

*Witch(craft) Subversion in Live Events  
(Performance Art) in Croatia:  
From Art to Everyday Praxis*

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**Abstract:** This paper<sup>1</sup> offers an interpretative review of artists on the Croatian scene who use in their actions and performances the strategy of ‘witchcraft performance’ as matrix of subversion of the existing model of ‘desirable appearance’, as performative deviation from the desirable image of womanhood, but also as a kind of decision to express protest and subversion. Some women artists, like Neda Šimić-Božinović and Xena L. Županić, alongside the performance of witchcraft subversion, are also united by the voco-performance with which they approximate animal vocalisation as the source of logos.

**Keywords:** witch(craft) subversion, cat-iconogram, live events, performance art, Croatia.

There is a strong connection between witchcraft and art-craft/artmaking, as stated by artist Kristen Dodge. Being an artist, Dodge said, is “an act of rebellion fueled by a will to take risks (subtle or grand) both in their practice and in the cultures at large. Witches are subversive. They don’t subscribe to popular modes of behavior and belief systems,” and have been seen as societal threats. Artists and witches have always been perceived as dangerous and

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strange outsiders.<sup>2</sup> In this representation of witchcraft, Jesse Jones's *Tremble, Tremble* (Venice Biennale, 2017) "approached the witch as a proto-feminist archetype – a figure feared and condemned by the patriarchy for her suggestion of recalcitrant power."<sup>3</sup>

As regards the Croatian performance art scene, the witches' subversive role has been thematised by Sanja Iveković (b. 1949) with her performance *Upalim motor i nisam više na zemlji. Možda odem u raj, ali idem paklenski brzo* (*I Turn on the Engine and Leave the World Behind. I May Reach Heaven, but I'll Get There Fast as Hell*). She performed this piece in 2015 as part of the project *Drugarice vještice* (*Comrade Witches*) – artistic research thematising the concept of *the witch* that is still filled with numerous negative meanings, which reflects the strong resistance of the patriarchal mindset to accept the image of a strong woman who creates on equal footing and acts according to her own free will. The aforementioned performance was re-enacted by artist Nina Kamenjarin (Almissa Open Festival, Omiš, 2019). The idea of the author's work, the 'fitness' performance, is the continuous spinning on an exercise bicycle accompanied by the song *Harley Davidson* by Brigitte Bardot and a slideshow of recognisable photographs of artists known for their anthological performances – Hannah Hoch, Hannah Wilke, Ana Mandieta, Carolee Schneeman, Linda Benglis, Valie Export... Nina Kamenjarin, a young-generation artist (b. 1991), sees the reason for the reinterpretation of Sanja Iveković's aforementioned work in the need to underline, confirm or shout aloud that, to quote the artist herself,

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<sup>2</sup> Alina Cohen, "Why Artists Have Been Enchanted by Witchcraft for Centuries," 2019, accessed December 19, 2019, <https://www.artsy.net/article/alina-cohen-artists-enchanted-witchcraft-centuries>

<sup>3</sup> Hettie Judah, "How Witchcraft Continues to Cast its Spell on Artists's Magical Thinking," 2018, accessed December 19, 2019, <https://frieze.com/article/how-witchcraft-continues-cast-its-spell-artists-magical-thinking>

The figure of the witch is also used for touristic and promotional purposes in Croatia; for example, the International Fairy Tale Festival is held annually in the town of Ogulin, known for its numerous oral stories/legends on witches, such as the one according to which the witches, fairies and elves from all over the world gather on Klek mountain during stormy nights. Furthermore, it is estimated that there are about 100 followers of Wicca in Croatia, who advocate the recognition of this pagan belief as a religion.

