

The “Yugoeslavia” Folder

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——— In 2018, the Uruguayan-Slovene artist Francisco Tomsich launched the artistic research project *Give my regards to those you connect*, an exploration on connections and dialogues between artists from the former Yugoslavia and the River Plate region corresponding through the Mail Art network from the late 1960s onward. The research’s point of departure was a list of postal addresses from artists in Serbia prepared prior to the dissolution of Yugoslavia by the Uruguayan artist Clemente Padín and expanded in 2019 by Tomsich through the study of the “Yugoeslavia” folder at the General Archive of the University of the Republic of Uruguay. This paper traces the project’s development in Uruguay and Serbia in 2019 and summarises some of its achievements while describing the author’s approach to artistic research and the key issues of method, archive, comparative art histories, institutional context and failure.

Keywords: Mail art, Yugoslav art history, Serbian art history, Uruguayan art history, Clemente Padín, artistic research, archive, method, dictatorship, institutions, failure.

Send My Regards to Those You Connect

For a better understanding of what follows, it is important to present here a brief contextual narrative which manifests a strong autobiographical character. It also illustrates my approach to artistic research in general, and to the specific research I am dealing with in this essay, as a “*continuum* <...> in research and life [which] runs from being an interested outsider into being an immersed participant”¹.

I began my artistic career (exhibitions, publications, founding of artists’ associations) in Montevideo, Uruguay, between 2001 and 2006. I emigrated to Europe in 2013 and at the end of 2014, I moved to Ljubljana, Slovenia. I started that year to develop the long-term artistic research framework and model of actuation *Talgia*, focused on the study, adoption, use and manipulation of elements from the culture, history and art practices of Yugoslavia² and the former Yugoslavian countries, exploring at the same time the relationships, connections, similarities and differences between them and their correlatives in the Southern Cone³ of South America⁴. *Talgia*’s range of products, outcomes and public appearances goes from essays and poems to paintings and films, from academic papers and translations to art exhibitions, collective platforms and collaborations⁵.

On the 18th of February 2015, I visited an exhibition dedicated to the work of the poet, visual artist and art historian Josip Stošić (Zagreb, Croatia, 1935–2009) in Ljubljana. Shortly afterwards, I emailed the poet,

1 Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta, and Tere Vadén, *Artistic research methodology: Narrative, Power and the Public*, New York: Peter Lang, 2014, p. 61.

2 I understood the term “Yugoslavia” here in its broadest sense, comprising “the countries that made up the various Yugoslavian political entities that formally existed and I believe that persist at various levels”; Guido Herzovich, “El país que persiste en las películas. Una introducción conversada al cine yugoslavo. Entrevista a Francisco Tomsich”, in: *Eslavia*, [online], December 2019, No. 4, [cited 10-09-2020], <https://eslavia.com.ar/el-pais-que-persiste-en-las-peliculas-una-introduccion-conversada-al-cine-yugoslavo-entrevista-a-francisco-tomsich/>.

3 Traditionally, the term “Southern Cone” refers to the more or less (economically, culturally, historically, linguistically) homogeneous geographical area comprising the countries of Argentina, Uruguay and Chile. In a broader sense, as I understood it here, it includes Paraguay and the south of Brazil as well.

4 The first stage of this research framework, entitled *Realisms, allegories and functions: towards an assimilation of recent visual art practices from Eastern Europe*, was granted in 2013 with an Artistic Research Scholarship for Young Artists (FEFCA) from the Ministry of Education and Culture of Uruguay (MEC).

5 See: <https://anticlimacus.wordpress.com/category/talgia/> Among the projects developed in *Talgia*’s framework which are related to this research, I should mention the exhibition and research programme “Ice Floe. The institutional issue. Crossroads between Eastern Europe and the River Plate region”, organized together with the association of artists MACMO (Museum of Contemporary Art of Montevideo) and the National Museum for the Visual Arts of Montevideo, Uruguay.

visual artist, theorist and activist Clemente Padín (Lascano, Uruguay, b. 1939), whom I have known since at least 2008 and have interviewed on various occasions. After mentioning some of the close similarities between his and Stošić's works, I asked him if he was: "still in contact with interesting artists from the former Yugoslavia that I should contact"⁶. I was aware that Padín was at the heart of the Mail Art network⁷ from its very beginnings and I also knew about certain Yugoslav artists who were part of it and had had exchanges with Padín from the end of the 1960s onward⁸. Nonetheless, it is important to stress here that I was never particularly interested in this area of Padín's work⁹. My knowledge of the history and achievements of Mail Art at an international level was quite limited. I was, at this moment, just an "interested outsider". This essay traces some of the events and actions that made me "an immersed participant" throughout a process whose point of departure is Padín's answer to the aforementioned email, written on the 19th of February 2015:

Sí, con gusto <...> ahí va mi carpeta con contactos en Serbia <...> Te recomiendo a Nenad Bogdanovic, performer, a Dobrica Kamperelic, tal vez el más importante e influyente y a Miroljub Todorovic, tal vez el más importante como creador.
Dale mis saludos a quienes conectes y mucha suerte, estimado amigo [...].¹⁰

6 Francisco Tomsich, "Gmail – Pregunta", in: Francisco Tomsich's personal archive, Dale mis saludos a quienes conectes/Archivo/Correspondencia con Clemente Padín, fol. 1, p. 1 (2015).

