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A Manifesto for Yugofuturism: Maska's Tools and Strategies for Imagining Possible (Feminist) Futures Inspired by Regional Pasts

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ABSTRACT

The article analytically synthesises the growing archive of insights from artists and writers gathered around the non-governmental organisation Maska, a performing arts production and publishing house from Slovenia, on the newly coined concept and movement called Yugofuturism. Five aspects of Yugofuturism are determined and unpacked. First, Yugofuturism is positioned historically, geographically and through a generational, post-Yugoslav perspective. It is further examined in its relation to the historical *avant-gardes*. As its inspiration came from Hungarofuturism and Afrofuturism, it is then compared to these movements. Similarly to other neofuturist movements, especially Afrofuturism, it strives to affirm its own voice and thus creating a possible future in a space where there is allegedly none. Yugofuturism is also examined in its complex relation to feminisms, and finally pinpointed as a techno-imaginary, a creative shaping of a future that takes into consideration how technology (in this case the tools developed by the site yufu.kompot.si) is reshaping the world. Yugofuturism is thus outlined as a creative strategy that employs past potentialities as well as fictions to construct a future world – one where we have learned to use failure strategically, to better resolve upcoming adversities.

Keywords: Yugofuturism, neofuturism, affirmation of failure, future strategies, periphery

INTRODUCTION

> While post-communist, post-socialist and post-Yugoslav discourses merely reinforce the appearance of an unchanging and unstable present with a more or less accurate expression of the situation, Yugofuturism follows the example of other ethnofuturist movements such as Afrofuturism, Sinofuturism, Baltic Ethnofuturism and Hungarofuturism, which tactically empower peripheral identities and subversively affirm individual cultural curiosities.

This is the way the Maska Institute's 'YUFU' conference in 2021 was announced on the 24th Biennale of Graphic Arts 'Iskra Delta' organised in Ljubljana. Maska institute is a Slovenian nongovernmental organisation, known for its engagement in groundbreaking contemporary performing arts production, publishing, education, research and activism since 1993. It is based on an even older journal for contemporary performing arts *Maska* (first published in 1920 and regularly since 1985), of which I am currently the editor-in-chief. The conference was Maska Institute's second but essential take on posing the question of what Yugofuturism (Yufu or YUFU in the context of conferences) might mean, preceded and followed by many more (**Table 1**). These events never sought to establish a single definition of this newly[1] coined term but were conceived to foster mutual critical research into the manifold meanings and potentials that Yugofuturism evokes.

The term Yugofuturism was suggested by the new editorial (Rok Bozovičar and I) and directing (Alja Lobnik) team at the Slovenian-based Maska Institute; this team was at the time succeeding the 22-year long legacy of Emil Hrvatin (Janez Janša)'s artistic directorship that took place in 2021. In the early 2020s, suggesting to discuss 'Yugofuturism', a term bearing a complex but clear reference to a left-behind past of the Yugoslav failed state

[1] We have detected a journal created by the homeless, *Liceulice*, titled 'Yugofuturism' (2016), as well as the site www.yugofuturism.eu, which promotes concerts of bands from the Balkan region throughout Europe. At the inauguration of the New Yugoslav Studies association at the annual convention of the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) 2023, Dijana Jelača (2023) introduced Yugofuturism to the academic setting.

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Table 1. Table of major Maska Institute's Yugofuturism events between 2020 and 2024

Event name	Date	Web site
Conference 'Precarity or Self-management?' at the Old Power Station Ljubljana	8 September 2020	https://maska.si/en/project/precarity-or-self-managment/
Issue of *Maska* 200cc: Yugofuturism	Winter 2020	https://maska.si/en/journal/jugofuturizem/
Conference YUFU on the 34th Biennale of Graphic Arts 'Iskra Delta'	19 November 2021	https://bienale.si/en/event/yufu-conference/
Issue of *Maska* 209-210: YUFU 2.0	Fall 2022	https://maska.si/en/journal/jufu-2
Conference 'Swish of the Tracksuits of the Future', Belgrade BITEF festival	30 September 2022	https://maska.si/en/seminar/the-swish-of-the-tracksuits-of-the-future/
YUFU event at New Post Office Ljubljana	11 to 15 October 2022	https://mladinsko.com/sl/novice/338/poseben-programski-sklop-yufu-na-novi-posti/
YUFU cycle at the Old Power Station Ljubljana	24 to 27 January 2024	https://maska.si/en/project/yufu-cycle/

which ended in tragic wars, was a move beyond what seemed to be conceptually imaginable in the forward-looking, 'progressive'[2] environment characteristic of the (post-)socialist cultural scenes in those South-Eastern-European states that once belonged to the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. At the same time, the term came about as the result of the general feeling of dissatisfaction and absence of future prospects (in this space). Palpable among the young(ish) people from this post-socialist part of the Balkan region who were raised and received their primary and secondary education in the 1990s, this feeling was detected (and shared) by the Maska team while working with cultural workers from the region. Here, the sentiment does not only reflect the omnipresent 'long dark night' of neoliberal capitalist realism spoken about by Mark Fisher (Fisher, 2009: 80), who pessimistically suggests there is no alternative to capitalism. In this region, this conclusion is also, and perhaps especially based on the peripheral economic or/and political realities of the various national states.

Thus, thinking Yugofuturism is not transgenerational, but largely marked by a distinctly generational pessimism; nor is Yugofuturism marked by a sense of nostalgia for the socialist past. We, the developers of Yugofuturism, do not have a conscious firsthand experience of living in the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (1963–1991), where, from our current perspective, people may have lacked *things*, but not a sense of the *future* as the ever-potential communist ideal, which they were building together. The future has since been eliminated, the mythological temporalisation (Berardi Bifo, 2011: 18–19) of progression is gone for good, and dystopian endings of history are not only possible, but likely and calculable. This results in a generationally and regionally underlined cynicism, depression, and despair.

However, as I will argue further, proposing Yugofuturism does not have to do with feeling nostalgic for a country or a political regime. Rather, Yugofuturism engages the nostalgia for the feeling of having a (worthy) future as a pleasurable affect that activates, rather than passivises. Accordingly, conceptualising Yugofuturism is a communal project, which involves practicing 'pleasure activism' (Brown, 2019) by imagining those unlikely and even impossible futures that are present as fictions or potentialities found in the collective consciousness. And if 'what you pay attention to, grows' and 'we become what we practice' (Brown, 2019: 12) it does not matter if something like this ever before existed or not. It is a theoretical and artistic 'youth work action'[3], where the action itself may alone be the aim or what is to be built. This article offers a reflection on the first five years of conceptualising Yugofuturism and outlines its contours and limits by drawing on the numerous and diverse contributions to the discussions that have been accumulated by the Maska Institute and *Maska* journal. The aim of the article is to consider the affordances of Yugofuturism as a techno-imaginary. By this term I understand processes of shaping a future by means of technology, as well as future visions that take into consideration how technology is reshaping the world.