See also Ivana Kalogjera, "Poznati Hrvati dio su grupe hrvatskih vještica," 2016, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.express.hr/life/poznati-hrvati-dio-su-grupe-hrvatskih-vjestica-7802>

today we, the self-confident, strong and brave women, will not let repression and various political right-wing and religious mechanisms tear down and trample on our rights that have long ago been hard-won, but for which we are still fighting. Hence, on the day of the performance, when I sat on that bike, I felt a kind of shift, as if I was propelled by the strength of all of those women (Hannah Hoch, Hannah Wilke, Ana Mandieta, Carolee Schneeman, Linda Benglis, Valie Export) who appear one-by-one on the screen behind me and that I, in turn, re-propel them and do not let them be forgotten. After roughly two hours of continuous spinning on the exercise bike and having finished the performance, I took off the leather jacket (guided by the moment, intent, or perhaps adrenaline) and headed to a nearby restaurant to change clothes. What is specific about Brigitte Bardot's video, about her appearance, contradiction and somewhat ironised, even sarcastic song lyrics (as I perceive them) – despite the fact that her feminine and seductive movements can be viewed as exploitation of feminine sexuality, especially in 1967 when the video was released – is that now I see it as strength, since female sexuality indeed equals strength...<sup>4</sup>

Or, as Brigitte Bardot sings in the aforementioned song, wherein the astral vehicle i.e. broom has been replaced by a new kind of vehicle<sup>5</sup> –

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<sup>4</sup> Nina Kamenjarin, "Biti s jedne i s druge strane," 2019, *Plesna scena*, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://www.plesnascena.hr/index.php?p=article&id=2368>

<sup>5</sup> Within the framework of astral riding of animal vehicles, the witches' psychonavigational broom – chosen by witches as an astral and psychic vehicle primarily in the implementation of the technique of ecstasy – can be viewed as an isomorphism of the shamanic horse-headed stick, with the handle shaped as a horse's head and used by the Buryat shamans in their ecstatic dances. The latter is also called the horse and is not unlike the handle of the witch's broom; it figures as a kind of hobby-horse which the shaman *rides* to the *other* world or, as defined by Eliade – the symbolic 'riding' conveyed the leaving of the body, the shaman's "mystic death". See Suzana Marjanić, "Witches' Zoopsychonavigations and the Astral Broom in the Worlds of Croatian Legends as (Possible) Aspects of Shamanistic Techniques of Ecstasy (and Trance)," *Studia Mythologica Slavica* no. 9: (2006) 169-202, and Suzana Marjanić, "The Mythic Cyborgs of Croatian Oral Legends and the Fantasy Genre," *Studia Mythologica Slavica* no. 14 (2011): 87-106.

However, the facts on this visual history of witchcraft (the broom head positioned behind or in front of the flyer in the aerodynamic form) do not coincide – the key encyclopaedia of witchcraft notes that the "Hollywood-type" of riding (the broom head behind the flyer) is the earliest preserved portrayal of witches' astral flight as depicted in the Parisian manuscript poem *Le Champion des Dames (The Defender of Ladies, 1440-1442)* by Martin Le Franc, one of

“I don’t need anybody/ When I’m on my Harley Davidson!/ I don’t care about anyone/ When I’m on my Harley Davidson!/ I turn on the engine/ And leave the world behind/ I may reach heaven/ But I’ll get there fast as hell.”<sup>6</sup>

The artistic research by Sanja Iveković *Comrade Witches* deals with the case of the “Witches from Rio”, i.e. media ostracism of Jelena Lovrić, Rada Iveković, Slavenka Drakulić, Vesna Kesić and Dubravka Ugrešić, which was one of the greatest media scandals of the early 1990s in Croatia during the nationalist era of Franjo Tuđman, the first president of Croatia. “As feminists, they were accused of allegedly spreading lies to Croatian people and being anti-nationalist. [...] It all started in 1992, with the article entitled ‘Croatian Feminists Rape Croatia’, published in the Croatian weekly magazine *Globus*.”<sup>7</sup>

Here I would like to mention Sanja Iveković’s installation *Isn’t She Too Old for That? – On Witches* (2013), on the occasion of which the artist highlighted the following: “Many women who were persecuted as witches were indeed members of older age groups and, above all, belonged to the poorest strata of society. According to Silvia Federici, ‘older women were those who offered greatest resistance within the community to the destruction of communal connections in the face of expansion of capitalist relationships. They were a live treasury of knowledge and memory of the community’.”<sup>8</sup>

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the earliest works that took a stand in the favour of the accused and processed witches. This part of the poem features two illustrations of the witches’ flight: one rides an ordinary stick, and the other a broom, a “Hollywood-like” type of flight.

