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Practical Aesthetics:

Negotiating Sickness in Serbia and Macedonia

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts  
in Culture and Performance

by

Christina Novakov-Ritchey

2017

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2017

## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Practical Aesthetics:  
Negotiating Sickness in Serbia and Macedonia

by

Christina Novakov-Ritchey

Master of Arts in Culture and Performance

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor David Delgado Shorter, Chair

As cultural practitioners, traditional healers in Macedonia and eastern Serbia negotiate the materiality of the sick body by facilitating aesthetic encounters. *Bajanje* healers manipulate words, lead, plants, water, and other materials to transform their guests' relationships to health. Within the *bajanje* encounter, healers create intimate, culturally-sanctioned spaces through which to materially intervene in their guests' mental and physical health. Negotiating shame and vulnerability, *bajanje* healers empower individual members of rural Serbian and Macedonian villages to maintain their own health and the health of their communities. Calling upon a long traditional lineage, these healers delineate a community that extends through innumerable past and future generations. By recognizing how *bajanje* weaves itself into the daily, material

routines of healers and their guests, I propose that we recognize *bajanje* as part of everyday life and by extension that we recognize *bajanje* as contemporary and enduring.

The thesis of Christina Novakov-Ritchey is approved.

Anurima Banerji

Aparna Sharma

David Delgado Shorter, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2017

Dedicated to the emotional.

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## Section I

### Introduction

*Practical Aesthetics* is an experiment in epistemological collaboration. Committed to the sensuality of research, I question how to create communal spaces for our bodies to theorize within ethnography. Two years ago, I revisited Serbia—my familial home—with fresh eyes, wanting to understand the soft interplay of my family and everyday life in the village. Here, I collided with *bajanje*, a verbal healing practice that provoked in me the same affect that I perpetually seek out in art: that fuzzy feeling of leaving one state and entering another; the over-awareness of the perimeter of one’s body; the flushed face of someone whose vulnerable boundaries have just been transgressed. A deeply performative practice, *bajanje* opens up a fascinating site within the extant literature on Balkan tradition. Impossible to divorce from its purpose as a healing modality, *bajanje* reveals how people materially engage with tradition as the site of their life’s fate. *Bajanje* healers offer incantations that range from the treatment of colic to protection from evil eye to the invocation of love.<sup>1</sup> Unlike other traditional cultural practices such as singing, dancing, and weaving, *bajanje* does not exist beyond its vernacular utility. You cannot mount *bajanje* on the wall nor book a healer to give an evening-length performance. While the governments of Serbia and Macedonia may support the conversion of traditional music and dance into staged spectacles for consumption, when we divorce *bajanje* from the inter-personal negotiation of health and fate, *bajanje* dissipates.

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<sup>1</sup> Often referred to in Serbian as *bajalice* or *vračare*, and as *bajačke* in Macedonian, I refer to healers as “*bajanje* healers” in this text, because among the Vlach population I collaborated with “*bajalica*” referred to the incantation rather than the healer. To avoid conflicting definitions amongst my collaborators I use the term *bajanje* healer to refer to practitioners.

While working with *bajanje* healers, I am repeatedly confronted by how we choose to take care of each other and how we open up sites of vulnerability wherein we feel empowered to reveal our deepest insecurities and to ask for help. In the existing literature on incantation practices in Serbia and Macedonia, scholars pay great attention to linguistic detail while all but ignoring the *life* of the practice. Although we may benefit from understanding the linguistic structures of incantations, erasing the living bodies who produce these healing incantations commits violence against already-marginalized rural practitioners. Often fiercely guarded, the lives of these incantations end once dissected and splayed apart for us to consume as literature. My study introduces the vivid lives of *bajanje*'s shepherds and exposes the epistemic violence committed against healers by those scholars who choose to dissect the words of their incantations as a form of folk literature.

By understanding how healers manipulate words, plants, water, and other materials in living relation to the fate-seeker, we can understand the healer as the facilitator of an experimental knowledge process. Within the transformative site produced through *bajanje*, practitioners give a voice to the troubling emotions of the participant. By inviting these emotions to the table, healers create an intimate, culturally-sanctioned space through which to materially intervene in our mental and physical health. Negotiating shame and judgement, *bajanje* healers empower individual members of rural villages to maintain their own health and the health of their communities. Calling upon a long traditional lineage of *bajanje*, these healers delineate a community that extends through innumerable generations backwards and forwards in time.

In this study, I refuse to present *bajanje* as an exotic practice located in the forgotten recesses of the modern project. Rather, I demonstrate how *bajanje* is “everyday” and “ordinary” in the sense of Michel de Certeau (1984) and Kathleen Stewart (2007). By denying the orientalist

gaze, I situate *bajanje* as a mode of survival. I fully insert my subjectivity into this research to demonstrate how I use *bajanje* as a mode of my own survival. Rather than standing outside of the practice and attempting to develop a formula of a traditional genre, I encounter these healers as people uniquely capable of healing me. I bring them my troubles with love, my headaches, my anxiety, and my depression, not because I need to feel implicated, but because my own troubled relationship to health brought me to this research. In the field, I do not seek to find the alleged conjuror who caused Nikola Radosavljević to commit nine murders a decade ago, nor do I seek to acquire the healers' powers, rather, I seek a mode of survival that has thus far been both discursively and materially denied to me in the realms of academia and biomedicine.<sup>2</sup>

When we recognize seemingly fantastical cultural practices as “everyday,” we admit that these practices are not auxiliary, but are rather the fabric of human life. Perceiving *bajanje* as a pedestrian practice forces us to confront our conflicting worldviews. In the American academy, our worldview dictates that *bajanje* is a ritual, a tradition, and a rite of passage—something extraordinary; however, in healers' worldviews *bajanje* sits within their everyday lives as an incantation practice akin to praying that helps people to manage their struggles. Scholars employ words such as “ritual” and “tradition” to deny that non-Western cultural practices possess inherent logic and rationality. *Bajanje* does not sit outside of life; *bajanje* is integral to the daily survival of my collaborators in Serbian and Macedonian villages. This everydayness promotes rural futurity. By recognizing that my collaborators heal the same way that they make *ajvar* I

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<sup>2</sup> In 2007, Nikola Radosavljević killed nine people in Jabukovac, a village in eastern Serbia, and blamed his actions on *crna magija* (black magic). This crime is often the first thing that comes to mind when you bring up *bajanje* to Serbs today.

demonstrate that *bajanje* is not a relic nor a pageant, but rather a commonsense approach to negotiating health.<sup>3</sup>

I begin *Practical Aesthetics* by reviewing the extant literature on *bajanje* in Serbia and Macedonia. From the mid-nineteenth century to the present, these scholars rely heavily on folkloric methodologies that promote the subjugation and erosion of rural life in the Balkans. Using the theories of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Johannes Fabian, and Maria Todorova I demonstrate that when scholars employ a folkloric approach to *bajanje*, they harm healers and the people who visit them by promoting a temporal hierarchy between rural and urban practice. To re-situate *bajanje* within the context of contemporary rural life in Serbia and Macedonia I pay particular attention to the bodily knowledge strategies employed by the healers and their guests. Due to the damage wrought upon *bajanje* by folklorists and scholars who rely on folkloric methods, I propose a new methodology which interweaves performance studies, autoethnography, and practice-based research.

In Chapter One, “Sensing Sickness,” I argue that *bajanje* healers collaborate with their guests’ sick bodies to develop mutually-informed aesthetic encounters that manipulate senses of time, vocal tones, and textures to achieve an affective transformation. I examine *bajanje* performances by Serbian and Macedonian healers to demonstrate the ways in which these healers intuit the sick body through their aesthetic senses. Chapter Two, “Expressions of Vulnerability,” examines the mechanisms through which *bajanje* healers open sites of culturally-sanctioned emotional vulnerability. I argue that by opening these sites of vulnerability, healers invite rural citizens to care for mental and social sicknesses that biomedical doctors either ignore or lack the capacity to treat. I conclude *Practical Aesthetics* with Chapter Three, “The Endurance

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<sup>3</sup> *Ajvar* is a quintessential Balkan condiment made from roasted peppers.

of the Ordinary,” where I transform *bajanje* from an interpersonal healing practice into a modality of rural endurance. By recognizing how *bajanje* weaves itself into the daily, material routines of healers and their guests, I propose that we recognize *bajanje* as part of everyday life and by extension that we recognize *bajanje* as contemporary and persisting. Witnessing the intense economic and social pressure opposing the rural population in Serbia and Macedonia, I propose that *bajanje* and other rural cultural practices enable these communities to survive.

## Literature Review

The first published reference to *bajanje* was written by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić in the early nineteenth century. A Serbian philologist and linguist, Karadžić is responsible for the creation of a standardized Serbian alphabet and orthography.<sup>4</sup> In his pursuit of linguistic transformation, Karadžić collected vast numbers of Serbian oral poems and myths. Committed to uplifting the common man, Karadžić used these collections as the source material for developing a standardized written language based on Serbs' vernacular use of language. Due to his role in developing a Serbian national consciousness based on oral tradition, Karadžić is a household name in present-day Serbia. In his biographical article on Karadžić, V. Ćorović attributes much of the success of the Serbian peasant rebellion against Turkish rule to the newfound Serbian national and cultural identity promoted by Vuk Karadžić in his celebration of oral poetry (1938: 674).<sup>5</sup> The publication of these anthologies of Serbian vernacular culture catalyzed the emergence of a cohesive national identity—paralleling the emergence of a uniform written language. Beyond Serbia's borders, Karadžić's sphere of influence extends into the American academy, where he inspired Milman Parry and Albert Bates Lord to base their Oral-Formulaic Hypothesis on the *guslars* of Serbia (Lord 1960). The darling of the Serbian imagination and the Euro-American study of oral composition, Karadžić initiated two centuries of scholarship on the rural traditions of the Balkans.

Karadžić first references *bajanje* in the second edition of *Srpski rječnik* (*Serbian Dictionary*) published in 1852. An expanded version of his earlier etymological volume, the

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<sup>4</sup> Before Karadžić's reformation, Serbian had no standardized written form and often combined Serbian with Russian or Church Slavonic (Ćorović 1938: 668).

<sup>5</sup> Karadžić worked as the secretary for two different revolutionary leaders before fleeing to Vienna in 1813 (Ćorović 1938: 667).



1852 edition of *Srpski rječnik* more closely resembles an encyclopedia than a dictionary. Here, Karadžić mixes indices of rural cultural practices with unusual folk terminology. Karadžić includes two *basme* transcriptions, several *bajanje* ritual actions, and terms used to describe these village healers and their practices.<sup>6</sup> Looking at these three versions of *bajanje*, we can see that Karadžić constructs a tripartite division of the practice: the spell-as-text, the choreography, and the title. By splitting *bajanje* into these components, Karadžić suggests that to understand *bajanje* we do not need to integrate the incantation with the healer's movement and how they name their practice. Ontologically, Karadžić views each of these components as a discrete unit, regardless of whether or not a scholar chooses to later re-contextualize *bajanje* as the articulation of language and movement in space. By deconstructing *bajanje* within *Srpski rječnik*, Karadžić endorses scholars who decontextualize, catalogue, and mass-produce representations of rural Serbian cultural practices.

We see this system of deconstructing *bajanje* into component parts—often with hundreds of pages separating each definition—perpetuated in the anthologies of subsequent scholars such as P. Kemp (1935), Ljubinko Radenković (1973, 1982, 1983) and Slavoljub Gacović (2002). Radenković, the foremost expert on *bajanje* in Serbia, organizes his 1982 anthology, *Narodne basme i bajaranje* (Folk *basme* and *bajaranje*), along Karadžić's ontological lines. Dedicated solely to *bajaranje*, Radenković divides his anthology of more than 600 *basme* by presenting the transcriptions according to their corresponding sickness and then, several hundred pages later, briefly commenting on the ritual actions related to each sickness. Radenković concludes his volume with an extensive list of references from which he sourced each of the transcriptions.

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<sup>6</sup> In the 1935 edition, you can find the *basma* for *micine* (373) and the *basma* for *molitva od more* (380), the definitions of *bajaranje* (13), *basma* (16), *gatanje* (86), and *vračanje* (76-77); the illnesses *strava* (740), *strah* (741), and *uroci* (813); the techniques of *salivanje* (683).

While reading the transcriptions, you receive no information about which country or region the *basma* is from, what date the researcher collected the *basma*, or the name of the healer. Instead, Radenković provides the reader with a number that corresponds to a bibliographic entry. Radenković organizes these bibliographic entries by country, which then refer the reader to other collections of folk medicine and oral literature. The structure of anthologies such as Radenković's only permit the production of linguistic knowledge. By not specifying the site, date, mode of collection, or greater social context, Radenković presents *bajanje* as a site of literary analysis and thereby eclipses the relevance of *bajanje* to living communities.

One of the most recent examples of a *bajanje* anthology is Slavoljub Gacović's *Bajanja u kultu mrtvih kod Vlaha severoistočne Srbije (Bajanje in the Cult of the Dead amongst Vlachs in Northeastern Serbia)* (2002). While this text significantly contributes to a shamefully small volume of literature on Vlach culture in Serbia, Gacović replicates the same ontological system as Karadžić and Radenković. Gacović structures his anthology by providing a five-page introduction to the role of *bajanje* in Vlach culture and the parameters of his fieldwork, followed by six sets of *basme* that relate to the dead. In these subsections, Gacović introduces individual *basme* with several lines that describe the ritual in both Serbian and Vlach language, which he follows with the transcription of the *basma* in phonetic Vlach and Serbian.<sup>7</sup> Following the completion of all *basme* transcriptions in a particular section, Gacović offers several pages of commentary in Serbian. Unlike Radenković and Karadžić, Gacović's received these *basme* through direct communication with healers and he provides the reader with names, ages, and locations. Unfortunately, the presentation of the *basme* transcriptions in a list demonstrates

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<sup>7</sup> The inclusion of transcribed Vlach language is significant as Vlach has no official written form. Gacović uses Romanian orthography, because Romanian is Vlach's closest linguistic relative.

Gacović's indexical epistemology. While Gacović makes his research more accessible to the healers by writing in both Serbian and phonetic Vlach and by not compiling *basme* from secondary sources, Gacović fails to contextualize *bajanje* within a greater social context.

Beyond these anthologies exists a small body of scholarly articles published on Serbian and Macedonian *bajanje* in folklore, ethnology, and linguistic anthropology beginning in the mid-twentieth century. This group of scholars includes American linguistic anthropologist Barbara Kerewsky-Halpern and Professor of English and Classical Studies John Miles Foley; Vlach ethnologist Paun Es Durlić, Slovenian Professor of Folklore and Comparative Mythology, Mirjam Mencej; Macedonian Professor of Ethnology Ljupčo Risteki; and Serbian scholar of Ethnology, Maria Vivod. The oldest of the group, Kerewsky-Halpern and Foley, began to incorporate the social intricacies of everyday life into the transcriptions of *basme* in the 1970s. In her article "Watch out for Snakes!" (1978), Kerewsky-Halpern examines the discrepancy between the profusion of cows' snakebite injuries and the absence of poisonous snakes in Orašac, Serbia to transform the snakebite from a literal bite to an appropriate analogue to the *bajanje* healer and her dualist powers. To discover the referent of the analogy, Kerewsky-Halpern uses transcriptions of *basme* as springboards to analyze healers' invocations of symbols. By prioritizing textual symbols, Kerewsky-Halpern promotes an analysis of *bajanje* that marries linguistic analysis with cosmological theory.

We see a similar coupling of linguistics and cosmology in the work of Paun Es Durlić. In his article, "Basme iz gornjeg poreča" ("Basme from upper Poreč") (1987), Durlić echoes Gacović's anthology by first introducing his fieldwork methods, then presenting *basme* transcriptions in Vlach and Serbian, and concluding with narrative context and analysis of each

*basme*.<sup>8</sup> Durlić's analysis, similar to the analysis presented by Kerewsky-Halpern and Foley, emphasizes the folk beliefs that healers promote through the script of their *basme*. In his exegesis of the *basma* relating to the forest mother (*šumske majke* in Serbian, *muma padure* in Vlach), Durlić emphasizes that belief in *muma padure* is strong in upper Poreč, citing a 1983 study that reports eighty percent of eighth graders at B. Perić elementary school in Rudna Glava believe in *muma padure* (1987: 116). Despite this statistic, however, Durlić fails to provide us with any evidence of how people live alongside *muma padure*. The omission of villagers' living relation with *muma padure* forces me to see Durlić's emphasis on "belief" as an assault on villagers' rationality. By solely relying on the textualization of healing incantations and a survey with eighth graders to prove a state of belief among villagers in the upper Poreč region, Durlić severs the contemporary life of *bajanje* and encourages a portrait of *bajanje* practitioners as irrational.

While later scholars begin to depart from a sole reliance on *bajanje*-as-text, this emphasis on belief and cosmology remains. One of the most recent examples of this practice is Ljupčo Risteki's 2005 essay "Traditional Healers in Poreče from the Time of Joseph Obrembski to the Present Day," where Risteki revisits the site of well-known ethnographer, Joseph Obrembski, who performed fieldwork in the early 1930s in Poreče, Macedonia. Risteki argues that healers communicate with illnesses-as-persons by speaking in the second person during their incantations (2005: 137). While a nuanced analysis of the words of the *basme* in tandem with a verbal agreement from the healer may confirm Risteki's theory, Risteki never reveals the voices nor the bodies of the healers in his essay. Instead, he confirms his theory of illness-as-person by citing "mythical notions," a "mythical code," and "folk notions" (2005: 138). The extrapolation

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<sup>8</sup> Durlić uses Serbian orthography for his transcriptions of Vlach language, as opposed to Gacović who uses Romanian orthography.

of cosmology based on an abstract portrait of *bajanje* healers' mythical psychology dangerously places these healers outside of time and history. When scholars erase healers' subjectivities from analytical texts, we see the living healer become equivalent to the transcription of a *basma* in an anthology.

