

**NON-ALIGNED MODERNISM: YUGOSLAVIAN ART AND
CULTURE FROM 1945-1990**

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to understand and recover contemporary social, political and aesthetic value from the often dismissed or marginalized history of Yugoslavian modernism. The significance and complexity of the Yugoslavian experiment with modernism has often passed unrecognized. It has been dismissed as derivative and marginal or else eclipsed and tainted by the collapse of the Yugoslavian state in the early 1990s. To understand Yugoslavian modernism's particularity we must recognize that socialist Yugoslavia existed as an in-between political power that negotiated the extremes of the Cold War by building a version of socialism independent from the Soviet model. Its art and culture were equally idiosyncratic. Although Yugoslavian cultural and political elites accepted modernism as a national cultural expression, the way that modernism developed did not strictly follow Western models. As a mixture of various aesthetic, philosophical, and political notions, Yugoslavian modernism can only be described by a political term associated with the international movement that Yugoslavia participated in at the time: Non-Aligned.

I make a parallel between Yugoslavia's political ambitions to build a country outside of the two Blocs and its rising modernist culture meant to reflect ideas of Non-Alignment, self-managing socialism, and nation-building. Yugoslavian Non-Aligned modernism also had strong anti-imperialist characteristics influenced by the country's colonial and semi-colonial status vis-à-vis Western Europe. Modernist influences were therefore refracted and changed as they penetrated the Yugoslavian

cultural milieu. Artistic and intellectual groups, exhibitions, and political ideas discussed in this thesis show a tendency to oscillate between revolutionary socialist ideas, and more conservative aesthetic and political attitudes. But it is precisely this curious mixture of aesthetic utopianism and aesthetic and political pragmatism that make Yugoslavian modernism interesting and valuable to reconsider now.

Instead of reading Yugoslavian modernism as derivative of predominantly Western forms, we should read it as a form of alternative modernism that developed its complexities not only because of the Western colonial and imperial cultural project, of which Yugoslavia was a part of, but in spite of it. Non-Aligned modernism is therefore both a critique and a continuation of the modernist project and as such deepens our understanding of modernism and its struggle to actualize its progressive ideals.

For my daughter Yara that she may always
persevere and flourish

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Introduction

A Prelude from a Present Now Passed: the Communist Archive circa 1980

*History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [Jetztzeit].*¹

— Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*

In the early 1980s Yugoslavian neo-avant-garde artist Mladen Stilinic initiated his first *Exploitation of the Dead* series (Fig. 1). Varied in size, structure, and imagery these elaborate installations featured a variety of iconic, mythical symbols of Eastern European culture, communist politics, and art. Some of the symbols, such as Kazimir Malevich's square, were taken directly from the visual repertoire of the Russian avant-gardes. Others were drawn from socialist-realist art or borrowed from the wider symbolic repository of the communist visual vocabulary: the communist star, the hammer and sickle, assorted military paraphernalia and so forth. Stilinic also transformed the objects to varying degrees by adding his own painted, drawn, written, and sculpted visual commentary. The artist imagined his work as a way of signaling the death of crucial artistic and political ideological apparatuses. The dead he was exploiting were the failed modernist aesthetic propositions, remnants of communist structures, and ruins of utopian dreams that had turned into nightmares by 1984 when he began the series. Stilinic's art from this period was a voice in the

¹ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hanna Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969a), 261.

wilderness, a prophesy of the end of an era, a long-protracted death of the revolutionary ideas launched into action in October 1917.

The work also addressed the death of socialism in Stilinovic's own country — Yugoslavia. In the mid 1980s the official Yugoslav political establishment still held on to an illusion of the success of its self-managing socialist utopia as it was pronouncing the country's viability as an in-between power (one neither East nor West). Despite the cynicism woven into Stilinovic's installation, Marina Grzinic has convincingly argued² that the artist was also mourning the end of the socialist era. Born immediately after the war, Stilinovic, with many other Yugoslavian baby boomers, helped build the country, bringing it into late twentieth century modernity. His generation witnessed Yugoslavia's greatest prosperity and its violent end. *Exploitation of the Dead* is therefore positioned to hover in an in-between space: an archive of a time the artist was still living in, yet which he knew was ending.

Grouped images and objects in *Exploitation of the Dead* are placed in different settings (a portable workers' sleeping container, a dilapidated house, a gallery wall) and operate as temporary museum exhibits containing a number of conflicting representations (avant-garde artwork with symbols of totalitarian rule); collages of ideas. We could therefore also understand Stilinovic's continuously morphing installation as a museum of the end of the world and a museum of its future. The artist is positioned in the inevitably

² Marina Grzinic, "Mladen Stilinovic - Strategies of the Cynical Mind," in *Mladen Stilinovic, Exploitation of the Dead*, eds. Branka Stipancic and Tihomir Milovac, trans. Maja Spoljan and Graham McMaster. (Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007), 21-38.



Figure 1. Mladen Stilnovic.
Exploitation of the Dead. 1984-
1990, container, installation view
at Documenta Kassel, 2007.

difficult space in-between. While his position affords the privilege of being in three temporal realms at once (past and present looking into the future) it also condemns him to a permanent state of flux, constantly searching for the connections between the three. The work thus operates as an unstable archive both fluctuating (as time passes) and frozen in time (because the time that the archive chronicles is long gone, yet constantly brought back to the surface of the now). Positioned in this way, Stilinovic's installation reveals a useful methodology for my own investigation of the history of culture and art in socialist Yugoslavia.

A similar model of temporal disturbance was proposed by Walter Benjamin in his essay "On the Concept of History" (1940).³ The essay begins with a discussion of Paul Klee's chalk and watercolour-tinted ink drawing *Angelus Novus*, of 1920. The writer suggests that Klee's vision of a "new angel" is a dialectical image exemplifying the idea of the future in the past. Benjamin describes the angel as having his back to the future while his face is turned toward the catastrophes of the past.⁴ In a sense he simultaneously exists in two temporal realms, embodying a dialectical clash between them. The future in the past is a concept that rests on Benjamin's understanding that history cannot be perceived as a simple succession of events that unfold through a particular rational system. Rather, historical unfolding has to be seen as a clash between the moment of the present and the moment of the past. Their collision opens a possibility of revelation, or a flash of intelligibility that allows a more comprehensive understanding of an idea. Consequently, in order to

³ Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, 257.

⁴ *Ibid*, 257.

signify the prospect of a transformed future, history has to confront the present rather than be succeeded by it. Like Benjamin's reading of *Angelus Novus*, Stilinovic produced a curious assemblage that engaged an historical archive in a struggle with the future. Working loosely with the methodological precedent of both Walter Benjamin's dialectical image of *Angelus Novus*, and Mladen Stilinovic's communist archive, I intend to bring the past to the present in my own analysis of socialist modernism.

Non-aligned Socialist Modernism

A persistent paradox infuses most of the negative stereotypes entertained in the self-styled West: the Other is hopelessly diverse, fragmented, and internally divided—so much so that in the end all such peoples seem radically alike. Who can make sense of so much difference? It is easier to dismiss it as all the same.
—Michael Herzfeld, *Balkan as Metaphor*

The past of socialist Yugoslavia, which I am analyzing in this dissertation, represents a contested and marginal space in twentieth century history, one usually used to illustrate the perils of socialism and ethnic nationalism.⁵ From the perspective of most historical accounts this past is remembered primarily as one among modernity's many failed emancipatory experiments. And yet, although socialist Yugoslavia and its culture were among a number of utopian projects that could not survive late twentieth century political and social turmoil, I argue that Yugoslavian

⁵ Robert Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*, (New York: Picador: Macmillan Publishing, 1993).

society, with its various constellations of cultural and social ideas and ways of being, needs to be reexamined and salvaged from its historical grave.

Reexamination of Yugoslavia's socialist modernism is necessary for three reasons. The most obvious is that Yugoslavia's cultural history is virtually non-existent in current broader international histories of modernism. This blind spot can be attributed to the 1990s wars of secession that have impeded analyses of Yugoslav culture outside of the discourse of nationalism and violence. It can also be attributed to the fact that the new countries formed after Yugoslavia's breakup are economically devastated, entirely dependent on foreign aid/loans, and still in a period of transition from socialism to capitalism. As such they do not have enough political clout, or will, to construct alternative historical narratives of their socialist past. Reevaluation of Yugoslavian socialist modernism is also required because local accounts of socialist histories are for the most part reproducing liberal and neo-liberal analyses of this past, placing Yugoslavia's modernism solely within the history of Western modernism. Finally, a socialist humanist analysis of Yugoslavia's cultural history that takes as its starting point ideas of self-management, Non-alignment, and utopian political aesthetic (expressed in the work of artistic group EXAT 51, architect Vjenceslav Richter, and theorists of the Praxis group) can offer elements of socialist modernism as models of cultural organization in our current cultural context.

I therefore identify and analyze Yugoslavian socialist culture in the context of what Dilip Gaonkar calls “alternative modernities”⁶ by tracing its history through four select examples that demonstrate both its official state-sponsored and unofficial cultural forms. These examples are: the first exhibition of the Yugoslavian Association of Fine Artists; four examples of state-sponsored memorial sculptures; the celebration of a public holiday known as Youth Day; and finally the work of artistic group EXAT 51, artist Vjenceslav Richter, and the theoretical group Praxis. Each is treated as a case study of the ways in which socialist modernism oscillated between various power structures, political and aesthetic ideas, and historical discourses as it attempted to develop its unique cultural language suffused with utopian idealism and negotiated between aesthetics and politics. In order to address these issues I position my work similarly to Stilinovic’s communist archive: always in-between various voices of artists, politicians, intellectuals, critics, and historians. This in-betweenness I recognized in the history of socialist modernism, and in my own research, has prompted me to define Yugoslavian socialist modernism as non-aligned modernism.

The main objectives of this thesis are to investigate how the four case studies exemplify characteristics of alternative modernities, in what way they can offer alternate views of Yugoslav socialist culture, and to what effect they could intervene in narratives of Yugoslavian art history. These central questions are closely related to three interconnected broader vectors: First, to what degree can the chosen examples

⁶ D. P. Gaonkar, "On Alternative Modernities," in *Alternative Modernities*, ed. D. P. Gaonkar (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001b), 1.

contribute to creating models for a more radical aesthetics? Secondly, can the relationship between aesthetics and politics, in spite of what Walter Benjamin argues is the danger of the “aesthetization of politics,”⁷ be theorized as one of productive creative work rather than simple propagandistic manufacture of meaning? Finally, can the rearticulation of culture’s place in society take shape through removal of the barriers between culture and the everyday, and in the process establish a more radical, and more profound relationship between human intersubjectivity and the spaces of ethical social engagement? I propose that non-aligned socialist modernism offers a twofold answer to these questions. It contains a warning against reification of culture, both in the West and the East. This reification is traced over and over again through the four chapters and is evident in the ways that the Yugoslav state continuously attempted to experiment and propose innovative alternatives to the standard socialist discourse, but at the same time failed in their implementation. Secondly, non-aligned modernism also carries a hope as some of the examples discussed in my thesis point to individuals and groups who sought to avoid the reification of culture, stating that in truly self-managing communities “culture must return to life itself, to which it properly belongs, and become reintegrated both in the life of community and in the life of every individual.”⁸ How that life is defined is crucial because “the life of a

⁷ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Arendt Hannah, trans. Harry Zohn. (New York: Schocken Books, 1969b).

⁸ Zagorka Golubovic, "Culture as a Bridge," in *Praxis Yugoslav Essays in the Philosophy and Methodology of the Social Sciences*, ed. Markovic, Mihajlo and Gajo Petrovic. , trans.Coddington, Joan, Rouge, David. (Dordrecht, Boston, London: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979).

human community, and the life of a human individual comprise much more than is encompassed by the institutions of the social system.”⁹

The Literature on Yugoslavian Socialist Modernity and its National and International Contexts

To properly frame my objectives I will now consider the key literature addressing the issues of Yugoslavian socialist modernism and its various sociocultural and political implications. As already stated, the two theoretical frameworks that inform my analysis of socialist modernism are intertwined with the idea of modernity and modernism as they developed in the course of the twentieth century. The first posits Yugoslavian culture as an example of an alternative modernity, providing a general sociopolitical context, while the second examines it as an example of socialist modernism, as an aesthetic category. These frameworks help to establish a critical context for the project.

It is a particular challenge to establish a proper intellectual, social, and historical context when writing about the art and culture of a society that no longer exists. When it comes to the former Yugoslavia, contextualization is crucial because its sociocultural and political identities have often been misread and misrepresented, especially after its 1991-95 dissolution. There is a great deal of literature, both academic and non-academic, that examines the breakup of the Eastern Block and the

⁹ Ibid, 184.

political, social and cultural issues around its disintegration.¹⁰ The war in the former Yugoslavia and its aftermath played a major part in these analyses, both because of Yugoslavia's proximity to Western Europe and because of its violent breakup.¹¹ The country's breakup is still most commonly attributed to a rise in ethnic nationalisms fueled by internal and ancient hatreds.¹² Such analyses are made from a standpoint of liberal political theory, assuming that a modern nation-state is a sovereign, homogenous unit.¹³ These discourses fail to recognize the complexity of Yugoslavian

¹⁰ See: Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) ; Richard Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century - and After*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1997); Baruch Andrew Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia*, ed. Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Vladimir Tismaneanu ed., *The Revolutions of 1989* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), to name a few.

¹¹ Branka Magas, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracking the Break-Up 1980-1992*, (London and New York: Verso, 1993); Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia: Third Balkan War*, third revised ed. (London, UK: Penguin, 1999); Bogdan Denitch, *Ethnic Nationalism: The Tragic Death of Yugoslavia*, revised ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*; ; Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State Building and Legitimation 1918-2005*, (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Willson Center Press, 2006).

¹² See for example: Paul Mojzes, *Yugoslavian Inferno: Ethnoreligious Warfare in the Balkans*, (London: Continuum Publishing, 1994); Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*; Glenn Bowman, "Xenophobia, Fantasy, and the Nation: The Logic of Ethnic Violence in Former Yugoslavia," in *Anthropology of Europe: Identity and Boundaries in Conflict*, ed. Goddard, V., Llober, J. & Shore, C. (London: Berg, 2004).

¹³ The most prominent of such analyses is Sabrina Ramet's *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation 1918-2005* (2006) in which she mounts a careful and detailed analysis of what she calls "three Yugoslavias", and argues that, contrary to more simplistic arguments based solely on analyzing ethnicity and nationalism, Yugoslavia's failure was based in the inability of its political leadership to establish rule of law and political legitimization for that rule of law. Her starting point, however is based in what she theorizes are three points of legitimacy of a state: moral legitimacy based on universalist values, political legitimacy and economic legitimacy (Ramet, 22.) All three are based in classical liberal theory of Locke, Hume, Bentam,

socialism's attempt to manage the country's multiethnic makeup, colonial history, sociopolitical structure and relationships to international political and economic systems outside of liberal structures. In the case of a liberal critique of ethnic nationalism and state legitimation in Yugoslavia, such as Sabrina Ramet's, the main arguments are usually that Yugoslavia was an impossible creation imposed through an authoritarian socialist regime. As such, the country was fated to dissolve.¹⁴ Another important implication embedded in liberal reading is a paternalistic notion that its peoples, and especially its leadership, were not mature enough to create a viable nation state. The violence of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s was (and still is) attributed to the violent nature of the Balkan peoples, its histories, and to the failures of the Yugoslav form of socialism.

There have been alternate analyses of Yugoslav history and its breakup. Most notably Susan L. Woodward's *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War* (1995). Woodward argues that instead of falling back on entrenched causations of the war as "resulting from peculiarly Balkan hatreds or Serbian aggression" the conflict needs to be understood as one of larger, international political disintegration.¹⁵ Central to her argument is that the West (the U.S. and European Union in particular,) gravely underestimated "the interrelation that exists between the

and Mill. Furthermore, as hers is a centrist and western view of political and social order, Ramet could not find legitimacy in the Communist Party's attempts at structuring alternative sociopolitical frameworks. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State Building and Legitimation 1918-2005*,

¹⁴ Ibid. 23.

¹⁵ Susan L. Woodward, *The Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War*, (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1995), 3.

internal affairs of most countries and the international environment,” and ignoring this, “led to many paradoxes and had counterintuitive results” in dealing with Yugoslavian crisis.¹⁶ A complex interconnectedness between various loans, national debt, trade tariffs, and the influence of U.S.-imposed economic and social measures, influenced the final dissolution of the country. Woodward’s analysis is crucial to understanding socialist modernism because it implicates powerful international forces in shaping of Yugoslavia’s fate, and in part brings to bear colonial theory as an important aspect of analyzing the country’s history.

As I discuss here and throughout the four chapters, the history of how the Balkans have and continue to be represented is crucial in making sense of how Yugoslavian communists steered the trajectory of the socialist revolution, and how artist and intellectuals I discuss have chosen to theorize socialist modernism. Balkanism and postcoloniality, with their important critique of colonial representations of the other, are therefore the first theoretical structures that I utilize to investigate socialist modernity. Rather than analyzing Yugoslavia as a paradigmatic failed modern state, I read it as an experiment in forming a hybrid modern multinational, multicultural state; in other words, as an alternative socialist modernity.

As we will see, a number of prominent texts drew on earlier discourses that depicted the region as a dark, barbaric, utterly anti-modern place, haunted by its own violent ghosts. Although this large body of writing developed over centuries, it never

¹⁶ Ibid, 3.

amounted to a systemic study of the Balkans.¹⁷ It began as travelogues and journalistic accounts that were later incorporated into academic studies of the region. One of the most famous contemporary accounts of Balkan history is Robert D. Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* (1993). Written at the height of the Yugoslavian dissolution, Kaplan offers a historical journey into the heart of what he calls "the original Third World," which birthed the world's "first terrorists" and perfected ethnic conflict.¹⁸ In the prologue Kaplan quotes numerous journalists, politicians, historians, and writers who depict the region as continuously volatile. While Kaplan's book has been disputed and critiqued since its publication, especially by academics such as Tomislav Longinovic, Vesna Goldsworthy and Dusan Bijelic, analysis of Yugoslavia and the Balkans proposed by Kaplan still reverberates throughout both popular writing and in academic circles.¹⁹

¹⁷ Dusan I Bijelic, "Introduction: Blowing Up the 'Bridge,'" in *Balkan as a Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2002), 6.

¹⁸ Robert D Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: Journey Through History*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), xiii.

¹⁹ For example Tomislav Longinovic argues that the writing about nationalism in the Balkans which in the 1990s described the region in horror-like terms (especially in the work of Robert Kaplan,) is in effect a sign of the West's inability "to see its own reflection in the mirror of Balkan temporality, and it buries its fears of intrusion from the East in the dark chambers of Dracula's castle" Tomislav Longinovic, "Vampires Like Us: Gothic Imaginary and 'the serbs'," in *Balkan as a Metaphor Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, ed. Bijelic, Dusan I. & Savic, Obrad. Anonymous (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2002), Vesna Goldsworthy's excellent book *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (1998) similarly points out the undercurrent of gothic narratives when it came to the nineteenth century representations of the Balkans, especially in British literature. Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) Also see: Dusan I. Bijelic, "Introduction: Blowing up the

In her book *Imagining the Balkans* (1993), the Bulgarian historian Maria Todorova has termed this discursive construction of the region “Balkanism,” linking it explicitly to Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism.²⁰ Through an analysis of the language used to represent the region, Todorova’s points to the construction of a dichotomy between the modernizing force of the Western Enlightenment and its ‘other’ embodied in the Balkans.²¹ She argues that Western European modernity needed multiple others in order to position itself as the centre of the civilized world. Yugoslavian ‘authoritarian’ socialism (despite being hailed as superior to its Soviet counterpart,) and its violent dissolution were used to fortify the centuries-old narratives that Todorova analyzes in her book.

Historian Milica Bakic-Hayden pushes Todorova’s thesis further in “Nesting Orientalism: The Case of Former Yugoslavia” (1995) as does Vesna Goldsworthy in *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (1998). Bakic-Hayden argues that while Said’s *Orientalism* is indeed an important text for understanding the Balkans, the Balkanist discourse requires a specific analysis of the complex network of essentialized identities in both the West and the Balkans.²² Historian Dusan Bijelic echoes this:

"Bridge", in *Balkan as a Metaphor Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, ed. Dusan I Bijelic and Obrad Savic, (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2002).

²⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books Editioned. (New York: Vintage Books: A Division of Random House, 1994).

²¹ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²² Milica Bakic-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia," *Slavic Review* Vol. 54, no. Winter (1995): 917-931.

Without denying overlaps with Orientalism, the Balkan scholar insists that Balkanism has different representational mechanisms. While Said argues that the East/West Orientalism binary refers to a “project rather than a place,” Bakic-Hayden claims that, in the former Yugoslavia, Orientalism is a *subjectivational practice* by which all ethnic groups define the ‘other’ as the East of them; in doing so, they do not only Orientalize the ‘other,’ but also Occidentalize themselves as the West of the ‘other.’²³

Bijelic’s and Bakic-Hayden’s analysis of the Balkans in relationship to the West portrays a connection in which various ethnic groups have embodied stereotypical images of themselves through a complex mechanism of hierarchical colonial subject-construction; on the other hand the West had also essentialized its own position as one always in divergence from its dark Eastern neighbors.

