

**Abstract:** This essay places the work of Svetlana Kana Radević in the context of the ‘Yugoslav cultural space’, post-1968, drawing parallels between Kana’s focus on the social role of architecture and the socially and politically engaged practices of her contemporaries in the field of art. I introduce the New Art Practice generation of artists, whose central preoccupation was the social purpose of art within the Yugoslav system, as they challenged the dominant socialist modernist tropes foregrounded by Yugoslav own version of the modernist project. Using conceptual, Arte Povera and Pop strategies, through performance, street actions, text and the moving image, critically minded artists such as Braco Dimitrijević, Sanja Iveković, Mladen Stilinovic and many others sought to democratise art, through public actions, engagement of non-art audiences and passers-by, through questioning authorship and introducing non-traditional materials into their work. But like in architecture, in the visual arts the scene was heavily dominated by male artists and the essay interrogates gender discrepancies in the Yugoslav cultural sphere, asking how progressive and emancipatory these practices really were if they did not seek to challenge and disrupt the embedded sexism within the art establishment. Media representation of women did not help either. While in the 1960s and 1970s ushered a sexual revolution in Yugoslavia just like in the West, the proliferation of tabloids, adverts and films perpetuated the objectification and instrumentalization of women’s bodies all the while the authorities continued to proclaim their supposed equality with their male counterparts. Introducing these complexities into the picture of Yugoslavia during Kana’s early life and career, the essay seeks to highlight the challenges present in Yugoslav society and offer a nuanced account of the environment within which this unique architect was able to build an exceptional career.

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## Svetlana Kana Radević - The Only Woman in the Crowd

In a 1980 television documentary portrait of Svetlana Kana Radević, directed by Branislav Mićunović and broadcast on Yugoslav television, we see Kana interviewed on a beach, discussing her childhood, upbringing and key influences that led to her career as an architect. Gazing toward the horizon, Kana recounts an anecdote dating back to her early childhood, describing how she used to play with other children in the block of flats in which she lived. One day, she explains, a pile of insulation boards appeared in the communal courtyard where they used to play. The children, including Kana herself, intrigued by this new arrival, immediately set about building ‘houses’ for themselves out of these newly available materials. Their approach was to lean one block against another, creating a triangular tent-like structure. Each child promptly constructed their own ‘house’. However, the makeshift houses proved to be quite small, not even tall enough for the children to stand up in. Their individual constructions were only spacious enough for them to each sit inside on their own. Nevertheless, proud of their achievements, the children sat in their respective houses for hours on end. But soon they became bored. They found sitting like this rather isolating. They wanted to socialise and visit each other, but the space proved too small to allow for visitors. Each neighbourly visit resulted in the collapse of the house. They repeatedly tried, but failed to construct a larger house that would be suitable for socialising. No solution for a communal space could be found. Growing tired of trying to solve the problem, one of the children drew a sun dial in the sand in front of the makeshift houses.

The children quickly became fascinated by this new creation, observing the way in which the shadows moved, trying to follow the passing of time on the makeshift clock. The movement of the sun and the shadows it created caused lively debates amongst the children who were keen to show off their ability to tell the time. Soon, the makeshift houses with their capacity constraints were forgotten and the children started spending all their time in their 'agora', socialising and chatting.

Kana concludes the anecdote with the observation: *'I think it is communication that gives the strength of sense to a space'*.<sup>1</sup>

### **From an Aesthetic Solution to an Ethical Act**

I begin the essay with this anecdote as a way of drawing attention to Kana's choice to retell this particular childhood experience and in order to emphasise her focus on the importance of communication in the way space is produced. By contrasting the isolation of individualism with the productive possibilities of shared public space, activated, as she explains, through communication, Kana does much more than simply recount a childhood event. She, in fact, articulates the core ethos of Yugoslav socialism, which had worker led self-management at its heart, paired with the radical redistribution of property after the Second World War, from the private realm into the *social realm*. This central mechanism of Yugoslav socialism, the system of self-management, initially developed by Edvard Kardelj, its main ideologist in 1950s, was based around the gradual withering away of the state, in favour of a set of newly developed mechanisms built around the worker as the main subject, who, through participation in worker councils, had a certain amount of decision-making power, such as deciding on how profits would be spent, deciding between investment in infrastructure, worker conditions, new equipment, or other needs.<sup>2</sup> Within this system, one of the most significant, but also most controversial achievements of Yugoslav socialism was the creation of the category of 'social property', introduced in the years following the establishment of Yugoslavia in 1945. Yugoslavia therefore had three types of property: private, state and

