

Neo-Avantgarde and Feminist Underpinnings Of Post-Yugoslav Literature and its Utopias: A Comparative Reading of Judita Šalgo and Slobodan Tišma

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Summary

The topic of the paper is the exploration of the 'woman's woman' identity, as desired and conceptualized by the protagonist of Slobodan Tišma's novel Bernardi's Room, further analysed over its relation to the unwritten history of the post-Yugoslav literature. I tried interpreting what kind of a poetical and political identification that is and why it would be important to identify in such a way in the context of post-Yugoslav literature. To be a 'woman's woman' points at a tradition, that is at inheriting or continuing what comes to be defined as womanly, understood as a sexual, textual and a literary possibility, or becoming. Therefore, the effects of a comparative reading of the two novels by Vojvodinian authors Judita Šalgo and Slobodan Tišma enable observing the continuities among late Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav literatures, disclosing their Neo-avant-gardist and feminist underpinnings. While those aspects integrate in the imagination of a utopia, which bears upon the gendered bodies and territories, the paper also aims at responding to the universalist/particularist dilemma which accompanies the process of establishing a literary text inside a respective literary field.

Mislim da žene treba da odustanu od borbe.
 Treba da se povuku na pusto ostrvo, na pusti kotinent o kakvom
 šapuću, sanjare one hiljade luetičarki ujedinjenih tela i umova,
 mislim da žene treba da napuste svetsko bojište, da pobegnu, povuku
 se iz istorije, da odbiju da rađaju.
 Žene treba da pokažu ni manje ni više kako mogu da zaustave, promene svet.
 (Judita Šalgo, *Put u Birobidžan*)¹

¹ "I believe women should give up the fight. They should leave to the desert island, desert continent which is already in the murmurs and dreams of those

Nema polova, ja sam žena žene, svi muškarci su žene a žene su samo žene! Iz inata, odlučio sam da ubuduće govorim u ženskom rodu. Nije me uopšte bilo sramota.²
(Slobodan Tišma, *Bernardijeva soba*)

Introduction: (Dis)continuities of the Literary Field

This paper is the exploration of the “woman’s woman” declaration from the quote above and its connection to the unwritten history of post-Yugoslav literature. I will try to interpret how it addresses literary and historic continuities among late Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav literatures.

A dynamic marking the development and the conceptualization of Yugoslav literature corresponds to the wavering universalist and particularistic models of organizing and understanding a respective literary field of the East-Central European “literary cultures”.³ Its name is in fact just one of the few possible designations of the literary field coinciding with the Yugoslav state: depending on the principle which prevailed in the categorization (universal Yugoslav or particular national) either Yugoslav literature, Yugoslav literatures or individual national Yugoslav literatures, like Croatian, Serbian, or Macedonian were practically simultaneously circulating. Recent debates on the post-Yugoslav literature somewhat paradoxically legitimize it by claiming that even Yugoslav literature never really existed, or at best that it started dissolving long before 1991. Yet, the good news is that the *withering away* of the field “has never been concluded”,⁴ and that the true gist of any common framework

thousands of the luetic whose bodies and minds unified, I believe women should leave the world’s battlefield, they should flee, withdraw from history, refuse to reproduce. Women must show how they can stop, how they can change the world.” (Judita Šalgo, *Put u Birobidžan*, Stubovi kulture, Beograd, 1997, p. 153). All translations in this essay are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

² “There are no sexes, I am the *woman’s woman*, all men are women and women are simply women! Out of spite I decided to speak about myself from the female perspective, by using the feminine grammatical forms. I was not the slightest bit ashamed.” (Slobodan Tišma, *Bernardijeva soba. Za glas (kontratenor) i orkestar*, Kulturni centar Novog Sada, Novi Sad, 2012, p. 31).

³ The difference between the “pan-European” and the “national emphasis” in XIX century East-Central literary cultures illustrates well this argument (Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe. Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 2004, p. 8).