METHODOLOGY AND STRUCTURE

In this article, I re-examine and summarise the first important steps taken by the co-creators of the Yugofuturism (Yufu) as a term, concept and movement at the Maska Insitute to outline what it currently presents.

[2] The 1990s' art scene in Slovenia was born out of 1980s' subcultural critique of state-socialism; in the 1990s, the art scene played a crucial role as a beacon of change in the so-called democratisation processes of the transitional era. Its 'progressiveness' is thus meant literally, as a forward-looking practice, critical of the past state.

[3] Youth work brigades were voluntary working groups active the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia especially in the immediate post-World War II period. The groups carried out physical labour of public importance, and the activities were also politically significant, as recruitment into socialism. One of their outcomes was the Šabac-Sarajevo railroad, built in only seven months. See also the utopian project of the Pioneer Railroad (Pionirska proga).

To this end, I analytically explore the emergent archive of Yugofuturist sources. These comprise texts written on the topic, mainly in the *Maska* 'YUFU 2.0' journal edition, a compendium of 13 literary and theoretic contributions; conference contributions presented at the 'YUFU' event at the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts (2021, seven speakers) and the 'Swish of the Tracksuits of the Future' conference at the Bitef festival (2022, four speakers), along with other, artistic events that took place at both YUFU events in 2022 and 2024 in Ljubljana. Furthermore, I present and reflect on another important source – an experimental under-construction internet site developed by the Kompot IT collective, featuring the permanently evolving Yugofuturist Manifesto. I unpack it as a possible techno-imaginary for the further development of Yugofuturism as a movement.

To unpack and conceptualise Yugotufurism, I elaborate on its five dimensons in the following chapter. I first frame the term historically and geographically as well as position it as a post-Yugoslav development marked by a strong generational perspective. Next, I contextualise Yugofuturism in its relation to the historical *avant-gardes* with an emphasis on the ones that were active in the region of the Balkan peninsula. I proceed to focus on recent neofuturisms, such as Afrofuturism and Hungarofuturism, to outline how these contemporaries to Yugofuturism differ from the historical *avant-gardes*, and to emphasise Yugofuturism's specificities and differences from these movements. I then zoom in on Yugofuturism's crucial but complex feminist dimension; finally, I conclude by outlining the technological parameters of the project as an evolving manifesto.

UNPACKING AND CONCEPTUALISING YUGOFUTURISM

Thinking About the Future in the Post-Yugoslav Context

I am turning to the past and am not outlining a vector that would derive from the young national state I come from, the Republic of Slovenia, independent since 1991, for a reason. A nation-state embracing neoliberal capitalist ideology common to modern Western democracies, but in a 'peripheral' format (Bohle and Greskovits, 2012), the Slovenian state has little agency to help carve out an alternative to extractivist neocolonial consumerist capitalism (Podvršič, 2018). In contrast, the Socialist Federative Republic (SFR) Yugoslavia (SFRY) was organised as a socialist regime where democracy was to be implemented through self-management, and as a federal constitution of multiethnic republics (the Republics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Slovenia, and Serbia, which included two Socialist Autonomous Provinces, Vojvodina and Kosovo). After the Second World War (WWII), this state was ideologically grounded in antifascism. Yugoslavia was not a straightforward project but had different simultaneous temporalities, some of which the imaginary of Yugofuturism can still draw on today, while others can more easily be forgotten. Some of the former are: declared equality of all people in terms of classes, genders, generations and nations (comradeship), peaceful global coexistence (initiation of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961 eschewing the East-West polarisation), and a politics of strengthening cultural, instead of ethno-religious identities. It was by no means peripheral as are most of its independent successor-states are today, in relation to the EU (Majstorović, 2021).

Though the majoritarian and dominant language was Serbo-Croatian, SFR Yugoslavia exercised a polycentric model of linguistic unity that strived for equal representation of the languages of the peoples (Serbo-Croatian, Macedonian and Slovenian), ethnicities (ethnic minorities) and ethnic groups, as well as both scripts (Latin and Cyrillic), which means that publications and radio and television programmes in minority languages were encouraged. This Socialist post-WWII state was quite unique to the European Eastern Bloc, especially after the so-called 1948 'Informbiro split', when the president of SFRY Josip Broz – Tito distanced Yugoslavia from the USSR and gained a certain degree of autonomy from it. It was in SFR Yugoslavia that 'our society ceased to be peasant and traditional and became urban and (post)industrial', as sociologist Aleksej Kišjuhas (2021) states, with great effect on peoples' everyday lives, and their rights and liberties. The socialist Yugoslavia was, at least in these aspects, a futurist incarnation in the making, imagined by the (regional) historic *avant-garde*, with only small adjustments to be made in the infinite future. Until this future ceased abruptly.

The wars in the 1990s that accompanied Yugoslavia's dissolution followed a period of political and economic crisis after Tito's death in 1980 (Velikonja, 2021: 10–11), when surges for independence on the one hand, and ethnic conflicts and nationalism on the other ended the multiethnic ideal of brotherhood and unity with a lot of bloodshed, leaving many countries wrecked, with millions in exile (Popović, 2021: 44). The generations born after the nineties were raised in new nation-states, in an increasingly nationalistic and revisionist atmosphere. These times were often (as is doubtlessly the case for Slovenia) marked by xenophobia to other nations from the region. In self-colonising ways (Kiossev, 1995), the new states strived to prove their legitimacy by acting as a democratic, Western-like countries, while always failing slightly, or declining into authoritarianism and corruption completely. This post-war and post-Yugoslav generation is therefore marked both by its parents' generation's war trauma and by strangely positive memories of the socialist Yugoslavia – a now non-existent state –, passed on by their older relatives. But this is also the first 'global generation' of digital natives, in many cases more fluent in English than

the common language of the past, who did not necessarily look for community with people from the region, for there was not a future reserved for them there.

Can anything about the present idea of Yugoslavia offer the starting point for Yugofuturism – perhaps a specific experience, a feeling, or an identity? In the *Maska* 'YUFU 2.0' edition, voice was given mostly to a generation that did not experience Yugoslavia fully, and whose position towards the idealisation of this state is very sceptical.