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<sup>1</sup> The Only Life of Man' (*'Život Jedinici Čovjeka'*), an episode about Svetlana Kana Radević, Directed by Branislav Mićunović, Produced by Radio Television Titograd, 1980. Available at <https://archive.org/details/zivotjedinicovjekasvetlanakanaradevic>, Last accessed 16 August 2023

<sup>2</sup> Edvard Kardelj (1910 – 1979) was a Slovenian politician, and economist by profession, who fought as a Partisan on the Slovenian Liberation Front during the Second World War, and later became one of the key leaders in Tito's Yugoslavia. He is credited the main architect of the system of workers' self-management.

social, and the public discourse of self-management centred predominantly on the intricacies of developing effective systems for workers' governance of social property.<sup>3</sup>

While in her anecdote Kana does not address this concept per se, her focus on shared space reveals the socially engaged nature of her thinking and her concern for public benefit beyond simply fulfilling commissioning agendas. In the same documentary Kana later asserts that *'social engagement transforms aesthetic solutions into an ethical act'*.<sup>4</sup> It is precisely such an approach that underpinned much of Yugoslav political promise that led to deprivatisation and investment in the commons.

In this essay I aim to provide a broad cultural context for Kana's work, drawing parallels and highlighting differences between Kana's own ways of navigating Yugoslav cultural politics and her contemporaries in the sphere of visual art, whose interrogation of the role of art in society addressed some of the very same concerns, by other means. Kana's contemporaries, slightly younger artists born in the late 1940s, known as New Art Practice generation (NAP) sought not only to democratise culture, bring art into the public realm, freeing it from the discrete, historically bourgeois space of galleries and museums as a leftover of pre-Yugoslav times, but to also undertake a continuous critique of the state's failure to deploy culture as an active arena of political change. But despite the progressive and socially engaged nature of these artists' practices, the New Art Practice generation remained heavily male dominated and included very few female artists – another parallel with Kana's own field of architecture. Gender discrimination governed all aspects of Yugoslav life, from workplaces to the domestic sphere, and yet analyses of Yugoslav society from this angle remain far and few between. Lastly, in this essay I aim to address how this deep-set patriarchal order affected the cultural sphere by, normalising various forms of embedded sexism, omissions, and exclusions.

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<sup>3</sup> The category of social property was met with much controversy both during the period of its creation, due to the technicalities of administering property with no title and the complexity of confiscation and redistribution of resources, but also in 1990s in the process of Yugoslav 'transition' into individual countries, and the process of privatization, in which in many cases property that was social was treated as if it had been owned by the state.

<sup>4</sup> *The Only Life of Man* ('Život Jedini Čovjeka'), an episode about Svetlana Kana Radević, Directed by Branislav Mićunović, Produced by Radio Television Titograd, 1980. Available at <https://archive.org/details/zivotjedinicovjekasvetlanakanaradevic>, Last accessed 16 August 2023

## Aligning Visions – the shifting role of the cultural worker in Yugoslav socialism

Cultural workers operating in socialist Yugoslavia occupied a range of positions vis-à-vis state support, depending on both their artistic and political outlooks. Some, like Kana, were able to express their creative ideas within the system, smoothly aligning their practices with the visual representations of Yugoslav socialism. In the aforementioned documentary Kana exclaims: *'In the past architects worked for individuals, today, they work for society'*, revealing a sensitivity to the social role of architecture that underpins her practice.<sup>5</sup> Kana achieved major success by winning numerous highly competitive public commissions, giving her a chance to design projects ranging from hotels and war memorials to key civic spaces, such as a central bus station, offices and apartment buildings, from the late 1960s onwards. The range of projects is testament to her alignment with the goals of self-management and its use of urban space, but also her transnational education and network, operating across the US, Japan and the Soviet Union. Only a small minority of cultural workers operated at this level and circulated on the roster of public commissioning. Others, while still maintaining active practices, did so in alternative spaces, relying less on government commissions and more on developing peer networks in burgeoning critically engaged countercultural circles. Artist Sanja Iveković has explained that *'those who were active on the countercultural scene at the time took the socialist project far more seriously than the cynical governing political elite'*<sup>6</sup>