⁴ Svjetlan Lacko Vidulić, “Književno polje SFRJ-a. Podsjetnik na tranziciju dugog trajanja”, in Virna Karličić et al. (eds.), *Tranzicija i kulturno pamćenje. Zbornik radova*, Srednja Europa, Zagreb, pp. 27-43, p. 28.

is “in certain common situations and contexts, like those linguistic or artistic, strong enough to ‘bond’ the territories”.⁵

Yet, despite the *organic* connections and common “situations and contexts”, the reality of war is what influences the narratives of disjunction: “The trauma of the war-time in the beginning of 1990s that sharply divides these two systems [Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav], engenders the narrative about a discontinuity and the two incompatible worlds, as if they were never inhabited by the same people”.⁶ Thus the argument about the Yugoslav (or South Slavonic) cultures preceding and outliving the Yugoslav state⁷ allows for the more scrupulous and coherent conceptualization of the common post-Yugoslav literary field.

Another possibility is to read the post-Yugoslav literature as a minority literary discourse. As the feminist theoreticians of the (post)Yugoslav literature argue, literature written by women develops outside the canon: “Are the so-called small cultures able to generate parallel canons, except when the women’s writing is at issue?”⁸ Furthermore, a transnational feminist perspective in studying the post-Yugoslav literature identifies the existence of “paranational communities”,⁹ best represented in the “[s]elf-conscious or feminist oriented women’s literature”.¹⁰

A “woman’s woman” desired identity, Tišma’s protagonist’s choice of the female body and *voice* is a gesture of entering the space of women’s literature, or more precisely, of one particular woman’s writing – Judita Šalgo’s. Both Judita Šalgo (1941-1996) and Slobodan Tišma (1946) are the protagonists of the Yugoslav Vojvodinian Neo-avantgarde: bringing back Šalgo and her fiction is a Neo-avantgardist signal, a feminist choice. The bond Tišma makes is constitutive to an alternative or a counter-canon of an “alternative *herstory* of women’s writing”.¹¹ Importantly, Tišma’s *return* to Šalgo’s writing and the Yugoslav past occurs as a Benjaminian “revolutionary *appropriation* of the past”.¹² While

⁵ Predrag Brebanović, “Jugoslovenska književnost. Stanovište sadašnjosti”, in Karlić (et al.), *Tranzicija i kulturno pamćenje*, cit., pp. 57-64, p. 61.

⁶ Maša Kolanović, *Udarnik! Buntovnik? Potrošač... Popularna kultura i hrvatski roman od socijalizma do tranzicije*, Naklada Ljevak, Zagreb, 2011, p. 24.

⁷ A claim supported by many researchers of the Yugoslav social and cultural history, among others Dubravka Stojanović, Dragan Markovina, Mitja Velikonja, etc.

⁸ Dubravka Đurić, “Teorijsko-interpretativni modeli u postjugoslovenskim pesničkim kulturama”, *Sarajevske sveske*, 32/33, 2011, pp. 333-363, p. 334.

⁹ Seyhan in Jasmina Lukić, “Rod i migracija u postjugoslavenskoj književnosti kao transnacionalnoj književnosti”, *Reč*, 87, 33, 2017, pp. 273-291.

¹⁰ Lukić, *Rod i migracija*, cit., p. 286.

¹¹ Ivi, p. 289.

¹² Brebanović, *Jugoslovenska književnost*, cit., p. 62.

the avant-garde “negation of the linear and naively progressive temporal consciousness”¹³ might suggest a negative, non-historical “aspiration to somehow attain happiness past main historical roads and ruptures, past history all together”,¹⁴ it also enables the new ‘social imagination’. Essential figurations in Šalgo’s and Tišma’s novels – female utopias – are at once the avant-gardist projections and the spaces of women’s bodily and communal performances: “the true explosion, the activation of the reality comes into being only after the events have been written down. The writing induces the events, the happenings, the history”.¹⁵ A comparative reading of Šalgo’s and Tišma’s fiction reveals the junctures constitutive of the post-Yugoslav literary field: its (Neo)avant-garde and feminist underpinnings which integrate in the utopian imagination.