A few scholars in the last decade have begun to recognize *bajanje* practitioners as social actors, rather than as mouthpieces of oral tradition. One of the best examples of the interrelationship of healing and sociality is Maria Vivod's 2009 essay, "The Charms of Biljana, a Bajalica (Conjuror) in Budisava Serbia." In her essay, Vivod uses the popularity of Biljana in the Vojvodina region of Serbia to demonstrate that in the post-Yugoslav era *bajanje* continues to increase in popularity due to both the prohibitive cost of biomedicine and a renewed nationalist search for roots in traditional practices. By forging a relationship with a single healer in this study, Vivod demonstrates that *bajanje* acts to maintain village social networks through the treatment of spell-boundness, a sickness which results from the violation of a social taboo. While Vivod constructs Biljana as more of a living subject than any of the previous authors, she still places cosmology above subjectivity. In her analysis, Vivod places Biljana at the crossroads of the traditional Serbian worldview, where healers are the companions of *vile*, and the Serbian Orthodox Christian worldview.<sup>9</sup> In an uncanny similarity to Karadžić's tripartite division of *bajanje*, Vivod analyzes Biljana's use of the word "prayer" to mean *basme*, her physical movements (which she aligns with the traditional worldview), and the linguistic content of her *basme* (which she aligns with the Serbian Orthodox Christian worldview) (2009: 241). Vivod argues that the division between Biljana's words and her movements is the Christianization of Serbian tradition. Referring to Biljana's *basme* as her "so called 'prayers'" we see Vivod's

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<sup>9</sup> *Vile* is generally translated as fairies.

inherent *disbelief* in Biljana's exegesis of her own *bajanje* practice (2009: 244). Placing her own worldview above Biljana's, Vivod takes one step forward and two steps back. While Vivod significantly situates the popularity of *bajanje* in relation to the 1990s wars and thereby affords Biljana contemporary status, she simultaneously denies Biljana's agency by usurping her narrative authority.

To better understand the consequences of valuing cosmology and claims of belief above social context, I turn to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's 1998 article "Folklore's Crisis." In her article, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett locates the discipline of folklore within social evolutionary discourse and demonstrates the complicity of folklore scholars in the destruction of non-Western cultural practices. By citing folklore's original definition in 1846 England as the "'survivals' in a civilized society," Kirshenblatt-Gimblett demonstrates how, in service of producing a homogenous civilized culture, folklore became a tool to render cultural practices obsolete and to subsequently transpose their value as emblems of heritage (1998: 297-298, 295). Rather than an innocent scholarly interest in remote cultural practices, folklore's disciplinary interest in the cultural practices of subjugated people reveals folklore's complicity with national imperialist projects. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett lucidly demonstrates this complicity when she cites the work of Steven Mullaney, who analyzes the expert ethnographic re-creation of Brazilian villages in 1550 Rouen as a performance of the destruction of culture. By forcing indigenous Brazilians to perform in a re-enactment of a French siege within a re-constructed set of indigenous life located on French soil, Henry II demanded "the elimination of its own pretext" (1998: 297). Henry II deployed folklore to establish an authentic context through which to violently eliminate that context as a reality. Within folklore, we witness again and again the representation of a present

that is quickly turning into the past. This temporal shift results in the placement of folklore's objects of study within a scenario of planned obsolescence.

By articulating Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's model of folklore with Johannes Fabian's model of chronopolitics, we can extend the agenda of cultural evolutionism into ethnographic practice at large. In his 1983 text, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, Fabian articulates the built-in anthropological bias to render the ethnographic object as past. Drawing from the same evolutionary discourse as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Fabian demonstrates that anthropologists do not target the primitive, but rather wield primitivism as a strategy (1983: 18). By transferring the discourse from the object of study to the technologies which produce the object, Fabian widens our understanding of folklore as a mechanism of erasure. Where Kirshenblatt-Gimblett focuses on the production of folklore-as-object, which consequently produces the discipline of folklore, Fabian focuses on the temporal worldview of anthropologists (and by extension folklorists) that dictates this homicidal behavior.

Fabian transforms our understanding of anthropology's temporal frameworks by demonstrating how anthropologists deny coevalness to their interlocutors through the navigation of three models of ethnographic time. Fabian's models of typological time and cultural taxonomy are the most relevant to my critique of the extant *bajanje* literature. Typological time separates anthropologists from their colleagues in the field by developing a before/after typology, such as pre-literate versus literate and traditional versus modern (1983: 23). Anthropologists, and folklorists more so, use typological language to create distance between themselves and their collaborators. By creating distance between the ethnographer and the object of ethnography, the ethnographer rhetorically gains the authoritative upper-hand in knowledge production.

As evolutionary discourse becomes more covert, so too does the language that we use to express temporal distance (Fabian 1983: 39). Over time we see typological time replaced with cultural relativity and taxonomy. Both of these modalities deny the necessity of recognizing temporality in anthropological studies. Cultural taxonomy carries special weight in relation to the textualization of *bajanje* and the production of charm anthologies. Fabian argues that following the methodological lines of structuralism, cultural taxonomy places cultures on an objective grid, which flattens time and renders temporal discourse obsolete (1983: 52). To be successful, taxonomization requires the conversion of all cultural data into text-based technologies (1983: 98). Once converted, anthropologists can mine these cultural texts for historically decontextualized data that will allow them to win the “game” of structural analysis (1983: 99). These distance-producing anthropological strategies ultimately reveal the chronopolitical nature of geopolitics: present-tense subjects dictate the essential character of past-tense subjects (1983: 144). Within a discipline that colonizers originally deployed to prove their evolutionary superiority, we find the temporal residue of cultural evolutionism woven into the fabric of contemporary ethnography.

In the previous literature on *bajanje* we witness an oscillation between the chronopolitical practices of typology and taxonomy. The earliest references to *bajanje* by Vuk Karadžić fit most comfortably in taxonomic form, as his encyclopedic entries present each *basme* as a neat point on the Serbian cultural grid, ignoring social and historical context. Karadžić does not employ typological time in his dictionaries, because labeling cultural practitioners as pre-literate or pre-modern would have undermined his reformation of the national Serbian language using vernacular speech. Following this reformation, however, we see the entrance of explicit typological time. We can identify the employment of typological time through phrases such as



“the charm is ageless and timeless, its symbolism reaching back to when myth was truth” (Kerewsky-Halpern 1978: 312), the repeated use of “archaic” to describe contemporary healing practiced by living people (Risteki 2005: 141, Petreska 2008: 40), the qualifier that the fieldwork sites are “undeveloped rural areas almost completely without industry” (Mencej 2005: 38-39), and the surprise that despite the covert ritual nature of *bajanje*, “There are some ‘modern’ elements as well” (Vivod 2009: 241). By defining *bajanje* as simultaneously archaic, timeless, surprisingly modern, and from pre-industrial sites, these scholars execute a chronopolitical maneuver which denies coevalness to healers in Serbia and Macedonia. Deployed as a strategy to grant authors textual authority, scholars’ insidious denial of coevalness prevents a meaningful analysis of *bajanje* as a contemporary healing practice.

Never part of the practical analysis of *bajanje*, scholars use the aforementioned typological phrases as rhetorical maneuvers to emotionally place rural Balkan healers in the past before taxonomizing the practice of *bajanje*. During their taxonomic analysis, we see scholars divide *bajanje* into its component parts according to the style of the individual author—or game player, according to Fabian. Risteki (2005) divides *bajanje* into six possible healing modalities, Mencej (2005) produces a taxonomy of witches in eastern Slovenia versus western Macedonia based on the behaviors that villagers from each region ascribe to “witches,” and Kerewsky-Halpern (1983) uses three examples of versions of a snake bite charm to diachronically track their linguistic transformation. The most blatant promotion of taxonomy in the study of *bajanje* is Jonathan Roper’s proposal to develop an international index of verbal charms in the Committee of Charms, Charmers, and Charming (Roper 2004: 139-141).<sup>10</sup> In a series of

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<sup>10</sup> The Committee on Charms, Charmers, and Charming is part of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research. The members of this committee produce scholarship on charming

responses offered by committee members, including Ljubinko Radenković, scholars accept Roper's proposal and suggest organizing charms by narrative plot elements (Radenković), by their practical function (Ülo Valk), or based on language (Ekaterina Velmezova)(Agapkina 2009). This scholarly conversation underscores that the chronopolitical model provided by Fabian and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett permeates the entire field of study on *bajanje*. By abstracting components of healers' practices, such as the words of their incantations, their materials, and their corporeal movements, scholars render these healers as relics of the past who will soon fade into history and in the process become transmuted as symbols of heritage. By placing their interlocutors in the past, scholars evade subjects who talk back.

This chronopolitical attitude towards the Balkans is neither new nor anomalous. Occupied by the Ottoman Empire from the fourteenth century until 1878, the Balkans became a surrogate for the Oriental East in relationship to Western Europe. Using Maria Todorova's text *Imagining the Balkans*, we can begin to understand how, with the re-popularization of the Great Chain of Being in late nineteenth and early twentieth century discourse, Western European intellectuals constructed the Balkans as their inferior. This evolutionary attitude expressed itself in both physical and temporal portraits of Balkan life by writers such as Marcus Ehrenpreis who in his 1928 book, *The Soul of the East: Experience and Reflections*, aligns the poor physiognomy of Balkan people with being not "yet Europeans" (1997: 125)<sup>11</sup>. The convergence of Romanticism and Evolutionism at the turn of the twentieth century produced a simultaneous

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practices in countries including Brazil, England, Greece, Hungary, Russia, Serbia, Sweden, and others.

<sup>11</sup> In his chapter "Across the New Balkans" Ehrenpreis describes Balkan physiognomy as "low foreheads, sodden eyes, protruding ears, thick underlips" with a "low intellectual, and to a certain extent moral, quality" (Ehrenpreis 1928: 11-13).

interest in the Balkan *Volksgeist* as expressed in folklore and the location of Balkan “folk” in the past and/or as sub-human. After the diminishing public role of evolutionist discourse post WWII, we see folklore take up the full representational burden as the Balkans become the folk museum of Europe—a touchstone for Western Europe to remember their evolutionary and cultural past (Todorova 1997: 129).

Todorova most effectively demonstrates the complicity of Balkan folklore in cultural evolutionary discourse by analyzing the debate between Johann Gottfried von Herder and Immanuel Kant. A student of Kant, Herder rejected Kant’s assertion in *Anthropology* that Slavs lack the necessary qualities to be considered “folk.” In Herder’s subsequent work on *Volksgeist*, he promotes the Slavs as a cohesive folk group. A great example of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s identification of folklore with the conception of homogenous culture, Herder promoted Slavic culture as a unity to contest Kant’s evolutionist claims about the primitivism of Balkan people (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 295). Herder’s “homage to the Slavs” became the sustenance for multiple generations of Slavists after its publication in *Slavin* magazine in 1806—including Vuk Karadžić and his mentor Jernej Kopitar (Kropej 2013: 216). The result, however, of this oppositionally-constructed discipline of Slavic Studies became the conflation of folklore and evolutionist ideology once explicit evolutionist discourse went underground.

The lasting impact of conflating cultural evolutionary theory with folklore in the Balkans manifests in ever-increasing rates of rural de-population and poverty. To continue rendering the cultural practices of rural Serbs and Macedonians as folklore is to commit epistemic violence. When seventy-two percent of Serbs living in rural areas who work in agriculture are below the poverty line and the number of rural households has decreased by 7.4% since 1991, we cannot deny that an organized pattern of elimination is underway (Pejin-Stokić 2012: 14; Čikić 2015:

50). In her discussion of how people react to having their practices labeled as folk, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett cites her Hasidim collaborators' vehement rejection of Purim plays as folklore, because if you consider these practices as folklore then you do not believe and "by not believing, folklorists devitalize what Hasidim do" (1998: 305). I see the same drama unfolding with healers in Serbia and Macedonia. By rendering *bajanje* as a form of folklore, scholars question the veracity of healers' worldviews. By questioning the truth of *bajanje*, scholars invalidate rural life and package these healers' lives as examples of our heritage rather than our future.

While each of the prior phases of research on *bajanje* provides us with invaluable knowledge on the relationship between traditional healing and the academy, future research must move beyond folklore. Recognizing the complicity of folklore in cultural evolutionism and witnessing the subjugation of rural communities in present day ex-Yugoslavia, we must develop new epistemological strategies through which to research cultural practices such as *bajanje*. By recognizing the coeval status of *bajanje* practitioners, we enter into a rich new field of study that does not draw a line in the sand between traditional and modern culture.

## Methodology

To re-situate *bajanje* within the social context of contemporary rural life in Serbia and Macedonia, I prioritize the embodied epistemologies employed by healers and their guests. Reacting against the damage wrought upon rural cultural practices, including *bajanje*, by earlier scholars who employ folkloric approaches, I propose a research methodology that interweaves performance studies, autoethnography, and practice-based research. As a performance artist, a dramaturg, and a scholar, I regularly find myself negotiating the meaning of collaboration. Whereas I witness a more equal division of labor in the development of collective performance pieces, such as ensemble theatre, I am often unsure of the boundaries of scholarly labor. Despite the popularity of terms such as “intersubjectivity,” the methodological division of labor between ethnographers and their interlocutors remains obscured. I approach my work with *bajanje* healers as an experiment to discover how we can build a model of ethnographic collaboration wherein we divide our labor to articulate and achieve common goals. For *Practical Aesthetics*, these goals include healing rural communities, de-stigmatizing *bajanje*, and recognizing the value of these cultural practices in a globalist context. These goals are of interest both to the healers with whom I work and to myself as a scholar/practitioner. By approaching fieldwork as a collaboration, my methodology grows out of the epistemic crossroads between our relationships to practice.

The present study has grown out of four months of fieldwork over a period of two years. Beginning in 2016, I resided in Jurumleri, a settlement on the southeastern edge of Skopje, Macedonia. From here, I frequently traveled to small villages across Macedonia. My primary collaborators in this region are Suada in Ognjanci, Talija in Petrovec, and Bojana in Češinovo. I met each of these healers through a close friend who is related to Talija and Bojana and has previously received treatment from Suada. In 2017, I divided my time between Macedonia and

Majdanpek, Serbia. From my base in Majdanpek I began to collaborate with Ilija in Luka and Marija in Tanda. Aleksandar Repedžić, the former director of Majdanpek's ethnographic museum, introduced me to both of these healers.

While I use the traditional ethnographic field methods of interviews and participant observation, my most meaningful research strategy has become the development of collaborative performances in conversation with healers and other colleagues in the field. This model of performative collaboration provides me with the data required to adequately address the aesthetic and sensory knowledge produced by *bajanje* healers. I use the writings of Dwight Conquergood, Diana Taylor, Heewon Chang, Paul Stoller, and Susan Melrose to systematize this performative methodology and to demonstrate the necessity for new epistemological models in the field. By intertwining my artistic practice with scholarship on performance and ethnography I have produced a sensuous performative research methodology that allows me to step out from under the shadow of folklore and into a collaborative zone where healers and I physically exchange knowledge about our practices.

To first ground my methodology within the prior research of performance studies theorists, I turn to Dwight Conquergood, who transforms anthropologists' theories of intersubjectivity to re-endow the sensuous body with the power to produce and disseminate knowledge.<sup>12</sup> In his 2002 article, "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," Conquergood critiques academic epistemologies' ocular hegemony, which distances the scholar from the subject on which she writes. Conquergood's model of sensory hierarchy does not restrict ocular hegemony to the domain of images, but also indicts our pre-occupation with the

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<sup>12</sup> Like Conquergood and Taylor, I call attention to the body rather than the person, not because I intend to refer to a de-personalized body, but rather because the invocation of "person" immediately connotes linguistic thought as the constitution of subjectivity.

verbal. By emphasizing the visual and the verbal, scholars prevent themselves from receiving the knowledge that bodies express in the form of gesture, intonation, and affect (Conquergood 2002: 146). When we rely on the textualization of the voice through transcripts, we commit epistemic violence against our collaborators who do not value the text as paramount (Conquergood 2002: 147; Rabasa 2000: 9, 22; Shorter 2009: 200-203; Smith 2012: 36-39).

To counter ocular hegemony, Conquergood uses the writings of Frederick Douglass to propose a socially engaged epistemology. Recognizing the organized denial of literacy to enslaved people in nineteenth century America, Douglass argues that one must feel and listen, rather than read the history of slavery. Conquergood identifies a performative epistemology in Douglass' "riskier hermeneutics of experience, relocation, copresence, humility and vulnerability" (2002: 149). Rather than abstracting knowledge from the body in order to typify it—as in the typological epistemologies critiqued by Fabian—Conquergood uses Douglass' example to advocate for the horizontal incorporation of text and performance (2002: 151). Neither prioritizing theory nor embodied practice, by inviting these forms to collaborate with one another we empower ourselves to produce knowledge that resonates with the people we study alongside.

Building on Conquergood's critique of textualization, Diana Taylor de-centers literate epistemology to draw attention to the performing body as a site of knowledge production in *The Archive and the Repertoire*. Examining performance as a knowledge system, Taylor draws a continuum between the archive and the repertoire to demonstrate the relationship between knowledge and the body. Taylor locates the archive in the colonial Americas during conquest, where archival ideologies installed written language as the only legitimate form of knowledge and, by extension, power. The archive, she writes, "succeeds in separating the source of

‘knowledge’ from the knower,” presenting objects of knowledge as unmediated floating representations (1999: 19). Taylor argues, however, that while the archive may have usurped power, writing never replaced embodied practice. Taylor uses the term “repertoire” to refer to the enactment of memory in the body (1999: 20). This process of embodiment, expression, and transmission requires the corporeal presence of others and refuses to abstract subjects and present them as fixed objects.

When Conquergood interprets Frederick Douglass’ epistemic proposal, he recognizes Douglass’ construction of a repertoire. Douglass prescribes that one must “place himself in the deep pine woods, and...in silence, thoughtfully analyze the sounds that shall pass through the chambers of his soul,” thereby demanding not an archival examination of slavery, but rather a performative repertoire through which to access the knowledge of “the soul-killing power of slavery” (Douglass 1969 [1855]: 99; as cited in Conquergood 2002: 149). While Conquergood uses Douglass’ proposal to argue that we accept *feeling* as a mode of knowing, Taylor offers us a methodological tool: the scenario. Reacting against the tendency to read the body as a text, Taylor draws upon Michel de Certeau and Pierre Bourdieu to offer the scenario as a formulaic structure within which settings, actions, and place co-define each other (1999: 28). Rather than falling into the over-determinism of social constructivists, Taylor’s model of the scenario invites manipulation by participants and interpreters (1999: 31).