The feeling of being dismissed as irrelevant by the ruling elites was evident in the student protests which erupted in Yugoslavia's larger cities in the summer of 1968. One of the key reasons for protester dissatisfaction was the League of Communists' (the name for the Communist Party since 1952) failure to embrace culture as a central element in the creation of socialism – relegating it instead to an illustrative

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<sup>5</sup> The Only Life of Man' (*Život Jedini Čovjeka*'), an episode about Svetlana Kana Radević, Directed by Branislav Mićunović, Produced by Radio Television Titograd, 1980. Available at <https://archive.org/details/zivotjedinicovjekasvetlanakanaradevic>, Last accessed 16 August 2023

<sup>6</sup> <sup>181</sup> 'Feminism, activism and Historicisation: Sanja Iveković talks to Antonia Majača', *n.paradoxa* 23 (London, 2009), p. 6.

role, endorsing the specific visual language of socialist modernism and failing to recognise cultural life as a vital arena for furthering socialist goals. Politically engaged students, including those studying at the art academies, felt sidelined and misunderstood. This dissatisfaction was eloquently expressed in a statement issued at the applied arts academy's student's assembly, held in Belgrade on 6 June 1968, read:

*'We condemn all insinuations that seek to discredit us, separate us from the worker, and portray us as anti-socialist elements. We have always been, and remain today, the mobilising force of socialist development, and we demand to be trusted as our word is the word of progress.'*<sup>7</sup>

It was such sentiments that led the 1968 demonstrators to demand spaces for culture that would be accessible to all. This resulted in the creation of Student Cultural Centres in Yugoslavia's larger cities (Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana) which were multidisciplinary cultural organisations, which came with secure infrastructural funding and were under the auspices of the cities' respective Universities.<sup>8</sup> (Fig. 1) This succeeded in galvanising a generation of cultural workers who gathered in these centres, fuelled by a genuine belief in the emancipatory potential of art and culture as active sites of social change. Among them were conceptual artists who were later grouped under the moniker New Art Practice (NAP).

Generationally close to Kana, NAP artists, many of whom are household names on the global art scene today, included Mladen Stilinović, Sanja Iveković, Marina Abramović, Braco Dimitrijević. As observed by the curator Marijan Susovski, who first exhibited their work under this umbrella term, these artists *'changed their ways of*

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<sup>7</sup> Issue 1/2 (1969) of the journal *Praxis*, entitled 'June 1968 – Documents', was dedicated to a comprehensive report of the 1968 protests which were held across Yugoslavia. The issue covered all events through collated correspondence exchanged between the students and various regulatory structures that they addressed in their demands. For a full archive of *Praxis* and associated publications, see <http://www.praxis-arhiva.net/>, last accessed 27 November 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Unlike galleries or concert halls, student cultural centres were not only exhibition, screening and music event spaces, but also functioned as meeting places with rich discursive programming and in some cases social spaces and café facilities.

*operating as a result of the realisation that the old system of relations artists-artwork-society, is no longer socially relevant'*.<sup>9</sup> Susovski used the term *izmnjenjena umjetnicka komunikacija* – 'altered (amended) artistic communication', to describe commonalities across the works exhibited, which all significantly departed from the mainstream art tendencies (Informel painting and sculpture) that were valued and endorsed (as well as funded) by the Yugoslav art establishment.

NAP artists with their conceptual approach were certainly more critical of the political system than Kana and others who regularly received commissions (after all, art was possible to make on a shoestring budget, but buildings were not), but they shared similar concerns to do with how socialist self-management was actually being implemented when it came to the lives of ordinary citizens. For instance, Kana's consideration of the democratisation of space was demonstrated in her planning of the Podgorica hotel (opened in 1967), by ensuring that local residents would be able to use the hotel's public terrace so that the hotel would not become a privileged site for guests only, but a destination for local citizens too. At its core this was the same preoccupation to do with access and agency of the ordinary citizen, that NAP artists were tackling in their work.