Furthering Bakic-Hayden’s and Bijelic’s observations, I would argue that the apparatus of colonial subjugation and subject-creation described in their texts has a psychological dimension that recalls a central argument from Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin White Mask* (1952).²⁴ In his book, Fanon delves into the consciousness of those exposed to racialized trauma in the process of African colonization, revealing the subtle mechanism of subjugation of the colonized mind as they are made to conform to the white colonial ideal. He writes, “the more the black Antillean assimilates the French language, the whiter he gets.”²⁵ Although the experiences of African colonization and the subjugation of the millions of people from that continent cannot be directly compared to the Yugoslavian situation, it is nevertheless credible to suggest that a similar *mechanism* is at play within the Balkanist discourse. This

²³ Dusan I Bijelic, “Introduction: Blowing Up the “Bridge,”” 4.

²⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (New York: Grove Press, 2008).

²⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

discourse allows the Western ideological construction of the Balkans and its presumed ‘irrationality’ to be internalized and even reproduced in acts of subjugation committed by the Balkan peoples against one another.²⁶ This closed circle demands additional ‘othering’ as the Occidental border is moved further and further East. The source of this violence—both epistemic and actual—is not some nebulous construct of the dark Balkan psyche, but the imposed normalization of a Western subjectivity as the only possible way of being in the space of the Balkan everyday.

Bijelic argues that although it is necessary to dissect this deeply embedded notion of the Balkans through a methodology similar to Orientalism, it is also crucial to embed it in its own geographical position. East and the West have always been unstable categories in a region that is perpetually in-between. Bijelic suggests that recognizing this gives concreteness to the crucial difference of the Balkanist discourse.²⁷ Once Balkanism is properly investigated and positioned, we see that the peoples of the region have constantly resisted the universalist rationalities of the academic language often used to discuss it. It becomes evident, in fact, that the region was not colonized in a classical sense and that the multitude of ethnic, religious, national and cultural groupings established amorphous and idiosyncratic relationships to forms of identity.²⁸ This means that the Balkans, and the territory that was formerly Yugoslavia in particular, were, and still are, in a constant state of flux, evading clear-cut definitions of nationalism, the nation-state, modern identity and so forth. For

²⁶ Bakic-Hayden, *Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia*, 920.

²⁷ Dusan Bijelic, I “Introduction: Blowing Up the “Bridge,”” 4.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 7.

Bijelic this means that Yugoslavia could never be placed in neat, universalist categories often employed in the academe. My project takes this idea of Balkanism as state of in-between as a key perspective on the situation of Yugoslavia.

Part of the critique of the Western hegemony in Yugoslavia also has to come from an understanding of the colonial and semi-colonial relationships in the Balkans. These relationships cannot be separated from notions of modernity, liberal and neo-liberal discourses, and finally the discourses of capitalism itself. The production of subjectivity is never detached from economic influences and therefore economic considerations need to be brought into the discussion of Yugoslavia's positioning in the 20th century world. An effective critique of capitalism's relationship to colonization in the Balkans is postulated by Slovenian philosopher Rastko Mocnik. In "The Balkans as an Element of Ideological Mechanisms," (2002) he argues that a discussion about the construction of the Balkanist discourse cannot be understood without understanding how the present state of the Balkans has been marked by forms of neo-colonial rule.²⁹ These current relationships are shaped by the varied forces of globalization and by European policies of integration and assimilation. More than that, Mocnik argues, neo-colonial relationships were forced through geo-political and military apparatuses of Western organizations such as NATO and the International Monetary Fund. All of these have influenced the development of our understanding of the region in the past 20 years and fuelled a number of academic and policy-making

²⁹ Rastko Mocnik, "The Balkans as an Element of Ideological Mechanisms," in *Balkan as Metaphore: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, ed. Dusan Bijelic and Obrad Savic, (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2002), 79-116.

efforts to interpret the breakup of Yugoslavia as an example of old hatreds, rather than Western economic and political policies. His argument therefore dispels the idea that Yugoslavians are disposed toward violence and cruelty, while at the same time offering a constructive critique of the systemic violence that does indeed exist in the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

Mocnik's text suggests that to fully understand Yugoslavian socialist culture one must see it as existing in tension with modernity and read it against the grain of the standard analyses of modernity. Modernity is one of the most ubiquitous and contested terms in recent theory and history and it continues to 'haunt' contemporary consciousness despite being pronounced dead decades ago by postmodern discourse. There have been numerous excellent studies of modernity's impact and development over the years (Berman, 1982; Harvey, 1989; Habermas, 1990, to name a few).³⁰ Many of these have qualified it as a general movement towards specific modes of political discourse emerging along with industrialization and establishing frameworks such as the secular state, individual rights, and development of universal legal and social systems. Twentieth-century critiques of modernity were central in shaping our current understanding of modernity's history and legacy. A crucial analysis was the Frankfurt School's critique of the Enlightenment. Building on Hegel, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1966) diagnosed the

³⁰ See: Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 383.; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, (Cambridge MA and Oxford UK: Blackwell Press, 1989); Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1990), 430.

basic problems of modernity as centered on a radical removal of the subject from the world in which he/she lives, and the consequent objectification, or instrumentalization of that world (reflected in the abuse of resources and nature for example).³¹ In their view modernity was structured through the dual forces of modern capitalism and the development of technological-scientific systems unseen in the history of humankind. Such a complex matrix of relationships between intellectual, economic, and cultural systems produced an ultimate mastery over all other forms of life, and the seemingly ultimate mastery of the Western world over all other cultures and societies.

In the last twenty years theorists and historians have grappled with the idea of modernity by proposing alternative views of modernity's origins and development. Charles Taylor emphasizes the importance of recognizing 'cultural modernity' as a way of problematizing the multiplicity of experiences in modernity and even the

³¹ The Enlightenment/modern subject standing at a distance from the world, claiming a hold on that world, still plays a crucial role in contemporary identity formation, and political organizing of society. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer have critiqued such radical subject formation because it inevitably leads to instrumentalized reason. The linearity of the Enlightenment narrative of progress, its emphasis on and trust in the objectivity of scientific research, betterment through research, and modes of thinking was based on a noble yet flawed logic that demanded an almost religious belief in reason and its capabilities. More importantly, reason is the property of self-contained, free subjects acting according to their will. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Horkheimer and Adorno write that "Enlightenment understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters" (1). Liberation of humanity and its rise to the pedestal of sovereignty, has produced an overall objectification of nature and the world around us, and in many cases other cultures and humans who were not a part of the Enlightenment logic. It is important to underline that Adorno and Horkheimer do not see instrumentalized reason as unique to the Enlightenment; rather they see it as a constant human impetus driven by self-preservation, and more importantly by the need to rule nature. Max and Theodor Adorno Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid-Noerr trans. Edmund Jephcott, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 282.

rejections of modernity found across the globe in the last two hundred years.³²

According to Taylor there are two theories of modernity: the cultural and the a-cultural. The former seeks to understand modernity as developing in relation to its sociocultural basis, which the latter, (and dominant) approach tends to elide. A-cultural theories ignore the social, political, or cultural roots for the development of different modern paradigms.³³

Postcolonial theory and history have been even more productive in their analysis of modernity, ultimately shifting accounts of modernity towards more multifaceted and fragmentary definitions. They have challenged the view of modernity as a primarily Western movement in various fields of intellectual, social, and political life. It has become clear that modernity is neither a Western ‘invention’ nor has it taken hold of the world in one overarching sweep.³⁴ Janet Abu-Lughod argues in *Before European Hegemony: the World System A.D. 1250-1350* (1991) that all the iconic elements attributed to the European expansion of the 16th century, and believed to have ushered European dominance in the world, have existed previously and across the globe in China, Egypt, India and other countries.³⁵ Similarly, Walter

³² Charles Taylor, “Two Theories of Modernity,” *The Hastings Center Report* Vol. 25, No. 2 (Mar. - Apr., 1995): 24-33.

³³ Taylor however stops short of fully acknowledging the existence of other powerful systems that have shaped Western development.

³⁴ Various postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha, Fanon, and Said, have pointed out the innate problematic of modernity as an oppressive ideology closely linked to Western colonial and imperial expansion. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 408.; Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

³⁵ Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: the world system A.D. 1250-1350*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 8-12.

Mignolo states in *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledge* (2000) that long before the Western hegemony, there were a number of other ‘world systems’ each of which had predominance over world economic, technological, and social exchanges.³⁶ Abu-Lughod’s and Mignolo’s arguments suggest that hegemonic relationships in the last four to five hundred years do not stem from West’s innate superiority, but from a system of well-established world economies into which Europeans inserted themselves as aggressive ‘newcomers’.³⁷ Consequently, modernity could not have developed uniformly across the world; rather its movement across time and space was dependent on the relationship between the West and world systems existing prior to Western hegemony. The category of modernity is therefore flawed but necessary.

The question is whether it is possible to salvage forms of thinking found in modernity’s theoretical language, forms which allow for emancipatory practices, without ignoring the violent history of modernity’s trajectory? In his influential book *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1990), Jurgen Habermas argues that modernity is not finished and that instead of digging its grave, we need to rethink it. This means that any serious engagement with modernity will automatically contain modernity’s radical, progressive critique, enabling possibilities for going forward

³⁶ Walter Mignolo, *Local histories/global designs*, 23.

³⁷ Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, 12.

with those parts of the project that are still relevant.³⁸ As subjects we are always-already within modernity, tarrying with its many faults. He states:

Even on methodological grounds I do not believe that we can distantiate Occidental rationalism, under the hard gaze of a fictive ethnology of the present, into an object of neutral contemplation and simply leap out of the discourse of modernity.³⁹

Without rejecting the significance of postcolonial and other critiques of modernity I want to emphasize the value in holding on to specific elements of modernity that should not be rejected along with the rest of its problematic legacy. This requires recognition of the paradox of the West positioning itself as the modernizing, democratic force while inflicting brutal imperial subordination on other cultures. It would, however be patronizing and ultimately colonizing to say that Western modernity simply ‘took over’ the world and imposed its socio/political and economic structures. A richer, more nuanced approach is required to uncover the complexities of modernity as it developed in the rest of the world not only because of the Western colonial and imperial project, but at times in spite of it.

³⁸ This also signifies his critique of the postmodern condemnation of modernity that claims a space outside modernity’s gates. For Habermas this is an impossibility simply because although deconstructive in its nature, the language of postmodernity is still steeped in modernist doctrine. This is Habermas’ main criticism of postmodernity in which it fails as a radical movement away from modernism. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, 430. This however does not mean that the critique of rationalism and Enlightenment logic should not take place, but what it should acknowledge according to Habermas is its place in an ongoing project in which modernity is restructuring itself not only through questioning of its own premises but through what Theodor Adorno would call negative thinking, or thinking against thought.

³⁹ Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 59.

Having deployed the idea of alternative modernities several times I would like to take a moment to note the literature in this area. The term is born from theories that call for re-investigation of the term to include multiple, complex and idiosyncratic movements and points of contact between Western modernity and modernism, and the permutation of these social and cultural forms in the rest of the world.⁴⁰ Shmuel Eisenstadt writes in his text “Multiple Modernities”:

The idea of multiple modernities presumes that the best way to understand the contemporary world—indeed to explain the history of modernity—is to see it as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of social programs. These ongoing reconstructions of multiple institutional and ideological patterns are carried forward by specific social actors in close connection with social, political, and intellectual activists, and also by social movements pursuing different programs of modernity, holding very different views of what makes societies modern.⁴¹

Modernity, as Eisenstadt argues, was never a unified movement towards structural social transformation, rather it was always an uneven constitution and reconstitution of ideas and practices. “To think in terms of ‘alternative modernities’ is to admit that modernity is inescapable.”⁴²

Thinking in systematic, manifold, and interdisciplinary ways about modernity therefore remedies three problematic, long-standing issues in modernist scholarship.

⁴⁰ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, ed. D. P. and Benjamin Lee Gaonkar, (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 229; Johann P. Arnason, "Communism and Modernity," *Daedalus* 129 (2000): 61-90; Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus* 129, no. Winter (2000): 1-29; D. P. Gaonkar ed., *Alternative Modernities*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001a) ; Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002).

⁴¹ Eisenstadt, 2.

⁴² D.P. Gaonkar, ed. “On Alternative Modernities,” *Alternative Modernities*. (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2001), 1.

First it problematizes simplistic critiques of modernity that can often be found in late twentieth and twenty first century scholarship.⁴³ Secondly, it provides a new language for constructing multiple narratives for thinking about modernity from the point of view of those who were often relegated to the margins of the modern ethos. And finally, it also provides a basis for constructing a response to the current surge of amnesiac histories that create artificial breaks with various historical narratives and conveniently circumvent the legacies that those pasts affirmed.⁴⁴

Contemporary Western idioms tend to contextualize the recent past in polar oppositions (East versus West or communism versus capitalism). The uniformity provided by this view often has triumphalist characteristics, especially after 1989 fall of communism. The triumph of capitalism has been often framed as the inevitable outcome of the progress of the modern age. My argument is that looking at alternative modernities and their histories will point towards ways of thinking and being outside

⁴³ Here I particularly want to point to a Western-centric view of history and more recently its narratives of communism, socialism and coloniality. It is especially symptomatic that all three terms have a prefix ‘post’ as finished processes that have now opened up ways to the new globalized social and cultural system. I would like to trouble this assertion.

⁴⁴ The often-reverberated idiom of ‘the dark communist past’ was used especially in the early 1990s during the immediate post-communist era. Politicians, as well as, other public figures would initiate this idiom quite often in order to distinguish themselves from what was perceived as an evil period in the history of post-communist nations. Unlike other communist countries of Eastern Europe, in Yugoslavia this term became a political/ideological weapon that served to assert specific nationalistic discourses which were often brought up as a way of discerning between the seeming freedom which nationalism now provided and the totalitarian system that closed off any possibility of having national identity asserted. Unfortunately, this kind of approach created an amnesiac view of history through which the fifty years spent in communism were truly left in the dark without ever really coming to terms with the legacies that that period has left.

of the one that we are currently accustomed to. The post 1989 world has been too quick and too harsh with its rejection of the various forms of socialism and communism that have developed in the twentieth century. Given the problematic nature of the Soviet system and its violent past it is no surprise that it was easy to dismiss. However, the potential value of the utopian thinking found in specific aspects of socialist and communist sociocultural and intellectual production during modernity suggests the need to reopen a discussion of the merits and possibilities of socialist thought. This needs to be conducted in the context of contemporary postcolonial theory and outside modernity's traditional construction.

I therefore want to bring to light such crucial elements from the socialist past with respect to my own country—socialist Yugoslavia. The socialist modernity I will tease out belongs to the alternative modernist discourse, but it also stands on its own because of Yugoslavia's specific characteristics. Its heterogeneity can be described as non-aligned modernism, one always attempting to balance between East and West. In a sense this dissertation is therefore involved in the work of teasing out the future in the past, as the very things that can be useful in the upcoming century may be found in that now-forgotten past.

Socialist Modernist Art Histories

Modern Yugoslavian and post-Yugoslavian art history developed in three periods that roughly corresponded to the changes in perceptions and reception of

modernism since the mid 1940s. These were an initial stage in which modernism was rejected, followed by an embrace of what was described as socialist modernism and finally a move toward postmodernism. During the initial stage (roughly 1945-1954) art historians and critics rallied against international modernism, rejecting it as bourgeois and counter-revolutionary. The art historical texts from this period are important because they showcase the scope of the impact that the politics of the day had on the artistic milieu. The most influential advocates of socialist realism were Grga Gamulin, Oto Bihalj-Merin, and Aleksa Celebonovic. Their writings were primarily concerned with weeding out traces of what they described as modernist formalist tendencies, a history that I discuss in chapter one of this thesis.

By far the most influential voice of the group was Gamulin. His influence was wielded not only through exhibition reviews and catalogue essays, but also by establishing the Croatian—and by extension, Yugoslavia—post war discipline of art history. Gamulin’s general rejection of modernism came not only because of its so-called bourgeois character, but also because such works did not, “shape phenomena nor information, nor the yearnings of humanity that break into the consciousness and emerge victorious.”⁴⁵ In one of the most influential texts of the socialist-realist period, “Along With the Idolatry of Cézannism” (1946), published in *Republika*, a monthly journal for literature, art, and society, Gamulin attacked the work of Cézanne in particular, who was seen as the ‘father’ of formalism. He argued that Cézanne’s art

⁴⁵ Grga Gamulin, "Along with the Idolatry of Cezannism," in *Croatian Art Criticism in the 1950s: Selected Essays* [Hrvatska likovna kritika 50-ih godina], ed. LJiljana Kolesnik, trans. Ljubo Lasić Edo Bosnar (Zagreb: Drustvo povjesnicara umjetnosti Hrvatske, 2005), 318.

could be used as a didactic tool to teach visual language of art, but that the young generation of socialist artists had to be careful not to fall into the trap of Cézanne's "formalist idolatry."⁴⁶ Instead, Gamulin advocated clarity and 'truthfulness' to reality in artistic expression. Gamulin decried lack of humanist values in Cézanne's art, arguing that his "paintings are devoid of feelings for the joy and sorrow of man, for his happiness and tragedy."⁴⁷ The emphasis on art as formally analytic, he believed, turned the modernist aesthetic into an anti-humanist project.⁴⁸

Coupled with the socialist-realist art criticism and history, there were a number of intellectuals and artists of the time who supported modernism: the EXAT 51 group, Rudi Supek, Radoslav Putar and so forth. The two streams often clashed in public and brought both formal and political arguments to larger Yugoslavian audiences, especially because many of their texts were published in daily newspapers. The modernists did not renounce socialist politics, however. For the most part the literature of this period reveals a complex narrative of art production and reception

⁴⁶ Grga Gamulin, "Along With the Idolatry of Cezannism," 301.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 319.

⁴⁸ What Gamulin's criticism echoed was a long-standing debate in the 20th century art over the relationship of art to the social. This of course was also what the classic Soviet socialist realist tradition grappled with as well. According to socialist realism, all modernist art was subordinated to the capitalist project and its emphasis on the form as content was seen as a sign of art's servitude to bourgeois values. Paradoxically, modernist artists, and especially the avant-gardes, sought to explore artistic form in order to speak to the social content. With socialist realism the absence of clear political, popular visual language was seen as elitist. Cezanne was singled out because historically he was the most influential in the development of formal tendencies in European and Western art. When Gamulin attacked Cezanne, he spoke to the history of the anti-formalist movement that was in Eastern Europe largely influenced by political questions.

built on a serious investment by both sides in understanding how Yugoslavian art could thrive in the new socialist context.

The second period of modernist reception in Yugoslavia emerged once modernism became a politically and aesthetically more attractive option. At this point art historical accounts of the Yugoslav art establishment began to favor a modernist aesthetic, supporting artists who espoused it in their works. This period lasted several decades. Historians Stevo Lukic and Miodrag Protic were the most influential early commentators to extensively explore the development of modernism in Yugoslavia. Protic is arguably the most prominent writer and historian of modernism and he has penned numerous studies of international and domestic modernist developments. Among these are his *Slika i misao* (1960) *Oblik i vreme* (1979) and *Slika i utopija* (1986) all of which discuss Yugoslav art in respect to the formal language of modernist criticism and aesthetics. While his work is crucial for understanding Yugoslav relationships with international modernism. Protic addresses many theoretical aspects of contemporary and historical art, arguing for the value and place of abstraction in modern societies. He strongly critiqued simplified criticisms of abstraction, arguing instead that all forms of art, whether abstract or not, are relevant for the development of Yugoslavian national art. What Protic's texts lacked was a deeper investigation of the relationship between the social and the aesthetic. Although he never denounced the link between the two, he also never fully explored the potentials that their interaction afforded. Steva Lukic's *Socialisticki estetizam* (1969) was a much more political work, with the author arguing against the most prevalent

forms of socialist modernism because he believed they were too directly in the service of the state.

In the late 1960s a younger generation of art historians came to the fore. Jesa Denegri was the seminal figure in this trend. He started writing in the mid 1960s and his career spanned both the modernist and post-modernist eras. Denegri was, and still is, arguably the most prolific and influential critic of this mid-generation. He is the author of numerous essays, criticism, and books on the subject of Yugoslavian modernism and post-modernism. He was also a curator of contemporary art for almost forty years, organizing numerous influential exhibitions of modernist, conceptual, post conceptual and new media art. Denegri did not directly engage questions of the relationship between politics and aesthetics during socialism. Political issues were usually implied through the critique of problematic forms of modernism, and with that of socialism as well. Political contexts stayed in the background of his work as a constant companion to the rising post-socialist aesthetic of the 1970s.

After 1990, and especially in the last fifteen years, Denegri, and some of his contemporaries (such as Vera Horvat-Pintaric) have published texts in which they reconstruct their own work, and the work of artists of the time, in a more politically and socially engaged context.⁴⁹ Denegri recently published several books, in this vein, including *Teme Srpske umetnosti 1945-1970* (2009) *Fragmenti postmodernog pluralizma* (2007) and a number of volumes of collected essays. One of Denegri's

⁴⁹ See: Vera Horvat-Pintaric ed., *Kritike i eseji: 1952-2002*, (Zagreb: Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, Gliptoteka and EPH Media, 2012).

major contributions to the study of the socialist modernist period in Yugoslavia is the notion that it was characterized by two streams or, as he puts it, “two lines:” the first being official modernism, and second its alternative, less official forms.⁵⁰ The official modernist, formalist art criticism was characterized by an ostensibly apolitical stance while nevertheless retaining ideological adherence to official socialist dogma.