Cautioning that scenarios can lead to oversimplification and invite a type of fantasy, Taylor analyzes Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Coco Fusco’s *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit* to investigate how these artists construct the audience’s consumptive relationship to the performers. Taylor draws a continuum between the theatrical scenarios of discovery embodied during the conquest of the Americas and Gomez-Peña and Fusco’s uncanny ethnography. Taking



the performers' theatrical maneuvers seriously, Taylor reveals the doubled ethnography of the performance: the simultaneous construction of the performers and the audience as the ethnographic Other (1993: 76). By presenting themselves as the caged exotic Other, Fusco and Gomez-Peña place the spectators into the role of the ethnographer, however, as the voice of the performance—particularly in their post-mortem commentary—we realize that Fusco and Gomez-Peña are also ethnographers studying the colonial behaviors of their spectators. In her analysis of *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit*, Taylor uses the scenario as a method to identify the production of knowledge in performance. By recognizing both the knowledge inherent in the physical interaction of the performer and the spectator as well as the power of performers to theorize, Taylor transforms our understanding of embodied knowledge.

Jumping off from Taylor's identification of the performer as an ethnographer, I use the writings of Heewon Chang and Paul Stoller to demonstrate how we can transform our embodied sensory and poetic experiences in the field into theoretical texts. In the first text solely devoted to autoethnography, Heewon Chang demonstrates how autoethnographers should train their self-reflexive awareness skills to acculturate them to noticing and documenting the physical and emotional landscapes of their daily lives (2016: 89). In the process of this acculturation, a new *sense* develops, which mediates between one's role as an ethnographer and the present moment (Chang 2016: 93). This sense acts as the ethnographer's compass, detecting the signals of knowledge production between the ethnographer and the ethnographer's collaborators in the field. Examples of this training include recording your emotions at the same time every day for two weeks, documenting your personal rituals in private versus public spaces, or cataloguing all of your social interactions for one month. Chang's model of ethnographic training reminds me of the training regimens I have undergone as a performance artist. Reminiscent practices include

taking three hours to eat a bowl of rice, keeping a journal of everyone who passes through a particular archway over a four-hour period, and forming communities while blindfolded. Each of these training modalities encourages the re-awakening of a sleeping sense, an acute awareness of your body that we usually gloss over, such as the sense of time passing, your sense of smell, or your sense of physical proximity. Chang brings our senses back into our ethnographic purview by refusing to leave our perceptive strategies to chance.

In his 1997 book, *Sensuous Scholarship*, Paul Stoller transforms ethnographic practice by offering us a model with which to interpenetrate the aesthetic, sensory, and analytical encounters of ethnographers and our collaborators. For Stoller, smells, tastes, sounds, and feelings provide us with an important interface through which to understand any cultural practice. In “The Sorcerer’s Body,” Stoller uses his 1990 fieldwork trip to Niger, which was thwarted by malaria, as a great source of sensuous knowledge. Stoller examines community members’ reactions to his illness, all of whom agreed that he needed to promptly leave the field site, because he was under attack and had not sought the proper ritual protections prior to beginning his work (1997: 11-12). Sickness becomes the perfect vehicle for Stoller to investigate sensuousness as an affective state that thoroughly intermeshes his body with the social world. The significance of Stoller’s turn towards illness is his attention to the body as a site and agent of knowing. Stoller does not sterilize his ethnographic encounter for the sake of a homogenous text, but rather turns to the body when the body declares itself present.

Stoller uses this sensuality as the basis for his argument to incorporate the poetic into the analytical in academic writing. When he analogizes the ethnographer and the griot, Stoller demonstrates that truthful representation for his Songhay collaborators necessitates a truthful *poetic* rendering (1997: 26). While anthropologists have sought to produce cultural analysis that

converts observations into abstracted knowledge, Stoller transforms the debate on ethnographic truth by elucidating the Songhay aesthetic epistemology. Stoller's assertion that his collaborators' "ultimate test of scholars is whether their words and images enable the young to uncover their past and discover their future" is not a cursory aside to assuage his ethnographic conscience, but rather perfectly sums up the difficult ethnographic task of interfacing (1997: 26). When ethnographers return to the field to share their research, they should not just bring photos and footage from the field, but rather the ethnographer should always be working towards a synthesis of their own subjective aesthetic epistemology and the epistemologies of their collaborators.

Stoller's scholarship transforms the epistemological strategies of Chang and Conquergood by demonstrating that the body does not only produce knowledge as an actor in space, but on the most minute level the body knows through its senses—the body knows through smelling, touching, and listening. Here, Stoller struggles with our extra-linguistic capacity for knowing. If we acknowledge the interrelationship of sensuous experience—much of which lays beyond the limits of language—and knowledge production, how do we invite that knowledge into our ethnographic texts? Stoller hints that the answer lies in the poetic. However, despite Stoller's wonderful examples of needing the poetic to achieve intersubjective collaboration in the field, he does not actively argue for the development of new ethnographic methodologies. Stoller signals the importance of the poetic, however, he does not discuss the interconnectedness of epistemology, poesis, and the senses in relation to research methodology.

To construct my methodology, I place the work of practice-based research scholar Susan Melrose in dialogue with critiques of ethnography. In her 2005 presentation, "...just intuitive..." Melrose argues for the coeval relationship of practitioner-based knowledge and spectator-based

knowledge. Recognizing that performance studies scholars often over-signify or mis-signify works of art due to their status as spectators, Melrose asks us to shift our attention away from the effects of a performance and towards the causes of a performance (2005: 7). By attending to performance-making causes, we re-ascribe practitioners with intention and agency.

This epistemological shift elucidates one of the most stubborn conflicts in ethnography: the hierarchy of exegeses. Too often in ethnographic writing, ethnographers produce an excess of signification. This excessive signification results from the ethnographer's position as a spectator, where the effects of a "performance" on the ethnographer are valued above the internal logic and impetus of the performance. By over-signifying cultural practices as rituals and traditions, ethnographers participate in the production of "optical illusions." In his essay "Power and Dialogue in Ethnography: Marcel Griaule's Initiation," James Clifford uses the phrase "optical illusion" to refer to Marcel Griaule's (and other ethnographers') identification of false unities in the cultural practices of ethnographic subjects, simply because those cultural practices are all similarly dissimilar from the ethnographer's worldview (1983: 89).

Melrose's spectator is Fabian's chronopolitical anthropologist who deploys primitivist temporality to create distance between the anthropologist and their interlocutor to gain textual authority. The ethnographer-as-spectator disseminates knowledge as though their representations were the words of God. Melrose defines her "spectator theory of knowledge" as theory written by scholars who observe performance and retrospectively analyze how and why the artist produced their work. By virtue of the discursive conflation of theory and writing, these theoretical works reinforce and reify the position of writing as the correct medium for theory. Melrose problematizes this conflation by demonstrating how artistic practice always-already theorizes. Using the example of choreographer Rosemary Butcher's *The Return*, Melrose

identifies the initial stage of practice-based theorization in Butcher's construction of the generative process—or the rehearsal process—the conclusions of which Butcher articulates through the “minute detail” of her public performance (2005). To depart from a spectator-centric theory of knowledge, Melrose demands that we first recognize the *structure* of the artworks we analyze prior to devising symbolic and thematic assumptions. Melrose dubs this epistemic shift as a focus on “*performance-making causes*” rather than “*performance effects*” (2005). By shifting our attention in this way, we move beyond the false conception that artists attempt to convey meanings which already exist in the world, to instead recognize that artists invent via intuition.

This intuition extends beyond studio artists to include the writer-theorist. Using Pierre Bourdieu as her prime example of this inventiveness, Melrose argues that in his theorization of *habitus*, a “strategy-generating principle” that subjects use to negotiate their social contexts, Bourdieu invents a structure of intuition (Bourdieu 1977 [1972]: 72). Because Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* places *habitus* beyond the limits of direct representation, in order to have arrived at this theory, Bourdieu must have invented *habitus* through his own intuition. Melrose's assertion that both the artist and the writer-theorist navigate theory via intuition opens up an alley through which the writer-theorist and the practitioner in the field can co-produce an epistemology. By recognizing the inherently inventive practice of writer-theorists, we can seek out commonalities in our inventive processes.

As both a performer and a writer-theorist, I recognize how fluency between modes of knowledge production empowers us to be better scholars. During my fieldwork over the last two years, situations have repeatedly arisen that demanded the presence of an ethnographer who can invent new strategies of understanding. When my collaborators recognize my need for healing

and request my participation in their work, I do not serve them by cataloguing each metaphor, each use of an herb, or by copying lists of the archaic words they speak. Rather, the path to meaningful ethnographic work on intuitive practice requires my sensuous presence in the field, where I prioritize the relationship with my collaborator above all else. To focus on disassembling a healer's practice into its component parts would require my lack of commitment to the healing. If I deny my collaborator my commitment, why should they feel inclined to give me theirs? Hearing the words of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's Hasidim collaborator, to encourage the vitality of *bajanje* requires an investment of my vitality.

When I develop artistic collaborations in studios or rehearsal rooms, all parties of the collaboration demand presence. Without this presence, the distribution of power and responsibility is unequal. We have all experienced notorious group projects in primary school where one or two students commit to the work, while the others simply hitch a ride. The philosophy is the same when approaching ethnographic fieldwork. Ethnography often lags two steps behind performance studies. When analyzing a performance, how many performance studies scholars would extract the script, reproduce the script on the page, and proceed to analyze the performer's words devoid of any larger context? Which scholar would publish a list of metaphors expressed in a particular choreography without ever naming the choreographer? The discrepancy in research practices between performance studies and ethnography demonstrates the pervasive de-valuation of non-elite cultural practices. Scholars only recognize names, social context, and the coeval status of cultural practitioners once those practitioners achieve bourgeois status.

Recognizing the value of true collaboration in the field, I model my research methodology on my experience producing collaborative performance. When healers work on my

body and when I create performance pieces in response to their practice, I invite our agentive bodies into written theory. I take emotions, sensations, and intuition seriously in my writing by analyzing the continuum of my collaborators' aesthetics and my affective engagement in their aesthetic practices. By integrating interviews and participant observation with practice-based research, I place the healers' epistemologies in a coeval relation with my own. Informed by Dwight Conquergood and Diana Taylor's theories of the limits of written epistemology, I acknowledge alternate ways of knowing that originate in the body. I use Heewon Chang's autoethnographic strategies to recognize those alternate knowledge capacities in the field, which Paul Stoller and Susan Melrose catalyze by demonstrating the interrelationship of our senses and poesis. Ultimately, I approach my fieldwork as a scholarly and artistic collaboration between myself and the healers I work with. By building a methodology located at the intersection of *bajanje* and performance art, I experiment with how to produce an epistemological encounter through which to exchange ethnographic knowledge.

## Section II

### Sensing Sickness

Two years ago, I spent time singing with Svetlana Spajić, a well-known traditional singer in Belgrade, Serbia. Svetlana splits her time between living in Belgrade with her daughters, being on tour, and visiting villages throughout the former Yugoslavia where she learns new forms of traditional singing. When we first met, Svetlana stopped me in the middle of our conversation to tell me that the way I was using my voice was painful for her to listen to. She told me that I was preventing my full voice from leaving my body and that the sound of my truncated voice was causing her emotional pain. To remedy this, Svetlana invited me to her home so that we could sing together. Traditional Balkan singing is loud, polyphonic, and foregrounds dissonant harmonies—the perfect antidote to a trapped voice. While we were singing, we located my vocal troubles in the way that I breathe. Svetlana told me that I needed to engage with the air as a stream that continues infinitely in front of and behind me. When I speak or sing, she says I need to “catch” the stream, which is already flowing. Svetlana’s knowledge of breath as a stream of air made me realize the significance of considering our voice and the air as *materials*. Reminded of the longstanding debate in performance studies over the ephemerality of live performance, I realized that we too often assume that our voices are immaterial and ephemeral.

*Bajanje* healers and their guests negotiate the materiality of objects, time, breath, and the human voice through the creation of collaborative aesthetic encounters. In the extant literature, the inventiveness of *bajanje* is generally limited to the theory of oral poetry as a pre-structured improvisation. An extension of Milman Parry’s oral-formulaic theory, in *The Singer of Tales*, Albert Bates Lord theorizes that oral poets compose their epics through a structured association



between different formulaic narrative elements (1960). In his 1995 book, *The Singer of Tales in Performance*, John Miles Foley identifies *bajanje* as a “poetic form” which he breaks down into “registers” and “frames” (101, 112). While he disavows the connotations of labeling the practice as formulaic, Foley proceeds to break down the “formula” of *bajanje* by identifying recurrent images and themes. Scholars who analyze *bajanje* as oral poetry fail to recognize the fundamental difference between *bajanje* and poetry. While epic poetry in the former Yugoslavia has great consequences for community members’ identities and relationships to history, *bajanje* is explicitly a healing modality. We must recognize that the inventive practice of these healers extends beyond their oral formulas to include how the healer’s body *feels* and *intuits* the body of the sick.

To demonstrate the collaboration between the healer’s body and the sick body, I want to first define sickness in the context of *bajanje*. Sickness in this sense refers to the broader category of ill-health, which includes both disease and misfortune. I base this model on the work of medical sociologists, such as Peter Conrad and Kristin K. Barber. In their article, “The Social Construction of Illness: Key Insights and Policy Implications,” Conrad and Barber trace a tripartite genealogy of social constructionist thought in medical sociology: the meaning of illness, the experience of illness, and the knowledge of illness (YEAR). In their exploration of the culturally constructed meaning of illness, Conrad and Barber turn to the work of psychologist Leon Eisenberg. Eisenberg analyzes the social construction of psychosis as a disease among certain medical disciplines and as a disorder among other disciplines to transform our definition of disease from an “entity” to a “relational concept” (1977: 18). Eisenberg argues that we cannot accept the biomedical definition of disease as a set of “abnormalities in the structure and function of body organs and systems,” and must instead understand disease as a social category for dis-

order (1977: 11). Eisenberg's rebuttal of disease as a thing-in-itself transforms the scope of sickness within the context of *bajanje*.

I utilize "sickness", rather than "illness" or "disease," because we can conceptually separate a lack of health from the clinical definition of disease as an organ or system abnormality. When asking Suada in the summer of 2017 about *strah* (fear) and *uroci* (evil eye) as illnesses she responds,<sup>13</sup>

"Listen my dear, those are not diseases—well, the *strah* and *uroci* are some sort of disease, but it is like *mental* disease. When a person has *strah*, and that *strah* gets old, you are not mentally well. Your soul is not peaceful, because *strah* produces restlessness, nervousness, and insomnia, and when you have all of that, your soul is not calm."<sup>14</sup>

Here, Suada does not portray *strah* and *uroci* as biomedical diseases—there is no inherent flaw in your brain nor a system-wide incapacity for serotonin reuptake. Rather, Suada draws attention to health and sickness in terms of movement and flow. When *strah* enters the body, lingers, and grows old, the afflicted person becomes restless. The biomedical model over-emphasizes the body as a closed system in which disease is a strictly physical abnormality. In *bajanje*, we witness the body as an open system where the recognition of sickness intermeshes the body with one's greater social context.

To underscore the sociality of sickness in *bajanje*, I will first analyze a healing performed for love—a type of verbal conjuring that most scholars characterize as magic rather than healing. Ilija, the healer, produces an aesthetic encounter through his material manipulation of water, basil, a padlock, and his voice. By producing this encounter in collaboration with my sensuous

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<sup>13</sup> *Strah* and *strava* are both used to refer to fear sickness. *Uroci* is the plural form of *urok*, which is also a commonly used word for "evil eye"

<sup>14</sup> Interview on July 26, 2017

body, we can understand Ilija as an aesthetic laborer. Following my analysis of Ilija's love healing, I introduce Suada's healing of *strah* and *uroci*. While Suada also participates in the production of aesthetic encounters, I articulate her practice with Michael Taussig's model of implicit social knowledge to demonstrate how Suada interacts with the materiality of my breath through an experimental knowledge process. By presenting these theoretical models of the aesthetic encounter and knowledge-as-experiment, I foreground the inventive and creative labors of *bajanje* healers.

My friends Aca, Saša, and I visit Ilija on an extremely hot day in the middle of the summer in 2017. Ilija lives at the end of a treacherous dirt road in the hills of Luka, Serbia. Blind and almost ninety years old, he lives alone and works as a cowherd. Still out with the cows when we arrive, we wait in the shade of some oak trees for a half an hour before Ilija emerges from the woods, following one cow and leading another, cursing at them. After putting the animals away, Ilija invites us into his home. Here, Aca and I briefly recount our family genealogies to Ilija as we try to locate a familial connection—Aca finds a distant aunt who is related to one of Ilija's cousins. The discovery of this relation lightens the mood in the room. After talking about Ilija's animals and the difficulties of the summer, Ilija asks me what problems he can help me with. I ask Ilija to “open me up to love again,” explaining that since my partner and I split up a year and a half ago that I have been unable to develop romantic interest in anyone, and that I am ready to re-awaken that part of my life. Ilija understands and tells me to go gather water from three sources and then to return to his house, so Aca and I walk to the neighbors' house to retrieve water from their wells.

When we return, Ilija asks us to combine the three waters in a single bottle, which Aca does before handing the bottle to Ilija. Ilija opens the bottle, dips a dried basil flower inside and

holds it at the top of the bottle. Then, he begins his incantation. Speaking in a low voice at a quick pace, Ilija produces a verbal rhythm in tune with dipping the basil. Periodically, he pauses to lock and unlock an ordinary padlock several times before resuming his focus on the basil. About halfway through the *basma*, his cell phone rings. He answers the phone—a local woman is calling who wants to visit him, because her child is several years old and still unable to speak. Ilija gives the woman vague directions to his house, tells her to visit him tomorrow, and then hangs up the phone. Without any recognition of the interruption, Ilija resumes the *basma*. As he continues his repetitive pattern of speaking, dipping, locking, and unlocking, I notice the pounding ticking sound of the clock permeating my mind. My eyes are watering and I am so focused on Ilija that my senses of space and time become distorted.

Ilija concludes his *basma* with a final manipulation of the padlock and then tells me that I need to take the water with the basil to finish the healing. He instructs me to go somewhere secluded, remove my clothes, and wash myself with the water. I need to take a sip of the water and then brush my chest, abdomen, and back with the soaked basil blossom. After performing this choreography three times, I must dump the rest of the bottle's contents into a moving body of water. At this point I will be free from what binds me against love. He tells me that my future lover will not be able to sleep or eat again until they find me, and that I will not be able to sleep or eat again until I find them.

