Collaborative Actions, Continued Omissions
Notes Toward a Feminist Revisiting of Yugoslav Collectives in the 1960s and 1970s: The Case of the OHO Group

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When writing about the formation and functioning of artists' groups, British literary critic Raymond Williams observed that "the real point of social and cultural analysis, of any developed kind [is] to attend not only to the manifest ideas and activities, but also to the positions and ideas which are implicit or even taken for granted."[1] His critique, written in 1980, addressed the perceived lack of attention and appropriate tools for the study of the workings of cultural groups, as opposed to larger social organizations, such as churches or the educational system.

Since Williams's observation, penned some forty years ago, multiple approaches to the study of artists' groups and collective practice have developed, emerging across fields as diverse as cultural studies, art history, performance studies, sociology, and curatorial and feminist studies, among others, drawing on existing conceptualizations of the relationship between the individual and the collective, but also complexifying the legacies (and ruptures) of collectivity of the twentieth century. Questions of intent and historicization, the analysis of what constitutes a collective, when a collective begins and ends, what differentiates an artists' group from a community of artists, and the nature of artists' communities formed around a particular site or venue, a document, a manifesto, or a set of beliefs are all pertinent to this study. In short, the three aspects of collectivity that interest me are the mechanics and

1 Raymond Williams, "The Bloomsbury Fraction," in *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 1980), 356.

processes involved in collective practice, the question of terminology, and the historicization of collectives.

The historicization of collective practice is shaped by how these practices are written about. It is influenced not only by writers' own paradigms with all their conventions and naturalized disciplinary patterns, but also by what material they have to work with in the first place. Take for instance the art-historical convention of citing author, title, material, and year of production when writing about art, which does not account for the iterative, processual, and multi-output "life-as-art" approach of much collective work. Historicization thus operates at an intersection between researchers' own positionality and desire, and an always already reduced material at their disposal, usually generated by the members of collectives themselves or by their close collaborators. Also of importance is the question of what information about the collective is deemed valuable, and inevitably, which members have been doing the talking, collecting, archiving, or discarding. The narratives foregrounded by collectives' own members may or may not align with subsequent accounts of their work, and the outcome is inevitably a patchwork of a narrative forged through a complex web of subjectivities. Acknowledging this, and with the decolonial proposition of pluriversality at heart, we must then ask what is at stake when, as is the case in this text, new readings and voices engage in revisiting collective practice.

Collectives, whether formally articulated or not, have often emerged out of an impetus to perform institutional critique, often functioning as alternative institutions, no matter how non-institutional their core ethos may be. By contrast to more institutional histories, rarely are formal documents available in the wake of these collectives, making the work of revisiting their narratives even more important and multifaceted.

In *Collectivism after Modernism* (2007) Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette problematized the shedding of collectivity's revolutionary past in contemporary practice, seeing contemporary collectives as propped up by what he terms "enterprise culture," the gallery system, and the art world's masterful co-opting of anonymity, collectivity, and ephemerality—lessons learned through the commodification of conceptual and live art.[2] The terminology used in relation to collective practice—the frequently blurred notions of authorship and participation, and the often interchangeable terms *collectivity*, *collaboration*, *coop-*

2 Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette, eds., *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 1–15.

eration, *intersubjectivity*, *co-dependency*, etc. open a field of study that requires a whole essay to itself. Ellen Mara De Wachter's neologism "co-art" seeks to act as an umbrella term, with a view to surveying the diverse practices of contemporary artists' collectives, allowing for multiplicity and incongruities amongst the many approaches to collectivity today, evoking Richard Sennett's idea of "a conversation that does not resolve itself by finding common ground."[3] Maria Lind's focus on artistic agency has precisely asked to what extent collectivity can disturb and intervene in a system which is so profoundly set on celebrating individual genius as subject.[4]

Such material has introduced a wealth of analytical tools enabling the study not only the creative outputs but also the mechanics and operational structures of artists' groups." The crucial role of collaboration in art cannot be disputed, but the processes, relationships, and operational dynamics within groups remain a field in need of further study. The question of the gendered nature of collectivity is of particular interest here. As Lind observes, "even the lone artist in their studio is dependent upon contributions from others. This is especially true for many male artists who have been able to rely on more or less invisible support from surrounding women," and it is this aspect of collectivity that I wish to focus on.[5]

But even with the recent acknowledgment of the centrality of collectivity in art, in-depth intersectional analyses of factors that determine and shape the nature of artists' involvement in collectives and groups remain scarce. Structural questions examining how collectives are formed, who has agency in their formation, and what their mode of operation as well as their articulation is, need to be underpinned by broader structural explorations of who has access to such networks in the first place and whose names remain associated with groups' legacies after they cease to operate.