7 The term "Mail Art" was coined in the decade of 1960. The Mail Art Network was an international network of numerous artists and cultural workers from various fields active since then and centered on the exchange of small-scale works (postcards, drawings, prints, etc.) through the postal service. Its history is crossed and fed by numerous global literary and artistic movements (Visual and Concrete Poetry, Performance Art, Conceptualism, etc.), associations and art groups (*Fluxus* and *Noigandres*, for instance), magazines and networks of activists.

8 Padín was the first publisher of works representing Miroljub Todorović's *Signalism* movement in South America, for instance (magazine *Ovum 10*, No. 4, Montevideo, September 1970). Padín's works were also extensively shown in exhibitions and published in avant-garde magazines from Serbia and Vojvodina, especially in the decade of 1970.

9 I have extensively studied the performative aspect of Padín's work. See, for instance, Francisco Tomsich, "De qué se repite, cómo y por qué: modelos de re-enactment en el arte contemporáneo y actual. Un panorama crítico", in: *Museo* (Montevideo), 2014, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 1–29. The article is available online: https://www.academia.edu/7708148/DE_QU%C3%89_SE_REPITE_C%C3%93MO_Y_POR_QU%C3%89_Modelos_de_re_enactment_en_el_arte_contempor%C3%A1neo_y_actual_Un_panorama_cr%C3%ADtico [cited 09-10-2020].

10 "Yes, with pleasure <...> here it is, my portfolio of contacts in Serbia <...> I recommend you Nenad Bogdanović, a performance artist; Dobrica Kamperelić, perhaps the most important and influential one, and Miroljub Todorović, maybe the most important one as a creator. Give my regards to those you connect and good luck, dear friend [...]"; Clemente Padín, "Gmail – Pregunta", in: Francisco Tomsich's personal archive, Dale mis saludos a quienes conectes/Archivo/Correspondencia con Clemente Padín, fol. 1, p. 2 (2015).

It happens sometimes that an apparently innocuous (physical or conceptual) object unleashes a maelstrom of evolving effects and unexpected consequences. Padín's attached contact list of Yugoslav artists who had been corresponding with him for many years was one of those Proust's *madelaines*. It comprised the names and contact information of six artists (two of them presented as a couple)¹¹ from different cities of what is now called just "Serbia", but "Yugoslavia" or (later) "Serbia and Montenegro" back then when the list was (gradually) built.

Postal addresses, I thought when I read the list, are complex artifacts everywhere, but they are even more complex in places like Belgrade, where odonyms have been subject, for several decades, to periodical radical and abrupt changes¹². Three of the contacts on the list included email addresses: two of them were evidently useless, since they ended in .yu, the internet country code top-level domain (ccTLD) assigned to Yugoslavia, which expired on 30 March 2010¹³, and the third one proved to be outdated as well. That uselessness of the email addresses triggered the conception of an artistic research project based on the possibility of still relying only on the postal addresses in order to contact those persons. I wrote down the first sketch of a research project immediately after reading the list. In 2018, after many unsuccessful applications, the project was granted, under the name *Give my regards to those you connect*, with a fund (amounting to 288.850 Uruguayan pesos¹⁴) from the programme Fondo Concursable para la Cultura (FCC) of the Ministry of Education and Culture of Uruguay, Visual Arts division. I started work on the project in December 2018.

A Black Hole: The "Yugoeslavia" Folder

The objectives and methods of the *Give my regards to those you connect* project were articulated on the application form provided to the FCC programme in the following way:

¹¹ Filimir, Nenad Bogdanović, Rora & Dobrica Kamperelić, Igor Bartolech and Miroљjub Todorović.

¹² Srdan Radović, *Belgrade Odonyms*, Belgrade: Dragana Radojičić, 2014.

¹³ See: <https://web.archive.org/web/20100201171046/http://www.rnids.rs/en/node/67> [cited 09-10-2020].

¹⁴ Approx. 7800 euros at the time.

