

**Tracing the Subversive Femininities in the Socialist Yugoslavia: An Analysis  
of Katalin Ladik's Poetry and Performances of the 1970s**

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## Abstract

This thesis is about Katalin Ladik, a Hungarian artist born in Novi Sad (Serbia) in 1942, and her art works produced mainly in the 1970s in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). I limit my analysis to her poetry, early performances and several late performances within the timeframe ranging from the late 1960s till the first years of the 1980s, and analyze her art production within this timeframe as an example of the feminist art work. In order to support my claim that Ladik's work in the 1970s was feminist, I emphasize the importance of the context that recognized her as subversive. Comparing contemporary reactions published in the Yugoslav press, interviews conducted with Ladik and official socialist discourse regarding gender and art policies, I examine what was considered as "subversive" in the socialist Yugoslavia of the 1970s.

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## Introduction

This thesis is about Katalin Ladik, a Hungarian artist born in Novi Sad (Serbia) in 1942, and her feminist art works produced mainly in the 1970s in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). The 1970s were an important decade in her career, when she started experimenting with different art forms such as: experimental poetry (visual, phonic, concrete), conceptual art, arte povera, mail art, experimental music, performance art, etc. Prior to this, she worked as an actress and belonged to a circle of Hungarian writers in Novi Sad. Since the scope of my MA thesis does not allow enough space for an extensive analysis of all the genres Ladik experimented with, I limit my analysis to her poetry, early performances and several late performances within the timeframe ranging from the late 1960s till the first years of the 1980s.<sup>1</sup> Selected genres best support my claim that Ladik's experimental art production from this timeframe was hybrid, a mixture of different forms of art and art disciplines that were inseparably intertwined and complemented each other.

Drawing on the postcolonial theory of 'hybridity' developed by Homi Bhabha, I will illustrate that hybrid forms are subversive. I suggest that not only particular experimental genres she used were hybrids, but that her whole opus can be deemed as a hybrid. As such, Ladik's art production became a space of subversion through which she was able to switch between genres, from poetry to visual arts, and disrupt the existing cultural and art norms in Yugoslav socialist society. Furthermore, I will show that hybridity as such enabled her to negotiate the position of women in socialist context of Yugoslavia.

I will analyze Ladik's art production as an example of feminist art work. I draw my definition of the feminist art from Mary Kelly, a feminist artist, as described by feminist art critic Griselda Pollock.<sup>2</sup> Kelly argued that the most important aspect that allows us to call a work of art

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<sup>1</sup> I expand the timeframe into the 1980s in the case of her poetry in order to illustrate the feminist character of her poetry better.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Kelly presented her ideas in a paper entitled "Sexual Politics" at the conference called "Art and Sexual

feminist is its effect on “existing regimes of power and ideological meaning, sexual and other forms of social difference,” and not the author’s intention or the artists’ gender experience mediated in the works of art.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, I focus on the reactions to Ladik’s work, based on the articles published in the Yugoslav press during the 1970s, as an illustration of Ladik’s effect in the context of socialist Yugoslavia. However, I do take into account Ladik’s individual experience of being a woman, because her sex was a significant factor that determined her position within socialist Yugoslav art system in the 1970s.

It is important to bear in mind that Ladik never declared herself as a feminist.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the question posing itself is: can we regard the art work as feminist when an artist does not describe herself as such? When is such a move legitimate? An answer to these questions shifts the importance from the author to the reader/critic.

### ***The role of the critic***

According to Pollock, a reader/critic is equally important as authors of art works. She argues that without the readers, who recognize the work, “the work in a profound sense never exists.”<sup>5</sup> A work of art needs theorists, interpreters, whose task is to produce the knowledge about it, and “reveal it” to a wider population.<sup>6</sup>

The importance of the interpreter, or of the reader, as described by Pollock, echoes the poststructuralist debates around the authorship initiated by Roland Barthes in his essay “Death of the Author.”<sup>7</sup> According to Barthes meaning of the text is not singular, and it is not exhausted in the author’s intention. A writer is “never more than the instance writing” and imposing him/her

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Politics” in London in 1977. For the complete text of the paper see Mary Kelly, “Art and Sexual Politics,” in *Imagining desire* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 2-10.

<sup>3</sup> Griselda Pollock, “Inscriptions in the Feminine,” in *Inside the Visible: an Elliptical Traverse of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: In, Of, and From the Feminine*, ed. M. Catherine de Zegher, (Cambridge, Mass. And London: MIT Press, 1996), 72.

<sup>4</sup> “Interjú Ladik Katalinnal,” Appendix, 73. (Interview with Ladik Katalin)

<sup>5</sup> Pollock, “Inscriptions in the Feminine,” 82.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Full text is available online at: <http://www.deathoftheauthor.com/> (accessed: May 5, 2011).

on the text is limiting. Therefore, argues Barthes, once the text is finished, the author of the text metaphorically dies, and a reader is born. The reader gives the meaning to the written text.<sup>8</sup>

As outlined by Rita Felski, Barthes' influence on the feminist thinking in the early 1980s took a form of debate between Nancy Miller and Peggy Kamouf.<sup>9</sup> As Felski argues, for Miller the sex of the author was particularly significant, while the feminists, who sided with the poststructuralists, such as Kamouf and Toril Moi, argued that distinction between male and female authors was not that important, and assumed that, instead of essentializing female writers, feminists should concentrate on questioning the gender norms.<sup>10</sup> In the poststructuralist feminist circles 'the death of the author' shifted the focus to the reader and his/her relation to the text, that lead to creation of a number of theories about readers, such as 'a resistant reader' (Felski) or 'an implicated reading' (Pearce).<sup>11</sup>

Elisabeth Grosz, feminist literary critic, emphasized the possibility of multiple readers and multiple readings of one text as a consequence of the symbolic 'death of the author,' as proclaimed by Barthes. According to her, neither the sex of the author nor that of a reader determines the position of the text (or the work of art) as feminist. In her opinion, there is no simple "carry-over" of the author into the text, or in other words, being a woman writer (or a woman artist) does not guarantee that the text produced by her will automatically be a feminist one.<sup>12</sup> As Grosz argues any text can be read from the feminist point of view if the reader's position associates it with the subversive strategy of undermining the patriarchy.<sup>13</sup> The openness of the text and its ability to be "continuously re-read, rewritten, its capacity to slip into – and out of – feminist interests and contexts" supports her notion that every text can be seen as feminist

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Rita Felski, "Authors," in *Literature After Feminism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 59.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> For more on a resistant reader see: Rita Felski, "Readers," in *ibid.*, 23-56.; on 'an implicated reading' see: Lynne Pearce, "The Ghostly Romance: Towards a Theory of Implicated Reading," in *Feminism and the Politics of Reading* (London: Arnold, 1997), 1-33.

<sup>12</sup> Elisabeth Grosz, "Sexual Signatures: Feminism after the Death of the Author", in *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 12-14.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 16.

depending of its context, or how and by whom it is used to cause a certain effect.<sup>14</sup>

I approach Ladik's work from the position of the poststructuralist feminist thinking that emphasizes the role of the reader/interpreter. As I will show, Ladik's work in the 1970s provoked the patriarchal morality in Yugoslav socialist context and negotiated women's position in Yugoslav culture. In order to support my claim that Ladik's work in the 1970s was feminist, I emphasize the importance of the context that recognized her as subversive, based on the contemporary reactions published in the Yugoslav press. It is important to keep in mind that she was in a dialogue with the cultural milieu of Yugoslavia of the 1970s, and accordingly, her work should be read as feminist in relation to that social context.

In my thesis I will first briefly outline gender and art policies of SFRY in the 1970s, in order to illustrate the close ties between the Yugoslav art system and the regime's politics. Accordingly, I will show that Yugoslav art system was not separated from the state politics, and it mirrored its working mechanism. I will position Ladik within that system. After outlining the social context, I will turn to analysis of formal aspect and the content of selected Ladik's art works within the established timeframe emphasizing their subversive character. In the final chapter, I examine the response to her works in Yugoslavia and problematize the relation between Yugoslav feminists and Ladik's art works.

In my analysis I apply the archeological approach<sup>15</sup> proposed by Griselda Pollock. In the following chapter I will outline the main characteristics of this approach and explain how it relates to my research.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>15</sup> Pollock in her essay "Inscriptions in the Feminine" did not explicitly call her approach "the archeological approach." It is my designation based on her word choice ("excavation," "deciphering an ancient culture") and more direct associations she made with the archeology ("I want to do a little archeology into the moment of feminism's confrontation" or "differently conceived archeology of other moments in the histories of femininity").



## *Tracing “the feminine inscriptions” into culture: Griselda Pollock’s archeological approach*

Griselda Pollock defined her approach in opposition to “the curatorial model of criticism.” According to her, the curatorial method of analyzing art works was prevalent in the twentieth century, and it is still applied in museums, galleries, and in teaching history of art today.<sup>16</sup> Pollock argues that the curatorial approach was based on the idea of preserving and cataloguing the works of art. Its effect was classification and periodization of artists and their works into groups according to various aspects such as: technique, genre, historical period, etc. Following the historical periodization, and relying on already existing categories in art history, proponents of the curatorial method approached the works of art with a premise that they knew precisely what these categories meant, and accordingly, simply placed artists’ names or works of art in groups according to the logic of classification. Regarding women’s art this means, as Pollock suggests, that in a number of interpretations, art historians claim to know what “women are, feel, [and] experience as women.”<sup>17</sup> Such approach is problematic for Pollock, since it presumes a clear definition of the femininity, and entraps the feminine in the circle of “current ideological constructions of femininities,” thus producing “an idealized femininity.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, based on the curatorial interpretation, the feminine becomes a singular ideal promoted in the public discourses that are tied to a specific cultural context, and as such, a basis for aforementioned confident interpretations. Consequently, canons constructed in that way, argues Pollock, are fragmentary and incomplete.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, Pollock suggests feminist method of analysis of women’s art works. Her method, that I call “the archeological approach,” entails a reverse approach to women’s art works in relation to the curatorial. Feminist art historians should, argues Pollock, regard a work

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 71.

of art done by female artist as an archeological artifact that needs to be deciphered.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, the feminist researcher should not assume to know anything about the culture given work of art belongs to. Instead of working with pre-given and pre-determined categories, as in the curatorial approach, feminist art historians using the archeological method should, through the analysis of women's work of art, reconstruct the ways cultural system in question worked and produced categories.

A work of art, according to this approach, is not a product of stable and unified "individual subject".<sup>21</sup> On the contrary, drawing on Julia Kristeva, Pollock suggests that subject is never unified, homogeneous. In fact, subjectivity is a complex "intersection between individual and social histories, individually inflected and socially circulated signs."<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, an artistic practice has its point of reference in a particular subject, from which it derived, but as such, an art work bears the traces of the discourses that were a backdrop of its coming into existence. In other words, through works of art, we are able to trace and interpret the logic and the working mechanism of a given cultural/social system, because artists operate with the terms, stereotypes and ideas that belong to a particular cultural context, and are in a dialogue with their time. Therefore, Pollock's approach calls for contextualization that puts individual's work of art in relation to its contemporary social structures.

Pollock's approach to art works may be perceived as belonging to a broader framework of the feminist intersectional analysis, insofar as it does not take categories for granted, but aims to reconstruct, expose, reveal the processes of how categories and difference are created. According to Mary Hawkesworth: "[intersectionality] capture[s] the intricate interplay of social forces that produce particular men and women as members of particular races, classes, sexualities, ethnicities, and nationalities."<sup>23</sup> As such, the proponents of an intersectional analysis

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Hawkesworth, "Intersectionality," in *Feminist Inquiry: From Political Conviction to Methodological Innovation* (New

explore “the mutual constitution of identities and the social practices that produce and sustain hierarchies of difference.”<sup>24</sup> Intersectional analysis represents a useful tool, because, as pointed out by Kathy Davis, encourages “thinking *across* the categories,” instead of building differences on those categories.<sup>25</sup> Thus, according to Hawkesworth, feminist intersectional analysis “can challenge the dominant approaches” of knowledge production and reveal “processes of marginalization that mainstream accounts omit.”<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, the analysis of Ladik’s works, according to Pollock’s approach that I locate within the broader framework of intersectionality, alters the way works of art are perceived in traditional art history. Namely, Ladik’s works, within this framework, become significant not only for their artistic quality, but as objects/processes that came about as products of complicated intersection of gender, nationality, class and the working mechanisms of Yugoslav socialist art system in the 1970s. Therefore, the examination of Ladik’s art production, according to the archeological approach, offers insights into ways mechanism of Yugoslav socialist art system worked, and because of its focus on gender differences it gives more differentiated picture, than traditional art history did or does, of how Yugoslav art system functioned in the 1970s.

In order to describe Yugoslav art system, beside analysis of Ladik’s selected poems and performances, I will use interviews conducted with her in 1981, 1982, 2009 and 2011. Furthermore, I will analyze the reactions Ladik’s worked provoked, based on articles published in contemporary Yugoslav journals. Through juxtaposing the responses to Ladik’s work with her own insights about the Yugoslav socialist system, I will infer what was the prevalent notion of “artist” (writer) in traditionalist circles of artists/writers in Novi Sad, and how was that position complicated in the case when the artist was a woman belonging to the Hungarian ethnical minority in Yugoslavia.

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Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 209.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Kathy Davis, “Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful,” *Feminist Theory* 9, issue 1 (2008): 75.

<sup>26</sup> Hawkesworth, “Intersectionality,” 209-210.

According to Pollock, the archeological approach does not serve only to deconstruct the system through analysis of products that originated in interaction with it, but also for locating the disruptions in the system caused by the feminine art works. This process is what Pollock refers to as looking for the ‘feminine inscriptions’ in a given culture. Tracing feminine inscriptions in the culture is based on her assumption that the language system is phallogocentric and that as such cannot contain the feminine. Therefore, anytime women artists try to articulate the feminine in the language it causes a rupture, disruption of the language, or the ‘feminine inscriptions.’ Pollock urges for realization that the language cannot be escaped. “[T]here is no outside to use as a resource against a dominant inside, there is no elsewhere beyond the spaces of discourse.”<sup>27</sup> In such a language the feminine is the other of the dominant masculine order. Since there are no appropriate signifiers to express its difference, feminine signification in language is possible either through masculine definition of what is it to be a woman, a case when the feminine is not a rupture since it is not representing the feminine at all, or through disruption of the language, which marks the appearance of the “actual” feminine. Therefore, according to Pollock, the feminine cannot be articulated in a language as such, and when it appears in it, it is necessarily subversive, and “in conflict with a phallogocentric system.”<sup>28</sup>

It seems that Pollock suggests that only the feminine that disrupts the phallogocentric system is the “real” feminine, and that the feminine that is not disruptive is merely a masculine definition of it. Although Pollock tried to break with the homogenization of the feminine category that, according to her, appears as a consequence of the curatorial approach and phallogocentrism of the patriarchal system, it seems that she ended up creating another homogeneous category of the “real” feminine (a subversive feminine). However, when I apply Pollock’s method in my analysis, and regard Ladik’s works as the feminine inscriptions, I acknowledge the existence of multiple femininities. I do not exclude the possibility that there

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<sup>27</sup> Pollock, “Inscription in the Feminine,” 71.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

were other examples of femininities that were not subversive in Yugoslavia during the 1970s.

Pollock's archeological approach offers tools for analysis of Ladik's subversive art production in the 1970s, and a different approach to art works not widely used by art historians in general. A number of Serbian art historians (Lukić, Dedić and Šuvaković)<sup>29</sup> classified and analyzed Ladik's work within experimental art production<sup>30</sup> and, therefore, applied curatorial approach. Instead of examining her works in a segmented way, and focusing on a particular art groups she belonged to, or a genre she had been using, for example performance art that is most often associated with her feminist production (as in case of Dedić, Šuvaković and Schuller),<sup>31</sup> I intend to analyze her art work produced during the 1970s as a whole.

Different from *The Power of a Woman*, a publication written by Serbian art historian Miško Šuvaković published as a catalogue of Ladik's retrospective exhibition in 2010 (Novi Sad), which offers an outline of Ladik's entire art production from the late 1960s to her most recent work, I narrow my scope to the 1970s. Those were the years when feminist literary criticism and feminist art history still did not yet exist in Yugoslavia. However, in the late 1970s the "neofeminism" emerged in Yugoslavia.<sup>32</sup> Placing Ladik's works in the relation to Yugoslav feminism in the 1970s opens an opportunity to examine the connections between art practices of a woman artist and the feminist attitude towards.

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<sup>29</sup> Kristian Lukić, "Video u Vojvodini," in *Evropski konteksti umetnosti XX veka u Vojvodini*, ed. Dragomir Ugren and Miško Šuvaković, (Novi Sad: Muzej savremene umetnosti Vojvodine, 2008), 707-715; Nikola Dedić, "Vizulena poezija," in *Evropski konteksti umetnosti XX veka u Vojvodini*, ed. Dragomir Ugren and Miško Šuvaković, (Novi Sad: Muzej savremene umetnosti Vojvodine, 2008), 603-608.; Miško Šuvaković, "Umetnost XX veka u Vojvodini: Kontradikcije i hibridnosti umetnosti XX veka u Vojvodini," in *Evropski konteksti umetnosti XX veka u Vojvodini*, ed. Dragomir Ugren and Miško Šuvaković, (Novi Sad: Muzej savremene umetnosti Vojvodine, 2008), 250-252.

<sup>30</sup> Under the term 'experimental art practice,' I understand a set of practices beginning with the late 1960s in Yugoslavia, that correspond to the term "new artistic practice" used by Serbian art historian Ješa Denegri (see fn.3, chapter 4).

<sup>31</sup> Nikola Dedić, "Performans," in *Evropski konteksti umetnosti XX veka u Vojvodini*, ed. Dragomir Ugren and Miško Šuvaković, (Novi Sad: Muzej savremene umetnosti Vojvodine, 2008), 609-618.; Nikola Dedić, "Umetnost Vojvodine u XX veku i problemi rodnih identiteta," in *Evropski konteksti umetnosti XX veka u Vojvodini*, ed. Dragomir Ugren and Miško Šuvaković, (Novi Sad: Muzej savremene umetnosti Vojvodine, 2008), 721-727.; Miško Šuvaković, "Ženski performance: mapiranje identiteta," in *Centralnoevropski aspekti vojvodanskih avangardi 1920-2000. Granični fenomeni, fenomen granica*, ed. Dragomir Ugren (Novi Sad: Muzej savremene likovne umetnosti, 2002), 144-145. Gabriella Schuller, "On Katalin Ladik's Performances," in Miško Šuvaković, *The Power of a Woman: Katalin Ladik Retrospective 1962-2010* (Novi Sad: Muzej savremene umetnosti Vojvodine, 2010), 253-261. (originally published in Pál Derék and Andrés Müllner (eds.), *Né-ma? Tanulmányok a magyar neoavangárd köréből* (Budapest: Ráció Kiadó, 2004), 134-145.)

<sup>32</sup> I talk about "neofeminism" in more detail in chapter four.

## 1. The social context of Yugoslav self-governing socialism

In this chapter I will illustrate the ambivalence within the art and gender politics in Yugoslavia of the 1970s, by comparing the official socialist discourse regarding aforementioned domains (art, gender politics) with Ladik's lived experience mediated through the interviews conducted with her in 2011, 2009 and 1982. My aim is not to carry out an in-depth analysis of women's position in the socialist regime of Yugoslavia, but to show on Ladik's example that the practices of everyday life differed from the official discourses of Yugoslav socialist regime.