In this essay, which is a starting point for a larger project entitled Collective Actions, Continued Omissions, which investigates the gendered nature of collective practice, I begin to unpack some of the above, using as a case study the work of the Yugoslav group OHO (1962–71) and the agricultural and artistic commune that followed from it, the Šempas Family, within the broader

3 Quoted in Ellen Mara De Wachter, *Co-Art: Artists on Creative Collaboration* (London: Phaidon, 2017), 20.

4 Maria Lind, "Complications: On Collaboration, Agency and Contemporary Art," *Public* 39 (Spring 2009), 53–73.

5 Lind, "Complications," 73.

context of collective practice in Yugoslavia of the 1960s and 1970s. This was a period that saw a proliferation of artists' groups, often sharing a post-revolutionary ideological basis with both Yugoslav socialism (while also engaging in critical evaluation of it) and the anti-institutional, iconoclastic, and subversive ethos of the global student protests of 1968.[6]

My reason for focusing on the OHO group as the first case study of this project is twofold. Firstly, OHO's multifaceted body of work drew me to further investigate the relationship between their progressive ideas and the group's operational structure, asking whether their hippie, anti-institutional ethos, connection to nature, challenging of rigid social structures, anti-war stance (i.e., anti-Vietnam war slogans depicted in their works), and commitment to collectivity were reflected in the group's own structure and working methods. Secondly, the involvement of numerous women who frequently appeared in OHO's artworks but were rarely credited as their authors, inspired me to investigate the question of gender within the group's activity. What particularly intrigued me was the *tension* between the fluidity and collaborative nature of OHO's ethos used in the production of their works and, in contrast, the rigidity of the group's narrativization, which only cites a small number of male authors, and no female authors, in exhibition catalogs, documentation of works, and video credits, for instance. Ironically, this very tension—*despite* OHO's rejection of many moral structures of Yugoslav society—unwittingly reveals the internalization of patriarchal structures present in the country at the time.[7]

Moreover, whilst I am aware that the collective artistic practices of OHO and this generation of artists (New Art Practice, described below) are universally recognized for their radical potential in breaking down the divide between the hitherto discrete sphere of art and wider publics, through the participatory and inclusive nature of their work creating novel affective artist/au-

6 The project Collaborative Actions, Continued Omissions started in 2019 and will continue through a series of interviews, publications, and a conference. See http://dzuverovic.org/?path=/research/collaborative-actions-continued-omissions/.

7 Much has been written about the complexities of women's position in postwar Yugoslavia. With the proclamation of gender equality, Yugoslav women found themselves in a "double-bind" with the social responsibility of being active citizens who were equal in the workforce while privately struggling with deep-seated sexism in the private sphere. For a detailed discussion, see Bojana Pejić, ed., *Gender Check, A Reader: Art and Theory in Eastern Europe* (Cologne: König, 2010) and Jelena Petrović, *Women's Authorship in Interwar Yugoslavia: The Politics of Love and Struggle* (London: Palgrave, 2019).

dience sensations and relations, they simultaneously fail to reflect on the very nature of the collective—its constitution, practices, and production. The failure to attend to the ways in which collaborative works were produced through the collective reveals a tension between ideological beliefs (deinstitutionalization, deindividualization, the artist being freed from bourgeois beliefs and moral codes) and practice which inadvertently erases from the formal written history of Yugoslav art certain subjects who participated in producing this sensual revolution. My point is simple: the history of these revolutionary artistic movements is incomplete if certain participants of the collective are erased (erasure not necessarily meaning complete omission but also the act of being written into narratives in *particular* and limiting ways). If we consider Rancière's distribution of the sensible—the claim that aesthetics, always already political, have the potential to refigure the political by legitimizing certain ways of seeing, acting, feeling, and acting, then these practices fall short in their revolutionary possibilities.[8] My attempt here is to expand the revolutionary potential of these groups by writing women into their narratives.