Although Dengeri does not explicitly make the link, one can see that such paradoxically apolitical-political art, art history, and criticism parallels the forms of supposedly apolitical international modernism found across the Western world and elsewhere. This phenomena of a-political character of late modernist art was described by Peter Burger in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984) as an entrenchment of autonomous art and this is where Denegri’s arguments coincide with Burger’s.⁵¹

Burger suggests:

We note that the historical avant-garde movements negate those determinations that are essential in autonomous art: the disjunction of art and the praxis of life, individual production, and individual reception as distinct from the former. The avant-garde intends the abolition of autonomous art by which it means that art is to be integrated into the praxis of life. This has not occurred, and presumably cannot occur, in bourgeois society unless it be as a false sublation of autonomous art.⁵²

Unlike Burger who denies possibility of an avant-garde movement after WWII, Denegri claims that artists and critics belonging to the second line sought alternative forms of socialist aesthetics within the system of state-socialism, but without falling

⁵⁰ Jesa Denegri, "Cetiri modela "Druge Linije" u hrvatskoj umjetnosti 1950.-1970." *Knjizevna revija* 42, no. 3-4 (2002): 95.

⁵¹ Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, *Theory and History of Literature* ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

⁵² *Ibid*, 53-54.

into the trap of dogma found in official art. This politically engaged art created the conditions for the birth of post-socialist practices and theory in Yugoslavia in the 1970s and beyond. This important distinction is crucial to my own understanding of socialist modernism and its complex connections to larger sociopolitical contexts.

Another recent example of careful scholarship on socialist art is Ljiljana Kolesnik's *Između Istoka i Zapada: Hrvatska umjetnost i kritika 50-ih godina* (2006). Here, Kolesnik studies a large body of writing on art from the 1940s and 1950s in Croatia and Yugoslavia, meticulously analyzing the political and social implications of socialist realist and modernist art under state socialism. Her book is the first to consider modernism in relation to both the Soviets and the West. While Kolesnik's extensive study is one of the most important to come out of the region in the last two decades it is not without problems. Although Kolesnik provides a careful analysis of the historiographical trajectory of art criticism during the socialist realist period and immediately after, she tends to interpret the sociopolitical context of Yugoslavian socialist culture from a classical liberal perspective. This perspective leads her to conclude that Yugoslavian socialism was inherently authoritarian, undemocratic and difficult to maintain. Her reading of the tensions during the socialist realist period in Croatian art is critical of the polemics of the socialist realist critics like Grga Gamulin. In Kolesnik's text there is no room for more sympathetic and nuanced readings of socialist realism. She fails to credit the genuine idealism and commitment on the part of many artists and critics to make socialism work and create a new national identity through culture. And while she does offer a critique of

international modernism, Kolesnik understands modernism to be a more palatable idea than those proposed by socialist realist artists and critics, or those offered by writers such as Miroslav Krleža, for example, who called for constituting an autochthon Yugoslav national art.

The history of socialist art gets a similarly reductive reading in other key texts, including *Impossible Histories* (1998), the first English-language survey of Yugoslavian modernist art, and the most important history of the period in English language to date. This thesis is written, in part, as a corrective to this point of view. In the introduction, art historian Misko Suvakovic claims that: “Yugoslavia was a state of untenable, even impossible, connections and clashes among the cultures of Middle Europe, the Balkans, and the Middle East, from its founding in 1918 to its dissolution in 1991.”⁵³ As I have noted earlier, claims about the “impossibility” of Yugoslavia are based on a liberal conception of the modern nation-state as a repository of homogeneous, self-contained identities.⁵⁴ The idea of Yugoslavia’s impossibility, and the impossibility of its culture, is challenged and complicated in my thesis by exploring the variety of artistic voices expressed on the Yugoslav cultural scene, the relative freedom of expression, the multiple attempts to revitalize and re-imagine

⁵³ Misko Suvakovic, “Introduction,” *Impossible Histories*, 3.

⁵⁴ For an in-depth look at the problematic of the idea of the nation-state and Yugoslavia’s history see: V.P. Gagnon *The Myth of Ethnic War: Croatia and Serbia in the 1990s* (Cornell University Press, 2004). For a more general discussion of the idea of the nation-state and its history see: E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

socialism and so forth.⁵⁵ Unlike the texts in *Impossible Histories*, I treat Yugoslavian art as intrinsically connected to the country's socio-political and economic context, which takes a prominent place in my research. And while *Impossible Histories* builds the narrative of Yugoslavian modernism via a variety of artistic movements framing them within familiar histories of Western art, I posit that Yugoslavia's art took on an entirely idiosyncratic shape because of its socio-political heterogeneity and thereby it did not conform to standard aesthetic categories found in Western modernism.

While I attempt to enter into a dialog with the contemporary art historians such as Kolesnik, Denegri, Suvakovic, and those of the older generation such as Gamulin, Protic, and Lukic I do so by constantly moving between their work, the work and writings of artists, and the larger political and social context, including that of Cold War and postcoloniality. An example of a similar approach is Piotr Piotrowski's *Avant-Garde in the Shadow of Yalta. Art in Central-Eastern Europe, 1945–1989* (2009) in which he makes direct links between Cold War politics and policies and the development of various modernist and post-modernist (post-socialist)

⁵⁵ Another important point of divergence from *Impossible Histories* is the fact that all artists in *Impossible Histories* are marked via their national/ethnic belonging, while I have chosen not to identify them in this way. This need to name one's national belonging became important after Yugoslavia's 1991 breakup. But during its existence, socialist Yugoslavian political structures and ideas around patriotism, nationalism and belonging were built around ideas of "brotherhood and unity;" two terms describing a need to be different, yet unified. As a result a vast majority of citizens defined themselves as Yugoslavians of various ethnic origin. This was valid for artists, especially when it came to national and international representation. At all points artists were self-described as Yugoslavian. My decision to refer to artists as Yugoslavian and not adhere to ethnic delineation was therefore to recognize the importance that most artists themselves placed on the idea of living in a multiethnic, multicultural state.

theories. His book attempts to link a number of avant-garde practices as they developed across Eastern Europe assessing their success, legitimacy and standing within larger modernist art historical narratives. Of all the recent studies on modernism in Eastern Europe, Piotrowski's is by far most engaged with the political currents in art and he does not shy away from addressing difficult nuances within artists' works. The question that haunts studies of this subject, including mine, is how to theorize, historicize and navigate complex relationships between art and politics, and art and the social. As art developed in tension and conflict with Eastern European and Western social contexts, and as many of the avant-gardes and neo-avant-gardes positioned themselves in opposition to the state, the tracing of the political interests and strands is challenging but crucial for putting together a more complete picture of the twentieth century art in the region.

Susan Buck-Morss' study of the Russian avant-garde and Stalinist art and culture in *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (2002) links art and politics by suggesting that both Stalin and the revolutionary avant-gardes (such as the Russian Constructivists) had clear aesthetic and political ambitions. While Stalin attempted to build the "new socialist man" the avant-garde artists wanted to transform not just the everyday Soviet sensorium, but the political landscape in which that sensorium existed. Similarly, Boris Groys analyzes art of the Soviet era in *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (1992) making a daring claim that as much as Stalin wanted to aestheticize

politics, avant-garde artists also wanted to impose a form of aesthetic-political dictatorship:

Consequently, in the early years of Soviet power the avant-garde not only aspired to the political realization of its artistic projects on the practical level, but also formulated a specific type of aesthetic-political discourse in which each decision bearing on the artistic construction of the work of art is interpreted as a political decision, and, conversely, each political decision is interpreted according to its aesthetic consequences. It was this type of discourse that subsequently became predominant and in fact led to the destruction of the avant-garde itself.⁵⁶

Groys' analysis implies that a more radical goal was embedded in the framework of the avant-garde. Inevitably all their decisions were filtered through their political zeal and revolutionary interests. The constant linkage of politics to aesthetics in Groys and Buck-Morss suggests that the modernist utopia was as much an aesthetic proposition as a political one. My own position aligns closely with Groys and Buck-Morss as I contribute to the ongoing study of socialist modernism by arguing that: Yugoslavian socialist modernism was a form of utopian thinking that sought to transform the socialist revolution, its material relationships in architecture, design, and art along with the Yugoslavian people's sensorial apparatus.

Chapter Summary

The first chapter of this thesis covers the early period of cultural development in socialist Yugoslavia during and right after WWII that was characterized by a short

⁵⁶ Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 21.

brush with socialist realism. The focus of the chapter is the first official exhibition of the Yugoslav Association of Fine Artists, which was the most prestigious artist organization in the country when the exhibition occurred in 1949. I analyze the exhibition as an example of Yugoslavia's struggle to make sense of and implement socialist realism as an official theoretical, cultural and political category. Its development paralleled the state's own wrestling with notions of socialist governance and its proper implementation. Difficulties with socialist realist aesthetic and the ensuing paradoxes in its adaptation in Yugoslavian art are at the core of the dialogs, theoretical discourses, and critical responses to the first exhibition. My analysis uses a number of first-hand accounts and reviews of the artworks shown at the 1949 exhibition to argue that Yugoslavian socialist realist art was in fact a hybrid of Soviet socialist realist doctrine and modernist aesthetics. This argument goes against the grain of most of the art historical accounts of the period that are committed to reading Yugoslavian socialist realism as rigid and unforgiving.

The second chapter discusses the adoption and adaptation of modernism as an official form of socialist culture. This process was influenced by internal and external factors, most importantly Yugoslavia's estrangement from the mainstream international socialist governance (under the Soviet tutelage), and by rising influence of the American foreign policy on Yugoslavia's economic and political standing. In parallel to these tectonic political shifts, international modernism, especially its American version, became increasingly important to Yugoslavia's nascent cultural scene. Once they became official policy, various forms of socialist modernism

developed quickly in all forms of Yugoslavian mainstream art. This chapter focuses on analysis of socialist modernism's most excessive forms — monumental memorial sculptures — which were clearly both modernist in their form, and highly politicized in their content. Through a close reading of the form, content, and use of the memorial sites, I uncover close links between modernism's seeming removal from the everyday, and its service to state policies, especially as a powerful tool in the project of nation building.

The third chapter links socialist modernism and its development to more populist, everyday versions of socialist culture through a discussion of forms of state pageantry. In this section I analyze the Youth Day state holiday celebrated on President Josip Broz Tito's birthday. This was a mass, public event meant to penetrate all forms of everyday life. As much as Youth Day was oppressive in its forms, it was also an example of how the Yugoslavian state attempted to build public consensus by allowing more informal, even irreverent forms of behaviour that ultimately sustained its power. In this case socialist modernism was built through more ephemeral forms of public participation, through mass events which spoke to people's sensorial apparatus, or as I claim, by activating affect as a form of political and aesthetic engagement.

The fourth and final chapter studies examples of alternative socialist modernism: artworks and culture often created in opposition to their mainstream counterparts. These groups and individuals, although critical of Yugoslavia's increasing adoption of bureaucratic socialist management (which in their eyes

betrayed the initial revolutionary goals), were also committed to reforming socialism and its forms of art and culture. Similarly to the Russian Constructivists, group EXAT 51, Praxis, and artist Vjenceslav Richter, proposed a more radical version of aesthetics, critical of both East and the West. Through their artworks, architectural designs, and theoretical writings these alternative socialist cultural workers continuously demanded reform and a return to the values of Yugoslavia's self-managing socialism developed in the late 1940s. Their utopian visions, however, were often dismissed as too radical, or simply incomprehensible. I argue that the failure of the Yugoslav state to see such propositions as important contributed to its demise at the end of the twentieth century. I also note that the alternative artists were in fact visionaries whose propositions can still contribute to our analysis of leftist politics and art.

Chapter 1 Yugoslavian Socialist Realism: An Uncomfortable Relationship 1945–1954

Precarious Histories

In 1949 the Yugoslavian Association of Fine Artists¹ held its inaugural exhibition in the capital city, Belgrade. The main goal of the exhibition was to showcase the work of members of this new association representing the official voice of the fine arts in Yugoslavia. An important task of the Association was to affirm the principles of the Soviet socialist-realist aesthetic. In the introduction to the show's catalogue the organizers state:

The first federal exhibition represents a small review of the newest achievements in our art in line with the struggle for the new socialist-realism and as such it equally addresses audience and artists. It should assist in finding an urgently needed answer to a whole spectrum of important questions which have not been properly highlighted.²

¹ The Yugoslavian Association of Fine Artists was formed in 1947 in order to coordinate the functioning of the provincial associations, which were formed a couple of years earlier in several Yugoslavian republics. The first president of the association was the Croatian sculptor Antun Augustincic. The co-presidents were painters Bozidar Jakac and Marko Celebonovic. The association represented several hundred members across the country. It grew in size over the next several decades to represent around one thousand six hundred artists in the 1960s. See Lidija Merenik et al, "Umetnost i vlast 1945–1951," in *Quadrifolium pratense/Detelina sa cetiri lista*. Published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at Muzej 25 Maj, (Beograd: Kulturni centar Beograda Clio, 1998), 35–60.

² "Uvod," *I. Izložba saveza likovnih umetnika FNR Jugoslavije*, Savez likovnih umjetnika FNRJ ed., (Beograd, 1949), n.p
"Prva savezna izložba predstavlja skromnu reviju najnovijih dostignuca nase umetnosti na liniji borbe za novi, socijalisticki realizam, i kao takva namenjena je podjednako I publici I umetnicima. Ona treba da pomogne nalazenju nuznog odgovora na citavi niz bitnih pitanja, koja jos nisu dovoljno osvetljena" [My translation.]



Figure 1.1. Radenko Misevic,
Teacher and a Pupil
oil on panel, 1947



Figure 1.2.
Gabrijel
Stupica, *Still
Life*, oil on
canvas, c.1947

However, the show did not fully succeed in its second goal. Many of the artworks did not conform to the socialist-realist aesthetic, showcasing instead wide-ranging ideas about art. A comparison of paintings by Radenko Miscevic (Fig. 1.1) and Gabrijel Stupica (Fig. 1.2), for example, demonstrates the differences in stylistic, thematic, and ideological premises to be found in Yugoslavian art at that time.

Miscevic's *Teacher and a Pupil* is a small (120cm x 90cm) painting in which the artist followed the general prescriptions of the socialist-realist genre, creating a clear and cohesive representation of socialist life both in form and content. The tightly composed scene shows a teacher and her two female pupils. The painting's cramped space reveals a small schoolroom lit by a single lamp, the sparse interior decorated only by Lenin's portrait on the back wall, sternly watching over the women. The student in the foreground wears an army jacket signaling her involvement in the partisan war. She also appears to be older than both the other student and their teacher. Miscevic's painting adopts elements of the ideological realist representation. It is spatially and compositionally clear. The characters and their actions are simple enough that the political messages of hard work, party-mindedness,³ and signs of progress could be easily read by all. Finally, the

³ This is an English translation of the Russian term "partiinost" coined by the Communist Party leaders in various writings and public addresses on socialist-realist culture. It refers to a socio-political and cultural consciousness of the Communist Party goals, ideological and political demands. In aesthetic terms it meant the subordination of artistic life to the needs of the Communist Party. See: Herman Ermolaev, *Soviet Literary Theories, 1917-1934: The Genesis of Socialist Realism*, (New York: Octagon Books, 1977).

brushwork is smooth and the palette restrained, giving prominence to the narrative content while formal, painterly concerns remain unobtrusive.

Teacher and a Pupil presents several themes of great political significance in war-devastated Yugoslavia. Youth and women were considered particularly important for the development of the largely agrarian country, and the state promoted the education of women in order to increase its skilled labour force. Emphasis was also placed on literacy and the education of adults, as signaled in the painting by the students' ages. The goals of electrification, industrialization, and economic development of Yugoslavia's first five-year plan⁴ are also prominently displayed, most notably by the conspicuous electric lamp. Finally, Lenin's portrait hangs in the background to give ideological credibility to Yugoslavia's Communist Party, placing it squarely within the ideals of the Communist International. The attempt to visualize this union likely explains the pictorially awkward overlapping juxtaposition of the teacher's face with the portrait of Lenin.

Stupica's *Still Life* differs greatly from Misevic's party-touting representation. While Misevic's work speaks to and for the ideological needs of the state, Stupica's canvas, which is similar in size (123cm x 93cm), conveys a heavy psychological mood rather than a particular political ideology. Portraying a darkly lit room with a table filled with food and drink, Stupica's painting is especially noteworthy for the absence of people. There are no partisans, teachers, or communist

⁴ Five-year plan addressed Yugoslavia's underdeveloped economy; the Communist Party aimed to rapidly modernize country's industry, force farm collectivization, and begin building basic infrastructure. The plan was problematic because it copied the Soviet model, a model that addressed a number of very different set of needs.

leaders here; the evidence of a human presence is only to be found in the traces of consumption on the messy table with the half-eaten food. Through his language of absences and decay Stupica refers to the well established Christian theme of *memento mori*, which as an allegory is conspicuously mute in regards to the ideological questions of the post-war period, and if analyzed further could even be construed as a veiled critique of those values. There are several wine bottles, empty plates, some fruit and bread, yet there is only one chair. Could this entire meal be for one person? Given the economic scarcities in 1947 Yugoslavia, the image does not suggest the restraint promoted by the state, nor does it put a positive spin on its collectivist future. The painting's dark, bleak space, the table with the food centrally placed in the middle ground, and the single chair in the foreground do not evoke socialist-realist aesthetic ideals of party mindedness or ideological commitment.

Taken together, the two works are emblematic of a Yugoslavian artistic and cultural life that was driven by ambiguous and often contradictory dual forces: ideologically correct works in line with the official voice of the state and darker, more abstruse reflections on post-war life. Even during these early days of socialist Yugoslavia, the time of the most rigorous political dogma, artists showcased a complex and varied relationship to aesthetic and political concerns of their time.

The existence of contradictory perspectives suggested by *Teacher and Pupil* and *Still Life* indexed a natural precarity and resonated across Yugoslavian post-WWII culture as it struggled to build a national culture and define its geo-political standing. Since its founding in 1943, socialist Yugoslavia's position within Europe

and the world had been precarious. As a smaller country it was understood to be in a subordinate and peripheral position between two political and military superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union. Each superpower nevertheless wished to bring Yugoslavia within its sphere of influence during the Cold War. Yugoslavia was multiethnic and multilingual in its socio-cultural makeup, underdeveloped in terms of industry and economy, and attempting to build its own version of socialism. Its complexity was furthered by a unique political tension. The key event in Yugoslavia's early political and cultural life was its growing disagreement with the Soviet Union, followed by its ousting from the Cominform⁵ in 1949. This political split with the Soviet Union and the international communist governance meant that Yugoslavia had to reimagine itself outside of the dominant communist discourse. It was left to find a way between Western capitalism and Soviet socialism in the East.

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, the rich history of the early development of socialist art in Yugoslavia is still a contested territory and therefore worth analyzing. In the period following the 1950s, art historians, critics, and artists vehemently attacked socialist realism as anti-modern and backward. Many recent art historical accounts from the region deem this short period as dogmatic, ideological, and ultimately problematic. While both groups (those writing in the 1950s and today) take the political and social context of the post-war socialism into account, they often gloss over its intricacies, declaring it utterly politically saturated dogmatism, or outright ignore it, thus producing an incomplete picture of the socialist realist era. The

⁵ Cominform is an acronym for Communist Information Bureau formed in 1947 as a substitute for the Communist International.

first exhibition of the Yugoslavian Association of Fine Artists, as the first official national showcase of socialist art, and its aesthetic, cultural, and socio-political context reveals a more complex history of the period. As the two paintings in the introduction exemplify, both the works exhibited at the show and the character of the Yugoslavian socialist realism in general, show a multiplicity of approaches to politically active art, revealing a rich and diverse artistic scene.

This chapter therefore addresses the tensions and conflicts in post-WWII Yugoslavian art as it struggled to find an appropriate national artistic voice that would convey the country's recent revolutionary struggle and its search for a national identity. I present this history through a discussion of the 1949 national exhibition organized as a showcase for the best Yugoslavian art of the time. I also investigate the models for the development of socialist realism, both aesthetic and political, paying special attention to the Soviet socialist-realist art that weighed heavily on the Yugoslavian cultural scene. The complexities of Yugoslavia as a new nation-state, its in-between international position, and its cultural diversity are all implicated in the development of the socialist art. Meandering through the convoluted debates around meaning and the nature of socialist realism, the functioning of self-management socialism, and national self-determination in the wake of a newly-forming world of anti-colonial politics is important to understanding the structure and interaction of aesthetics and politics in Yugoslavia. Further complicating my analysis, was Yugoslavia's precarious relationship to the hegemony of modernity and modernism as

the country adopted the modernist aesthetic and adapted to these influences from its position on the margins of the Western world.

Theoretical, Social and Political Contexts of Socialist Realism in Post-war Yugoslavia

The complex character of Yugoslavia as a country was paralleled in the turbulence of its artistic production, especially after WWII, when politics and aesthetics became close companions. Yugoslavia emerged from WWII as a semi-colonial society, shaped through the centuries by its powerful masters (Austro-Hungarians, Italians, Germans, French, and the Turks), having to confront modernity's exigencies of fast industrialization and build a unified national identity and culture, while at the same time forming relationships with the rest of the world.⁶ The pressures of modernization coupled with the difficulties of post-WWII rebuilding and economic development deeply influenced artistic and cultural production making them the site of crucial social formations which negotiated, critiqued, and built various ideas around what it meant to be creative in Yugoslavian socialism. The official voice of the state was echoed in cultural policies that shifted as Yugoslavia's geo-political status changed. This official voice, however, was never the only one; a number of official and unofficial networks existed in parallel, created by individual artists, artists' groups, academics, art critics, and other intellectuals. Yugoslav art of

⁶ For more on colonial history of the Balkans and its constructed identities see: Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

the period developed in contrast to Soviet art, which was strictly controlled through the Soviet Union of Artists, an organization kept under the close scrutiny of the Communist Party. In the Soviet context artists did not have freedom of opinion and all dissenting voices were crushed or retreated underground.⁷ In Yugoslavia, on the contrary, various groups and individuals debated the meaning, implementation, and standing of Yugoslav art in both domestic and international contexts, especially as these related to the question of socialism. The debates contained as much zeal towards revolutionary socialist politics as they did towards artistic form and content.