See Charles Zika, “Sticks,” in *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft. The Western Tradition 4*, ed. Richard M. Golden (Santa Barbara, Denver and Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 1087.

<sup>6</sup> In this paper, I am referring to Nina Kamenjarin’s re-enactment of the aforementioned performance since I personally attended it.

<sup>7</sup> “Witches of Rio,” accessed December 19, 2019, <http://slavenkadrakulic.com/women-memory-on-the-witches-from-rio/>

<sup>8</sup> Sanja Iveković, “Isn’t She Too Old for That? – On Witches,” accessed December 19, 2019, <https://www.kontejner.org/en/projekti/ekstravagantna-tijela/ekstravagantna-tijela-ekstravagantne-godine-2/izlozba-8/nije-li-ona-prestara-za-to-o-vjesticama>

Sanja Iveković, “Drugarice vještice,” accessed December 1, 2019, <http://www.eurokaz.hr/v3/projects/drugarice-vjestice>

### The Rat Singers + *Cat Witch Sonatina for Voice and Theremin*

In this central part of the paper, I will thematise the biographic meeting (already mentioned in the summary) between Neda Šimić-Božinović (1929-2015), multimedia artist from Rijeka, and Xena L. Županić, multimedia artist from Labin who is far better known on Milan's countercultural scene. This meeting was actualised in their performative engagement both as actresses and as performance artists – i.e. sound performance, voco-performance – as our only women representatives of sound performance, initiated in former Yugoslavia by Katalin Ladik, an extraordinary Serbo-Hungarian poet and performance artist. Alongside the figure of the witch, their multimedia performative practices also suppose voco-performances, very interesting from an anthropological point of view.<sup>9</sup>

Apart from acting, Neda Šimić-Božinović was engaged in painting, sculpture and anti-fashion performance. She also worked with metal and manufactured authorial jewellery and miniatures. In the last ten years of her life (in the context of MMC Palach) she had also become an accomplished performance artist. Alongside Krešo Kovačiček and Vladimir Wöfl, she was member of the post-avantgarde musical and stage project The Rat Singers. Furthermore, she published a collection of one hundred poems *Vitezica lutilica (She-Knight the Wanderer)*.<sup>10</sup> Neda Šimić-Božinović was also a well-known “cat artist” who produced a number of drawings and portraits of cats, as well as the poem *Cat Witch Sonatina for Voice and Theremin*, modelled along the lines of the onomatopoeic neo-Dadaist poem by Cathy Berberian

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<sup>9</sup> Gabriella Schuller, “O performansima Katalina Ladik,” in *Moć Žene: Katalin Ladik, Retrospektiva 1962–2010 (The Power of a Woman: Katalin Ladik, Retrospective 1962–2010)*, ed. Miško Šuvaković, Dragomir Ugren and Gabriella Schuller (Novi Sad: Muzej savremene umetnosti Vojvodine, 2010), 252-61.

Suzana Marjanić, “Vokoperformansi – Neda Šimić-Božinović i Xena L. (Loredana) Županić: glumice i umjetnice performansa,” in *Krležini dani u Osijeku 201. Redatelji i glumci hrvatskoga kazališta. Prvi dio*, ed. Martina Petranović, Boris Senker, Anamarija Žugić, Anamarija (Zagreb, Osijek: Zavod za povijest hrvatske književnosti, kazališta i glazbe HAZU, Odsjek za povijest hrvatskog kazališta, Zagreb, Hrvatsko narodno kazalište u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet, Osijek, 2018), 201-12.