Hysteria and History. Bodily and Utopian Transitions in the Post-Yugoslav Fiction

Judita Šalgo’s novel *Put u Birobidžan* (A Journey to Birobidzhan, 1997) narrativizes the founding/finding of a female continent, a women’s utopia. The initial concept has been the historical Birobidzhan, the district for the Jewish people in the Soviet Union, which in the fable of the novel translates into a haven for the ill – syphilis infected, prostitutes and deprived women – and eventually for all women. Bertha Papeenheim (Freud’s Anna O.) travels to the Balkans and the Middle East in search of the female continent; spending some time in Budapest’s hospital “for venereal diseases, therefore, exclusively for prostitutes”,¹⁶ she is drawn to go *deeper* to the south-east by a rumour of the “movement or the state of mind” which intuited a “utopia of the great global refuge for women, the Female continent”.¹⁷

However, the initial mention of Birobidzhan is set within the *genesis* of the Jewish family Rot and their essential relationship to Birobidzhan as the historical and symbolic haven; the topos is re-actualized in the outbreak of the Yugoslav war as a suggested asylum for one of the Rot family members: “It is difficult to predict how important would Birobidzhan be in the future, but in the times of great tremor when worlds swoop down to the past, nothing

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Judita Šalgo, “Smrt utopija i svetski duh”, in *Jednokratni eseji*, Stubovi kulture, Beograd, 2000, pp. 170-175, p. 173.

¹⁵ Šalgo, *Birobidžan*, cit., p. 69.

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 71.

¹⁷ Šalgo, *Birobidžan*, cit., p. 66.

else is there anyhow",¹⁸ for "Birobidzhan is the land without killing Birobidzhan as an ideal city (utopia) B. as the spare homeland".¹⁹ After a few episodes the story retrospectively draws back to the beginning of the century, Bertha's visit to Belgrade and acquaintance with the Rot family.

Judita Šalgo built her narrative about the female utopia on the insights of the psychoanalytical theory of hysteria and the medicinal discourses which influenced it, but also on their perpetual contestation and ironizing. She explored the regimes of female bodies and sexuality by making direct references to the "idea, found in Hippocrates and discussed by Plato, of the *wandering womb*— the extraordinary belief that the uterus, when deprived of the health-giving moisture derived from sexual intercourse, would rise up into the hypochondrium (located between the stomach and the chest) in a quest for nourishment".²⁰ The astonishingly precise imagination of the ancient medicine resulting in this predictable route of the uterus is converted into a quite improbable journey in the imagination of Judita Šalgo. Since a "[w]oman wanders through life the way the womb wanders inside the woman's body"²¹ and "on her travel Bertha herself feels like the womb which is wandering in the body",²² women are defined by and identified with their bodies. Yet, "when the womb gets tired and stops, then a woman herself continues the travel".²³ In Šalgo's discourse women 'emancipate' themselves from their bodies, by reclaiming them in their attempt to reach the "promised land": "A continent discovered by women guided by their uteri. A promised land which one reaches ... by incident, through a hysterical messianic cry, revolt and spasm, a scream".²⁴ The listed symptoms of hysteria don't relegate women to the place held in reserve for them by those in control of the femininity discourse, but quite the contrary, they are the symptoms of a riot and, most importantly, of the women producing their own discourses about their experiences, bodies, about themselves. Though one of the most prominent discourses of the feminine is precisely the psychoanalytical theory Šalgo appertains to, the

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 16.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 63.

²⁰ G. S. Rousseau, "A Strange Pathology. Hysteria in the Early Modern World, 1500-1800", in Sander L. Gilman et al. (eds.), *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1993, pp. 91-221, p. 118.

²¹ Šalgo, *Birobidžan*, cit., p. 77.

²² Ivi, p. 105.

²³ Ivi, p. 90.

²⁴ Šalgo, *Birobidžan*, cit., p. 94.

“fanciful geography of hysteria”²⁵ transforms in Šalgo’s novel into the women’s expansion onto the new territory, geographical, political, and bodily.