When I come to Ilija to receive love *bajanje*, he does not categorically distinguish this *basma* from the *basma* he uses to treat cancer. In the *bajanje* context, sickness encompasses what we typically label as disease and what we usually identify as misfortune. I utilize “sickness”, rather than “illness” or “disease” here, because we can conceptually separate a lack of health from the clinical definition of disease as an organ or system abnormality. *Bajanje* healers such as

Ilija broaden our conceptions of sickness and health through their paradigms of social sickness. Speaking with Aca during the summer, we discuss how the most common reasons that people visit *bajanje* healers are problems with love, disease, money, death, and having children. Each of these problems—whether biomedical or not—is a sickness that impedes the successful engagement of a person with their broader social environment. In my field notes, I note Aca saying “These are everyday problems, and *bajanje* is the appropriate everyday answer. It’s not an existential crisis” (August 5, 2017). The biomedical model over-emphasizes the body as a closed system in which disease is a strictly physical abnormality. In *bajanje*, we witness the body as an open system where the recognition of sickness intermeshes the body with one’s greater social context.

To understand Ilija’s success in healing people’s everyday problems, I analyze Ilija’s practice as a technique of producing and manipulating aesthetic encounters between himself and his guests. I base my definition of aesthetic encounter on the work of David MacDougall, who uses “aesthetics” to refer to a social sensory structure. Departing from Kant’s definition of aesthetics as the valuation of beauty, MacDougall transforms aesthetics into a language through which to understand “culturally patterned sensory experience” (2005: 98). Aesthetics here function as a material *sense* through which to distinguish the known from the unknown. MacDougall positions social aesthetics as a physical and external manifestation of Bourdieu’s intuitive *habitus* (2005: 98). Foregrounding the interrelationship of materiality and sensuality in our discussion of social aesthetics allows us to move away from a conception of aesthetics as a one-to-one sensory code. Each deliberately produced sensory stimulus does not correspond to a pre-existing fixed symbolic, historical, or ideological meaning. Rather, MacDougall’s aesthetic

paradigm lends materiality to our sensory experiences and allows us to discuss the material exchange of extra-linguistic knowledge.

Within this aesthetic paradigm, I characterize Ilija's social aesthetic structure as an encounter. I use the word "encounter" here in the sense of Martin Buber, who uses this word to describe a subjectifying rather than an objectifying relation. The subjectifying relation (named the I-You relation) rests outside of language and sits firmly within the body—this encounter is the space where you and another subject become one porous entity. Ilija uses his aesthetics to produce this encounter with his guests. Foregrounding the materiality of his voice, his phone, his lock, and our emotional bodies, Ilija re-structures my social relationship to the material world.

Recognizing the aesthetic as a material sense that structures our social relationship to the material world, Ilija's voice, phone, and lock emerge as the fulcrum points of his practice. I engage with the materiality of Ilija's voice using Svetlana's understanding of voice and air as a continuum. During the *bajanje* incantation, Ilija uses his voice less as a medium of verbal communication and more as a modality of touch. Due to the shared interiorization of voice, Ilija connects his larynx to my eardrums. The individual words and their meanings carry less weight than the affect his voice has upon me—I feel the tone of his voice more than I construct a narrative of what the words of his incantation imply. The deep rhythmic pattern of his voice envelopes my body as I sit next to him, my sense of time begins to distend, and despite being in a deep state of concentration I frequently lose my sense of self—I have difficulty remembering where I am and why I am there. His voice acquires a texture which reaches out and touches you. By using his voice as a modality of touch, Ilija experiments with my sick body to learn the nature of your imbalances—he senses apprehension, the tightening of my neck, the alternating clenching and relaxing of my fists, and my eventual stillness.

This seemingly typical ritual is disrupted when Ilija answers his cell phone. Rupturing my trance, when Ilija answers his phone I re-enter a mundane social space. I look around at Aca and Saša and we smile both knowingly and uncomfortably. My solitary healing zone is exposed to the mechanics of everyday life. After Ilija hung up the phone, he does not acknowledge his conversation as an intrusion nor as a transgression of the healing space. This abrupt interaction with communication technology and Ilija's juxtaposition of pedestrian phone calls with *bajanje* healing sessions demonstrates that *bajanje* sits within the realm of the everyday. In her book, *Ordinary Affects*, Kathleen Stewart defines the ordinary as a "shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges" (2007: 1). Practices and knowledges unfold within the ordinary as a flow that is punctured by events, but not ontologically *about* events. The ordinary appears as the bleeding together of the intimate and the public (Stewart 2007: 39). Here, both Ilija's cell phone and his incantation sit within the same shifting field of the ordinary. Ilija's phone call breaks our valuation of the healing as an *event* to instead foreground *bajanje* as an enduring ordinary practice in a field of other ordinary practices—such as the practice of scheduling future healings. At the moment that Ilija's phone rings, the public enters the intimate space of *bajanje* and lets the air out of its supernatural mystique. Our romantic visions of *bajanje* as the casting of magical spells are confounded to reveal *bajanje* as an ordinary way to negotiate with sickness.

Ilija produces an aesthetic encounter that weaves together ritual and the everyday. Beyond the phone call, Ilija's aesthetics come into view when he transforms an ordinary padlock into a ritual tool for healing. Ilija manipulates sound, activity, and touch through his repetitive locking and unlocking movements. Remembering that our aesthetics *sense* material difference, we see Ilija employ the lock aesthetically to confound our senses of material difference represented by his voice and his cell phone. The lock works to both undermine scholars'

representations of *bajanje* as archaic and magical, while highlighting the extraordinary dimension of the ordinary. The lock, here, is both ordinary and bizarre. While locking and unlocking the padlock, Ilija's incantation dictates my release from that which holds me back from love and the simultaneous release of my lover from whatever holds them. Materially, Ilija opens up my body through my identification with the padlock. I interiorize the "click" of the lock just as I had interiorized the low hum of Ilija's voice. When the lock clicks shut or open I *feel* tension and pressure accumulating and dispersing. By creating this juxtaposition of the ordinary and the ritual, Ilija moves healing into the zone where we perform everyday life. We cannot write off *bajanje* as magic, because we recognize that *bajanje* is as ordinary as the padlock that keeps our bike attached to a parking meter. Understanding the interconnection of Ilija's voice, his cellphone, and his padlock in relation to my lovesickness healing, we witness an aesthetic encounter emerging which values the facile oscillation in and out of the ordinary.

When we recognize Ilija as an aesthetic laborer, we simultaneously refuse to grant the "art world" sole authority over aesthetics and we recognize the aesthetic as integral to our everyday lives. By demonstrating how the aesthetic functions as a material sense, we broaden our discussion of materiality and sensuality. I recognize Ilija's position as an aesthetic laborer to foreground the inventive and productive nature of *bajanje*. Not recycling oral formulae in the sense of Foley and Lord, Ilija constantly invents new material techniques with which to draw together the everyday and the extraordinary. While scholars of oral poetry and *bajanje* are invested in demonstrating the age and archaism of the practice, Ilija's use of the padlock and his cell phone confounds their dedication to mystification. Ilija heals members of his community through the invention of an aesthetic encounter that sits between their body and his.



To extend my discussion of *bajanje* as an inventive and continuously changing practice, I turn to the work of Suada, who materially experiments with her guest's body by repeatedly melting and freezing lead until she intuits that her readings have transformed their guest's relationship to their sicknesses. I use "experiment" to mean a deeply knowledgeable and responsive material practice. Suada experiments in the sense of scientific experimentation, whereby she closely studies the materiality of her guests and their sicknesses to determine the best method of negotiation. As an experimental mode of healing, Suada continuously produces new knowledge. Each of her guests encounters her with a new set of sicknesses, which she interprets and experiments with through lead melting.

Like Ilija, Suada also lives at the end of a dirt road, however, Suada's road is much less treacherous. Originally from Dobož, Bosnia, Suada moved to the village of Ognjanci in the Petrovec municipality of Macedonia when she married her husband in the early 1980s. A fourth generation *bajanje* healer, Suada has practiced *bajanje* since she was twenty years old. Today, she sees around twenty people per day and up to seventy people on weekends, many of whom travel from other countries to visit her.

I first visit Suada in July 2016 with my good friend Filip and his mother. We spend an hour or so speaking with Suada outside of her house, drinking coffee, and smoking cigarettes. When she finds out that I am Serbian she gets excited, because that means that she can speak in Bosnian rather than in Macedonian.<sup>15</sup> Suada asks if I would like her to perform *bajanje* on me, and I say yes. We move to a small structure adjacent to her livestock pens. Within the structure there is a wood stove, two sofas, and some agricultural tools. Suada sits on a small stool in front

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<sup>15</sup> Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian (BCS) are linguistically considered the same language, distinguished as dialects more than languages. Macedonian, while comprehensible by a BCS speaker, is a different language with a different grammatical structure.

of the stove, while I sit behind her on the sofa. Filip and his mother sit on a sofa along the opposite wall.

Once I sit down, Suada lays a small piece of lead flat on her palm and asks me to blow on it three times. She then opens the stove to remove several hot wood coals and drops them into a pot of water. After dropping these coals in the water, Suada tells me that I have *uroci* and *strah*. The *uroci*, she says, is giving me headaches and problems with my legs, while the *strah* is causing uneasiness, nervousness, and stomach problems. The *strah* is a result of stress. She tells me that I have a good soul. She tells me that I think of everyone else first and put my own needs last. She tells me that I give a lot to people and that I do not receive enough in return. She tells me that I need to put myself first. Suada lights some paper on fire and puts the burning paper inside the stove. She tells me that I have a lot of luck in my life, because the moment she placed the paper in the stove a huge fire erupted.

I had left a few of my things outside when we were drinking coffee earlier and Suada pauses to retrieve them, because she says that I need to have all of my things with me for the *bajanje* to be effective. After handing me my phone and lighter from outside, Suada places the lead in the stove to melt. While the lead begins to melt, she cuts through it with a hand sickle. Suada says she has to use this sickle, because it can cut through everything bad (Fig. 1). Once the lead has melted, Suada throws a purple satin sheet over me. Holding the pot of water over my head she drops the molten lead into the water. I hear the distinct sizzle above me and I remove the sheet. Suada uses a spoon to pick up the solidified lead piece, which has assumed the shape of an explosion frozen in mid-air. Suada then begins to read the lead. She says that *strah* and *uroci* are present throughout. She sees a duck and a baby. She sees the hearts of my future children. Suada then places the lead in the stove again to melt a second time. Once the lead has

melted, she again places the sheet over me. This time, she holds the pot of water first in front of my chest as she pours half of the lead, and then in front of my abdomen as she pours in the remaining lead. I remove the sheet.

Suada wraps one of the lead pieces in newspaper and tells me not to open it and that I need to keep this lead close to me. She says I can either carry the wrapped lead with me in my purse or place it under my pillow. She then pours some of the water from the pot into an empty plastic bottle. Suada says that every morning and night I need to bathe myself with this water. I need to wash my hair three times, my face three times, my chest three times, and my legs three times. I should not let any of the water touch the ground. When the bottle is empty, I need to throw the lead into a moving body of water.

Suada's *bajanje* practice is distinctly different from Ilija's and from any of the other healers with whom I work. While scholars usually conflate *bajanje* with verbal incantations, we never hear Suada utter one. In Suada's practice, she speaks the incantation internally. This confounding of most *bajanje* scholarship provides an ideal scenario for my exploration of *bajanje* as an experimental physical practice. While I understand Ilija's practice through his development of aesthetic encounters, I understand Suada's practice primarily as an experiment in materiality. Evidencing Michael Taussig's model of implicit social knowledge, Suada transforms her guest's relationship to illness and health by negotiating the social relation between her body and the body of her guest via the lead.

In his 1986 study of terror and healing in the Putumayo jungle, Michael Taussig forces us to abandon our reified epistemologies in exchange for a model of knowledge as a material experiment. Witnessing the practices of Putumayo healers, Taussig demonstrates how implicit social knowledge functions as a social sensibility—an experimental mode of knowing, which

manifests in images of memory and history (1986: 367). Liberated from essentialism, knowledge-as-technique navigates the limits of self and other in social relations. In the Putumayo context, the discourse of envy de-centers literalist naming practices in favor of feeling and perception (1986: 394).<sup>16</sup> To remove envy from its resting place in the stomach, head, chest, or lower back, the Putumayo shaman performs implicit social knowledge through sucking, massaging, and inviting purgation through *yagé* (1987: 395). Emphasizing the senses, Taussig re-incorporates knowledge into the physical body—envy inscribes the body with illness (1987: 168). In this context, the act of knowledge-as-experiment exteriorizes the body’s interior and transforms envy from an implicit, internal inscription of violated social bonds into an explicit, external pile of vomit on the floor. The discourse of envy enables a circumnavigation of the body’s interior and exterior to inscribe the relation between self and other.

In his model of implicit social knowledge, Taussig creates a new reality where knowledge has no source, but is rather a *technique* of social life. Taussig demonstrates that the discourse of implicit social knowledge brings together our bodies with our imaginings in a place where we *become* our sensations and perceptions only to then re-enter the discourse of interpretation (1987: 443). Using Walter Benjamin’s “dialectical image,” Taussig circumscribes past and present through the relation of image and voice (1987: 369). Putumayo healers reach into the past via colonial images to produce montages through which to negotiate with the future. Confounding temporal order through the appropriation and manipulation of the colonial visual epistemology enables healers to subject God to chance. Where Roger Casement struggles to reconcile the myth of labor scarcity in the Peruvian Amazon Company with the horrors of mass murder, the Putumayo shamans take colonial myths as the pliable *textures* and living *subjects* of

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<sup>16</sup> Envy, in the Putumayo context, causes illness—similar to *uroci* in the *bajanje* context.

implicit social knowledge—the interplay between image and voice, which enables an intervention with fate and essentialist colonial memories. Disrobing the power of linear history, Taussig reveals the social life of knowledge as a means of perceiving and interacting with the contemporary world. Images and words co-constitute each other in this social model of knowing, where the colonial past and colonial present are murky, but not impenetrable.

Taussig’s model of implicit social knowledge maps knowledge-as-experiment to demonstrate how individuals interact and *intervene* with animate images to contest the reification of fate. Weaving together this theory of knowledge, Taussig leaves us with the gift of the fragment: images always invite our intervention. I read Suada’s healing practice through Taussig’s model of implicit social knowledge to demonstrate how images and words co-constitute themselves through the sensuous bodies of the healer and her guest. Whereas in the Putumayo context healers manipulate *yagé* as a porous film between healer and guest, *bajanje* healers manipulate materials such as lead, water, and voice. By focusing my attention on healers’ strategies, I refuse to essentialize *bajanje* as a set of fixed healing formulae. Methodologically, we can avoid the trap of seeking *bajanje*’s hidden truths by shifting our attention to *how* healers experiment with knowledge to navigate social relations.

While Suada does not speak her *basma* aloud, her healing practice is flush with active dialogue. The first significant moment of verbal conjuring occurs after I blow on the piece of lead. When her guests blow on the lead, Suada says that she “feels what you have inside.”<sup>17</sup> Suada takes your breath—mediated by the lead—and interiorizes it. My breath via the lead, however, is not the only information Suada receives. Before she says which problems afflict me, Suada drops some burning embers into a pot of water. Watching the way that the embers fall in

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<sup>17</sup> Quote from conversation in fieldwork on August 6, 2016.

the water and the quality of the steam produced, Suada experiments with the raw knowledge that she receives through my breath. She refers to this phase as “learning.”<sup>18</sup> She can feel in my breath the exteriorization of my inner self—in a medium similar to the exteriorization of the self through vomit in Putumayo healing. However, in the Putumayo context the focus is on images—seeing the image of the snake in the bile—while in Suada’s context the focus is on materials as learned through her senses. At this stage in *bajanje*, rather than an experimentation with image-making, we witness an experimentation with materiality. Through her material manipulation of my breath, lead, coals, and steam, Suada transforms my subjectivity.

Suada synthesizes the first stage of her first material experimentation by naming my sicknesses: *uroci* and *strah*. *Uroci* is the combination of both envy—as in the Putumayo context—and excess praise. In my body, *uroci* physically manifests as headaches and pain in my legs. *Strah* is the condensation of stress in the body, which manifests as nervousness and digestive problems. By giving my physical and emotional problems a name, Suada validates my body. She tells me what she learned about me through my breath, the lead, and the embers. This knowledge does not end with the naming of physical and emotional pains, but extends to social pain. Suada recognizes and names my social pain: the imbalance of generosity. By telling me that I give people more than I receive, she names a lack of reciprocity, which contributes to my ill-health. To heal my social self, she tells me to prioritize my own needs. By placing my self-preservation within the paradigm of social reciprocity, Suada enables me to shift from viewing self-care as selfish to viewing self-care as contributing to my health, and by extension the health of my community.

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<sup>18</sup> “you blow onto the lead and I throw it in the water...before that I chant—I learn from it” (Interview with Suada on July 26, 2017)

By naming the materiality that she intuits through my breath, Suada invites me into her implicit social knowledge process. Naming my sicknesses gives them a social life and enables our intervention. In the healing space, I recognize the power of Suada's experimental maneuver. When she articulates my inner anxieties and my social and emotional pain, my breath gets caught in my throat. I feel my face become hot and flushed, and my eyes begin to water. I feel exposed in front of Suada, Filip, and his mother. However, this exposure rapidly turns into an opening—an opening through which we can negotiate with my sicknesses. Rather than leaving my physical, emotional, and social health to chance, Suada names them and thereby begins a dialogue with them.

To truly bring my fate down to earth in Taussig's sense, Suada has to complete the material transformation of my sicknesses. After first introducing me to *uroci* and *strah* through the manifestation of my breath in the lead and the coals, Suada then introduces me to my sicknesses through speech. Now, Suada begins the material transformation of my sicknesses—and by extension myself—by transforming those materials who first introduced themselves. Suada initiates this process by placing the lead in the stove which has been lit through my “luck.” Here, I collaborate with Suada to melt the lead. I produce the fire which breaks down its solid form. The fire burning strongly, Suada rhythmically stirs the melting lead with her hand sickle and cuts the curses which bind me. Suada transmutes the lead as the carrier of my sickness by cutting the ropes that connect me to fear and evil eye.