<sup>10</sup> Nela Valerjev Ogurlić, “Neda Šimić Božinović – cvijet riječkog performansa. In memoriam,” 2015, *Novi list*, <http://www.novolist.hr/Kultura/Neda-Simic-Bozinovic-cvijet-rijeckog-performansa>

*Stripsody* from 1966, in which she used the vocal technique of *sounds* of graphic novels. Within the framework of her performances (e.g. *Church in the Witch and Vampire in the Government*, Zagreb, 2011), she often performatively incorporated the subversive figure of the witch.<sup>11</sup>

As member of The Rat Singers, Neda Šimić-Božinović presented well-noted performances influenced by exceptional women artists i.e. vocal performers, e.g. Cathy Berberian, Laurie Anderson, Diamanda Galás, Björk, Beth Gibbons, for whom she often stated the following: “They are not only exceptional vocalists, but also authorial figures, performers who have access to the intuitive space, vocal invention, deep strata of Being. These are the voices that I seek to hear and listen to.”<sup>12</sup>

Upon her death under unfortunate circumstances, Neda was attributed as the *flower of Rijeka’s performance art scene* by multimedia artist Damir Stojnić, Professor at the Academy of Applied Arts in Rijeka.<sup>13</sup> Specifically, according to the accounts of her friends, the fire in the flat of Neda Šimić-Božinović broke out as the artist melted plastic to make a mask for her upcoming performance, which speaks volumes about the status of existential vulnerability of numerous non-institutional artists in our society.

As regards her voco-performances, they began with her participation in two larger collective performances: *Reddies/ Skinscraper*, performed at MMSU (Rijeka) and the Museum of Modern Art Dubrovnik in 2005, and *An(im)omalia* by Damir Stojnić, presented at Marganovo hall in Hartera on the occasion of FONA (New Arts Festival) in the same year. Furthermore,

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<sup>11</sup> She participated in the exhibition dedicated to feminist gerontology entitled *Ekstravaganтна tijela: Ekstravaganтne godine (Extravagant Bodies: Extravagant Age*, curatorial team: Kontejner, 2013) with her performance *Countess Zrinski-Nugent-Laval*, and in the programme *MMC – poduzeće u kulturi (1998.-2011.): riječka akcionistička i performerska scena (Culture Enterprise MMC Ltd., 1998-2011: Rijeka’s Actionist and Performance Scene)* with the performance *Crkva u Vještici i Vampir u Vladi (Church in the Witch and Vampire in the Government)*, with which she registered the theory and practice of the turbulent new actionist and performance scene of Rijeka, once centred around MMC and O. K. Gallery at Palach Club (Tvornica Jedinство, Zagreb, 2011, organised by Damir Čargonja, Marijana Stanić and Suzana Marjanić). See Suzana Marjanić, *Kronotop hrvatskoga performansa: od Travelera do danas* (Zagreb: Udruga Bijeli val, Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, Školska knjiga, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Šimić-Božinović, qtd. in Suzana Marjanić, *Kronotop hrvatskoga performansa*, 1399-1408.

<sup>13</sup> Nela Valerjev Ogurlić, “Neda Šimić Božinović – cvijet riječkog performansa. In memoriam.”

as regards the already-cult performance *Reddies/ Skinscraper*, Neda's role consisted of the vocal interpretation of the text *Red* by Burroughs. To quote the artist herself: "It is the first unpublished Croatian translation from 1987 by Sonja Sunde, who lives in Bergen. The text enables a wide interpretative range. Several voices of different character, several different moods and emotions, gestures and attitudes are used. Because the integral text was projected in the background as captions, I had the freedom to select parts I was interested in interpretation-wise. There were screams and shrieks of indignation, deep tones of sensual whispering, the wallowing of the dark matter of menace, the barking of dogs that revolted against any regulation, the wailing of dying beasts with limbs wounded and torn apart..."<sup>14</sup>

And finally, as regards this exceptional artist, I would like to recommend the listening to a fragment of her poem *Cat Witch Sonatina for Voice and Theremin*<sup>15</sup> in which she uses the vocal technique of the *sounds* of comic books (onomatopoeia).<sup>16</sup>

### **Xena L. (Loredana) Županić and witchcraft voco-performance**

As regards the biographic context of Xena L. Županić – actress, director, writer, set designer, model, performance artist – I will present in more detail her voco-performances in the context of her recently-published fourth book

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<sup>14</sup> Stojnić, qtd. in Marjanić, *Kronotop hrvatskoga performansa*, 1402.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmRbKZVVfX4>

<sup>16</sup> "Neda's life was related to art almost in its entirety. I say 'almost' as I would also like to mention two of her other great passions – her cats, which she also used to portray quite often; I would like to mention here the interesting portraits of cat-women, for which I hope they will be preserved. Neda had always kept a lot of cats and talked about them often. When she died, she only had two; one of them is cared for by her neighbours, and for the other one they say that it probably ran away due to shock, but if it returns, the same neighbours will tend to it. I know that Neda would be really happy and grateful for this."