Though Anna O.’s identity had been suppressed and Freud had never even met her, she contributed greatly to the “psychoanalytical theory and technique”.²⁶ Hunter offered “a psychoanalytic-feminist reading” of Bertha’s behaviour and her inability, that is her refusal to use the regular speech which shown her need to liberate from “integration into a cultural identity [she] wanted to reject”.²⁷ What Hunter shows is that Bertha herself produced “the knowledge of the unconsciousness”, she has invented the “talking cure”; men (Bruer and Freud) later theorized what Bertha herself performed. Bringing attention to the active role Anna O.’s suppressed and silenced sexuality and her revolt against the patriarchy had for the creation of the psychoanalytical discourse results in a modern feminist reclaim of the hysteria seen as “feminism lacking a social network in the outer world”.²⁸

Yet, the theme of reaching the female continent remains open; it is the matter of speculation, intention (“[i]f/when the female continent is discovered, it will be, it is, the emotional fact-the truth of emotion”).²⁹ The ambiguity is inscribed in Šalgo’s understanding of the feminist worldview, together with other discourses she incorporates into the novel’s narrative,³⁰ paradoxically enabling the discourse of utopia, for “if there is anything certain, that is Birobidžan”.³¹ The uncertainty of the novel’s discourse is *completed* by the fact that the novel hasn’t been finished; effects of this are the self-evident openness of the ending, but also the multiplication of the author (two editors) and the entanglement of the real and the fictional. Judita Šalgo’s biography had become an aspect of the text in a bodily sense: the end of her life coincides with the end of the novel, enabling an auctorial postscript. What

²⁵ Rousseau, *A Strange Pathology*, cit., p. 118.

²⁶ Dianne Hunter, “Hysteria, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism”, in Katie Conboy et al. (eds.), *Writing on the Body. Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1997, pp. 257-276, p. 258.

²⁷ Ivi, p. 260.

²⁸ Israël in Hunter, *Hysteria*, cit., p. 272. In this respect important is the book: Sander L. Gilman et al. (eds.), *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1993.

²⁹ Šalgo, *Birobidžan*, cit., p. 151.

³⁰ Rosić wrote about this issue in her article: Tatjana Rosić, “Autopoetika kao antiutopija - motiv ‘nove zemlje’ u romanima Vojislava Despotova i Judite Šalgo”, *Sarajevske sveske*, 13, 2006, pp. 265-289.

³¹ Šalgo, *Birobidžan*, cit., p. 174.

has been a narrativization of the text as the body now becomes the body as the text. The unintended inscription of her own body into text is the ultimate (Neo-)Avant-garde gesture: while exploring the “possibilities of conceptual and performative art practices, Vojislav Despotov³² and Judita Šalgo had come upon The Body, that is simultaneously the object and the instrument of the cognition; ... body is territory, but also a medium; the base for writing and the writing itself”.³³

Šalgo’s work and this novel in particular recur as a common topic in present-day literary research, especially in the field of feminist theory and women’s writing.³⁴ The circulation of the figure of the “female continent” as a metonymy of women’s writing and women writers illustrates a cult status of the book, as a rule perceived as epochal and ground-breaking.³⁵ Nevertheless, the influence of the *Birobidzhan* is not consumed by these tributes: the most critical – though not recognized so far – is its reappearance in Slobodan Tišma’s novel *Bernardijeva soba* (Bernardi’s Room, 2011). Constructing his novel as a multiple reference to Šalgo’s book, the author reiterates the *Birobidzhan* narrative by adding the telling ending: unlike the *Birobidzhan* chronicle, in *Bernardi’s Room* the protagonist actually reaches the utopian female continent.

In Tišma’s novel the story revolves around the protagonist remembering of the (Yugoslav) better past, but the Yugoslav war and the dissolution are also facets of the narrative. The title refers to the Yugoslav modernist designer Bernardo Bernardi³⁶ and the furniture he designed, a metaphor of Yugoslavia (Yugoslavia *as the past*). Yet, the figure also points at the status of this past and this country in the contemporary discourse: the furniture set is an aestheticized reminder of the obsolete former times. Hence, Šalgo’s and Tišma’s novels bring up the historical reality of the Yugoslav war, in both novels narrativized by its relation to

³² A prominent Vojvodinian Neo-avantgarde poet.

³³ Rosić, *Autopoetika*, cit., p. 268.

³⁴ One of the researchers coins the term “Šalgology” (šalgologija; Dragana V. Todoroskov, *Tragom kočenja. Prisvajanje, preodevanje i raslojavanje stvarnosti u poetici Judite Šalgo*, Zavod za kulturu Vojvodine, Novi Sad, 2014, p. 38).