Accordingly, Asja Bakić, a prolific novelist from Bosnia based in Croatia, and author of one of the articles in the 'YUFU 2.0' edition, is convinced that 'A futurism that forces us to think only about the past, to constantly question it, moves us closer to conservative values' (Bakić, 2022: 15). At the same time, she does write affirmatively about a certain moment before the dissolution of the Women Antifascist Front (AFŽ), a Yugoslav feminist and anti-fascist mass organisation (1942–1953), when the new socialist country was still connected to *avant-garde* artistic movements through figures like Koča Popović – surrealist poet, partisan, and, later, a political functionary. Apart from this short period in Yugoslav history, when it was possible to think about the (communist ideal) future as something impossibly amazing, she proclaims, there was no ideal time in Yugoslavia. She pessimistically adds that it was always 'a sexist and racist society' (Bakić, 2022: 15).

Muanis Sinanović's[4] literary autofiction 'Ten images of Yugofuturism' is also sceptical and pessimistic about the potential of a movement derived from a sentimental appreciation of the former Yugoslavia, arguing that the nationalism that resulted in its bloody demise was always inherent to it. Yugofuturism is only possible, he states, 'beyond itself (…) provided that it completely abandons the idea of a new Yugoslavia' (Sinanović, 2022: 27). His is a typical non-nostalgic generational scepticism based on the assumption that seeds of the massacre of the nineties must have been present for a long time, under the ideological surface of multiethnicity, self-management and equality. As Bakić and Sinanović argue, there has always simultaneously existed more than one Yugoslavia, a more or less lived out ideal to the point where the ideal of brotherhood and equality was in direct contrast to the living conditions.

But perhaps we needn't search for a flawless utopia, either by acting it out through some kind of moral superiority in the present or archeologically digging it up from a past where it supposedly acted as an island amidst the dystopian reality. As An Fazekaš points out in her experimental writing, 'it would be more appropriate to refocus our futurist thinking towards an affirmation of the negatives: failure, ignorance, powerlessness, misunderstanding, and misrecognition; resignation, defeat, and oblivion' (Fazekaš, 2022: 141), in a part of the world that has given the name to the shattering of a region to small hostile parts (Todorova, 1997: 34). Instead of regaining hope, which is just 'a perpetually shattering past promise of a future that will never come' (Fazekaš, 2022: 141), we should reach beyond it. For Fazekaš, Yugofuturism is not a desperate try to find hope again but entails acknowledging hope as hopeless and obtaining pleasure exactly from the affirmation of this 'always late to the party' (Fazekaš, 2022: 141) peripheral position.

Can the *negative* and its affirmation present a possible strategy of this locally specific neofuturism? Alexandar Kiossev's metaphor of *self-colonisation* is a productive starting point for answering this question. The reception of the Balkans from the position of the West as well as self-assessment of the living conditions from the people from the region today is mostly negative. The only but significant exception from recent history is the socialist Yugoslavia, when a part of the region enjoyed a certain level of stability, and autonomy. Before that period, and especially after Yugoslavia's dissolution, the Balkans as a region in proximity to the West as the centre of economic and symbolic power – although never truly colonised – were culturally and economically in a lateral position from which they had to 'recognize self-evidently foreign cultural supremacy and voluntarily absorb the basic values and categories of colonial Europe' (Kiossev, 1995). Kiossev claims that even the very ideology of nation building comes from the adaptation of Western values and is therefore, though seemingly an attempt at sovereignty, an act of self-colonisation. Even though he refers to the society of the 18th and 19th centuries, the Western Balkans in the 21st century are, again, viewed as lagging behind in terms of Western democratic values. Moreover, many countries in this region have been in the process of EU accession negotiation for a decade, without a result. But is it at all possible to lag without a feeling of worthlessness? I believe it is necessary to reconsider the orientation of the back and front altogether.

Maybe, to acclaim *loserhood* is to stop competing in a race that had been decided in the beginning by the West as the centre of power, and to recognise that this very situation of being perceived as perpetually 'lagging' gives us a certain knowledge that we can turn in our own favour. It is possible to strategically use these experiences as a vantage point in another 'race', or rather another direction, that does not promote growth and competition and moral supremacy and diligence, where the rules will not anymore be set by an unquestioned authority. In my opinion, and we will explore this later, establishing a Yugofuturism that includes the alienated younger generations, means that we can no longer draw solely on the feeling of our past country's autonomy, credibility and sovereignty towards its outside that may have existed in a period of time (parallel to other temporalities of Yugoslavia

[4] Sinanović is a second-generation descendant of Bosnian immigrants to Slovenia. Due to these circumstances, his position to Yugofuturism is at the same time situated and distanced.

experienced by many marginal identities, such as Albanian people, queer people, etc.). Even though this potentiality of autonomy and sovereignty that is more a dream than a memory to the post-transitional generation can bring a sense of hope in a hopeless place (Petrović, 2019: 131–134), we can no longer rely on it. Instead, we must embrace the scepticism and pessimism as well as the feeling of loserhood that derive from experiencing the present situation and subvert it in a way that will make for an honest Yugofuturism that the transitional generation can relate to. If it doesn't, the bond with the past will permanently break. Embracing loserhood is also a point that aligns Yugofuturism with other contemporary neofuturisms, as I will demonstrate below.

Yugofuturism Between the Historical *Avant-Gardes* and Contemporary (Neo)Futurisms

Long seen as an episode of the early 20th century, futurist movements have become in vogue again over the past several decades. The origin of futurism is commonly located in early 20th century artistic *avant-gardes*, and a fascination with the speed and dynamism of modernised industrial society embraced by artists in Italy and in Russia a little later. The affirmation of industrial society was seen as a suitable vision of the future against the backward, 'snobbish' bourgeois art and culture of the time (Perloff, 2003: xxi). Various manifestoes were written during that time, Filippo Tomasso Marinetti's futurist manifesto from 1909 being the most well-known among them. The Italian futurists had infamously allied with fascism, which promised the technological and socio-political modernisation of the country, then a relatively backward and suppressed nation (Conversi, 2009: 94). In contrast, the cubofuturists in Russia sympathised with the political project of communism, which was their vision of the prosperous and dynamic future to come.