Clemente Padín's list is the only document with which Francisco Tomsich will travel to Belgrade in order to locate those artists or their heirs, interview them, send them regards from Padín and investigate their activities in the years when they were part of the [Mail Art] network, their further developments and their connections with Uruguay, the River Plate region and South America. The field research period in Belgrade will be documented through a multimedia diary (drawing, painting, video, writing, photography, sound) whose further editing will be the project's primary output <...> supplemented by archival pieces and original documents related to the Uruguayan and Argentine connections of the Yugoslav artists, exhibitions and a series of publications and public presentations in Montevideo and Belgrade that will lay the groundwork for further development of the project as a platform for research and exchange between artists from both continents. <...> [The artist's] privileged tools are *conversation* and *walking*.¹⁵

A brief summary of the project's stages and achievements read as follows:

1) In December 2018, I spent one month in Montevideo studying the "Yugoeslavia" folder [Fig. 1] at the Clemente Padín Archive, hosted by The University of the Republic of Uruguay. I then compiled a more extensive list of addresses from Yugoslav artists represented in the binder but not included in the list sent by Padín in February 2015, which he accessed from his personal computer. That final list summoned postal addresses for 18 artists, one politician¹⁶ and 4 art galleries in Serbia (cities of Belgrade, Kragujevac, Priboj, Subotica, Odžaci and Novi Sad)¹⁷. I photographed many pieces (postcards, drawings, catalogues) and made a selection of some noteworthy ones, according to their contents (explicit political statements, remarkable artistic quality or mysterious provenance/unidentified authorship) [Fig. 2]. Finally, I conducted a long and detailed interview with Clemente Padín, recorded on video by the documentary filmmaker Henrike von Dewitz.

¹⁵ Francisco Tomsich, Formulario de postulación y cartas de interés, in: Francisco Tomsich's personal archive, Dale mis saludos a quienes conectes/Papeles Fondos Concursables, fol. 1, pp. 2–4 (2018).

¹⁶ Milan Panić (b. 1929) was Prime Minister of Yugoslavia in 1992, and ran against Slobodan Milošević in that year's Serbian general election. His address, provided in a leaflet sent by an unknown artist, was the one of the Federal Executive Council 1, also known as the Palace of the Federation back then (Lenin Boulevard 2, Belgrade), now Palace of Serbia (Maihailo Pupin Boulevard 2). I still do not know who sent the leaflet.

¹⁷ In addition, I compiled three more addresses from Slovenia (Celje), Montenegro (Podgorica) and Macedonia (Prilep).



1. The “Yugoeslavia” Folder; Clemente Padín Archive, General Archive, University of the Republic of Uruguay, Montevideo, photo by Francisco Tomsich, December 2019

2) Between February and May 2019 I was based in Slovenia, making preparations and discussing my project with artists and researchers from Ljubljana, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Sarajevo and Trieste.

3) I moved to Belgrade on the 1st of June. After two unsuccessful attempts at visiting the artists from the list without previous announcement or arrangement (verifying the accuracy of one of the addresses by doing so)¹⁸, I decided to change my strategy, and I posted letters (in English) to all the artists from the list in the territory of Serbia, attaching printed copies of some of their works kept in the Clemente Padín archive. In the meanwhile, I started to frequent the cultural venue, the Center for Cultural Decontamination¹⁹, where I met some artists, researchers and cultural workers who showed some interest in my project. One of them was the Belgrade-based researcher Nenad Vujić, whose exhaustive research on the history of Yugoslavia’s experimental music and cassette culture²⁰ allowed him to recognise

¹⁸ One of the artists declined to receive me. The others (a couple) were not at home. Even if their names were written on the doorbell, they never answered the letter I left in the post box. I could not confirm from other sources whether they still resided at the same address.

¹⁹ Centar za kulturnu dekontaminaciju (CZKD). See: <https://www.czkd.org/en/>.

²⁰ See: <https://ahogonsindustrialguide.blogspot.com/>.



2.
An unidentified (at the time of the registry) piece from the “Yugoeslavia” folder; Clemente Padín Archive, General Archive, University of the Republic of Uruguay, Montevideo, photo by Francisco Tomsich

some names from my list as authors of recordings and founders of collectives and experimental music groups he knew well²¹. Thanks to Nenad, I learned something more about the activities and whereabouts of some of the artists I had sent letters to. One of them had died not long ago, one of them was working in a factory in New Zealand and another was based in the Netherlands. Some of the artists who were part of the rich artistic scene in the northern region of Vojvodina in the 1970s had moved to Hungary in recent years. On the 28th of June I held an event at the CZKD²², in which I presented and discussed the *Give my regards to those you connect* project and the first sketch of the short experimental film *Sa vodom iz ispranih revolvera*²³ (*With water from washed revolvers*) [Fig. 3], based on extracts of my video diaries during my field research period. At the end of June I received the first answers to my letters. On the 1st of July I conducted, together with Henrike von Dewitz, an interview with the multimedia artist, art critic and poet Andrej Tišma (Novi Sad, 1952) in Novi Sad. The next day we travelled to Odžaci, a small city not far from the capital of Vojvodina, where we met

21 “Mail art and its network – the sum total of its interacting focal nodes – was especially instrumental in constituting cassette experimentalism as a separate phenomenon”; Nenad Vujić, “The cannibal cassette”, an essay for the upcoming publication on the project, exhibited at the exhibition *The “Yugoeslavia” folder*, Museum of Memory, Montevideo, December 2019–February 2020.