³⁵ An anthology of the Serbian contemporary short stories written by women is edited by Ljiljana Đurđić, *Ženski kontinent* [Female continent], Prosveta, Beograd, 2004); Vladislava Gordić Petković’s book of essays *Na ženskom kontinentu* [On the female continent], Dnevnik, Novi Sad, 2007), etc.

³⁶ Member of the Exat 51, group of painters and architects “who presented a living connection to the activist heritage of the historical *avant garde*” (Iva Ceraj, “Bernardo Bernardi – The spiritus movens of Early Design in Croatia”, *art BULLETIN*, 63, 2013, pp. 98-119, p. 99).

territories and bodies, either non-existing or imaginary (a former country, a utopia).

Bernardi's Room is a story about a young man, Pišta, who started dwelling inside the old car wreck after an unsuccessful attempt at a 'male' commune, in fact a shared flat with a mixed group of his friends and acquaintances. His maturation is preceded by a crisis which culminates after he sells the designer furniture ("Bernardi's room") – his last belongings – to a dealer who pays with counterfeit money; the protagonist ends up in jail after trying to pay for something with it. The plot resolves when his long-absent mother helps him get out of prison, bringing him with her to a remote farm in the wilderness. There he undergoes a type of rite of passage and an initiation into the woman's commune. He continues to live with his mother and other women inhabitants of the commune on the farm in south-eastern Serbia. His mother takes him where Šalgo's protagonist never managed to really arrive: the journey ends and I would like to offer a possible explanation for such an unpredictable twist.

Psychoanalytically marked figures of parents, allusive rhetoric, a mysterious female protagonist from the past and finally Pišta's claim for his femininity form an expressive discourse of body and desire, which also shapes his remembering of the past. Comparable to Šalgo's approach, Tišma debunks the psychoanalytical understanding of femininity. The protagonist Pišta often imagined to be somebody different and actually intended to change his sex due to the already existing "preconditions";³⁷ Pišta himself witnesses that "there was an empty space, a void between [his] legs".³⁸ Initially travestyng Freud's *penis envy*, Tišma complicates his 'gender challenge' by ironizing the "form of biology rooted in classical Antiquity, where sexual difference was construed as difference of *degree*"³⁹ which in fact allows illustrating the structural similarities and thus the "*mutability*"⁴⁰ of male and female bodies".⁴¹ Namely, "[m]en and women are, in this model, not different in kind but in the configuration of their organs Turn outward the woman's, turn inward, so to speak, and fold

³⁷ Tišma, *Bernardi*, cit., p. 30.

³⁸ Ivi, p. 12.

³⁹ Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco, "Normal Bodies (or Not)", in Mariam Fraser et al. (eds.), *The Body. A Reader*, Routledge, New York, 2005, pp. 145-149, p. 145.

⁴⁰ Emphasis added.

⁴¹ Thomas Laqueur, "Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology", in Fraser et al., *The Body*, cit., pp. 151-157, p. 154.

double the man's, and you will find the same in both in every respect".⁴² Yet, what Tišma does is that he uses this topology against the standard misogynist theories: it is possible to be both, or to choose to be either a man or a woman.

Therefore, Pišta's 'imperfection' conflicts the "Freudian notion of castration, by which female difference is defined as lack rather than Otherness".⁴³ Pišta favours this otherness: "I want to be a woman's woman because I am attracted to women, I am attracted to *womanliness*, I want pure essential womanly love I as a *woman's woman* need the compassion of the woman's woman".⁴⁴ This choice of the female sex/gender, in effect qualifies Pišta's admission to the female continent. After his mother takes him to the female commune and he undergoes the rite of passage, the women in the commune complete a performance of crucifying him to a cross placed on the five-pointed star, after which the protagonist *becomes* a woman (the performance involves the sexual indications of the devirginating; also, after he wakes up they give him women's clothes to put on).

While Šalgo's utopia is beyond reach, in Tišma's novel it is 'colonized'. Confirmation of this *homecoming* is underscored by the latently erotic scene in which Pišta shoots from the air gun into the target together with the "three graces": "Hitting in the centre, yes! What I was always missing".⁴⁵ The lack ("missing") permits hitting in the centre, which is quite a precise metaphor of the protagonist's gender teleology (his womanly lack helps him reach the goal).