Simultaneously, *avant-garde* movements also appeared in South-Eastern Europe, speculating about the potentialities held by the future for the people in the region of the Balkan peninsula. For example, Zenithism, conceived by Ljubomir Micić in early 1920s, was a 'synthesis of movements, such as futurism, expressionism and dadaism' (Pranjić, 2020: 142), which was critical of the decadent West, blamed for the First World War. Zenithism's founder Ljubomir Micić coined the term *Barbarogenij* (Barbarogenius) – a radical autostereotypisation believed to have a strong, though pacifist artistic power to overthrow hierarchy that favoured the bourgeois Europe values and marginalised the 'barbarism' of the Balkan region. This was the time after the first world war, when political powers were setting anew and the *avant-garde* figure of '*barbarogenij*' was one such identity figure of a new hero that could retreat from the 'dying Europe' (Vrečko, 2012: 267) with authenticity and strength of the marginalised peoples. Though later with the novel *Barbarogenije decivilizator*, Micić became bound to the nationalist idea that prioritised a single Serbian nation, initially, Zenithism was a pan-Slavic, internationalist *avant-garde* movement, which explicitly stood against Marinetti's 'unhumanly and generally mechanic futurism' (Pranjić, 2020: 146) and acclaimed 'generally human and barbarian' (Pranjić, 2020: 146) values, where barbarity was seen as a trait that could save the decadent Western civilisation by decivilising or balkanising it. Due to its regional focus and interrogation of the centre: periphery distinction, Zenithism can be seen as an avant-gardist proto-Yugofuturism (Pranjić, 2020; Dović, 2021; Bošković, 2022).

The future-oriented paradigms that have emerged on the brink of the 21st century, also known as (neo)futurisms, do not necessarily praise speed and technology, reflecting the fact that modernity has not succeeded in solving all of humanity's problems, and has brought about further crises, such as ecological unsustainability (Latour, 1991). Rather, contemporary futurists tend to use techno-imaginaries and related future scenarios to imagine parallel, often extraterrestrial future worlds. Here, for instance in Octavia E. Butler's science fiction opus, life is made possible for those communities that are presently experiencing biases and antagonisms that they feel should not be perpetuated any longer. Neofuturist scenarios are heavily invested in experiments of building alternative societies or accelerating existing ones to the dystopian extreme.

Neofuturisms mostly derive from minoritarian, non-mainstream contexts, not from the centres of power. These peripheral positions are concerned, as is Afrofuturism for Kodwo Eshun, 'with the possibilities of intervention within the dimension of the predictive, the projected, the proleptic, the envisioned, the anticipatory and the future conditional' (Eshun, 2003: 293). In other words, these specific situated positions do not endorse the projections of doom that are made about their futures by the majority's reign, so they construct their own improbable ones as a way to exercise collective agency, or they subversively exaggerate the implications of a present to the absurd so that these projections become alien.[5]

Neofuturisms mostly claim to be open and inclusive, but still, they seem to derive from specific and situated experience of alienness (racialisation, Orientalism, easternisation, Balkanisation, homo- or trans-phobia, misogyny, xenophobia, etc.) one can or cannot relate to (Kreuger, 2017). They cannot work through all these different experiences simultaneously except by appropriating them. Due to these limitations of the present imagination, I think it is important to articulate a specific kind of alienness for the people living in the successor states of the former SFRY so to better, from a situated position, imagine common, (improbable) futures.

[5] As in Hungarofuturism, explained below.

Neofuturisms as Peripheral Visions of Possible Futures

Of all neofuturisms – futurist articulations that have succeeded the historical *avant-gardes* – Afrofuturism possibly has the longest history, reaching back to the writings of W. E. B. du Bois already in the beginning of the 20th century, making it contemporary to the historical European futurisms, but with a unique cultural context of re-examining the proclaimed 'backwardnesss' of communities, which has somehow defined all the contemporary neofuturisms. The term Afrofuturism was first coined in 1994 by Mark Dery in a collection of interviews and essays by various authors titled *Flame Wars*. Tasha L. Womack writes that Afrofuturism is 'an intersection of imagination, technology, the future and liberation' in which 'Afrofuturists redefine culture and notions of blackness for today and the future' by combining 'elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magic realism with non-Western beliefs' (Womack, 2013: 9). There is a terminological question about the naming of the movement, as it implies African situatedness (which is often described as Africana Futurism) or African descendancy, but not necessarily the racial aspect, which the term Black Futurism captures better. The latter is however not by definition connected to the specific and 'actual historic or socioeconomic situations' (Scott, 2021: 146), connected to Africa. Afrofuturism's specificities according to Eshun lie in creating 'temporal complications and anachronistic episodes that disturb the linear time of progress, these futurisms adjust the temporal logics that condemned black subjects to prehistory' (Eshun, 2003: 297).

In the beginning of the millennium, an upgraded concept of Afrofuturism 2.0. was suggested that expanded the historical debates about social responsibility, radical politics, and black artistic production to an 'understanding of blackness's multi-dimensionality, the good and the bad, the respectable and the undesirable' (Anderson, 216: 232). Or, as Kodwo Eshun articulates it, 'Afrofuturism is by no means naively celebratory' (Eshun, 2003: 297). This is what we can see for example in the literature of Octavia E. Butler's ambivalent multiracial and multispecies dystopias. Afrodiasporic authors have experiential access to estrangement and the feeling of alienness through which they developed a 'tool-kit' for either utopian or critical parallel worldbuilding, which has for long been after 'the imperative to code, adopt, translate, misread, rework, and revision' (Eshun, 2003: 301). It is either of these strategies that many of the other neofuturist movements of the late 20th and 21st Century have been adapting.

Following Afrofuturism, there has been a recent global surge in artistic projects and experiments engaging with different minoritarian neofuturist formations that have proposed different techno-imaginaries in forms of manifestos or curatorial topics[6], as spontaneous ideas, movements or curated framings of existing practices, each of these projects is unique in terms of ideas and forms. In this respect, and attentive to the echoes of Afrofuturism, I would like to examine Yugofuturism in comparison to one of its neighbourhood cousin movements, namely Hungarofuturism – a movement that had significantly impacted the formation of Yugofuturism at Maska Institute. Its creators from Technologie und das Unheimliche[7] claim that 'Hungarofuturism (HUF) is a Laibach-style occupation and manipulation of the nationalist ideological code. The geopolitical mythology of Hungarian national exceptionalism is not enough for HUF, which expands the narrative of Hungarianness into the cosmic reaches of outer space' (Miklósvölgyi and Nemes, 2021: 155).