This process of breaking down and melting the lead invites the second phase of Suada's implicit social knowledge process: “showing.” To reach this phase, Suada first separates me from my illnesses. She covers my body with a sheet, thereby encasing and protecting me (Fig. 2). She separates my body from the manifestation of my sickness in the lead. In this moment of

separation, Suada pours the molten lead into the water so that my sicknesses can show themselves.<sup>19</sup> My sicknesses form “figures” that Suada recognizes through looking. She first recognizes *uroci* and *strah* through the texture of the transformed lead. The lead’s emergent patterns confirm what she learned from my breath. Then, she moves beyond my sicknesses to recognize two non-sicknesses that are embodied by a duck and a baby. The duck is fun and easy—a good figure to meet during *bajanje*.<sup>20</sup> The baby is a messenger of life yet to come. While we have been focusing on my sicknesses and their manifestations in my body as expressed through the lead, we have been ignoring the rest of my life. My body holds not only *strah* and *uroci*, but also lightness, luck, and a future. When my sicknesses show themselves, they also *expose* themselves. No longer supernatural, *uroci* and *strah* are laid bare here for us to see. Meeting us in broad daylight, Suada and I see that these sicknesses are no larger than the rest of my life to come, and that neither of these sicknesses overpower the goodness in my life. Without this “showing” phase of Suada’s *bajanje* practice, hearing about the *strah* and *uroci* festering in my stomach, legs, and head would only contribute to their growth. By forcing *strah* and *uroci* to show themselves, Suada empowers me to intervene. No longer an abstract arm of fate, Suada demonstrates how we can materially negotiate with our health.

By questioning and doubting those who control the production of knowledge, Suada enables us to intervene in our fate. Suada doubts the monopoly over medical knowledge when she says, “even [doctors] come to visit me, for their health and their children’s health, because

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<sup>19</sup> “when I put [the lead] in the water, it shows. And by looking at those figures that are made on the lead, I know what is *uplav*, what is *uroci*, what is *nagazeno*, and what is something else” (Interview on July 26, 2017 with Suada)

<sup>20</sup> Suada said about the duck, “*to je mnogo ubavo, mnogo lesno* (that is very fun, very easy)”



they can't heal it all. For fear and evil eye, there is no doctor my dear. Only *bajanje*.”<sup>21</sup> Suada recognizes that biomedicine only represents one perception of the body. The biomedical approach to the body excludes the possibility of fear and evil eye, however, Suada recognizes that people can simultaneously hold the biomedical worldview and the *bajanje* worldview. When she mentions that even doctors come to receive *bajanje* from her, Suada recognizes the experimental and social nature of knowledge. These doctors who come to her for *strah* understand that some sicknesses lay outside the bounds of biomedicine, and therefore visit Suada instead of going to a hospital.

Suada practices implicit social knowledge by recognizing both knowledge and the body as social actors. By recognizing knowledge, the body, and our sicknesses as *social* Suada invites dialogue and intervention. Suada began her *bajanje* with me by first verbalizing the imbalance in my social relations and how that imbalance has grown into a physical sickness in my body. She introduces my body within the *bajanje* space as a social actor. By doing so, Suada prefaces my sicknesses with inherent sociality. She then affords this same sociality to the illnesses themselves—first learning from them, and then seeing their figures. Subsequently recognizing their materiality—and their choice of material style—Suada recognizes the *materiality of sociality*. Our social bodies are at once material and dialogic. Practicing knowledge as an experiment, Suada questions and doubts the materiality of my body as mediated through the materiality of the lead. By performing this material experiment, Suada theorizes the boundaries of my social body. She intuits knowledge about my social self and my material self through her *sense* of my breath via the solid lead. Her commitment to sociality through the materiality of social life lets us intervene in fate because we recognize knowledge, my body, and my health as

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<sup>21</sup> Interview on July 26, 2017

socially co-constitutive. Within *bajanje* I do not exist as a solitary consciousness or a closed system, but rather as a social actor moving through a material body.

By analyzing Ilija and Suada's *bajanje* practices as aesthetic encounters and modalities of implicit social knowledge, I empower us to witness how *bajanje* opens up a social site wherein we can negotiate our own health. While in the next chapter I will identify the significance of the healing guest's response to the healer's instructions, we must first recognize Ilija and Suada as producers of knowledge. I situate the embodied practices of *bajanje* healers in the foreground so that we can identify how knowledge is produced in the interaction between the healer and their guest. I first introduced Ilija's healing practice as an aesthetic practice to expand our sense of the aesthetic beyond the artistic. Whereas previous scholars analogize *bajanje* and oral poetry by locating the site of invention within the words of healers' *basme*, I propose that we understand the entire *bajanje* practice as an aesthetic practice. However, I do not use "aesthetic" to refer to beauty or art, but rather a material *sense*. I then expand this material sense through Michael Taussig's model of implicit social knowledge, whereby *bajanje* healers use their aesthetics to produce knowledge. Suada experiments with my breath as a material to produce knowledge about my body's health and sickness. Both Suada and Ilija use their material senses to intuit a way for us to negotiate with our social fate. Refusing to leave sickness in the domains of chance and biomedicine, Suada and Ilija recognize the body's inherent capacity *to know, to exchange and to heal*.



Fig. 1 Suada holds the hand sickle as she cuts up the melting lead, video still (Ognjanci, Macedonia in August 2016).



Fig. 2 After covering my body with a sheet, Suada pours the molten lead into a pot of water, video still (Ognjanci, Macedonia in August 2016).

### Section III

#### Expressions of Vulnerability

Ilija and Suada produce aesthetic encounters through collaborative models of healing. To complete the healing process, *bajanje* healers require their sick guests to experiment with their own bodies and emotions in the domain of everyday life. In both Ilija and Suada's practices, they produce shame and vulnerability in collaborative aesthetic encounters. Ilija and Suada encourage their guests to express shame and vulnerability to open up a space of negotiation within everyday life. By focusing on my performative responses to Ilija and Suada's healing prescriptions I will use shame and vulnerability in this chapter to demonstrate that *bajanje* practitioners manipulate our senses of public and private space to foreground senses of the ordinary.

Suada and Ilija demand vulnerability from the outset of their healing encounters. During the initial meeting between the healer and their guest, the healer brings their guest's discrete personal problems into the semi-public sphere of *bajanje*. In the case of my meeting with Ilija, he requires me to vocally name the problems which cause me to seek his help, while Suada uses her own voice to name my sicknesses. When I vocalize love as the sickness which I want Ilija to heal, I immediately experience a mixture of shame and embarrassment. I identify the production of this affect as partially the shame of admitting a personal failure in my life and simultaneously a cultural experience of gendered shame. I feel stereotypically feminine about my vocalization of troubles in love—something that makes my loudly-feminist-self squirm—particularly in front of three men. This semi-public admission constructs both an intimate and a socio-cultural subjectivity. My failure in love constructs my subjectivity first as a sick person. Following this admission, my subjectivity expands from the feeling of personal failure to the failure of a social

role. By admitting that I seek help with love, I become a feminized subject within the space of Ilija's *bajanje* healing.

With Suada, I experience vulnerability more than shame. When she initially intuits my sickness, she provokes my vulnerability while also making me feel understood. By feeling my sicknesses through my breath, naming them as *strah* and *uroci*, and then melting those sicknesses down, Suada lends language and material form to my deep emotional problems. The most shame that I feel during this initial exchange occurs when she names the imbalance of generosity between my community and me. By naming that I give more to others than I receive in return, she strikes a social nerve. While feelings of shame due to being inadequate or unloved arise, Suada dispels them more quickly than Ilija by affirming the goodness of my soul in the moment that follows. Compared to Ilija, Suada pays much more attention to my emotional states. While Ilija focuses more on clearing a blockage, Suada participates more in caretaking.

Each of these strategies exists within a collaborative paradigm. The healing strategies of Ilija and Suada do not end when I leave their homes, but rather they require that I take material responsibility for my health. After firmly grounding me within both a hyper-local social network and a broader socio-cultural community, Ilija and Suada open the space for me to collaborate with them as healers and to thereby recognize my own social agency. To analyze the healing process as a collaboration, I constructed performative responses to Ilija and Suada's practices based on the instructions they provided me. I present both of these examples in tandem with my analysis of the interrelationship of shame and vulnerability with public and private space in the realm of everyday life.

After Ilija performs his incantation and provides me with instructions on how to complete the love healing, I am responsible for responding. Instructed to bathe myself with the water and

the basil, Aca, Saša and I head to Prerast—about a twenty-minute drive from Luka. A significant site in local Vlach cosmology, Prerast is a naturally formed stone bridge that separates the world of the living from the world of the dead (Fig. 3). Due to the unusually dry summer, Aca recommends we complete the ritual here, because the stream that runs throughout will be low enough to cross over. We park on the side of the road and I grab my recording equipment, because I decide that the generous response to Ilija’s healing would be to produce a performance based on his instructions. We hike for about fifteen minutes before reaching Prerast. Once at the site, I hesitate after setting up the recording equipment. I feel uncomfortable undressing in front of Aca, who I had only met earlier that day. I take a breath, override my sense of embarrassment, take off my clothes, and head into the middle of the frame. I unscrew the cap of the water bottle, remove the basil, and drink. After drinking, I pour water onto the basil and brush my abdomen, chest, and lower back (Fig. 4). I then repeat these actions two more times. When I finish, I slowly pour the rest of the water into the stream, tuck the basil back into the bottle, screw the cap on, and throw the bottle off to the side. I then walk back to Aca and re-dress. Implicated in the performance, Aca recommends that I leave the bottle at the site as a signifier to future visitors that *bajanje* is still being practiced here.

Out of all the affects evoked during this performative response, vulnerability and shame speak the loudest. When I experience shame before undressing in front of Aca, I remember experiencing shame when vocalizing my difficulties in love. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed argues that emotions mediate between signs and bodies to contour the body as simultaneously the body of a subject and as a signified stereotype. While her chapter on shame largely focuses on the role of shame within the national project, Ahmed includes a discussion of shame as a material “de-forming and re-forming of bodily and social space” (2015 [2004]): 103).

In the transformation of the surface of the ashamed subject's flushed skin, we can identify the intrinsic sociality and materiality of shame. A performative emotion, we require a desired audience in order for us to experience shame. In our moment of failure, we experience shame, because our audience also witnesses that failure.

Shame and vulnerability intersect as the cornerstone of my aesthetic encounter with Ilija. In Ahmed's formulation of shame—just as in the word's etymological root—shame is an exposure that immediately provokes the desire to hide. Within the context of my love *basma*, however, I enact a performative relationship to *bajanje* that requires me to transform my shame back into vulnerability. While standing above the stream in Prerast, my experience of shame propels me to expose myself further. I embody shame as a performative affect and subsequently amplify that affect into a state of deliberate vulnerability. I see Aca filming the bathing as my audience who requires me to rise to the occasion of the performance. Assuming the role of the public, Aca underscores my offering of vulnerability as a material sacrifice.

Within this performative state I see shame not as an act of hiding, but as an act of material transformation. Shame transforms the surface of my body by pulling heat into my skin. By accepting Ilija's prescription to bathe myself, I materially transform my body. I inscribe my body with shame and vulnerability by brushing my abdomen, chest, and back with water-drenched basil. Understanding "performative" as a presentational mode oriented towards a spectator, I utilize the production of shame and vulnerability to theorize the interrelationship of the private and the public within the space of *bajanje*.

When I perform at Prerast, I intersect shame and vulnerability with everyday life. A national monument, Prerast exists at the threshold of public and private space. Recalling Kathleen Stewart's definition of the ordinary as the bleeding together of the intimate and the

public, Prerast can be understood as an ordinary space. While isolated and intimate, Prerast also sits on the land of the state and must be understood as a public site. Beyond the site, we cannot locate any of the actions that I perform at Prerast firmly beyond everyday life. I do not employ any specially made ritual objects—my manipulation involves the handling of basil and water from an ordinary water bottle that I had purchased at a convenience store on my way to Ilija’s house. Despite the common classification of *bajanje* as “magic,” I do not invoke any supernatural beings nor do I respect a strict ritual calendar. While shame is commonly invoked in ritual theory as the gatekeeper of transcendent experience, I instead experience shame as profoundly ordinary. The shame of not living up to societal expectations is a story shared by everyone. Rather than invoking the intervention of the divine, my shame enables me to take material responsibility for my fate. My performative response to Ilija’s *bajanje* healing in Prerast *punctures* the everyday while sitting within an ordinary trajectory.

This ordinary trajectory also forms the crux of my performative relation to Suada’s *bajanje* practice. While one could argue that lead is not an ordinary material due to its now-well-known lethal qualities, Suada’s everyday epistemology comes into view when she instructs me to initiate a daily bathing practice. Unlike the short duration of my performative response to Ilija’s healing, the culmination of Suada’s healing takes four weeks. At the end of our lead melting session, Suada instructs me to bathe myself twice a day with the water that she used to freeze the lead. While listening to Suada, I imagine that this bathing will last around one week, however, I quickly realize that her prescription to not let any of the water touch the ground forces this healing to become a long-term commitment.

I make my first performative decision in relation to Suada when I choose to record each of my bathings as a video diary. Each morning when I wake up and each night when I am about



to fall asleep, I open my laptop and film a short video (Fig. 5-7). In each video, I begin by looking directly into the camera for a few moments in stillness. Then, I loosen the cap of the water bottle very slightly and pour a small amount of water into my palm. I use the water to brush over my hair—an action which I perform three times. After washing my hair, I wash my face, my chest, and my legs. Each time I pour the smallest amount of water into my palm, sweep my hand over the appropriate place on my body, and then pour a little more water into my palm. I pay careful attention while sweeping water over my legs to ensure that none of the water drips from my legs onto the floor. After completing the bathing, I spend about thirty seconds on camera with my eyes closed, breathing deeply, contemplating my own healing.

Re-watching these videos one year later, I recognize the corporeal sensation of being exposed. When I watch them now, I feel a double exposure. I remember feeling exposed while recording these videos—unsure of where they would end up and who would ever see them. Today, this past sensation of vulnerability occurs as an echo. Transformed into my own voyeur, I am exposed again as I scrutinize this past version of myself in the process of transforming my own experience into academic discourse. I feel exposed, ashamed, and vulnerable of my past self, my *afraid* self. Fear is a failure, and here I am Ahmed's desired audience. I am failing in front of myself, but my past self persists in exposing herself further.

This auto-exposure culminates in a performance at Veliko Ratno Ostrvo (Great War Island)—an island situated at the convergence of the Sava and Danube rivers in Belgrade. Lush with both agricultural cultivation and wild vegetation, I often found refuge here during my first research trip in Serbia. Originally, I did not plan to have a culminating performative event for Suada's *salivanje strava* healing. I planned to record these small video blogs, which at some point I would project as tiled videos onto blank gallery walls. However, about a week before I

had to leave Serbia I still had almost half of the water left. I knew that I needed to complete the healing in Serbia, so I developed the performance *Melting Our Fear* as a practical negotiation between Suada's terms and my own.

On the morning of my last day in Belgrade, I arrange to meet a videographer and a sound artist near the platoon bridge that leads to Veliko Ratno Ostrvo. Having already scouted locations earlier in the week, we walk for about forty-five minutes before reaching a particularly beautiful clearing. The foliage is verdant and the sky is bright blue—the space looks completely separate from everyday life in the city. However, in the audio you regularly hear planes soaring overhead. and from my perspective during the bathing, I could see tall housing blocks peering above the trees from Novi Beograd. The performance begins with me standing still in the center of the frame, nude, feet pressing into the soft earth. I twist the cap of the water bottle slightly, pour a small amount of water into my hand, and then splash the water onto my hair (Fig. 8). I repeat the same bathing pattern as I had performed during the video blogs, however, this time when I finish the third washing of my legs, I start the cycle over again from the beginning. I lose count of the number of bathings I undergo during the twenty-one minutes that I take to reach the last drop of water in the bottle. Once the bottle is empty, I dress in a traditional Yugoslav embroidered underdress and walk to the edge of the northern side of the island. Here, I wade into the water, soft sand swallowing my feet as I walk. I hold the piece of lead wrapped in newspaper for a moment, remembering what we had been through together, and then I fling the lead into the river. I stand for a few moments in stillness (Fig. 9).

Looking back over my field notes from that day, I see that I felt both relieved and apprehensive about completing the healing. After participating in this bathing twice a day for four weeks, I now had lost a component of my routine. I had grown attached to this meaningful

cleansing, and disliked that I had shifted my attention from being present within the healing to questioning the efficacy of Suada's *basma*. However, I also felt relieved—this bathing had become an abscess in my daily life. I could never come home after a long day and just go to sleep—I had to undress, illuminate myself, turn on my computer, and record some kind of intimate confession. When I hurled the lead into the river, I felt the material release of my daily commitment to Suada and, by extension, my daily commitment to fear.

Over the four-week healing period, shame and vulnerability destabilize my understanding of public and private space. The video diary entries of my bathing take place within the intimate space of my home, however, I rupture this intimate space when I invite the public into my bedroom by taking videos of myself for an imagined future public audience. Despite no one sitting on the other end of the camera, their imagined presence permeates my bathings—a public Other always sits in relation to me. I both appropriate the public tool of surveillance to render that technology as an intimate site of negotiation, while also confounding our ideas of the bedroom as private space. By introducing performativity into my bedroom, I question the solidity of the border that sits between the public and the private.

I persist in this line of questioning when I undermine the “public” status of Veliko Ratno Ostrvo by foregrounding my intimate self. While anyone could theoretically encounter my team and I filming this bathing, we remain alone for twenty minutes. The first people to encounter us find me already re-dressed and ready to move to the other side of the island. My recording team is my audience, while also functioning as an extension of myself. I make this space of the island into my bedroom. I appropriate public land to produce an intimate healing space. Hearing construction sounds and airplanes flying overhead locates my body within everyday public space, however, I puncture that zone through my intimate nude bathing. The ordinariness of the

space allows my transformation to take place firmly within daily life, thus the healing's enduring affects sit within my daily life.