22 „Yugoeslavia“ folder i slične priče – razgovor sa umetnikom Franciskom Tomsičem. See: <https://www.czkd.org/2019/06/yugoeslavia-folder-i-sliene-price/>.

23 The first edition of *Silent Works | Essays | Sa vodom iz ispranih revolvera* (black and white, silent, 7'45", 2019) was included in the exhibition *The “Yugoeslavia folder”* as a mono-channel video installation accompanied by the DVD booklet. It was later exhibited in Francisco Tomsich’s exhibition *Elegija; Cirkulacija 2*, Ljubljana, July 2020, see: <http://www.cirkulacija2.org/?p=6816>.



3.

With water from washed revolvers (Sa vodom iz ispranih revolvera) as video installation at Francisco Tomsich, *Elegija, Cirkulacija 2*, Ljubljana, photo by Francisco Tomsich, July 2020

the visual and performance artist, publisher and curator Nenad Bogdanović (Odžaci, 1955), who expressed, after confronting some contradictory memories, his wish to travel to Uruguay in the framework of the project. More or less at the same time, I succeeded in establishing contact via email with two artists who I could not meet in person were, and I conducted written interviews with them²⁴. On the 4th of July, we finally met Rorica and Dobrica Kamperelić at their house in Belgrade. Rorica and Dobrica Kamperelić collaborated for many years in different artistic activities until the latter's death in January 2020. Dobrica Kamperelić is considered a major figure in Yugoslav experimental and avant-garde poetics, and his wife and artistic partner Rorica Kamperelić was the only woman mentioned in Padín's first list. All these face-to-face interviews were conducted without a common script. Sending Clemente Padín's regards was the starting point of a series of conversations that moved over the personal history of the artists' engagement with Mail Art activities, their archives, the stories behind them, their linkage to South American artists in general and to Padín in particular. In addition, I was interested in finding some clues to the origin or authorship

²⁴ One of them lives in Serbia and answered my letter. The other one lives in New Zealand: his email address was given to me by a third person I met in Belgrade during the field research period.



4.
Dobrica and Rorica Kamperelić with the mould used to produce the “Lenin stamp”, Belgrade, photo by Francisco Tomsich, 04-07-2020

of some pieces from the Montevidean “Yugoeslavia” folder. Thus, showing a copy of the “Lenin stamp” [Fig. 2] to Kamperelić, for instance, led to an extraordinary situation where he confirmed he was the author of it and the mould used to produce it was documented [Fig. 4].

4) Back in Slovenia (September–October 2019) and Uruguay (November–December), I selected and edited materials to be shown at *The “Yugoeslavia” folder*, an exhibition comprising film, video, photography, objects, prints, texts and documents inaugurated in the Museum of Memory of Montevideo on the 13th of December [Fig. 5]. The opening of the exhibition was attended by a large number of visitors²⁵, Clemente Padín among them. Nenad Bogdanović was also present, and he performed his work *Human code*²⁶ on the occasion. Bogdanović was able to travel to Montevideo in the framework of the *Give my regards to those you connect* project thanks to the support of the Ministry of Culture of Serbia and (through my own mediation) the Contemporary Art Space from the Ministry of Education and Culture of Uruguay.

²⁵ 1313, following the Museum’s own estimation, in: Francisco Tomsich’s personal archive, Dale mis saludos a quienes conectes/Papeles Fondos Concursables/Papeles finales/Constancia de actividad 1_Inauguración de la muestra_opt, fol. 3, p. 1 (2019).

²⁶ See: <https://anticlimacus.wordpress.com/2019/12/16/the-yugoeslavia-folder-opening/>.



5. Artists Nenad Bogdanović and Clemente Padín together with researcher May Puchet watch the documentary film *We'll see us tomorrow* (Henrike von Dewitz, 2019) at *The "Yugoslavia" folder*, Montevideo, Museum of Memory, photo by Henrike von Dewitz, 13-12-2019

5) At the time of this writing, *Give my regards to those you connect* as a project developed in the framework of a state-run funding programme is being formally completed. It is planned to set up and launch the next stage in 2021–2022, and it will include a publication and a series of presentations and exhibitions that will allow the revision and expansion of the research's goals and focuses. Some steps in order to initiate the research on the Slovenian, Montenegrin and Macedonian connections were already made in 2019 and will be continued in the near future.

