intriguing practices are not shown attention they deserve. Female artists are always more invisible, yes, but this goes above gender and affects artists across the board.

A.D.: Could you say for yourself that you are a feminist?

J.R.: Yes, I am a feminist. Simply just by the way I live my life. I present an example of something outside of the norm: I live on my own, as an immigrant in a non-developed country, whose majority of population is deeply religious and family-oriented. Feminism for me is an everyday opportunity to give (even to BE) a different point of view on any possible topic it can reflect on, be it in economical, political, or any other context.

A.D.: What do you think about feminism in art practices in Serbia? Is there any? If so, what are its topics and specificities?

J.R.: Yes, feminism in Serbian art exists for a long time now, and the topics are changing over time, together with the context they emerge in. Since Katarina Ivanović, celebrated as the “first Serbian female artist” who became an honorary member of Academia; she started out as a student at Vienna Academy of Fine Art.

Its focus, in one way or another, has always been the women’s role in the contemporary society. It may not be that the artists themselves are consciously addressing the subject of feminism, but nonetheless it is inseparable from their work, which may speak subconsciously about it. Very few artists, especially in the last two decades have assumed an outspoken, strong feminist position.

A.D.: What characterize your art, besides other things, are figuration, portraits, and self-portraits. In them one can primarily observe liveliness – persuasiveness, originality and often caricature trends. Do you think that it is expressivity which could be defined as *womenspeak* style?

M.R.: It is true that I use figuration but for a specific concept. In order to realize an idea, to me it is important that the work can be interpreted within a certain context. By the same token, I believe that my role as a woman can be seen in my work because it is the part of my identity. Very often there are things that are visible in our work but that we are not aware of because it happens that we “inscribe” ourselves into our works.

A.D.: *Body Parts (Pretty or Ugly)* is the photography series where you are posing with parts of your body marked in the way it is done in preparation for surgical procedures. The very evaluation of whether something is pretty or ugly is dealing with the topic of body through the cosmetic surgery, and aesthetic namely visual *cropping, cutting, and patching* of corporeality and identity. How would you comment on that series from your own opinion about the topic?

M.R.: This work is about the youthful wish to obtain the desirable model of beauty launched by the media. By making it, I wanted to emphasize the tension that appears between our desire to accept ourselves and find something beautiful in our singularities on one side, and on the other, to reject ourselves and do everything in order to satisfy the current aesthetic norms. And, what happened here is that there appeared a certain drama that produced tension in this work especially because it is about the living body.

A.D.: What do you think about the effect of contemporary standards of beauty on the personal experience of the body? What is going on culturally and what is happening with you individually?

M.R.: Culturally speaking, the desirable models of beauty serve to gain profits by everyone included in the chain of trends creation. Therefore, it is unfortunate to consider literally that only trendy things are beautiful – in young people, in people who are still searching their true identity, it can cause some form of self-criticism and self-destruction because they cannot fit

into the perfect picture. Also, if we see ourselves that way, it is the way others will see us; that is how discrimination appears. In my case, beauty standards do not play any role because through the years I realized that the beauty comes from the inside. There is everything inside, there is an abundance of things that the beauty is made of and it manifests through relating with people in the beauty and that is manifested through relationships with people in the immediate surroundings.

A.D.: *Before and After* is about physical changes in pregnancy, also about viewing the body within time frames (transitions, fragility, and ephemerality), it is also about the switching of social positioning that comes with the new role of becoming a mother. Up to what degree does your autobiographical influence your interests? How much is our relation with the above topics a cliché in a certain way (learnt or internalized)?

M.R.: That work represents fears about whether a woman/artist will lose freedom and individuality once she becomes a mother; it is about roles, about saying goodbye to youth and about the entrance into the extended family. My works are created in the climax of my frustration only to bring me the answers later. In a way, through the creative process, I select what is important to me and in this case it was to remain both mother and artist.

A.D.: Do you think that the story about *private* role of mother colliding with *public* role of woman artist is a stereotype? How do you combine those two roles?

M.R.: As far as the roles of artist and mother are concerned, I realized that it is a prejudice that mother cannot be a good artist and vice versa. However, everyone knows herself best. There are many factors that have to be satisfied in order to do art and the most important one is to have an idea.

A.D.: Topics which refer to relationships between woman and man, mother and child, woman and family are inevitable points in the so-called *female experience*. In your case, the visuals and aesthetics reflect imagery that is polished, colourful, and vivid but with shades of irony and sarcasm. The very form that you choose and realize is what captures our attention and keeps us interested.