See Čekada, Tajči, "In memoriam. Umjetnica anti modnoga i glazbenog performansa," *Zarez*, 22 February 2016, <http://www.zarez.hr/clanci/in-memoriam-umjetnica-anti-modnoga-i-glazbenog-performansa>

*Yztok Zapada (East of West)*.<sup>17</sup> Multimedia artist Xena L. (Loredana) Županić is far better known on the counterculture scene of Milan; in her voco-performances, she also frequently incorporates the androgynous visual of the subversive witch.

In the context of her voco-performances at *divine frequencies*, on this occasion I would like to note that she graduated in Philosophy and Art History from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zadar, in Acting and Set Design from Scuola di Recitazione Quelli di Grock in Milan, and in Acting from Accademia d'Arte Drammatica di Milano.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, she was engaged in fashion (she had her own fashion brand, *Hermetika*) and took part in fashion shows of the most renowned world designers; she also acts in theatre (whereby she particularly highlights the collaboration with actor Carmelo Bene), feature films (Gabriele Salvatores), radio and TV dramas, music videos; she recorded four albums for EMI Italiana, and two with Metal Guru; in 2002 she founded and managed Ludiialydis Club in Milan; she worked in Italian television ("*Markette*", P. Chiambretti, *la 7*, Mediaset, Rai Uno, etc.), exhibited at solo and group exhibitions (Biennale di Venezia; Tanzquartier Wien; collaboration with curator Harald Szeemann at the exhibition *Blood and Honey: Future's in the Balkans*, 2003). In 2002, she became member of Labin Art Express and Metal Guru.<sup>19</sup> Today, she works as multimedia artist, presents her own performances and actions, and directs theatre shows.<sup>20</sup> Also, using her appearance, she performs anti-fashion presentations that are always close to system-subverting witchcraft imaginarium.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Xena L. (Loredana) Županić, *Yztok Zapada* (Labin: Own Edition, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> In her biographies, she always emphasises that she is also a model, and the only Croatian woman photographed by Helmut Newton, a luminary of erotic photography (Xena thereby frequently stresses his feminine nature in his work with women models). See Marjanić, *Kronotop hrvatskoga performansa*, 1197-1206.

<sup>19</sup> In 1994, together with Massimo Savić and Krešimir Farkaš, Dean Zahtila founded the multimedia group Metal Guru, one of the fractions of Labin Art Express. He is the initiator and manager of L.A.E.'s fundamental project *Underground City XXI Labin*.

<sup>20</sup> Marjanić, *Kronotop hrvatskoga performansa*, 1215.

<sup>21</sup> In folklore imaginarium of witches, alongside physical characteristics (e.g. a haggard old woman with a humped nose and a wart, which is more likely to have come from the so-called high culture, inquisitorial questionings, during which they looked for marks on the



Among other things, the artist founded Ludiialydis Fashion Company in Milan, meaning “actors/actresses who come from the land of Lydia”. In ancient Rome, actors came from Lydia, Asia Minor: as Županić often highlighted the theatre matrix of fashion, this name seems very adequate. Specifically, together with Mario Canali, multimedia artist from Milan and one of the pioneers of electronic and digital art, she founded the aforementioned cultural centre, i.e. experiment centre as she often defined it, or poetically – *experimentation and production of theatre and video works, of interactive virtual installations*, as Italy’s first psycho-bar. The artist herself states the following: “*Psycho-bar [...]* in the sense of active interaction with virtual machines, with live performances, thoughtfully selected on the basis of transgressive elements in their work. Their end-goal consisted of sophisticated bombardment of conscience: to reexplain everything old and introduce the new.”