The Politics of Archives

The fact that I had a privileged role in making possible the reunion of Bogdanović and Padín in Montevideo confirmed the fact that I was *an immersed participant* in the phenomena I was researching in a way that

addresses the issue of the “artistic” character of the “research” and how the applied method²⁷ differs from that of the art historian. This point has something to do with the paradoxical documentary character of the list and with the operations used to re-activate it. The group of decisions taken in order to carry out the project (exclusive reliance on the list of postal addresses and reproduction of Mail Art strategies being the most important) were intended to avoid the necessity of providing any further justification for my presence and intentions. I was there to send regards from Clemente Padín and prove the reliability of the list.

Therefore, a calculated manipulation of the idea of monumentalisation of the list’s contents came into play. The actual information about the individuals represented on the list became a historical object in itself. It was taken away from the archive and critically deprived of its former function (a reliable source of contact information) in order to acquire the same function in another context, with different purposes. Paradoxically, this updating operation was done by replicating some of the technological conditions of production of the list itself. The researcher depended exclusively on it to start with, and consciously dismissed the use of internet-based social networks as appropriate tools in the context of his interest. Since this decision was taken at the very conception of the project, I never searched for the artists’ names in Google or similar search engines, neither did I look for them in social networks. I consciously avoided them on the internet, I knew nothing about them aside from what arose from the (physical) archives I was studying in order to produce the project. In terms of scientific research, this methodological decision is limiting, passive, completely arbitrary and impractical. In terms of an artistic research based on “artistic thinking”²⁸, it represents the main path to a potential method²⁹ itself. At

27 The question of methodology is at the core of much of the contemporary discussion about artistic research, as it evidently asserts many of the most important topics surrounding the notions of specificity, epistemological foundations, classification, value and criteria.

28 “a form of thinking characteristic of artistic practices, in which reliance on experience, the bodily and sensory human existence, the recognition of uniqueness, being immersed and enchanted by something, being vulnerable and being communicative are essential features.”; Mika Hannula et al., *op. cit.*, p. 61.

29 “A method is a road to go over and over again; a path that is offered to us in a stable, affordable way, which in turn offers no preparation or guidance: place of arrival rather than departure, a place of coexistence therefore. What has made it necessary and possible has been deleted, previously canceled. It is therefore offered as something immediate for those who find it, who is, from the beginning, invited to be in it, within it.”; María Zambrano, *Notas de un método*, Madrid: Mondadori, 1989, p. 19.

the same time, and in accordance with that, I never tried to conceal that I was searching for something but did not know exactly what. Acting as an artist, not a historian, I was ready to alter the current conditions and coordinates of my study subject (inviting Bogdanović to Montevideo, for instance, to give a performance and meeting Clemente Padín at his house as an unexpected but constituent part of the project).

On the other side, I do not think that imagining an exhibition as the main and most important outcome of a research project guarantees the artistic character of the endeavour in question. Nevertheless, the institutional aspects cannot be avoided in a discussion of the issue. *The “Yugoeslavia” folder* was an exhibition produced with all the prerogatives, assumptions and conditions of a *visual arts* exhibition. It made use of the tools, languages and devices commonly accepted in the visual arts field by a professional visual artist supported by an official (national) cultural institution in another governmental institution devoted and prepared to produce, manage and draw public attention to precisely these kinds of outcomes. The Museum of Memory, however, is not just any institution. I insisted, in spite of many obstacles, on holding the exhibition project there, with the conviction that there was not another museum or exhibition room in Montevideo adequate to the research’s objectives and connotations.

The Museum of Memory was founded in 2006 by the government of the city of Montevideo as “an institution devoted to build the memory of state-run terrorism and the struggle of the Uruguayan people against the dictatorship, in order to provide the new generations with knowledge of the recent history of our country [...]”³⁰. This description alludes to the right-wing, neoliberal civic-military authoritarian regime in power in Uruguay between 1973 and 1985, which was responsible for (with help from the government of the U.S. and the Argentinean and Chilean contemporary military dictatorships) the illegal arrest and torture of thousands of political opponents, the exile of ca. 10% of the country’s population and the kidnapping and assassination of ca. 200 persons, most of them never found again and called *desaparecidos* (disappeared people)³¹. Both the Yugoslav-South

³⁰ “Centro Cultural Museo de la Memoria”, in: *Museo de la Memoria*, [online], 2020, p. 1, [cited 09-10-2020], <https://mume.montevideo.gub.uy/museo/centro-cultural-museo-de-la-memoria>.