### ***1.1 "Yugoslav self-management socialism 'with a human face'"<sup>33</sup>: political propaganda of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia***

Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito refused the resolution of Informbiro and severed the relations with the USSR in 1948.<sup>34</sup> The consequence of such a political move was that Tito had to look for other allies, and he turned to the West. He started building diplomatic, economic and strategic relations with USA and Western European countries. However, Yugoslavia was not opened only to the West, but to the so called "Third World" countries as well, which led to creation of Non-Aligned Movement (1961). Tito's strategic moves were of great significance regarding the long term position of the state in the world politics, because they led to an increase of international importance of Yugoslavia in the following years. Yugoslavia opened its borders, and cultural influences from the West in the form of magazines, exhibitions, movies, music, etc. streamed freely into the country, which became an opened space of cultural exchange. Yugoslav citizens could freely travel in and out of the country, both to countries belonging to the so called

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<sup>33</sup> I borrow this expression from Ješa Denegri, Serbian art historian, who used it as a description of an image Yugoslavia wanted to promote about its regime to the world through its art system. Ješa Denegri, "Inside or Outside "Socialist Modernism?" Radical Views on the Yugoslav Art Scene, 1950-1970," in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991*, ed. Miško Šuvaković and Dubravka Đurić (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 2003), 175.

<sup>34</sup> Lidija Merenik, *Ideološki modeli: srpsko slikarstvo 1945-1968* (Beograd: Beopolis, 2001), 12.

Eastern Bloc, and to the countries of NATO Pact.<sup>35</sup> Ješa Denegri, a Serbian art historian, described Yugoslav politics as “swinging on the fence between the East and West,” which as a consequence produced an art system that “functioned outside both the rigid ideological pressures prevalent in the countries of real socialism and the advantages and the demands of the art market in the countries of liberal capitalism.”<sup>36</sup>

Ultimately, with the growth of the importance of Yugoslavia, it became very important what image of its self-governing socialist regime Yugoslavia sent to the world. As Denegri pointed out, Yugoslav regime estimated that the culture was a useful political tool in building connections with the Western countries in the years after Yugoslav regime turned away from USSR.<sup>37</sup> Through the series of touring international exhibitions and biennials organized in the capitals of Yugoslav republics at the beginning of the 1950s, Yugoslav artists were able to get acquainted with the up-to-date art forms of the Western European countries and the USA.<sup>38</sup> Also, representatives of Yugoslav art scene that participated for example at Paris Biennial of Youth, Venice Biennial, etc., promoted Yugoslav art scene to the West.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, organized cultural exchanges that implied artists from the Western Europe and the USA coming to Yugoslavia, and Yugoslav artists visiting international exhibitions had political significance, since they also strengthened the relations between Yugoslavia and the countries in question. Hence, cultural institutions were of particular interest to Yugoslav regime, and they became increasingly

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<sup>35</sup> Vida Penezić, “Women in Yugoslavia,” in *Postcommunism and the Body Politics*, ed. Ellen E. Berry (New York and London: New York University Press, 1995), 59-60.

<sup>36</sup> Denegri, “Inside or Outside “Socialist Modernism?”” 172.

<sup>37</sup> The consequence of Tito’s brake with the Soviet Union in art was a definite rejection of the socialist realism style in 1952. Therefore, under new-found circumstances, re-entering the streams of contemporary European art was deemed as an important political move by the Yugoslav regime. Merenik, *Ideološki modeli*, 48-50.

<sup>38</sup> Some of the exhibitions were: “Contemporary French Art,” held in 1952 in Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana and Skopje; “A Selection of Dutch Paintings,” in 1953, also in Belgrade, Zagreb and Skopje; “Contemporary Art of the United States of America,” exhibited in Belgrade in 1956, and others. Denegri, “Inside and Outside “Socialist Modernism,”” 173.

<sup>39</sup> As pointed out by Denegri, participants that represented Yugoslavia came from different republics, since the socialist Yugoslavia consisted of six republics. Art traditions within the republics slightly differed from each other. When speaking of the Yugoslav art in this section of my thesis, I give a rather simplified picture and use the term in a rather homogenizing way. However, it is important to note that “Yugoslav art space,” as designated by Denegri, was not a homogeneous, unified space that erased the national specificities in terms of the art production. Instead, it encompassed a number of smaller art scenes that interacted with each other within the broader space of Yugoslav art. *Ibid.*, 171

dependent on the state's ideological and financial support.<sup>40</sup>

Regarding the experimental art practices in Yugoslavia, to which Ladik's work belonged to, they were not banned by the Yugoslav socialist regime, contrary to other countries in the region that were members of the Warsaw Pact. As a Hungarian literary critic Havasréti József noted, an adequate description of Yugoslav neo-avant-garde art practices would be "alternative" instead of "underground," which was a concept that he used to describe Hungarian artists, who opposed the mainstream socialist realism.<sup>41</sup> His distinction between the two terms indicates the differences between political contexts of the two countries as well, since the word "alternative" describes an art practice that is parallel to another one, while "underground" entails an art movement forced into illegality because of the political pressure.<sup>42</sup> According to Piotr Piotrowski, a Polish art historian, the situation regarding Yugoslav alternative art was indeed unique in the region. However, both nationalism and politics were setting the limits of the liberalism in Yugoslav art. Yugoslav artists could not openly criticize the regime without the political consequences, and the same applied to the critique of the ideal of Yugoslav "brotherhood and unity".<sup>43</sup>

Another uniqueness of Yugoslav socialist art system of the 1970s was that neo-avant-garde artists exhibited not only in alternative and marginal spaces of student institutions, such as Student Cultural Centre (Studentski kulturni centar - SKC) in Belgrade or Youth Tribune (Tribina mladih) in Novi Sad, but they were also invited to exhibit in museums, a places usually associated with the mainstream artists.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the Yugoslav socialist system endorsed the neo-avant-garde artists. The socialist system granted them exhibition spaces, and as long as these neo-avant-garde artists did not criticize the state politics, they had their freedom to work and

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>41</sup> József Havasréti, "Bevezetés: Az "underground" és az "alternatív" értelmezései," in *Alternatív regiszterek: A kulturális ellenállás formái a magyar neoavantgárdban* (Budapest: Typotex, 2006), 29.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, "Mapping the Neo-avant-garde, c. 1970," in *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 303.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



exhibit there. Hence, Yugoslav regime provided the room for the experimental practices within the socialist art system and Ladik, as an experimental artist, belonged to this sphere.

However, although Ladik never made open political statements against the Yugoslav politics, her art work negatively affected her private life. She spoke about these contradictions openly in the interview conducted with her in 1982.<sup>45</sup> In the following subchapter, where I deal with this issue in detail, I will show that the reason for the negative attitude of the officials toward Ladik was conservative morality prevalent in Novi Sad of the 1970s. Proponents of traditional, patriarchal morality framed Ladik's experiments with the body and opened display of female sexuality as an excess.

Regarding gender politics during what Sabrina P. Ramet calls "the Tito era" (1943-1980) Yugoslavian socialist platform promoted equality between the sexes.<sup>46</sup> According to Ramet this meant "inclusion of women in politics on equal footing with men," but women were also included in other domains as well, such as state's economy, industry, culture, etc.<sup>47</sup> The aim of Yugoslav socialists was to enhance the education of women, and enable/ensure their socioeconomic freedom and security. One of the famous Croatian politicians of the time Stipe Šušvar in 1980 said: "Our ideal is that women should be the architect of society on an equal basis with the man."<sup>48</sup> Ulf Brunnbauer suggests that this equality was in fact imposed from the regime and that it resembled "uniformity" more than "genuine equality."<sup>49</sup>

Although communist regimes of the South Eastern Europe imagined women's emancipation through their participation in paid employment, according to Brunnbauer "much

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<sup>45</sup> Dragiša Drašković, "Katalin Ladik: Muškim šovinistima izmišljam novi krik," *Omladinske*, March 27, 1982, 14.

<sup>46</sup> Sabrina P. Ramet, "In Tito's Time," in *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 89.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>48</sup> Šušvar quoted in Ramet. *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Ulf Brunnbauer, "From Equality without Democracy to Democracy without Equality? Women and Transition in Southeast Europe," in *Gender Relations in South Eastern Europe: Historical Perspectives on Womanhood and Manhood in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, ed. Miroslav Jovanović and Slobodan Naumović (Belgrade and Graz: Institut für Geschichte der Universität Graz and Udruženje za društvenu istoriju, 2002), 220.

of the progress under communism remained ambiguous and volatile, or even contradictory.”<sup>50</sup> Women could work and be economically independent but most of them had families at the same time. This meant that women carried the burden of ‘double day,’ or in other words after their working day, they still had to finish domestic work as well. Also, although Yugoslav socialism had opened door for career advancement, statistics showed that women were still concentrated around particular jobs (culture, health care, sales) and underrepresented in leading positions in politics (party, delegate system, councils).<sup>51</sup> As Brunnbauer suggest this meant that “social reality,” the lived experiences of women of the time did not correspond to proclaimed gender equality promoted by the socialist regime.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, as the author argues, women were more “objects than the agents of change” since their emancipation seemed not to be “an end in itself, but an instrument for wider political goals, as defined by the party.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, this meant that some aspects of women’s equality were rather a part of Yugoslav socialist propaganda, than of actual reality.

### ***1.2 Being a woman artist in the 1970s: Ladik’s experience***

Looking back on the 1970s from the perspective of 2011, regarding women’s economic position, Ladik agreed that, indeed, women in the socialist Yugoslavia had the opportunity to work, and the expectations they had to meet as employees were, according to her, same as for men, in terms of working hours and satisfying the employer.<sup>54</sup> However, regarding the art scene, she remembers that the environment she belonged to, Novi Sad, and its circle of Hungarian writers was ruled by patriarchal notions.<sup>55</sup> In Nenad Milosević’s documentary filmed in 2009 about the Youth Tribune, the alternative student institution in Novi Sad around which neo-avant-

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>51</sup> Ramet, “In Tito’s Time,” 97.

<sup>52</sup> Brunnbauer, “From Equality without Democracy to Democracy without Equality?,” 221.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>54</sup> “Interview with Ladik Katalin,” Appendix, 65.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 71.

garde artists of the 1970s gravitated, Ladik acknowledged that this writers' circle represented an important source of information for her.<sup>56</sup> Regarding the gender aspect of the group, she noted that beside her it consisted entirely of men.<sup>57</sup> Ladik was not the only woman artist just in this circle. Members of the art group Bosch+Bosch, which she joined in 1973, were also all men.<sup>58</sup> Beside Ladik, Ana Raković, a member of important conceptual art group called (⊖ (reversed "E"), Judita Šalgo, literary critic and Bogdanka Poznanović, a very influential artist belonging to the older generation and active around Youth Tribune, were the only women who worked on the art scene of Novi Sad during the 1970s.<sup>59</sup> Thus, women artists were rare on the experimental art scene of Novi Sad.

Ladik noted already in 1982, that Novi Sad was a place where "his majesty the male chauvinist ruled."<sup>60</sup> While members of alternative art groups were usually more opened and supportive towards her experiments, real problems occurred within a group of Hungarian writers who lived in Novi Sad. Their views on art were governed by patriarchal notions, and since Ladik belonged to their circle, they expected her to conform to their norms regarding what a poet should be. According to Ladik (2011), they imagined a poet as "sacred and untouchable" (szent és érinthetetlen). Consequently, a poet could not allow himself to take off his clothes, especially in the case if that poet was a woman.<sup>61</sup> Novi Sad was therefore, in artistic sense, on one hand very opened to experimental practices, as in the case of the Youth Tribune and artists working there, but on the other, very conservative, like the example of Hungarian writers will show. In 1982 Ladik noted: "I do not hate my city. In Novi Sad very important things are

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<sup>56</sup> Nenad Milosević, *The Youth Tribune*, documentary, Novi Sad: IFC Kino Klub Novi Sad and New Media Center\_kuda.org, 2009.

<sup>57</sup> Some of the writers were: Tolnai Ottó, Végel László, Váradi Tibor, Brasnyó István, Gion Nándor, etc. Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> The group existed from 1969 until 1976. Ješa Denegri, "Bosch+Bosch," in *Sedamdesete: teme sprske umetnosti* (Novi Sad: Svetovi, 1996), 43. For more information about the group see Szombathy Bálint, *7 godina grupe Bosch+Bosch* (Beograd: Salon muzeja savremene umetnosti, 1981).

<sup>59</sup> Miško Švaković, "Ženski performans: Mapiranje identiteta," in *Centralnoevropski aspekti vojvodanskih avangardi 1920-2000.: Granični fenomeni, fenomeni granica*, (exhibition catalogue) ed. Dragomir Ugren (Novi Sad: Muzej savremene likovne umetnosti, 2002), 144.

<sup>60</sup> Drašković, "Katalin Ladik," 14.

<sup>61</sup> "Interview with Ladik Katalin," Appendix, 68.

happening, it is only necessary be in the right street [sokaku].”<sup>62</sup> The conservatism of the environment irritated Ladik, but as she stated in the same interview (1982) exactly the traditionalists that judged her naked performances negatively, gave her impetus to work and provoke them further.<sup>63</sup>

From today’s perspective (2011), Ladik thinks that the art scene of Novi Sad was ruled by “double standards/morality.”<sup>64</sup> This, as suggested by her, meant that it was impossible for a woman to be accepted in Yugoslav art world of the 1970s in a same way as men were. Social expectations towards women were, argues Ladik, different and certain things were just not expected from women to do.<sup>65</sup> For example, it was not so much the usage of obscene language in her poems, but an opened display of female sexuality in her performances that was seen as scandalous and unacceptable, although men, at the same time enacted naked performances in Yugoslavia.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, despite the fact that popular magazines in Yugoslavia freely published naked pictures, when her naked pictures appeared in *Start* in the beginning of the 1970s, it caused a scandal in her hometown in the circle of Hungarian writers.

Ladik’s art work affected her social situation, and therefore her private life. Under social situation I mean the living conditions she had to endure as a consequence of her small salary. The treatment of the official institutions, such as her theatre and troupe, or the Alliance of Vojvodina’s Writers (Društvo književnika Vojvodine) in Novi Sad, as described by Ladik in 1982, revealed a different attitude toward her as an artist in relation to the other writers/actors.<sup>67</sup> Although she had been actress for over 20 years, in the interview Ladik complained that she had the lowest payment in her home theater. She never got an apartment from the Party as other artists did, nor the financial support as a representative of Yugoslavia on numerous festivals of experimental poetry in Europe and America. According to her, the reason for such an attitude of

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<sup>62</sup> Drašković, “Katalin Ladik,” 14.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> “Interview with Ladik Katalin,” Appendix, 68.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>67</sup> Drašković, “Katalin Ladik,” 14.

her superiors was a consequence of her nude performances enacted at the beginning of the 1970s and her nude pictures published in *Start*. According to her, naked performances and experimental art degraded her as an artist, and she was remembered rather as “a woman who strips down” than as an artist.<sup>68</sup> Also, Ladik got expelled from the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (Savez komunista Jugoslavije) in 1975 for immorality, and almost got fired for the same reasons.<sup>69</sup>

According to Šuvaković, Ladik’s exclusion from the League of Communists points to the one of the ambiguities of the Yugoslav cultural system. Namely, both the magazine where naked photos of Ladik were published (*Start*) and the institutions where her naked performances took place (Atelje 212) were under some form of the state control.<sup>70</sup> As opposed to the earlier years of real-socialism, argues Šuvaković, that is before the break with the USSR in 1948 when the state had a strict politics of censorship, in the self-managing socialism of the 1970s the control was conducted indirectly, “as a form of ‘public response’ and a social critique of transgression within its ‘liberal’ systems of information and entertainment.”<sup>71</sup> Therefore, Šuvaković argues that there was a duality in the Yugoslav socialist system visible in the promotion of particular kinds of liberties (to travel, to produce art outside the mainstream socialist modernism, etc.) on the one hand, and the regime’s “surveillance and critique” on these liberties in practice, on the other.<sup>72</sup>

In other words, the cultural system of Yugoslavia in the 1970s was ambivalent. It seemingly proclaimed and enabled certain freedoms and liberties but in fact, socialist regime monitored art practices. Also, although Ladik did not openly challenge the politics of Yugoslav socialist system, her art production was still deemed disturbing, as the consequences to her private life proved. However, Ladik stated that her diverse art production enabled her to “run

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> “Interview with Ladik Katalin,” Appendix, 68.

<sup>70</sup> Šuvaković, *The Power of a Woman*, 85.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

away” from the accusation coming from proponents within one art discipline. For example when writers were judging her, she started working in the domain of experimental music, or performance art, etc.<sup>73</sup> Switching between different forms of art (experimental poetry, performance art, happenings, experimental music, etc.) allowed Ladik to escape the attacks pointed against her and disrupt the same norms from another art domain. As such – as a mixture of various art genres and forms, Ladik’s art diverse art production can be deemed as a hybrid.

In the next chapter I will describe the importance of hybrid forms as empowering and subversive, based on Homi Bhabha’s postcolonial theory of hybridity.

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<sup>73</sup> Drašković, “Katalin Ladik,” 14.

## 2. Subversive form: hybridity in Ladik's poetry and performances

In this chapter, I will focus on the analysis of the formal aspect of Ladik's early experimental poetry from the late 1960s, early performances from the first half of the 1970s and her late performances enacted in the second half of the 1970s, in order to illustrate the feminist character of these works. I suggest that Ladik's art production in this decade was a hybrid, contingent on the postcolonial theory of hybridity formulated by Homi Bhabha. I emphasize the hybridity of art genres Ladik worked with, in order to show that precisely hybrid form as such, owned an inherent subversive potentiality that was empowering. I start the chapter with explaining Bhabha's theory, and precede chronologically examining Ladik's poetry, early performances and late performances. With the intention of illustrating the importance of the language use in Ladik's early performances, I draw on Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of border identities.

### 2.1 *Hybridity as a site of possible subversion*

Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity explains how colonizers produced a discourse on the territory of the colonized, with the goal of stabilizing their position of power in relation to the colonized other. "Colonial presence" is, according to him, marked by its need to represent the colonial subject. The process of representation is dependent on "a sign of difference," a clear line that would demarcate the conqueror from the conquered, self from the other. As such, it would enclose the colonial identity as homogeneous, "true" and whole.<sup>74</sup>

However, he illustrates that the colonial representation could not absolutely exclude the other (colonized object) and therefore, it became split, ambivalent.<sup>75</sup> Bhabha explains how the rupture occurred as the consequence of the mechanism of colonial authority based on, what he

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<sup>74</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," in *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 111.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-110.

termed “*the rules of recognition*.”<sup>76</sup> The purpose of the system was to mirror the “subject of enunciation” (colonizer, colonial subject) entirely, so that the colonial discourse accurately reflects its source, the origin of authority. Using Lacanian terms, Bhabha shows that the product of such system was not mimesis – an exact replica of the subject of enunciation, but mimicry – camouflage, resemblance.<sup>77</sup>

Colonial mimicry is, according to him, dangerous because in itself it carried the ambivalence of being “*almost the same, but not quite*.”<sup>78</sup> Exactly this ‘almost the same’-ness through the repetition produced the disjuncture: the colonial subject of the proposition, the grammatical “I” of the discourse/sentence did not equate with the “real I” of the speaking colonial subject. The meaning produced in the language was, therefore, neither transparent or mimetic but, according to Bhabha, split between these two subjects.<sup>79</sup>

Translated into the colonial setting, mimetic discourse produced “a partial vision of the colonizer’s presence” and disrupted its authority by inducing the sameness and the difference at the same time.<sup>80</sup> Such discourse allowed the existence of both the English and the Anglicized within the same framework.<sup>81</sup> In fact, Bhabha argues that the exercise of colonial authority produced, required hybridization. “[C]olonial specularity, doubly inscribed, does not produce a mirror where the self apprehends itself; it is always the split screen of the self and its doubling, the hybrid.”<sup>82</sup>

I suggest that not only the colonial system of representation produces hybridization, but that hybridization is possible within other systems of representation as well. I will examine Yugoslav socialist art system of the 1970s as an example of one such structure. One of the

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>77</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory,” in *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 36-37.

<sup>78</sup> Homi K Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” in *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 86.

<sup>79</sup> Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory,” 36.

<sup>80</sup> Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 88.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>82</sup> Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders,” 114.



characteristic of art system in Yugoslavia was that it represented itself to the outside world as liberal and non repressive, in contrast to the other socialist regimes of the region that censored their art production. As such, Yugoslav art system endorsed experimental art practices. Bhabha's "rules of recognition" applied to this representational structure assert that, as I illustrated in the previous chapter, unless neo-avant-garde artists were criticizing the state politics, experimental art was accepted as a legitimate part of the socialist art system. However, Ladik's works were not only experimental, but also feminist, or in Bhabha's terms "almost the same [as experimental art], but not quite," and therefore, a hybrid.