As regards her voco-performances, the artist herself states that they are guided by *phoné*, the voice that is profoundly connected to the sound and vocal expression of being. Thereby she puts special emphasis on the role of artist Carmelo Bene, representative of Italian neo-avantgarde theatre and film, whom she considers the embodiment of conscious and deeply deliberated concept of human voice – pitch, intensity, and tone. Briefly put, as the artist herself points out, “this is an abundance of tones of voice, even though tone remains the same and tonality varies. Such disciplined voice acquires orchestral capacity at full swing.”

In the conceived multimedia performance *Carska Rez-ba (Caesarean Sect(ion))*, the artist therefore indicates the mystery of the corporeal and spiritual transformation of the female body. Gradual encirclement, spheroidisation of female abdomen indicates the *Urform*, the primordial sphere out of which everything originates and is born. Within the framework of her voco-performances, the artist accompanies by sound the scream of birth as the eternal trauma of being born, as she conceived it within her video-

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bodies of alleged witches), what is more notable is the belief in zoo-psychonavigations. For example, in the area of the Balkans, there is a widespread belief that a butterfly flying around the house in the evening is a witch, as recorded by Tihomir R. Đorđević in the first monograph on South Slavic witches.

performances presented at the exhibition on reproductive rights at Vladimir Bužančić Gallery in 2017, which is also the first exhibition on pregnancy within the local scene.<sup>22</sup>

In the aforementioned context, I would like to recommend joint listening, watching of fragments of the video performance *Živo-tinja (Ani-Mal)*,<sup>23</sup> wherein the artist uses vocal manifestations to eco-feministically establish in correlation the lives of women and animals, almost resembling the ancient Witch, the sorceress.

Alongside her living (human) sculpture Beatrix, which is based on the imaginarium of *Maleficent* (as embodied on the film screen in 2014 by Angelina Jolie, dir. Robert Stromberg),<sup>24</sup> the artist states the following:

The 'witches' transformation is a revolutionary, subversive act if it indicates symbolically or spiritually, as a kind of 'code', the existence of another 'parallel reality', of another path leading straight to the heart of its covert centre. If so, it is the 'principle of hope' that opens a new, unexpected horizon or, better put, a possibility of different lifestyle. My own achieved level of reality is manifested on my mask, my human sculpture that is numb one moment, and primordially furious and mimetic the next.

Facial expressions and the primordial scream crumbled in thousands of blows of vocal cords.

Human sculpture formed by the covert, unknown, Ur-(innate) energy that possesses me. As such, it becomes the Icon of the unknown Origin.

Mask – Image – Icon, as an abruptly-found signpost for others. For the closest ones, for the farthest ones, in annulled space and time of their and my own presence.

This human sculpture, Mask – Image – Icon, originates according to the principle 'discard, tear off from yourself everything (superfluous)'. This is Vaztrg (*ecstasis*) which discards the residuum so as to reach the necessary,

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<sup>22</sup> Exhibition *Žena – trudnica – majka: zelene sfere i nekropolitike (Woman – Pregnant Woman – Mother: Green Spheres and Necropolitics)*, Zagreb, Vladimir Bužančić Gallery, curator: Anita Zlomisljić, text in the catalogue: Suzana Marjanić.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPTpLIFyh30>

<sup>24</sup> See "A few things you need to know about *Maleficent*," accessed December 19, 2019, <https://starcasm.net/what-is-maleficent/>

the essential. The necessary, the elemental is the 'numinous', 'sacred', 'Maleficent', 'Magical' image (icon). It is 'neutral' in the sense of strength, which in turn is constantly growing. The entire process is non-conscious, albeit deeply rooted in this world, by which we are called to embark on the final revelation.