³¹ The independent organization Mothers and Relatives of Detained and Disappeared Uruguayan Citizens lists 197 names of *desaparecidos* (updated May 2020). See: <https://desaparecidos.org.uy/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Lista-Detenidos-Desaparecidos-Actualizada-Mayo-2020.pdf>.

American connection and Clemente Padín's practice and archive are traversed, and traverse, those crucial events of Uruguay's recent history. My pivotal interests as a researcher, as well as the institutional background of the research's first public appearance, deal with those specific dialogues as well.

Clemente Padín's stance in relation to the dictatorship's illegitimate and criminal nature and the question of the *desaparecidos*, for instance, was always transparent, and he articulated it on countless occasions as an essayist, performance artist³², visual poet, activist and public persona. The coherence and persistence of this position was the main reason why Padín was one of the artists invited to present a work of his own at the inauguration of the Museum of Memory (2007). It is noticeable that raising awareness about this issue is one of the red threads of Padín's work as a mail artist too, as demonstrated by many pieces produced and distributed from the 1980s onward (he was not alone in this endeavour, however, either in Uruguay or in the rest of South America). Taking into consideration the fact that Padín's level of involvement and support in the making of the *Give my regards to those you connect* project was extremely high, it is worth mentioning here that the political national context in which this research and the opening of *The "Yugoeslavia" folder* unfolded was one of uneasiness. This was in November 2019, just when a newly formed coalition of right- and far right-wing parties won the Uruguayan national elections, showing off in the way discourses which often came to defend, justify or even deny the crimes of the dictatorship. In that context, *The "Yugoeslavia" folder* was, as I noticed after a special guided tour for the museum's staff, a way of re-staging and re-activating historical emancipatory, critical and resistant positions, and showing how they found their way to be heard and seen in a wider international scope.

At the level of the exhibition's device, this aspect was visible in a series of printed archival documents collected during the research's development, as well as in Nenad Bogdanović's performance, focused on mass production, genetic manipulation and digital control. But it assumed a real prominence almost by chance. The room given to *The "Yugoeslavia" folder* at the Museum of Memory usually hosts the "Popular Resistance" section of the institution's permanent exhibition, summoning different kinds

³² See, for instance: Francisco Tomsich, "Los desaparecidos no son líneas de ómnibus", in: *Brecha* (Montevideo), July 2010, p. 27. Also available online: <https://icaa.mfah.org/s/en/item/1240643#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-1673%2C0%2C5895%2C3299>.

of documents and objects “produced to confront, resist and denounce the dictatorial regime”³³: leaflets, publications, journals, magazines from various banned organisations and so on. One of the pieces on display there is a collection of old pots and pans [Fig. 6] hanging from the room’s ceiling. It alludes to the *caceroleadas* [*cacerola* = pot], a mode of collective demonstration against the regime done by banging pots and pans that became very popular (and effective) in the last years of the dictatorship. While mounting the show, I was confronted with the decision of whether to remove them or not, since their imposing presence was evidently neither visually nor discursively in dialogue with the elements I was arranging for the exhibition. At the same time, they looked so appropriate, too fused with the space, almost immovable. On the 4th of December 2019 I wrote an email to Nenad Vujić in which I mentioned, among other things, the pots. His answer included a comment on the photo of the installation that I had sent to him:

we had a similar practice during Milosević times. People banged pots from their windows and terraces at 19:30 each day – when the central news programme would start airing on the national TV – and [they]would bang them for 20 minutes or so till the programme ended.³⁴

After reading this, I just printed and framed the four sheets of our exchange of emails and hung them on the wall close to the installation of the pots, now re-activated and re-signified by an easy-to-grasp, poetical and truthful symbolical bridge built between the contemporary critical contexts of the studied phenomena in both countries represented in the exhibition. These kinds of operations, as I have noticed before when working on similar issues of comparative contemporary art histories from South America and Eastern Europe, are hard to get, due to the incommensurability of the respective political, historical and social contexts³⁵.

³³ Virginia Martínez Guidolin, Políticas de Memoria del pasado reciente en las ciudades de Montevideo y Buenos Aires, Montevideo, in: University of the Republic of Uruguay, Faculty of Social Sciences, [online], 2015, p. 57, [cited 10-09-2020], https://www.colibri.udelar.edu.uy/jspui/bitstream/20.500.12008/17033/1/TMFCS_Mart%C3%ADnezGuidolinVirginia.pdf.

³⁴ Nenad Vujić, “Gmail – rough draft”, in: Francisco Tomsich’s personal archive, Dale mis saludos a quienes conectes/Kairotopo Serbia/Muestra MUME/Muestra/Obras sala/Pots, fol. 1 (2019).