The works of this generation of artists often used allegory to put into question the agency of the represented subject (the citizen, worker, artist) by alluding to another, spectral element—invoking the 'absent presence' of Josip Broz Tito, Yugoslavia's president for life. For instance, one of Yugoslavia's early conceptualists, Braco Dimitrijević's *Accidental Passer-by* series, consisted of numerous street actions that, as the title suggests, involved passers-by in the making of the work, 'spotlighting' the ordinary citizen and directing attention away from the omnipresent image of power.

One of his earliest works in this vein is *Casual Passers-by whom I met at 13.15, 16.23 and 18.11 hours* (1971) (Fig. 2). Dimitrijević was commissioned by the Zagreb Salon – an annual open call which offered the opportunity to selected artists to make new work to be shown in public spaces. Dimitrijević's project involved printing three

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<sup>9</sup> Marijan Susovski (Ed),. *Dokumenti 3 – 6, Nova Umjetnicka praksa 1966 – 1978* (Zagreb: Galerija Suvremene Umjetnosti 1978), p. 3.

photographic banners of passers-by that he had met at the times he later noted and displayed on the façade of a prominent building in Zagreb's Republic Square (today Ban Jelacic square). This, being the city's main square, was the same spot where portraits of Tito were regularly displayed during public holidays and celebrations, as was the case with all Yugoslav cities. The commission was accepted by Želimir Koščević, the progressive and open-minded curator of the Student Centre gallery in the city, and the Republic Square woke up on a May morning in 1971 dominated by banner-sized portraits of three ordinary Zagreb citizens – a middle-aged man, a young blonde woman and an elderly lady with a hat.

In her account of the event, Nena Dimitrijević, curator, and lifelong partner of Braco Dimitrijević, explained: *'confused early morning commuters queuing up for the tram wondered whether there had been a sudden regime change. But the look of three ordinary faces in no way confirmed the thesis of new political triumph.'*<sup>10</sup> By placing the subject of Yugoslav socialism at a site where the leader would normally be seen, Dimitrijević invoked Tito's absent presence, posing the question of who really mattered in Yugoslav society, the governing elites, or the ordinary citizen.

By destabilising the mechanism of associations between the image and its location, Dimitrijević produced a critical subject. Seeking to disturb and unsettle any possible complacency in his fellow citizens, the work inspired a social consciousness which would put into question the fetishisation of the image of the leader. Dimitrijević's work, without resorting to representation, destabilised the established relationship between the viewer and their environment.<sup>11</sup>

A similar approach was further explored through exhibitions held at bus stops, foyers of residential buildings and through artworks staged to be executed by unsuspecting passers-by, in an act aimed at transferring the authorship from the artist to the

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<sup>10</sup> Braco Dimitrijević and Nena Dimitrijević, *Tekst(s)*, (Zagreb: Durieux, 2014), p. 351

<sup>11</sup> Bojana Videkanic, 'First and Last Emperor: Representation of the President, Bodies of the Youth', in Breda Luthar and Marusa Pusnik, (Eds), *Remembering Utopia: The Culture of Everyday Life in Socialist Yugoslavia*, pp. 37-64.

ordinary citizen, reminiscent of Yugoslavia's egalitarian promises.<sup>12</sup> In works such as *Accidental Sculpture* (1968), *Accidental Drawing* (1968), and *Painting by Krešimir Klika* (1969) (Fig. 3). Dimitrijević set up situations in public spaces which would then be completed by the unknowing actions of passers-by. For instance, a car would drive through a carton of yogurt that Dimitrijević had placed on the road, causing the yogurt to spill, creating a shape on the tarmac. Dimitrijević would stop the car and ask the accidental artist to sign the work, titling the resulting series of photographs them, in this case, 'Painting by Krešimir Klika'. These works clearly acted as provocations, challenging the myth of artist genius and the mystification of art while pointing to the potential of the ordinary person, as a reminder of Yugoslavia's promised gradual shift of decision making towards citizen governance.

Where Svetlana Kana Radević's projects tackled the question of how to best make public space work for Yugoslav people at the level of architecture, Dimitrijević's actions carried that question further by asking how much agency ordinary people did have once they were occupying these spaces.