That which is discarded in Vaztrg is the 'imposed', 'learned' image of woman and femininity, of its paradigm and eternally renewable, perpetual processes. Settled 'forms' are demolished; once exposed, they disappear by blending into a new Mask – Image – Icon of powerful, primordial femininity. The unknown, 'neutral' force is recognised as 'sinister', maleficent – causal-effectual energy that is dreaded by the rest of the world. Actually, all of this remains a mystification, the inability to recognise the primordial.<sup>25</sup>

### **Appendix: Katalin Ladik – the first voco-performance artist of former Yugoslavia**

As I have introductorily mentioned Katalin Ladik, the first representative of sound performance art in the former country whose line is represented today on the Croatian scene only by the two already-mentioned multimedia artists (unfortunately, Neda Šimić-Božinović has recently passed away), in this appendix I would like to contextualise the genre of voco-performance, i.e. sound and poetic performance. Specifically, I use the term voco-performance on the basis of the term *vocovisual* as the movement of art neo-avantgarde/post-avantgarde that was initiated and described in the eponymous book by Vladan Radovanović. In the context of the aforementioned, I would like to point out that Katalin Ladik is close to Artaud's concept from his book *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938); when she visited Marseille in the spring of 1996, on the occasion of 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Artaud's birth she presented the performance *L'agneau de dieu et le double* in his hometown. Thereby the title was the only thing that was associated with Artaud, the great negator of logocentrism. It is also important to note that she is the first woman

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<sup>25</sup> Excerpt from an e-mail interview with the artist.

performance artist in Yugoslavia, who entered the field of performance art in the revolutionary year of 1968.<sup>26</sup>

As a sorceress, colloquially a witch, and in her struggle against socialist patriarchy, the artist conceived her own rendition of performance art in the context of sound poetry in the 1960s and 1970s, when she started her subversive life activity as a woman, i.e. as single mother and artist in a patriarchal society. She additionally enhanced the subversion in her sound poetry performances with props related to the context of sewing or “semiotics of the kitchen” as termed by Martha Rosler, who likewise promoted the kitchen as the place of performative resistance in the 1970s. The subversive phonetic-poetic strategy of Katalin Ladik was also the transgression of poetry into communication. Hence she interpreted ‘collages’ from *Burda* magazine (sewing and needlepoint schemes) as sheet music; she decided to sing them. That night, the re-enactment was exceptional: one of such collages was projected on the video-wall (a needlepoint scheme from *Burda*), while Katalin Ladik was standing next to it and ‘singing’ the aforementioned scheme which she, as an artist, read as sheet music. As regards her extensive biography, I would like to note that she has been named the first woman performance artist of former Yugoslavia in her monograph *Moć žene: Katalin Ladik, Retrospektiva 1962–2010 (The Power of a Woman: Katalin Ladik, Retrospective 1962-2010)*. And finally, it is important to mention that Yoko Ono also gave the award *The LennonOno Grant for Peace* to Katalin Ladik in 2016.

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<sup>26</sup> On Katalin Ladik, her work with ‘sexuality discourses’ and how she – in the context of the liberal society of the post-1968 socialist society – offered the nude female body as a spectacle, as a sight to behold. Furthermore, Dubravka Đurić also highlights the specific use of folklore in Katalin Ladik’s voco-performances, which the artist used while exploring female sexuality. Specifically, folklore was used by artists in the period of socialist modernism from the late 1950s onwards in the construction of universal meanings within the framework of humanist socialist self-managing culture. See Dubravka Đurić, *Politika poezije. Tranzicija i pesnički eksperiment* (Beograd: AŽIN, 2010), 20-21.

### **In conclusion, or once more on the subversive performance of witchcraft**

And finally, I would like to repeat that, as regards sound performances, our domestic scene had/ has only two women artists – Neda Šimić-Božinović and Xena L. Županić; thereby all of the sound performative matrices of voco-performance, with which they approximate animal vocalisation as the source of logos, are archetypal. Unfortunately, Neda has recently passed away in tragic circumstances, while Xena – with her strong, acrid, rough, androgynous voice – is more present on the Italian scene. Still, she remains insufficiently recognised ‘at home’ as regards the mainstream.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, Xena refers to futurism, primarily *The Art of Noises* (1913) by Luigi Russolo,<sup>28</sup> and Neda Šimić-Božinović to neo-avantgarde and post-avantgarde vocal experiments, namely the already-mentioned Cathy Berberian and her cult feline *Stripsody*.<sup>29</sup>