Bhabha argues that hybridity posed a danger, threat since the existence of hybrid object, in colonial terms/setting, turned the gaze of the disciplined toward the colonizer revealing its power "as something other than what its rules of recognition assert".<sup>83</sup> It caused the rupture, splitting of the subject of enunciation alienating the colonizer's identity from its essence. In the context of Yugoslav art system of the 1970s, Ladik's hybrid works caused the splitting, because they induced Yugoslav art system to reveal itself as repressive and monitoring.

Hybridity, according to Bhabha, undermines and questions the authority of the colonizer.<sup>84</sup> It is a position that enables negotiation of the cultural authority,<sup>85</sup> with the ability to reverse "the *formal* process of disavowal."<sup>86</sup> A hybrid is "uncontainable because it breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside" in colonial setting<sup>87</sup> As such, a hybrid produces a space of possible intervention within the dominant discourse Bhabha refers to as the "Third Space of enunciation," a space that "destroys this mirror of representation," and where all cultural statements and systems are actually constructed.<sup>88</sup> He argues that symbols and meaning in this space have no fixity or unity, which means that they can be translated and re-

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 117-118.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>88</sup> Bhabha, "The Commitment to Theory," 37.

appropriated in different contexts.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, Ladik's hybrid art works not only revealed the actual working mechanism of the Yugoslav art system, instead of the idealized image of it that Yugoslavia promoted, but the "Third Space of the enunciation," the space Ladik's hybrid works produced, enabled her to negotiate the position/meaning of what a woman artist was in the context of Yugoslavia in the 1970s. Therefore, as suggested by Bhabha, hybrid position is potentially subversive, because it challenges the dominant representational system and exposes its mechanisms of working. It is at the same time empowering, since the hybrid position produces the "Third Space of enunciation," where meanings established by the dominant system are negotiated.

In the following part of the chapter I will analyze the formal aspect of Ladik's works, and her use of the language in the case of early performances. My aim is to illustrate the hybrid, and therefore, subversive aspect of her experimental poetry, early and late performances, and locate the possibilities these forms opened for feminist artists.

## ***2.2 Ladik's experimental poetry***

Ladik recalls that her first book of poems (*Ballad of the Silver Bicycle*, 1969) was already published with the vinyl disc. It contained the inception of all the elements and art forms she will use in her latter works.<sup>90</sup> For example, beside the traditional elements such as rhyme, rhythm, verse, etc. she says that her early poetry comprised the possibility of being sung. Some of the poems were written as dialogues, a form that was later, as she pointed out, easily transformable into a performance. Also, the layout of her book differed from the traditional ones in a sense that the visual component of her poems had an equal importance as their content. Although the initial impetus for transgressing and blurring of the borders between different art forms in her poetry (text, visual art, music) came instinctively, later on, she consciously started nurturing and

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> "Interview with Ladik Katalin," Appendix, 72.

developing each of them separately.<sup>91</sup>

Making visual elements at least equally, if not more, important than verbal ones, places Ladik's early poems in the domain of visual poetry. This is an experimental form that is, according to Willard Bohn, meant for viewing and reading. Not only that it is appealing "to the reader's intellect but arrests his or her gaze".<sup>92</sup> In that sense visual poetry can be deemed as a hybrid since, unlike traditional poetry that focuses mainly on conveying the meaning through the use of the signifier, it takes the visual composition of the text as another medium of communication with the reader. Although Bohn argues that all poems are to a certain extent designed for viewing because "visual recognition precedes verbal comprehension", the difference between the traditional and visual poetry is in the "degree of self-awareness" of the predominance of its "iconic dimension".<sup>93</sup> This experimental form emphasizes the materiality of the poem and its nature as an object in contrast with the transcendental qualities of the poetry as a bearer of ideas.

As illustrated by Bohn, visual poetry emerged as a consequence of what Andrew E. Benjamin named "the crisis of modernity."<sup>94</sup> The crisis occurred as a symptom of realization that a sign does not represent a homogenous unity of the signifier and the signified. The notion of unity was, argues Benjamin, based on the presumption of the direct relationship between the signifier and the signified.<sup>95</sup> Applied to the works of art, according to him, this meant that the "object of interpretation" (an art work) "is on an ontological level compatible with the self-image of the mode of interpretation or philosophical inquiry."<sup>96</sup> In other words, Benjamin argues that works of art understood in a way that presupposed a direct signifier-signified relation, excluded the possibility of heterogeneity of meaning. Consequently, those works of art "could

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> William Bohn, "The Crisis of a Sign," in *Modern Visual Poetry* (Newark: University of Delaware Press and London: Associated University Presses, 2001), 15.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 21

<sup>95</sup> Andrew E. Benjamin, "Betraying Faces: Lucian Freud's Self-Portraits," in *Art, Mimesis, and the Avant-garde: Aspects of a Philosophy of Difference* (London and London: Routledge, 1991), 62.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 63.

only frame the singularity of intent.”<sup>97</sup>

The crisis, according to Benjamin, came about when avant-garde artists realized that such unity is impossible, and refused to follow the traditional literary models.<sup>98</sup> For Bohn rejection of previous traditions consequently disturbed the deemed straightforwardness of the relationship between the signifier and the signified.<sup>99</sup> As he put it “they managed to turn the sign against itself,” to make it contradict itself.<sup>100</sup>

Therefore, within the framework of traditional poetry, focusing predominantly on the content of the word and presuming a direct connection between the signifier and the signified, realization of the possibility of multiple meanings (interpretations), as opposed to one meaning, brought about the uncertainty: the signifier, the words, no longer carried only the supposed meaning the poet intended to convey with them, but the potentiality of the meanings that existed beyond that one. In other words, the signifier (the word) was not an identical mirror image of the signified (the content), but became split, as in the mechanism of colonial representation where disjunction occurred between the subject of proposition and the subject of enunciation. The words carried the meaning intended by a poet, and something beyond it at the same time.

The signifier-signified split was in poetry followed by another step that involved what Bohn calls the “transformation of the linguistic sign into a visual sign.”<sup>101</sup> This meant realization that a word, as a material sign, also contained a visible component beside its linguistic aspect – an ability to convey meaning emphasized in traditional poetry. According to Bohn, visual poetry contained some of the initial signifier-signified split, but its appearance was not caused by it immediately. However, although the aforementioned split was not the immediate impetus for the birth of visual poetry, its existence was dependant on it. It was necessary to interrupt the direct link between the signifier and the signified in order to favor the visual aspect over the linguist

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>99</sup> Bohn, “The Crisis of a Sign,” 21.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 22.

one that is, according to Bohn, the case with the visual poetry.<sup>102</sup>

Also, as Bohn illustrated drawing on Anna Whiteside's argument, the visual poetry carried the signifier-signified disjuncture a bit further. According to her, as argued by Bohn, the relation "between the signifier and the referent is stronger than that between signified and signifier or signified and referent."<sup>103</sup> This means that "[i]n these works, the visual design depicts not the idea of the thing in question so much as the thing itself."<sup>104</sup> Bohn suggests that as such, visual poetry contains a paradox that, although literature is essentially a temporal form of art, visual poems aspire to resemble "the condition of painting or sculpture".<sup>105</sup> Therefore, visual poems are essentially hybrids, since they combine the elements of visual arts with the temporality of the literary texts.

Šuvaković pointed out that experimental writing radicalized the relation not only between the signifier and the signified/referent, but more importantly, between the body of the performer (reciter), his/her voice and the text.<sup>106</sup> This radicalization is significant, because it marks the spot where Ladik's body, as women's body becomes important, and gets connected to the formal aspect of her poetry. Because her poems had a visual and sound aspect beside the textual one, she was able to transgress each of these disciplines separately, and from pure poetry come to what Šuvaković calls "performances with verbal or phonic scores"<sup>107</sup> and I refer to as early performances.

### **2.3 Early performances**

Ladik's early performances present a transitional form between her early experimental poetry of the late 1960s and performances *per se* from the late 1970s. Early and later

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Šuvaković, *The Power of a Woman*, 105.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

performances differ from each other insofar as her early performances were heavily dependent on her poetry, and were in fact enacted recitals of her poems that engaged both her body and her voice. On the other hand, performance *per se* is a separate art form that, although draws on elements from the literature, differs from solely enacting the poetry. It is an independent art work with its own concept, plot, etc.

Within early performances, unlike visual poetry that combined poetry with the visual and textual elements, audio elements played an important role. Ladik managed to break out from the purely textual dimension of her poems exactly through these sound components. She remembers that already her poems pushed the borders of the literary genres, because they were examples of, what she called the “daring” and “savage” (vad) genres. The logical step after experimental poetry and freedom in language for Ladik, as she described it the interview (2011), was to free her body and test whether she was able to achieve the same freedom in social interactions/society.<sup>108</sup> Her early performances were the examples of these first experiments with the body and her endurance in the face of the contemporary critique. Her art work also illustrates a gradual progress from the poetry, through early performances, where she involved body acts for the first time, to the late performances as a form more independent from the poetry.

One of the rare video documents of Ladik’s early experiments is a four minute footage filmed by Novi Sad Television (RTV 1) in 1970 for the show called “Ellenpont” (Counterpoint).<sup>109</sup> She subsequently named the excerpt “Ólomöntes,” (Lead-molding) after the title of one of her poems she performed for that broadcast. The short excerpt shows her reciting parts of her poems in Hungarian combining dance-like theatrical performance with the visual elements, such as drawings, texts and letters. As a background sound she was using musical instruments - a bagpipe and drums, and her own voice.

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<sup>108</sup> “Interview with Ladik Katalin,” Appendix, 69.

<sup>109</sup> “Ellenpont,” 4 minute footage, Novi Sad: RTV 1, 1970. Courtesy of the artist.

Therefore, the common trait of early enactments, such as “Ólomöntes” or “Vabljenje” was that they were not long (about 15-30 minutes). Also, they were heavily depended on the texts of her poems and her voice performance. During performances Ladik either recited poems, or parts of them, or combined played footage of her voice from the cassette tape with live recital, using various props, commonly instruments, and costumes. However, more interesting than the form of Ladik’s early performances was her use of language. She was reciting in Hungarian in front of Serbian and Croatian audience that did not understand her. In order to explain the importance of such actions, I will apply Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of borderland identities.

### 2.3.1 Language

Before I turn to Anzaldúa and Ladik’s use of language, it is necessary to briefly outline the specificity of Vojvodina in terms of its history and nations that inhabited its territory, to be able to understand the position of Hungarian minority within Yugoslavia in the 1970s.

Before World War I Vojvodina was a part of Austro-Hungarian Empire. In November 1918 the Big National Assembly of Serbs, Bunjevci and other Slovenes of Bačka, Banat and Baranja (Velika narodna skupština Srba, Bunjevaca i ostalih Slovena u Bačkoj, Banatu i Baranji) proclaimed the integration of Vojvodina’s territory to the Kingdom of Serbia, and one month later it became a part of a newfound State of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes Croats (Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca).<sup>110</sup> During World War II Vojvodina was occupied by the Axis powers. Parts of its territory were divided, among others, by the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska – NDH) and Hungarian army.<sup>111</sup> It was liberated by the Yugoslav Partisans in 1945, when Vojvodina became a part of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

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<sup>110</sup> The State of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes existed from 1918 to 1929, when it changed its name into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929-1941). Dimitrije Boarov, *Politička istorija Vojvodine u trideset i tri priloga*, (Novi Sad: Europanon consulting, 2001), 111.

<sup>111</sup> Šuvaković Miško, Šimičić Darko, „Centralnoevropski aspekti vojvođanskih avangardi 1920-2000. Granični fenomeni, fenomeni granica“, in *Centralnoevropski aspekti vojvođanskih avangardi 1920-2000. Granični fenomeni, fenomeni granica*, ed. Ugren Dragomir (Novi Sad: Muzej savremene likovne umetnosti, 2002), 8.

Aforementioned political events caused ethnic migrations and shifts in the ratio of nations living on Vojvodina's territory. For example, before World War I Hungarians and Germans represented the majority of population, while after the war members of these two nations gradually turned into minorities in relation to a growing Serbian population. Vojvodina was a mixture of several nations already in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and even today there are more than 26 nations, and 6 official languages in use in the educational system.<sup>112</sup>

In Vojvodina during the 1970s the biggest minority population was Hungarian. The circle of their intellectuals, to whom Ladik belonged to, was grouped around the Hungarian publisher (Forum Kiadó) in Novi Sad. When we examine the position of ethnical minorities in the Yugoslavia of the 1970s, it is important to bear in mind that the ideal of Yugoslavian socialism was 'the brotherhood and unity.' According to this policy minorities had equal rights with the nationalities that made up the majority of Yugoslav population, namely, the rights to education, media, newspapers, etc. on their own languages. However, in practice, in most of the cases the policy encouraged forming of smaller minority groups within the dominant ethnicity, like the Hungarian minority around the Forum Publisher in Novi Sad. Although connections and interactions between Hungarians and Serbians, or other cultural centers in Yugoslavia existed, still, Hungarians in Novi Sad remained a small, rather marginalized and homogeneous ethnic group that existed alongside Serbian majority. Furthermore, Hungarians in Vojvodina remained in contact with the Hungarians living in Hungary, and as such, they became a bridge between the Hungarians living in the Hungary and the Yugoslav population.

Similarly to a "bridge" role that Hungarian minority in Vojvodina played between Serbians and Hungarians living in the Hungary, Gloria Anzaldúa wrote about Chicanos, a hybrid race, mixture of Spanish colonizers and Mexican Indians, who inhabit the border between

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<sup>112</sup> Those languages are: Serbian, Hungarian, Slovak, Croatian, Romanian and Ukrainian (Rusin). [http://www.vojvodina.gov.rs/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=100&Itemid=68](http://www.vojvodina.gov.rs/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=100&Itemid=68) (accessed: May 5, 2011).



Mexico and USA.<sup>113</sup> The aspect of Anzaldua's theory about hybrid identities that is relevant in the context of Ladik's work is Anzaldua's emphasis on the importance of the language. According to her, the language is an inseparable part of one's identity because it makes visible belonging to a certain ethnic identity.<sup>114</sup> As such, according to Anzaldua, a language has the potential to both split and unify the cultures separated by the border. In the case of Chicano language, a fusion of Spanish and English that corresponds to their hybrid identity, Anzaldua argues that instead of claiming either the Spanish or English heritage, Chicano language has the potential to heal the split between the cultures and transcend dualities between these nations.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, the language becomes the sign of belonging to both cultures simultaneously. "Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and so long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate."<sup>116</sup>

Ladik's early performances enacted in Hungarian language in Belgrade or Zagreb, where it was expected to speak Serbo-Croatian (Srpskohrvatski), reverberate with Anzaldua's assertion about the connection between the language and the cultural belonging. Using Hungarian in front of the Serbian and Croatian audience suggests that Ladik wanted to emphasize that she belonged to Yugoslav art scene/culture as Hungarian from Vojvodina. Instead of submitting to the norms and expectations according to which Hungarian should be spoken in Novi Sad or, more broadly in Vojvodina, and Serbian in Belgrade, she inverted this logic and made herself visible as a bilingual, Hungarian-Serbian poet whose work was not marginalized and limited to Vojvodina, but belonged equally to Serbian writers. With her early performances in Hungarian, Ladik

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<sup>113</sup> For more detailed explanation of Chicanos' origin see: Gloria Anzaldúa, "The Homeland, Aztlan.El otro México," in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 1-13.

<sup>114</sup> Anzaldúa, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 59.

<sup>115</sup> Anzaldúa "La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness," in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 80.

<sup>116</sup> Anzaldúa, "How to tame a wild tongue," 59.

claimed her belonging to both cultures, Serbian and Hungarian, at the same time. As such, a language used in a way Ladik had done became a feminist tool, because, as Anzaldúa suggested in the case of Chicanos, instead of marginalization and differences produced in a given culture, it worked as a mediator joining those cultures and nations.<sup>117</sup>

In the last sequence of the chapter I will turn to the analysis of final aspect of Ladik's art production in the 1970s, her late performances. First, I will outline the main characteristics of the performance art in general, and then turn to locating the important aspects that were particularly important to female artists. My aim is to support Bhabha's claim that hybrid works create the space for negotiation of norms that belong to the dominant discourse on the example of performance art.

#### **2.4 Late performances**

Performance art is a hybrid form that occurred in the second half of the 1960s. As Johann Lothar Schröder described it, performance was a combination of elements coming from theatre, dance, music, visual arts, architecture, etc.<sup>118</sup> As such, it belonged to "intermedia," an umbrella term that encompassed all experimental art forms, indicating their mixed nature.<sup>119</sup> According to Schröder, an important distinction/difference between performance and other intermedia genres was the active and insistent use of body as a medium and material.<sup>120</sup>

Particularly significant aspect of performance art for women artists, as suggested by Sally Dawson, was its open, experimental form. According to her, formal difference between performance art and traditional art genres was that traditional genres were bound to particular

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<sup>117</sup> Anzaldúa "La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness," 79-81.

<sup>118</sup> Johann Lothar Schröder, "Bevezetés: A performance, valamint más rokon kifejezések és kifejezési formál fogalomtörténeti, történeti és elméleti áttekintése" in *A performance-művészet*, ed. Szőke Annamária (Budapest: Artpool-Balassi Kiadó-Tartóshullám, 2000), 13-14.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 16-18.

formulas/prescriptions that determined the technique, the materials, etc. As opposed to traditional genres, performance art did not operate with previously determined limitations regarding the use of materials and the content of the art work.<sup>121</sup>

The importance of its characteristics for female authors becomes evident if we bear in mind Pollock's explanation of women's position in art starting from the nineteenth, and during the first half of the twentieth century. According to her, bourgeois culture of the nineteenth century confined women in a domestic, "feminine" sphere and endorsed women's art and literature insofar as it corresponded to a woman trope of the time. "Lady painters" and woman writers were unified in a "singular abstraction Woman," that Pollock described as "classed and racialized trope;" accordingly, the category of women's art work implied works that lacked depth and profoundness of thought.<sup>122</sup> As such, women's art was deemed less valuable in comparison to the "real" masculine art that mirrored deep, universal truths.<sup>123</sup> Therefore, a premise that women's work somehow bore a recognizable, unavoidable sign of gender of its creator on it, became a sign of its weakness. Inscription of female gender and sexuality in art polluted its purity and intellectual character during this period.

Pollock continues that modernism seemingly offered women a possibility to enter art scene as more than mere "women artists" or "lady painters." Modernist art movements considered sex and social background of the artist irrelevant. However, Pollock asserts on the example of abstract modernism (1930-50) that women got a possibility to enter the art world as creative, intellectual individuals, for the price of giving up on their sexuality. This is what she calls a "paradox of modernity". The abstract modernism, as she illustrated, supposedly opened the space for women equality with male artists, as long as any sign of "femininity" in their art work remained undetected. Female abstract painters created in fear that a slightest inscription of

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<sup>121</sup> Sally Dawson, "Women's Movements: Feminist Censorship and Performance Art," in *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies*, ed. Katy Deepwell (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 115.

<sup>122</sup> Pollock, "Inscription in the Feminine," 67.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

gender on their art work might lead to losing their credentials as artists.<sup>124</sup> Pollock concluded that there was no room for “autonomous feminine subjectivity” in modernist art system ruled by “fantasies of masculine heterosexual psyche.”<sup>125</sup>

Therefore, performance art with its hybrid and opened form promised women an actual opportunity to claim equal position as artists alongside their male colleagues. Also, as pointed out by Helen Potkin, performance was a way to “insert the female self into art practice.”<sup>126</sup> Female body as a material used by women artists was one of points where autonomous feminine subjectivity could enter the art system. Furthermore, performance art was a medium for representing women’s experience, and for negotiating that experience with the dominant discourse on femininity. As such, performance confirms Bhabha’s assertion that hybrid forms produce a space for negotiation and re-appropriation of terms determined by the dominant discourse.