"Everyone's Mother"—The Adoption of Familial Structures

One of the most apparent ways in which the internalization of patriarchal structures becomes visible in collective endeavors in Yugoslavia is through the very absence of female artists from the narratives of the collectives of the period. Take for instance the 1978 New Art Practice catalog edited by Marijan Susovski, the chief curator of Zagreb's Gradska galerija suvremene umjetnosti (City Gallery of Contemporary Art) between 1972 and 2003. The catalog, one of the first articulations of conceptual practices that came to be known as New Art Practice, gives a thorough account of this new and radically different direction in art. The collectives listed include both OHO and the Šempas Family, with their profiles both authored by the art historian Tomaž Brejc, a writer closely linked to the collectives. Brejc's OHO text gives a close and detailed account of the group's developments and works produced, with no female members mentioned. By contrast, the Šempas Family section, giving an overview of the group's radical shift away from art toward life-as-art communal living dutifully lists all members of the group, including women and

8 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Continuum, 2004).

children. It is as if the domain of art is reserved for male protagonists, but as soon as the collective activity is extended to the sphere of social reproduction, women are allowed in, although still seen to be occupying marginal roles.[9] Of course, the absence of female artists in art collectives was far from unique to OHO. The continued normalization of such narratives is evident in the apparent acceptance of the glaring absences of female protagonists, an inequality seemingly universally accepted as part and parcel of the patriarchal order, even as recently as 2012, which is when I conducted my first interviews.[10] Furthermore, books such as Ješa Denegri's *Prilozi za drugu liniju 3*, published by the Marinko Sudac Collection in 2015, which provides an account of a 100 percent male history of Yugoslav art, only serve to underline the ripple effects and perils of the continuation of partial narratives.[11] Frequently, when pointing out this issue in my interviews with cultural workers from the region, the responses would inevitably be accompanied by a sigh: "Yes, I know, the art world was very sexist, it was a different time," my interviewees would explain.

In discussions both with the members of the OHO group and with other cultural workers from the region, certain linguistic discomfort in relation to female members of collectives became apparent. Terms like "lateral women," "backing singers," "the soul of the collective," and "everyone's mother" were used in interviews, by female and male interviewees alike, pointing to the implied affective labor and the naturalized nurturing roles of the women involved in collectives.[12] In many cases the career paths of my interviewees, most of whom came of age in the late 1960s and early 1970s, seemed to suggest that male cultural workers found a way to pursue careers as artists whereas

9 Marijan Susovski, *Nova Umjetnicka Praksa* (New art practices) *1966–1978* (Zagreb: Galerija Suvremene Umjetnosti, 1978).

10 The research I refer to here explored Pop Art in socialist Yugoslavia: Lina Džuverović, Pop Art Tendencies in Self-Managed Socialism: Pop Reactions and Counter-Cultural Pop in Yugoslavia in 1960s and 1970s (Ph.D. diss., Royal College of Art, 2017, https://researchonline.rca.ac.uk/2850/).

11 Ješa Denegri, *Prilozi za drugu liniju 3* (Zagreb: Agroinova: Institut za istraživanja avangarde, 2015).

12 These terms were used in interviews with OHO members David Nez and Marko and Marika Pogačnik, curator Jasna Tijardović, and art historian Beti Žerovc conducted between 2014 and 2019 and were used by the interviewees in conversations about collectives in general, not only OHO.

their female counterparts ended up in the roles of curators, organizers, administrators, archivists, and art historians—roles that foregrounded organizational, promotional, or contextualizing skills over artistic development. We are reminded of Lucy Lippard's observation made in 1971 stating that "It is far easier to be successful as a woman critic, curator, or historian than as a woman artist, since these are secondary, or housekeeping activities, considered far more natural for women than the primary activity of making art."[13]

My aim here is to add to the already rich body of scholarship on gender and art in Yugoslavia by focusing specifically on the way collectivity is historicized. I aim to build on the long history of feminist work in the region including the theoretical writings of Lydia Sklevitsky, Chiara Bonfiglioli, Suzana Milevska, Bojana Pejić, Ivana Bago, Jelena Petrović, and in parallel the curatorial projects of the the Red Min(e)d collective, Mesto Zensk festival, Sanja Iveković's, "Electra," a distribution network for women artists, and the work of the Centre for Women's Studies Zagreb, amongst many others.

