Living Archive: The Performative Potential of a Document (on the contextual part of the exhibition *The Promises of the Past*)

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One of the most recent thematic exhibitions that placed at the heart of its research and display questions related to the history of conceptual and contemporary art in former-Eastern Europe was *The Promises of the Past 1950-2010: A Discontinuous History of Art in the Former Eastern Europe* at the Centre Pompidou (spring 2010). The exhibition was consciously divided into two main parts, or two complementary exhibition parcours. The first part, co-curated by Christine Macel and Joanna Mytkowska and displayed within a zigzag structure created by the Polish artist Monika Sosnowska, dealt with the particularities of conceptual art from former-Eastern Europe and the different types of relations—such as reactivation, re-enactment, quotation—between the neo-avantgarde practices and contemporary artistic positions from both the former-East and former-West of Europe. Through seven chapters—Beyond the Modernist Utopias, Fantasies of the Totality, Anti-art, Private and Public Space, Female-Feminist, Micropolitical Gestures and Institutional Critique, Utopia Revisited—the parcours established themselves with a linear narration but as a display within and around the pockets, created by Sosnowska’s zigzag structure.¹ In the following text, I will look more closely at the second complementary part, the so-called contextual part of the exhibition *Promises of the Past* that I curated, and its status as a living archive and as a space of emerging discourse about former-Eastern Europe. By assessing the notion of a performative document, I will discuss the reactivation and presentation of various types of documents, as well as the reactivation of a semi-forgotten local (Parisian and French) memory that they bear witness to.

A historic accompanying document of an artwork provides augmented visual access to an affirmative representation of that artwork and, on some occasions, is the only trace that is left

to constitute that artwork as such. The “need to document”\(^2\) and the desire to see and be persuaded by the reality the document is revealing, has become the object of enormous attention in the recent theories and practices of exhibition making and museum studies. No longer arising only from the artists’ engagement with archival methods of classification and presentation,\(^3\) whose outcome is often a “politics of the truth,”\(^4\) contextualisation as a certain pedagogical turn or “pedagogical aesthetics,”\(^5\) which an insight into an archive provides, can be observed in many progressive art institutions and museums. One of the first exhibitions to consciously address the performative document was *Body and the East* (1998), curated by Zdenka Badovinac at the Moderna galerija in Ljubljana. Badovinac curated a survey on body art in Eastern Europe, presenting an important counter-universalist point about the difference between actions done in the West and in the East of Europe that lay in the observation that similar gestures have different reading in different geopolitical spaces. A later exhibition by Badovinac, *Interrupted Histories* (2006), focused furthermore on archiving as an artistic practice and a mode of self-historicisation. To name but a few further recent examples: *Living Archive* at the Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, is an ongoing series of documentary exhibitions based on the museum archives and contains “The future of the past” which is “…vitaly important for the museum’s identity and self-consciousness […] Cultural and historical contexts are reconsidered, the little-known history of a work of art is revealed, and the artist’s considerations are scrutinized.”\(^6\) In his two programmatic lectures in Paris in 2009 (organised by the seminar *Something You Should Know*, EHESS, and by the Centre


Pompidou, Paris), Manuel Borja-Villel, the director of Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid, talked about the increasing role of the archives in group or solo exhibitions. Through the presentation of “documentary evidence” and “archival objects” (artworks, sources, letters, articles and film or video documentation of performances) formed the contextual part of the exhibition *The Promises of the Past* that occurred within architecture conceived by the Slovene artist Tobias Putrih. The objective of the contextual part was to reveal how theoretical and art historical discourses about former-Eastern Europe are in progress and, from a curatorial perspective, a living archive seemed the most appropriate form with which to address this. Artworks by the group Irwin and artist Deimantas Narkevičius, archives of the Paris-based Gallery 1-36 and Galerie des Locataires (Tenants’ Gallery), archives of Pierre Restany and the Paris Biennial, as well as the film and video documentation of performances of the artists on view in the living archive of *The Promises of the Past*, were chapters in the historical analysis of the exchanges between France and former-Eastern Europe, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. The central curatorial question brought forward within the contextual part of the exhibition was the (im)possibility of transmitting an ephemeral experience through the reproduced form of a document. As Manuel Borja-Villel wrote, “… how are experiences, which are at once unrepeatable and infinite, collected? How does one render visible and transmit a work of a textual sort that has more to do with the archive and the document than anything else?”