Not unlike Dimitrijević's focus on the agency of the individual citizen, two works by Sanja Iveković made in 1979— *Trokut (Triangle)* (Fig. 4) and *Novi Zagreb. Ljudi Iza Prozora (New Zagreb. People Behind Windows)*, (1979), (Fig. 5) highlighted the tension between individual agency and authoritarian control of public behaviour. Both works used public notices that were issued to citizens on occasions of parades involving Tito and other dignitaries passing through the city, as triggers to explore the relationship between power structures and individual citizens. Iveković's home, on Savska Street in central Zagreb, one of the city's main arteries, was (and continues to be) on the path of such events. Both works sought to investigate the boundaries of individual agency, when faced with a specific directive, posing questions about freedom and agency of the individual in Yugoslavia.

To explain further - residents, including Iveković, of the streets where the convoy would pass, would receive notices in their mailboxes issuing specific orders for behaviour during the event. These directives instructed citizens to stay inside their homes, marking certain areas

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<sup>12</sup> Braco Dimitrijević and Nena Dimitrijević, *Tekst(s)*, (Zagreb: Durieux, 2014).



off limits. It was prohibited for inhabitants to stand by the window, or to use their balconies if they faced the street where the convoy would be passing. The other option, apart from staying indoors and away from their windows, that was open to inhabitants of these buildings, was to go out to the street and join the celebration by standing in the designated public areas at specific times.

The performance/installation piece *'Trokut' (Triangle)* (1979), which has since become a paradigmatic work for conceptual feminist practice, is centred on a performative situation set up by the artist on her balcony. As articulated by the art historian and writer Antonia Majaca, Iveković's action was *'a unique exercise in the utilization of the gendered body as a trigger for the instantaneous exposure of the mechanisms of control, surveillance and techniques for the preservation of state order'*.<sup>13</sup>

In *'Triangle'* Iveković becomes the unruly subject – 'the body that is out of control'<sup>14</sup> disregarding state directives, by choosing to occupy the wrong space at the wrong time. By sitting on her balcony, which indeed does directly overlook the street where Tito was to pass during his visit on May 10, 1979, Iveković asserted her own will over that of the state. Not only did Iveković occupy a prohibited space, she also did so in ways that signify dissent, not only as a citizen, but as a female citizen: Iveković could be seen on her balcony wearing a T-shirt with an American slogan and a skimpy skirt, hand suggestively between her legs simulating masturbation. She is smoking a cigarette, drinking whiskey while reading the 1964 book entitled *'Elites and Society'* by the British Marxist sociologist T. B. Bottomore, a sociological study of power relations in modern society. The triangulation suggested by the title occurs between Iveković, as the unruly female subject, and two police officers, who are communicating by walkie-talkie. One is positioned on the roof of a building opposite Iveković's and can see her balcony action in full view. He is in communication with his colleague who is standing on the street below Iveković's balcony. This series of small

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<sup>13</sup> See Antonia Majaca, 'Feminism, Activism and Historicisation, Sanja Ivekovic talks to Antonia Majaca', n.paradoxa, vol 23, January 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

gestures and acts taking place in Iveković's 'autonomous zone' of the balcony: the T shirt, the choice of book, the whiskey and cigarette and the freedom achieving sexual pleasure should she want it, formulate Iveković's vocabulary which, through both the refusal to comply, and her chosen signifiers of individualism, critique the forms of control she is subjected to as a citizen. Iveković opts for liberalism and individualism in the face of expectations to play a part of orchestrated performance of state rituals. Iveković's balcony 'sit-in' lasts for 18 minutes until her doorbell rings and a police officer demands that 'the persons and objects are to be removed from the balcony'.<sup>15</sup> This marks the end of the performance.

Iveković's act of disobedience and decision to override state demands was also echoed in the display of '*Triangle*'. When shown, the four photographs are to be displayed in a triangular fashion with the image of Iveković on the balcony positioned to the right of the image of Tito as he passes by in his convertible car, waving at the gathered masses around him. The two images below and above these, show the policeman on the roof across from Iveković's balcony, and the crowds below. The three images that show the state-orchestrated event are wide-angle shots filled with willing participants performing their roles within the choreography of the event. The event is only possible through collective participation of these bodies who are willingly fulfilling their roles within the choreography. Tito himself is one of these willing participants, fully immersed in the performance of his role in the overall event, as he waves on cue. But the image of Iveković on her balcony is different in

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<sup>15</sup> This text is included in the panel explaining the work which is shown alongside the four images (see image). The full text reads: 'The action takes place on the day of the President's visit to the city, and it develops as intercommunication between three persons:

1. a person on the roof of a tall building across the street from my apartment;
2. myself, on the balcony;
3. a policeman in the street in front of the house.