M.R.: For me the form is often the medium to reach something, to get it out of the system, to view it, and to problematize or explain something. Irony and sarcasm help me use humour in order to deal with all the issues. By the artistic act I am trying to pose questions to myself and

to others. Very often I get the answers and that is exactly how art helps us overcome the challenges.

A.D.: How would you characterize the position of women artists here at this moment? How do you see yourself in that context?

M.R.: Today women artists are striving for freedom and finding all that they need in order to create. It is not an easy road but it takes consistency and a lot of self-respect.

A.D.: Could you say for yourself that you are a feminist?

M.R.: Yes and no – I support gender equality but I do not belong to any organization and I seldom declare myself.

A.D.: What do you think about feminism in art practices in Serbia? Is there any? If so, what are its topics and specificities?

M.R.: Yes, there is and it is implemented by good and engaged organizations in Serbia which are about women issues and they influence the politics which should be a good thing.

A.D.: When we speak about the body politics from the aspect of political and personal, your video *I am Milica Tomić* from 1999 obviously connects the personal with the collective. While the aesthetics should have been repulsive because of the use of “blood red” paint, even though your portrait rotates, nevertheless it remains at the level of a static doll.

M.T.: My idea was to make a sculpture, and the idea was to investigate about what stands behind the concept of identification with a certain nation, with a certain ethnic group; and that such identification is not given but that it is our decision, our intimate choice. Hegel calls that “accidental necessity” – our place of birth is a coincidence, as well as the moment of decision about our ethnicity. But at the same time it is the matter of a political decision because national identity is the question of political decision of every individual. But the problem is that we accept that as something given and do not question it. In the end we are unaware about it, in the end only the consequences of it we accept as the necessity while we miss the opportunity to react and make a choice. In the end it all comes to the decision which is not unconscious. That video is about awareness, because we are all witnesses that we did not have a defined national identity and that we had a much wider picture of Yugoslav identity before and that later it was artificially constructed. Actually, every identity is artificially constructed not only a national one. That work also questions the way in which art takes part in the construction of identity, national identities, and new history.

A.D.: In the same year, you did also the video *Portrait of My Mother* where you represent and define her through the political and social changes. On the other side, what happened to the construction of your identity during the process of Yugoslav debacle?

M.T.: You defined it very well because the film is about that – how I from my perspective see her. At the same time, even though we are close, there is a distance and a kind of alienation between me and my mother. For me that work is not only about relations that are political and social but it is also an intersection between the politics and the intimate where our intimate relation can be interpreted as a political relation. It is also an attempt to emancipate from parents – in contact with your mother for example you cannot be emancipated because you

are forever that little girl for her. *Portrait of My Mother* is also an attempt to leave and get out of that relation.

A.D.: In your work *This is Contemporary Art* there is our folk diva Dragana Mirković singing for the Serbian public in Vienna. What do you think about turbofolk as a phenomenon?

M.T.: I think that it was a capitalist phase that happened, as a “turbo” period of capitalism that happened in the 1990s. What is most significant influence of turbofolk music is that it lasts, and that it is still present – that is its power. It is connected to the globalization and in our case it is linked with the period of transition from the collective-social to the private property; and it is still an ongoing process and absolutely turbofolk is connected to that. In our case it is also linked to privatization that happened through the war as well. Here, that privatization happened literally in the form of robbing the public property, it was very visible.

A.D.: You did another project with Dragana Mirković called *Alone* in which it seems that even though men and women are in the same space, they are separate. Man stands for (hidden) power while woman is only an ornament.

M.T.: It is the hidden thing which uses female body as a screen. Her role is to distract attention from the war.

A.D.: When we speak about remembering, in your work *Belgrade Remembers* we can see a certain kind of radical image which is disturbing. Do these spaces have to make art which is in a way more extreme because the public became insensitive?

M.T.: The fact is that people prefer to ignore serious topics and stay unaware about difficult issues – they do not want to think or see such things. And the fact that I am a woman makes it even harder because in this war woman had a different role than for example in the Second World War. In the Second World War she was an active subject while in this war she was just an object. I think that art did not deal enough with that topic, and it is certain that we can speak about the same thing in various ways but perhaps that is the reason why it might seem extreme – because it is an under-represented theme.

