NEW COLLECTIVES: ART NETWORKS AND CULTURAL POLICIES IN POST-YUGOSLAV SPACES

Sezgin Boynik

Introduction

This article deals with cultural policies of the artistic collectives in post-Yugoslav contexts. Since most of the artistic collectives discussed here were founded in the 1990s, we feel permitted to take and analyze them as important indicators of the transitional dynamics and predicaments that occurred within the post-Yugoslav cultural domain during that historical period. We are going to discuss the role of the artistic collectives from different angles. To presage our main thesis, artistic collectives were playing a key role for the re-articulation of the cultural policy in the sense of bringing about the shift from a state-centered socialist planning strategy to de-centralized and neo-liberal open-market networking. It is clear that the terms related to cultural politics such as ‘decentralization’ and ‘liberalization’ could invoke confusion when applied to the case of Yugoslavia. We have the impression that this confusion must be traced to the complex and perplexing discourse around the theory and practice of ‘self-management,’ which had constituted one of the keystones of the Yugoslav path to socialism. However, we will not propose any theory on the cultural policy of self-management in Yugoslavia and its after-life in the post-Yugoslav spaces whatsoever. Yet, a critical light must be shed upon the contemporary, post-Yugoslav appropriation of this conceptualization put forward by artistic collectives. Here, the original meaning of ‘self-management’ is in a positivist fashion reduced to the managerial aspects. To discriminate between Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav artistic collectives in the following, we are going to use the terms ‘First’ and ‘Second Collectives.’ Thereby the term ‘Second Collectives’ is reserved for the current post-Yugoslav artistic collectives. It must also be stated that most of the Second Collectives, and especially the ones referred to in this article, were not collectives managed by the artists, but on the contrary, they were artistic collectives who were managing the artists. They are artistic collectives of art curators, art critics, art producers and art designers. This demarcation is vital for the sake of preventing a generalization of the
proposed thesis of this article – concerning the role of art collectives during the transitional period – to the function of art as a whole.

In addition, I need to emphasize that our analytical focus in this article does not lie on art practices as such, but rather on art systems in general. Tackling the question of the relation between art and ideology, Louis Althusser defended the autonomy of art as a distinct way of producing knowledge-effects: “I do not rank real art among the ideologies, although art does have a quite particular and specific relationship with the ideology” (1971: 203). On that account, the following proposition on the relation between artistic collectives and ideology concerns the relationship between art systems functioning as collectives on the one hand and ideology on the other – or, as Althusser would put it, between the ‘empiricist,’ ‘historicist,’ and ‘humanist’ art and the ideological state apparatuses. To sum up, the main subject of my article is the Second artistic collectives, which typically do not possess a coherent and fixed organizational structure. For several reasons that will become clearer in the following pages, I am mostly drawing from Croatian examples, especially from Zagreb. Yet, one can assume, in principle, analogous correlations with regard to form and content in other post-Yugoslav spaces.

Managerial Aspects of Artistic Collectives

Before we concentrate on the ideological implications of the managerial aspects of artistic collectives in various post-Yugoslav settings, we first have to engage in the already existing international debates on this subject. This detour is apposite for at least two reasons: first, because significant segments of the post-Yugoslav Art Theory hinge on international (mostly European) discourses on artistic collectives; second, because the largest part of the post-Yugoslav artistic practices are financed by international (again mostly European) cultural agents and foundations.

For reasons that will become clear while I expose my argument, I want to display the betoken affinity by referring to Maria Lind, the renowned curator, theoretician, and ideologue of the recent tendencies in artistic collaborations and collectives. Lind’s approach rests upon the assumption according to which collaborations in the contemporary art field were inevitable, necessary, and even “obvious.” In her explication of this

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1 The main protagonists of the Second collectives are WHW Collective, Mama (Zagreb), Prelom Collective, RUK (Belgrade), and kuda.org.