Due to the cement construction of the balcony, only the person on the roof can actually see me and follow the action. My assumption is that this person has binoculars and a walkie-talkie apparatus. I notice that the policeman in the street also has a walkie-talkie.

The action begins when I walk out onto the balcony and sit on a chair, I sip whiskey, read a book, and make gestures as if I perform masturbation. After a period of time, the policeman rings my doorbell and orders the 'persons and objects are to be removed from the balcony'.

scale altogether – the image is a close-up of the balcony with only Iveković at the centre. This is Iveković's domain, reclaimed and orchestrated by her only. The juxtaposition of the small figures in other images and the centrality of Iveković's position propose a reversal of the power dynamics between state and individual. In both *New Zagreb* and *Triangle*, Tito is present, but becomes a marginal figure, in the face of actions performed by those who are going against the imposed narratives.

*New Zagreb* (Fig. 5) is a companion piece to 'Triangle' thematically, in the way in which it highlights the possibilities of civil disobedience. Using a large black and white newspaper photograph of Tito and his wife Jovanka Broz as they pass through a busy city street, Iveković shifts the emphasis away from Tito's convoy onto the block of flats behind it. The homes of those who chose to ignore the public notice requiring they stay away from their windows, are highlighted in bright yellow, red and blue. The primary colours with which Iveković highlights the homes of the 'disobedients' act as a way of dividing the image into two planes – the black and white state-directed narrative, and the brightly coloured 'Pop space' of those refusing to conform. The blocks of colour in the image act as a visual device which draws the viewer in, shifting the gaze from the central figure of Tito, to the multitude of individual acts of disobedience taking place in the semi-private spaces of citizen's balconies.

Like Dimitrijević's *Passer By* series, Iveković reverses the order of power by placing the ordinary citizen centre stage. Whether that citizen is the artist herself, as is the case in *Triangle*, or the figures standing by their windows that can be barely glimpsed in the blown-up newspaper photograph documenting Tito's visit, in *New Zagreb*, these works are about the possibility of acting otherwise and asserting one's will in a controlling system. By giving visibility to the possibility of dissent, Iveković opens up a space for imagining options of a different social order in which the citizen is truly the subject with a voice and a power to enact change.

The works by Sanja Iveković and Braco Dimitrijević, described here, as many other works by this generation of critically minded artists, all focused on urban spaces as

sites which produced ideological visual narratives of Yugoslav socialism. Through regular displays of ideological state control, embodied in public rallies, processions, celebrations and state visits, which punctuated Yugoslav daily life, the socialist government asserted not only its visibility but also its ability to orchestrate and choreograph the behavior of its citizens. Such events were the most frequent and visible points of encounter between citizens and Yugoslav ideology, turning the citizen into either the willing participant performing their part in the choreography, or rendering them invisible, should they not adhere to the prescribed rules (as seen in Iveković's works which highlight the requirements for citizens to stay away from their windows and balconies if not willing to part-take in the event in specific ways).

In all three of the works the artists were interested in the citizen as disobedient subject – the one who remains visible in the public space while also refusing to take part. In all of the works, Tito's image, normally centrally positioned and made the focus around which the ceremonies were conducted, was displaced, his prime position reclaimed by the ordinary citizen. In doing so, these artists repopulated the structures of Yugoslav ideology, for as a way of giving agency to the ordinary citizen and highlighting the discrepancies in Yugoslav society.

### **Whose Democratised Space?**

New Art Practice artists were highly progressive, internationally-minded and interested in structural change and culture's role in society beyond the representational. However, this period, not only in art, but across every aspect of Yugoslav life, contained the blind spot of gender discrimination. The heavy gender imbalance that saw women remain excluded from many key positions, was generally glossed over, despite the public declaration of equality, one of Yugoslavia's key claims to a new egalitarian social system. The Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia signed on 31 January 1946, for the first time inscribed women's rights as equal political, social and economic subjects following their enormous contribution of in the antifascist Resistance during World War Two through the Antifascist Women's Front

(Antifašistički front žena [AFŽ]).<sup>16</sup> This early commitment to equal rights sadly did not translate into equality on the ground. If anything, a conflicting value system ensued, one in which women found themselves uncomfortably negotiating the post-war legacy of AFŽ and the female emancipation that it had stirred on the one hand, and the gradual return of the pre-war bourgeois patriarchal traditions placing women in charge of the domestic sphere (whilst still retaining the outward image of social equality) on the other. The gulf between the rhetoric of socialist emancipation and the reality of women's lives was rapidly widening.