The French critic Catherine Millet qualified the exhibition as “essentially documentary” and within her short commentary this denomination turned out to be pejorative. Therefore rendering the question of a document’s status vis-à-vis a work of art—regarding its representation, actuality and the potential performativity of the past—as the key issue.

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7 Lately, a few more international projects reactivated the role of documentation and the archive, among them Working Title: Archive at Museum of Art, Łódź (2009), and Invisible History of Exhibitions: Parallel Chronologies, organised by tranzit.hu in Budapest (2009)—whose main parts were the documentary exhibitions The Case of Student’s Cultural Centre in the 1970s by Prelog Kollektiv from Belgrade and Media Ontology. Mapping of Social and Art History of Novi Sad by the collective kuda.org from Novi Sad. The exhibition Universal Archive at MACBA in Barcelona (2008-09) presented the history of the photographic document and its genealogy. The exhibition Vojin Bakić by the curatorial collective WHW in Zagreb (2008) went even a step further: while the part of the exhibition that presented artist’s sculptural models was inaccessible for most of the time and only seen from the outside, documents and other archival material were accessible to the public for the entire exhibition duration.


10 See the section ‘Right of Reply’, *Art Press*, nr. 369, July-August 2010: 99.
Typology of Documents

A variety of documents were presented in the living archive within the exhibition. The established typology that follows here is linked to questions about the document and its performativity as proposed by Philip Auslander, the American theoretician of performance.

In his seminal text, *On the Performativity of Performance Documentation*, Auslander references his colleague, American theoretician of performance and body art Amelia Jones, who in her essay *Presence in Absentia* explores the relationship between performance and document. Reinstating photography’s position as an access point to the reality of performance, Jones declares how she is “… respectful of the specificity of knowledges gained from participating in a live performance situation […] I will argue here that this specificity should not be privileged over the specificity of knowledges that develop in relation to the documentary traces of such an event. While the live situation may enable the phenomenological relations of flesh-to-flesh engagement, the documentary exchange (viewer/reader< - ->document) is equally intersubjective.” Following on from this argument, Auslander classifies any performance documentation into two categories: documentary and theatrical. Specifically, the latter is interesting for our discussion here, since he includes in it projects where the performance is totally staged with the sole purpose of being recorded, the original event bearing no preceding meaningful existence whatsoever: “The space of a document, be it visual or audiovisual, becomes the only space in which the performance takes place.” Not only the captured reality or situation, but also its production features in the work itself. Facing the theatricality, the document’s authenticity and its ability to reflect reality is discredited. The consequence is that the spectator does not see the document as communication of information but as the staging of information.

In his most recent research, Auslander develops further his theoretical approach to performance documentation, focusing on the phenomenological relation of the public to the performance document, and less on the ontological relation of the document to the original

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13 See note 11, p.24.
performance. In his approach, Auslander observes how a spectator’s primary action regarding performance art is not the witnessing of live events but the imaginative reconstitution of performances from images, whether held in memory or available through documentation. He draws on the hermeneutics of the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer who argues that understanding something does not consist of revealing an objective truth inherent in it, waiting to be discovered. Rather, understanding proves to be something that emerges through dialogue, in our case the dialogue between the performance document and its public. Auslander claims that the public’s imaginative reconstitution of a performance from its documentation is not a process in which they retrieve information about something that took place in the past, but is itself a performance in the present in which we take part.  

Furthermore, the notion of performativity can be attributed to the document itself. By assessing this concept through Judith Butler’s *Excitable Speech: The Politics of the Performative* (1997), where performativity is defined as a study of the discourse used in identity formation and law-making, or John Langshaw Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), where stating objects is considered in some circumstances similar to constituting those objects and linguistic expression does not simply take place but carries out an action at the same time, we can see that the concept of the performative document describes the ways in which words are used to describe and define reality, or perform events. In our discussion it is interesting to note that if we consider the past through the aspect of the performativity of language, we can detect how, while observing it through images or other material, our words and interpretations assist in the understanding of the past.

**Artworks, Archives**

For the architectural structure that contained the archival part of *The Promises of the Past*, Tobias Putrih took as a model two socialist modernist cinema architectures (Kino Šiška from Ljubljana and Cinema International from Berlin, both built in the 1960s and with similar features). In order to divise the presentation space into an entrance vestibule, Putrih designed

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a corridor with a relief, taken from the facade of Cinema International, a triangular lobby for
the exhibition of archival material, and an auditorium with semi-transparent walls and ceiling,
where weekly lectures, debates and a changing video programme took place. To replicate
architectural elements from different space and time, Putrih used fragile material such as
Styrofoam and cardboard.