Overidentifying[8] with the absurdities of nationalism, Hungarofuturism enables a cynical distance, establishing 'an alternative way of being Hungarian through discovering post-Hungarianness' (Harrison, 2020). Hungarofuturism is thus a movement that creatively and through subversive affirmation searches for a futurist escape from a suffocating present that flattens down Hungarian identity to absurd nationalist state policies. In contrast, Yugofuturism has a double starting point – not only in the suffocating peripheral present of its current national states, but also in an actual, highly potent multinational past, which can additionally fuel a possibility of a future and relativise a present with means that supersede mere cynicism. Neofuturisms are thus like viruses that infect and alter – if not utterly destroy or severely question – who we are. Their recognition means detecting something foreign, alien in us and subversively using it for purposes of future world-building. It is an agency through which a certain generation that has become detached from its past, its situatedness, or its identity, can find means and strength to construct its own desirable futures that otherwise seem to be doomed.

Yugofuturism's adaptation and reworking of these ideas is manifold. We cannot speak of a racial grounding in relation to Yugofuturism. Though multiethnic, the population of the Balkan peninsula is predominantly white, or at least almost white, as its peripherality has allegedly marked its people as white, but 'not quite white' (Baker, 2018:

[6] See for example: Islamofuturism, Buslim futurism, Bosnian futurism, ethno-futurism, Sinofuturism, etc. An interesting case of Albanofuturism, a term suggested by Mladen Zobec, an explorer of the economic migrations of Albanian people throughout the former Yugoslavia (Zobec, 2021) was presented at the Conference YUFU. The Albanian ethnic community, though rather large in proportion, was never treated equally, it was inferior to those that had its federative sovereignty in the anyhow Belgrade-centric former Yugoslavia and was with its language, culture, religion, and economic models an alien factor in the former State. This could bring a distinctive perspective to the debate on Yugofuturism.

[7] Technologie und das Unheimliche (TU) is the movement and site of the projects, connected to Hungarofuturism.

[8] Overidentification is a perfromative artistic tactic of engaging in excessive or inappropriate identification with 'the enemy' in order to subvert it. It was for example promoted by the Slovene art collective IRWIN and music group Laibach.

80). As the region is not a final location for recent migrant waves, it has stayed white(ish) (Migrant Mobility Situation Report, 2025). At the same time, the historically and economically peripheral region of the Balkans, has, throughout its pre socialist history, consisted of peasant bits of (the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman) Empires. Although it never consisted of slave colonies, its inhabitants were never colonisers themselves. The post-WWII war devastations have created sizeable migrant diasporas from the region across the Western world. This has increased during the Yugoslav wars in the nineties. Migrants to the West and even to other former Yugoslav countries have doubtlessly experienced alienness (being foreign, a minority), especially when the refugee discourse is increasingly becoming infected by its far-right interpretation not as a humanitarian problem but a security threat (Krasteva, 2021: 190–191). Additionally, the manifold cultures of the former Yugoslavia that had coexisted under the same umbrella State can be compared to the many African cultures and ethnicities that are treated as a formless unity of otherness by the western coloniser's gaze, which was thematised by authors such as Franz Fanon (Fanon, 1986).

The past Yugoslav ideology of brotherhood and unity may be inspiring, but it is the brother-slaying war and fragmentation into nation-states that reminds us of the fragility of these ideas that quickly delineate who belongs to a community and who does not. This problem of potential exclusivity also applies to all the mentioned futurist movements that are so strongly rooted in situatedness and identity. It is often understood that only a certain community can access the subculture or movement; that, for example, Afrofuturism belongs only to the members of the African (American) community. Its important aspect surely is that it derives from the 'norms, cultures, and values of the community', but it mostly promotes an invitation and 'involves participants from all races and ethnic identities' (Sinha, 2023: 477) exactly by showing how we can all start speaking and acting in our own names.

But who are we? I believe that boundaries of whom movements belong to must be questioned again and again. The aim of one of the Yugofuturism events (Conference YUFU at the 34th Biennale of Graphic Arts Iskra Delta) was to expand the notion of Yugofuturism as connected solely to the borders of the former country by inviting a participant from the UK and later also one from Bulgaria. The latter is a country that was never part of Yugoslavia, though we could see it as culturally overlapping with it in many aspects. What is more, '*yug*' means 'south' in Slavic languages, so Yugofuturism could be understood as *Southern Futurism* or even *Global South Futurism*[9]. Like Afrofuturism, Yugofuturism tries to gather and reinforce collective agency for an (ecstatic) movement, even though it can have a dark twist as there are few real and visible material grounds for its existence left. Or we could argue that exactly this emptiness, loss and failure are the only real material grounds that can define the Yugofuturism's position in the present. As An Fazekaš argues, it is this lagging behind and the overwhelming feeling of hopelessness that we should not necessarily dismiss, as it is what defines us. By accepting it and moving on, we can find an outline of the key to Yugofuturism for a new generation. Maybe it is the ecstasy of the feeling that we finally affirm and embrace that we are *losers* and decline from shamefully hiding it that is the true scope of a subversive affirmation that we could ascribe to a certain generation's contribution to this movement. It can be an important moment in reassessing the direction and the rules of the game that is shaping our futures.

Feminism as a Non-Cynical Cornerstone of Yugofuturism

The former socialist Yugoslavia's socialist ideals aimed at establishing an environment of equality for all, where there would be no discrimination. The working peoples' labour was to bring about economic development that the people would all be able to benefit from according to self-management principles. Socialist self-management was a social and economic model formulated by the Communist party of Yugoslavia in 1950, its goal to move the managing of companies into the hands of workers. In the Slovene partisan and postwar socialist politician Vida Tomšič's words, 'ending any form of discrimination, one's own work and responsibility for one's own and societal issues become the ground stone of the new ethics, the new socialist morality' (Tomšič, 1980: 143). Exclusive organising amongst women was seen as (self)segregation that would give women the false impression that they must find the solutions to the inequality of their position by themselves, so it was not encouraged. But Tomšič explicitly stated that emancipation could only be reached if all people were free, so women's emancipation was seen as crucial to the development of society (Tomšič, 1980: 61). Though the literacy and employment numbers among women rose constantly in Yugoslavia, they varied greatly form republic to republic or autonomous zone (Tomšič, 1980: 89–95). Moreover, due to women's traditional double burden of productive and reproductive labour, they did not reach equality and freedom.

[9] In this respect, Yugofuturism can be seen as following a legacy of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) – an international organisation of countries that sought to remain independent or neutral during the Cold War. Founded in 1961 in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, by nations that did not want to formally align with either of the two major power blocs at the time, NAM's main goal was to preserve the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of member states against the influence of the major world powers. NAM also aimed to advocate for issues like decolonisation, disarmament, and economic development for newly independent nations.