In Ladik’s art production performance art was a subversive art form she instinctively arrived to, starting from her poetry, and continuing through early performances. Intermedia character of performances enabled her to move across disciplines and combine them into a single work. However, the whole trajectory from poetry to performances illustrates that her experimental art work in general was very compact and intertwined during the 1970s, and consequently it seems out of the context to concentrate solely on one genre she worked in. That is why I chose to examine her poetry, early performances and late performances simultaneously.

As analysis of formal aspect of experimental genres Ladik used in the 1970s illustrated, it is not enough to define the feminist art practices solely as subversive, hybrid art forms, since there are hybrid art forms that are not necessarily feminist, for example visual poetry. In fact, as

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Helen Potkin, “Performance art,” in *Feminist Visual Culture*, ed. Fiona Carson and Claire Pajczkowska (New York: Routledge, 2001), 76.

suggested by Bohn regarding visual poetry, neo-avant-garde art practices were subversive per definition, since they were directed against the traditional art norms/recipes of how to create a work of art. Therefore, subversive form is an important, but not a sufficient condition for the work of art to be regarded feminist. Another significant aspect of the art work that has to be addressed in order to consider a work of art feminist is its content. Thus, in the following chapter I will turn to feminist topics and issues Ladik addressed, examining selected poems and late performances from the 1970s.

### 3. Under a magnifying glass: content analysis

As I illustrated in the previous chapter, it is not sufficient to describe a feminist art work as such, based solely on the formal analysis of the works, since the avant-garde works of art were, regarding their formal aspect, directed against the traditional art norms, and therefore, subversive. Thus, in this chapter I turn to the content analysis of several selected Ladik's poems and performances, in order to illustrate that both meaning and form should be taken into account when interpreting feminist art works. To illustrate the feminist character of Ladik's poetry, I will use the literary theory of *écriture féminine*, introduced by the French feminist Hélène Cixous. For the purpose of demonstrating the nature of Ladik's poetry better, I will expand the timeframe of inquiry to the 1980s.

#### 3.1 *Écriture féminine in Ladik's poetry*

Susan Sellers argues that, according to Hélène Cixous, subversive women's writing has to challenge the logic and objective meaning of phallogocentrism.<sup>127</sup> "It is not a question of appropriating their [male] instruments, their concepts, their places for oneself or of wishing oneself in their position of mastery," but a way to "shoot through and smash the walls," run away from the syntax and break the line of the logic.<sup>128</sup> By using the same language tools a female writer should let herself go "beyond the codes of the (masculine) symbolic" where "words diverge' and 'meanings begin to flow'."<sup>129</sup> Thus, this strategy somewhat resembles the mechanisms of freeing the unconscious into the language as a means to subvert the existing system. The results are texts with numerous possibilities of meanings, rendering one fixed

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<sup>127</sup> Susan Sellers, "Towards an *écriture féminine*," *Language and Sexual Difference: Feminist Writing in France* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 144.

<sup>128</sup> Hélène Cixous, "Sorties: Our and Out: Attacks/Ways out/Forays," in *The Newly Born Woman*, Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 96.

<sup>129</sup> Cixous quoted in: Sellers, "Towards an *écriture féminine*," 143.

meaning impossible.<sup>130</sup>

This description also suggests that the language as a phallogocentric system suppresses feminine in writing. In that sense language resembles the colonial system of representation that wants to exclude the colonized other but is not able to omit it entirely. Cixous' suggestion to women writers to embrace the different meanings in language similarly indicates an understanding of a language as a system that is split, as a colonial discourse is, in a way that it represents/mirrors only the masculine. *Écriture féminine*, according to this scheme, resembles what Bhabha calls "negative transparency", a disturbing hybrid that unsettles the authority/power of the system.

However, literary theory of the French feminists offers a possibility of resolving this disjunction. It can be found in a bisexuality of a female subject, a motive detectable in Ladik's poetry. In a poem called "Follow me into the mythology" Ladik writes:

Dvopolno sam biće: lažljivo. Dakle iskreno  
Ja sam plod samo-mučenja, to jest samo-ljubavi.

[I am a two-gendered being: lying. Therefore sincere  
I am a fruit of self-torture, that is of self-love.]<sup>131</sup>

According to Svetlana Slapšak bisexuality presents the necessary condition of desire and pleasure in Ladik's literary writings.<sup>132</sup> According to her, motives in Ladik's poems such as plum (šljiva), sparrow's nest (vrapčije gnezdo), caterpillar (gusenica), etc. illustrate "two poles of pleasure" (dva pola uživanja). Therefore, as suggested by Slapšak, bisexuality in Ladik's poetry cancels out the power of one gender, and as such, in building what Slapšak calls "bisexual world," Ladik has no

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> All the translations of the poems into English are mine. Serbian translation of the extract is taken from: Radmila Lazić, "Mesto žudenje: Katalin Ladik," *Profemina*, No. 5-6 (1996): 138.

<sup>132</sup> Svetlana Slapšak, "Katalin Ladik: Osvajanje opscenosti," *Profemina*, No. 5-6 (1996): 142.

need to draw from traditional erotic motives.<sup>133</sup>

Bisexuality is important term in Cixous' theory as well. According to Rita Felski, feminist literary critic, Cixous argues that women writers "are far more willing to embrace sexual ambiguity."<sup>134</sup> Therefore, for Cixous bisexuality is closely linked to femininity, or more precisely, woman is bisexual for Cixous.<sup>135</sup> However, she distinguished two types of bisexuality: "bisexuality as a fantasy of a complete being" that entails androgynous union that annihilates the sexual differences between sexes, and "the other bisexuality" that includes creation of subjects' own "erotic universe," or in other words "the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes."<sup>136</sup> The important difference between the first and the second type of the bisexuality is that the other bisexuality embraces and does not "annihilate differences" between the sexes.<sup>137</sup> Similarly to Cixous' "other bisexuality", Ladik created an erotic universe in her poetry that did not limit her female sexuality to her biological sex. As such, her poetry is an example of what Cixous described as "the multiplication of the effects of desire's inscription on every part of the body," a female openness to "the other bisexuality."<sup>138</sup>

Cixous' "other bisexuality" translated into the literary theory of *écriture féminine*, as argued by Sellers, indicates that feminine writing embraces the otherness. This does not mean the negation of the (feminine) self. According to Cixous, as pointed out by Sellers, it means valuation of the self's own needs and simultaneously allowing the "not-said," the elements that do not correspond to the codes of masculine to be heard in language.<sup>139</sup> In that sense bisexuality can mean the wholeness of both sexuality and, applied to literature, of theoretical approach. Also, compared to Bhabha's theory, it can present the solution for the unification of the split subject.

It is important to note here that Ladik's explanation of bisexuality echoes what Cixous

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Rita Felski, "Authors," in *Literature After Feminism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 74.

<sup>135</sup> Cixous, "Sorties," 85.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 84-85.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Sellers, "Towards an *écriture féminine*," 144-145.



termed “bisexuality as a fantasy of a complete being,” and is therefore closer to bisexuality as androgyny, where an androgyne is perceived as a rather asexual being. Ladik described the motive of androgyne in her poetry as an evocation of a child-like wholeness she felt in her early childhood.<sup>140</sup> During that time, as she recalls, she did not know what her gender was and she felt incredibly free. According to Ladik, in the 1950s when she grew up, parents in general did not emphasize or pay much attention to children’s sexuality until their puberty. Only at the teen age her parents and her immediate environment changed their behavior and expectations toward her, and only then she was forced to perform her gender role. Puberty was a point when she had to realize that she was a girl and to start behaving accordingly. Thus, Ladik suggests that a child as androgyne is neither male nor female, but a sexless unity of both.<sup>141</sup> As pointed out by Lucy Lippard, an American art historian, similar understandings of female-male wholeness echo more traditional Platonic and Gnostic explanations of androgyny.<sup>142</sup> Furthermore, Ladik’s description of androgyny indicates that, according to her, each gender separately is not free but constrained, inhibited by the norms of the society. Therefore, her resolution for resolving the sexual differences was searching for, and bringing back the child-like feeling of freedom in her art works, a feeling that was, in her opinion, founded in androgyny.

Returning to the feminine writing as subversive, as a precondition for *écriture féminine*, if we read the critique of Ladik’s poetry by Judita Šalgo, published in *Polja* (“Opasne igre razgrađivanja – Beleška uz poeziju Ladik Katalin”, 1969), it is evident that Šalgo recognized and identified the subversive character of Ladik’s poetry. Šalgo refers to Ladik’s writing as a “dangerous game of dismantling” (opasna igra razgradjivanja). According to her, Ladik’s poems dismantle literary forms of the past creating a “new order of things” - one that reaffirms the demolition and denies the existence of any order. Ladik makes unexpected connections of space

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<sup>140</sup> “Interview with Ladik Katalin,” Appendix, 72.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Lippard, “The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: European and American Women’s Body Art,” in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women’s Art* (Dutton and New York: A Dutton Paperback, 1976), 128.

and time in her texts. In that sense, argues Šalgo, her thoughts seem “crippled,” building constructions that are unified in nonsense. Šalgo suggests that this process liberates the words and expressions from their original meanings, giving them a new one, similar to the ritual chant.<sup>143</sup>

I find that the expressions such as “the unexpected connections of space and time,” “stratification of language,” “crippled thoughts that enclose in unified nonsense,” she used to describe Ladik’s poetry, echo Cixous’ strategy of bringing the elements of the unconscious into the language. Although Šalgo does not denominate them as such, she identifies the qualities of Ladik’s poetry that enable its reading as surreal. Radmila Lazić on the other hand, in a much latter written article, argues that female sexuality was considered impure and dangerous since it has always been measured in masculine terms. This led to its suppression into the unconscious.<sup>144</sup> Following this logic, delving into the depths of the suppressed and unconscious can bring the feminine sexuality onto the surface. Although the “feminine practice of writing” cannot escape, step out of the domain of phallogocentric system, Cixous suggests that if women begin to speak and write bringing up unconscious drives into writing, the phallogocentric system can be undermined.<sup>145</sup>

Šalgo stresses other important elements in Ladik’s poetry - the eroticism and the carnal - marking further links to the theory of *écriture féminine*. Following extract illustrate the way of using the body and eroticism in her poetry:

Repica ima pukotinu

Kada repica primeti da ima pukotinu, sakrije se u travi. Pojede puno trave i kad od toga reči počnu da joj naviru kao koprivnjača, ispiše po svom telu dugačku pesmu. Tako repica postaje pesnik, ali pukotina i dalje raste. Uzalud je skriva, pocepa joj suknju od hlorofila i sunčeva svetlost

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<sup>143</sup> Judita Šalgo, “Opasne igre razgrađivanja – Beleška uz poeziju Ladik Katalin,” *Polja*, No. 128 (1969): 2.

<sup>144</sup> Lazić, “Mesto žudnje,” 138.

<sup>145</sup> Cixous, “Sorties,” 92.

prodre joj u telo. Tako repica napokon nahrani pukotinu, a lživavu travu svoje naslade nazove Anima i Animus. Taj bljutavi užitak u spostvenoj poeziji, druge repice nazvaše – masturbacija.<sup>146</sup>

[A beet has a crack

When a beet notices that it has a crack, hides in a grass. Eats a lot of grass and when words start to rush like hives from it, writes a long poem over its body. That is how a beet becomes a poet, but a crack continuously grows. It (a beet) tries to hide the crack in vain, since it tears her dress of chlorophyll and sunlight penetrates her body. That is how a beet finally feeds the crack and names the slimy grass of her pleasure Anima and Animus. That insipid, tasteless pleasure in her own poetry other beets called – masturbation.]

In this text a beet (repica) can stand as a metaphor for Ladik` s poetry. She compares the joy that writing poetry has for her with sexual pleasure linking the body and the text. Cixous stresses the importance of *jouissance* (pleasure, enjoyment) in women` s writing. How woman feels about her desire, what she wants and pleasures her, as well as where does *jouissance* happen and how does it write itself are the key issues for her.<sup>147</sup> The way of breaking the chains of submission is “writing the body” – writing about female sexuality, the “complexity of their becoming erotic”.<sup>148</sup> Following poem is another example of this:

Sedi na smeđem panju  
Poluotvorenih usta, u ruci joj ogledalo,  
mazi samu sebe. U drugoj  
gusenica pod slapom toplih čipki.  
Zna već  
šta nedostaje nervoznim vrapcima,

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<sup>146</sup> Serbian translation of the poem is taken from: „Katalin Ladik: Portret savremenice“ *Profemina*, No.5-6 (1996): 127.

<sup>147</sup> Cixous, “Sorites,” 82.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

vrapčijem gnezdu  
međ butinama.

[Sits on a brown stump  
With mouth half opened, holding a mirror in her hand,  
caresses herself. In the other (hand)  
a caterpillar under the ruffle of warm lace.  
Knows already  
what nervous sparrows,  
sparrow's nest  
between the thighs misses.]<sup>149</sup>

According to Radmila Lazić, the characteristic of Ladik`s work that differentiated her from other members of Yugoslavian avant-garde was her attitude toward the body. Lazić argues that Ladik was one of the rare female authors who managed to step into male world of poetry simultaneously retaining her femininity.<sup>150</sup>

Other characteristics of subversive feminine writing Cixous speaks about are the anger and “spoken word exploding”.<sup>151</sup> According to her, a woman needs to speak, to burst. “Now, I-woman am going to blow up the Law: a possible and inescapable explosion from now on; let it happen, right now, in language”.<sup>152</sup> I believe that this explosion of suppressed anger and female confinement to silence in Ladik`s poetry emerge in ironizing the female position. Women she writes about do not do what is expected from them. They do not want to be oppressed any longer; they bite and confront their oppressors. Another poem called “Brown floor” illustrate

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<sup>149</sup> Serbian traslation of the poem is taken from: „Katalin Ladik: Portret savremenice“ *Profemina*, No.5-6 (1996): 127.

<sup>150</sup> Lazić, “Mesto žudnje,” 136.

<sup>151</sup> Cixous, “Sorties,” 94.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

this well:

[Brown floor

Braon patos

Brown floor – who painted it?

Mrki patos – ko ga ofarbao?

I scrubbed it, walked on it, foamed of beating.

Ja sam ga ribala, gazila, zapenjena od batina.

Brown door – who is knocking?

Mrka vrata – ko to kuca?

Is there a good, warm cunt for sale?

Ima li dobre, tople pičke na prodaju?

There is. There is.

Ima.Ima.

In a quilt, in the oven, in the drawer,

U perini, u furuni, u fioci,

One angry cunt bites.]

Po jedna besna pička ujeda.<sup>153</sup>

The brown floor, the quilt, the oven are all metaphors for female work and the woman. The obscene language, according to Radmila Lazić, functions as a means for the irony and a tool against the taboos of patriarchy. Obscenity can be seen as a mark of bursting, exploding in the language as well. Svetlana Slapšak argues that uncensored language serves as a subversive instrument for unmasking the actual power relations between the sexes. The picture of biting, which implies hidden teeth according to her, marks the detraumatization of women's experience: they have overcome a fear of the masculine.<sup>154</sup>

Applying the literary theory of *écriture féminine* on Ladik's poetry, I illustrated that being subversive in the language is important way of acting against the patriarchal norms. Ladik's poetry serves as an example of a female author, who demonstrated and communicated her female sexuality on her own terms. This means that she did not accept to submit herself to the patriarchal norms and morals that defined a feminine sexuality in a certain way, but that she expressed her sexuality in poetry according to her own individual, subjective experience.

In the following part of the chapter, I turn to Ladik's late performances in order to

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<sup>153</sup> Serbian translation of the extract is taken from: Lazić, "Mesto žudnje," 139.

<sup>154</sup> Slapšak, "Katalin Ladik," 143.

illustrate how she negotiated women's position in Yugoslav socialist system of the 1970s, using her body as a medium, in this specific genre.

### **3.2 Late performances**

As pointed out by Jorge Glusberg, German art historian, performance art was not dealing solely with the body but, more importantly, with the discourses around the body.<sup>155</sup> Accordingly, Glusberg defined body as a biological manifestation of “culturally conditioned fact/reality”.<sup>156</sup> This means that engaging with the body enabled performance artists to question the social norms in connection/relation with female and male bodies. Also, through the analysis of performance art practices, it became possible for researchers to trace the discourses operating in a given culture in a particular moment in time.

Sally Dawson, English performance artist, asserts that artists' work within the culture is determined by the “collective knowledge,” a set of ideas and beliefs that perpetuate certain value system.<sup>157</sup> Speaking from the position of an artist, she suggests that artists' task in a specific cultural context is to look, see and describe a given culture in his/her own way.<sup>158</sup> Also, inverting the same logic, researchers can learn about the social context of the art works when they examine them. Accordingly, through the analysis of Ladik's performances, I want to detect particular discourses around the women's body present in the socialist Yugoslavia of the 1970s Ladik responded to, and the ways she problematized them. In order to illustrate feminist character of selected Ladik's performances, I will compare the issues regarding women's position in art and society that emerged in her performances with relevant/suitable feminist art theories.

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<sup>155</sup> This characteristics made performance significant for interventions of male performers too. Jorge Glusberg, “Bevezetés a testnyelvekhez: a body art és a performance (1979),” in *A performance-művészet*, ed. Szóke Annamária (Budapest: Artpool-Balassi Kiadó-Tartóshullám, 2000), 94-97.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Sally Dawson, “Women's Movements: Feminism, Censorship and Performance Art,” in *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies*, ed. Katy Deepwell (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 112.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

Therefore, I will show that the questions Ladik raised were relevant feminist issues theorized by feminists art historians.

Ladik's performance "The Screaming Hole" was enacted for the first time in Novi Sad in 1979. Inside the exhibition space, for the purpose of the performance, Ladik built a circular structure covered with paper, so that the audience, when entered the room, would not be able to see her and what she was doing inside the structure. Ladik furnished this secluded/private space with objects such as a chair, a table, a cooker, radio, pans, etc. Outside the structure, the audience could only hear her and smell the food she was cooking. At first they waited, and after a while, a daring member of the audience made a first hole in the paper, followed by the others, who soon perforated the paper structure in shapes of peep holes, to be able to see what Ladik did inside. Also, Ladik hired a photographer, who made photos of the event and the audience watching her.

In "The Screaming Hole" Ladik tackled the subject-object, active-passive binary that positioned women in art as passive and as objects of male gaze. Drawing on the work of Griselda Pollock, Sue Thornham, a feminist theoretician of the media representation of women, argues that women in history of art (from renaissance to the twentieth century) were portrayed as fetishized objects of men's gaze, as "a mask of beauty" stripped of their individuality and personal identity, perceived solely as the body.<sup>159</sup> As such, women were objectified and their bodies in art were, as Helen Potkin emphasized quoting Lisa Tickner, colonized by the male fantasy.<sup>160</sup> Women's task, according to Tickner was to "reclaim [their bodies] from masculine fantasy" and from its status of a "raw material for the men."<sup>161</sup> In Potkin's opinion, performance art by women, as an experimental genre without overwhelming history attached to it, opened a possibility for women artists to reclaim their bodies and "to insert [their] female self into art

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<sup>159</sup> Sue Thornham, "Fixing into Images" in *Women, Feminism and Media* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 29.

<sup>160</sup> Potkin, "Performance Art," 76.