Lastly, I would like to return to the introductory part of the text, in which I have stressed that the performance of witchcraft is subversive and, along these lines, I would like to note another performative example – artist Ksenija Kordić who, at the beginning of her activity, promoted the gothic-witch appearance in her first performance *Self-Combustion* (2003), in which she ritually burned (three) holy books. Specifically, she presented the performance on 14 January 2003 at Močvara Club in Zagreb, as part of which she ritually burned the *Bible*, *Quran* and *Bhagavad Gita*, and mixed their ashes with clay to form a phallic symbol. As the artist frequently stresses, on the occasion of this performance she experienced three instances of censorship – institutional, media, and coming from some of her colleagues. Furthermore, at the exhibition *Avatar*, which she chose to present at Pigalle, an *eros shop* in Zagreb, she placed herself in the role of a digital witch who, naturally, does not tell fortune,

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<sup>27</sup> Among the artist's more recent guest performances, I would like to note the performance at FIUK – Festival of Performing Arts and Theatre in Koprivnica (upon invitation by Bojan Koštic) in 2015, at which she presented the performance *Halt* (together with collaborators Krešo Kovačiček and Neda Šimić-Božinović) and also promoted her book *East of West* (Labin, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Caroline Tisdall and Angelo Bozzolla, *Futurism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 111.

<sup>29</sup> Naturally, all of them perform along the lines of Dadaist verses without words, i.e. the vocal phonetic poetry of Hugo Ball, who invented a new kind of voice/phonetic poems (made-up words that toy with elementary fragments of language). Just as Hugo Ball marked his Dada-performances with costumes, these three voco-performance artists also do the same.

but rather – in a quite similar manner, as a witch i.e. her ‘human’ image, as summarised by art historian Olga Majcen Linn<sup>30</sup> – ‘reads’ the visitors’ thoughts and answers them in an attempt to hold meaningful conversation. On this interactive software, the artist states the following:

I intended to present the exhibition in a private porn booth that can be found in some of Zagreb’s sex shops. However, the owner was not interested in collaboration, so I had to abandon this idea and improvise a similar situation in an eros shop.

The work itself was inspired by TV-referendums at which even the most complex social questions are answered with a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’, which forces one to opt for one of the extreme options, which I find utterly absurd. I have also noticed myself falling into the trap of the referendum question and often do not even deliberate the subject in an adequate manner, as the aim is to decide as quickly as possible in order to, supposedly, eliminate and discredit the opposing side. *Avatar* poses some of these ‘delicate’ questions, while a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ leads to a change of its mood and a new question. This continues until it suggests the ‘examinee’ to destroy it, to kill it. Since the work itself cannot be seen in its entirety if all of the questions are not answered with both ‘yes’ and ‘no’, the examinee is also forced in a certain manner to provide a dishonest answer. Thereby I seek to ironise the relationship towards the authority of media, to illustrate the manner in which they manipulate us.

While the figure of the witch appears subversive and revolutionary in the art practice, as I have stated in the introduction, there are around one hundred followers of contemporary witchcraft in Croatia. Some of them are well-known public personas; however, as stated by ethnologist Sonja Miličević Vukelić, who defended her final thesis on the subject of Wicca at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb, it is unlikely to expect that any of them – followers of the world’s oldest religion – would come forward and publicly declare: “I am a witch!”<sup>31</sup>

Translated by Mirta Jurilj

<sup>30</sup> Olga Majcen, “Ksenija Kordić, Avatar,” 2007, accessed July 8, 2019, <http://www.kgz.hr/hr/dogadjanja/ksenija-kordic-avatar/18409>

<sup>31</sup> See Ivana Kalogjera, “Poznati Hrvati dio su grupe hrvatskih vještica,” 2016, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.express.hr/life/poznati-hrvati-dio-su-grupe-hrvatskih-vjestica-7802>

### Photo contributions



**Photo 1:** Nina Kamenjarin: *I Turn on the Engine and Leave the World Behind. I May Reach Heaven, but I'll Get There Fast as Hell*, re-enactment of Sanja Iveković's performance (2019).



Photo 2: Neda Šimić-Božinović, The Rat Singers – *Requiescat in Pacem* (2015).





Photo 3: Xena L. Županić, "BeatriX".



**Photo 4:** Ksenija Kordić: *Self-Combustion* (2003).

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