Yugoslav feminism's strong point was especially in society's joint efforts in the direction of equality for all, but even more so in women's self-organisation outside or inside other organised structures, which has enabled a tremendous push in tackling women's emancipation. No one is free until everybody is free. This means that men were expected to recognise women as equal, and women were expected to treat all classes of women as such.

Yugoslavia had its history of won feminist struggles. For one, women won their right to suffrage already in 1945, before many women from the Western European countries Women's equality with men was written into the Yugoslav constitution in 1946. Fighting the high mortality of infants due to clandestine abortions, the legislation on abortion was liberalised already in 1952 and further on in 1977. These and many other efforts made many women's lives significantly better in just a couple of decades, especially when we speak about legal equality, but it has indeed not brought equality on all levels (Republic of Slovenia, 2024). The latter continues to be advocated for in the post-socialist as well as in the western world, ever more so with the rise of contemporary re-patriarchal tendencies since the (far) right parties have strengthened their position in Europe.

I believe that Yugofuturism can only be feminist, as it is what we make of it and if we are constructing a future, we want one that can bring about a plethora of feminist values and tools with which we can conquer inherent feelings of shame that come from peripheral, nonautonomous positions. For it is feminism(s) that have the most knowledge and experience in recognising and articulating structural (gender) inequalities and organising to fight with and against them in different ways.

And yet, in the context of futurism, it is an important historical lesson that the question concerning the oppression of women will not be solved by itself. No miraculous economical system or even technological innovation will by itself help prevent the suppression of people by gender if we do not intentionally programme it to do so. Economic reorganisation and technological innovations can be used against women, or they can work for their empowerment, depending on the agenda, as proclaimed by Shulamith Firestone. Sara Kember argues, that

> futurism is inherently problematic, not so much in its tendency to make predictions that may or may not (usually not) prove accurate, but in its adherence to technology-driven visions that play out a limited dualism of utopias and dystopias, of secularised heavens and hells. (Kember, 2012)

But it is still important to pursue a feminist futurism as a need for alternatives today, she argues, when technology is ever more becoming surveillance while being sold as service. For as Katja Čičigoj and I argue in the article 'Sublimo in mondeno atomske bombe' (Sublime and Mundane of the Atomic Bomb), 'to imagine different futures does not mean to make all antagonisms disappear, but to invent feminist strategies to steer between them better' (Brezavšček and Čičigoj, 2023: 27).

Asja Bakić's pessimist remark that Yugofuturism (as an *avant-garde* movement, not the ambivalent neofuturism we are unpacking) was only possible until the dissolution of Women's Antifascist Front (AFŽ) is in complete opposition to the opinion shared by the older generation of socialist scholars. But this also means that the dialogue between the generations was disrupted and that the experience and references of both are very different. Feminist scholars, educated and active in Yugoslavia, such as Lilijana Burcar, are convinced that such an understanding of Yugoslav feminism is one-dimensional and revisionist, influenced by Western liberal feminism which is at most reformist, enabling women's rights and their entrance to the labour market only to the extent that they serve capitalism. According to Burcar, the Women's Antifascist Front as a separate organisation was dissolved due to the belief that such separatism meant 'ignoring the structural nature of the problem of sexual marginalisation, second class citizenship and exploitation of women' (Burcar, 2014: 59).

Indeed, despite systemic efforts conditioned by the ideologies of the time, chauvinism was not *de facto* eliminated in SFRY, as the anthropologist and feminist Svetlana Slapšak remembers, chauvinism was real. As she explains, there was, for example, no space for feminism in the revolutionary 1968 in Belgrade, the site of the fist mass social justice protests after WWII in Yugoslavia, following the example of the student uprisings in France. Women were shut silent under arguments such as 'feminism was theoretically not serious enough', 'now was not the moment', and 'the past is solved, women have rights now' (Slapšak, 2011: 170). Nevertheless, there were elaborate and organised socialist feminist endeavours later in the late seventies and eighties that were without a doubt able to prove patronising American feminists who believed feminism was a Western invention, their fair point (Slapšak, 2011: 172). Today, however, the younger post-Yugoslav generation mostly reads the works of western feminists. This is because their own living experience is more easily aligned with these theories better, and due to the wide accessibility of these texts online. But responsibility for the scarcity of intergenerational bridges cannot be put solely on this generation's shoulders.

A kind of grief for the non-existent intergenerational regional comradeship transpires through the writing of contemporary Yugofuturism contributors. They feel they are left alone while they fight the same, still not won battles, as their predecessors. I believe this is also why this new generation's Yugofuturism is not an optimistic but a complex, affectively ambivalent movement.

At the same time, some authors rely on this very intergenerational bond, which often skips a generation and is handed on from grandmothers to granddaughters. The cultural studies scholar Natalija Majsova states in her case study of Marta Popivoda and Ana Vujanović's work that Yugofuturism can be detected in certain contemporary artistic practices that are not nostalgic or projecting a different future as such but are '*a form of action* and *an attempt to act for the future* in the now' (Majsova, 2022: 86), inspired by ordinary, but nonetheless revolutionary figures from our (intimate) pasts. Yugofuturism for her thus means to maintain a strong antifascist and antipatriarchal stance, paying respect to the values and rights fought out or continuously fought for by our grandmothers. It thus potentially exists in any present if we can keep embodying these timeless values. But as explained above, it is hard to maintain these bridges and keep these values embodied when intergenerational bonds are not self-evident.

Jasmina Šepetavc too believes that futurisms are embodied practices but finds cases of these practices in an unusual place and time, the 1980s *avant-garde* video scene in Ljubljana, Slovenia, especially in the work of the group Borghesia. More precisely, she speaks of Yugoslav queer futurism, which fought against 'bureaucratic Yugoslav society, its ideologies of the future, and its ideas of decency' (Šepetavc, 2022: 127) with the dancing, sweating, pleasureful queer bodies suspended in the now. She is not reading the practice as an apolitical escapism, but an embodied political practice running against the *chrononormativity*[10] that was present in the former Yugoslavia and is still present today. It is a nonfamilial, queer kind of bond or kin that is passed on as an emancipatory strategy.

What is then a feminist vision of Yugofuturism and can it have the power to invent useful strategies? I believe that the connection to the concrete experience of our (not necessarily biological) female ancestors, who have gained certain knowledges connected to the rearticulation of the biases of their own situations also in connection to western feminism and the understanding of their struggles and joys connected to it, can help us understand what we never want to abandon and what we ought to fight against. It can help us learn from their embodied joys and errors. There is no point in further generational separatism, but to avoid it, a certain alienation and pessimism of a post-transitional generation should be considered. Their experience too can prove to have a certain value for future worldbuilding in a futureless place where many still live in the past.