<sup>161</sup> Lisa Tickner, "The Body Politic: Female Sexuality and Women Artists since 1970," in *Looking on Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media*, ed. Rosemary Betterton (New York: Pandora Press, 1987), 239.

practice.”<sup>162</sup> According to Potkin the “moving subject resists the assumption of the passive female, and challenges the patriarchal gaze,” which means that women performers were visibly active during the performance, and as such defied the stereotype of female passivity on the basic, literary level of meaning.<sup>163</sup>

In the case of Ladik’s performance her active position was marked by her deliberate/intentional choice to make photographs of the audience watching her. Through the camera’s lens, and the eye of the photographer, Ladik transformed her position from being an object of the gaze, to a subject position of an active female artist, who returned the gaze, although her body was exposed to the looks of the audience. Also, as Lippard suggested regarding women performers who filmed the performances, another purpose of the camera was to mirror how the audience saw the artist. As such, according to Lippard, camera became a symbol of centuries long women’s awareness of being watched, that made them anxious about their appearance.<sup>164</sup> According to John Berger women’s appearance was crucial in determining how men will treat them. That is why women were, in his opinion, from their childhood taught to constantly survey themselves.<sup>165</sup> Consequently, argues Berger, woman’s self was split into surveyor within herself, defined by Berger as male, and the surveyed, an image of femininity, imposed on her by the culture. This image represented a norm defining what a woman should be in a given culture, and therefore, it accompanied women in their everyday life.<sup>166</sup> As a result, women turned themselves into a sight, and unconsciously supported the production of a stereotype that Berger summarized in a sentence: “*men act and women appear.*”<sup>167</sup>

However, in Ladik’s case, she was the one shaping the image of herself as a woman that she conveyed to the audience. Therefore, Ladik by means of her feminine body transformed herself from being solely an object of (male) gaze, into manipulating subject that negotiated the

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<sup>162</sup> Potkin, “Performance Art,” 76.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Lippard, “The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth,” 129.

<sup>165</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972), 46.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 47.



cultural stereotypes of women as appearance, historically attached to the feminine body. Ladik, with her performance, tried to modify and negotiate such position of women in her culture.

“The Screaming Hole” is interesting work from yet another point of view, because it included two shorter performances entitled “Poemim” and “Blaskhave-Poem,” that Ladik also enacted separately. I will focus on the analysis the latter one. Ladik performed “Blackshave-poem” several times (Zagreb 1978; Budapest, 1979), and it was an example of what she called “inverted striptease.”<sup>168</sup> Ladik incorporated it in “The Screaming Hole,” and the relevant aspect of the whole performance for the “Blackshave-poem” was that from the beginning of the entire show she wore several layers of clothes that she gradually took off, after the audience made peep holes in the paper structure and she performed “Poemim,” until she remained only in bra and panties she wore over black pants and black pullover.<sup>169</sup> Before taking off her underwear, Ladik shaved her armpits, over the black pullover, and her face, using razorblade and shaving cream. Eventually, she took off the underwear too and stood “naked” in front of the audience. Although the audience of the performance expected Ladik to strip down completely, this did not happen. She stayed in the black pants and pullover. However, at the end of her “striptease” Ladik made a traditional gesture of covering her intimate body parts in shame.

Ladik’s decision not to take off her clothes is another example of the “manipulation of the audience’s voyeuristic impulses.”<sup>170</sup> She refused to do the obvious and play the role of the seductress. She shattered the expectations of the audience to see her naked, and once more turned herself from the position of an object to a position of subject, who controls the development of events. Her anti-striptease can be read as a message to the part of the audience that, judging from her early performances when she used explicit nudity, considered her an exhibitionist, that she was an artist able to communicate a meaning without having to show her naked body. Another important aspect was that Ladik managed to avoid – what Lippard called

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<sup>168</sup> “Interview with Ladik Katalin,” Appendix, 73.

<sup>169</sup> Ladik Katalin, “The Screaming Hole: Illustrated description of the performance.” Courtesy of the artist.

<sup>170</sup> Expression is taken from Lippard. Lippard, “The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth,” 125.

“self-exploitation,” that was, according to her, one of the traps/dangers for women artists who used their own bodies as a material for art works, in order to expose the objectification of women in the society.<sup>171</sup> For Lippard the way women’s bodies were used in the art by female artists moved on a fine line between parodying the women’s object position in the society, and confirming that position with unjustified exposure of the female body.<sup>172</sup> However, in these two performances, Ladik successfully negotiated women’s position of a passive object, and offered an alternative femininity that subverted the patriarchal norms.

As I illustrated in this chapter, a feminist art work has to be subversive in terms of its form and content. Nevertheless, I claim that, the analysis of the work of art from the present perspective is not complete without taking into account the response it caused in its social context, and cannot be interpreted as feminist, unless it caused disruption, and was deemed provocative in that environment. That is why, in the last chapter, I turn to the context of criticism and map out the reactions caused by Ladik’s works based on contemporary newspaper articles.

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.,124-125.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

## 4. Reception

In the final chapter, I turn to examination of reception of Ladik's performances based on the articles published in Yugoslav press between 1970 and 1982. I expand the timeframe of analysis in order to illustrate that certain approaches to Ladik's work had not changed in ten years, and to be able to include affirmative assessment of Ladik's work by the feminist journalist Vesna Kesić. I emphasize the importance of the conceptual apparatus and explore the ways how the lack of both feminist criticism and theoreticians of experimental art practices in Novi Sad, influenced the interpretation of Ladik's works in Yugoslavia during the 1970s. I begin the chapter with addressing the situation regarding art criticism in Novi Sad of the 1970s.

### *4.1 The context of criticism in Vojvodina of the 1970s*

It is necessary to stress that there were no adequate art critique that would parallel neo-avant-garde activity in Novi Sad. There was no critical language or conceptual apparatus that could account for the experimental tendencies of the alternative art scene. Szombathy Bálint, one of the founders of Bosch+Bosch group Ladik joined in 1973, pointed to the fact that criticism in Vojvodina was lagging behind in comparison to Belgrade or Zagreb.<sup>173</sup> He was one of the first artists who tried to write about the "new artistic practice"<sup>174</sup> in the 1970s in Vojvodina. Without competent critics in Vojvodina there was no one to mediate between the experimental art practices and traditionalists – the artists and the critics who apprehended art

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<sup>173</sup> One of the art historians in Belgrade, who followed the experimental art practices was Ješa Denegri. Balind Vera, "Beszélgetés Szombathy Bálinttal, 2009. december 17.," in *A szerb – magyar avantgárd művészek kapcsolata a hetvenes években* (MA thesis, Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, 2010), 110.

<sup>174</sup> "New artistic practice" was a term coined by the French art critic Catherine Millet in the late 1960s early 1970s. In Yugoslavia Ješa Denegri was the first art historian to apply it to describe the emerging experimental practices in the Yugoslav context. According to him, the term referred to experimental practices of the 1970s as "new" in relation to traditional art, "artistic" emphasizing that they were not anti-art, and "practices" because the art works were not necessarily art objects any longer, but processes like i.e., performances. Ješa Denegri, "Sedamdesete: radikalni umetnički stavovi, redukcije materijalnog objekta, novi mediji, mentalni i analitički postupci, ponašanja umetnikove ličnosti," in *Sedamdesete: teme sprske umetnosti* (Novi Sad: Svetovi, 1996), 22-24.

within traditional frames taught at art universities in Yugoslavia.<sup>175</sup> These traditionalists shared a conventional notions and value system regarding works of art. Consequently, neo-avant-garde artists faced the audience that was incapable to comprehend and appreciate the importance of their art.

However, experimental art practices were tolerated by the regime and artists were allowed to work and exhibit openly (not ‘underground’) as long as they did not challenge the legitimacy of Yugoslav socialist regime. In the first half of the 1970 Youth Tribune (Tribina mladih), an institution formed as a part of local university, played the most important role in promoting progressive art practices at the time in Novi Sad.<sup>176</sup> However, after members of one of the artistic groups, whose base was in the Tribune called FEBRUARY (FEBRUAR), in 1971 openly criticized Yugoslav socialist regime and Vojvodina’s local authority in an exhibition titled “Repast of New Arts”<sup>177</sup> (Zakuska novih umetnosti) organized in Belgrade’s Youth Center (Dom omladine), regime’s attitude towards Novi Sad’s alternative art scene gradually changed.<sup>178</sup> The exhibition was evaluated in contemporary newspapers as scandalous and shocking, and had political consequences. The editors-in-chief of *Polja* (Vujica Rešin-Tucić) and *Új Symposium* (Tolnai Ottó), two journals published in the Tribune, were replaced with more loyal subjects.<sup>179</sup> According to Kristian Lukić, Serbian art critic who dealt with the video art in Vojvodina, this produced a very different Youth Tribune that after 1974 lost its pace in following events around neo-avant-garde both in the region and abroad. In his opinion this caused Tribune to loose its

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<sup>175</sup> Kristian Lukić, Serbian art historian, emphasized that Novi Sad did not have, and still does not have its Art History department at Univeristy of Novi Sad. Kristian Lukić, “Video u Vojvodini,” in *Evropski konteksti umetnosti XX veka u Vojvodini*, ed. Dragomir Ugren and Miško Šuvaković (Novi Sad: Muzej savremene umetnosti Vojvodine, 2008), 711-712.

<sup>176</sup> On more about the programs in Youth Tribune see: Gordana Đilas, Nedeljko Mamula, *Tribina mladih 1954-1977: Građa za monografiju Kulturnog centra Novog Sada* (Novi Sad: Kulturni centar Novoga Sada, 2004).

<sup>177</sup> English translation of the title is taken from the documentary about the Youth Tribune. Milosević, *The Youth Tribune*.

<sup>178</sup> The authorities’ attitude changed especially towards Vujica Rešin-Tucić and Miroslav Mandić. On more information about the conceptual art groups in the Novi Sad see: Miško Šuvaković, *Grupa Kód, (3), (3-Kód. Retrospektiva* (Novi Sad: Galerija savremene likovne umetnosti, 1995); Radojčić Mirko, “Aktivnost grupe Kód,” in *Nova umjetnička praksa 1966-1978.*, ed. Susovski Marjan (Zagreb: Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, 1978), 36-47.

<sup>179</sup> Milosević, *The Youth Tribune*.

position and importance regarding alternative art practices.<sup>180</sup> Furthermore, as suggested by Šuvaković, aforementioned exhibition in Belgrade in 1971 revealed the conservatism of both political and art system in Yugoslavia that was unable to recognize excess as a work of art.<sup>181</sup>

Answering the question where would she locate herself on the Yugoslav art scene of the 1970s from today's perspective (2011), Ladik pointed that she was not fully aware of her position at that time. She worked with a certain group of people, i.e., Bosch+Bosch, and was familiar with their works. Furthermore, Ladik emphasized that she was not a member of any official art institution and, therefore, lacked the overview of the entire art scene and her own position in it.<sup>182</sup> However, in an earlier interview (2009), Ladik labeled what she had been doing during the 1970s as “marginal” art production because, as a new art practice in Vojvodina, it lacked a competent critics who would write about it in Hungarian language. According to her, experimental work of Hungarian minority in Vojvodina was followed only by a very small circle of people, who belonged to similar groups in Novi Sad and Yugoslavia.<sup>183</sup> Since no one “commissioned” the work of the neo-avant-garde artists, as in the case of the mainstream artists, they had to finance their experimental work themselves. Ladik believed this ensured her freedom of doing whatever she wanted in the domain of art with no formal or topical constraints.<sup>184</sup>

Therefore, not only that the critics that would be sensitive for importance of experimental works were missing in Novi Sad, but there was no feminist literary criticism at the time in Serbia either. However, with the appearance of the “neofeminism” in Yugoslavia in the late 1970s feminist texts appeared in the popular journals, such as the Croatian tabloid *Start*.<sup>185</sup> This is important because Vesna Kesić, one of the Yugoslav feminist journalists, published an

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<sup>180</sup> Lukić, “Video u Vojvodini,” 711.

<sup>181</sup> Šuvaković, *Grupa Kód, (D), (D-Kód. Retrospektiva*, 14.

<sup>182</sup> “Interview with Ladik Katalin,” Appendix, 70

<sup>183</sup> Vera Balind, “Beszélgetés Ladik Katalinnal, 2009. november 22.,” in *A szerb – magyar avantgárd művészek kapcsolata a hetvenes években* (MA thesis, Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, 2010), 102.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> According to Zsófia Lóránd, Yugoslav regime allowed “neofeminists” to publish in the popular and mainstream magazines such as *Danas*, *Žena*, *Pitanja*, *Start*, etc. Zsófia Lóránd, “Feminism as Counterdiscourse in Yugoslavia in Two Different Contexts” (MA Thesis, Central European University, 2007), 23.

article about Ladik in 1981.<sup>186</sup> Her article, that I examine in the last part of this chapter, marked an important turning point in the attitude toward Ladik's performances in comparison to prevalent misogynic comments. Therefore, during the 1970s there was almost no competent critic who would be able or willing to appreciate her experimental work in Novi Sad, let alone feminist aspects of Ladik's performances and writings. Most often artists themselves engaged in writing/publishing theoretical texts regarding the emerging genres and practices. Such were the works of Bálint Szombathy and Slavko Matković, who both belonged to Bosch+Bosch group, and Judita Šalgo, already mentioned as a contemporary literary critic writing about Ladik's poems.<sup>187</sup>

Still, various newspapers in Yugoslavia published texts informing about Ladik's works in the 1970s. In order to illustrate how were her performances accepted in public, bearing in mind lack of an adequate critique at that time, I will map out some of the different reactions that appeared in Yugoslavian press in the 1970s and in the beginning of the 1980s. First, I concentrate on the critique written by male authors and then move on to an analysis of Kesić's article from 1981.

#### ***4.2 A "striper" or an artist? Analysis of responses to Ladik's performances***

The reception of Ladik's performances based on the newspaper articles was twofold: three authors from 1970, whom I chose to mention, praised her, and two, of which one commented her work in the 1970 and the other in the 1980, severely criticized her. The positive reactions represented the more progressive strain in Yugoslav culture that was opened toward the experimental practices, while the other side stood for the defenders of the traditional values in art. I start with describing favorable comments and proceed with the negative ones, at the same time reconstructing what were the characteristics of art according to the traditionalists.

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<sup>186</sup> Vesna Kesić, "Katalin Ladik: Ja sam javna žena," *Start*, February 28, 1981, 72-74.

<sup>187</sup> See previous chapter.

In February 1970 Belgrade daily newspapers *Večernje novosti* and *Politika ekspres* published two short articles about Ladik's performance in the basement of Atelje 212,<sup>188</sup> Belgrade's avant-garde theater, several days after Ladik's enactment there. Both authors had a very positive attitude toward her show. The author of *Večernje novosti* informed the readers about great interest that preceded the event, writing how all of the tickets were sold out days before her act. He judged Ladik's performance as a very original and "exceptional spectacle."<sup>189</sup> Similarly, the author of the text published in *Politika ekspres* on the same day, called her show "brave" and "provocative." The author emphasized that Ladik was the first poet in Serbia who chose to directly and openly face her audience, bridging the gap that, in author's opinion, existed between the writer and the reader.<sup>190</sup> Thus, he acknowledged her intention to reveal herself completely in front of her audience. Authors of both articles suggested that the event was very successful, and announced its reprise soon.

P. Matić, the writer of the text published in *Adam i Eva* in June 1970, gave more background information about Ladik's life and work. He presented her as a poetess, whose hobby was acting. According to him, although no one could deny the quality of Ladik's poetry, he suggested that it were naked performances that brought her fame. In his explanation another reason for this was that she was Hungarian and that her poems reached the wider audience only after they were translated to Serbian and Croatian.<sup>191</sup> Similarly to two authors who wrote about Ladik's performance in Atelje 212, Matić's article was also written in a very positive and affirming tone.

Parallel to positive evaluations of her work existed another strain of critique with a very

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<sup>188</sup> Atelje 212, one of the most important alternative theaters in Central Europe was founded in 1956 in Belgrade, as a non-traditional neo-avant-garde theater. From 1967 it was a home of one of the most significant festivals BITEF, and a place where number of experimental guest performances from all over the world took place during the 1970s and later on. "History of Atelje 212," <http://www.atelje212.rs/pozoriste/istorija/>. (accessed: May 5, 2011).

<sup>189</sup> "Katalin u podrumu," *Večernje novosti*, February 23, 1970; reprint in: Miško Šuvaković, *The Power of a Woman: Katalin Ladik, Retrospective 1962-2010* (Novi Sad: The Museum of Contemporary Art Vojvodina, 2010), 91.

<sup>190</sup> D.G., "Žestoki aplauzi u hladnom podrumu," *Politika ekspres*, February 23, 1970; reprint in: Miško Šuvaković, *The Power of a Woman: Katalin Ladik, Retrospective 1962-2010* (Novi Sad: The Museum of Contemporary Art Vojvodina, 2010), 91.

<sup>191</sup> P. Matić, "Naga pesnikinja," *Adam i Eva*, June 10, 1970, 12. Also in: Šuvaković, *The Power of a Woman*, 92.

cynical and ironic ring to it. One example, an article from *Ilustrovana politika* written by Z. Grasi, was from 1980.<sup>192</sup> After a very thorough description of Ladik's performance, broken down onto minutes, Grasi proceeded with assessment of the audience. He commented that, if not for a presence of an elderly composer, the average age would not cross twenty three years.<sup>193</sup> Furthermore, Grasi defined the culmination of the performance, "catharsis" as he called it, the moment when Ladik, at one point of her performance, revealed her naked breasts.<sup>194</sup> The author's statement about the age average and the "catharsis" read together, reveal the author's intention to imply that the performance was of interest to the audience solely because of Ladik's nakedness. Grasi's description, according to which seven people left during the act, while others sniggered or commented, also carried a value judgment: as he defined at the beginning of his article, he could not decide whether the show he encountered was happening, performance or a "séance" (seansa), in other words, was it art at all.<sup>195</sup>

Towards the end of his article the author engaged with explaining about yet another shift in paradigms that occurred in the modern art. Grasi described that artists, such as Ladik, did not care any more about formal artistic education, but considered any intervention in their immediate urban and natural environment as a form of art.<sup>196</sup> Therefore, unsettling thought can be read between the lines: these "quasi" artists claimed that anyone and everything could be an art. Furthermore, Grasi ironically expressed his doubt whether members of the audience realized that they "participated in the creation of the art."<sup>197</sup> His conclusion added a final touch to a rather mocking tone of the whole article asking: "Who knows maybe this article [prilog] is also an art work?"<sup>198</sup>

Grasi's text shed a light on several issues problematic not only for him as an author, but

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<sup>192</sup> Z. Grasi, "Hepening: Krici i kokodakanja," *Ilustrovana politika*, December 2, 1980, 33. Also in: Šuvaković, *The Power of a Woman*, 100.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.



also for a broader audience, including contemporary Yugoslav artists and critics. His critique reflected artists' and critics' doubts about whether Ladik's work was an art, since it opposed values of mainstream art world and the dominant, shared traditional notions of what art work should be. Grasi, as a representative of the Yugoslav mainstream art world and value system problematized the use of the body, namely, naked female body by a woman artist, and was seeing for an explanation of such a choice – was it to draw young men's attention and lure them into audience? What was the meaning of a naked act? Another question that can be read in his article referred to the position of alternative, neo-avant-garde artist: a doubt whether s/he was a representative of “real” art, and if yes, how did it affect the notion of art as it was before similar experimental practices.

Lastly, Grasi's article raised the question of the audience. Who went to watch these performances? Why there were not any prominent critics in the audience? From his description a reader gets a picture of a very young audience, presumably male, wishing only to look at Ladik's naked body. Grasi's article posed a question whether a performance enacted in a smoky room involving “screams,” “clucks,” and “unjustified” use of naked female body can be regarded as art at all.

Another telling example is an interview with Ladik published ten years earlier (1970) in *Vjesnik*, written and conducted by Aldo Bressan.<sup>199</sup> The article shows that nothing essentially changed in the dominant attitude towards Ladik's work over the course of ten years, and, therefore, in the attitude of the representatives of mainstream art scene toward experimental art practices. At the very beginning, Bressan made an interesting comparison/connection between Novi Sad as the first city in Eastern Europe where “bunnies” (zečice), “waitresses dressed as dancers in the western night clubs” emerged in 1967, and Novi Sad as a city, where a pretty “half Yugoslavian and half Hungarian” actress recited her poetry naked in front of the audience.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Aldo Bressan, “Poezija i striptiz: Pjesnikinja koja recitira gola,” *Vjesnik*, December 8, 1970, 10.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

His analogy suggests the answer to a question he posed later on in the text, namely, whether Ladik was a poet who wanted to draw attention by taking off her clothes, or a stripper that pretended to be a writer.<sup>201</sup> Judging from the tone and his attitude regarding Ladik, it is more likely that Bressan was leaning rather towards the second option than even apprehending the first one as a possibility

Bressan seemed deeply disturbed by Ladik's nakedness during the recital and he could not understand why Ladik had to undress and be naked if she was a poetess. He even made a remark that he would understand her poems perfectly well without her reciting them naked.<sup>202</sup> Bressan was bothered with the meaning, significance of the nakedness, as Grasi will be ten years after. Was it Ladik's strategy to provoke, was it to draw the attention on herself, a "wish for a publicity"? Throughout the whole interview Bressan maintained a highly provocative tone.