Entering this space, the work *Retroavantgarde* (1997-2005) by the Slovene group Irwin
appeared, in which the group’s ongoing strategy of “self-historicisation” and questions of the
status of an artwork in relation to its documentation were introduced. Through creating a rich
iconography and accompanying theoretical treatises and manifestos, Irwin has been known
for advocating a resistance strategy against being confronted with the ignorant gaze from the
Western art world. With the aim to unmask the subjective construction of ‘Western’ art
history that was imposing its canons on other parts of the world, Irwin, together with their
long-term collaborator and writer Eda Čufer, wrote a manifesto *The Ear Behind the Painting*
(1990): “During the Cold War, numerous artists emigrated to the West, and the false
conviction that modern art, no matter whether coming from the East or from the West, is so
universal as to be classified under a common name: the current –ism, appeared to be very
common [...] The different contexts in which the Western and the Eastern experiments were
carried out deprived modern art of its international character [...] With Eastern time preserved
in the past and Western time stopped in the present, modern art lost its driving element – the
future [...] The name of Eastern art is Eastern Modernism. The name of its method is
retrogradism.” By referring to the master narrative of modernism, Alfred H. Barr’s *Diagram
of Stylistic Evolution from 1890 until 1935*, which Barr, Founding Director of New York’s
MOMA, developed in 1936 as a genealogic tree of the European avant-garde movements as
precursors of the abstract art of modernism, Irwin in collaboration with the philosopher
Marina Gržinić “… with a similarly arrogant attitude [...] transfers this scheme onto
Yugoslavia, here in the form of a reversed genealogy of the “retroavantgarde”, which extends
from the neo-avantgarde of the present back to the period of the historical avant-garde. The
installation Retroavantgarde [...] is both an independent work of art and a pragmatic,
cartographic instrument [...] By postulating the existence of a fictive Yugoslavian retro-avant-
garde, Irwin (re)constructs and posits a modernism intrinsic to Eastern Europe. This ‘Eastern
Modernism’ however, turns out to be just as construed, fictive, and artificial as its Western
counterpart.”17 In the painting *Retroavantgarde* (1997/2005) and, later on, in an installation which included original works by, among others, Mangelos, Mladen Stilinović, Braco Dimitrijević, Kasimir Malevich18 and Irwin, the artists incorporated their heroes and influences into an organised system. Moreover, the work highlighted the way in which Eastern Europe has usually been seen in the eyes of Western art historians as a region where belated influences from the West constructed its respective art history and where reproductions or copies of masterpieces were seen more often than originals. Irwin’s work in the exhibition, *Retroavantgarde*, was a print of the installation, which included original works, and thus drew the artwork itself into the debate about the original, the reproduction and the document—on both a material as well as historiographic level.

Further into the exhibition, and installed so as to be seen before arriving into the triangular space with the archival material, was a video projection by the Lithuanian artist Deimantas Narkevičius, *The Disappearance of a Tribe* (2005). Narkevičius took as a starting point for the film a personal archive and its performativity. A succession of black and white portrait photographs from the artist’s personal archive (mostly depicting the life of his father) chronologically linked the lives of a group of people who lived in the time of communism from the 1950s onward—their youthful looks, postures and smiles evoke an innocent following of the ideological indoctrination of communist ideals and their utopian power on the individual. There is no verbal narration, only a soundtrack of field recordings the artist took from around the locations shown accompanies the photo stills of friends in pastoral surroundings, their progressive socialisation depicted as they become soldiers, nuns, husbands and wives. However, the editing and the final shots of the artist’s father’s funeral reveal an important turn in the viewer’s belief that she or he is watching an authentic document, since “… some figures appear several times, it is obviously a photomontage. By

18 Kasimir Malevich belongs to a series of authorless projects originating from South-Eastern Europe, active from the early 1980s until today. Among these projects are Salon de Fleurus in New York, a performance by Walter Benjamin in Ljubljana in 1986, Museum of American Art in Berlin, etc. As Marina Gržinić writes: “In the projects of copying from the 1980s in ex-Yugoslavia the real artist’s signature is missing and even some of the ‘historical’ facts are distorted (dates, places). From my point of view, the production of copies and reconstruction of projects from the avant-garde art period in post-Socialism had a direct effect on art perceived as ‘Institution’ and against ‘History’, which was (and is still?) completely totalised in post-Socialism.” Gržinić, M. 2003. ‘The Retro-Avant Garde Movement In The Ex-Yugoslav Territory Or Mapping Post-Socialism’, in Arns, I. (ed.), op.cit., p.220.
revealing the fact that it is an imitation, the authentic appearance of the album is called into question. These private images all seem to have been coded and staged. On the other hand an imaginary dimension is opened up by the emphasis on the performative aspect, and this intensifies the film on an emotional level.”