³⁵ See: Francisco Tomsich, “Como el témpano flotante”, in: *Museo*, [online], 2017, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 18–41, [cited 09-10-2020], https://www.academia.edu/36372687/COMO_EL_T%C3%89MPANO_FLOTANTE.



6.
The "Yugoslavia" folder. Installation view (detail) with a remaining element of the Museum of Memory's permanent exhibition, an installation of pots in remembrance of the demonstrations called *caceroleadas*

Francisco Tomsich ———
The "Yugoslavia" Folder

The necessity of articulating critical positions through the re-activation of models of actuation from the past applies to the archives addressed by this project as well. Mail Art archives are highly volatile, and the political contexts in which they are read, updated, manipulated or destroyed play an important role in this story. Again, the case of Clemente Padín himself is illustrative, since his original archive of magazines, books, recordings, prints and all kind of memorabilia collected during the seminal years of developing his own mail art network was destroyed, with the exception of four recriminatory pieces³⁶, when the military arrested and jailed him in August 1977, while he was working in the second epoch of the avant-garde magazine *Ovum*. The imprisonment of Padín and his fellow colleague, the poet Jorge Caraballo, was followed by an international campaign launched by their friends from the Mail Art network that eventually succeeded (thanks to Dick Higgins, among others) on getting the attention of the United States government, which in turn pressured the Uruguayan military regime to release Padín after three years in jail. This story is told by the artist in a conversation from December 2019 included in the short film *We'll see us tomorrow*, a documentary work in process about *Give my regards to those you connect* produced by the filmmaker Henrike von Dewitz³⁷ which was exhibited in *The "Yugoeslavia" folder* at the Museum of Memory as well [Fig. 5].

It is noticeable that the Clemente Padín archive, hosted now by the University of the Republic of Uruguay, is a reconstruction made by Padín himself after his release, and therefore incomplete³⁸. This is clearly observable in the sections of it devoted to far away countries. The "Yugoeslavia" folder, consequently, includes almost exclusively materials that were sent to Padín from the 1980s onwards, and especially in the 1990s, when the Serbian node of the Mail art network saw an unexpected revival, fuelled

³⁶ Padín was accused of "public derision and vilification of the morale of the armed forces". See: Riccardo Boglione, "Ovanguardia Uruguaya: las revistas experimentales de Clemente Padín entre política, relaciones y acción (Archivo Padín, Montevideo)", in: *Red de Conceptualismos del Sur*, [online], n.d., p. 3, [cited 09-10-2020], <https://redesur.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/4-archivoclementepade3adn.pdf>.

³⁷ Henrike von Dewitz, *We'll see us tomorrow*: Documentary film, 2019. Colour, sound, 17'29". Available online at <https://vimeo.com/387430894>.

³⁸ From the other side, there is not in general a comprehensive, unified archive of Mail Art, or something comparable to the Clemente Padín Archive of Montevideo in terms of accessibility and institutional protection in Belgrade or in Serbia.

by the Yugoslavian wars and the blockade imposed on Serbia during Milošević's regime. This fact has important consequences for the possibility of claiming some kind of representative character of the "Yugoeslavia" folder regarding the historical development of the Yugoslavian and Serbian mail art networks and their connections with its Uruguayan counterpart. It also means that the Serbian side (in terms of quantity of artists but also when it comes to points of view) may be overrepresented in the "Yugoeslavia" folder, if we compare it to other former Yugoslavian republics. These issues and their political connotations and consequences have been very evident in the many conversations and interviews I conducted in Serbia right up to today. In certain cases, the artists offered their own archives, or part of them, as proofs of certain commitments or engagements. Delving the Serbian, private counterparts of Padín's archive in current times means updating the personal political and artistic/aesthetic positions of the artists who developed and keep them. More often, this operation questions the meaning of certain works and statements that were taken for granted or simply misunderstood. As some Serbian witnesses recalled, for example, the apparition in the "Yugoeslavia" folder of a non-filled (but signed) membership card (*članska karta*) from the Association for Yugoslavian-Cuban friendship was symptomatic. They argued that the interest in strengthening relationships with Cuba acquired a new meaning and urgency during the several rounds of international sanctions (widely referred to locally as "the blockade") imposed on Serbia between 1991 and 2001 which contrasts with the previous years' "disinterest" on the issue. This disinterest can be related to the history of the relationships between Yugoslavia and Cuba from the times of the Non-Aligned Movement's big debates, but the warmer approach to the issue in Milošević's time is also symptomatic and telling of the self-perception of many Serbian citizens (in the 90s) as victims of the 'West' and somehow faithful to the Yugoslavian epos.