Similarly to Grasi, he suggested that the audience in the full room came only to see Ladik naked. Bressan supported this claim by pointing to the fact that she was performing in Hungarian, a language majority of the audience present that day did not understand. Although he noted that Ladik provided translation of the poems in Serbian, his conclusion was that people went there only to see her body. "Did not understand a poetry – do understand undressing," a title of a section of Bressan's article describing the audience and her performance illustrates his opinion on this matter clearly.<sup>203</sup>

On closer examination, just as Grasi's words stood for a representation of the mainstream practices, Bressan's article echoed broader cultural issues in Yugoslavia of the 1970s. Namely, his words bore remnants of modernist division on "high" and "low" art. According to Andreas Huyssen, German literary critic, in modernism "high" art was associated with masculinity, authenticity and intellectual pursuit, while "low," or popular culture, was affiliated

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

with the mass production, femininity and consumerism.<sup>204</sup> Thus, as Huyssen suggests, popular culture was perceived as inferior.<sup>205</sup> Bressan's dilemma summarized in his questions: "Is she a poet? If she is, what is the purpose of undressing?"<sup>206</sup> therefore, revealed his vision of poetry and literary writing as purely intellectual practice, a form of "high" art that did not need any other element beside the mind, words and a paper for conveying a meaning.

However, one characteristic of popular culture was particularly important in Ladik's case, according to Šuvaković, namely, that it reached a wide audience. Šuvaković considers that both Yugoslav socialist modernism and neo-avant-garde belonged to the "high" art.<sup>207</sup> This statement is problematic if we take into account that the neo-avant-garde artists of the 1970s fought exactly against the norms and ideas associated with the "high" art. However, it suggests the different nature of experimental art in comparison to the popular culture, and to the fact that, although Yugoslav regime allowed its existence, experimental practices in Yugoslavia were still marginalized from the wider audience, and usually only the artists, who belonged to the neo-avant-garde groups followed the events related to experimental practices. Ladik, as Šuvaković asserts, was the first artist who stepped out of this "isolation" and "acknowledged the importance of intervention into the mediated social field of popular and mass culture."<sup>208</sup> This means that Ladik, according to Šuvaković, belonged to both neo-avant-garde and popular culture. Ladik's activities in popular culture, her participation in popular TV shows, films, magazines, etc., made her visible in comparison to other contemporary women artists in Yugoslavia, such as Marina Abramović, who also performed naked.<sup>209</sup>

Another implication regarding distinction between "high" and "low" culture can be

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<sup>204</sup> Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 47.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>206</sup> Bressan, "Poezija i striptiz," 10.

<sup>207</sup> Šuvaković, *The Power of a Woman*, 83.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> A possibility for further research would entail a differentiation between female body art practices in Yugoslavia during the 1970s that would focus on why was Ladik's work scandalous and Abramović's, who also had naked performances, was not that interesting to the media.

traced in Bressan's article. Modernist notion of "high" art entailed an artist as a monolithic category associated with the "purity and the autonomy in art."<sup>210</sup> On the other hand, as suggested by Rita Felski, popular culture was associated with the vulgar taste of masses.<sup>211</sup> Vulgarity in Ladik's case, based on Bressan's assessment of her work, can be linked further to morality that implicates perception of a naked body as something filthy, unclean or impure.<sup>212</sup> Therefore, in Bressan's article Ladik's nudity may function as a sign of vulgarity, as an element that stained the otherwise pure state of poetry. Accordingly, his comment on Ladik's work made visible that in Yugoslavia in the 1970s existed a traditional view on poetry, poets and art in general, as a purely intellectual pursuit with very clear boundaries of what was to be regarded as art. Emerging experimental forms in the 1970s posed a challenge to these traditional notions, since proponents of traditional values did not know where to place experimental art. However, as a counterpoint to modernist notions of art, it is useful to examine what was the importance of naked body for Ladik. In the following subchapter I will reconstruct her attitude toward body based on several interviews conducted with her.

### **4.3 *Body as a medium***

Looking back from today's perspective (2011) for Ladik body represented yet another medium just as words or a voice did.<sup>213</sup> However, in the interview with Bressan in 1970, she described the importance of body in a slightly different manner: a naked body was a symbol of unity of body and mind. Ladik stated that her poems mirrored her deepest wishes and thoughts,

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<sup>210</sup> Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman," 55.

<sup>211</sup> Felski, "Readers," 31.

<sup>212</sup> Bressan's article echoes body-mind distinction that was an object of feminist inquiry. For debates around this topic see: Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Harvard University Press, 1992); Susan Bordo, "The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought and the Seventeenth Century Flight from the Feminine," in *The Flight to Objectivity, Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 97-118.;

<sup>213</sup> "Interview with Ladik Katalin," Appendix, 70.

and were “a materialization of soul’s nakedness.”<sup>214</sup> Physical shape of her body was according to her, naturally, in harmony with the shapes of her soul and she wanted to display it as a unification of body and the mind in a process of performance. It was the only true/harmonious mode of expressing her art.<sup>215</sup>

In 1982 her nudeness was still very topical, since she played in a theatrical play called “Bayer Aspirin,” a monodrama written especially for her by Tolnai Otto, famous Hungarian writer still living in Vojvodina today. In this play she was once again naked on the scene, which again stirred negative comments from her environment. Referring to this play, she stated that throughout the whole play she stayed naked and “as usual, there is a reason for my nakedness. I had never undressed myself to show my body.”<sup>216</sup> Carolee Schneemann, a famous performance artist and Ladik’s contemporary, had a similar take on nudity as quoted by Lucy Lippard, a feminist art historian: “I didn’t stand naked in front of 300 people because I wanted to be fucked, but because my sex and work were harmoniously experienced [so] I could have the courage to show the body as a source of varying emotive power.”<sup>217</sup>

An important difference is to be noted here. Male performers also used their bodies as material, or as the medium for conveying their messages during the same decade. However, as Piotr Piotrowski suggests, the framework that existed within male body art of the 1970s was different from women authors, who concentrated on displaying female sexuality through use of their bodies. Majority of male artists focused on examining the physical limitations of the body.<sup>218</sup> Male body, as used by the artists during this time, was defined as both individual’s body and as universal, human body and, according to Piotrowski, in that sense a particular (male) body, was used as a basis for gaining broader, universal knowledge regarding “the general human

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<sup>214</sup> Bressan, “Poezija i striptiz,” 10.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Dragiša Drašković, “Katalin Ladik – Muškim šovinistima izmišljam novi krik,” *Omladinske*, March 27, 1982, 14.

<sup>217</sup> Carolee Schneemann quoted in: Lippard, “The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth,” 126.

<sup>218</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, “The Politics of Identity: Male and Female Body Art,” in *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and Avant-garde in Easter Europe, 1945-1989* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 363.

condition.”<sup>219</sup>

This did not mean that these artists did not challenge the social norms, but, as Piotrowski argues, their performances had different consequences. Male performances had political implications in the contexts of Central and Eastern Europe. Artists’ testing of the limitations of “accepted morality,” conventions and “ideological indoctrination” in particular regimes of Central and Eastern Europe, according to Piotrowski, “acquired political significance” and as such, male performances became objects of careful examinations conducted by the authorities.<sup>220</sup> Therefore, female and male nudity in terms of performance art moved in different interpretational frameworks in socialist countries.

Lippard suggested that woman’s approach to her body was “necessarily complicated by social stereotypes.”<sup>221</sup> Her claim can be supported with the example of Bressan, a Yugoslav male author, who being trapped within mainstream art norms and traditional views on female sexuality, associated Ladik’s nude performance with dancers in night bars. The important question emerging is the one Sally Potter asked, as quoted by feminist artist Sally Dawson in her essay dealing with the relation between the feminism, censorship and performance, namely, “can women ‘use’ their own bodies in performance in a progressive way [and be recognized as such] in a culture in which women are consistently objectified?”<sup>222</sup> Apparently, the situation of women as experimental artists was significantly dependent on the social reality they were living in.

In the environment of Novi Sad that was, on one hand, very opened to the experimental practices and, on the other hand, at the same time extremely conservative, Ladik’s body became a medium of her own struggle for emancipation. Her performances were an open challenge for the gender norms of society she lived in and also, as she described it, a test of her own

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 364.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Lippard, “The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth,” 124.

<sup>222</sup> Sally Dawson, “Women’s Movemens: Feminism, Censorship and Performance Art,” in *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies*, ed. Katy Deepwell (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 114.

endurance.<sup>223</sup> In an interview (2011) Ladik said that negative comments that followed her performances affected her in a way that she became even more defiant.<sup>224</sup> She realized that nudity upset the establishment and deliberately used it to provoke and to draw attention to other qualities of her work that were overshadowed by the stigma of being a “naked poetess.” It was also her personal fight, to see whether she was capable to withstand the critique and also to fight her natural shyness that presented a biggest obstacle towards a carrier as an actress.<sup>225</sup>

Although Lippard brought the example of Catherine Francblin, a woman critic who was against the female nudity (in 1975), arguing that exposing female body in the art lead to exactly “the opposite of a denial of the woman as object inasmuch as the object of desire is precisely the woman’s own body,”<sup>226</sup> it is important to stress the other meaning of using the body as a material pointed out by Lippard. Namely, as she argues a woman becomes active through the use of her own body and that, according to her, marked an important psychological moment: a transformation from object to a subject position.<sup>227</sup>

However, alongside misogynic comments that were all, as Ladik herself drew my attention to, written by men, there were also articles written by women. Therefore, I devote the last section of the chapter to one article written by a woman and a feminist, published in *Start* in 1981.

#### ***4.4 Feminist approach to Ladik’s works: the article of Vesna Kesić***

The text I am writing about is from 1981, one year after Grasi wrote his comment on Ladik’s performance in Belgrade. The author of the article, a feminist journalist Vesna Kesić, described Ladik as “intelligent, beautiful, excessive, talented and sexy woman.”<sup>228</sup> Since Kesić was

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<sup>223</sup> “Interview with Ladik Katalin,” Appendix, 69.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Francblin quoted in: Lippard, “The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth,” 123.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>228</sup> Vesna Kesić, “Katalin Ladik: Ja sam javna žena,” *Start* (28.02.1981): 73.

a professional journalist and not a feminist art critic, she did not, and could not analyze feminist aspects of Ladik's art works. Rather, she gave an overview of Ladik's diverse art production and included assessments from two directors (Bódy, Gyula), who knew Ladik's neo-avant-garde art works. As a feminist belonging to a circle of emerging "neofeminist" movement<sup>229</sup> in Yugoslavia, Kesić appreciated Ladik's struggle for women's emancipation in the art domain, which is evident from the tone of the article, however, her positive assessment did not account for Ladik's performances or poetry.

At this point, it is interesting to make a comparison between the Yugoslav context and the context of the USA, in terms of relations between women's art production and feminist criticism. As I already mentioned, in Yugoslavia of the 1970s feminist literary criticism and feminist art criticism did not yet exist, as opposed to the USA. According to Zsófia Lóránd, biggest difference between Yugoslav "neofeminism" of the late 1970s and the feminist movement in America in the 1970s was that the Yugoslav movement was "mostly an intellectual one."<sup>230</sup> This meant that the Yugoslav "neofeminism" was "ideologically diverse" and did not mobilize women as it was the case in America.<sup>231</sup> Different from Yugoslavia, in the USA feminist art criticism appeared in the broader context of the second wave feminism.

Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, who theorized the relations between the feminist movement in the USA and the art in the 1970s from today's perspective, pointed out that the goal of the feminism in the 1970s was to "change the nature of art itself, to transform culture in sweeping and permanent ways by introducing into it the heretofore suppressed perspective of women."<sup>232</sup> In the American context the feminist movement had a significant influence on the

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<sup>229</sup> According to Zsófia Lóránd, "neofeminism" was a movement that emerged in Yugoslavia in the late 1970s. The first conference associated with neofeminists was held in Belgrade in 1978, and its title was "Drug-ca žena: žensko pitanje – novi pristup" (Comrad-ess women: women's question – new approach). For more details on Yugoslav feminism in the 1970s see: Zsófia Lóránd, "Feminism as Counterdiscourse in Yugoslavia in Two Different Contexts" (MA Thesis, Central European University, 2007).

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, "Introduction: Feminism and Art in the Twentieth Century," in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New



art production, while on the other hand in the Yugoslav context feminist movement was, in comparison to the USA, marginal.

Given the fact that feminist art criticism already existed in the USA during the 1970s, it is interesting to explore how feminist conceptual apparatus influenced the reception of women's art during the same period. For example, Luccy Lippard, the feminist art critic active in the 1970s, wrote about Hannah Wilke, whose performances resemble Ladik's. Wilke also started performing in the 1970s, and openly displayed her sexuality, as Ladik did. However, Lippard criticized Wilke for "confusing of her roles as beautiful woman and artist, as flirt and feminist."<sup>233</sup> Lippard had a little sympathy for women artists, who in their works fell into the trap of what she termed as 'self-exploitation'. 'Self-exploitation' for her meant that these artists failed to criticize social stereotypes around women, and reinforced them instead.<sup>234</sup> Therefore, Wilke's performances, in Lippard's opinion, walked the fine line between the critique of the stereotypes regarding women and the 'self-exploitation.' The way Wilke displayed her naked body in her performances in the 1970s, given the fact that she was a pretty woman, was "in times politically ambiguous" for Lippard, and as such "exposed her [Wilke] to criticism on a personal as well as on an artistic level."<sup>235</sup> Therefore, it is clear that Lippard criticized Wilke for reinforcing certain cultural stereotypes about women in her works.

Thus, it is evident that conceptual apparatus, or its lack in the case of Ladik, influenced ways of how a certain art work was interpreted. In the context of the USA, Wilke experimented with the female body in a similar way as Ladik Katalin did in Yugoslavia, however, Lippard criticized Wilke and described her work as "politically ambiguous."<sup>236</sup> Within the framework of the radical feminism that aimed to transform the masculine culture, Wilke's performances with explicit nudity carried the possibility of being perceived as reinforcing the stereotypes i.e., of

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York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), 10.

<sup>233</sup> Lippard, "The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth," 126.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 124-125.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

women as object, radical feminist were fighting against, as it happened in the case of Lippard's criticism. On the other hand, in Yugoslavia, in particular in Novi Sad, there was no conceptual apparatus to account for experimental practices of the neo-avant-garde artists, let alone feminist criticism. In that context Ladik's art was interpreted according to the existing, traditional approaches and concepts. Consequently, her nude performances were either criticized and mocked as a form of 'non-art' or, in the case of Kesić and similar affirmative assessments, authors did not address Ladik's particular art works, and rather wrote descriptively about them.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I argued that Ladik's art works were feminist. I showed that her experimental poems, early and late performances, within the framework ranging from the late 1960s till the early 1980s, were hybrid art forms that opened a space for her intervention in the field of Yugoslav socialist culture. With her poems and performances, Ladik negotiated the position of women (artist) in the socialist Yugoslavia of the 1970s.

The reactions to her works published in the contemporary press, when analyzed in relation to the official socialist propaganda regarding the art system, indicated ambivalence between the proclaimed/promoted image of the system and the actual practice. Ambivalence within the system is characteristic of the socialist regimes that Susan Gal and Gail Kligman emphasized regarding the gender policies:

Indeed, socialist regimes were often characterized by contradictory goals in their policies toward women: they wanted workers as well as mothers, token leaders as well as obedient cadres. While officially supporting equality between men and women, the regimes countenanced and even produced heated mass media debates about issues such as women's ideal and proper roles, the deleterious effects of divorce, the effects of labor-force segregation – such as the feminization of schoolteaching and agriculture – and the fundamental importance of “natural difference.”<sup>237</sup>

Similarly to the lived experience or “the everyday practices of men and women” that, according to the authors, did not correspond to “official discourses,”<sup>238</sup> the reality of Yugoslav socialist art system did not match entirely the image promoted to the outside world. Yugoslav regime represented its art system as progressive, and indeed it embraced the experimental practices, but at the same time remained within the framework of traditional/patriarchal morality. This caused

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<sup>237</sup> Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, “After Socialism,” in *The Politics of Gender After Socialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 5.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

the conflict between Ladik's experimental practices, involving display of female sexuality, and the representatives of the traditional morality.

The analysis of the reception of Ladik's works also revealed that the interpretation of her art work depended on the conceptual apparatus. As shown in chapters four and five, contemporary critics could not account for the feminist aspects of Ladik's works, and the response to her works was either negative, because it relied on traditional conceptual tools, or descriptive, as in the case of Judita Šalgo and Vesna Kesić.

However, Ladik's diverse and complicated art production opens various possibilities for analysis based on conceptual apparatus that is available in the present. One feasible option for the future research could be a comparative analysis of women's performances in Yugoslavia, within the same timeframe, that would expand the field of inquiry from Novi Sad to other art centers of Yugoslavia (Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana). A goal of such comparative research would be to further differentiate among different strategies applied by female performers in the Yugoslav context, and to put aforementioned art centers in relation to each other. Additionally, the scope of the investigation could grow further to include women artists from the region, for example, Hungary or Poland that would parallel context of Yugoslav art system with other socialist countries in the region.

A future study that would complement the research on women's performance in former Yugoslavia could also include examination of the ways male performers expressed their sexuality in the same context. The study would address the issue of sexual differences and instead of focusing only to women's art it would further nuance the complex intersections of gender and the discourses around the body operating within the socialist cultural system of Yugoslavia. Similarly to the suggestion regarding women's performance art, the focus of the analysis could be broadened from the countries of former Yugoslavia to a wider region.

## Appendix

### *Interjú Ladik Katalinnal (Interview with Ladik Katalin)*

**Kérdez: Bálint Vera**

**V.B.: Kíváncsi vagyok a 70-es évek munkásságára, különösen az emlékeire, hogy milyen volt nőnek lenni a szocialista Jugoszláviában. Emlékei szerint mik voltak a társadalmi elvárások a nőkkel szemben ebben az évtizedben? Mit jelentett „normális” nőnek lenni?**

L.K.: Én nem tudtam, hogy milyen nőnek lenni más körülmények között, és csak azt az érzést ismerem, amit akkor megéltem. Mindegy, hogy az szocialista vagy nem szocialista, nekem csak az az egy lehetőségem volt, mást nem ismertem. Utólag, negyven év után, valamilyen kis különbséget már érzek. Akárminek nevezzük ezt a társadalmi berendezést, szocialista vagy pedig átmeneti – szerbül létezik egy kifejezés erre, a „tranzicija”, magyarul nem használjuk – a mostani is egy átmeneti időszak épp úgy, mint akkor a szocializmusban haladtunk a kommunizmus felé. Hogy most mi felé vezet ez az átmeneti időszak, nem tudom. Ha most már kimondottan arra keressük a választ, hogy milyen volt nőnek lenni akkor és most, az én helyzetem, és azt hiszem nagyon sok nő helyzete, nem sokat változott azóta, főleg ha a munkahelyi elvárásokat nézem. Az elvárások akkor is komplexek voltak, és most is. Akkor is elvárták, most is elvárják a nőtől, hogy a munkahelyén nemcsak hogy egyenrangú legyen a férfival, hanem többet mutasson fel a férfinál. A nőnek akkor is és most is többet kellett bizonyítania, mert előítéletek voltak akkor is és most is, a női munkaerővel szemben. Ilyen szempontból az elvárások nem változtak.