We can compare subaltern experiences to connect the common struggles in an ever more globalised world where problems can no longer be solved regionally. The connection of struggles internationally was already the agenda of the Yugoslav socialist feminists (Tomšič, 1980: 145–155). We can build our common future with the building blocks from different feminist imaginaries that take inspiration from lived experience, suspended potentialities from our different faintly remembered or constructed pasts and rich feminist artistic and literary projections. All this can help us develop strategies that can shift – not necessarily our entire prospects – but our way of dealing with these prospects, bending the directions towards which they tend to develop and shifting the speeds of these developments.

Though fiercely fought for, the socialist feminist battle was not won; therefore, it remains our common battle. In my opinion, Yugofuturism's feminist drive consists in striving for building bridges between generations, for sharing tools, for declining from patronising attitudes and separatist behaviour. But it also means also claiming loserhood for feminism, a non-equal starting position, which can question the race for power itself and to establish new strategies to survive and conquer the surely ambivalent futures.

The Ambivalent Cyber-Utopia of Yufu.kompot.si

In this section, my aim is to show the outlines of the Yugofuturist techno-imaginary through a technological perspective. The nineties and the beginning of the widespread use of the Internet 2.0 brought about a strong wave of cyber-utopianism that believed in the internet's ability to establish a community that is decentralised, democratic, and libertarian or even held ideals connected to digital socialism (Flichy, 2008; Marlow, 1996). Thirty years later, the internet has profoundly changed our society, but not in the direction of open-source access and democratic participation. As Evgeny Morozov has argued in his book *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, 'the idea that the Internet favours the oppressed rather than the oppressor is marred by what I call cyber-utopianism: a naïve belief in the emancipatory nature of online communication that rests on a stubborn refusal to acknowledge its downside' (Morozov, 2011: 13). Big Tech private internet platforms and media have, due to their commercial interests, developed access to content based on people's habits, needs and desires – the filter bubbles – which have further eradicated the public sphere (Kaluža, 2021: 267–283) and have thus not supported democratic ideals. What is more, the internet has proven useful for authoritarians and their propaganda, for surveillance and sophisticated censorship and has thus done the opposite than allegedly giving agency to the people (Morozov, 2011).

Cyber-utopia has crushed in on itself, the market of web services is highly monopolised and in such economic hierarchies it is hard to do things differently and have any reach at all. But there are guerilla developer groups that though knowing 'they will never reach the goal' (Kompot) are trying to build small communities and raise

[10] Chrononormativity is a term coined by Elizabeth Freeman in her book *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010). Freeman uses the concept to explore how societal expectations around time – such as when people are 'supposed' to get married, have children, or retire – create pressures to conform to heteronormative and capitalist timelines.

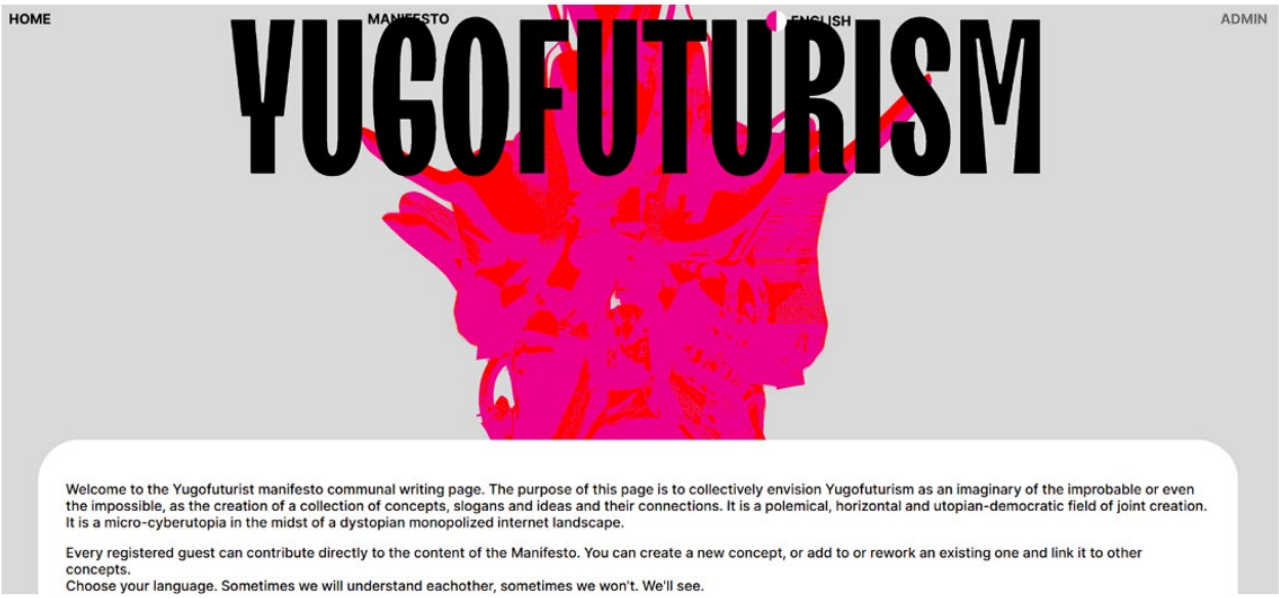

Figure 1. yufu.kompot.si – an interactive site for communal writing of the Yugofuturist Manifesto (created by Maska and Kompot, 2024)

awareness. One such group is Ljubljana's Kompot: a network of hosting service providers that operate under the principles of freedom privacy and decentralisation (librehosters), or in their own words, 'a network of cooperation and solidarity that uses free software to encourage decentralisation through federation and distributed platforms' (Kompot). They are a growing community that exchanges and shares knowledge while mutually providing a stable, upgradable, and interconnected code.

Having launched and developing the website Yufu.kompot.si together with Maska Institute in 2024, they have offered an open code librehosted platform for the communal writing of the Yugofuturist manifesto. Its open code is written in a way that supports a democratic process of negotiation, of adding, erasing, rewriting, reformulating a proposed headword or entry which can be done in real time simultaneously from anywhere in the world. The website is a possibility for everybody to directly intervene in a growing conglomerate of text and thus to gradually build a common vision of a future, grounded in certain lost values that belonged to the times passed. This is one of the evolving techno-imaginaries of how to strive for openness and inclusivity internationally by code and technology while proposing a new concept or a new movement that is Yugofuturism (**Figure 1**).