A.D.: If that historical conscience and collective responsibility are that much ignored and forgotten, is there still a possibility for us to realize that there is a fair share of individual responsibility in all that happened or perhaps living in oblivion will just go on? Is struggle

against fascism in its various forms only artistic and conceptual? Is it possible to do something about it?

M.T.: I think that art can make changes but not directly and immediately. I believe that my art is activist but that it takes time for art to make changes in that immaterial level; we need time to understand and see those changes.

A.D.: What were the reactions about your project where you were moving around in the streets with the machine gun?

M.T.: I was in three cities and in each of them I had a completely different reception in the streets. In Belgrade, nobody spoke to me, they ignored me. In Copenhagen the reaction was very similar – as if nothing had been going on. Until I went to the part where there were prostitutes, immigrants, addicts and so, where a woman in a visibly bad condition came to me saying that she was preoccupied that something might happen because of that weapon, then a Turkish guy also showed some interest saying that he had that weapon as a soldier. So, there two people came to speak to me. But in Italy (no matter its historical role in the Second World War and that fascism is still so present in the public spaces) there *is* anti-fascism in the streets; there are spaces where people come to do commemorations on their own. And what happened was that people came to me asking about the weapon, they asked whether they could accompany me – it was a completely different type of attitude which is very interesting. In this case you can clearly see how the public space functions and what kind of politics actually rules the public space. People recognized the weapon, men know what Kalashnikov is, many of them had it in their hands, but it is the matter of the state politics to give permission for weapon possessing. We are in a state of permanent war – the war against terrorism; it is the so-called “war on terror”. And it is permanent – you are either a terrorist or an anti-terrorist. For me, the whole scenery is important here. There is a fifty year old woman going back from work, carrying a bag from the supermarket, and an act that you can go around carrying a weapon as a handbag. I carry the weapon as an object that is not active but at any moment it *can* become active. The fact is that all countries have their armies standing somewhere there with their weapons ready to be used.

A.D.: In many of your artworks and projects you appear as the main protagonist. Is it a matter of self-portrait or is it because you want to experience that work – to make it a performative experience and manifest yourself?

M.T.: Yes, that is it. But in the beginning, I was not that much aware of that need of mine – for instance, when I started I wanted others to appear in my projects, for example my colleagues. But it turned out that it is actually impossible to do it the way I want it to be done, because nobody else has that agenda, or motive, or drive to do it the way I would. It is also the desire for the personal engagement; all is connected to the way how I see that idea as well.

A.D.: I would like to know your opinion about the position of women artists here at this moment? How do you see yourself in that context?

M.T.: There are important women authors from these spaces – for example, Nadežda Petrović has an equal importance as Van Gogh in the Netherlands – both of them are on banknotes which is a par excellence recognition. But it must be also mentioned that it is banknote of a recent edition. Here, in our spaces feminism does not exist, there is no feminism in arts either. It is of a formal character, as a “given” possibility, not real feminism. Women artists are officially “allowed” to deal with topics of femininity, but they always reject to be identified as feminists. Here there is no feminism and, therefore, there is no feminism in art either.

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BIOGRAPHY

Aleksandra Dedić was born in 1972 in Niš, SFR Yugoslavia.

She graduated in English language and literature at the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš (1997) and sculpture at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade (2000). Due to the Italian Government Academic Scholarship, she realized painting research at Accademia Albertina di Belle Arti (2003/2004). Later, she also completed specialization for professional artists in glass and clay studio at Ecole Supérieure d'Art et de Design in Marseille (2005/2006). In 2007, Aleksandra graduated in visual arts at Aix-Marseille Université.

Officially a sculptress by vocation, during her studies she also became interested in painting, mostly dedicated to portrait. In time, Aleksandra's work expanded to photography as well. Her search for the means of expression and her research in contexts of identity and visual diversity of various topics continue in experimentation and continual learning by sharing knowledge and experience through cooperation. In the meantime, besides creating her artistic production, she was an art teacher and author of creative workshops, and also worked as an interpreter and translator.

In 2011, she completed Master in Artistic Production with specialization in Contemporary Thought and Visual Culture at Facultad de Bellas Artes San Carlos in Valencia, where she is currently doing her PhD thesis. Besides her home town, she lived and worked in Belgrade, Turin, Strasbourg, Marseille, Graz and Valencia. She is a member of the artists' associations ULUS and ULUPUDS; her artwork has been exhibited in Serbia and abroad at individual and collective exhibitions since 1997.