Tendencies in the Historicization of Artists Groups

The phenomenon of male-dominated networks of Yugoslav artists of course did not begin in the 1960s but dated back to earlier artistic endeavors, such as those avant-garde groups formed in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918–41). Enormously influential networks such as the avant-garde movement Zenitism and its associated magazine *Zenit*, which operated in Belgrade and then Zagreb (1921–26), with ties to Italian Futurists and a broad European network, consisted exclusively of male members. Similarly, the Zenitist-inspired Traveleri group (founded in 1922) included only one woman, Višnja Kranjčević, whose limited biography states that she worked in administration at the Croatian National Theatre (HNK) but little else is known about her professional or artistic life.

This was also the case with the artists' collective Zemlja (The Earth) (1929–35), whose ten founding members were all male, and which had only two women exhibiting within their later exhibitions: the designer Branka Hegedušić-Frangeš and the Bauhaus-trained weaver Otti Berger. A few decades later, Exat 51 (1950–56), a Zagreb-based group of designers, artists,

13 Lucy Lippard, quoted in Nanne Buurman, "Angels in the White Cube? Rhetorics of Curatorial Innocence at dOCUMENTA 13," *On Curating* 29 (May 2016), 157.

and architects, counted no female members, while the group Gorgona, the authors of the playful eponymous "anti-magazine" whose activities started in 1977 in Zagreb, equally gathered an entirely male network of eminent artists and art historians.

The 1960s and 1970s saw the introduction of conceptual art and pop culture when many Yugoslav artists, by then known as the New Art Practice generation, began to experiment, in many cases through forming collectives or, from the early 1970s onwards, gathering less formally around the newly created Student Cultural Centres in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana. Even though by that point a much larger number of female artists were active in the country, including the now well-known Sanja Iveković, Marina Abramović, Katalin Ladik, Bogdanka Poznanović, and others, the more formalized networks remained organized and led by male artists.

For instance, The Group of Six Artists, in Zagreb (1975 onwards), whose members were Boris Demur, Željko Jerman, Vlado Martek, Mladen Stilinović, Sven Stilinović, and Fedor Vučemilović, organized "exhibition-actions" in non-art spaces. It is not until 1978, when the Group of Six Artists launched the magazine MAJ/75, that the work of female artists was first included in its activities. MAJ/75, which ran for eighteen issues over six years, was printed in the studio of artists Vlasta Delimar and Željko Jerman, and it is through this collaboration that Delimar's work was included.[14]

Despite socialist Yugoslavia's (1943–91) progressive political position vis-à-vis gender equality (at least in terms of its public proclamations), artistic networks showed no signs of living up to this particular aspect of the country's promises of equality, at least not through their own structures. Women who came of age in the late 1960s and early 1970s in

Yugoslavia matured into what would prove to be a conflicting value system. On the one hand, they were brought up on the legacy of, and had great respect for, Yugoslavia's vital women's organization, the Anti-fascist Women's Front (Antifašistički front žena, AFŽ), which was an active entity during the

14 This account is not intended to be a comprehensive history of groups or collectives across the ex-Yugoslav cultural space, but a small sample used as an illustration of an overarching tendency observed during my research. Drawing attention to these groups' structures is as a way of triggering a conversation about the relation between their activities and their very foundations. Many other groups such as Decembarska Grupa (1955–60, Belgrade), Bosch+Bosch (1969, Subotica), Grupa TOK (1968), grupa 143 (1975–80) could equally be added to this list as examples of histories in which women either played marginal roles or no roles at all.

Second World War and central to women's postwar emancipation.[15] The legacy of the AFŽ promulgated equality between women and men (including equal pay) and sought to enable women to be active working members of society. On the other hand, Yugoslav women found themselves facing a gradual return of prewar bourgeois patriarchal traditions which dominated the private sphere and strove to make them once again solely responsible for domestic life and child-rearing (while upholding an outward image of their social equality).