Socialist regimes, more broadly, were often characterized by contradictory goals in their policies toward women: “*They wanted workers as well as mothers, token leaders as well as quiescent typists.*”<sup>17</sup> Despite the public declaration of her equality with male counterparts, the Yugoslav *drugarica* (comradess) lived with the expectation of always being well dressed and groomed as well as being a fast and efficient homemaker. This was summed up in the speech by the Slovenian socialist leader Vida Tomšič in 1948 in which she explained how the “comradess” would ideally aspire to fulfilling all of these roles: “*all that we want – beauty, joy and diversity. We should teach our women how to dress well and how to clean their homes so they can do it quickly.*”<sup>18</sup>

This negotiation between “public patriarchy” (the state) and “private patriarchy” (the family), in the field of culture meant that female cultural workers garnered little visibility and had limited agency, often being relegated to secondary roles in collective projects or being

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<sup>16</sup> The AFŽ was a women's social and political organisation founded on 6 December 1942 in Bosanski Petrovac in Bosnia, as part of the National Liberation Struggle (*Narodno-oslobodilacka Borba* (NOB)) during World War Two. AFŽ's goal was to unite all women in the struggle against the fascist enemy, through women's participation in armed operations and diversionary activities, organisation of child-care, and women's cultural and educational development. Following the liberation of the country, AFŽ engaged with war consequences through the care for war orphans and the wounded as well as cultural activity. AFŽ's work in women's emancipation consisted in opposing all forms of gender-based discrimination, ensuring women's inclusion in Yugoslav economic and political life. AFŽ was dissolved in 1953 when the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia (SAWPY) decided that gender equality could be more effectively reached through non-gender specific agencies. AFŽ was criticised at the time for allegedly becoming too involved in politics (or for being too successful/having too much power), which also contributed to its demise. It appeared that equality and emancipation were only welcomed to a certain degree. For more information on AFŽ see: Sabrina P. Ramet, *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States* (University Park PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, (Eds.), 'Introduction', *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life After Socialism*, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000) p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Vida Tomšič, 'Speech to the Anti-Fascist Women's Front Plenum', October 10 1948, as quoted by Bojana Pejić in 'The Morning After', p. 97.

involved as “supporters” in the role of girlfriends or wives of male artists. Few women succeeded in establishing their own artistic practices and sustaining them in the long term. In artists’ collectives, for instance - a dominant trope for NAP artists - women were either ‘minor figures’, playing what were seen to be marginal roles in collective art-making according to art historical accounts, or were erased altogether. These supposedly secondary roles, were in fact not minor at all, involving administration, maintenance, social reproduction, affective labour – all essential but heavily undervalued forms of labour. In my interviews with Yugoslav cultural workers about artists’ groups of this period, terms like ‘*lateral woman*’, ‘*backing singer*’, ‘*soul of the collective*’, ‘*everyone’s mother*’ were used, therefore reproducing the very familial social structures that collectivity sought to challenge in the first place.<sup>19</sup>

The situation was further complicated by the proliferation of the schematic portrayal of women in magazines, Yugoslav film and advertising from the mid-1960s onwards. The public realm of media and advertising filled with women as sex symbols; temptresses; women as out of control (a particularly familiar trope in film in this period) or indeed women as consumers and housewives embracing the rapidly permeating consumer bliss of the new, Western-facing, liberalized Yugoslavia. The notion of women as a “virus” through which consumerism spread across the country seemed to underpin female representation across all spheres of public life in patriarchal Yugoslavia of the 1950s and 1960s. Not unlike their Western counterparts women became the prime target group (and protagonists) for advertisers, in particular for products related to fashion, make up, the domestic realm, food or family, leading to their association with spending and indulgence, and perception of them as a self-indulgent and greedy consumerist virus (Fig. 6).