Changing of the Display

During the exhibition period, a change in display of the archival documents in the triangular space, as well as a changing screening programme of video documentation of performances in the auditorium, were held to visibly render activities that are anchored in both the past and present. In the archival part of the exhibition, highlights were given to the four different chapters in the Parisian art scene of the 1970s—situations, events and personalities provided a fragmented, yet interesting view on the role of Paris as one of the nodes in communication between Eastern and Western Europe in the field of art. A present actualisation of this archival material was at stake in the displays of Anka Ptaszkowska and Michel Claura (with the archives of Galerie 1-36), and Ida Biard (with the archives of Galerie des Locataires), who all curated their own presentations and activations.

In the early 1970s, art critic and co-founder of the legendary Foksal Gallery in Warsaw Anka Ptaszkowska (born 1935) and her partner, photographer Eustache Kossakowski moved to Paris, after Ptaszkowska’s rupture with the gallery. Soon after meeting with Daniel Buren and the art critic Michel Claura in Paris, Ptaszkowska decided to run a gallery space, with Buren as a consultant and Claura as co-director/co-author. The gallery held its opening to the public in 1972, in a cellar of an apartment, and with each of its events (discussions, exhibitions) it

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20 Not only as a city that many young artists tried to visit or even live in, Paris also became a temporary residence for many Eastern European artists from the 1950s on, mostly with the help of scholarships (Tadeusz Kantor and Miklós Erdély obtained scholarships to visit Paris in late 1940s and early 1960s respectively, Goran Trbuljak lived in Paris for a year in 1972, Alex Mlynarčík lives between Paris and Slovak Republic), and is or was a permanent residence for Braco Dimitrijević, Sarkis, Alina Szapocznikow, André Cadere and Julije Knifer. On the other hand, Parisian journals covered occasionally what was going on behind the Iron Curtain. Among them the art magazine Opus International most notably published special focuses in its issues on artists from the Soviet Union (1967), Poland (1968), Czechoslovak Republic (1968) and Yugoslavia (1970), and had in its network correspondents from Warsaw, Prague and other cities, whereas Les Lettres françaises, supported by the French Communist party, was of crucial importance for enabling Polish neo-avant-garde artists and critics to follow the Paris scene.
would alter its name: Galerie 1, Galerie 2, etc. Soon after Galerie opened, Ptaszkowska made a commercial deal with the extreme leftist collector Isi Fiszman from Antwerp that led to the works of Carl Andre, Joseph Beuys and others from his collection being sold in her gallery. She showed film projections of Dan Graham for the first time in Paris, and invited the crucial Polish avant-garde artists Henrik Stażewski and Edward Krasiński for solo exhibitions.

In her display within *The Promises of the Past*, which Ptaszkowska named *Galerie 39*, a poster for Galerie 6 and Galerie 7 (an exhibition where the artists Goran Trbuljak, André Cadere, Claude Rutault and others changed their works following a mathematical system) was hung next to a painting by a deceased artist whom Galerie never exhibited. On the other wall, facsimiles of all the posters produced by Galerie were presented. These posters were positioned by Ptaszkowska as exhibitions, thus surpassing the status of ‘mere’ documents. A diorama of the complete oeuvre of the main documentary photographer of the Polish avant-garde, Eustache Kossakowski, was on view as well, covering the activity of Galerie Foksal in Warsaw and Galerie in Paris. Subsequent to the categories of performance documentation established by Auslander and mentioned above, the documentation shown within this diorama of the sculptural and performative work of Edward Krasinski certainly corresponds to Auslander’s theatrical category.