Ha a viselkedés és alkotói munka felől nézem a nők helyzetét, itt már látok változást. A múltban még a patriarchális nézetek és elvárások uralkodtak az élet minden területén, a magánéletben is. Volt, amit megtehetett a férfi, de nem tehetett meg a nő. Ez így volt Jugoszlávia szinte egész területén és Magyarországon is. Nem lehetett egyenrangúan érvényesülni. Megbotránkozást keltett, ha egy nő olyan alkotásokat hozott létre a filmben, az irodalomban, vagy a képzőművészetben, mint egy férfi. Ezt a kettős mércét lehetett érzékelni a hetvenes években, és nem véletlen, hogy a hatvanas, hetvenes években jelentkezik az a bizonyos női emancipációs hullám, a nők szexuális forradalma és a feminizmus is, mert ez a társadalmi probléma már a levegőben volt. Különösen ott vezetett ez konfliktushoz, ahol nagyon erős vallási gyökerek voltak.

Az emancipáció változást hozott a nők életében, mégpedig kettős változást. Korábban, mikor a nő még elfogadta a rákényszerített, vagyis alárendelt patriarchális szerepet, könnyebben férjhez mehetett, családot alapíthatott. Elvállalta, hogy két műszakban dolgozzon: a munkahelyén és otthon, a hagyományos családanya szerepében. Hogyha ebben a szerepkörben megtalálta magát vagy belefért ebbe a szerepbe, akkor ebben a kettős megterhelésben élhette az életét.

Az emancipációval változott a helyzet. Nem lehet mondani, hogy jobbra vagy rosszabbra fordult, de változott. A mai nő nem talál magának férjet, nem tud egyenrangú partnerként családot alapítani. Megjelent a szingli életmód, sokan vállalják ezt az életmódot nem csak Európában, hanem már az arab világban is, ahol a nők képzettek, van diplomájuk, sőt iskolázottabbak, mint a férfiak. Azok a nők, akik a hetvenes években nem akarták vállalni ezt a hagyományos alárendelt függőségi viszonyt, igyekeztek maguknak egzisztenciát teremteni. Iskolába jártak, hogy legyen diplomájuk és olyan munkahelyük, ahol el tudják tartani magukat, és nem függenek a férfi jövedelmétől. Megházasodtak, szültek maguknak egy gyereket és elváltak. Ez így kezdődött. Most már a nők házasság nélkül is vállalnak gyereket és egyedül felnevelik őket. Ez az a változás, amit érzek.

Ezzel együtt jár az is, hogy a férfiak frusztráltabbak lettek a nők iránt. Ez olyan, mint a

tyúk – tojás, minél emancipáltabb a nő, annál frusztráltabb a férfi és viszont, és most már ott tartunk, hogy mind nehezebben találunk egymásra, egyazon értelmiségi szinten, a férfi és a nő. Az egyiknek mindig engednie kell. Most már ott tartunk, hogy rendszerint a nő a pénzkereső, és nő van magasabb pozícióban. Mivel nem talál magának egyenrangú és még kevésbé magasabb rangú partnert, ha tényleg családot akar, kénytelen alacsonyabb rangú, mármint társadalmilag és végzettségben alacsonyabb rangú férfit választani partnerül. Ugyanis, a magasabb rangú férfiak, akik tényleg domináns szerepet játszanak a gazdaságban és a társadalomban, nem szorúlnak rá a házasságra, és olyan nagy a férfiak iránti kereslet és a szabad nők kínálata, hogy válogathatnak köztük. Egyszerűen több a nő és az iskolázott nő. Mostanában nem szívesen nősülnek a férfiak, különösen a mi vidékünkön Vajdaságban. A kilencvenes években a háború következtében kiesett egy egész férfikorosztály, és nagyon érződik a hiányuk. Az egykori Jugoszlávia területéről a férfiak külföldre mentek dolgozni. Azok a nők, akik otthon maradtak, és akikről én beszélek, nem találunk maguknak korban hozzájuk illő férfit. Tehát több nő maradt, a férfiak, akik partnerként számításba jöhetnek, jóval fiatalabbak, nagyon fiatalok és rendszerint van már családjuk. Sőt a nőknek megvan a biológiai koruk, hogy mikor szülhetnek. Sokan vállalják a szingli életmódot, és vagy nem szülnek és egyedül élnek, vagy szülnek maguknak egy gyereket és felnevelik. Ez az a változás, amit érzek.

Korábban, a 70-es évek végéig elképzelhetetlen volt, hogy házasság nélkül szüljön a nő. Sokan úgyis mentek férjhez, hogy igen, szülök egy gyereket és utána elvált nőként felnevelem. Akkor már volt annyi egyenjogúság, hogy el lehetett válni. Nagyon sok nő vállalta ezt az utat, főleg ha sikerült neki megfelelő munkahelyet találni, hogy el tudja tartani a gyereket. Hát én is így voltam, egyedül, elvált nőként egyetlen gyerekkel. Abból a kis fizetésből, amit kaptam, nem tudtam volna még egy gyereket eltartani. Ha meglettek volna az anyagi körülmények, én szültem volna még egy gyereket, amit nagyon sajnálok, hogy nem történt meg.

Én is a nőknek abba az első generációjába tartozom, akik vállalták azt, hogy kilépnek egy házasságból, amely már nem működött. Bár nagyon igyekeztem, és sikerrel, hogy a gyerek ne érezze azt, hogy nincs apja. Volt apja. A válás után ugyanúgy kommunikáltunk volt férjemmel, mint eddig, és együtt neveltük a gyereket. Ma pl. ismerem párokat, akik nem is házasodnak össze, élettársi viszonyban vannak, gyerekük van és így élnek. Két háztartás, két család, de a gyerek miatt kommunikáltunk és továbbra is megmaradt az alkotói együttműködés, mivel művészek voltunk mind a ketten.

Az én életmódom akkor eléggé provokatív volt. Sokan nem tudták elképzelni, hogy lehet az, hogy elválunk, és mégis jóban vagyunk, és egyfajta alkotói kapcsolatban maradunk, vagy hogy a volt férjemmel együtt visszük nyaralni a gyereket, együtt megyünk kirándulni vagy az étterembe. Ez is egy furcsa élet, mert akkor még úgy volt, hogy azok, akik elváltak, azok elváltak. Az volt a többség. De voltak már párok, családok, akik megoldották ezt, hogy válás után továbbra is „együtt maradjanak”. Ez egyfajta emancipált változata volt a házasságnak, ahol a volt házastársak továbbra is együtt tudtak dolgozni gyerek és a munka érdekében. Ma ezt olyan formában látom, hogy nem is házasodnak össze, és bizonyos szabadsága megvan az egyik félnek is, a másiknak is. Talán nem is laknak együtt, de ez elfogadott életmód. De hát ehhez sok évnek el kellett telnie.

**V.B.: Miško Šuvaković által készített interjúban említette, hogy az életében kétszer is választania kellett a művészet és a privát élet között, először 1962-ben, amikor az akkori barátja, illetve 1968-ban, amikor az első férje állította választás elé, hogy karrier vagy a család. Visszatekintve, mennyire volt nehéz összeegyeztetni a művészi pályát, a családját és a feleség szerepével?**

L.K.: Nekem személy szerint nem volt nehéz, hanem a férjnek, a társadalomnak volt nehéz ezt elfogadni. Én össze tudtam volna egyeztetni a művészetet és a családot, és nem értettem, hogy

ha valaki valakit szeret, hát miért nem tudja elfogadni mind a két szerepet. Mai napig vezetek háztartást, mint minden hagyományos háziasszony, mindent csinállok, és, még amennyire az erőmből futja, a művészettel is foglalkozom. Csak mások nem tudják ezt elfogadni, hogy családom is vagyok, meg feleség is vagyok, meg pénzkereső is vagyok, meg művész is vagyok, és én úgy érzem, hogy ez egy bizonyos féltékenységi az élet energiámra, ambícióimra. Mert én nem azt mondtam: vagy-vagy; én mindent megcsináltam, amit ezek a szerepek tőlem megköveteltek, és megcsinálom a mai napig is. Ez az, ami frusztrálja a férfiakat, féltékenyek a munkámra. Kivéve az első férfit az életemben, ezek mind művészek voltak. Viszont, akár hagyományos életfelfogású férfiről van szó, akár művészről, mindig fennállt a féltékenység a művészi munkámra, vagyis hogy az életenergiámnak egy részét nem rájuk, hanem a művészetemre szántam. Ráadásul munkahelyem is volt, ott is helytálltam. Az rendben is volt. De, hogy az alkotói energiámmal valami mást csinállok, azt nem tudták elfogadni.

Három házasságom is volt. Amikor házasságban élek, rengeteg energiámba kerül, de én ezt vállalom. Amikor magányosan élek, és nincs férjem, akkor sokkal több energiám van a munkára. Persze, akkor is ott a gyerek, de akkor nincs az az állandó küzdelem, meg titkolózás, hogy most én írok. Szinte titokban kellett írni, mintha szégyelltem volna, hogy nemcsak velük foglalkozom, hanem a saját munkámmal is. Ez mindig úgy volt, mintha valami bűnt követtem volna el, a bűn az volt, hogy én mással is foglalkozom. Tehát nem az történt, hogy nőtt volna a becsületem, a presztízsem a családban, hanem inkább mintha valami bűnös szenvedély rabja lennék. Pedig az első férjem is művész volt, zeneszerző. Ő, ha alkotott, akkor becsukta az ajtót, akkor ne zavarják. Ha én alkottam, vagy el kellett utaznom, akkor ez már baj volt. Tehát, ezek voltak a problémák.

Szerintem ez a helyzet nem változott a mai napig sem. Ugyanezt éreztem a harmadik házasságomban is, ott is ez van. Pedig művész a férjem, és mégis. A második férjem is művész, és ott is megvolt ez az alkotói féltékenység. Megértette ugyan a művészi ambícióimat, de úgy érezte, versenyben áll velem. Ez egy ösztönös dolog. Ő egész fiatal volt. Én dolgoztam, kerestem, mindent elvégeztem a háztartásban, ő semmit, csak a művészetének élt, és mégis féltékeny volt a munkámra, a karrieremre. Ilyen értelemben, az életemben a mai napig semmi sem változott, mert az ilyen emberi tulajdonságot sem a társadalom, sem az idő nem tudja megváltoztatni. Ismerek művészpárokat, akik gyönyörű szimbiózisban éltek, mint például Bogdanka és Dejan Poznanović. És ma is ismerek művészeket, akik harmóniában élnek. Viszont nagyon ritka az ilyen pár. Ez emberi tulajdonság, és nem a hetvenes évek vagy a szocializmus folyománya.

Bár ha történelmi távlatban nézem az írónők vagy az írófeleségek helyzetét, ellent kell mondanom önmagamnak, a társadalmi elvárások gyakran drámaian, tragikusan határozták meg a sorsukat. Gondoljunk végig például a Brontë nővérek sorsát. Erős nők voltak, akik magányosan éltek. Milyen ádáz kritika fogadta a műveiket, pedig megfelelték az elvárásoknak! Vagy például George Sandnak férfinéven kellett írnia, mert csak a férfi lehetett „komoly”, valódi író, annak ellenére, hogy az avantgárd körökbe tartozott. A társadalmi elvárások tartották represszió alatt a nőket, még a férfi-női kapcsolatban, a szűkebb családban is represszióknak voltak alávetve.

Ez nagyjából a hetvenes évekig tartott, amíg a nők emancipálódása nálunk el nem kezdődött.

Az évszázadok alatt felhalmozódott frusztráció ellenálláshoz és robbanásszerű kisüléshez vezetett. Bátor női dac jelentkezik most irodalomban, művészetben, zenében, öltözködésben, viselkedésben, amely néha átcsap túlzásokba is, de természetes reakciója ez az évszázadokon át tartó elnyomásnak. Csakhogy ez a lázadás szerintem nem teszi boldogabbá a nőket. Ez csak egy segélykiáltás, hogy a nők mégis csak harmóniában szeretnének élni a férfitársadalommal. Még a feministák is, csak a tiltakozásukban mennek el a végletekig. A nők valójában egy olyan társadalmi rendre vágnak, ahol a társadalom harmóniában élne a nők biológiai ciklusával, ahol megadnának a nőknek a szülési szabadságot, és támogatnák a szülés után visszatérő nők részmunkaidős foglalkoztatását. Hogy a társadalom ne büntesse őket azért, mert szülnék, vagy a biológiai ciklus miatt időnként gyengélkednek. Ha ez természetes dolog volna, akkor a nők nem

titkolnák sem a menstruációjukat, sem a szülést nem halasztgatnák. A TV-ben szülésre biztatják a nőket, és hogy nem szégyen a terhesség, de a terhes nőt elbocsájtják, és szülés után nem veszik vissza a munkahelyére. A munkainterjúk során megkérdezik a nőtől, hogy akar-e szülni az elkövetkező két évben. A nő ekkor vagy kénytelen eltitkolni, hogy gyereket szeretne, vagy blöfföl. Ez az a kettős, álságos magatartás, amely ellen a nők fellázadtak.

**V.B.: A jugoszláv médiában szabadon lehetett publikálni meztelen fényképeket, de csak az Ön fotói keltettek botrányt szűkebb környezetében. Miért? Mi volt az a sajátos erkölcsi mérce, amelyet csak a vajdasági magyar kultúrában, vagy a munkahelyén alkalmaztak, amikor kizárták a pártból, illetve a rádiótól is el akarták bocsájtani?**

L.K.: A botrányt nem a meztelenség, még csak nem is a női meztelenség váltotta ki. Férfiak már a hetvenes években anyaszült meztelenül mutatkoztak a happeningekben vagy pl. Eva Ras szerb színésznő Dušan Makavejev filmjeiben. A szlovén OHO csoportban vagy Kugla Glumiste-ban sem voltak szégyenlősek. Jancsó Miklós filmjeiben is gyakran látunk meztelen női testet mint dekorációt. A hatvanas években a BITEF-en is rengeteg külföldi színház lépett fel meztelen előadásokkal, pl. a La MaMa is. Később Vlasta Delimar-nak voltak botrányos performanszai Zágrábban, amikor meztelenül lovagolt végig Zágráb főterén. De ez jóval azután volt, hogy az én költői performanszaim, illetve provokatív tálalásuk a jugoszláv bulvársajtóban felkavarták a vajdasági kedélyeket.

A botrányt az én esetemben az okozta, hogy a magyar kultúrában az író szent és érinthetetlen, aki nem engedheti meg magának, hogy levetkőzzön, főleg hogyha nő az illető. A trágárság nem lett volna probléma, a férfírók akkor már trágár szavakat használtak az írásaikban. De én voltam Jugoszláviában az első, aki nem színésznőként, hanem íróként, és önálló performerként mint nő álltam a közönség elé. Ez volt a probléma. Hogy nem egy színésznő voltam a sok közül, akit levetkőztetnek egy-egy szerep miatt, hanem egy autonóm, önálló nő, aki önmaga válogatja és adja elő saját verseit, és ehhez a saját testét választja kifejezési eszközül. Ilyet akkoriban senki más nem csinált, én voltam az első.

Ez volt az igazán botránykeltő, de sok egyéb körülménynek, - többek között egy politikai tisztogatás-hullámnak -, kellett összejárnia, hogy erkölcstelenségre hivatkozva kizárjanak a pártból. A munkahelyemről csak azért nem dobtak ki, mert volt egy karakán főszerkesztőm a rádiónál, aki nem engedett kidobni.

**V.B.: Egy 1981-es Start-interjúban Ön hivatkozik Marija Crnobori egy mondatára, ahol Marija azt mondja: „Igen, Katalin, én megértem magát, ez a sorsunk nekünk, nyilvános nőknek”. Mit jelent itt a „nyilvános nő” kifejezés?**

K.L.: „Javna žena” szerbül is és magyarul is körülbelül ugyanazt jelenti. Ugye, a kuplerájról is azt mondjuk: nyilvános ház. Nyilvános nő az, akit a férfiak tárgyként kezelnek, és a férfitársadalom zsákmánya lehet. Ha ezt egy olyan nő mondja, mint Marija Crnobori, aki mit drámai tragikus hősnő megbecsült képviselője a szakmának, ez vigasztaló volt számomra, hogy még ő is annak tartja magát. Olyan időket éltünk akkor amikor még a színésznők nem nagyon szülhettek, és állandó párkapcsolatuk, férjük sem lehetett, mert eleve leminősítette magát az a férj, aki egy színésznőt vett el feleségül. Mert egy „normális” férfi nem vesz el egy színésznőt, hiszen az nemcsak meztelenül mutogatja magát, hanem gyakran olyan szerepe van, hogy esetleg más férfival kell csókolóznia a színpadon vagy a filmen. Mondjuk, akkoriban még nem vetkőztek annyit, mint manapság, de dekoltázs az lehetett, vagy a nyilvánosság előtt meg kellett ölelni egy férfit, vagy fel kellett emelni a szoknyát. Ennyi elég volt ahhoz, hogy egy nő nyilvános nőnek minősüljön. No de azt a férfi is hülye, aki elvesz egy ilyen nőt, hiszen nem csak az övé, hanem



más is nézheti a melleit. Tehát lehet egy nő drámai színésznő vagy tragika akkor is vannak olyan szerepek, hogy el kell játszani, hogy szerelmes egy férfiba vagy sejtetni kell, hogy esetleg elmegy a hálószobába vele. Ilyen értelemben minden színésznő nyilvános nő.

Arról nem is beszélve, hogy egy színésznőnek hónapokig, hetekig kell dolgoznia egy rendezővel, szinte mint családjával kell élnie egy társulattal a színházi munkában. Hónapokig dolgoznak együtt reggeltől estig ugyanazon a színdarabon, akkor az embernek az családja. Tudjuk, hogy milyen élet a színházi élet. Egyébként az ember bárhol is dolgozik, többet van a munkahelyén, mint otthon. A munkahely is egy család. Csak az a különbség, hogy ott a színészek nemcsak az érzelmeiket osztják meg egymással, hanem a testüket is. Ez szakmai követelmény. És a szemérmesség levetkőzése is nagyon fontos. Ezt tanítják a színiskolában, az akadémián. Nekem az volt a problémám, hogy testileg nagyon szemérmes, nagyon szégyenlős voltam. Pont ezt a szemérmességet volt nagyon nehéz leküzdenem. Pedig már igazán színésznő akartam lenni és éreztem, hogy a testközelség mennyire zavar, mennyire gátlásos vagyok tőle. Elhatároztam hát, hogy leküzdöm a színészi pályám legnagyobb akadályát, azt hogy testileg nagyon, nagyon szemérmes vagyok. Úgy éreztem, hogy csak valami radikális gesztussal tudok megszabadulni el tőle. Valahogy úgy voltam vele, mint amikor valaki nem tud úszni, és akkor beleugrik a mélyvízbe. Vagy belehalok, vagy nem, körülbelül ilyen elhatározás volt ez.

Verseimben már úgy éreztem, hogy felszabadult vagyok, vagy leszek, hiszen akkor már mindenféle irodalmi formát kipróbáltam. Az összes izmusokat, a merész, a bátor, a vad formákat, ezekben mind benne voltam. Most már csak a testi és a társadalmi levetkőzés hiányzott. Az, hogy a társadalomban is ugyanolyan bátor legyek, mint a verseimben, mert akkoriban még csak a verseket írtam. A hangköltéssel sikerült kilépnem a verseknek a két dimenziójából. A hangban tehát kezdtem megszabadulni a két dimenziótól, és kitörtem a versből. Már a vers formájában is nagy felszabadultság mutatkozott. Ennek természetes következménye az az igény volt, hogy a testem is felszabadítsam, a saját személyemet is, nemcsak színészi alapon, hanem hogy kipróbáljam magam, hogy tényleg képes vagyok-e teljes egészben, ahogy Rimbaud mondta „modernnek lenni mindenestül”. Ki akartam próbálni magam, hogy tényleg modern vagyok-e mindenestül, mármint az alkotói értelemben. Hogy tudom-e vállalni magam mindenestül vagy beledöglök. Maradok egy tipikus női író, aki meghátrál, amikor látja, hogy nagyon bántják, és inkább megmarad hagyományos írónőnek, aki hétféteken csendesesen írogat. Én nem akartam ilyen lenni. Számítottam a reakcióra, de hogy ilyen nagy reakció lesz, arra nem. De hát meg kellett tennem. És ez tényleg nagy bátorság, szinte fanatizmus volt nálam, hogy én ezt megcsináltam. Ez önmagam ellen is, és a kettős erkölcs elleni gesztus volt. Mert én nem voltam kettős erkölcsű, csak gátlásos. Azért voltam gátlásos, mert a társadalom azzá tett.