As an ordinary practice, I understand *bajanje* in dialogue with Michel de Certeau's model of walking in his essay "Walking in the City" (1984). Walking, for de Certeau, is a constitutional act of the city. De Certeau regards walking as the pedestrian enactment of speech acts. The walker appropriates the "topographical system" to transform the city itself. The walker invents public space and defines her body's relationship to that public space (de Certeau 1984: 98). In the everyday practice of walking, we clearly see the ordinary as the interpenetration of public and private space.

An experimental practice, de Certeau recognizes that walking "affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it 'speaks'" (1984: 99). Marking the walker as an inventive material actor resonates with my experience with *bajanje*. After Suada and Ilija materially experiment with my body during our initial healing sessions, they require that I move into an active role in relation to my own body. I have to "walk" through my body by bathing, navigating public space, and exposing my private self. In the case of working with Suada, I conjure a particularly dense relationship between rural and urban space. Generally emplaced within rural space, *bajanje* invokes a particular relationship between my body and space, which is different than my body's relationship to space within the city. After conducting four weeks of bathing squarely within the confines of the city—the particular orientation of my windows forces the city into my bedroom, where every night I hear Enrique Iglesias blasting from the river clubs until eight in the morning—I choose to move the final bathing from this strictly urban space to a seemingly non-industrial space within the topographical borders of the city.

Veliko Ratno Ostrvo, or Great War Island, which formed in the fifteenth century, was first used as a Turkish prison during the Ottoman takeover of Belgrade. From the fifteenth century until the end of World War II the island was used as a strategic military base by the Austrians and the Ottomans while struggling for control over Belgrade. After World War II, the Belgrade city government planned to mine the island for resources to support the construction of Novi Beograd—the new capital of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia. A little too topographically rebellious to be mined in this way, architects instead sourced sand and soil from the Little War Island to the south—an island which has all but disappeared as a result. Today, Veliko Ratno Ostrvo is federally protected land because of its indigenous marshland species and a few families have also built makeshift summer homes with fruit and vegetable gardens on the island (Mijailović 2007).

I recount this history to elucidate my intuitive navigation of rural and urban space in my performance. This island was the lynchpin of political control over the city (Belgrade) while simultaneously being a “wild” space that refused to be mined for its “raw materials.” Political battles took place here over the imperial control of a major Balkan city and simultaneously people illegally moved onto the island and began to cultivate the land. Suada’s only location-related stipulation for my healing resolution was that I throw the lead into the river—but I could have done that off of the bridge, in the gentrifying gallery district of Savamala, or from the edge of Kalemegdan (a military fortress first built in the third century BC). Instead, I chose this land that some of my friends who grew up in Novi Beograd had never even stepped on.

On Veliko Ratno Ostrvo, the drama of private versus public space invokes the narrative opposition of rural and urban space. This pseudo-rural space disrupts its urban context in the same way that my private bathing problematizes the island as public land. Within this doubly

constitutive space, I choose not to produce a spectacle, but rather to produce a continuous flow of practice. My bathing does not become more spasmodic as the twenty minutes pass by, but rather I carefully repeat these tasks in their prescribed sets of three. By slowly and deliberately carrying out the actions that Suada prescribed for me over and over and over again, I am seeking to understand the narrative that Suada constructs through her knowledge of the interrelation of body, action, and space.

I theorize that both Ilija and Suada practice healing as a renegotiation of their guests' practical relationships to everyday life. As an everyday practice, I locate *bajanje* in a continuum with de Certeau's model of walking. An inventive mode of experimentation, *bajanje* healers first experiment with their guest through the materiality of their body before handing you the tools to do the same. Their initial intervention brings awareness to your ability to choose a different walking path through the city, while their prescription for bathing forces you to enact that new path. By choosing to walk in a different configuration and in a different style, you recognize your own agency in crafting the relationship between your intimate and public self.

I read my rejection of traditional public performances of these *bajanje* pieces from a practitioner's epistemology. I recognize from my first meetings with Ilija and Suada that their *bajanje* techniques perforate the private and the public to *theorize* the everyday. *Bajanje* healers materially open up our fates by demonstrating how we can strategically move between private and public space. When I choose to locate both of my performative healing resolutions on public land—exposed to open air—my body recognizes Suada and Ilija's everyday epistemologies. Intuitively, I recognize in their practices that *bajanje* does not exist as a spectacle for public presentation. Simultaneously, I recognize that *bajanje* is not a *private* practice. The space of *bajanje* healing is neither private nor public, but rather somewhere in between. Thus, even in my

most private moment—bathing myself alone in my bedroom—I knew to invite the camera into that space. Bathing myself in private was insufficient for my practical comprehension of *bajanje* as a healing technique.

By asking me to complete these bathings, Suada and Ilija theorize the everyday and invite us into a collaborative relation by materially manipulating shame and vulnerability. Enacting a practitioner-based theory of knowledge, I respond to Suada and Ilija’s initial acts of implicit social knowledge with acts of my own. Less interested in the effects of the healing or the performances, I orient my theorization towards “performance-making causes” (Melrose 2005). By taking my own performance practice as my source of data, I relate to Suada and Ilija’s practices as a collaborative practitioner.

Within this collaborative process, where I labor in response to the labors of Suada and Ilija, I pick up on the ordinary status of our practices. While from a spectator-based theory of knowledge, performance art and healing sit outside of everyday life as spectacles or rituals, within our own paradigms of practice, performance art and *bajanje* sit within our ordinary lives. Every morning Suada wakes up, cooks breakfast, and receives her first guest. Ilija demonstrated through his initial cell phone interruption that *bajanje* does not require a mystical aura to be successful. Ilija does not categorically extoll *bajanje* over his work as a cowherd. Recognizing that *bajanje* holds these ordinary registers within Ilija and Suada’s daily lives, I took advantage of my own practice to explore how this ordinary register *feels* within the body. Understanding that my performance practice is an integral component of my own daily routines, I used this everyday practice of my own life to intersect with the everyday practices of my collaborators.

Based on the corporeal knowledge generated through my physical processing of Suada and Ilija’s *bajanje* practices, I recognize that Suada and Ilija confound the fixity of categories

such as the private, the public, the rural, and the urban. Recognizing the emphasis of my performative responses on the intersections of these categories, Suada and Ilija promote a technique of knowledge-as-transgression, which is evident in my performative emphasis on the intersections of the aforementioned categories. Suada and Ilija ask me to investigate where the outer limits of these categories lie and they empower me to confound these traditional boundaries through my own physical practice. While in my life, this physical practice became intertwined with my performance practice, for other *bajanje* guests this physical practice intersects with their own specific daily physical labors. By encouraging the physical transgression of public and private space, *bajanje* healers continually work to redefine the social body in space.





Fig. 3 Valja Prerast near Majdanpek, Serbia



Fig. 4 Bathing myself for my performance *Everyday We Keep Asking*





Fig. 5 Video still from *strah* healing video blog on August 13, 2016

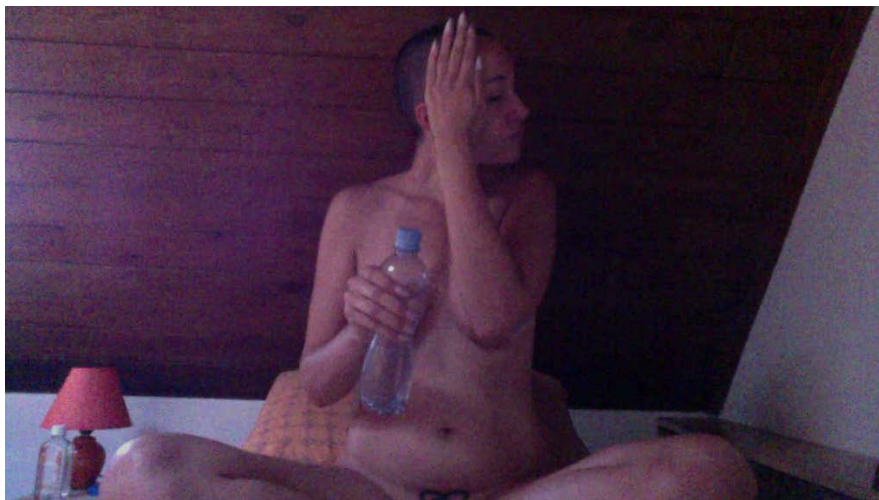


Fig. 6 Video still from *strah* healing video blog on August 19, 2016



Fig. 7 Video still from *strah* healing video blog on August 12, 2016



Fig. 8 Video still from *Melting Our Fear*, 2016



Fig. 9 Video still from *Melting Our Fear*, 2016

## Section IV

### The Endurance of the Ordinary

Marija is a healer in her mid-eighties who lives in the village of Tanda in eastern Serbia. Aca and I visit her on a hot day in the middle of summer. She lives in a single room within a larger house that used to belong to her husband. Twice widowed, Marija's late-husband's children took possession of the house after he died and left her with one small room to live in. She cooks on a fire outside, which is smoldering when we arrive. Lacking a dining room or a living room, we sit on logs in the garden adjacent to the smoldering fire. The smoke periodically whips up in our faces while we sit in heat that well-exceeds one hundred degrees Fahrenheit.

Despite her economic conditions, Marija eagerly shares her *bajanje* knowledge with us. She has baked us some *plašinte*, a Vlach pancake made with egg and cheese, and bought some cookies and juices. She repeatedly tells us to eat more. I ask Marija about her relationship with her village. She says that she gets along with everyone and that everyone comes to her for healing. She says that she “learn[s] the people in this way.”<sup>22</sup> Part of a social landscape where people are constantly concerned about being cursed by other people, Marija says that when people visit her and either tell her that they hate someone or that someone else hates them, she warns that people who hate throw rocks. She says that instead of throwing a rock, you need to give the object of your hate some bread. She tells us that she enjoys helping the people of her village through her *bajanje* work and that she gets great satisfaction out of being able to help.

Shortly after this, Paun, the son of a healer from a nearby village sits with us. He prompts Marija to sing by humming the melody of a song that people use to bring the dead back down to earth. After first saying that she has forgotten the song, she begins to sing. The song makes all

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<sup>22</sup> Interview on August 6, 2017

the hairs on my arms stand on end. Marija's voice is piercing and rough. The song is emotional. She is singing to invite her dead husband and his brother to sit with us. She sings to their souls to invite them to spend some time with us, eating, drinking, and smoking. During her singing, which lasts for five to ten minutes, the wind furiously picks up at moments, flinging leaves across the area where we are sitting. At the end of the song we all say "*bogda prost*," meaning "this is from us."

Compared to the practices of Suada and Ilija, Marija has the most intimate relationship with death. She is an expert in treating living vampires, people who are unconscious and suspended between life and death. I tell her that my grandfather was in this state several years ago. At the end of his life he stopped eating and lost consciousness, subsequently remaining in his bed unconscious for a week until he died. Marija tells me that people in this state need *bajanje*. The healer must encourage the dying person to choose death or life. The indecision of dying people presents a threat to the community, because while they are in this vampire state, they will eat their neighbors' sheep and other livestock through their dreams to stay alive.

After discussing work, *bajanje*, and Marija's performance, we take a break to talk about our family histories. We discuss Aca's sister's schooling in Belgrade, his parents, my grandparents, and my Serbian genealogy. We then begin to talk about Ilija. Marija tells us that someone visited Ilija a few months ago, claimed that they needed healing, and then stole 6000 dinars from him (around sixty US dollars, a significant amount of money in this part of Serbia). Marija then tells us that someone stole fifty liters of gasoline from her car. She visited Ilija for help finding this gasoline and he told her that the person who stole her gasoline would come to her and that that thief would end up having an "accident." A few weeks later, Marija's bull impaled the woman who stole her gas, and the thief ended up in the hospital.

We keep talking about how powerful Ilija is and we indirectly talk about how powerful Marija is. Marija tells us that when she was very young and married to her first husband, her in-laws' cow fell ill. While her mother-in-law did not believe in *bajanje*, her father-in-law did. Marija mixed some plant medicines and *tamjan*, gave the mixture to the bull, and recited a *basma*. After this, the bull stood up and was healthy again. When she tells stories about herself, Marija does not draw much attention to herself as a healer, but rather foregrounds the efficacy of *bajanje* healing in spite of people's contradictory worldviews.

Before we leave, Marija shows us one of her photo albums. This album contains photos of her children, her grandchildren, and Marija dressed in traditional Vlach clothing. The last photo, however, is the most interesting. She tells us that she paid someone to Photoshop a photograph of her standing between her two late husbands. In this photograph, Marija and her late husbands are immortalized in their mid-twenties in black and white. Marija invented a new history for herself. She tells us that she learned in a dream many years ago that she would be old, alone, and crying. She says that while it is true that she lost both of her husbands and now lives a very difficult life, these photos bring her joy.

Throughout my conversations with Marija, she populates our time with stories. She tells stories about her experiences healing people, stories about receiving healing from other healers, and stories about the misfortunes and triumphs of those other healers. In an instant, Marija switches from telling stories to singing or practicing healing on either Aca or myself. Listening back over the recordings of our conversations, I hear pauses transform into singing before I realize what is happening. In that moment of uncertainty, my confusion lies not only in the quick oscillation from speaking to singing, but also because Marija's singing voice is an accentuation

of her speaking voice. Before I realize that she is singing, I think that she is beginning another story.

I identify *bajanje* as performance, because performance endures. After Peggy Phelan's explosive definition of performance as that which disappears, performance studies scholars have contested and problematized the epistemological consequences of such a declaration (Phelan 1993: 146-152). In her book *Performing Remains*, Rebecca Schneider argues against Phelan's ontology of performance as a perpetual state of loss (2011). Taking advantage of Phelan's use of "disappear," Schneider offers disappearance as a negotiation of performance's materiality rather than as a loss of materiality. The moment that a performance ends, the performance does not cease to exist, but rather the performances changes form. Schneider rejects the immateriality or intangibility of performance, and instead calls attention to the material quality of performance that *remains* in the body. I recognize the negotiation of materiality in *bajanje* through healers' discursive construction of *bajanje* in conversation, the guest's performative response, and the transmission of *basme* to the younger generation. *Bajanje* healers negotiate materiality through their performances as a practice of endurance. By articulating my endurance-based performance practice with the healing practices of my collaborators, I propose a model of endurance whereby *bajanje* healers care for the endurance and futurity of their rural communities through their healing practices.

Schneider argues that the "remains" of performance transmit knowledge. Through performing the past, the body forges a new transmissive temporality that changes both the past and the future-stepping-present. Performance does not become lost, but rather perpetually re-appears to transform history and memory. By side-stepping disappearance, Schneider contests "ocular hegemony" to foreground the body's less objectifying senses, such as touch and aurality



(2011: 98). A direct threat to archival practice-as-usual, the performing body negotiates the materiality of history and re-members its past.

When Marija quickly moves between recounting and enacting, she demonstrates the material transformation of *bajanje*. By weaving the live enactment of her practice, such as singing to invite her dead husband to sit with us, together with her discursive construction of *bajanje* through storytelling, Marija proposes *bajanje* as a continuum. Marija confounds linear temporality within this continuum by revealing the constant interplay between past, present, and future in her practice. This temporal construction is the most obvious in her presentation of the photograph of her amongst her dead husbands. Marija presents this photograph, which archival ideology teaches us is a document of the past, however, this evidence is an invention of a new history. While Marija is of course aware that she was not with both of her husbands at the same time, nor at the same ages, she produces this ironic narrative as a continuance of life. Despite having her domestic life marked by death and poverty, Marija refuses to objectify and fix herself within a pessimistic narrative. Rather, she invents a parallel narrative of her life that persists just beyond our view.

Marija deploys this non-linear temporality as a mechanism of endurance when she discursively constructs *bajanje* through her stories. In her narratives, Marija continually introduces the muted presence of suspicion against *bajanje*. Throughout my conversations with Marija, she obliquely addresses people's distrust in *bajanje* healing. In the story recounted above when her in-laws' bull fell ill, Marija deflates suspicious attitudes towards *bajanje* by making her mother-in-law's disbelief appear ridiculous. While telling this story, Marija starts laughing when she recalls how easily she healed this bull. Rebuffing any spectacular representation of her own healing, Marija concludes her story by saying that the bull just got up and acted normal once her



healing was finished. We all start laughing. Marija's commonsensical attitude toward the efficacy of *bajanje* exposes her skeptics, while simultaneously refusing to orient her perspective towards those skeptics.

By recounting past narratives of confounded skepticism, Marija both asserts her knowledge in the past and creates a vivid present for *bajanje*. When Marija tells Aca and I about her healing of her in-laws' bull, she transforms her relationship to that past event of disbelief and she simultaneously shares with us the mixture of plants and incense which brought about the animal's healing. In doing so, Marija demonstrates how the performance of *bajanje* endures through a change in materiality. While the event of the bull's healing has passed, we hear an echo of that performance today, sitting with Marija. The visual dimension of *bajanje* has passed into a different material form. Through discourse, *bajanje* moves from the visual to the aural.

Sitting with Marija, I notice that while we talk about *bajanje*, she regularly discusses practices that I had not previously understood as contiguous with *bajanje*. For example, after we spoke about my grandfather and his vampire state at the end of his life, Marija began to teach us a song about Mary receiving Jesus off the cross following his crucifixion. Marija began this song before I really knew what was happening. While singing, she stares intensely at Aca. She tells us after she finishes that by knowing this song, you will be able to transition from life to death without this painfully drawn out stage in-between.

Hearing Marija juxtapose *basme* for love with songs to help the dying transition alongside ironic narratives of disbelief forces me to re-articulate my definition of *bajanje*. While I had originally fallen into a typological understanding of *bajanje*, dividing the performance of the *basma* from the performative response to the *basma* from the discussion of *bajanje*, I realized through my discussions with Marija that one could not firmly distinguish the discussion of

*bajanje* from the recitation of verbal charms, songs, or prayers. By incorporating discussions, charms, songs, and prayers into her definition of her practice, Marija produces an expansive definition of *bajanje*.