Unsurprisingly, the female body became a dominant trope in Yugoslav Pop work of the period, with a slew of paintings and screen-prints by male artists featuring fetishistic depictions of pin-ups and isolated parts of women's bodies and titles such as ‘For Men Only’ - a unambiguous work by Boris Jesih, featuring a woman’s torso wearing suspenders. Using Pop approaches of stripping away and paring down to the simplest elements of images, flat

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<sup>19</sup> Dzuverovic, Lina, *Collective Actions, Continued Omissions*, in ‘What Will Be Already Exists – Temporalities of Cold War Archives in East-Central Europe and Beyond’, transcript Verlag, 2021, pp xxx

monochrome surfaces were dominant, reducing the image to schematic representations of their subject, erasing any subjectivity or possibility of agency.

We must, then, ask, how far did the democratisation of public space go and how much did those in marginal positions benefit from the actions and efforts that sought greater equality in such a self-unaware male-dominated sphere.

## **Conclusion**

It is not difficult to observe the discrepancies and contradictions described above in Kana's own life and work, even though she bucked the trend and achieved enormous success despite the uneven playing field. Images of Kana receiving the prestigious Borba award in 1968 – the youngest ever recipient of this prize and the only female architect to have ever won it – show her shaking hands with an all-male panel. In the aforementioned documentary, Kana's is the only female name to appear in the closing credits, a significant fact, even if she is the subject of the documentary.

Women like Svetlana Kana Radević, Sanja Iveković, Marina Abramović, all mentioned in this text, were certainly not alone in forging artistic careers, but they were in a minority, able to jump higher over the endless hurdles of unrealistic expectations and predominantly male networks.

I end this essay by stressing the need for an intersectional analysis of Yugoslav cultural sphere of this period. The highly contradictory environment of this young, innovative socialist self-managed country, set out a complex terrain for its cultural workers, especially women. It simultaneously provided excellent opportunities unlikely to be available in other countries - enabling someone like Kana to build major national projects in her 20s - while also placing high, and at times unrealistic and potentially destructive, expectations on women and ignoring their oppression, objectification and marginalisation, protected by legislated equality. Analyses of the Yugoslav cultural sphere via the lens of gender, class, sexuality, race as well as discrepancies between the richer north and poorer south and enormous rifts between urban and rural areas, are still far and few between.

In thinking about Svetlana Kana Radević, we must think about what it meant to be a woman from one of the less wealthy of the six Yugoslav republics, working publicly in such an environment, simultaneously encountering unprecedented opportunities and forms of silencing through the discrimination that was normalised in that very complexity.<sup>20</sup> *'I wish to be and remain an architect to my very last breath'* exclaimed Kana in the documentary.<sup>21</sup> In her case, such focus and dedication indeed resulted in a stellar life-long career. But while we embark on a much-needed deeper study of Kana's significant oeuvre, we must also ask, why so few women? It is necessary to not only investigate those whose success is evident but ask what prevented other ambitious and driven women to achieve such goals. In learning how to ask the right methodological questions, we must also closely scrutinise the discourses and categories involved in such historicization and ask how it is possible for figures like Svetlana Kana Radević to only be receiving the due attention posthumously.

To turn to feminist art history for our methods, a double task is needed: one of *'the historical recovery of data about women producers'*, and a simultaneous *'deconstruction of the discourses and practices of art history itself'*, as famously articulated by Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker.<sup>22</sup> By asking 'how do we account for a much larger role than currently acknowledged of women cultural producers in Yugoslavia?' we can open up a space to expand the conversation begun by Svetlana Kana Radević and her contemporaries.

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<sup>20</sup> Svetlana Kana Radević's native Montenegro, along with Bosnia & Herzegovina and Macedonia was economically less prosperous than Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia, which held most of the economic and political power in the country.

<sup>21</sup> *The Only Life of Man* ('Život Jedini Čovjeka'), an episode about Svetlana Kana Radević, Directed by Branislav Mićunović, Produced by Radio Television Titograd, 1980. Available at <https://archive.org/details/zivotjedinicovjekasvetlanakanaradevic>, Last accessed 16 August 2023

<sup>22</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*, 3rd edn (Routledge, 2003), p. 77. Here Griselda Pollock refers to her book with Rozsika Parker, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (1981) in which they discuss the double project of feminist art history.