In 1972, the small art scene in Paris was informed about existence of another unique project through the work *Anonymous Artist* by one of the most intriguing Croatian artists Goran Trbuljak, who at that time lived in Paris. He sent an anonymous questionnaire to the Galerie des Locataires (Tenants Gallery), amongst other Parisian galleries and institutions, with the question “Would you like to exhibit this work in your gallery? 1) yes, 2) no, 3) maybe.” In Galerie des Locataires’ first gallery newspaper, one can read that “… the Galerie des Locataires exists there where it chooses to be. It has neither walls nor decrees. It is not impossible; its reason for existing: the artist is he to whom one gives a reason for being.”21 Its founder Ida Biard, Croatian art historian and a ‘proto-curator’, who lived in Paris, presented Galerie des Locataires as a critical state of mind, an alternative space for artistic production that would function independently from the then inconsistent, but growing art market. By

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functioning as more than an exhibition space, by not being bound to locality but realising works by artists that they would sometimes delegate to her, Ida Biard opened *poste restantes*\(^\text{22}\) in Paris, Düsseldorf, Milan and Zagreb where the projects would be either distributed or sent to and exhibited. Galerie des Locataires conducted projects with, amongst others, André Cadere, Daniel Buren, Christian Boltanski, Annette Messager, Goran Trbuljak, Sarkis and Bálint Szombery. Throughout the 1980s, Galerie des Locataires organised public projects such as *Taxis avant minuit*—a one night exhibition where artists organised their own itineraries and, accordingly, arranged their works in public space (Paris, 1987)—or *Simplon Express*—where Ida Biard and invited artists embarked upon a trip from Paris to Zagreb in 1989 and installed their works throughout train compartments. For the first display in *The Promises of the Past*, a photo-souvenir by Daniel Buren—train blankets embroidered with the artist’s typical blue and white lines—and the blankets themselves were exhibited. Online documentation of all the projects of La Galerie des Locataires stayed in place during the exhibition’s duration.

For the second display, different documentary objects (letters, faxes, photocopies, files, photographs) comprised a presentation of the correspondence between the legendary and uniquely generous art critic Pierre Restany and Eastern European artists. Due to Restany’s unstoppable curiosity and thanks to many acquaintances he was able to acquire via the international art critics’ association AICA, he maintained an ongoing insight and dense correspondence with many art critics, museum curators and artists in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia. Besides being asked on a regular basis to organise exhibitions of his artist friends from the circle of New Realists, or to participate in jury sessions for different events (most often in Prague and Bratislava), he developed a special friendship with one of the most important Slovak conceptual artists, Alex Mlynárčik,\(^\text{23}\) whom he met in Paris in 1964. With Mlynárčik, Restany also collaborated on three exhibitions that took place at Galerie Lara Vincy in Paris (1972, 1977 and 1994) and, together with Liliane

\(^{22}\) *Poste restante* or general delivery is a service provided by the post office that holds mail until the recipient calls for it. It is a common service for people who are visiting a particular location and have no need, or way of having mail delivered directly to their place of residence.

\(^{23}\) Mlynárčik exhibited at the Biennale of Young Artists in Paris (1967, 1969, 1971), at the Venice Biennale (1972) and at numerous other international exhibitions. He was the initiator of the total connection of art and life based on the appropriation of reality, as well as the co-author with Stano Filko and Zita Kostrová of the seminal manifesto and actions/happenings *Happsoc* (1965).
Vincy, they created the fictive kingdom *Argillia* in 1977. Among other frequent correspondents, the archive also includes inspiring dialogues with the famous Czech art critic Jindřich Chalupecký, Endre Tót, Stano Filko and Alina Szapocznikow, for whom Restany also contributed many catalogue essays.

In another vitrine in the second display, scarce documents sourced from the archives of the Biennale de Paris, pertaining to the participation of some of Eastern European countries in the Biennale, were shown. While keeping a focus on specific Eastern European conceptual artists, filmmakers or art critics and commissioners, research into the history of the Biennale de Paris developed a comprehensive network of material. The French and international press, at the time the 5th Biennale de Paris (1967) and subsequent editions occurred, were not particularly affirmative and presented the “biennial of youth” as an awkward and overly complex event that contested the prescribed bourgeois tastes in painting, sculpture and other art disciplines. Very few art critics addressed the fact that behind the invitations for artists of other countries, especially those living under a different regime, to participate at the Biennale meant an extraordinary opportunity to meet their colleagues as well as to exhibit one’s own vision in front of a Western public. Obviously, not every Biennale presented the most exciting artistic positions. But, similarly to the Venice Biennial, insight into each participating country’s cultural situation was enabled through the state commissioners, who changed every two years. What remained however, and was augmented in time, were the “correspondents,” a group of individuals from all over the world who acted as consultants and, importantly, kept their role over various editions of the Biennale. Another important role was played by the section *Envois postaux*, organised by Jean-Marc Poinsot in 1971, where, through Mail Art and the discourse of “communication through distance” and its aesthetic implications, Endre Tót or the Czech performance artist Petr Štembera, for example,

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24 The Biennale de Paris was held between 1959 and 1985.