Yugoslavia's struggle for cultural authenticity, and attempts, by some, to implement a Soviet-style socialist-realist aesthetic, resulted in an artistic production that was neither fully socialist realist nor fully modernist, but a hybrid of the two. Tensions between the two artistic models were both formal—expressing the need to find a proper visual vocabulary—and content based, as artists struggled to find corresponding narratives that expressed specific Yugoslavian social contexts. I analyze Yugoslavian art between 1945 and 1954 in order to bring to light both the socio-political contexts that shaped artistic practice of the period, and artistic and art historical responses to the question of what it meant to create a national culture in a socialist context. The stakes were high for the artists, art historians, and art critics who participated in these debates.

The best way to characterize the situation in Yugoslavian art during and immediately after WWII is to call it unsettled. Struggles over aesthetic values and

⁷ Matthew C. Bown, *Art Under Stalin* (New York: Holms and Meier, 1991), 92.

ideas embodied in the conflict between socialist realism coming from the Eastern Bloc and modernism coming from the West, persisted throughout the first post war decade of Yugoslavian cultural development and extended roughly from the formation of the Communist government and the first partisan units in the early 1940s until the end of the war in 1945. During this period artworks were diverse and often created under difficult circumstances. Some artists were active combatants, some were imprisoned as POWs, some were in concentration camps, and others stayed in large urban centres either participating in underground resistance and working from their studios, or retreating into solitude.⁸

The most intense chapter in Yugoslavia's early cultural development began following its liberation from German occupation in 1945. This period was characterized by attempts at defining Yugoslavian socialist art and lasted until 1949 when the country officially broke with the Soviet Union. Eager to build a new society based on socialist principles, Yugoslavia's cultural workers and politicians at first espoused Soviet-style socialist realism. In those years (1945–49) the prevailing attitude of the Communist Party and several prominent members of the art establishment was that art had to actively participate in building the socialist state, and to that end it should be easily understood by the masses. Officially, the cultural and artistic landscape immediately after WWII was typically totalitarian with a strong socialist-realist component.

⁸ Miodrag B. Protic, "Slikarstvo u NOB i revoluciji." *Srpsko slikarstvo XX veka*. Vol 2. (Beograd: Nolit, 1970), 352.

The most vocal proponents of socialist-realist art in Yugoslavia⁹ at first supported the three Soviet theoretical/aesthetic models: “partiinnost” or party-mindedness, “ideological commitment,” and “national popular spirit” as officially outlined by the Soviet politician Andrei Zhdanov.¹⁰ These categories were developed to parallel Soviet Leninist and Stalinist ideologies. Aesthetic categories were therefore inseparable from the exigencies of the Communist Party, and were in fact entirely subordinated to state ideology.¹¹ Among the three models, “ideological commitment” most clearly addressed formal concerns by assuring the dominance of the Party’s idea of aesthetic form and content. This meant rejecting formalism¹² and

⁹ These were the founding members of the Yugoslavian Association of Fine Artists, painters such as Djordje Andrejevic-Kun, Bozo Ilic, sculptors Antun Augustincic, art historians Jovan Popovic, Grga Gamulin, and several others. For more see: Jesa Denegri, *Pedesete: Teme srpske umetnosti*, (Beograd: Biblioteka Svetovi, 1995).; Miodrag Protic. *Srpsko slikarstvo XX veka* (Beograd: Nolit, 1970).

¹⁰ Andrei Zhdanov was a Soviet politician who was instrumental in constituting the Soviet cultural policies that were the basis for socialist-realist aesthetics. See Leonid Heller, “A World of Prettiness: Socialist Realism and Its Aesthetic Categories,” in *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, ed Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995); Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: avant-garde, aesthetic dictatorship, and beyond*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

¹¹ Heller, “A World of Prettiness,” 52.

¹² The new style was focused on a rejection of formalism as the painter Aleksei Volter stated in his 1933 speech at the Moscow Section of the Artists’ Union [Bown, *Art Under Stalin*, 92).] Even though critics and artists such as Osip Beskin, Aleksei Volter, Aleksandr Gerasimov, and Isaak Brodski wrote texts condemning formalism, such texts were aimed at attacking any stylistic experimentation that “distorted” the human figure, concentrated too much on the form, or distanced the ideological content from the precepts of the Party as reflected in Volter’s speech [David Elliot, “Engineers of the Human Soul,” in *Soviet Socialist Realist Painting: 1930s-1960s* (Oxford: The Museum of Modern Art, 1992).] Despite many written texts and treatises condemning formalism the question remained vague for much of the socialist-realist history. It rested on the premise that, as Bown argues, “artistic form has an ideological content.” Bown,

embracing art's role in the realistic depiction of concrete political needs. While there have been a number of modern theorizations of the relationship between form, formal experimentation, and content the dominant understanding of formalism within the Soviet sphere during this period was most clearly expressed by artists such as the painter Aleksei Volter in his 1933 speech at the Moscow Section of the Artists' Union:

Formalism is in essence the expression of bourgeois ideology and world view, and it is from this point of view that we must consider those comrades who use this bourgeois formalism, and perhaps without wanting to, mechanically transfer bourgeois ideology to us.¹³

Even though critics and artists such as Osip Beskin, Aleksei Volter, Aleksandr Gerasimov, and Isaak Brodski¹⁴ wrote texts condemning formalism, such texts were aimed at attacking any stylistic experimentation which “distorted” the human figure, concentrated too much on the form, or distanced the ideological content from the precepts of the Party as reflected in Volter's speech.¹⁵ Despite many written texts and treatises condemning formalism, the question remained relatively vague for much of the socialist-realist history.¹⁶ Given its intended subservience to the state, socialist realism became, “a method of creation rather than a style.”¹⁷ This meant that its stylistic categories were subordinated to the role of social and political

Art Under Stalin, 93. This fact proved crucial for Yugoslav artists who wanted to implement socialist realism in Yugoslav art after WWII, as their own discussions about formalism resonated with similar concerns about what it meant.

¹³ Quoted in Bown, *Art Under Stalin*, 119.

¹⁴ Lahusen Thomas and Evgeny Dobrenko. ed., *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, Anonymous (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995).

¹⁵ Elliott, “Engineers of the Human Soul,” 12.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 12.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 13.

transformation, as understood in the narrowly propagandistic terms developed in the Soviet Union. By extension the early days of socialist Yugoslavian art were characterized by similar aesthetic and political needs and equally undefined ideas regarding what formalism meant in the socialist context.¹⁸

The concept of realism was another crucial element of socialist realism, spanning all three of Zhdanov's aesthetic models. It played an especially important role in shaping ideological commitment. Soviet socialist realists saw realism as an antidote to formalism, which was perceived as an essential quality of bourgeois art, and to naturalism, which was seen as not celebrating revolutionary values. The key question was how to accurately reflect reality.¹⁹ Reality in this case did not refer to naturalism, or mimesis, but to an ideological, idealized, reality that would show communist life at its best and thereby inspire the masses. Soviet artists under Stalin's influence drew on a variety of existing styles, including those of the nineteenth-century Russian Itinerant Painters,²⁰ as well as Rubens and Rembrandt, to

¹⁸ Leon Trotsky writes: "Every ruling class creates its own culture, and consequently, its own art. History has known the slave-owning cultures of the East, and of classic antiquity, the feudal culture of medieval Europe and the bourgeois culture which now rules the world. It would follow from this, that the proletariat has also to create its own culture and its own art" Leon Trotsky, "Art and the Party," in *Marxism and Art: Essays Classic and Contemporary*, Maynard Solomon, ed., (1973; reprint, Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State university Press, 1979), 193.

¹⁹ Ljiljana Kolesnik, *Izmedju istoka i zapada. Hrvatska umjetnost i likovna kritika 1950ih*, (Zagreb: Institut za povjest umjetnosti, 2006), 125.

²⁰ It is important to note that Itenerants were a group organized in order to oppose the strict style of the Russian Art Academy of the 19th century. Their work emphasized ordinary Russian life with all its faults and beauties. Matthew Bown argues that their work offered a popular, documentary-style painting that appealed to the masses, and would provide the kernel of Stalin's socialist realism several decades later. See Matthew C. Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale

create their vision of socialist realism. For socialist-realist artists this meant that they were to record reality, as a photographer would, but at the same time project (into) a better future, as promised by the Party. Matthew Bown astutely summarizes this tendency:

This requirement for artists, in documenting the present, to find in it those elements that foreshadow the dazzling future of Communist paradise-on-earth, is the pivotal tenet of socialist realism, because it is the concept linking the antagonistic requirements of party-obedience, on the one hand, and truthfulness on the other.²¹

As a result of the demand to reach into the future through the depiction of an idealized present, art was showcasing optimism and typification in both formal and narrative structures. Art historian Boris Groys states that such artworks were supposed to model specific social and ideological behaviors. In *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (1992) he argues:

What is subject to artistic mimesis is not external, visible reality, but the inner reality of the inner life of the artist, who possesses the ability to identify and fuse with the will of the party and Stalin, and out of this inner fusion generates an image, or rather a model, of the reality that this will is striving to shape . . . this then, is why the question of the typical is a political question.²²

University Press, 1998). Publically voicing private discussions among a small circle of artists around Stalin, critic Osip Beskin professed that Soviet socialist-realist art should espouse the stylistic precepts of the 19th-century Russian *Itinerants*, and more precisely of painter Ilya Repin. Their works were characterized by adherence to a representational style which romanticized the everyday lives of ordinary Russians. Other traditions were also invoked, as exemplified by writer Ivan Gronski's statement that "socialist realism is Rubens, Rembrandt and Repin put to serve the working class" [quoted in Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting*, 92.]

²¹ Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting*, 142.

²² Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 52. Also see Thomas Lahusen, "Socialist Realism in Search of Its Shores: Some Historical Remarks on Historically Open Aesthetic System of the Truthful Representation of Life," in

Successful artworks depicted standard social models in a photographic, populist and idealized form of realism that spoke of happiness and promised a utopian future. Both Soviet and Yugoslavian socialist-realist art was therefore supposed to model an idealized political, social, and cultural reality by nurturing idealized forms of realism as a visual category and as a narrative mechanism producing political content. The use of realism ensured the creation of a concrete socialist political visual representation stripped of as much ambiguity as possible.

Although in principle socialist realism was the party-endorsed style in Yugoslavia, in practice it took on an ambiguous and idiosyncratic character. The Yugoslavian cultural and artistic scene never fully accepted socialist realism in its ‘purified,’ highly ideological Soviet form, and eventually both the state and the art world rejected it outright. There were several reasons for this rejection. Yugoslavia’s 1948–49 political break from Stalin allowed, and even encouraged, the reconsideration of its aesthetic policy on non-Stalinist terms. Also, unlike the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia did not have a prior history of socialist-realist aesthetics dating back to the 1930s that they would have to break from. Finally, the artistic institutions in socialist Yugoslavia’s relationship to the state and its ideologies were more diffused and dependent on internal struggles amongst particular artists, rather than fulfilling the Party’s wishes. These factors created space for the expression of divergent views on socialist art, which did not exist in the Stalinist Soviet Union.

Art critic and artist Miodrag Protic writes that orthodoxy in Serbian, and Yugoslavian art in general, came from the dictatorship of the provincial and federal artistic associations, rather than direct political pressure of the Party.²³ According to Protic, the early days of socialist realism were indeed marked by an ideological fervor on the part of more dogmatic artists, leading to a “purification” campaign between 1945 and 1948. During this early stage several members of the Yugoslavian Association of Fine Artists took control of the Association’s exhibiting practices.²⁴ Protic argues that the majority of the artists used the appearance of ideological zeal to mask opportunism. In this way they could advance professionally and impose a more traditional academic aesthetic. Official art institutions were therefore run largely by a small contingent of artists who subscribed to an aesthetic model based on the classical academic styles of the nineteenth-century, which were not necessarily always in line with socialist-realist dogma. These important public institutions included federal and provincial professional art associations, academies of fine art, and various state-owned museums and galleries. Contributing to the solidification of the academic realist model was the fact that the country’s artistic institutions were formed in the nineteenth-century under the direct auspices of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which colonized most Yugoslavian territories, imposing its cultural and institutional structures. The Salon model of art education, exhibition, and professional practices was part of the Austro-Hungarian artistic culture. The same model was incrementally transplanted to the Yugoslavian territories through the long period of imperial cultural

²³ Miodrag B. Protic, *Sprsko slikarstvo XX veka*. (Beograd: Nolit, 1970), 360.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 355–56.

hegemony during Austro-Hungarian occupation. Classical training using plaster casts, nude model studies, anatomy, and painting techniques were the predominant pedagogical methods, and all of these methods contributed to the reception and implementation of realism after the war.

To add to the complexity of Yugoslavian art, the Communist Party demanded equal representation of all the ethnic communities in the country at all political and social levels.²⁵ The resulting social structures afforded a considerable amount of autonomy to the provinces, which in some cases operated as mini-states.²⁶ The party did this in an attempt to maintain national unity among diverse peoples. In institutional structures this meant that all cultural organizations and professional bodies had both federal and provincial representation. Each provincial body operated somewhat differently depending on the monies available and the infrastructure of galleries, museums, and educational institutions. The Croatian provincial art association, for example, organized more exhibitions than all the other provincial associations combined in the years between 1945 and 1950.²⁷ These structural differences furthered obstructed the implementation of a uniform aesthetic.

²⁵ Katarina Spehnyak, "Prosvjetno-kulturna politika u Hrvatskoj 1945-48." *Casopis za suvremenu povjest*. Vol. 25, no. 1 (1993): 73–99. See also: Goran Miloradovic, "'Hegemonisti' i 'revolucionari': KPJ/SKJ I kulturna elita u Jugoslaviji sredinom 20. Veka." *Istorija 20. veka*. Vol. 26, no. 2 (2008): 372–90.

²⁶ For more on the autonomy of the republics and the relationship between the federal and the provincial organizations. See: Susan Woodward, *Balkan tragedy: chaos and dissolution after the Cold War*, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1995).

²⁷ Dragoslav Djordjevic, "Socijalisticki realizam 1945-1950," *Jugoslavenska umetnost XX veka 1929-1950: Nadrealizam, postnadrealizam, socijalna umetnost NOR-a, socijalisticki realizam*, (Beograd: Muzej savremene umetnosti, 1969), 72.

On the form versus content question, Yugoslavian artists were, in the end, more concerned with form, not in the modernist sense, but in terms of clear academic realism. Artist associations set up a guild-like system in which specific regulations were enforced within the organizations, while the state distanced itself from what it deemed as internal squabbles. Protic noted that:

In their role as mediators, Association officials acted as representatives of their artist members before the state and Party forums, and conversely they acted in the role of the state before their membership, all the while their individual beliefs, culture and abilities played a key role in shaping opinions.²⁸

While political content remained an important measure of artistic success, the resulting artistic landscape in Yugoslavia was shaped more by petty power struggles than by true Soviet-style prosecution and cleansing of artistic form and content.²⁹ Despite attempts at imposing Soviet aesthetics on the Yugoslav artistic scene, Yugoslavian socialist realism remained transgressive, especially in its tolerance for the co-existence of various hybrid styles of art and some artists' penchant for formalism. After 1949 the Yugoslavian art scene was engulfed in heated public debates over which aesthetic should prevail — the socialist realism of the Soviets or the modernism of the West. Over the next five to six years the influence of the

²⁸ *Nalazeci se u sluzbenoj posrednickoj ulozi, tadašnji ideolozi i staleski zvanicnici mogli su da pred forume Partije i vlasti istupaju u ime staleza, a pred forume staleza u ime vlasti, pri cemu njihovo licno uverenje, kultura i spretnost nisu bili nevazni.* Protic Miodrag. *Srpsko slikarstvo XX veka*, 360.

²⁹ Ljiljana Kolesnik, *Izmedju Istoka i Zapada*, 160.

socialist-realist aesthetic progressively declined as the international modernist ethos prevailed.³⁰

The First Exhibition of the Yugoslavian Association of Fine Artists in 1949

Seventy-nine artists participated in the 1949 inaugural exhibition of the Yugoslavian Association of Fine and Applied Artists. The Association's organizing committee chose sixty-nine paintings, twenty-six prints and drawings, and thirty-eight sculptures from the six provinces that constituted Socialist Yugoslavia. Although there were earlier group shows held by provincial associations, this was the first national exhibition presenting the work of the Yugoslavian Association formed a year earlier.³¹ It was also the first, and arguably the last, national display of socialist-realist tendencies.

The exhibition sought to showcase national unity after the war, and it was therefore expected to reflect a cohesive stylistic and ideological visual expression. In the exhibition catalogue organizers stated:

With small exceptions our pre-war art, especially painting, had more or less all the characteristics of the decadent formalist art launched from Paris. As such, at least in part, it had a decorative significance and served a very small number of elitists. In the light of our new social relations artists are confronted with very important and complex problems that are impossible to solve with old aesthetic means and

³⁰ See: Ljiljana Kolesnik, ed., *Hrvatska likovna kritika 50-ih godina: izabrani tekstovi = Croatian art criticism in the 1950's : selected essays*, Tarns. Edo Bosnar and Ljubo Lasic (Zagreb Društvo povjesničara umjetnosti Hrvatske, 1999).

³¹ Savez Likovnih Umjetnika FNRJ, "Predgovor," *I. Izložba saveza likovnih umjetnika FNR Jugoslavije*, (Beograd, 1949), n.p.

methods. Life undeniably imposes a creation of art which will in its content be a reflection, explanation, and a document of this new reality, and in its form be accessible and easily interpreted by the average worker; the creation of an ideas-based art which will be didactic, and boost people's socio-political consciousness, such art will be dear and needed by our peoples. Under these circumstances an artist stops making artworks solely for the pleasure of rare individuals, and takes an honorable role of a fighter for a better life, for socialism.³²

This text echoes the Soviet socialist-realist rejection of formalism and intellectualism of the earlier 20th-century avant-garde movements. The exhibition's written mandate presented a cross-section of conceptual and aesthetic concerns under the "new social conditions." This would, it was hoped, demonstrate a clear political and formal direction toward socialist realism and signal unity of artistic purpose amongst Yugoslavia's multiple nationalities. In order to understand the 1949 show's significance in promotion of the socialist realist aesthetic I will briefly outline the two concrete models proposed to the Yugoslav artists prior to the show, and then examine the reception of the show by the Yugoslav art critics.

There were two important templates for the politically correct forms of art alluded to in the Association's text. The first was the 1947 exhibition of four leading Soviet painters, organized in collaboration with the Soviet state cultural organizations. The second was a 1948 speech on culture and propaganda by one of the chief Party members, Milovan Djilas. Djilas' speech became the de facto Yugoslavian Communist Party line on culture in general and art in particular.

Four Soviet Painters was a travelling exhibition and was the first opportunity for the Yugoslav public to see Soviet art. The Soviet works served as a model to the

³² Ibid, n.p. [My translation.]

nascent Yugoslavian socialist realist aesthetic and provided guidelines to the Yugoslavian Association's 1949 show. Although the Association's organizers allude to socialist realism in the text of the catalogue, the Soviet aesthetic model was not so clearly translated into the works exhibited at the Yugoslav national exhibition.

Part of the disconnect between Yugoslav and Soviet artists can be traced back to the Yugoslav perplexity over what truly constituted Soviet socialist-realist art. In her book *Izmedju Istoka i Zapada* (2006), Ljiljana Kolesnik points out the confusion Yugoslav artists felt when they visited the 1947 Soviet show. She states:

Most of the socialist realist artistic production in Croatia at the time indeed could not be compared to the works exhibited at that particular show because the framework of Croatian art was not based in experiences of other cultures, but rather in the body of the national art production created during WWII. . . . Moreover, the best artistic works of the time, even the ones aimed at mass audiences, were much closer to Expressionism or even Surrealism than they were to the poster realism of Gerasimov or Plastov.³³

Earlier art historical accounts of the Soviet show's impact expressed a similar sentiment. In 1969 Dragoslav Djordjevic wrote that the exhibition created a commotion among Yugoslav artists and critics who became "confused over what they saw as discrepancies between the theory and practice of socialist realism."³⁴ It

³³ *Najveci dio dotadasnje produkcije soc-realizma u Hrvatskoj doista se nije mogao usporediti sa bilo cime sto se moglo vidjeti na toj likovnoj priredbi buduci da se njezina okosnica nije nalazila u iskustvima drugih sredina vec prije u korpusu nacionalne umjetnosti nastalom za vrijeme Drugog svjetskog rata... Stovise , najbolja likovna ostvarenja toga vremena, pa i ona namjenjena najsiroj publici, bila su puno bliza ekspresionizmu ili cak nadrealizmu nego plakatnom realizmu Gerasimovih ili Plastova.* Kolesnik. *Izmedju Istoka i Zapada*, 38. [My translation.]