As Bojana Pejić has highlighted, Yugoslav women found themselves negotiating private (the home) and public (the state) patriarchy while also gradually becoming "the invisible subject." "In the wake of WW2 women did gain equal rights but also a new kind of invisibility" summarized Jelena Petrović in writing about women's authorship in interwar Yugoslavia, and this was equally the case for female artists as for any other working women.[16]

The Different Phases of OHO

OHO was an artists' collective formed in 1962, in Kranj, Yugoslavia (today Slovenia). It comprised core members Milenko Matanović, David Nez, Marko

15 The Antifašistički front žena (AFŽ) was a women's social and political organization founded on December 6, 1942, in Bosanski Petrovac in Bosnia as part of the People's Liberation Struggle during the Second World War. Its primary goal was to unite all women in the struggle against the fascist enemy, which it strove to achieve through the inclusion of women in the partisan struggle, participation in armed operations and diversionary activities, organization of childcare, and actions related to the cultural and educational upbringing of women. Following the liberation of the country, the AFŽ engaged in addressing the consequences of the war on health, social, and cultural issues, particularly the care of the wounded and the children who had become war orphans. The AFŽ worked to enable the emancipation of women, investing great efforts into including women as broadly as possible in economic and political life. The AFŽ was active in the spheres of medical care, counselling, organization of school cafeterias, collective laundries, and dry-cleaning services. The AFŽ strongly opposed discrimination and disrespect toward women and gradually grew into a powerful social and political force in the country. The AFŽ was dissolved in 1953, after a decision by the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia based on the argument that the goal of gender equality could be more effectively reached through non-gender-specific agencies. The AFŽ was also criticized for allegedly becoming too involved in politics (in essence, for being too successful and having too much power), which led to its demise.

16 Jelena Petrović, *Women's Authorship in Interwar Yugoslavia: The Politics of Love and Struggle* (London: Palgrave, 2019).

Pogačnik, and Andraž Šalamun as well as a host of collaborators including Iztok Geister-Plamen, Marjan Ciglič, Tomaž Šalamun, Matjaž Hanšek, Naško Križnar, Vojin Kovač-Chubby, Aleš Kermavner, Franci Zagoričnik, Marika Pogačnik, Zvona Ciglič, and Nuša and Srečo Dragan.[17] Many other artists, poets, and thinkers had "light" associations with OHO, and were involved under a loose umbrella known as the OHO Katalog (OHO Catalog), sporadically collaborating with the founding members and participating in actions and projects. The group worked in Kranj, and Ljubljana between 1962 and 1971, later moving to Šempas, a small village in the Vipava valley in western Slovenia. Their activities ranged from literature and visual poetry to films, happenings, land art, and conceptual and participatory performances. OHO's early work was conceptually aligned with Arte Povera, land art, and happenings, and also incorporated body art practices, which combined into what Tomaž Brejc termed "transcendental conceptualism," referring to that which reaches beyond what our senses can represent. The group explored human connections to nature and the relationship between the body and its environment, and it also took inspiration from systems theory to create their installations. OHO was by no means unique in its broad range of activities, but the group's sudden and decisive withdrawal from the context of art in 1971 to form a commune and farm their own food stood out as an unusual gesture. In what is today a heavily mythologized act, the group was dissolved in 1971, decisively performing an exodus from the art context and the urban environment to settle in the Slovenian village of Šempas, to live off the land as a commune, under the moniker "The Šempas Family," in order to be closer to nature and to work as a group in harmony with the environment and the cosmos. The commune lasted for many years, despite the members' initial lack of knowledge of how to cultivate vegetables or live off the land. Eventually it was only Marko and Marika Pogačnik and their children who continued to live at this location, and the pair remain there to this day.

17 This is the most common list of artists associated with OHO as listed on the Kontakt Collection, Kuda.org, and Monoskop websites, among others, becoming the account that is most "practical" and most frequently replicated in academic sources. However, it is worth noting the shifting authorship within the group and the way individual projects are credited. For instance, in *Impossible Histories*, Miško Šuvaković's text lists different phases of the OHO group which are useful in a more detailed analysis of how authorship is attributed. Miško Šuvaković, "Conceptual Art," in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes, and Post-Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991*, eds. Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 213–18.

In relation to OHO, the central question that interested me was one of participation in artistic networks—who were the women we see in OHO's Super-8 films and in documentary material of the group's actions? What was the connection these women had to the actions of this early hippie art group, why were they willing to take part in these works, and most importantly, what happened to them afterwards? Are some of them artists today? The obvious answer, which I frequently encountered, was that these were girlfriends or friends of the male artists, who were, ostensibly, "hanging around" as a form of entourage of the group. In some cases these relationships developed into creative partnerships (the topic of artist couples is closely related to mine but is beyond the scope of this essay), while in many cases today we hear of the artists' groups but rarely do we hear about those who were involved in informal ways. I became particularly interested in women who for whatever reason did not cultivate their own artistic careers but who repeatedly appear around the groups in question, often taking supportive and nurturing roles.