It is a tiny cyber-utopia amidst the dystopian internet landscape that has not hope of changing the grand scale. Failing to be loud and ambitious as it could be if hosted and promoted on the monopolised platforms but embracing its laterality so to conquer the narrative from the periphery, it is destined to remain a loser. From the position of loserhood, it will hopefully prove that ideas can meet in a democratic, horizontal dialogue, intersecting with one another and lively proposing a consensus or ever dispersing into different possible articulations. Meanwhile, which may be its purpose, it will create a community of people and regions through a common problem and creation, where there is currently little or no communication (**Figure 2**).

CONCLUSION

There is not a universal Yugoslav or post-Yugoslav or Yugofuturist position – to claim this would be to propose a (self)orientalising position that for example the writer Eurovicious strongly argues against while analysing the diverse queer moments of even such a seemingly nationalist, homophobic, sexist and machoist culture as is the Turbofolk (Eurovicious, 2014). But for me, the answer also does not lie in producing further fractions of balkanised futurisms from the former federative state positions that would perpetuate the nationalistic (moral, economic, historical) superiority of an ethnicity. For Yugofuturism is possible as a mobilising movement of the present for a common future only if agency can be returned even to its most marginalised constituency link.

In the article, I've analysed Maska Institute's emerging Yugofuturist corpus, identifying and reflecting on what appear to be its the key dimensions – its historical, cultural and geopolitical starting points as discussed through a post-Yugoslav generational perspective; its futurist positionality in relation to historical *avant-gardes* on the one hand and neofuturisms on the other hand, not neglecting its contemporary challenges. Perhaps, a transgenerational movement is needed, but to find a relation with the common past again, I argued that the younger generation must find its own key and its own affective ground towards it to reconnect with its locality's forgotten potential.

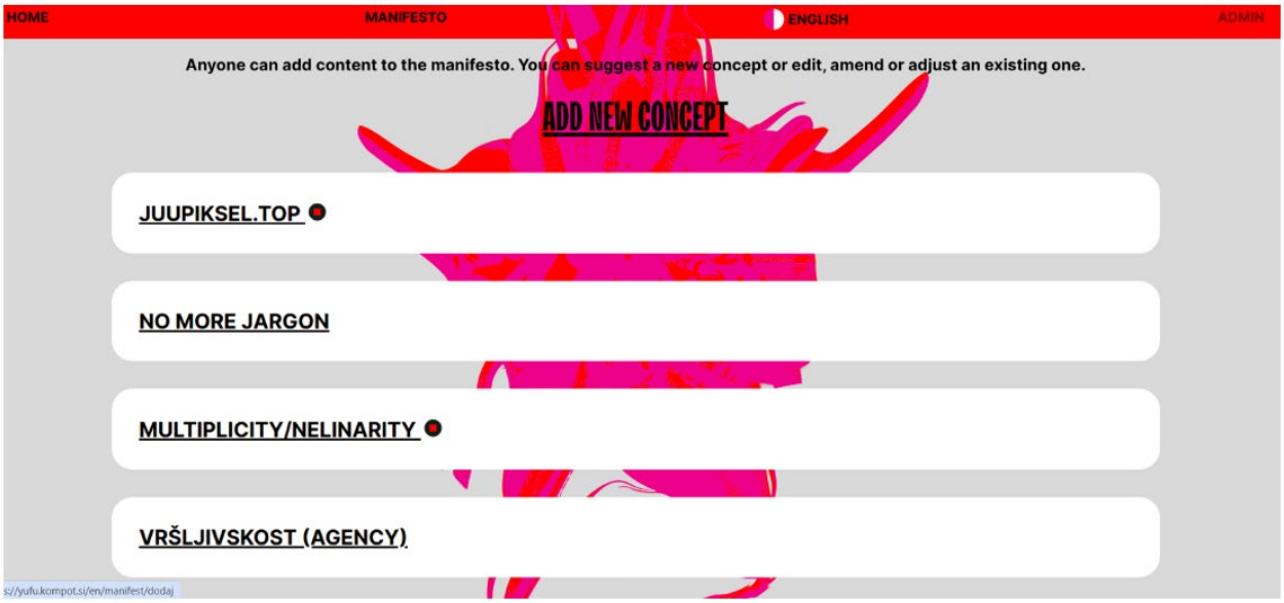

Figure 2. yufu.kompot.si – anyone can add content to the manifesto (created by Maska and Kompot, 2024)

Furthermore, I have discussed its feminist implications which are intergenerationally entangled or disentangled by different feminisms. Finally, I have laid out its technological aspects by employing a case study of the Yugofuturist manifesto's internet site, developed by the Kompot collective.

I have thus summed up the insights suggested by artists and writers invited by the Maska institute to consider what Yugofuturism as a newly suggested contemporary Balkan region-based futurist movement in the making might present. Yugofuturism is still a rather ambiguous term, but as I argue, it is strongly connected to the ambivalent connotation of the former state SFR Yugoslavia. The latter has brought modernisation, human rights, and welfare to a sizeable part of the Balkan region. The socialist Yugoslav period was a rare sovereign era for part of the Balkan peninsula, but its multiethnic unity nationalistically crumbled down. This failure cannot be undone and has a significant impact on the affective dimension of the transitional generation's attitude, which is often cynical and sceptical. This is a generational specificity that shows up in the arguments of the contributors to Maska's Yugofuturist publications and projects. I believe it is a trait we can use productively – to keep the bond with the past alive to be able to build techno-imaginaries or future scenarios in a futureless world.

The post-socialist situation left people in a vacuum, without a future, emigrated and marginalised, very much disconnected from one another and their common past, with a strong inferiority complex and inclination to be somewhere/one else and better. As other neofuturist movements, especially Afrofuturism, Yugofuturism thus aspires to affirm its own voice that would speak through ambivalences and thus create a possible future where there is allegedly none. It is a creative strategy that employs past potentialities as well as fictions to construct a future world, which is not necessarily a utopia, a perfect flawless world, but one where we have developed and learned to use failure strategically to resolve the upcoming adversities better. It is a feminist vision for it considers and employs regionally specific women's liberation struggles and learns from their flaws and won battles. But it does not rely on them. It searches for its own path to keep fighting the battles that are still open, but also the ones that only they can see from their own futureless generational perspective. Yugofuturism believes that no system or technology alone can overcome gender biases if it is not programmed to do so, which is why it is important that we are involved in future worldbuilding and technological innovation strategies. While understanding the internet today as a cyber-utopia kidnapped and monopolised by multinational tech giants, Yugofuturism is about developing a parallel micro community online to practice a democratic vision of joyfully creating a movement (for the possibly hopeless future) together.

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