³⁴ Dragoslav Djordjevic, "Socijalisticki realizam 1945-1950," in *Jugoslovenska umetnost XX veka: Nadrealizam. Postnadrealizam. Socijalna umetnost. Umetnost*

was felt that the works exhibited did not carry the same power and weight as the theoretical texts that Yugoslav artists and critics read and debated.

The second template for Yugoslavian socialist realist art came in a speech by Milovan Djilas at the Fifth Congress of the League of Yugoslavian Communists in 1948. This was also the only position from a Party official because the Party tried to avoid direct meddling in the theory and criticism of art.³⁵ Djilas' views on art were shaped by his sympathy for the writings of Zhdanov. Djilas called for a Yugoslav aesthetic politicized to its core and used as propaganda.³⁶ But much to the chagrin of the hardline supporters of socialist realism in the Yugoslavian art circles, Djilas' call for propagandistic socialist art was not readily reflected in the Association's 1949 exhibition.

This lack of unity was noted in critical reviews by some of the more ideologically committed critics. Serbian critic Aleksa Celebonovic noticed this lack of unity in a review of the exhibition in the art magazine *Umetnost*. His review underlined differences among the works presented, in quality, tone, formal structure, and narrative/political concepts, arguing that the lack of unity was a sign of deeper structural problems within the national art organization. Celebonovic, in fact, went so far as to claim that the national and provincial associations were in dissonance

NOR-a. Socijalistički realizam : 1929-1950, ed. Miodrag B. Protic. Anonymous (Beograd: Muzej savremene umetnosti, 1969), 75.

³⁵ Part of Djilas' zeal can be attributed to his staunch support of the Soviet Union, and the rest to his vision of art as a tool of the state rather than a separate intellectual and creative activity.

³⁶ Milovan Djilas "Izveštaj o agitaciono-propagandnom radu" in *V Kongres KPJ - Izveštaji i referati*, (Beograd: Kultura, 1948), n.p.

regarding the formal criteria, quality, and significance of particular artworks.³⁷

Reading between the lines of his analysis, we can surmise that the artworks were in fact so stylistically different that he could not pinpoint a coherent Yugoslav aesthetic. This would have been sacrilegious in light of socialist realist doctrine, so Celebonovic framed his criticism as a call for better inter-provincial collaboration, improved technical training of artists, and more ideological education.³⁸

In contrast, Oto Bihalji-Merin, another influential artist and critic, argued in the political daily *Borba* that the exhibition showcased a significant move towards coherent social content.³⁹ Yet he observed there was a considerable absence of true Yugoslavian “masterworks,” and noting that the show was not representative of the best works of socialist realism, implying that the works were of lower quality than the Soviet examples.⁴⁰ Even though theoretically socialist realist didacticism and clarity were enforced, and critics such as Celebonovic and Bihalj-Merin called for a political rigor in thematic and ideological choices, in reality artists simply did not fully represent a distinctive socialist realist aesthetic.

The persistence of formalism did not pass unnoticed. Jovan Popovic remarked in his review of the 1949 exhibition that:

³⁷ Aleksa Celebonovic, “Prva izložba Saveza likovnih umetnika Jugoslavije,” in *Ideje srpske umetničke kritike i teorije 1900-1950*, ed. Miodrag Protic, Vol. 3. (Beograd: Muzej savremene umetnosti, 1981), 334. *Umetnost*, No. 1, (1949): 66–9.

³⁸ Aleksa Celebonovic, “Prva izložba Saveza Likovnih umetnika Jugoslavije,” *Ideje srpske umetničke kritike i teorije 1900-1950*. Vol. 3. (Beograd: Muzej savremene umetnosti, 1981), 334.

³⁹ Oto Bihalj-Merin, “Prva izložba Saveza likovnih umetnika Jugoslavije,” *Borba*, Beograd 22 maj, 1949.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

In this First Exhibition of the Yugoslavian Association of Fine Artists, as with the last several provincial exhibitions, we can see how some artists are still trying to keep their old, thematically inadequate manners, hiding them behind subject matter; they take a factory or a construction site as an occasion to create landscapes with ambiance, or they fade away objects through postimpressionist use of colour”⁴¹

Popovic’s lament over ‘hidden’ formalist tendencies—academic and modern—lurking behind ‘proper’ socialist realist content suggests the impossibility of weeding out all formalist interests. It is also a reminder that beyond 19th-century academicism, pre-WWII Yugoslavian art encompassed a wide-ranging set of modernist aesthetic styles and approaches, from Cubism, Fauvism, German Expressionism, and Surrealism to Art Nouveau, Academic Realism, and Viennese Secessionism. All of these influences continued to co-exist after the war and contributed to both formalist interests, and a variety of approaches to the socialist realist themes.⁴²

Popovic’s critique of the Association’s exhibition is typical of the early socialist realist period when the political rhetoric among some of the artists and critics demanded that art should be subordinated to the will of the people. The text of the constitution of the Association of Yugoslavian Fine Artists, for example, states that: “art is the property of the people, and a tool in its [people’s] progress.”⁴³ On paper, and in official language, this meant that artistic form should be

⁴¹ Jovan Popovic, “Izložba Saveza likovnih umetnika Jugoslavije,” *Ideje srpske umetnicke kritike i teorije 1900–1950*. Vol. 3. (Beograd: Muzej savremene umetnosti, 1981), 320.

⁴² Kolesnik, *Između istoka i zapada*, 38.

⁴³ “Constitution of the Yugoslavian Association of the Fine Artists,” (Belgrade: Prosveta Publishing, 1948) Quoted in Miodrag Protic, *Srpsko slikarstvo XX veka*, (Beograd: Nolit, 1970), 355.

subordinated to socialist and national content. Formalism, as with Soviet art, was to be weeded out in order to create correct aesthetic models. What was meant by realism and formalism in practice was, however, rather murky.

Miodrag Protic wrote in 1970 that most artistic production during socialist realism in Yugoslavia could be described formally as “academic impressionism” characterized by nostalgia and sentimentality.⁴⁴ Impressionism was considered non-progressive for Soviet artists, but, although it was at times berated in Yugoslavia by ideologues, it was still practiced by most artists. As I argued, what was meant by formalism was not strictly obeyed by many of the artists. Officially formalism meant showing too obvious an interest in formal aspects of the work such as colour or brushwork. Protic argues that “every freer brushstroke, every stronger tone, all thinking in forms and colours, unavoidable in painting,” was seen as decadent.⁴⁵ Although these views were officially endorsed, and some artists were indeed criticized as formalists, in reality most artists continued to work in ‘transgressive’ formalist modes as the 1949 exhibition of the Yugoslavian Association of Fine Artists shows.

The catalogue of the exhibition, in fact, shows this variety of formal and conceptual approaches to the theme of the “new socialist context.” Boza Ilic’s *Exploratory Drilling in New Belgrade* (Fig. 1.3)⁴⁶ was exhibited earlier that year at the annual exhibition of the Serbian Association of Fine Artists, where it created a

⁴⁴ Miodrag Protic, *Srpsko slikarstvo XX veka*, 359.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 356.

⁴⁶ Sondiranje terena u Novom Beogradu.

sensation. It became Ilic's most famous work and earned him a place in the Yugoslavian Pavilion at the XXV Venice Biennale in 1950. Contemporary critics proclaimed that it was a work with clear socialist-realist formal and conceptual elements. One critic called it the greatest painting in recent Yugoslavian art, praising its "spirit" and atmosphere of humanist revival.⁴⁷ Ilic's work is a massive canvas, four-and-a-half metres wide by two- and-a-half metres high, and is indebted to the work of the nineteenth-century realists such as Courbet, twentieth-century social realists such as the Mexican artists Diego Rivera and Jose Clemente Orozco, and German Expressionists such as Kathe Kollwitz.

Compared to the Soviet socialist realist contemporaries such as Gerasimov, Deyneka (see Fig. 1.8), or Plastov, Ilic's work is freer and more painterly in terms of brushwork and paint handling. Ilic's monumental composition is a hybrid of nineteenth-century history painting and twentieth-century socialist art, with just a hint of impressionism in the loose brushwork in the sky. Its celebration of the anonymous, common workers, and their back-breaking actions was in the tradition of the earlier socially engaged artworks.

⁴⁷ Jovan Popovic, "Izložba Saveza likovnih umetnika Jugoslavije" in *Knjizevne Novine*, (Beograd, 24 maj 1949, vol. II, no. 2), 3.



Figure 1.3. Boza Ilic,
*Exploratory Drilling in New
Belgrade*, oil on canvas 1948

Ilic's painting depicts a scene of rebuilding in the capital city Belgrade. Lack of housing created a major problem, because the city was destroyed during the German bombardment, and because thousands of war refugees and those searching for a better future moved from villages and small towns to the country's capital. Immediately after the war the government started a rebuilding campaign, and a number of suburban neighborhoods with high-rise apartment blocks were constructed. One of the first tasks before building commenced was the drilling that Ilic depicts in his painting. The background is an industrial building site that spreads far into the horizon. A group of young workers in the foreground, both male and female, are turning the handles of the drilling probe.

The painting's format, with its pyramidal composition and dynamism created through the mass of bodies in action situated mostly in the foreground, is typical of a nineteenth-century history painting. Ilic binds these formal devices to the project of socialist realism, using them to construct a grand vision of the ordinary worker. The composition is closed, with the drilling probe in the middle and two groups of workers to the left and right. They are neatly framed by a pyramid-shaped scaffold rising around them. The painting's background is busy with more workers, cranes, drills, and other heavy equipment. A sense of movement is achieved by arranging the two main groups of workers in two diagonals that intersect in the middle of the canvas. Drills, wooden supports, scaffolding, and cranes placed further in the distance create a number of smaller diagonal and vertical movements pointing upward to the

sky. This movement seems to direct the viewer's eye to something beyond the canvas, perhaps to a possible future that they are helping to build.

Ilic's workers are young, healthy-looking, and serious. Each person is pictured pushing the drill, pensive, and seemingly without acknowledging the presence of the others. The three workers on the left facing the viewer lead us into the action. Their large, round bodies are pushing against the wooden handle of the drill. The young woman close to the centre is the focal point of the group. Her tall, powerful body creates a strong vertical movement, making her the symbolic core of the painting; an ideal worker full of health and energy. Although the workers' backs are bent into their task, there are no signs of physical strain on their faces as they do this back-breaking work. These idealizations could be read as Ilic's move towards socialist realist typification⁴⁸ of the human figure. These signs of typification in Ilic's work were singled out for criticism by Miodrag Protic in the 1970s.⁴⁹ Protic argued that the figures have a symbolic presence determined by what they are doing—the important task of re-building the nation—but provide no sense of how they feel about what they are doing. Protic argued that Ilic's paintings are, in fact, museum souvenirs of a documentary nature.⁵⁰ Accordingly, the role of people in *Exploratory Drilling* is to

⁴⁸ Typification is a term that describes the tendency to create specific narrative, easily discernable types of characters in paintings, this was a proscription developed in the process of theorizing socialist-realist aesthetic in the 1920s and 1930s. See: Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 126; Matthew C. Bown, *Art Under Stalin*, (New York: Holms and Meier, 1991).

⁴⁹ Miodrag Protic, *Srpsko slikarstvo XX veka* (Beograd: Nolit, 1970), 387.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 387.

set a standard of behavior and illustrate desirable attitudes, not to explicitly showcase emotion or explore psychological depths.

The workers do not meet the viewer's gaze; they are looking into the distance, or staring directly ahead. This puts them at a certain psychological remove from the us, yet we are invited to enter the scene through the open central space flanked by the workers on each side. The compositional conundrum is whether the painter wants us to join in and take hold of one of the wooden handles of the drill, or remain separated from the scene. This somewhat alienating spatial ambiguity and the lack of emotional tension both contribute to what I see as the painting's hybrid visual and conceptual structure. I would argue that Ilic is attempting to remain true to both the formalism of nineteenth-century academic painting and the socialist realist aesthetic.

Another point of diversion from socialist-realist orthodoxy in *Exploratory Drilling* is in the apparent modernist influences on formal elements, including the treatment of painted space. Spatial tension occurs between the two groups of workers in the foreground who represent the narrative, conceptual focus of the painting, and the space and actions taking place in the middle ground and background. All three layers of space are equally busy. As our eyes travel thorough the painting, passing over the building site towards the city in the distance, the artist does not attempt to create atmospheric perspective by having the colour diminish in clarity and saturation.

Ilic's interest in the flattening of space can be read as typical of late 19th-century and 20th-century modernist painting, but art historian Milanka Todic suggests that the

use of space in Ilic's painting was also subordinated to a set of optical techniques imported from Soviet socialist-realist photography and film.⁵¹ These filmic techniques provided a means to negotiate between recording reality and the formal and conceptual possibilities of painting. These techniques included in-depth staging, depth of focus, continuity, editing, and extensive use of medium and long shots.⁵² Such elements served to mimic the natural movement of the eye, yet at the same time provided the clarity of vision possible only with mechanical devices such as the lens of the camera. What this meant for film and photography was clarity of spatial organization in which filmmakers and photographers maintained equally sharp focus on objects situated throughout the space. Visual representation of actions, characters, and objects in medium and long shots instead of in close-ups meant that the viewer felt less disoriented as the camera lens mimicked the way our eye sees, at the same time placing the viewer in a privileged position from which they could, in a sense, visually own the entire environment.

Exploratory Drilling in New Belgrade incorporates some of these filmic techniques for representing space, offering a closed, centralized composition, through which the viewer visually seizes the scene in its entirety. There is a clash, however, in

⁵¹ Milanka Todic, *Fotografija i propaganda 1945- 1958 = Photography and Propaganda 1945-1958*, (Banja Luka: JU Knjizevna zadruga and Pancevo: Helicon, 2005), 48. Todic's argument, however, falls somewhat flat as she never fully explains what she means by "optical reproductive techniques" and how these techniques feature in Ilic's painting.

⁵² For more on formal structure of socialist-realist cinema see Eva Naripea, "A View from Periphery Spatial Discourse of the Soviet Estonian Feature Film," *Estonian Cinescapes, Spaces, Places and Sites in Soviet Estonian Cinema (and Beyond)*, (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1989), 49.

the painting between painterly and photographic space, for example, Ilic's decision to eschew atmospheric perspective and flatten space. Nevertheless, the relative subordination of the painting practice to the principles of total visibility, and to a documentary style of realist representation in response to ideological needs, created an in-between formal composition, which incorporated elements of both modernist and socialist-realist aesthetic. Art critic Jovan Popovic noticed at the time what he called, "Ilic's crammed composition" and argued that he left no "breathing" room for objects and people in the space.⁵³ Popovic added that the composition was rigid and needed more atmosphere. These observations, even at the time of Ilic's greatest success, point to the work's unreconciled hybrid nature as well as the lack of uniform critical standards for evaluating the work.

We can detect Ilic's modernist sympathies more directly by comparing *Exploratory Drilling in New Belgrade* to his smaller-scale study (Fig. 1.4) for the same painting. The study shows a closely cropped composition, more vibrantly colourful than the finished work, with strong complementary contrasts and saturated hues applied in flat areas. The figures are less naturalistically represented but more lively, and defined by bold black outlines. These stylistic choices are all features of early 20th-century modernism and Ilic almost completely eliminated them in the

⁵³ Jovan Popovic, "Izložba Saveza likovnih umetnika Jugoslavije," *Knjizevne Novine*, Vol. 2, no. 2 (1949): 3.



Figure 1.4. Boza Ilic,
Exploratory Drilling,
oil on canvas, 1947



Figure 1.5. Boza Ilic,
Woman at a Window,
watercolour, 1957

finished work. As a young artist coming into his own during WWII and influenced by the revolutionary aesthetic ideology, it is not a surprise that Ilic would try to “hide” connections to what critic Gamulin had called “the idolatry of Cézannism.” I suggest, however, that these interests do resurface more obliquely in the finished paintings through Ilic’s ambiguous treatment of space, its implied flatness, and his painterly approach. Once again we see the emergence of a stylistic hybrid: a subtly transgressive form of Yugoslavian socialist realism.

Another important socialist-realist work with unorthodox modernist influences from the 1949 exhibition was Djordje Andrejevic-Kun’s *The Witnesses of Horror* (Fig. 1.6) This study of an extreme human emotion departed from classic large-scale scenes often found in the Soviet socialist-realist models and provoked a number of mixed reviews. Kun’s work is a study of the reactions of a group of people to the horrors of war that they see outside of the picture frame, concentrating on the “witnesses” and those who are abused rather than the perpetrators, or Soviet-style heroic figures.

Compared to Ilic’s *Exploratory Drilling*, *The Witnesses of Horror* moves even further from the socialist-realist norm, most obviously in its departure from the wide field of vision preferred by Ilic and others in order to create an expressionistic intimacy instead. His composition is open-ended, constructed as a close-up of several characters (two children, two older men and two women) who are part of a larger crowd. The crowd is not fully visible but Kun suggests their presence beyond the



Figure 1.6.
Djordje
Andrejevic-
Kun, *The
Witnesses of
Horror*, oil on
canvas, 1949



Figure 1.7.
Käthe
Kollwitz, *The
Prisoners*
etching, 1908

canvas through the dark figures in the background cropped by the painting's borders. The close focus on the people in the foreground and the painting's confined space created by overlapping the figures, accentuate the emotional drama depicted on the people's faces.

A small, somewhat emaciated boy in the foreground of *The Witnesses of Horror*, has his back turned towards the viewer as if running away from us, but at the same time turns his head, directly addressing us with his gaze. We enter the painting via his gesture. The boy's turned body creates a strong diagonal from the bottom left moving upward and leads us towards the group gathered around him. The same upward movement is repeated in the two rows of people crowded in the foreground, and then by the lines of the road directly above their heads. These diagonals create a sense of movement away from whatever is directly in front of the group, and set the viewer before the figures, but slightly off to the side. This creates a sense of disorientation and claustrophobia arising from the tension between the gaze of the viewer, and the shock on the faces of people who are turning away from what takes place in front of them.

While the viewer is unsure about how and where to enter Ilic's painting, in *Witnesses*, the viewer is drawn into the work's psychological and emotional space both through the painter's formal decisions (use of perspective, composition, and sense of movement) and through his study of emotion. The three heads in the background are darkened to intensify the grim mood of the work. *Witnesses* uses the stylistic exaggerations that Soviet orthodoxy rejected as bourgeois modernist

formalism. These characteristics were noted in a strongly worded review by writer Radovan Zogovic. Similarly to Popovic's accusations of hidden formalism in many of the works in the 1949 show, Zogovic criticized Kun for leaving three figures in the background undone, and for the recurrence of old formalist tendencies. He saw this in the artist's treatment of clothes in the foreground figures.

But when he went on to paint his protagonists' clothes, Kun has allowed himself to give in to the light effects, formalist arrangements and recipes, soulless geometry of various surfaces which formalists call "resonating of colour," "symphony of tonality," "richness of colour palette," "straightforwardness of expression." Light effects have imposed themselves as the preeminent law, as the "alpha and omega of creation."⁵⁴

Zogovic goes on to say that despite many serious problems with the work, Kun, as one of the most committed and sincere communist artists, managed to capture the spirit of socialist-realist themes and the grandeur of the national liberation during the war.⁵⁵ Again we see the unresolved relationship between realism, formalism, and social commitment clearly embodied in Kun's work and its reception.

While *Witnesses* is outside the formal norms of socialist realism, its theme and narrative content are faithful to the ideological exigencies of the genre. Most of the ideological content comes from the psychology and the mood of the painting, something Zogovic commended him for.⁵⁶ The main protagonists, while fearful, are not without agency because determination can be felt in their gazes. Kun highlights

⁵⁴ Radovan Zogovic, "K licu covjeka!" *Knjizevne novine*, Beograd, 11 januar 1949," in *Ideje srpske umetnicke kritike i teorije 1900-1950*. Vol. 3. (Beograd: Muzej savremene umetnosti, 1981), 330.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 331.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 329.

this by painting them as strong and muscular, larger than life. The woman on the right with an infant in her arms has strong hands and bony facial features; her gaze is steely and defiant. The same is true of the man to her right. While these people are facing the horror of the atrocities committed by the Germans or their allies, their resolve as a group is symbolically representative of the Yugoslav nation as a whole.

Celebrating the suffering and sacrifices of the “common man or woman,” during the war of liberation was the most important theme of post-WWII Yugoslavian social realism. While Soviet socialist realism often used idealized forms of representation, depicting super-human workers and farmers, Yugoslavian artists emphasized the suffering brought on by WWII, brotherhood and unity among the many Yugoslav ethnicities, and their painful fight to liberate the country. The depiction of suffering and loss in many of the artworks could also be seen as a direct result of Yugoslav cultural memory, which was built in relationship to the history of colonization in the region. Yugoslav national consciousness rested on the close link between Marxism and the history of colonization and imperialism. For Yugoslav intellectuals and party elites the depiction of suffering in the war signaled the steep price of the socialist revolution. Kun’s expressive work is well suited to representing these traumas, and his work succeeds as an example of a psychological visual study of the human condition characteristic of many Yugoslavian artists of the period. Similar dark works reflect the complexity of the Yugoslav art scene even at the height of the socialist-realist period.