A Lacanian⁴⁶ argument that the "gap in some sense *belongs to* the object, identification is always imperfect"⁴⁷ helps associate Freudian imagination of sexuality and the feminist understanding of the identity (of writing): "The instability of 'femininity' as female identity is a specific instability, an eccentric relation to the construction of sexual difference, but it also points to the fractured and fluctuant condition of all consciously held identity,

⁴² Galen in Laqueur, *Orgasm*, cit., p. 153.

⁴³ Mary Jacobus, "The Difference of View (*Women Writing and Writing About Women*)", in Mary Eagleton (ed.), *Feminist Literary Theory. A Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1990, pp. 216-219, p. 217.

⁴⁴ Tišma, *Bernardi*, cit., p. 30.

⁴⁵ Ivi, p. 112.

⁴⁶ It is difficult not to touch upon Lacan, present in Tišma's text both as a suggestion and its feminist revision or ridicule.

⁴⁷ Thomas Brockelman, "Lacan, Jacques (1901-81)", in Edward Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 5, Routledge, London, 1998, pp. 336-338, p. 336.

the impossibility of a will-full, unified and coherent subject".⁴⁸ Similarly, besides being about 'feminine subjectivity', hysteria has been recognized as "an expressive discourse" by the surrealist artists Aragon and Breton,⁴⁹ while the French feminist theoreticians – Julia Kristeva in particular – associate the Avant-garde art and the *écriture féminine*.

Performances of Utopia: Vojvodinian Neo-avantgarde and the Post-Yugoslav Literature

Publishing her first poetry collection in 1962, Judita Šalgo continued experimenting with poetic language and publishing throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Her Neo-avantgarde textualism entailed the "gestural, bodily, oral, visual ... performing of the text".⁵⁰ Šalgo's performances also evidence the inseparability of the language and body, that is of the text production and the role the body plays in it.⁵¹ Body and its artistic and political configurations are revisited in Tišma's sexual/gender 'performances of the protagonist's body'. Though most often ironized, references to the performances he or members of his group carried out are amalgamated in the fable of the *Bernardi's Room*,⁵² together with the final episode of the novel occurring as a performance of the protagonist's transition.

One of Tišma's most famous actions, performed in 1970 – *Kocka* (the cube) – is translated into text through a network of complex geometrical symbolism. The cube is a very important figure in the novel (as a perfect sublime form); Bernardi's room as the central narrative object is precisely in the shape of a cube. An opaque inscription *Aesthetics* the protagonist sees in the female commune is a textual replica of one famous photograph performance in

⁴⁸ Cora Kaplan, "Speaking/Writing/Feminism (*On Gender and Writing*)", in Eagleton (ed.), *Feminist Literary Theory*, cit., p. 181.

⁴⁹ Hunter, *Hysteria*, cit., p. 272.

⁵⁰ Maja Solar, "Tradicija je otvorena, tradicija je u zatvoru", *Polja*, 53, 449, 2008, pp. 63-67, p. 66.

⁵¹ One of most impelling is her performance *Položaji književnosti* (Literary positions) in which by positioning her body variously Šalgo negotiates her auctorial position but also the position of women in the language and in the literary and cultural hierarchies, <https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=polozaji+knjizevnosti+judita+šalgo>.

⁵² Vojvodinian Neo-avantgarde groups: textualists (Judita Šalgo, who was also the director of the cult cultural center Tribina mladih), Januar and Februar, Bosch+Bosch, Kôd (Slobodan Tišma) and (\$) were active in textual experiments as well as in processual and conceptual art in the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s; information about the actions and programs of the Vojvodinian Neo-avantgardists is collected from Miško Šuvaković, "Neoavangarda, konceptualna umetnost i krize socijalističkog modernizma", *Republika*, 430-431, 2008, <<http://www.republika.co.rs/430-431/19.html>> (11/2016).