Interviewing OHO members—Division of Labor, and Authorship versus Participation

My interviews with OHO members so far have included a conversation with founding member David Nez, whom I interviewed in 2014 in Poreč, Croatia, and a joint interview with Marko and Marika Pogačnik, at their home in Šempas, Slovenia, in 2019.

A central question emerged pertaining to different conceptions of what constitutes *authorship* versus what constitutes *participation*, and to the gendered nature of these ideas. Authorship in OHO, it emerged, is associated with the genesis of an idea, the "birth" of the overarching concept, while execution and realization are seen to exist in the realm of participation, or general "support." It is along these lines that involvement with OHO appears to have been delineated, albeit without the artists themselves feeling much of a need to search for such structuring devices.

In the process of preparing and conducting my interview with Marko and Marika Pogačnik, the dynamics of the different roles within the group immediately became evident through Marika's reluctance to be interviewed. I initially approached the couple via Marko Pogačnik's email address, following on from my initial correspondence with him in 2014. Despite my insistence

that it was *both* of them I wished to interview, I was repeatedly asked whether Marika's presence would really be necessary.

Some months later, in August 2019, the interview took place at their house in Šempas (the home of the Šempas Family commune, where the couple still live), with both Marika and Marko hosting us on their veranda (I was kindly accompanied by a fellow curator and museum director, Saša Nabergoj). The interview started with them asking me once again whether Marika really needed to stay, making it clear that they would rather I spoke to Marko only. Upon my insistence on Marika's presence, she did remain for the duration of the interview, but it was Marko who took the lead in answering my questions. As the interview progressed, I occasionally interjected, interrupting the flow of Marko's answers, explicitly directing the same questions to Marika.

Marika frequently left the table, excusing herself in order to tend to the food that was being cooked. Her tone was filled with humor. As a way of explaining her reluctance to take part in the interview, she laughingly stated:

> I am a very bad speaker [conversationalist]. I am a good worker but a bad speaker. So, it is all divided. Some of us work, some of us speak. [*laughs*]

To this Marko added,

> Without her, nothing would work.[18]

Despite OHO's and the Šempas Family's deep commitment to the unity of art and life, a profoundly ingrained hierarchy between the way ideas are generated and their delivery and production was evident, as demonstrated in Marko's explanation of OHO's working process:

> And authorship did not exist, really, authorship did not exist. This work was collective. My concepts were the only authorship; I thought it was important that what we were doing would have a concept and to express that, for it to be conceptually clear, to be presented.[19]

Articulating simultaneously the lack of authorship and a clear attachment to singular authorship epitomizes the dichotomy in OHO—the genuine belief in collaboration halted by a reluctance to unravel the structures that propped up the smooth functioning of the group. This double conception of roles involved in the making of an artwork was articulated differently by various members

18 Author's interview with Marko and Marika Pogačnik, Šempas, Slovenia, August, 2019.

19 Interview with Marko and Marika Pogačnik.

of the group. The nurturing, supportive role women played within OHO was also foregrounded by David Nez, a founding member of the OHO group, in an interview in which I asked him about the presence of female artists in OHO's works:

> That's a really good question. I don't know—we just never really had any women. They always played more of a supportive role. Maybe that was just the '60s … […] It wasn't until feminism that women started coming out and having a voice. I mean, you could say that we were the continuity of the same old patriarchal … .
> But it is a good question, I think it was just the fact that the '60s had not yet seen women's liberation, it wasn't till later when that really came along. We never even thought about that. There were not really any women that were involved in the avant-garde as far as I know.
> I had a girlfriend, and she was always kind of jealous of OHO but she was never a part of the inner circle. We just had a strong bond between us, the four or five of us. Marika was always … the soul in a sense. She'd invite everyone for dinner, she was like everybody's mother, she was like my mother, like my surrogate mother, you know?
> LD: Yes, nurturing, supportive, and kind?[20]

For Nez, an American artist who studied in Ljubljana, who participated in early OHO activities as a founding member but moved back to the United States in 1972, the women involved were practically invisible, while he also implies a certain co-dependence and reliance on their presence, support, and participation.