This expansiveness is essential for an understanding of *bajanje* as an enduring performance. *Bajanje* never becomes “lost” after healers perform, because *bajanje* disperses and becomes embedded into daily discourse and the bodies of the people who practice and receive *bajanje*. In Marija’s relationship to Ilija, we witness the exchange of practice. Both healers, Ilija and Marija visit each other for help when they cannot heal themselves. Through her stories, Marija ascribes great power to Ilija. She comments on the things that Ilija can do that she cannot, such as see the future. She also shows the literal transformation of the body through *bajanje* when she describes the culmination of Ilija’s vision of reciprocity. While Ilija did not curse the woman who stole gas from Marija, he sees what will happen to the thief and sees the material transformation of the woman’s body. Marija uses this story as an example of Ilija’s strength, tying the efficacy of *bajanje* to the lasting transformation of the body. She mentions, gleefully, that the woman who stole her gas had to spend a long time in the hospital as a result of the bull’s attack. Both the story of the wounding and the physical wound endure.

I physically understand endurance through my own performance practice. In May 2017, I performed *Labors of Landscape*, a collaborative project with Zachary Tate Porter and Mari Beltran. In this piece, I dug up around two hundred pounds of dirt in Palos Verdes, California to put into a punching bag. Later that week, we set up the punching bag in a motel bathroom in Los Angeles (Fig. 10). I made a hole in the bottom of the punching bag and began a four-hour endurance performance where I punched the bag until all the dirt had fallen to the floor. Over these four hours, my arms began to shake violently as tiny fractures began to develop in my

forearms. As more and more dirt fell to the floor, the dust in the bathroom air became so pervasive that I could taste dirt in my mouth and feel my breathing becoming increasingly labored.

Through this performance, I became intimately acquainted with dirt as a collaborator. I recognized that my body and the body of the dirt encountered one another in this performative space. My body began to carry pieces of the dirt within it and the temporal quality of the performance materially transformed my body. We encountered one another aesthetically, through the sensorial landscapes that we built. As I type these words, I use forearms filled with calcium deposits that developed to fill the fractures produced by my encounter with the dirt. Performance as enduring is not a metaphor. Performances endures in the body, a body which includes bones, organs, muscles, and tissue.

The consequences of the endurance of performance in *bajanje* manifest in the bodies of both the healer and their guest. When Suada and Ilija give me instructions for completing the healing of my sicknesses, they are not only giving me instructions, but also a piece of their practice. In order to cure my sickness, I have to become corporeally invested in the temporal persistence of *bajanje*. When Suada instructs me to wash myself twice a day with the lead-freezing water, she requires both my material commitment to my sickness and my material commitment to the endurance of *bajanje* as a practice. By accepting her prescription, I move *bajanje* beyond her house and engage in a new form of transmission. The lead that contained my breath that she then melted became part of my body through my bathing practice.

Suada synthesizes this mode of transmission when she affirms that knowledge of *bajanje* is increasing in the younger generation. Referring to the treatment of colic, she says:

[Young people] believe more and more...Before, only the old people believed in *bajanje*, but now most young people believe...when one person comes and brings

her baby for *bajanje*, and they see I helped, she will tell others. And the others, you know...they have confidence in me that I will help them too if they come to visit me. And when they come, they usually say, “that person visited you and she sent us, because you made that for their baby, so you can do the same for ours.” And you know, confidence [in *bajanje*] grows when I help you. You will tell the others that it helped you, and that’s it. Now there are more and more young people who believe in *bajanje*.<sup>23</sup>

Suada structures the perpetuation of growing confidence in *bajanje* by requiring her guests to catalyze their healings within their own homes. While Suada and Ilija prepare for their guests’ healing during the initial meeting, the work to transform the sick body culminates when guests materially invest in their own healing. When I catalyzed my healing with Suada, I had to spend four weeks working on my own body with Suada’s water to achieve a state of healing. During these four weeks, I inscribed a new relationship not only with my body, but also with *bajanje* as the healing practice most equipped to heal my sicknesses.

Suada practices endurance when she prescribes a bathing practice, which she knows will take her guests several weeks to complete. Suada nuances the temporal model of *bajanje* proposed by Marija, because endurance implies the persistence of practice. When Suada recognizes that her bathing prescription will expand people’s knowledge of and confidence in *bajanje*, she recognizes the temporality of *bajanje* as an endurance practice. Suada theorizes the interrelationship of growing confidence and growing participation in the practice. Suada provided me with the above response after I asked her how she envisioned the future of *bajanje*. For Suada, the future of *bajanje* will not be built solely by a community of healers, but rather through healers’ collaborations with communities of young people who choose to seek out *bajanje* healing.

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<sup>23</sup> Interview on July 26, 2017

While I was bathing myself in Prerast in response to Ilija, my companion Aca recommended that I leave my water bottle at the site as a signal to future visitors that *bajanje* practice is still active at the site. I consider the significance of such an assertion and how Ilija structurally enabled this moment to take place. By requiring his guests to complete their healings outside of his home, Ilija enables *bajanje* to encroach upon people's everyday movements. After first performing the everyday aesthetics of his practice during the initial phase of healing, Ilija then requires his guests to theorize the integration of *bajanje* and everyday public life through their own performative culminations of his prescriptions.

*Bajanje* healers participate in the transmission of *bajanje* both through the facilitation of endurance performances within their healing practice and through the deliberate transmission of *basme* to the next generation. Within this discussion, I want to first address the largest divergence between the *bajanje* practices of my collaborators in eastern Serbia and my collaborators in Macedonia: modes of transmission. Amongst healers in Macedonia, *bajanje* practices are passed down usually from mothers-in-law to daughters-in-law, though this transmission genealogy can change to accommodate what is practically feasible. If necessary, one can pass down *bajanje* to a niece or a granddaughter. While these healers' lineages are usually all women, occasionally a man will also be taught to practice *bajanje* in Macedonia. Unlike these deliberate transmissions, my colleagues in eastern Serbia only receive *bajanje* knowledge through dreams and the gender of the recipient may be either male or female. Ilija and Marija cannot teach anyone else to practice *bajanje*, because that knowledge can only be gained within the dream world.

Out of all of my collaborators, Suada comes from the most codified lineage of *bajanje* healers. As a fourth-generation healer, Suada learned how to practice *bajanje* from her mother-

in-law after she got married. While telling me about how she learned to practice *bajanje*, Suada expresses an emotional relationship to her practice:

...when I learned the incantation from my mother in law, she gave it to me, she explained, she said what I need to do, from the bottom of her heart, and I accepted it from the bottom of my heart, so I can help the people...you need to have a strong will, and you need to want to do that, and to love that<sup>24</sup>

Suada powerfully affirms *bajanje* as not only a responsibility to heal the community but also as a source of joy in the lives of its practitioners.

Suada has not yet passed on her *basme*, but she hopes that either her daughter or her daughter-in-law will want to learn *bajanje* from her. Once she passes down her *basme*, Suada will no longer be able to practice *bajanje* herself. To transmit her *basme*, Suada tells me that she will transmit the incantations the way that her mother-in-law transmitted them to her. When she learned to practice *bajanje*, Suada had already been observing her mother-in-law's physical practice of melting and reading lead. When the time came for Suada to receive the *basme* that accompany each sickness, her mother-in-law spoke the words of each *basme* loudly one time and Suada memorized the words, which today she speaks silently while healing her guests.

Talija, a healer in nearby Petrovec, narrates a similar path of transmission. She hopes to pass on her *basme* to her grand-niece when she is old enough. Her niece sits with us while we talk—she is around nine years old. Talija does not want to teach her niece the *basme* until she trusts that she will keep the *basme* words a secret. When Talija performs her *basme*, she whispers the words under her breath.

While Talija does not trust that her niece will be able to keep the *basme* words a secret, my youngest collaborator, Bojana, tells me that she learned *bajanje* when she was nine years old.

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<sup>24</sup> Interview on July 26, 2017

However, unlike in the cases of Taliya and Suada, Bojana's grandmother wrote down her *basma* and gave the text to Bojana. Bojana is around twenty years old with a young son. She lives in Češinovo, a small village in eastern Macedonia. Within her family's *bajanje* transmission paradigm, Bojana had to learn *bajanje* before her menstrual cycle began. When I talk with Bojana about the continuation and future of *bajanje*, she says that she may pass on her *basma* to her niece, who is the son of my good friend's sister. She is now only six-months old.

Each of these transmission modalities from Macedonia exist within a teaching paradigm. Suada, Taliya, and Bojana all learned how to practice *bajanje* by first watching their grandmothers or mothers-in-law practicing healing and then receiving the words of the incantations either verbally or through writing. The only disjuncture within this paradigm arises when Suada tells me that the first generation of *bajanje* healers in her family, four generations ago, learned *bajanje* through a dream.

In eastern Serbia, the healers I work with only learn *bajanje* through dreams. No one can offer to teach or learn *bajanje*. Marija learned to practice *bajanje* through a series of dreams that came to both her and her grandmother. When Marija was four or five years old, her grandmother fell into a trance where three young women came to her and told her to leave her alcoholic husband in order to gain healing powers. Her grandmother did not leave her husband, and subsequently Marija gained healing powers in a dream. During this dream, two young women took her with them to sit in between them on the middle of a rotating cross in the sky. When Marija woke up from her dream, she knew how to practice *bajanje*.

Each of these examples of *bajanje* transmission embraces ambivalence. While passing *bajanje* knowledge from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law is the typical transmission lineage in Suada's family, sometimes this pattern differs and Suada does not object to passing on her *basme*

to her daughter instead. While Taliya and Suada recognize the significance of oral transmission, Bojana learned to practice *bajanje* through her grandmother's written transcription of the *basma*. Suada recognizes that in the past *bajanje* knowledge was transmitted through dreams, however, now the *basme* are deliberately taught. Marija does not make any claims to her uniqueness as the receiver of *bajanje* knowledge, but rather attributes her knowledge to her grandmother's failure to abide by the conditions of her dream. While each of these practices of transmission operates within a unique logical schema, healers can shift and adapt these structures to serve new purposes.

These ambivalent transmissions are the heart of endurance performance. By refusing to ascribe their powers to a direct source and refusing to participate in a hyper-structured mode of knowledge transmission, Suada, Taliya, and other healers privilege the epistemological capacities of their bodies. In the cases of Suada and Taliya, they did not learn the words of the *basme* directly, but rather had to "overhear" the words and memorize them. Throughout their discussions of transmission processes, healers confound common understandings of agency. Even when the two women in the dream give Marija *bajanje* knowledge, Marija disperses the power imbued in this moment by recognizing that her healing repertoire was originally intended for her grandmother. Marija obscures the agent of the power transmission and highlights her own individual actions as a healer. We do not *see* the complete figure of the agents who give *bajanje* knowledge to these healers, but are instead made obliquely aware of the agent's presence. When Marija tells the story of how she received *bajanje* knowledge, she does not clarify whether the women in her grandmother's dream were the same women that were present in her own dream. Marija refuses to fix the narrative of how she learned *bajanje* and instead prefers to discuss how she continues to use that knowledge in the present moment.



When Suada talks about transmitting her knowledge to her daughter-in-law, her feelings remain open-ended. She would like to transmit her *basme* to her daughter or her daughter-in-law, but only if they have a strong desire to practice *bajanje*. Suada is not interested in promoting the continuation of her own *bajanje* practice unless her practice is of value to the person learning. Suada says that when the first ancestor four generations ago learned how to practice *bajanje*, she learned *bajanje* from saints in a dream who told this ancestor the words of the *basme*, how to practice healing, and how to transmit healing knowledge to the next generation. We still feel the invisible presence of the saints today. Suada doesn't name these "saints," so they remain nameless and out of sight—a fourth person dictates the terms of transmission.<sup>25</sup>

Talija's ancestors are materially present, but discursively absent. While she never names the ancestral lineage of her *bajanje* practice, near the end of our conversation she performs a *basma* that requires the use of some extremely old equipment. Talija goes behind her house and retrieves two wooden handles that have dozens of rusty nails lined up in a row, resembling a set of hand rakes. She walks over to her husband and begins a *basma*. Holding one of the rakes parallel to the ground with the nails pointing to the sky, she holds the other rake in her right hand, perpendicular to the ground with the nails pointing towards her grandson in the doorway of the house (Fig. 11). She slowly moves her right arm parallel to her body in a clockwise motion while whispering the *basma*. At the end of the incantation, she interlocks the rakes above her husband's head and says "*dosta* (enough)." She quickly puts away the instruments after saying that these belonged to Baba Lika, one of her ancestors.

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<sup>25</sup> I use the fourth person here in the sense of Gerald Vizenor's theory of "survivance" (Vizenor 1999, 2008). The fourth person, or the obviative, is a nuance of the grammatical third-person perspective, which leaves the third-person referent un-named. The fourth person is the "shadow presence of some other person," the presence of a person who is not quite nameable, but nonetheless persists beyond the objectification of the third person (Vizenor 1999: 37).

Each of these healer's *bajanje* practices is permeated with the presence of ancestors. Whether spoken about directly through narratives of their own transmission or introduced through the tools of previous generations, I feel the historical orientation of these healers through their discursive and practical constructions of *bajanje*. This historical orientation extends both backwards and forwards through time. While we see the repeated introduction of ancestors, this discussion is never far from the discussion of future knowledge transmission. Marija, Ilija, Suada, Talija, and Bojana inscribe communities of practice through these discussions of transmission. By invoking ancestors and future practitioners, these healers position *bajanje* as a practice that maintain the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next.

While optimistic, this transmission is never romantic.<sup>26</sup> The ambivalent past of Suada's ancestor, dream saints, and Marija's grandmother's marriage comingle in the present moment of transmission. The transmission of *bajanje* knowledge looks towards the future and prepares the next generation to heal people in a moment of reverse Benjaminian history. Instead of embodying that quixotic moment of awakening from the dream of the past as a form of remembrance, these healers awaken from their dreams to consider the interrelation of the future and the present (Benjamin 1999: 389). Where Walter Benjamin would situate the healer within a paradigm of remembering the genesis of their own healing knowledge, healers situate themselves instead within a futural paradigm wherein they affirm contemporary circumstances to invite the future.

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<sup>26</sup> I position my definition of optimism in relation to Fred Moten's definition of black optimism as a "temporal paradox" that is "on the one hand, necessarily futural" and also "an assertion not only of the necessity but also of the rightness and the essential timelessness of the always already existing" (Moten 2007).

This temporal paradigm endures, because healers do not objectify their pasts or conflate themselves with those pasts. Whereas scholarly representations of healers tend to primordialize *bajanje* as an echo of an archaic past, when healers represent their own practices and lineages, they constantly return to questions of how the practice will transform and live beyond the present moment. These healers never question the persistence of *bajanje* at all. By refusing to participate in discourses of erasure, *bajanje* healers enact performances of endurance. Marija, Ilija, Suada, Bojana, and Taliya refuse to participate in an evolutionary economy wherein practices die and disappear in the relentless tumult of globalized modernity. These healers do not question the endurance or persistence of *bajanje*, but rather they debate the lived ambivalences of *bajanje*. When we discuss *bajanje*, we discuss the numerous inventive and experimental modalities through which healers deploy their *bajanje* knowledge and how these healers encounter the greater social world from a *bajanje* worldview.



Fig. 10 Still from *Labors of Landscape* video documentation, filmed and edited by Zachary Tate Porter.



Fig. 11 Taliya performs a *basma*.

## Section V

### Conclusion

By intertwining discussions of the materiality of the body, everyday life, and *bajanje* as an endurance practice, I recognize *bajanje* healers as significant cultural practitioners in rural Serbia and Macedonia. In chapter one, “Sensing Sickness,” I propose that *bajanje* healers manipulate the materiality of plants, metals, breath, and the body to achieve healing. In a village in eastern Serbia, Ilija heals sicknesses ranging from love sickness to cancer for guests both from the surrounding villages and those who travel long distances to see him. In the first stage of Ilija’s healing practice, he manipulates water, basil, and a padlock to unbind me from my lovesickness. I argue that this manipulation is part of an aesthetic schema which Ilija and other healers intentionally produce to achieve intersubjective encounters with their guests. Suada, a healer near Skopje, Macedonia produces these aesthetic schemas through the manipulation of lead. By intuiting the sicknesses of her guests through their breath and the material transformation of melted lead, Suada practices a mode of implicit social knowledge. In this experimental practice, Suada continually generates new knowledge by placing different materials into relation with her guest’s sick body. Suada and Ilija both recognize sickness as socially-situated and continually re-define sickness and sociality through their *bajanje* practices.

In chapter two, “Expressions of Vulnerability,” I articulate *bajanje* with my performance art practice to understand the status of the everyday within *bajanje* healer’s practices.

Approaching *bajanje* with a practitioner-based theory of knowledge, I use my performative culmination of Suada and Ilija’s healing prescriptions to understand how *bajanje* redefines the sick guest’s relationship to social life. I argue that Ilija and Suada theorize the interrelation of public and private space by generating shame and vulnerability. Deconstructing my uses of

technology and my practice of intimate bathings in public spaces, I propose that *bajanje* is an ordinary practice within healers' paradigms of daily life and that healers simultaneously enact *bajanje* to disrupt codified understandings of everyday life. I argue that *bajanje* healers encourage the transgression of public and private as social categories and subsequently force their guests to re-define their own relationships to everyday life.

Finally, in the third chapter, "The Endurance of the Ordinary," I develop a definition of endurance that connects healers' durational bathing prescriptions, healers' discursive constructions of *bajanje* in conversation, and techniques of transmitting *bajanje* to the next generation. I connect the endurance strategies of *bajanje* healers with a definition of performance that recognizes performance as the generation of lasting knowledge. I intersect performance studies discourse on performance as the negotiation of materiality with *bajanje* healers' negotiation of materiality within their practices to position *bajanje* as that which endures. In this chapter, I analyze how Marija in eastern Serbia constructs *bajanje* as an expansive category that can include discussions of *bajanje*, songs, and *basme* for healing sicknesses. I use my own experience as an endurance-based performance artist to propose a definition of endurance as a practice which changes your body through the production of new knowledge and new social relations. I align my endurance boxing performance with Suada's bathing prescription to demonstrate how Suada uses endurance to enact physical transformation through the practice of *bajanje*. Aligning the enduring practices of *bajanje* discussions and bathing prescriptions with the transmission of *bajanje* knowledge, I propose endurance as both a physical and temporal technique to ensure the continuing practice of *bajanje* healing.