**V.B.: Költői estjein, performanszain többször is levette a ruháját, illetve egy-egy testrészét mutatta. Emiatt „meztelen költőnőnek” (gola poetesa) nevezték el a sajtóban. Néhány szerző kétségbe vonta a művészi értéket a munkájában és pusztán exhibicionizmusnak tekintette vetkőzést, olyan taktikának, amellyel Ön állítólag magára akarta vonni a figyelmet. Mennyire befolyásolták az ilyen jellegű megjegyzések és cikkek az akkori alkotói tevékenységét?**

L.K.: Hatottak rám, még dacosabb lettem, és be akartam bizonyítani magamnak is, meg nekik is, hogy igenis van érték abban, amit csinállok. Nagyon hittem abban, hogy az, amit csinállok értékes, és nem csupán exhibicionizmus, habár az is benne volt benne. Persze, hogy magamra akartam hívni a figyelmet, de az igazi értékre. Ez egy gesztus volt. A performanszaim így autentikusak voltak. Miért ne hasonlítsak egy sámánra vagy pedig egy népi varázslóra, ha a sámáni rituálét adom elő? Volt benne feltűnési szándék is, hogy rám figyeljenek, és úgy éreztem, van mire ráfigyelni.

**V.B.: Performanszokon kívül a költészetben és a többi vizuális munkáiban kitüntetett szerepe jutott a testnek. Meséljen a test fontosságáról a művészetében. Az Ön számára mit jelentett a saját teste?**

L.K.: A test egy anyag volt számomra. Én abban a biológiai életkorban voltam, amikor az embernek fontos a test, nemcsak a nőnek, hanem a férfinak is. A test abban az életkorban, 20-30 évesen meghatározza az ember életét – az ember szexualitása, hormon háztartása fontos tényezők. Tehát nagyon jelentős a test bizonyos életkorokban. Később is, de másképp. Akkor a test már másról is szól. A test mindig nagyon fontos éppen úgy, ahogy a társadalommal folytatott dialógus. Nem igaz, hogy a verseimben és performanszaiban a test van előtérben. Nem. Testem csupán nyersanyag, amivel dolgozom, akárcsak a hang, vagy a szöveg. Másról is írok, nem csak a testről. Érdekes, hogy a közvélemény miért éppen erre reagál leginkább. Az életművemre visszatekintve, a testen kívül több más örök témám is van, de az akkori kor főleg a test témára reagált, arra volt érzékeny.

Mások is írtak a testről. Rengeteg mű szólt róla abban a korban. A test nagyon lényeges minden korban és minden alkotó számára, akármivel foglalkozik. Ez alapvető fontosságú téma, épp úgy, mint a szabadság. A művészet a szabadságról szól és az egyénről. Két örök téma van: a test és a spiritualitás. A nézőponttól függ. Aki jobban odafigyel, verseimben és performanszaiban megtalálja a spiritualitást. A hetvenes évekre jellemző, hogy abban az időben a testemre figyeltek inkább, és én tudatosan provokáltam a nyilvánosságot a testemmel. Ha ezzel lehet benneteket bosszantani, akkor elérem, hogy felfigyeljenek a költészetemre is.

Nyelvnyújtogatás volt ez: igen, meg merem mutatni a testem, hiszen, ami sokkal fontosabb dolog, a lelkemet, azt megmutattam a verseimben. Tessék, erre reagáljatok – akkor még így gondoltam. Fiatal voltam, és ez forradalom volt, személyes forradalmam önmagammal és a társadalommal szemben. A nők megértették ezt. A kritikát, amire maga utal, általában a férfiak írták. A nők általában megértően írtak. Pontosan tudták, hogy ez tiltakozás benne volt a levegőben. Mások politikai platformokon fogalmazták meg ezt az ellenállást, én pedig a munkáimban. Voltak más művésznők is, pl. Olja Ivanjicki, aki abban az időben festéssel foglalkozott, de nagyon kevés nőnek volt bátorsága, hogy ezt a személyes forradalmat meg is valósítsa. Később, azaz a 80-as, 90-es években fiatalabb írónők már bátrabban írnak.

**V.B.: A 60-as évek végén 70-es évek elején elkezdett foglalkozni a kísérleti költészetrel, illetve más művészeti formákkal mint happening, mail art, performansz, body art, stb. Hol helyezkedett el az Ön munkássága a művészeti szcénában Jugoszláviában a mainstream költők és művészekhez képest?**

L.K.: Én azt akkor nem tudtam megállapítani, hogy hol helyezkedem el. Nem is volt rá rálátásom, hiszen nem voltam intézményben, nem láthattam felülről, hogy mások mit csinálnak igazán. Nagyjából tudtam, hogy Jugoszláviában kik foglalkoztak hasonló dolgokkal. A rangsor, az érték, hogy hol helyezkedem el, később jött, amikor elhelyezték valahova engem. Azt hiszem, hogy mindenki, aki akkor dolgozott csinálta a dolgát és nem méricskélte a helyzetét, nem vetette össze magát mással. Ez annyira intuitív, spontán tevékenység volt nálam, és másoknál is. Én csak néhány embert ismertem, akikkel esetleg egy-egy fesztiválon találkoztam és láttam, hogy mivel foglalkoztak, pl. szlovéniaiak és a horvátok. Engem különböző kultúrintézmények meghívtak Zágrábba, Szlovéniába, Belgrádba. Ott bizonyára tudták, hogy ki hova tartozik. Én magam ezt nem tudtam bemérni. Az jelentette számomra a rangot, hogy az akkor legjelentősebb kultúrintézmények hívtak meg. Magyarországra is hívtak az akkori legavantgárdabb helyekre. Ez adott nekem valamilyen rangot. De, akkor én azt még nem tudtam, hogy ezek olyan fontos helyek. Ez utólag derült ki.

**V.B.: A 70-es években a Bosch+Bosch csoport tagja volt, valamint tartozott a vajdasági írók köréhez. A költők és művészek zöme férfi volt. Önnek milyen tapasztalatai voltak ebben a légkörben, mint művész- és költőnőnek?**

L.K.: Teljesen patriarchális viszony uralkodott ezekben a vajdasági csoportokban. Ez érződött. Elfogadtak nőként, azt mondták a hangköltészet azzal minden rendben van, de a vizuális művészet az ő területük volt.

**V.B.: 1972-ben Janez Kocijancić-tyal előadta a *R.O.M.E.T.* című performanszt Újvidéken. Ez kísérlet volt arra, hogy rekonstruálják a Tutanhamon halotti szertartását. Mennyire fontos volt a rituálé, a folklór és a szertartás a munkáiban?**

L.K.: Performanszaimban mindig fontos volt a rituálé, a szertartás. A verseim már más dimenziót jelentenek. Ott nagyobb a szabadság. A hagyomány nagyon is meghatározta a költészetemet. Nemcsak a magyar, hanem a balkáni, távol keleti hagyományok is. A gyökerek mindig kimutathatók. Még a legmodernebb verseimben is kimutatható valamiféle hagyomány vagy gyökér, amely engem inspirál, akkor is, ha egészen más jön ki belőle. Mindig a régi kultúrákból merítek, engem nagyon inspirálnak. Ebbe beletartozik az ázsiai, a távol keleti hagyomány és kultúra, a hindu, a sámán, a balkáni folklór és a mesék világa. A népek meséi, a valódi ősi mesék nagyon inspirálnak és hatnak rám, mint gyöngyszem, ami köré én építem fel a világot.

**V.B.: A *Vabljenje* vagy az *Ego-Alterego* című munkája két olyan performansz, melyekben természetes anyagokat alkalmazott mint kellékeket, illetve az a performanszok magában a természetben készültek. Meséljen a természetről, mint inspirációról az alkotásaiban.**

L.K.: A természetnek, mint ihletőnek sokkal nagyobb szerepe van a költészetemben és Performanszaimban, mint a meztelenségnek és a testnek. A tárgyaknak is nagy szerepük van, az ember által készített tárgyaknak. Fontos számomra a *homo faber*, a *homo ludens* is. Legfontosabb mégis, amit a természet alkot, a természeti jelenségek, a természet erői. Engem az ismeretlen, a megérthetetlen érdekel. A szél, a víz, az ősi elemek kezdettől fogva a mai napig jelentős szerepet játszanak az alkotásaimban. Mint már említettem test is csupán egy nyersanyag számomra, mint a fa, a levél. A tárgyak közül: az olló, a kés, a szék, az ajtó, az ablak. Szimbólum valamennyi. Az állapotok közül az álom, a fájdalom, az öröm, a kacagás nemcsak verseimben fordul elő, hanem performanszaimban is. Visszatérő motívumom a nevetés is. Tehát nem csak azért használom a hangom, hogy elmondjak valamit, hanem hogy felidézzem az ének-beszédet, az igazi ősi hangzást, ahogyan az archaikus ember élt a hangjával. A hangutánzó szavak, vagy a nevetés, a sírás mind helyet kapnak a verseimben, mert ezek az ember kifejezési eszközei, sőt gyakran ez maga a tartalom. Ilyen tartalom nálam a sikoly, amelynek sokrétű jelentése van a performanszaimban, a hangköltészetemben és a verseimben. A sikoly számomra egy érzés vagy egy gesztus sűrített, olykor túlsűrített kifejezése.

Vegyük például Edvard Munch festményét, a Sikolyt. Így gondolkozom én is. A versekben és a performanszokban az archaikus gyökereket, az archetípusokat keltem életre, mert szerintem ezek olyan alapvető elemei az életnek, és az emberi természetnek, amelyek nem változnak. Ósidőktől a mai napig hasonlóan érzünk és gondolkodunk. Szabadságvágy, természetszeretet – nem hiszem, hogy ezeket ki lehet irtani az emberből. Mint ahogy a szerelmet sem, a szexualitást sem, a család és a közösség iránti vágyat sem. Az ember alapjában véve közösségi lény. Azért érzem, hogy a mai korban másképp vagyunk szerencsétlenek, mint

azelőtt, mert nem tudunk családban, közösségben élni, ahogy szeretnénk. A régiek sem tudtak úgy élni, ahogy szerettek volna, de akkor mégsem volt annyi magányos ember, mert mindenki családban élt, bár többnyire nem azzal, akivel szeretett volna. A párválasztást az anyagi érdekek határozták meg. Ma másképpen boldogtalanok az emberek: magányosan vagyunk boldogtalanok. A régiek a családban voltak boldogtalanok. Most magányosan vagyunk boldogtalanok, és nemcsak mi nők, hanem a férfiak is.

**V.B.: Mikor és hogyan született az ötlet, hogy átlépje az egyes művészeti formák határát? Ön is említette, hogy a fónikus költészettel kitört a két dimenzióból...**

L.K.: Azt hiszem, ez ösztönös lehetett nálam. Mindez a hatvanas évek elején kezdődött, 1960 vagy 1962 körül, már az akkori verseimben ott volt a zene, a rituálé. Első verseskötetemben, a Ballada az ezüstbicikiről-ben benne van minden elem, amit a mai napig használok. Benne van a rituálé, a hang, mert olyan verseket írtam, amelyeket énekelni kellett, benne van a performansz forgatókönyv lehetősége, a dramatikusság, hiszen a verseimben párbeszéd is van. Az első kötetemben ösztönösen írtam olyan verseket, amelyekben már benne volt, hogy ezeket majd valamikor megszólaltatom, eléneklek. Mert megszólaltatásra, eléneklésre voltak alkalmasak. Vannak olyan versek, melyek csak az olvasásra valók, és vannak olyanok, amelyek előadásra, éneklésre valók. A verseim vizuális megformálása is formabontó volt, mert nem hagyományosan tördelték őket. Már az első kötetemet hanglemezzel kísérte. Tehát megvolt benne mindaz, ami később lényegesnek mutatkozott. A művészeti formák összemosása spontánul jött nálam, de később tudatosan fejlesztettem mindegyik művészeti irányzatot. Amikor a mese, folklór témához nyúltam akkor ráálltam erre a stílusra, és abból lett egy mesék inspirálta kötet. Amikor pedig olvasásra szánt verseket írtam, akkor ahhoz is megtaláltam a megfelelő formát.

A hangkölteményeimet otthon, házi magnóval vettem föl, és ezekből lett a performanszokra szánt hanganyag. A vajdasági televízió 1970-ben készített egy négy perces felvételt az „Ólomöntés” című a performanszomból, amelyben azonos című versemből adtam elő részleteket. A verset a hatvanas években írtam, és már 1965-től szerepelt a repertoáromban. Akkor még nem volt hangszerem, énekbeszédszerűen adtam elő a verset. Először a dob jelent meg a performanszaimban, meg a köcsögduda. A bőrdudát később szereztem meg, a hatvanas évek végén, 1968-69 körül és a hetvenes években már gyakran használtam. Azért voltak fontosak a népi hangszerek, hogy a versek rituális jellegét kihangsúlyozzam. A hangszer nem zenei aláfestés volt, hanem partnerem a performanszban, akivel párbeszédet folytattam. Például kukoricaszárból készítettem hegedűt, olyat, amelyet gyerekek szoktak, és azzal nyikorogó, csikorogó hangokat lehetett előcsalni. A gyerek önfeledt és szabad, mindennel tud játszani, muzsikálni: a testével, a kezével, az ajkával, az ujaival, fűszállal, levéllel, fésűvel, bugyborékolással. Ezt az állapotot próbáltam visszahozni, ezt a szabadságot, amit én a gyermekkoromban éreztem.

**V.B.: Számos motívum ismétlődik a verseiben és a vizuális munkáiban, pl. az androgyn vagy a mitikus elemek.**

L.K.: Mivel gyerekkoromban teljesen szabad voltam, ahogy nőtem, kezdtem érezni, hogy milyen átok az, hogy nő vagyok, mert akkor tiltottak meg sok mindent, ami kisgyerekként még szabad volt. Gyerekként tökéletesnek éreztem magam, mint egy androgyn vagy egy angyal: nem tudtam, hogy lány vagyok vagy fiú. Mentünk, csavarogtunk az utcákon, fiúk, lányok együtt. Az utcán éltünk, nevettünk, játszottunk, mindent csináltunk. Nem is voltak játékaink, a porban, a sárban játszottunk. Háború volt és a szülőknek nem volt idejük velünk törődni. Sokkal később, csak a pubertás korban derült ki, hogy én lány vagyok. Akkor kezdett megváltozni körülöttem a világ, és megjelentek az elvárások irántam, hogy miképpen kell viselkednem. Elvesztettem a gyermekkori

szabadságomat. Ezt az elveszett szabadságot akartam visszahozni valahogy, valami módon, hogy újra egész, teljes ember lehessenek. Nem nő vagy férfi, hanem az a lény, aki gyermekkoromban voltam.

**V.B.: Kérem, röviden írja le a *Sikoltozó lyuk* és a *Blackshave-Poem* performanszait.**

L.K.: A *Sikoltozó lyuk* performansz a voyeurségről szólt, amelybe belevettem több, rövidebb performanszomat, többek között a *Blackshave-Poem*-ot, amely lényegében egy anti-sztriptíz volt: egyenként levettem magamról ruhadarabjaimat, és amikor már a legutolsó réteg ruhához értem, amely fekete nadrág és fekete csukott garbó volt kívül fehér melltartóval és fehér csipkés bugyival, akkor elkezdtem az arcomat és hónaljamat borotvahabbal és zsilettel leborotvtálni. A borotválkozás végeztével levettem a fehér csipke bugyit és melltartót, és mint akit „meglestek”, szegyenkezve álltam fekete garbóban és fekete nadrágban - talpig felöltözve, és a hagyományos mozdulattal, hogy a nő elszégyelli és eltakarja nemi szervét. Ezt az anti-sztriptízt többek között előadtam Zágrábban és Budapesten is.

A másik ilyen betét a *Poemim* című performanszom volt. Amikor rányomtam az arcát az üveglapra, az arcom torzulása a lyukakon keresztül bámészkodók és leskelődők lelkét tükrözte. Mert ők ugyanúgy rányomták az arcukat a lyukra, miként én az üveglapra. Kukucskáltak, lestek a lyukakon keresztül, amiket a papírfalon lyuggattak ki.

Felfogadtam egy fotóst, hogy fényképezze a közönséget, ahogy meglesnek, és persze engem is, ahogyan a leskelődők látnak a lyukakon keresztül. Nagyon fontos volt a fotódokumentáció, mivel így kettőződött meg az esemény: egyszer, amit a közönség lát bent a kör alakú, kis intim szférámban, és másodszor, amit én majd utólag látok, hogy milyen volt a közönség, amikor engem nézett. Ha én kiállítanám ezeket a fotókat, ez is egy provokáció lenne.

**V.B.: Az interjúban utalt a feminizmusra, különösen a hatvanas, hetvenes években. Ismerte-e a feministák tevékenységét Jugoszláviában, illetve nyugaton?**

L.K.: Ismertem a feministákat, de soha nem tartottam magam feministának. Én nem vagyok annyira harcias, mint ők, de a platformjukat tökéletesen értettem. Soha nem tartoztam ilyen társadalmi vagy civil csoportosulásba. Egyrészt engem a hagyományos család és a munkahely lekötött, így fizikailag, idővel sem bírtam semmilyen csoportba beletartozni. Néha meghívtak feminista kongresszusokra Belgrádba. Jugoszláviában engem számon tartottak, és jól jött nekik, hogy engem meghívtak, mint egy reprezentatív személyiséget, aki a maga eszközeivel harcol a represszió ellen.

Meghívtak, mert végülis ugyanazt csináltam, mint ők. Csak én a közvetlen környezetemmel vettem fel a harcot, nem egy csoporton belül vagy mozgalomban. Egyfajta személyes emancipációt vívtam ki magamnak. Nem voltam soha a férfiak ellen, míg a feministák között, különösen nyugaton, nagyon sokszor éreztem azt, hogy férfiellenes programjuk van. Csupán a saját helyemet akartam kiharcolni, nem férfiak ellen indítani háborút.

**V.B.: Ugyancsak a *Start*-interjúban (1981) beszélt arról, hogy a magyar származása Jugoszláviában egzotikusnak számított, és fordítva, hogy Magyarországon a balkáni származása tűnt egzotikusnak.**

L.K.: Ez az egzotikum létezett, de nem is egzotikumnak nevezném, hanem másságnak. Az, hogy valaki más, felkeltette az emberek érdeklődését, legalább is akkor ez szerencsés helyzet volt. Ma már a másság sajnos nem előny, hanem nagyon nagy hátrány, mert az emberek kizárják azt, aki

másmilyen. Régebben a másság érdekességnek számított, és Jugoszláviában szinte előny volt a magyar. Jól illeszkedtem bele a több-nemzetiségű kultúrába, olyan értelemben jól, hogy szimbiózisban éltem a szerb, horvát, stb. környezetemmel, amely alkotásra inspirált. A magyarországiak számára a szabadság volt, amit a műveimből kiéreztek, és ez lehetett érdekes számukra. Nekik – itt az avantgárd körre gondolok, akik engem befogadtak, szerettek, és példaképük is voltam, ez a szabadság volt az imponáló. Számukra az újvidéki *Új Symposium* folyóirat, ahol publikáltunk, ablakot jelentett a világba, a szabadságba. Szintúgy a romániai magyarság számára is.

A hivatalos magyar kultúrpolitika éppen ellenkezően, negatívan reagált az írásaimra és a performanszaimra. Elrettentő példaként hoztak fel az egyetemeken, hogy hogyan torzítja el a nyugati kultúra az igazi művészetet: így jár az, aki nyugati irodalmat vesz példaképül, hogy lám szörnyű verseket ír és elfajul. Nem illik bele a elismert hivatalos magyar irodalmi kánonokba. És így ment ez egészen a nyolcvanas évekig. Attól kezdve fokozatosan kezdték közölni a verseimet Magyarországon.

**(Budapest, 26. 04. 2011)**

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