which the illuminated advert of the construction company was photographed. Furthermore, the *sea* figures as an important symbol in the text as either the Adriatic (the Yugoslav sea) or as a denser image of the *Ocean*, drawing back to Lautreamont's work *Les Chants de Maldoror* (The Songs of *Maldoror*); the motto of the novel is the verse from Lautreamont's poem: "Pozdravljam te, stari Okeane!" [I salute you, old Ocean!].⁵³ It is also an intertextual reference to Šalgo's usage of the figure of ocean in her *Birobidzhan* and another direct citation of the performance by Slobodan Tišma and Miroslav Mandić *More – Antimore* (Sea/Anti-Sea) in front of the Novi Sad cathedral in 1970.⁵⁴

Finally, the female commune is a textual reappearance of the commune the members of the Neo-avant-garde groups *Kôd* and (\$) founded in a house in Novi Sad. Božidar Mandić transferred the idea later to the mountain Rudnik,⁵⁵ creating a village commune still active nowadays *Porodica bistrih potoka* (Family of Clear Streams). A performance representing the crucifixion on the five-pointed star is a persiflage of one of the most well-known performances of Marina Abramović *Rythm 5* (performed in the Student Cultural Centre (SKC) in Belgrade in 1974) indicating 'mental and physical purification'; yet, after she laid down inside the burning five-pointed star shaped structure, she lost her consciousness due to lack of oxygen. Tišma's evocation is an ironic reminiscence of the Yugoslav cultural production and its affected subversion, or simply a pun on the 'mainstreaming' of avant-garde art.

Without attacking its own *body* utopian Avant-garde art is impossible: "the attack on the institution of art is the condition for the possible realization of a utopia in which art and life are united".⁵⁶ Artistic practices of the Vojvodinian Neo-avantgarde aimed at transgressing the borders between art and reality, and the performance as the format of this transgression placed the body as the physical reality and as the medium in the centre of this action: "Performing is the material social practice which is being carried out in the reality and whose effects are the features of

⁵³ A book favoured by the members of the Situationist International, which influenced the Vojvodinian conceptualists, Slobodan Tišma included.

⁵⁴ This kind of interdiscursive play has infinite effects: the Ocean is also a fact quote of the song *Okean* by Tišma's band *La Strada*.

⁵⁵ Mountain in eastern Serbia, comparable to the female commune on the farm in south-east Serbia in Tišma's novel.

⁵⁶ Peter Bürger, "Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde. An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of Theory of the Avant-Garde", *New Literary History*, 41, 2010, pp. 695–715, p. 696.

that reality".⁵⁷ Reproduced historical performances are narrative signals of the reality in the text, which is the ultimate artistic possibility discerned within the Neo-avantgarde discourse:

The discourse of the Neo-avantgarde is ... marked by the affirmation of the text as a second-degree discourse, which in itself does not produce solely the meta-position of an artist, but makes explicit the preceding concept, the context (intertextual relation, fact quotes etc.) Quotations of the Neo-avantgardists are made of flesh and blood, not because they resemble life, but because they embody life itself.⁵⁸

A dissent from the ruling cultural discourse and the harsh response of the state ("misinterpretations, resistance, bans and even arrest of some artists")⁵⁹ link the late Yugoslav Neo-avantgarde and the avant-gardist nature of the post-Yugoslav art and literature, which are in conflicting relationship with the mainstream nationalist cultures throughout the region; clearly, a "[p]olitical mobilization requires politicization, but politicization cannot exist without the production of a conflictual representation of the world".⁶⁰

The propensity of post-Yugoslav discourse to politicize culture, its transformative interest beyond the formal issues identifies it as an avant-gardist movement: "the avant-garde denotes supra-stylistic or extra-stylistic radical, excessive, transgressive, critical, experimental, projective, programmatic, and interdisciplinary practices in art and culture".⁶¹ Though post-Yugoslav discourse rarely involves radical and incident writings and acts, its supra-stylistic, interdisciplinary, programmatic and transgressive quality define its avant-gardist position. Moreover, it relates to historical Yugoslav Avant-garde which was a "special geopolitical and geo-aesthetic set of artistic and cultural phenomena",⁶² in fact a transnational and transcultural field "defined by the internal dynamics and interrelations of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats,

⁵⁷ Ana Vujanović, "Performativ i performativnost. O događajnosti, učinkovitosti i nemoći izvedbe kao čina", in Aleksandra Jovičević et al. (eds.), *Uvod u studije performansa*, Fabrika knjiga, Beograd, 2006, pp. 119-140, p. 133.