An example of such hierarchies can also be seen in the credits of the 35 mm film *Beli Ljudje* (White People, 1969/1970), featuring a large group of men, women, children, and animals covered in white body paint handling white objects and eating white food in an entirely white environment. In the credits, the author of the work is cited as Naško Križnar, another "core" OHO member, with a host of collaborators working on the script, while the other participants are listed as "bodies." (fig. 6.1) Art historian Ksenya Gurshtein has observed that

> In *Beli Ljudje*, the term "bodies" points not only to the transnational 1960s rhetoric of the sexual liberation of the body, but also highlights the uncertain

20 Author's interview with David Nez, Poreč, Croatia, July 2014.

status of the people we see on the screen as neither the actors' real selves (since the film is scripted), nor those of properly named or defined fictional characters.[21]

Figure 6.1: Naško Križnar, "Beli Ljudje" (White People), 1970, 12'.

Stills from the 35 mm film. Courtesy of Marko Pogačnik.

The participants' semi-fictional roles in OHO's works, their willingness to take part and act out a script (or in many street actions, to follow set rules and instructions), bring forth the question of agency in the making of these works. The question of what constituted authorship is highlighted in Nez's thinking about Marika Pogačnik's participation:

DN: Yes, but she wasn't really an artist.
LD: She didn't think of herself in that way?
DN: Yes, but she was very talented in terms of crafts and sewing and all that

21 Ksenya Gurshtein, "When Film and Author Made Love: Reconsidering OHO's Film Legacy," *Kino!* 11–12 (November, 2010).

> and collaborated a lot with Marko. And she has, since then, assumed, very much, the role of a collaborator.

The useful deployment of traditional gendered hierarchies of art and craft fits smoothly into the relegation of women's roles to those of careers and the transposition of familial roles onto the collective. This is echoed in Marko Pogačnik's spatial analogy which depicts a binary gendered division between the "internal" (private) and "external" (public) sphere:

> That is yin and yang, something is toward the internal life of a group, not just the wives and friends but others that were part of this circle, that was facing internally. And facing outwardly were men. Internally, women had the main role, facing outwards were the men. And there is some sense in that, in the end.[22]

He goes on to state that later this changed and in their later works they searched for an equilibrium, as part of their quest for the unity of art and life. He spoke about the works made as part of the Šempas Family in which the women and children were involved.

> That changed, later we were not happy with that, that was one of the reasons why we formed a commune, where that shared moment was at the center, […] we then moved onto works where women and children took part too. For example, the mobiles made of wool and wood, clay and steel, and drawings […]. That was life/work in the fields and in the workshops with clay and wool … we tried to find an ideal way to achieve an equilibrium.[23]

While there is no doubt that Marko Pogačnik (alongside a number of other artists) had a leading role in the authorship of OHO's works, accounts also point to the agency of Marika Pogačnik beyond the roles of producer, nurturer, and "surrogate mother." In the interview with art historian Beti Žerovc in *ARTMargins* (2013), a number of Marko Pogačnik's statements reveal Marika's active involvement not only in the making of the work but also in decision-making:

22 Interview with Marko and Marika Pogačnik.

23 Interview with Marko and Marika Pogačnik.

> My wife Marika and I drew conceptual diagrams of all our projects so that we could make copies and distribute them.[24]

This was followed by:

> When Walter de Maria came to Kranj to visit Marika and me, he tried to talk us into that [becoming actively involved in the international conceptual art scene—LD], on the grounds that we could rank high, as it were, among conceptual groups internationally. In the end, though, we decided on a completely different step, based on our group spiritual schooling.[25]

The role played by Marika Pogačnik in OHO and the Šempas Family is no doubt as crucial as that played by her partner, Marko Pogačnik. But it is *the way* in which her role is articulated and the value that is assigned to the type of work she contributed that renders her input seemingly less valuable in the grand hegemonic narratives of art history. Just as in other work environments, artistic work is dependent upon the invisible, un(der)paid, and undervalued work of social reproduction, without which even the basic structures would collapse. In the case of OHO, might it be possible to take Marko Pogačnik to task in his quest to "achieve an equilibrium" in the Šempas Family by broadening the realm of authorship to encompass (and make visible) *all* of the Šempas Family's activities, thus expanding the boundaries of what it means to develop a concept for a work of art?