25 For example, in the 9th edition (1975), among the “correspondents” are listed: Jindřich Chalupecký, the famous Czech art critic whose extraordinary views on Duchamp and the spiritual role of artists inspired generations of artists; Ješa Denegri, one of the most remarkable art historian from the former Yugoslavia and a long-time curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art (1965-1989); Denegri’s wife, the art critic Biljana Tomić, who, together with Dunja Blažević, and from 1977 with Bojana Pejić, led the Student Cultural Centre of the Belgrade University which, in the early 1970s, was famous for its annual international festivals; László Beke, the leading art historian and active supporter of the Hungarian neo-avant-garde artists; Wiesław Borowski and Andrzej Turowski, the then directors of the Foksal Gallery, the most radical and dissident art space in Warsaw; and the Slovak neo-avant-garde artist Alex Mlynárčik.
were involved. Many of the conceptual artists who participated in various manifestations of the Biennale are presented in the exhibition *The Promises of the Past*: Marina Abramović, Stano Filko, Goran Trbuljak, Tamas St.Auby, Raša Todosijević, Mladen Stilinović, Sanja Iveković, Endre Tót, Braco Dimitrijević, as well as group OHO, Želimir Žilnik, Dóra Maurer, Milan Knižák and others.

Performances, Actions, Films

The auditorium space of *The Promises of the Past* was host to a changing programme of film and video that document performances from the late 1960s to the early 1980s and was organised in order to provide enhanced contextual material about some of the most intriguing conceptual or neo-avant-garde artistic positions presented in the main exhibition. Until today, the most seminal work on the subject of conceptual or neo-avant-garde performance practice is the exhibition *The Body and the East* that Zdenka Badovinac curated in 1998 at the Moderna galerija in Ljubljana. In the accompanying publication (also edited by Badovinac) she writes about the signification of performances in Western and Eastern Europe: “… there are no essential differences […], the difference lies in something invisible and non-signified […], it lies in the fact that similar gestures are read differently in different spaces.”26 Either carried out in public—as we encounter in the early feminist positions of Sanja Iveković and Ewa Partum, the body art performances of Marina Abramović, the politically charged performances by Raša Todosijević, the happenings in nature and urban spaces of the group OHO, or the street demonstrations of Endre Tót—or as actions that happened within private space—as in the work of artists Ion Grigorescu or Tibor Hajas—it is clear, through the special attention paid to the performances’ documentation with photography, film and video, that the artists’ intention was oriented towards both a first and a secondary public: those who witness the event and those who discover the artworks through documentation. In particular, OHO was the first group in former Yugoslavia that understood the film documentation of its activities as a genre with its own aesthetics and methods of transmission. As Barbara Clausen notes in her introduction to the publication *After the Act* regarding the basic contradiction between temporal performance and static documentation: “Contrary to its original nature,

performance art, has through the historization of its documentary material become an object and imaged based art form [...] Initially as a press image, then as a historical document, and finally as a work of art, these images become part of the cultural archive.”

The aim of the programme of films that ran in parallel to *The Promises of the Past* (conceived together with Philippe-Alain Michaud) was to introduce the public to the polyvalence of many of the artists presented in the main exhibition. The film programme itself could only begin to account for the particular conditions of film production in former Eastern Europe and the role that film studios, production houses, amateur cine clubs, and the confrontation of film productions with the authorities played in that creativity; for example, Tamás St.Auby’s cult film *Kentaur* (1975) was censored immediately after its first screening at the Budapest Film Factory and withheld from the public for more than a decade, and Želimir Žilnik, one of the main representatives of the subversive Yugoslavian Black Wave, was a remarkable *persona non gratae* during Tito’s Yugoslavia due to his early films *Early Works* (1969) and *The Black Film* (1971). It is also worth mentioning that the broader conceptual movement in former Eastern Europe enabled artists and filmmakers to share and work with filmic language on equal and frequent basis. To draw attention to this condition of production, we presented films as diverse as documentary accounts of communist urban realities by Ion Grigorescu from late 1970s, filmed acts by Neša Paripović, such as the hypnotic *1978 N.P.M.S.* where we follow four sections of the artist’s “expressive, eroticized and theatrical”28 gestures, or Ewa Partum’s films from the series *Tautological Cinema* (1976), where the artist combined experimental sound poetry and action in open space. To contribute to the continual process of writing an art history of former Eastern Europe, a series of lectures and discussions took place weekly in the same space of the auditorium, underlining discoursivity and conversation as two representational modes of an emerging discourse.

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