Theorizing *bajanje* healers as practitioners of an everyday physical practice is significant, because we recognize *bajanje* not as irrational or archaic, but rather as a mechanism for everyday

health and survival. While performance studies scholars and anthropologists have begun to discursively recognize the capacity of the body to know, scholars still tend to over-rely on linguistic expressions of knowledge. In my research, I have given priority to the physical practices of my collaborators and my own physical practices in the field. By searching for the theoretical maneuvers performed by the body, I recognize that theory does not only take the form of linguistic screeds. While theorizing in this text about the theorizations of Suada, Ilija, Marija, and others, I begin my explorations with the body. I have revised the standard methodologies of ethnography to insist on the epistemological capacity of physical practices.

Recognizing the theoretical capacity of *bajanje* healers is particularly important in Serbian and Macedonian contexts, where *bajanje* is considered a primitive relic of the past even amongst the scholars who study *bajanje* and transcribe healers' *basme*. By drawing attention to the interplay of discourse about everyday life and the everyday status of *bajanje*, I argue both for the significance of analyzing cultural practitioners as theorists in academic writing and the contemporary status of *bajanje*. The ontological category of everyday life provides a rich strategy with which to re-study the objects of analysis in anthropological and folkloric writing. Departing from Mundoli Narayanan's critique of "over-ritualization," I argue for the re-examination of those cultural practices the academy has labeled as "magic," "ritual," or "tradition" (2006). When we pay attention to how practitioners understand their practices within the schemas of their daily lives, we can evaluate practices on their own terms rather than as an over-simplified contrast to Western models of art, health, and religion.

The theoretical propositions of everyday life and the Western disavowal of non-Cartesian epistemologies would benefit from further research within the context of former Yugoslavia. *Bajanje* is one practice within a constellation of rural practices in Serbia and Macedonia. The

representation of rural culture as primitive is not limited to scholarly representations of *bajanje*, but rather extends to rural populations as a whole. In my further research, I plan to examine the ways in which the economic and cultural policies of Yugoslavia and present-day Serbia constructed the contemporary antagonistic relationship between urban and rural populations. I recognize the temporal construction of the village as the “past” of urban centers in Serbia. By elucidating the interrelationship of cultural evolutionist discourse and the discursive construction of the rural “folk,” we can begin to understand how and why rural populations in present-day Serbia experience dramatically higher rates of poverty and unemployment than urban populations.

The distinction between the status of rural culture in the Yugoslav era versus the status of rural culture in contemporary Serbia also deserves further study. As discussions of the anthropocene proliferate, my colleagues in rural Serbia experience the consequences of being conflated with the land during the era of climate disaster. Witnessing widespread resource extraction in Serbia conducted by Russian, Emirati, Canadian, and American corporations, I question how this rapid consumption of the land since the collapse of Yugoslavia impacts both the daily lives of rural Serbs and the representation of rural life in urban space. In my future research, I seek to place theories of the anthropocene in dialogue with the daily lived realities of rural life in Serbia. I do not take the “rural” here as a fixed category, but rather as an opportunity to theorize different modalities of living with land in differing densities of human population. Taking the experiences of *bajanje* healers as my point of departure, in my future research I will attend to the broader socio-political relationships between humans and the land in Serbia.



## Appendix

### Interview with Suada on July 26, 2017 in Ognjanci, Macedonia

Christina Novakov-Ritchey: Kako ste naučile bajati?

Suada: Ovo je od svekrva mi. Ja sam sine četvrta generacija. Ova bajka ide sve od svekrva na snaja. Prva baba, prababa, njoj je došlo u san. Jesi me razumela? E... E, posle je, ona je davala takve jer ide bajka samo od svekrvu na snahu. Jer mora da je tu u dvor, ne može da ide dalje. E, e tako...

C: Kada ste bile dete šta ste mislie o bajanju?

S: Mislila sam da je to dobro, jer vidi sine, onaj, tradicija je, pogotovu kod nas u Bosni, da se baje deci, razumeš... i za decu, i za odrasle i za sve, nije bitno, ali to je još od staro. Vekovima nazad je se bajalo. E tako i zato... jesi me razumela?

C: Da li se Vaša percepcija o bajanju promenila kada ste počele kako da radi?

S: Ne nije. Ne može ništa da se promeni, ne možeš ti da... već to što ti je dato, to mora da ostane tako. Ti pre tebe što su radili, i ti isto tako moraš da radiš.

C: Ali Vaša percepcija o bajanju?

Filip: Znači pita da li ste drugačije gledali, na primer, kad ste bile malena, da li ste možda drugačije gledali, kad ste počeli da se?

Ne, sve isto ostaje. Ne...

C: I koje bolesti tretirate?

F: Znači šta bajate?

S: Vidi sine to nisu bolesti, ono do duše, strah i uroci jeste jedna vid bolesti, ali to je vid bolesti duševne.. e... jer kad čovek ima strah, i kad taj strah ostari, naravna stvar da nisi duševno... duša ti nije mirna, jer strah tera mnogo na nemir, nervozu, na nesanicu, i odmah sve to kad imaš i duša ti nije mirna. To je većinom, to nije kad... da se skrstiš ruku, da nešto drugo napraviš, da imaš neku drugu bolest, to je baš bolest duše, duša te boli. E to je... e to je...

C: I kako Vi znate, ako ljudi ima strah ili uroci?

S: Znam zato što kad... bila si prošle godine sam ti radila olovo. Ti kad dumniš u olovo i ja kad bacim olovo u vodu posle...ja pre toga njega čatim, učim na njego, i kad vrlim u voda, ono pokaže. I po samim tim figurama što su mi izišle na olovo znam šta je uplav šta su uroci, šta je nagazeno šta je nešto drugo. E tako to...

C: I koliko ljudi dolazi svaki dan?

S: Pa dolazi... pa preko dvadeset osoba dnevno.

C: Kako se bakanje odnosi na vaš svakodnevni život?

S: Ima vreme iskombiniraš, al većinom sam posvetena na bakanje samo.

F: Znači kao profesija...

S: Da, da, mada i drugi obavezi što imam ja doma... domaći poslovi, sve možem da završim

F: Ali uzima vremena.

S: Ali bakanje mi je na prvom mestu.

C: Kako izgleda zdravlje, ako nema strah ili nema uroci, kako izgleda zdravlje?

S: Pa izgleda... normalno čovek kad je zdrav... sad sam rekla od straha je nemir, nervoza... ne znam... e... nemir, nervoza, nesanica. Sine strah mnogo tera na nemir i na nervozu, a čovek kad nema straha, nema te simptome, nema to, i odmah je drugačiji. Jer čovek kad ima mnogo straha, mnogo je uznemiren. E... a većinom kod odraslih, strah je od stresova, znači da ima razlog za strah. I naravna stvar nekad ti se desilo da si imala neki stres i odmah osetiš u duši da imaš nemir, e to je sine. A već kad nema tih stresova i kad nema ništa, naravno, stvarno je čovek miran, da je... eto, kako zdrav čovek? E tako...

C: Zašto, ili da li je važno da ljudi nastavljaju da praktikuju bakanje?

S: Pa ono... vidi... sve zavisi do osobe. Ti ako hoćeš, imaš potrebu jednostavno da treba da ti se baje, jer ne može sve da izleči ni doktor ni psihijatar. Znači, da moraš da otideš za strah i za uroci nema doktor mila. Samo treba da se baje. Recimo i za uroci možeš i so krstena voda da se umivaš. I to isto mnogo pomaže i sve, ali samo za striktno za strah i za uroci mora da se baje. Ne može da pomogne doktor ništa. Znači da moraš da odrediš sebi to da, ti sama treba da, svaki čovek da odredi da li hoće da ide doktoru ili da ide na bakanje. E to...

C: Kako se većina ljudi osjeća za bakanju?

S: Vidi sad... sve više i više veruju pogotovu... pre su samo postari ljudi verovali u bakanje, a sad većinom i mladi veruju. Jer sine kad imaš muku i recimo, ja sam ti rekla i prošle godine, ja za , i malu decu, za bebe, obavezno od uroci, od strah, od klinovi, a klinovi su kod malih beba grčevi. E, i naravno tad dok se ne baju to, ne može to da prođe. Non-stop dete boli stomak. I sad mladi sve više kad im dođe jedna osoba donese njenu bebu za bakanje vidi da je pomogla, ona će da kaže na druge. I drugi, i onda, znaš... imaju poverenje u mene da ja ću njima da pomognem kad će da dođu. I kad dođu mi kažu, bila je ta i ta osoba kod tebe nas je poslala zato što ti, tako si napravila za njinu bebu, možeš i za našu. I znaš samo poverenje se stiče u to kad ja tebi pomognem, ti ćeš da kažeš na drugo da ti je pomoglo i odmah ima. Sad je mladi sve više i više veruju u bakanje sine. Sve više veruju u Gospoda i u to što je darba od Gospoda. Jesi me sad razumela? E tako.

C: Dakle, kakva je budućnost bakanja?

S: Pa da ti kažem da...

C: Više ljudi?

S: Da, ljudi sve više i više veruju u bakanje da ti kažem najiskrenije.

F: Ali hoće da pita, da li mislite da će nastaviti ljudi da se bave time? Ne samo vi, nego u principu.

S: Da, da, da... samo sve zavisi do toga, vi mladi ne sakate...A jer vidi sine, ja moram da sam kući, uvek neko ima za bakanje, jedino pita kad ne radim, ako je iziđem negde. E sad sve zavisi, da li je, mladi će hteti da prihvate to što sam ja radila, pa da ostavim ili ćerki, ili snaji. Sve zavisi do vas mladih. Kakvo vi razmišljanje imate i da li ćete hteti da prihvatite, sad sam ti rekla. Nije mila sve za kod doktora. Ima nešto što ne može i doktor da napravi. Jer da, jer i oni sami dolaze i za njih i za decu, jer ne može sve. Za uroke i za strah nema doktor mila. Samo treba da se baje. E to je, e to hoću da ti. Sve zavisi to koliko će bakanje da opstane i da li će da produži od vas mladih, da li će da prihvatite to što mi stari radimo. Eto... od sve od toga zavisi. Jer svi mi želimo da to produži dalje. Da ja naučim bilo ćerku, bilo snaju, šta treba da radi, sve zavisi do toga da li će oni da prihvate da rade to što ja radim.

F: A ne možete da je naterate?

S: So sila ne, ne, ne može. Jer vidi sine, bajanje, ja kad sam uzimala bajanje od moje svekrve, ona je meni dala, objasnila mi, rekla sve šta treba da radim od sve srca, i ja sam trebala da prihvatim od sve srce da može posle da pomažem narodu. Razumeš? Jer ti ako preko volje, znaš i sam, bilo kakav poso da radiš, ako ne radiš da merakom, nema tu ništa. Znači treba da imaš čvrstu volju, i da hoćeš to da radiš i da voliš da to radiš i onda nema problema. Ako ti nekog na silu teraš da nešto radi, ne može, ne može, tako ne može ništa da se napravi. Jer, sad sam ti rekla, ja sam četvrta generacija ide sve svekrva snaja, svekrva snaja, a ta prva, pra pra baba što je, njoj je došlo u san. Njoj su sveci u san rekli šta treba da radi, od šta da baje i kako da baje i da se prenosi sa kolena na koleno. E tako. E to. Sad sve zavisi kako vi mladi će prihvatite da li verujete u to što mi stari radimo. Eto. Sve od toga zavisi deco. Mada, sad vi mladi ste se mnogo okrenuli prema Gospodu i više verujete nego neki stari.

F: Mislite?

S: Da. Gledam sine po bajanju što mi dolaze za bajanje. Dosta mladih veruje. Pre nisu mogle svekrve da nateraju snahe da dođu da ja bajem deci za uroke, za klinove, za strah, a sad one same traže, jer pitaju dok se... sine, dok se na baje za klinove dete, dok se ne baje od uroci dete nema mir, ne može da spava, jer od klinovi boli mnogo stomak. I znači mora da ga donese da mu se baje.

## English Translation of Interview with Suada on July 26, 2017 in Ognjanci, Macedonia

Christina: How did you learn to practice *bajanje*?

Suada: That's from my mother in law. I am, my dear, the fourth generation. This *bajanje* knowledge goes from the mother in law to the daughter-in-law. The first grandmother, great-grandmother, it came to her in her dream. Did you understand? And then she gave the incantation that way, because it can only go from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law. Because it needs to be like that, it cannot go any other way. And so on...

C: When you were a child, what did you think about *bajanje*?

S: I thought it was a good thing, because, my dear, it is tradition, especially with us in Bosnia to practice *bajanje* for the children, for the grownups, for all; it doesn't matter, except that it is from the old times. People have practiced *bajanje* for centuries.

C: Did your perception change when you start to practice *bajanje*?

S: No, it didn't. It cannot be changed, you can't... it is given to you, and it needs to stay like that. The ones who did that before you, you need to do it in the same way.

C: But your perception about *bajanje*--

Filip: She wants to ask if you looked at it differently, for example, when you were a child, did you perceive it differently?

S: No, it all stays the same. No...

C: And which diseases do you treat?

S: Listen my dear, those are not diseases—well, the fear and evil eye are some sort of disease, but it is the sort of the *mental* illness. When a person has a fear, and that fear gets old, you are not mentally well. Your soul is not peaceful, because the fear produces restlessness, nervousness, and insomnia, and when you have all of that, your soul is not calm. That is mostly, that's not when...to cross your arms, to make something different, to have another disease, that is really the disease of the soul, your soul hurts you.

C: And how do you know if the people have *strah* or *uroci*?

S: I know, because... you were here last year when I used the lead.. When you blow onto the lead and when I throw it in the water...before that I chant—I learn from it—and when I put it in the water, it shows. And by looking at those figures that are made on the lead, I know what is *uplav*, what is *uroci*, what is *nagazeno*, and what is something else.

C: And how many people daily come to you?



S: Well.... more than 20 people per day.

C: How does *bajanje* fit into your daily life?

S: With my other obligations at my home, housework, I can make it all.

F: But it takes some time

S: But *bajanje* takes priority.

C: How does the health look like if there are no fears and curses?

S: Well, it looks... normally when a man is healthy, I just said, the fear makes restlessness, nervousness... I don't know... (interrupted, a guest coming for *bajanje*)...so... restlessness, nervousness, insomnia. My dear, the fear makes a lot of restlessness and nervousness, and when the person doesn't have the fear, when one doesn't have those symptoms, doesn't have that, and immediately they are different. Because, when a person has a lot of fear, they are very upset.

So... mostly, the fear in grownups is made out of stress, this is the cause of fear. It's understandable, probably at some point when you had some stress, you immediately felt restlessness in your soul—it's that my dear. And if you don't have those stresses, when there is nothing, of course, the person is calm... so how does the healthy person behave? Like that...

C: Why—or is it—important for people to practice *bajanje*?

S: Well... you see... it depends on the person. If you want, if you have the need to receive *bajanje*, because the doctors and psychiatrists can't cure all disease. It means, if you need to go and take care of *strah* and *uroci*, there is no doctor for that, only *bajanje*. For example for *uroci* you can wash your face with the holy water. It really helps a lot, but for *strah* and *uroci* you can only use *bajanje*. Doctors can't help, nothing. It means, somebody needs to make *bajanje* for you. You need to decide for yourself... each person needs to decide if they will go and visit a doctor or will go and have *bajanje*.

C: How do people feel about *bajanje*?

S: Listen now.... They believe more and more.... Before, only the old people believed in *bajanje*, but now most young people believe. Because, my dear, when you have a torment—I told you last year, I make.... for the young children, babies, especially for evil eye, for fear, for colic—and the colic is for small babies. And of course, if you don't make *bajanje*, it can't be cured. The child is in pain all the time. The young people, more and more... when one person comes and brings her baby for *bajanje*, and they see I helped, she will others. And the others, you know... they have confidence in me that I will help them too if they come to visit me. and when they come, they usually say, that person visited you and she sent us, because you made that for their baby, so you can do the same for ours. And you know, only the confidence grows when I help you. You will tell the others that it helped you, and that's it. Now there are more and more young people who believe in incantations. They believe more in God and in the gift of God. Did you understand?

C: So what is the future of *bajanje*?

S: Well, I'll tell you--

C: More people?

S: Yes, more and more people believe in *bajanje*, I need to be honest.

F: She wants to ask if you believe that people will continue with the *bajanje* practice. Not only you, but in general.

S: Yes, yes, but it all depends if you, the young ones...Because, listen my child, I need to be at home, because there is always someone who needs incantation, they only ask if I don't work, if I go somewhere. So, it depends, if the young people would like to accept what I do, so I can transmit it to my daughter or daughter in law. It depends on you, the young ones. What kind of thinking you have, if you would like to accept the knowledge, I just told you. You can't cure it all with the doctor. There is something that even a doctor can't make it. Because even they come to visit me, for their health and their children's, because they can't heal it all. For fear and evil eye there is no doctor for that my dear. Only *bajanje*. So it's that, I want... it depends how long *bajanje* will exist, and if it will be transmitted from you to the others, if you the young ones will accept what we, the old ones, do. So, it depends on that. Because, all of us want the continuity

of *bajanje*. I would like to teach my daughter or my daughter in law what she need to do, it all depends if they will accept to do what I do.

F: And you cannot force her?

S: With the force, no, it can't be. Because, when I learned the incantation from my mother in law, she gave it to me, she explained, she said what I need to do, from the bottom of her heart, and I accepted it from the bottom of my heart so I can help the people. Understand? If you make it against your will, you know, if you do any job, if you don't make it with love, you won't do a thing. So, you need to have a strong will, and you need to want to do that, and to love that and then there is no problem. If you force someone to do something, it can't, it can't, it can't be done. Because, I just told you, I am the fourth generation, it goes from mother in law to daughter in law, from mother in law to daughter in law, and the first one, the great-grandmother, it all came to her in her dream. The saints told her in her dream what she needs to do, what incantations to make, how to do it, and how to transmit it from generation to generation. Like that. It all depends how you, the young ones, will accept, if you believe in the practice that we, the old ones, do. It all depends on that children. Though, you, the young ones, turned to God now, and you believe more that the old ones.

F: You think?

S: Yes, I see it when I practice *bajanje* with people. The ones who visit me. a lot of young people believes, before, the mothers in law couldn't force the daughters in law to come to me to make

*bajanje* for their children, for colic, for *strah*, and now they (daughters in law) come voluntarily, they ask... my dear, if you don't make *bajanje* for colic for your child, until you make *bajanje* for *uroci*, your child will be restless, it won't sleep, because the colic makes pain in their stomach. It means she needs to bring it to me.

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