As Mierle Laderman Ukeles's "Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969! Proposal for an Exhibition: CARE" has taught us, the visible "top layer" of art only exists because it rests on numerous invisible layers of work done to enable the visible, i.e., the artwork. Ukeles aptly reminds us that the balance between the highly valued work that she terms "Development" and the overlooked and undervalued work that is "Maintenance" is never going to be equal because "maintenance is a drag. It takes all the fucking time."[26] The equilibrium Pogačnik refers to can thus only be achieved if cooking, cleaning, raising children, and producing craftwork are seen, valued, and made visible as intrinsic to the highly valued process of concept development.

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24 Beti Žerovc, "The OHO Files: Interview with Marko Pogačnik," *ARTMargins Online*, July 27, 2013, http://artmargins.com/the-oho-files-interview-with-marko-poganik/.

25 Žerovc, "The OHO Files."

26 Mierle Laderman Ukeles "Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969! Proposal for an Exhibition: CARE," 1969 https://feldmangallery.com/exhibition/manifesto-for-maintenance-art-1969.

So, what is to be done about gendered art historical narratives which continue to reproduce hierarchies of highly valued *authors* and undervalued "*support workers*"? The tension underpinning the workings of OHO—a group ahead of its time which set out to challenge established moral norms and, in forming the Šempas Family, also shunned the nuclear family structure—is the tension of deeply embedded patriarchal, heteronormative structures which even OHO's radical thinkers could not transgress.

Notes toward Feminist Interventions into Art's Histories

While a critical analysis of Yugoslav collectives based on gender differentiations may obfuscate the political potential of collective practices, and particularly the undoing of individualism running through the veins of the art system, such an analysis cannot be ignored, as collective artistic practices that aim to free us from individualism cannot succeed in doing so if they reproduce the very inequalities (including gender) that they seek to undo. The perpetuation of inequality and subjugation of certain subjects within the collective fundamentally limits the group's potential to deinstitutionalize and deindividualize. Simply accepting existing narratives, those centered on artworks as the only valid and valuable outputs of the achievements of these collectives, is no longer acceptable, and a paradigm shift is needed to allow for *all* aspects of collective activities to be understood as constituent and equal elements of their work, thus rendering the hitherto passive voices into key active agents of their operations.

In seeking to define a feminist approach to building contemporary paradigms of knowledge production about historical art practices, we must think with Griselda Pollock that we are not creating "a feminist art history but a 'feminist intervention' in art's histories."[27] Strategies for such interventions must transform not just our thinking but the discipline as a whole, drawing not just on art history itself but on a much broader constellation of struggles, connecting to the legacy of the women's movement, building allegiances across a number of fields. As Elke Krasny, in search for such an approach, noted: "it is indeed possible to initiate dialogue and to create temporary

27 Griselda Pollock, "Feminist Interventions in the Histories of Art: An Introduction," in: *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), 5.

alignments between activists, artists, curators, educators, historians, museum directors, researchers, theorists and scholars who are actively involved in women's museums or in the field of feminist curating."[28]

Lastly, in thinking with Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry about the writing of art histories, we may ask what would happen if we might for a moment turn away from feminist artists to feminist curators? In the case of Yugoslavia, my research has, unsurprisingly, revealed myriad women's perspectives—these are the women whose careers turned away from making and toward contextualizing, enabling, curating, producing, and, yes, supporting other artists. The women I interviewed and continue to interview are the ones whose narratives have remained secondary, those so-called "support workers" whose own achievements, conveniently for neat hegemonic narratives, fell outside of the boundaries of "authorship" worth writing about, thus remaining invisible, or at best, secondary. Thinking with Dimitrakaki and Perry:

> Could such a turn (imagined rather than actual at present) discover a different route into feminism's art histories? Would this displacement of the artist in favour of the curator permit greater insight into why feminism has not in fact succeeded at transforming a capitalist art institution (once belonging to the west but now globally hegemonic) that has, arguably and paradoxically, managed to both include women artists and exclude or neutralize feminist politics?[29]

Perhaps if the stories of these women were to be seen as primary accounts, as opposed to secondary narratives telling others' stories, we may begin to intervene into art's histories through a more textured and nuanced set of experiences and perspectives.

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28 Elke Krasny, "Introduction," in *Women's:Museum: Curatorial Politics in Feminism, Education, History, and Art*, eds. Elke Krasny and Frauenmuseum Meran (Vienna: Löcker Verlag, 2013), 16.

29 Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry, *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 17.