The more prominent painters who exhibited in the 1949 exhibition were Dordje Andrejevic-Kun, Boza Ilic, Marijan Detoni, Ismet Mujezinovic, and Branko Sotra, and sculptors Antun Augustincic, Kosta Angeli-Radovani. They represent a core of what art historian Jesa Denegri calls “true socialist realists.”⁵⁷ Others showcased in this first national exhibition had various styles ranging from small, intimate scenes such as Gabrijel Stupica’s already discussed *Still Life* (Fig. 1.1) to almost gothic studies, such as Frano Simunovic’s *Partisan Detachment* (Fig. 1.9)

This formal and thematic variety in an exhibit meant to showcase ideological commitment is paralleled by larger social and political transformations taking place in Yugoslavia at this time. As much as the artworks in the 1949 show were varied, so were the more general cultural debates, now deepened by the political crisis initiated after the falling out with Stalin. The 1949 exhibition may be seen as symbolic the end not just of socialist realism, and of Soviet politics in Yugoslavia in general.

The exhibition reviews in the daily newspapers and art magazines, and official meetings of various literary, artistic, and academic associations reveal a growing dissent against the Soviet influence. While artists looked for a counterpart to Stalinist culture, the highest functionaries of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia were now openly calling for a review of the state policies and the creation of an alternative socialism. Both the cultural debate and the growing political one were signs of Yugoslavia’s move towards its own utopian socialist experiment called self-management socialism.

⁵⁷ Jesa Denegri, *Teme Srpske umetnosti 1945-1970: od socijalistickog realizma do kineticke umetnosti*, (Beograd: Vujicic kolekcija, 2009), 16.



Figure 1.8. Deyneka,
Donbas,
oil on canvas, 1947



Figure 1.9. Frano Simunovic,
A Partisan Detachment,
oil on canvas, 1947

Aesthetic and Political Alternatives After the 1949 Exhibition

As president Tito and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia moved away from Stalinism the cultural debate over the adoption of socialist realism became more pronounced. This cultural shift cannot be understood as existing in a vacuum, outside of its political and historical framework. Intellectuals who participated in it saw the cultural and political work as intrinsically intertwined. The theoretical base for Yugoslavian alternative socialism, and its artistic variant, was in fact much deeper, as its kernels can be traced back to pre-WWII Yugoslav culture. The phenomenon started in the late 1920s within the ranks of the Yugoslavian Communist Party in response to the shift in the Soviet politics of the time. Recent historiography has recognized the debate as “the conflict on the literary Left.”⁵⁸ It expressed the deep ambiguity of a group of Yugoslav Marxists, with the Croatian writer Miroslav Krleža, —who recognized the problems with the show trials and purges in the Soviet Union initiated by Stalin⁵⁹—at the helm. The group was comprised of artists, writers, and intellectuals who, through their discussion of the relationship between art and the Marxist revolution, also addressed larger social and political questions of their time. The conflict was, however, political and philosophical as much as it was aesthetic in origin, and it is therefore somewhat of a misnomer to call it literary alone. It represented a dialogical confrontation with the forms of oppressive Marxism in

⁵⁸See Stanko Lasic, *Sukob na književnoj ljevici 1928-1952*, (Zagreb: Liber Izdanja instituta za znanost o književnosti, 1970), 5.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 6–7.

politics and art, establishing a precedent for what would become post-war Yugoslavian alternative culture.

Yugoslavian cultural debates on the Left, therefore, developed over a number of years and were shaped by a variety of Marxist positions that had persisted since the early twentieth century. Literary historian Stanko Lasic in *Sukob na književnoj ljevici 1928-1952* (1970) describes the fundamental conflict on the Left as the debate over how to create a synthesis between revolution and art.⁶⁰ In other words, how can revolutionary politics live in an aesthetic, creative form, and vice versa, how can art formulate and carry on revolutionary struggle? The arguments presented by Yugoslavian intellectuals over the several decades centered on the appropriateness of modernist and socialist-realist aesthetics for the revolutionary politics. One group advocated socialist realism as the most politically correct form of art, while the other suggested that art had to be both socially/politically engaged and keep its commitment to formal questions. Their discussions echoed similar concerns about modernist and socialist realist aesthetic in Europe in the 1920s and '30s, most notably articulated by Gyorgy Lukacs, Theodor Adorno, Bertolt Brecht, and Walter Benjamin.⁶¹ Yugoslav discussions however never reached a conclusion prior to WWII and were reopened in 1949.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 22.

⁶¹ See Theodor Adorno et al., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London, New York: Verso, Radical Thinkers Classic Editions, 2007).

Unlike its international counterpart, Yugoslavian pre-war debate was initiated at the height of the prosecution of the Yugoslav communists,⁶² and also involved questions of local, autochthonous, Yugoslavian artistic production. The most influential voice was that of the Croatian writer Miroslav Krleža (1893–1981). Between 1920 and the late 1950s he consistently attacked socialist realism in polemical texts and essays published in journals, magazines, and daily newspapers. In a powerful speech at the Congress of Yugoslavian Writers in 1952, Krleža called for a rejection of socialist realism, marking its unofficial end in Yugoslavia. Krleža's argument was two-pronged and tied to the idea that artistic production should be true to its formal, aesthetic nature on the one hand, and to the national, localized artistic production on the other. Yugoslavian art, he claimed, needed to keep in perspective a set of larger socio-political histories of the country involving Yugoslavia's colonial past and its communist, revolutionary present. Art, he wrote, had to address what it is to be a creative and political person, but also what it is to be Yugoslavian. An autochthonous Yugoslavian art would not be embedded in nationalism, but would take a Marxist stance towards its colonial history.⁶³ Such art is then both localized,

⁶² During the late 1920s Yugoslavian state initiated a campaign against communists. The state itself became absolutist under the leadership of the Serbian monarch Aleksandar, who abolished the Constitution and instituted an autocratic regime. Under his rule all political dissent, including communist, was seen as a major threat and dealt with severely. Many communists were imprisoned, while some fled the country. Branko Petranovic, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918-1988, knjiga I: Kraljevina Jugoslavija*. (Beograd: Nolit, 1988), 176.

⁶³ For an in-depth historical discussion of the colonial and semi-colonial histories of the ex-Yugoslavian territories see: Larry Wolff, *Venice and the Slavs: Discovery of Dalmatia in the Age of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*.

given its particular formulation in native histories, and international, as a socialist, Marxist project, which was for Krleza international in scope.

In light of this complex history, Krleza advocated that Yugoslavian revolutionary aesthetic develop in tension with modernism and socialist realism. Its in-between position would be grounded in Yugoslavia's location, figurative and actual, on the margins of Europe, often as its colony. He wrote:

If we could speak of a Left or a Right program, we are biased in support of the Left realization of our artistic objectives. That this cannot be realized through the genre painting styled on the works of the second half of the nineteenth century, through dilettante quasi-programmatic lyrical practices of Tihonov and Riljski, that this cannot be expressed through Fauvism or through Constructivist and Surrealist or abstract painting or poetry, that is fruitlessly preserved for more than fifty years, that is all without a doubt. Kandinsky was pointless already in 1913, especially from our perspective of Balkan wars and Austrian liquidation. That Gerasimov's and Zhdanov's right-leaning artistic contra-revolutionary work, together with idealist theoretical leanings of Todor Pavlov, cannot be of help here is without a doubt. Once a socialist cultural medium, conscious of its rich past and its cultural mission in contemporary European space and time, is developed our art will inevitably appear.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ *Ako se može govoriti o lijevom ili desnom program, mi smo tendenciozno za lijevo ostvarenje ovih umjetničkih objektivacija. Da se to ne može ostvariti na drugi način zanr-slikarstva po ukusu iz druge polovine devetnaestog stoljeca, na način diletantske kvaziprogramatske lirike kao što je njeguju Tihonov i Riljski, da se to ne može odraziti fauvistički ili po ukusu konstruktivnog i imaginističkog ili apstraktnog slikarstva ili poezije kakva se jalovo njeguje na Zapadu već više od pedeset godina, to je izvan sumnje. Kandinski je već godine 1913 bio bespredmetan, a pogotovo više iz perspective balkanskih ratova i austrijske likvidacije. Da nam desna, likovnokontrarevolucionarna gerasimovstina i zdanovstina s idealističkom spoznajnom teorijom Todora Pavlova kod tog napora ne može biti od koristi, i to je izvan svake sumnje. Onoga trenutka, kada se jave kod nas umjetnici, koji će svojim darom, svojim znanjem i svojim ukusom umjeti da te 'objektivne motive naše lijeve stvarnosti- subjektivno odraze', rodit će se naša vlastita Umjetnost. Ukoliko se kod nas razvije socijalistički kulturni medij, svijestan svoje bogate prošlosti i svijestan svoje kulturne misije u danšnjem evropskom prostoru i vremenu, naša Umjetnost pojavit će se neminovno [Miroslav Krleža, "Govor na kongresu književnika u*

Krleza's call for the construction of a uniquely Yugoslavian left-leaning art was both a political and an aesthetic response to the pressures of the socialist-realist dogma on the one hand, and what he perceived as a hollow, modernist, ahistorical "lartpourlartism"⁶⁵ on the other. He recognized the political impotence of European avant-gardes whose autonomous artistic production could not convey the reality of the colonial subjugation of the Balkan peoples.⁶⁶ In his analysis of Krleza's 1952 speech, Stanko Lasic argues that the development of an apolitical, autonomous artistic practice did not make sense in the context of the systematic pillaging that Yugoslav peoples had undergone over the centuries.⁶⁷ Krleza equally believed that Soviet aesthetic production, with its emphasis on a socialist realism that simultaneously retained traditionalist petty-bourgeois stylistic elements, could not provide the basis

Ljubljani on October 5, 1952," in *Svjedocanstva vremena: knjizevno-estetske varijacije* Anonymous (Sarajevo: Oslobođenje, 1988).] [My translation.]

⁶⁵ An aesthetic term used mostly in Yugoslavian criticism, and in criticism of some Eastern European countries, referring to the notion of art for art's sake. However, it is a version of the original French term, and as such gained a theoretical life of its own, particularly in the context of 20th-century Yugoslavian critiques of modernism.

⁶⁶ Peter Burger would argue the same thing decades later. See: Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.) Only in the late 20th century were art historians ready to account for problematic Western modernist tradition. Postcolonial approaches to art history have brought to the fore numerous instances of orientalizing and exoticizing representations in modern art. Books such as "Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction," "Primitivism and Twentieth Century Art," or "Cubism and Culture," brought to awareness the paradoxes of the modernist tradition. While many artists saw themselves as left-leaning, anti-bourgeois, and even anti-colonialist, they were, at the same time, implicated in representational visual practices based in primitivist, Euro-centric discourses. Balkan cultures and their representations in European consciousness fit within the same postcolonial discourse. This observation was crucial for Krleza's rejection of Western modernism, and his call for creation of an autochthonous aesthetic production.

⁶⁷ Stanko Lasic, *Sukob na knjizevnoj ljevici 1928-1952*, 22.

for a revolutionary art. For Krleza, a truly meaningful art could only happen through an integration of art and revolution. Western modernist notions of autonomous art as practiced by the European avant-gardes had failed to respond to the needs of life; they could not productively speak to and about the everyday. Equally important were the failures of the Soviet socialist realism that instrumentalized art and stripped it of its basic characteristics (imagination, creativity, experimentation).

In a second speech at the 1954 Congress of Yugoslavian Writers⁶⁸, which gave the final blow to socialist-realist doctrine, Krleza fully outlined his anti-colonial approach to art practice introducing a more radical idea of art. To follow Western examples of art production for him meant to “exist as an imitation.”⁶⁹ His dilemma was how to escape imitating Western and Soviet aesthetic types and put an end to existing on the cultural periphery. Krleza’s suturing of anti-colonialism to the aesthetic analysis is crucial to understanding how Yugoslavia’s lack of self-identity and aesthetic identity played out in the past. Stanko Lasic states:

[Krleza’s] response is similar to that of Franz Fanon: if we stop being an object and become a subject, if we stop being a periphery and become centre, if we come back to ourselves without regard for gods that have created us. That complete negation of Europe and its modern fetishes is in actuality a complete affirmation of the SUBJUGATED and the REJECTED: in the coming to oneself the DISPOSSESSED has to LIVE THROUGH and EXPERIENCE total rejection of the Other which has relegated him to a subhuman. That is the first moment of such dialectic. If the subjugated culture does not live through such dialectic it will never be able to constitute itself as a subject. It will forever stay an imitation.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Miroslav, Krleza, “Referat na plenumu saveza književnika 10 oktobra 1954,” in *Eseji knjiga I*, (Sarajevo: Oslobođenje, 1973).

⁶⁹ Stanko Lasic, *Sukob na književnoj ljevici 1928-1952*, 57.

⁷⁰ *Njegov je odgovor sličan odgovoru Frantza Fanona: ako prestanemo biti objekt i postanemo subjekt, ako prestanemo biti periferija i postanemo centar, ako se*

Placing Yugoslavia's socialist art within the postcolonial discourse of the 20th century is Krleza's most profound conclusion with respect to the relationship between art and revolution. There can be no political, social, or cultural transformation unless those who have been colonized and relegated to the margins, first, reject those who have subjugated them, and second, engage in a process of acquiring an identity. Political sovereignty, the right to self-determination, and social equality are Krleza's conditions for praxis-based art which can then be a part of the revolutionary transformation. There is an implied critique of classical Marxist tradition in which postcolonialism exists as an afterthought to the more pressing issues of the socialist transformation. He underlines the importance of the socialist revolution but only as a part of the realization of political and cultural sovereignty in the postcolonial sense. Accordingly, neither socialist realism nor modernism was in touch with the everyday as experienced by the Yugoslav masses. The margin, in this case Yugoslavian culture, exists in tension with the hegemonies of the Western world and its Soviet counterpart.

Krleza's analysis offers us two ways to understand the first exhibition of the Yugoslav Association of Fine Artists. One was that the exhibition was the Yugoslav attempt at adopting a socialist-realist aesthetic and therefore constituted an inauthentic effort at shaping a revolutionary art. The other is that the exhibition was

vratimo nama samima bez obzira na bogove koji su nas formirali. Ta totalna negacija Evrope I njenih modernih fetisa zapravo je totalna afirmacija POTLACENOG i ODBACENOG: u tom dolazenju do sebe RAZVLASTENI mora IZIVJETI I PROZIVJETI totalno odbacivanje Drugog koji ga je da sada relegirao u podbice, u drugorazredno bice. To je prvi moment te dijalektike. Ako njega ne prezivi drugorazredna kultura nece sebe nikada konstituirati kako subjekt. Ona ce ostati imitacija. Lasic, Stanko. Sukob na knjizevnoj ljevici 1928-1952, 57. [My translation.]

as an attempt at finding a path between two aesthetic paradigms of the time: modernism and socialist realism. The fact that the exhibition was characterized by a mixture of ambiguous socialist and modernist aesthetic elements supports the first reading. According to this, as long as Yugoslavian art attempted to mimic international styles, and adopted them without consciously positioning its production with respect to its identity, it would continue to produce poor, inarticulate copies of international art. In that case Bozo Ilic's *Exploratory Drilling* stands at the symbolic intersection of this argument in its attempt at a balance between modernism and socialist realism. The work constructed a formal and narrative hybrid that only partially responded to the political, social, and cultural exigencies of the new Yugoslav state.

At the same time the artists showing their works at the exhibition were either interested in the idea of socialism or fully committed to it. Finding an appropriate balance between their revolutionary zeal and their commitment to art production was at stake. Instead of judging the works as incoherent, or inept, we might read them as searching for the right balance between the position at the margins of the European centres of art and membership in the political vanguard of the socialist revolution. The push and pull between the geopolitical powers and the aesthetic exigencies is what comes out most clearly in the 1949 exhibition. This tension opened up questions of influence and, more importantly, pointed to the fact that influences (political or artistic) flowing from the centre to the margin are refracted and mutate as they are adopted and adapted in the various cultural contexts. When read through the lens of

hegemonic, and somewhat conservative, understandings of formal and conceptual elements of modernism and socialist realism, Yugoslavian art in the immediate post-war period would be found lacking. Once we consider it as a hybrid form that adapted to the demands of both aesthetic models in its own idiosyncratic way, we can argue that its short-lived brush with socialist realism provided a base for the development of further alternatives to the centres of aesthetic power.

The first national exhibition of socialist art also inadvertently pointed to the larger issues in Yugoslav social structures: the search for an autochthonous Yugoslav social and political life, one that could provide a small, underdeveloped country with a more powerful international position. The balancing act between the artistic and the political brings to light the tension between the centre and the margin, with Yugoslavia attempting to navigate between its position at the margins and the possibility of finding a way to deflect that position by proposing more radical changes in the discourse of Marxism and modernity.

Anti-colonial discourse based in a Marxist aesthetics as offered by Krleža, was closely related to the general trend in Yugoslavia at the time to think of socialism as a constellation of anti-imperialist, anti-bureaucratic forms of revolutionary politics. While in culture this meant rejecting forms of bourgeois aesthetic, on the one hand, and proscriptive, propagandistic art of the Soviets on the other, in politics it meant adopting more democratic forms of social organization and establishing connections

to other countries that exhibited similar attitudes. The solution to the Yugoslav socialist question was found in the theory of self-management.⁷¹

The basis for the self-management socialism was established in the late 1940s by one of the Communist Party leaders, Edvard Kardelj. Together with Milovan Djilas, Kardelj accused the Soviet Union of imperialist appetites, which was also the major reason for Yugoslavia's expulsion from the Cominform.⁷² Kardelj initiated two important structural transformations in the Yugoslav social system. One was self-management socialism, and the other was the restructuring of the role and functioning of the Communist Party itself.⁷³ Historian Gerson Sher writes that "each [of the two ideas] was in itself a revolutionary innovation designed to strike at the roots of the problems associated with the degeneration of the revolution in the USSR."⁷⁴

Yugoslavian theory of self-management can be defined as a form of social structure constituted by a number of self-organized worker councils that would manage their place of employment. The concept of a worker's council was an idea already discussed in 19th-century Marxist thought, but was abandoned after the state-socialist system prevailed in the 20th-century. The ultimate goal of the self-management system was to gradually get rid of the existing political structures, and the bureaucratic state in particular. Unlike anarchist models, self-management called for numerous self-organizing communities based on a system of self-accountability

⁷¹ Edvard Kardelj, *Pravci razvoja političkog sistema socijalističkog samoupravljanja*, (Beograd: Komunist, 1977).

⁷² Gerson Sher, *Praxis, Praxis: Marxist criticism and dissent in socialist Yugoslavia*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 9.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

and responsibility. The communities would decide on their fate through dialog and debate: in short, direct democracy. According to the theoretical models provided by Kardelj and others, the self-management system would also eliminate the inherent alienation of labour and life under both state socialism and capitalism.

Self-management was further developed by amalgamating it with the emerging international movement of the Non-Aligned initiated by Kardelj and president Tito in the late 1950s. Participation in the formation of the Non-Aligned movement helped Yugoslavian socialists further their anti-imperialist, postcolonial thinking. These political ideas became the elemental structure on which socialist Yugoslavia built its future until its demise in 1991. They were imbedded in all social structures and were written into the country's Constitution as well as promoted in the cultural and social realms. It was the goal of the Yugoslav political elites to make self-management, Non-Aligned movement, and brotherhood and unity the three basic pillars on which the state and its legitimacy rested. Because of this, the way in which socialist aesthetic developed after 1949 was closely sutured to the fate and legitimacy of these theoretical notions. How Yugoslavia would adopt its form of modernism was dependent on how it would adopt its version of socialist self-management.

Kardelj's and Djilas' work on defining and implementing self-management, however, would have been impossible without earlier intellectual preconditions. These preconditions are found in the original debate on the Left in Yugoslavia around the meaning of culture and art in the communist revolution. The polemics around freedom, communist revolution, identity, democracy, and agency were crucial

elements in these discussions. While the Yugoslav Communist Party in the late 1920s was trying to survive the authoritarian regime of King Aleksandar, its intellectuals were hard-pressed to properly define the nature of their struggle, especially in the light of Stalin's autocracy. Once the new socialist Yugoslavia was formed, the discussions on the intellectual Left became the base on which communist Party elites built ways to disassociate from the Soviet Union. In Yugoslavia, then, the artists and cultural workers were the true vanguard of alternative socialist thinking. Without their ideas the discourses of self-managing socialism would not have taken place. By the same token, the 1949 exhibition was a symptom of the impending, profound social change, rather than a symptom of the failure of socialist realism.

Missed Opportunities?

The turbulent years immediately after WWII were crucial for the development of Yugoslavian art. The rejection of the socialist-realist aesthetic, which unofficially ended in 1952 and officially in 1954 with Miroslav Krleža's speeches, marked a new beginning for the influx of various modernist influences. If we consider that the first national Yugoslavian socialist-realist exhibition was held in 1949, and that the first post-WW II abstract expressionist exhibition was held in Zagreb in 1953, we can surmise the scope and speed of the radical shift in aesthetic and cultural concerns. After the official break with socialist realism, those who were once celebrated as the preeminent socialist-realist artists, such as Boza Ilic, were marginalized. Existing in

relative obscurity the ‘regime’ artists often went back to painting in pre-war expressionist, intimate styles (see Fig. 1.5) Exhibitions showcasing more pronounced experiments with modernist forms became a common occurrence, culminating in the development of the official Yugoslavian cultural policy, which sought to finance, support, and present modernism as its core value. Stanko Lasic argues, however, that Krleza’s speech and its warnings against succumbing to either the capitalist West, or the Stalinist East, were not heeded.⁷⁵ Influences of the dominant conceptions of modernism in the West—aestheticism with pretensions towards apolitical formalism—became increasingly popular. Artists who had a more palatable, tame, and for the most part politically disengaged idea of modernism prevailed.⁷⁶ Krleza’s call for an alternative model of modernism rooted in political and revolutionary consciousness was largely left unresolved in favor of an apolitical form of socialist modernism. The end of socialist realism signaled in the writing of Miroslav Krleza, provided an opportunity to create an interesting, and perhaps progressive, alternative form of art making. Although this short period between 1949 and 1954 could be read as the time of missed opportunities, it also served as a base for constructing a uniquely Yugoslavian cultural milieu that constantly oscillated between the West and the East.