There is another lack of representativeness, however, which does not directly concern the archives themselves, but rather the way we read them instead. It has something to do with constructed notions of hierarchy and the reproduction of nation- and gender-related discourses and

stereotypes. Meeting and interviewing some of the artists from the list and accessing their archives made me aware that the attentive reading of Mail Art publications, documents and catalogues from different regions of the world leads to the perception of hierarchical artistic positions (articulated as leaders of movements, pioneers of artistic languages, organisers of events and so on) which are not always related to the actual course of events and often respond to a preconceived way of understanding the dynamics of the art world before being historicised. Something similar happens with the phenomena of the networks-inside-the-networks in global, regional and local art scenes.

Non-Conclusive Conclusions

This paper is a good example in itself of an approach to my subject which I would like to avoid, even if I am telling here the story of the process which led me to start perceiving the question and thinking of how to change the focus.

Sometimes, recognising hegemonic discourses in the margins of contemporary art histories of non-hegemonic regional contexts is a difficult task, due to our tendency to approach them sympathetically. In that sense, the whole field research period started to make sense to me when I began to pay attention to the Serbian archives founded on the process and noticed how often an artist's name (especially women's names) appears once or twice and then vanishes³⁹. Those appearances (especially when I started to hear more stories about the local and regional significance of some of those artists⁴⁰) started to haunt the original framework of the project, and in a way produced a feeling of failing⁴¹ in a very peculiar way.

The most important achievement made at this stage of the *Give my regards to those you connect* project was recognising that my own approach to the study subject can be understood as a formal failure of the *project*, a failure arising from its relative success, a failure as a tool in the process

³⁹ For example: Sonja Drakulić, Marta Tišma, Katalin Ladik, Rada Tomić, to mention just a few of the artists not represented in the Clemente Padín Archive of Montevideo.

⁴⁰ For example, Dobrica and Rorica Kamperelić's works are usually seen as illustrations of an artist-model relationship. At the same time, the works signed by Rorica alone are commonly dismissed or seen as minor examples of Signalism's sphere of influence. The role of Marta Tišma in the building of the Mail Art network in Vojvodina is not told anywhere.

⁴¹ Failure is an often articulated concept in the literature on artistic research, usually in relation to reception, adequacy, scientific value and lack of comparative criteria.

of developing a method. In this case, to articulate a critical approach to the project in these terms means to understand the hegemonic character of my own approach to the art histories implicated and the way I was contributing, through my own project's public formalisation, to the replication and perpetuation of those hegemonies. The next stages of the project will focus on the search for a method to make possible the quest and recognition of the voices which are not, and could not be, represented in the original list, a list that paradoxically made possible their emergence in the horizon of the research.

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Santrauka

„Jugoslavijos“ aplankas

Francisco Tomsich

Reikšminiai žodžiai: pašto menas, Jugoslavijos dailės istorija, Serbijos dailės istorija, Urugvajaus dailės istorija, Clemente Padinas, meninis tyrimas, archyvas, metodas, diktatūra, institucijos, nesėkmė.

Straipsnyje pristatomas tęstinio meninio tyrimo „Perduok linkėjimus savo pažįstamiems“ koncepcijos sukūrimo, jos taikymo ir vystymo naratyvas. Projekte tyrinėjami ryšiai ir dialogai tarp buvusios Jugoslavijos bei Urugvajaus menininkų, nuo XX a. 7 deš. veikusių pašto meno tinkle. Atskaitiniu tyrimo tašku tapo Urugvajaus menininko Clementes Padino sudarytas Jugoslavijos menininkų pašto adresų sąrašas, parengtas prieš pat Jugoslavijos subyrėjimą. 2019 m. studijuodamas Padino asmeninio archyvo „Jugoslavijos“ aplanką, saugomą Urugvajaus Respublikos universiteto centriniame archyve, Tomsichas šį sąrašą išplėtė. Pirmame skyriuje iš tyrėjo autobiografinės perspektyvos pristatomos projekto ištakos, aprašomos jo atsiradimo aplinkybės bei realizavimosi metu tyrėjo nueitas kelias nuo suinteresuoto išorinio stebėtojo iki įsitraukusio dalyvio. Antrame skyriuje aptariamas su meninio tyrimo vykdymu susijusios paraiškos rengimo procesas. Galiausiai trečiame skyriuje siūloma vykdyto meninio tyrimo analizė, kurioje akcentuojami archyvo, institucinio konteksto ir metodologijos klausimai. Meninio tyrimo metu atsiskleidė netikėta projekto „nesėkmė“ istorinio tikslumo, politinės prasmės ir reprezentacijų diapazono aspektais, dėl ko teko performuluoti projekto tikslus ir siekius.