⁵⁸ Dragana Beleslijin, "Muško, žensko, embrion, knjiga - quattro corpi in cerca d'autore", *Polja*, 464, 2010, pp. 123-129, p. 123.

⁵⁹ Šuvaković, *Neoavangarda*, cit.

⁶⁰ Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political (Thinking in Action)*, Routledge, New York, 2005, pp. 24-25.

⁶¹ Miško Šuvaković, "Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia", *Filozofski vesnik*, 37, 1, 2016, pp. 201-219, p. 204.

⁶² Ivi, p. 201.

and Slovenes and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and by the external dynamics, cosmopolitan relations, and internationalizations of local artistic excess and experimentation with international avant-garde practices".⁶³ Likewise, a multinational society⁶⁴ and a multilingual structure of the Vojvodinian art scene⁶⁵ are vital to the Yugoslav Neo-avantgarde, also marked by the intense communication among the artist from different parts of Yugoslavia.

The feminist analysis of the Yugoslav war and dissolution equally recognizes the multiplicity of the Yugoslav culture, opposing it to the gender and ethnic homogenous cultures of nationalism and war:

In most of the writing of former Yugoslavia's feminist theory the reality of war and the discourse of nationalism is gender identified What also runs like a thread through these writings is the need for these feminist authors to ground themselves in the sanity of peace, absolute rejection of any nationalism, and a reminder of multicultural frameworks of the former Yugoslavia.⁶⁶

Feminism politicizes the reliance on Yugoslavia: post-Yugoslav discourse is seen as the platform of resistance⁶⁷ and a utopia necessary in imagining the new post-Yugoslav cultural and political space.⁶⁸

Šalgo's indefinable utopia reflects her attitude about the possibility of its embodiment: "Utopian thinking is puritan: it does not allow duality ... Utopia is fundamentally discriminative; it seeks perfection, or nothing".⁶⁹ However, it supports the utopian imagination: "A vision must be inhabited swiftly, one must organize a life in it, turn it into an image, a clear idea, if necessary – a fixed idea – a durable and solid object of an imagination".⁷⁰ As Tišma has demonstrated, only if a utopian locus is an *intersection*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Solar, *Tradicija je otvorena*, cit.

⁶⁶ Daša Duhaček, "Eastern Europe", in Alison M. Jaggar and Iris Marion Young (eds.), *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, Blackwell, Malden, Massachusetts, 1998, pp. 128-136, p. 134.

⁶⁷ Svetlana Slapšak, "Twin Cultures and Rubik's Cube Politics. The Dynamics of Cultural Production in Pro-YU, Post-YU, and Other YU Inventions", *Südoesteuropa. Zeitschrift für Politik und Gesellschaft*, 3, 2011, pp. 301-314, p. 311.

⁶⁸ Slapšak in Tatjana Rosić, "Feministički esej u srpskoj književnosti i raspad Jugoslavije", *Književna istorija*, 47, 2015, pp. 233-254, p. 244.

⁶⁹ Šalgo, *Smrt utopija*, cit., p. 171.

⁷⁰ Šalgo, *Birobidžan*, cit., p. 101.

of a vision and corporeality, a feminine embodiment, 'the target is hit': "a moving target, a moving fleeing homeland, wandering promised land"⁷¹ is reached.

A female utopia is a proper figuration at once absorbing gender bias and embodying gender "perfection". In itself a radical project, it corresponds to the "utopian character of the Avant-garde project".⁷² Judita Šalgo's and Slobodan Tišma's novels intertwine and add to the discourse of post-Yugoslav literature via feminist and feminine aspects of their literary realities, which communicate through the shared cultural and artistic space of Yugoslav Vojvodinian Neo-avantgarde. They are the constituent parts of a literary tradition whose trajectory leads to post-Yugoslav literature. The Yugoslav Neo-avantgarde and feminist literature 'commission' the post-Yugoslav literature as a transnational, *différance* and a utopian discourse whose token is the female continent.

⁷¹ Ivi, p. 104.

⁷² Bürger, *Avant-Garde*, cit., p. 696.