⁷⁵ Stanko Lasic, *Sukob na književnoj ljevici 1928-1952*, 60.

⁷⁶ Sveta Lukic, “Socijalistički estetizam,” *Umetnost na mostu* (Beograd: Ideje, 1975), 235.

Chapter 2 The Ascent of Official Socialist Modernism

Socialism's Futures

1981 was a year marked by a futurist ethos in socialist Yugoslavia. A year after president Tito died, Yugoslavians needed to turn to the future, a future that now looked more uncertain. It also represented the height of socialist modernist culture, which began in the late 1950s and ended its dominance by the late 1980s. In 1981 Yugoslavia was plagued by an international economic crisis that propelled the socialist self-management political model into uncertainty. Yugoslavian culture responded to its social and economic challenges by creating imaginative propositions about the future. The year was also shaped by a building frenzy in Bosnia and Herzegovina in preparation for the upcoming 1984 winter Olympic games that promised to put the country on the international cultural and political map.¹ As the fissures in the socialist dreamworld became more evident, its forms of state culture, mainstream and popular entertainment became more extravagant.

An example of such extravagant culture is Vojin Bakic's large-scale monument completed in 1981, dedicated to the partisan insurrection in Croatia. The monument's steel cladding and abstract design gave it a futuristic quality (Fig. 2.2). Its form and overall presence resembled an alien tower propped up in the middle of a field.

¹ Organizing Committee of the XIV Winter Olympic Games 1984, *Final Report*, Anto Sucic et al. eds. (Sarajevo: Oslobodjenje, 1984).



Figure 2.1. Dusan Vukotic, *The Visitors from Galaxy* film, 1981.



Figure 2.2. Vojin Bakic, *Monument to the Partisans*, Petrova Gora, Croatia, reinforced concrete, stainless steel, and glass 1981

Interestingly enough, in the same year artist and animator Dusan Vukotic directed one of his rare feature films, a science fiction comedy about a confused writer, entitled *Visitors from the Arkana Galaxy* (Fig. 2.1). This Yugoslavian Czechoslovakian co-production was a rarity indeed, because Yugoslavian cinema had never produced a science fiction film before; Vukotic's collaboration with the famous Czech animator Jan Svankmajer resulted in a communist-era B-movie classic. The film's portrayal of contemporary Yugoslavia as a Western, progressive society, with pop culture, consumerism, tourists, and aliens, spoke to the country's ambition of emulating its European neighbors. Vukotic's film and Bakic's sculpture are examples of the modernist socialist ethos in search of both normalcy, via a portrayal of leisure and Western lifestyles, and of a better tomorrow promised through the Yugoslavian socialist modern.

Vojin Bakic's *Monument to the Partisans* is both a sculpture and a museum, resembling a rocket as the surrounding landscape is reflected onto its steel facade. Its shape, with curved walls, is equally curious, fluid, and organic, and yet also mechanical-looking because of the materials Bakic used in its construction. *Monument to the Partisans* is a quintessential example of Yugoslavian socialist modernism. Its blend of modernist abstraction and socialist idealism prevalent in Yugoslavian public life at the time, its symbolic celebration of modernization and industrialization, and a yearning for a utopian socialist future are all crucial characteristics of the style.

The tension between Bakic's interest in, and support of international modernism found in the West, and his responsibility as a public sculptor to respond to the needs of the state are also woven into the monument's concept. While it might read as a typical

monumental sculpture of the mid-twentieth century modernism, its ideologically-imbued subject matter, which reflects the great Yugoslav socialist project, sits outside of the traditional modernist definitions. We could argue that it represents a non-aligned modernism, one that was neither fully Western, nor fully socialist. During its relatively short lifespan of some twenty years, *Monument to the Partisans* was visited by hundreds of thousands of Yugoslavians. It was recognizable to the masses not so much because of its artistic merit, but more so because of its strangeness in the eyes of ‘common’ people, and its subject matter that celebrated the history of the Yugoslavian war of liberation against the occupying German forces. Its ideological message of a small nation rising out of the ashes of WWII was boldly intertwined with an abstract form to become a national icon.

The monument is also an embodiment of the Yugoslavian entry onto the world stage, and its ambition to become an international mediator between the East and the West. Just as the country became irrelevant in the post-Cold War politics of the late twentieth century, however, its form of socialist modernism disappeared into oblivion. Many of the socialist modernist works created from 1956 to 1989 have been destroyed in the last two decades. It is my intent to uncover these twentieth century ruins and connect their character and meaning to larger questions about the history of modernism in general—and socialist modernism in particular—and how they are embedded in the projects of modern nation building.

This chapter therefore traces intermingled aesthetic and sociopolitical narratives in official Yugoslavian art after 1954 in order to show parallels between the country’s

increasingly complicated internal and external politics, and the development of the particular form of socialist modernism. International modernism and American modernism were introduced to the Yugoslavian public in the 1950s and represented an invaluable tool in transferring the ideas of universalism, tolerance, and mediation that became the official policies of the Yugoslav state. While the state initiated the building of what Susan Buck-Morss defines as a “socialist dreamworld,”² in this case Yugoslavian self-management, it also encouraged artists to participate in building socialist culture by adopting formal and conceptual elements of international modernism and incorporate them into the universalist, utopian, democratic rhetoric of the state. Adoption of international modernism and its adaptation to Yugoslavian context was influenced by artists’ existing interest in it, and by important political transformations that the Yugoslav state initiated around this time.

I first define what socialist modernism was by examining interaction between the cultural and sociopolitical forces that allowed its implementation and influenced its formal and conceptual character. My argument makes direct links between the aesthetic and the political. I then proceed to analyze several examples of socialist modernist official art, which received its most powerful treatment in the building of monumental memorial sites. The sites chosen for my discussion are analyzed both as prime examples of socialist modernism, and as part of the project of building collective memory, and by extension, the idea of the Yugoslav nation-state itself. Socialist modernism became the official style of national memory and identity.

² Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2000), 25.

Defining State Socialist Modernism

Socialist modernism was an alternative form of high modernism that developed as a result of Yugoslavia's attempt to be socialist yet open to Western capitalism and its cultures. The history of its adoption is intricately connected to the earlier period of socialist realism. In Chapter One I analyzed the tumultuous years immediately after WWII, during which the official state culture looked to socialist realism as the dominant visual expression of the socialist revolution. The history of its short-lived reign was more complex than usually described in art historical accounts. The art world's multifaceted relationship to socialist realism was influenced by its liveliness and variety, and by the public political and social debates opened by Yugoslavia distancing itself from the Soviet Union in 1949. The art world was divided between socialist realist supporters on the one hand, and those more inclined towards a modernist avant-garde on the other. This came as a result of the constant negotiation between artistic autonomy and the institutionalized, bureaucratic tendencies of the socialist state. As I argue, the differences between the two camps were, however, more blurred than initially appears, as even the clearer examples of socialist realism exhibited modernist formal tendencies. What I describe as a hybrid between socialist realism and modernism in Yugoslavia provided a foundation for a relatively smooth transition to socialist modernism in the late 1950s.

As also noted in Chapter One, Yugoslavian mainstream art therefore opened to high modernist influences in the 1950s, incorporating abstract, semi-abstract, and non-

representational characteristics.³ Its move toward modernism was affected by several crucial elements: a large number of younger artists who voiced their adherence to a modernist aesthetic; the increasingly powerful influence of the US on Yugoslavia's politics, economy, and culture; and finally, Yugoslavia's own internal struggles to find an alternative socio-political and cultural identity to that proposed by the Soviet Union. Eventually, under the pressure of these forces, modernism became the officially sanctioned, state-funded form of art. While it developed in its own idiosyncratic way, it retained some of the crucial high modernist qualities that allowed Yugoslavia to carve out a space on the international art scene. The seemingly neutral, autonomous, individualistic character of high modernism appealed to the Yugoslav state because it embarked on incorporating liberal political ideas into its self-management system.⁴

Given the complex socio-cultural and political elements shaping the character of official Yugoslavian socialist modernism, it is important to place it in a clear relationship to other modernist tendencies across the world. Modernism as a term has been the subject

³ Miodrag B. Protic ed., *Jugoslovensko slikarstvo seste decenije*, (Beograd: Muzej Savremene Umetnosti, 1980), 17.

⁴ Political scientist Sabrina P. Ramet makes an argument that in fact the failure of Yugoslavian socialist state can be traced back to the 1950s when the state attempted to transform its socialist system by introducing a series of liberal reforms, however, according to Ramet these were never fully implemented which led to a crisis in legitimacy of the state and its eventual breakup. Although Ramet's argument is problematic, as she insists on a particular political structure based on traditional liberal formulations and ignores a more classic Marxist understanding of state-building, her observation about the attempts on the part of the Yugoslav state to introduce more democratic approach to social and political organization, and its links to liberalism are valid and important because it is these precise notions that lent themselves so well to the adoption of modernism in the cultural sphere. For more see: Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State Building and Legitimation 1918-2005*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

of numerous studies and has been theorized in multiple ways. One of the most interesting characteristics of modernism was its malleability, which allowed it to penetrate various societies and cultures across the world, creating hybrid forms along the way. Socialist modernism as discussed here is but one of the many such forms that developed both in spite of modernist hegemony and with its help. In my research I rely on a definition of high modernism as characterized by a tendency towards universalism, a belief in utopian possibilities of the modernist project, and a striving towards formalism.⁵ Although these characteristics by no means capture all of the nuances of modernist cultural activity, their preeminence within modernism is undeniable. As such these qualities became a major part of the official language of the Yugoslav culture.

Institutionalization of art was another major characteristic of developments in the global spread of modernism. How artists negotiated their place in the modernist ethos largely depended on how they positioned themselves within specific artistic institutions that modernism created. More importantly, each artistic institution was closely dependent on the ways in which nation states decided to organize artistic life. Although the modernist aesthetic demands autonomy of artistic form and content, this autonomy was tested in all versions of modernism across the globe, as individual artists and institutions had to position themselves vis-à-vis their nation states, the funding these nation states provided, and the weight that each nation state placed on its national cultural production. Yugoslavia was no exception, but how these issues were negotiated and the shape they took in Yugoslavia was unique.

⁵ See: Johanna Drucker. *Theorizing Modernism: Visual Art and the Critical Tradition*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

By the post-war period modernism's centre had shifted from Europe to the US, where its radical utopian impulse shifted, at least in its dominant discourses, towards the liberal values of Western Capitalism.⁶ Despite this, its characteristics were transformed as it spread to the rest of the world, with specific countries adjusting and adopting its general premises in different ways. Modernism's geographical and political intricacies are astounding, and its ability to hybridize, adapt, and transform itself is uncanny. I therefore distinguish between international modernism (an umbrella term referencing a general movement in intellectual, cultural, and artistic tendencies from the late 18th century to the mid 20th century); high, or late modernism (referring to the modernist tendencies after WWII and cultural institutionalization); Yugoslavian socialist modernism; American modernism; and finally, European modernism. Each version developed within its own set of aesthetic and political parameters and characteristics.

In the 1950s international modernism was going through a major transformation brought on by post-WWII devastation and by Cold War tensions. Influenced by Existentialism, some artists on the European continent, for example, Jean Dubuffet and Antoni Tàpies, lost their faith in the culture of modernism and questioned modernist aesthetic premises by turning to non-professional and "outsider art" in order to point to the modernist failures.⁷ On the other hand, as I noted, at critical points during and after

⁶ Jonathan Harris, "Abstract Expressionism and the Politics of Criticism," in *Modernism in Dispute: Art Since the Forties*, ed. Paul Wood et al. (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press in association with The Open University, 1993), 42; Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, transl. Michael Shaw, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

⁷ Serge Guilbaut "Disdain for the Stain," in *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context*, Marter, Joan M, ed. (Rutgers University Press, 2007), 42-44.

the war, modernism crossed the Atlantic and became an American cultural export as New York took over as the economic capital of the West and the capital of Western modernism.⁸

Post war, or high modernism, especially in the United States, became increasingly close to liberal politics, which were on the rise in the West.⁹ Liberal emphasis on individualism, entrepreneurship, and subjective human agency provided a counterpoint to the totalitarian regimes of the first half of the twentieth century and the subsequent creation of the Warsaw Pact.¹⁰ Some of those in the modernist movement who were leftist before WWII, were now, as a reaction to the Soviet totalitarian policies, turning to alternative political views, eventually becoming sympathetic to theorizing modernism as an entirely separate sphere from the social. Yugoslavian artists who were searching for an alternative to now-rejected socialist realism found themselves in the middle of this post-war transformation of the modernist ethos, exploring what kind of modernism best suited the newly emerging moderate socialism.

The spread and development of modernism in Yugoslavia was strongly influenced by external social and political pressures, especially those exerted by the United States. The Yugoslavian government was aware of the American priorities in the Balkans and it slowly forged new relationships with the West. Yet while it negotiated aid packages and loans with the Americans, the IMF and the World Bank, it also initiated

⁸ Serge, Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 44.

⁹ Nancy Jachec, "Modernism, Enlightenment Values, and Clement Greenberg," *Oxford Art Journal*, (21. 2 1998), 4.

¹⁰ See: Nancy Jachec, *The Philosophy and Politics of Abstract Expressionism 1940-1960*, (Cambridge University Press, April 2000), 30.

negotiations with the emerging economies in the far East, the Middle East and Africa — in keeping with the the Yugoslavian commitment to anti imperialism. American political influence, however, was undeniable as Yugoslavia struggled with post-war rebuilding. Paralleling this influence were major cultural events that took place roughly around the same time. What Jonathan Harris calls the “Americanization of modernism”¹¹ became a pivotal element in the transformation of the Yugoslavian art scene. Several international exhibitions were organized in the early and mid 1950s in three major Yugoslavian cities — Zagreb, Belgrade, and Ljubljana. These were crucial for the acceptance of modernism as a mainstream cultural form. By far the most important of the three was the *Contemporary Art of the United States of America* organized in 1956.

The dominant current view of the *Contemporary Art of the United States* exhibition has been Jesa Denegri’s argument that the show had a great influence on the local artists, as it opened them up to a world of new artistic possibilities.¹² Contrary to this, I argue that these shows were indeed crucial, not so much in the way they influenced artists as the way in which they influenced art’s audiences and publically announced Yugoslavia’s new cultural politics. Younger artists were formally and informally participating in various forms of international cooperation through exhibitions and education and were already exposed to new aesthetic ideas.¹³ It was the audiences, and in

¹¹ Ibid, 62.

¹² Jesa Denegri, *Teme Srpske umetnosti 1945-1970, Od socialistickog realizma do kineticke umetnosti*, (Beograd: Vujicic Kolekcija: Srpska umetnost XX veka, 2009), 95.

¹³ All of the major post-war modernist artists from Yugoslavia had international residencies or exhibited internationally both before WWII and after it. For example Vojin Bakic participated in a one-month art residency in Paris in 1949 (Tonko Maroevic, "Vojin Bakic," in *Likovna Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*, ed. Zarko Domljan. Anonymous

particular, the socialist, political cadres who visited the show, that were important for the support and institutionalization of international modernism as an official socialist art.

As high modernism moved from Paris to New York, it also became institutionalized across the world and implicated in larger questions of international politics. The shift in American modernist art towards “modernist orthodoxy” established “the rhetoric of ‘purity’ and ‘autonomy’” in the context of the politics of the Cold War.¹⁴ Both Jonathan Harris and Nancy Jachec argue that the politics of aesthetics were transformed as a result of an intricate coordination between artistic institutions, patrons, and of course, political interests of the Western, and particularly American, elites who recognized the power of their cultural exports to create a specific representation of the West, and America, in the world.¹⁵ Harris also emphasizes the anti-Soviet climate of McCarthyism as the final crucial element in the rise of the new American modernist supremacy.¹⁶ The actual and symbolic tug of war between the two superpowers was clearly detectable in modernist formalism

(Zagreb: Jugoslavenski Leksikografski Zavod Miroslav Krleža, 1984), 62. Dusan Dzamonja also spent several months in Paris in 1953 [Zeljko Sabol, "Dusan Dzamonja," in *Likovna Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*, ed. Zarko Domljan, (Zagreb: Jugoslavenski Leksikografski Zavod Miroslav Krleža, 1984), 375-376.] Petar Lubarda travelled throughout Europe in the 1920s and '30s. He had his first solo show in Rome in 1929 and participated in *Salon des Independants* in 1927 [Miodrag Kolaric, "Petar Lubarda," in *Likovna Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*, ed. Zarko Domljan, (Zagreb: Jugoslavenski Leksikografski Zavod Miroslav Krleža, 1987), 209-211.] Zoran Music intermittently lived and worked in Venice and Paris in the 1940s and early 1950s. He exhibited both in Europe and in Yugoslavia [Franc Zalar, "Zoran Music," in *Likovna Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*, ed. Zarko Domljan, (Zagreb: Jugoslavenski Leksikografski Zavod Miroslav Krleža, 1987), 402].

¹⁴ Harris, *Abstract Expressionism and the Politics of Criticism*, 62.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 42.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 57.

and in its increasing popularity.¹⁷ Yugoslavia's move towards modernism is an example of the success of American foreign policy, which promoted its art as a way to advance its political influence.¹⁸

At their height, modernist tendencies became a political battleground for the hearts and minds of the world in order to showcase the possibilities of the freedom of expression that the capitalist West wanted to convince the world it embodied. Harris and Jachec elaborate on this by pointing out how post-war abstraction, especially the type dominant in American art, because of its emphasis on the autonomous artwork as a stand-alone formal unit, lent itself well to American political goals. The large-scale, bold, colourful canvases of the Abstract Expressionists had the optimism, passion, and boldness of the new superpower itself. Historian Frances Saunders quotes Donald Jameson, a CIA agent in charge of liaisons with the American art establishment, on agency's perception of Abstract Expressionism and its usefulness in the Cold War:

We recognized that this was the kind of art that did not have anything to do with socialist realism, and made socialist realism look even more stylized and more rigid and confined than it was. And that relationship was exploited in some of the exhibits. Moscow in those days was very vicious in its denunciation of any kind of non-conformity to its own very rigid patterns. So one could quite adequately and accurately reason that anything they criticized that much and that heavy-handedly was worth support one way or another.¹⁹

¹⁷ Paradoxically the move towards more autonomous artistic expression was at the same time a political move which established American supremacy over international cultural production but in a particular ideological way which as Harris argues promoted triumphalism and autochthon characteristic which came out of American struggle for intellectual and aesthetic expression. Harris, 63

¹⁸ For more see: Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of the Arts and Letters*, (New York: The New Press, 1999).

¹⁹ Donald Jameson, "Interview, Washington, June 1994" Quoted in Saunders, Frances Stonor. *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of the Arts and Letters*, (New York: The New Press, 1999), 260.

Combined with the spread of desires and glamour of the new mass and consumer cultures following WWII, Abstract Expressionist monumental, solid, and iconic paintings became some of the most successful exports, embodying individualism, personal and political autonomy, economic growth, free speech, and democracy.²⁰

The American modernist aesthetic, in that sense, played an ideological role of promoting the established order of commodity exchange and life under a market economy. It did so not by teaching the masses through idealized, literalist illustrations of rising industry and happy workers, but by creating abstract, bold, and monumental images that, through their size, texture, movement, and relationship to the viewer's body conveyed freedom, and more importantly created a desire for it. This new relationship with the world through abstraction is definitively described by Meyer Schapiro in his classic text "The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art" (1957) in which he explains the

²⁰ The success of American modernism, however, needs to be prefaced by pointing out that it too had a difficult reception in its own country. Ironically, its precarious public life and acceptance stemmed from the fact that a great number of Americans, especially those in the political circles, did not want to understand or adopt modernist tendencies as part of American cultural values. Instead modernist works were perceived with suspicion, cited as examples of communist espionage and European perverse values. There was a deep rift within the ranks of the American elite as more conservative among them refused to accept modernism, while other saw it as the crown jewel in the American political, military, and cultural victory of the WWII. As a result the promotion of American modernism was handled through backchannels by which CIA funded private art institutions (such as MOMA for example,) making sure their funding could not be directly traced back. Saunders cites Donald Jameson as saying that the American artists were also largely unaware of these backroom deals because they "were people who had very little respect for the government in particular, and certainly none for the CIA." Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of the Arts and Letters*, 260.

shift in visual consciousness provided by post-war art.²¹ This is one of the most intriguing paradoxes of modernist art—that it became a vehicle of political and economic promotion just as it was announcing its retreat from the sociopolitical sphere.

Echoes of complicated international cultural relationships can be felt in the 1956 show *Contemporary Art of the United States of America* organized by Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in Yugoslavia. In his introductory note in the exhibition catalogue, director Rene d'Harnoncourt expresses Yugoslavia's important role in the development of positive international relations:

Cooperation established by Yugoslavia in the field of art activities within the UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization]²² mandate, its participation in various international artistic exhibitions, and a rich program through which the Committee of International Relations organizes exhibitions from other countries, are a testimony to Yugoslavia's affirmation that one of the most powerful instruments of promotion of understanding among various peoples of the world is through exchange of art.²³

Further on d'Harnoncourt acknowledges Yugoslavia's "strong contemporary artistic scene" and expresses his excitement at having the first such show of American art in

²¹ Meyer Schapiro, "The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art," *Art News* 56, no. 4 (1957): 38.

²² UNESCO was formed under the auspices of UN as UN's cultural arm. Its mandate is to protect, promote, fund, and develop world heritage. For more see: "Introducing UNESCO," in UNESCO.org [database online]. [cited 2013]. Available from <https://en.unesco.org/about-us/introducing-unesco>.

²³ *Saradnja koju Jugoslavija ostvaruje u aktivnostima iz oblasti umetnosti u okviru UNESCO-a, njeno ucesce na raznim medjunarodnim umetnickim izlozama i bogat program kojim Komisija za veze sa inostranstvom organizuje izlozbe iz drugih zemalja, sve ovo svedoci o njenom uverenju da je razmena umetnickih tvorevina jedno od najmocnijih instrumenata kojim se kuje razumevanje medju narodima sveta.* Rene d'Harnoncourt, "Uvod," in *Katalog savremena umetnost u SAD iz zbirki Museum of Modern Art New York*, ed. Komisija za kulturne veze sa inostranstvom FNRJ, (Beograd: Umetnicki paviljon na Kalemegdanu, Muzej fresaka, Galerija ULUS, 1956), 3. [My translation]

post-war Yugoslavia.²⁴ What d'Harnoncourt alluded to was the presence of modernist art exemplified in the work of the *December Group* and the *Group of Six*, both operating in Belgrade, and artists Oton Gliha, Vojin Bakic, and Petar Lumbarda all of whom moved towards abstraction around this time. The same year that the MOMA show toured Yugoslavian cities, representatives of the “new trend” were chosen to represent Yugoslavia at the 1956 Venice Biennale: Miodrag Protic, Lazar Vujaklija, Vojin Bakic, Marij Pregelj and Zoran Music.²⁵ The tone of d'Harnoncourt's text expresses an eagerness of the U.S. policymakers to support a more moderate form of socialist governance and culture as a counterpoint to the rigidity of the Soviets.²⁶ This opening and proliferation of international cultural relations between Yugoslavia and the West (namely the U.S., the World Bank, and the IMF,) followed a series of U.S. economic policies which, starting in 1949 and Yugoslavia's break with Stalin, increasingly propped up its economy through loans and other economic measures.

Political scientist Susan Woodward has extensively written about this particular political and economic strategy in *Balkan tragedy: chaos and dissolution after the Cold War* (1995). She outlines Yugoslavia's economic predicament following WWII and its survival due to U.S.-led economic aid:

²⁴ Ibid, 4.

²⁵ Marijan & Zinaic Susovski Milan. ed., *Venecijanski biennale i jugoslavenska moderna umjetnost 1895.-1988, katalog izlozbe*, (Zagreb: Muzej suvremene umjetnosti i Graficki zavod Hrvatske, 1988).

²⁶ The propping of the Yugoslavian moderate form of socialism as a contrast to the rigidity of Moscow's policies in Eastern Europe parallels the urban renewal of the Western Berlin in the 1960s as an instant, visual, reminder of the advantages of capitalism.

The regime survived thanks to U.S. military aid, U.S.-orchestrated economic assistance from the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, U.S. Export-Import Bank, and foreign banks; and the restoration of trade relations with the West after August 1949. In exchange, socialist Yugoslavia played a critical role for U.S. global leadership during the cold war: as a propaganda tool in its anticommunist and anti-Soviet campaign and as an integral element of NATO's policy in the eastern Mediterranean. Jealously guarding its neutrality.²⁷

It is not a surprise, then, that the first exhibition of contemporary American art took place in 1956 as a way of symbolically sealing Yugoslavia's status of a neutral and important socialist state.

For the American interests in the East Mediterranean, and so close to the Warsaw Pact, it was crucial to support a moderate Yugoslav state. The loans and Yugoslavia's early induction into international trade agreements supported this American strategy.²⁸ As a consequence of these economic and political decisions in the early 1950s, Yugoslavia managed to develop a solid industrial system, to modernize its economy and society, and finally, to start exporting its goods internationally. The immediate result of such changes was that Yugoslavia became a socialist country that increasingly adopted elements of a market economy. More importantly for its burgeoning culture, Yugoslavia also built a vibrant consumer society, which allowed for the development of a modest art market. All these factors fed back into the American policy of propping up Yugoslavia as a new and moderate system, keeping it away from Stalin and communism proper.

Cultural implementation of socialist modernism is a testament to the shift in Yugoslavia's foreign policy, which increasingly emphasized the need to find a third

²⁷ Susan L Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1995), 25.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

option between the two political Blocs. Culmination of this search came in 1961 when Yugoslavia became a founding nation (along with India and Egypt) of the Non-Aligned movement. The official core values of the Non-Aligned (peaceful coexistence, collaboration, universal rights, equality, and mutual respect)²⁹ closely overlapped with the aesthetics of international modernism (universalism, individualism, autonomy). In its promotion of universal, humanist, and utopian ideals, socialist modernism also paralleled the Yugoslav self-management system based on workers' self-governance, equality, and cooperation.³⁰ In fact there were many overlaps between traditional Marxism³¹ and modernist aesthetics, as both trace their originary moment to the Enlightenment. It was a natural outcome of Yugoslavia's Marxist traditionalism to espouse international modernism as a familial concept and marry it with centrist views.³²

Immediately after its expulsion from the Communist Information Bureau, Yugoslavia sought out other international allies who did not belong to either of the two

²⁹ K. Krishna Rao ed., *Non-Aligned and Developing Countries: Basic Documents*, Anonymous (New Delhi: Indian Society of International Law, 1970), 6.

³⁰ Petranovic, Branko. "Radnicki saveti." *Istorija Jugoslavije: Socijalisticka Jugoslavija 1955-1988*. Vol.III, (Beograd: Nolit, 1988), 288-291.

³¹ I use the term 'traditional Marxism' here to refer to some of the basic premises of the Marxist thought prior to the development of the later 20th century neo-Marxist and post-Marxist philosophies. Within the concept of 'traditional Marxism' are numerous ideas that have developed since the original Marx's writing. Traditional Marxism, as developed by Marx and those immediately after him, have been criticized in the work of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in *Dialectics of Enlightenment*.

³² The state's and communist Party's inability to implement a more radical political reform of socialism created an ongoing tension between different political fractions in Yugoslavia. Traditional views on Marxism continually blocked more forward-looking plans for the future of the country, creating a continually shifting political system. The most complete critique of this is found in the work of the philosophical group Praxis. For more see: Mihajlo Markovic and Gajo Petrovic, eds, *Praxis: Yugoslav Essays in the Philosophy and Methodology of the Social Sciences, Volume 36*, (Dordrecht: Holland, Boston: U.S.A., London: England: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1977).

Blocs. In 1954 President Tito embarked on a long international tour, visiting a number of African, Latin American, Asian, and Middle Eastern countries. In 1955, after the famous Bandung Conference,³³ Tito made closer contacts with Egypt's President Anwar Nasser and President Jawaharial Nehru of India. In the summer of 1956 the three met on the small Croatian island of Briuni where they set up the basic tenets of the future Non-Aligned movement.

The Non-Aligned was an international movement seeking cooperation between countries that did not want to become part of either of the two Blocs. Theirs was a political, economic, and cultural cooperation based on forging alliances with countries that were perceived by the two power blocs not as "equal partners in international relations" but as insignificant or simply as "a kind of a reserve or a voting machine in international forums such as the United Nations and others."³⁴ More importantly the tenets of the movement were based on anti-colonialism, and fighting for sustained political and economic independence. President Tito's second speech at the Belgrade conference addresses this:

It is simply unbelievable that some colonial powers cannot or do not want to understand the spirit of our times and the processes which are

³³ The Bandung Conference organized in Indonesia in 1955 was a first meeting of the newly-emerging post-colonial states from Africa and Asia. The conference was imagined as a way of securing space for the countries that did not belong to either of the two blocks. It became a stepping-stone for the forming of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961. See: Christopher J. Lee ed., *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2010) ; George McTurnan Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1956).

³⁴ John F. Kennedy, *President Tito's Speech: Non-Aligned Nations summit meeting, Belgrade, 1 September 1961* (Washington D.C.: Presidential Papers. President's Office Files., September 1961), NN11.

now taking place. They cannot resign themselves to the inevitable historical process which is now taking place in Africa and Asia; they cannot resign themselves to the fact that the last hour of colonialism has struck. In this they are not hesitating to resort to the most savage bloodshed and terror against unarmed peoples.³⁵

The politics of the Non-Aligned reverberated deeply in the Yugoslavian consciousness and became one of the most important political and cultural characteristics of Yugoslavian socialism. During the 1961 conference President Tito reiterated Yugoslavia's solidarity with all the colonized peoples, expressing the importance of anti-colonial struggle for Yugoslavians. "My country, like other countries represented in this conference, has emerged from a state of colonial domination after a long struggle full of sacrifice."³⁶ Similar sentiment was repeated in Yugoslavian media, the President's public addresses, and popular literature.³⁷ Movement values of negotiation, cooperation, and support were promoted as official Yugoslav cultural tropes and therefore were embedded in all the institutional structures.

It is not a coincidence that in the same year the MOMA exhibition was organized in Yugoslavia, the country embarked on a crucial new geopolitical trajectory. Modernist art that was introduced to the larger audiences in the 1950s was a perfect vehicle to carry the meanings of universalism, tolerance, and mediation that now became the official Yugoslav politics. For d'Harnoncourt, the show was a vehicle for promotion of modernism as a valid, and indeed desirable, cultural expression, and for the Yugoslavian

³⁵ President Tito's Speech: Non-Aligned Nations summit meeting, Belgrade, 5 September 1961, John F. Kennedy Presidential Papers. President's Office Files, NN7.

³⁶ Ibid, NN 22.

³⁷ See for example: Dusan Zivkovic ed., *Tito: Ceterdeset godina na ceklu SKJ 1937-1977* (Beograd, Ljubljana, Skoplje: Narodna knjiga, Partizanska knjiga, OOUR Monos, Nova Makedonija, 1979).

cultural establishment the show represented a token of its opening towards the West, its now new Non-Aligned policies, and its distancing from the Soviets.

The importance of such large international shows and their influence on Yugoslavian art, as well as the dispute between socialist realism and modernism, has been acknowledged by the recent art historical work by Ljiljana Kolesnik. In *Croatian Art Criticism in the 1950s* (2005) Kolesnik points to the intertwining of political structures and artistic life in the former Yugoslavia. She suggests that Yugoslavian culture embraced a modernist orthodoxy through domestic and international debates and pressures.³⁸ Kolesnik, however, dismisses the earlier debates among Yugoslav intellectuals, such as Miroslav Krleža, over what constitutes true socialist art as dogmatic and problematic, claiming that modernism was the only way of escaping Croatian and Yugoslavian cultural provincialism.³⁹ For Kolesnik, the MOMA exhibition and its political and economic contexts represented a welcome change towards modernism as the logical cultural and aesthetic choice for Yugoslavian artists.

Kolesnik's dismissal of the earlier Yugoslavian cultural debates as reactionary, however, misses an important point: the debates were pervaded by serious, often confrontational and politicized, but crucial ideas about the nature of art in the twentieth century in light of World War II, and the post-colonial world. Although in some ways

³⁸ Ljiljana Kolesnik, *Između Istoka i Zapada: hrvatska umjetnost i likovna kritika 50.-ih godina*, Studije i monografije Instituta za povjest umjetnosti, (Zagreb: Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 2006), 463.

³⁹ Kolesnik often uses polemical language when describing squabbles over meaning and place of art, calling the Croatian art 'provincial' between 1945-1950. She dismisses the importance of debates (no matter how dogmatic or political they might seem,) on the Croatian and Yugoslavian art scene. Kolesnik, *Između Istoka i Zapada*, 92-94.

problematic, the public discussions of the early post war period involving the leading critics and artists marked the first time that Yugoslavia understood itself as being not on the margins of European culture, but as having potential to intervene in, and even change cultural hegemony. The state's concurrent attempts at finding an alternative socialist socio-political model contributed to how intellectuals imagined the new culture would look. Possibilities envisioned in these early years were important because many of the discussions took place in the public domain (especially those in the form of art reviews and criticism in daily newspapers) and therefore afforded a wider audience. After 1956, when it became clear that high modernism was there to stay, discussions of art and culture were relegated to the professionalized artistic sphere and largely abandoned by the wider national audiences.

Modernism transformed Yugoslavian art into what Peter Burger defined in his *Theory of the Avant-garde* (1984) as “apolitical high modernism.”⁴⁰ Yugoslavian artists developed a hybrid art that expressed maladaptive forms somewhere between high modernist apolitical tendencies and artists' commitment to social change. The tension between the two engendered paradoxical aesthetic practices that were supposed to speak to the masses, while also being committed to the autonomy of art. By abandoning earlier critical discussions about the relationship of art to life, and relegating art to an autonomous and safely separated sphere, Yugoslavian art opened itself up to the normalizing force of the international modernist movement, whose aesthetic hegemony was further asserted by economic and political policies coming from the U.S.-backed

⁴⁰ Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, transl. Michael Shaw, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 26-27.

Western institutions (such as MOMA). I suggest that although it was practically impossible for Yugoslavia to establish an independent aesthetic production given its precarious international geopolitical and cultural standing, its form of modernism developed as a hybrid of high modernist forms, and utopian socialist politics.

International forces that propelled Yugoslavia's quick adoption of modernism were equaled by important shifts in the country's internal political and economic structures. In light of its international standing and interests, the state saw institutionalization and bureaucratization of the self-managing model as the only way to stabilize its socialist system.⁴¹ The work on this started in the early 1960s. As this process was contrary to the principles of the original version of self-management, the state was compelled to replace actual social transformation with a ramped-up political apparatus that nominally resembled its earlier revolutionary form. In the process, a gap was created between the high-minded theories initially expressed by the communist party's intellectual elite, and the actualities of everyday life now organized through an hierarchical social system. The only way the state knew to close this gap was to employ a variety of ideological mechanisms imbued with utopian rhetoric that would compel the people to act in the state's interest. Around the same time, the Party announced that it no longer wished to be the vanguard of the people's revolution; its role would now be to guide and instruct the citizenry towards their socialist future.⁴² At that point the party

⁴¹ See: Katherine Hilde Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia: Tito, Communist Leadership, and the National Question*, International Library of Twentieth Century History. (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2012); Milovan Djilas, *The new class: an analysis of the communist system*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1957).

⁴² Haug Kristine. *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 35.

declared itself simply an ideological, if not a spiritual, leader employing its “soft powers” of persuasion via cultural, artistic, and educational influence, rather than through the overt “hard power” of the police state.

In these circumstances, art, along with the mass media and education, became one of the most important ways through which the state protected its national and international interests. Along with the ossification of the state apparatus, cultural institutions were also ossified by implementing numerous committees, policies, and cultural bodies, which regulated the implementation and functioning of ideological processes. Cultural institutions were seen as repositories of the nation’s socialist agenda and therefore afforded full state sponsorship. The adoption of socialist modernism as the official visual expression of the state was an important step in its move towards creating a more humane face of socialism, and its emphasis on guiding, rather than leading social transformation. In short, political reasons for the support of socialist modernism lay in the country’s attempt to carve out its own socialist path, become an active member of the international community, and participate in the forming of the Non-Aligned movement.⁴³

The character of Yugoslavia’s socialist modernism was therefore shaped by its relationship to the Yugoslav state and its institutions. I wish to distinguish here between the two types of socialism at work in Yugoslavia, which paralleled the two types of socialist modernism that would develop. One was the revolutionary socialism, still a part of the official national rhetoric, which was related to the pre-war and war-time Communist struggle, and the other was bureaucratic, state-socialism which developed

⁴³ Branko Petranovic, *Istorija Jugoslavije: Socijalisticka Jugoslavija 1955-1988*, vol. III, (Beograd: Nolit, 1988).

later as a consequence of ossification and bastardization of initial socialist ideals. Revolutionary socialism was in many ways utopian and idealistic. Echoes of it were embedded in the party's attempts, beginning in the early 1950s, to restructure Yugoslavia via the theory of self-management. Paradoxically, as it initiated this process, the Communist Party leadership stopped short of full implementation.⁴⁴ The second type of socialism resulted from the aborted attempt at reform. The resulting system was a form of state socialism, or bureaucratic socialism, which depended on massive state apparatuses initiated and organized as a way of protecting the interests of the party and the state instead of the people.⁴⁵ State socialism was at odds with the ideals of its revolutionary counterpart, although the latter was supposedly the type of socialism that the Yugoslavian state officially endorsed. One of the top party leaders, Milovan Djilas (and the most famous Yugoslav dissident) qualified state socialism as the reign of the "new class" of socialist managers and elites.⁴⁶ In a series of articles in the late 1950s, Djilas

⁴⁴ This is where we see a tension between the will to reform socialism and the inability to move beyond traditional, even conservative, Marxist thought. Historian Hilde Katrine Haug argues that the Party, and Tito in particular, was too pragmatic in their understanding of socialism, and in their implementation to fully enact the necessary changes that the theory of self-management demanded. If it had been implemented properly self-management system would have imparted a full authority to the local workers' organization, in effect creating a form of direct democracy that did not require ideological leadership of the state, or the communist party. While a small group of party intellectuals saw this as a welcomed outcome of the process of moving towards truly revolutionary ideals, majority could not allow for the consequences such a system would bring to Yugoslavia. Milovan Djilas was among those who considered self-management as a step up towards establishing a democratic socialist system, however he never managed to change the minds of those in power and instead was arrested and ostracized from the Party. For more see: Katrine Hilde Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia: Tito, Communist Leadership and the National Question*.

⁴⁵ Milovan Djilas, *The New Class*, 45.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 45.

criticized Yugoslavian socialism as a new form of class society run by the socialist bourgeoisie, which furthered inequality and alienation. His words went unheeded and full reform was never fully implemented.

The result was a general conservatism culturally and socially that was reflected in a heavy bureaucratic apparatus and forms of proletarian morality based on a mixture of the remnants of petit-bourgeois morals and socialist ideology. The official form of socialist modernism reflected some of conservatism of such culture, manifested through the publicly-endorsed art that supported state ideologies of nation-building, national history, and memory. Works that were favored had safe subject matter celebrating events from WWII, they referred to brotherhood and unity, and presented expressive, symbolic, emotional content. Their formal aspects were based on semi-abstract still lifes, landscapes, and stylized human forms as artists were now freely engaging in formal experimentation and continued to be expressive in the use of the materials.

A 1951 painting by Pedja Milosavljevic, showcased at the 1952 Venice Biennale, is an early example of the emerging official style (see Fig. 2.3). Milosavljevic's canvas depicts the aftermath of the 1951 earthquake in the coastal city of Dubrovnik. He concentrated on the city's landscape with two human figures in the forefront. The two people and the city are distorted, painted in expressive, thick, brushstrokes. The figures and the background seem to melt into each other. The painter formally treated



Figure 2. 3. Pedja Milosavljevic, *Potres u Dubrovniku* [*Earthquake in Dubrovnik*], oil on canvas, 1951.

them in the same manner, so that the human flesh is equally as unstable as the buildings destroyed in the earthquake. As an emotionally charged work with distorted and expressive human forms, this painting would not have been publically exhibited in the immediate post-war period dominated by socialist realism. Now, however, Milosavljevic's canvas was a prime example of Yugoslavia's recent entry into post-war modernism.

The tension between an increasing interest in modernism among Yugoslav artists and the exigencies of socialism, Yugoslav state politics, and its international relations resulted in a style that was committed both to the modernist aesthetic and to the state's ideological needs. These two forces—one calling for autonomous self-contained art as found in high modernism, and the other for a politicized culture—were seemingly at odds with each other. Yugoslavia's version of modernism, with its international iterations, was indeed steeped in political discourse, but not in the same activist sense as the early twentieth century avant-gardes, as for example, the Russian Constructivists. Socialist modernism became distanced from the political, but in its emphasis on the form and the themes preferred by the state, it spoke more emphatically to the liberal politics of late modernity. This was the paradox of socialist modernism: the more it retreated into its own autonomous sphere, the better it served the official state politics. This type of indirect political subtext was present not only in the works themselves, but also in the discourses of art education, exhibiting, collecting, and in the functioning of other artistic and cultural institutions. The resulting complex Yugoslavian cultural structures were both bureaucratic and hierarchical, and concomitantly, forward-looking and utopian.

Serbian art historian Sveta Lukic has qualified the official socialist modernism describing it as “socialist aestheticism”⁴⁷ or a marriage of convenience between art and the political establishment.

The fact that freedom of artistic expression affirmed the right to individual expression matched well with the concepts of particular political structures that aimed to remove one’s own responsibility for the development of art; for artists who were burnt out by socialist realism, it meant that they could distance their work from the social problems and realities of life. The politicized and vain society of the 1960s preferred art that did not disturb, or ask puzzling or “problematic” questions. Aestheticism aimed at discussion of formal laws and pictorial problems was modern enough to appease the general Yugoslav complex of being “open to the west,” traditional enough to satisfy bourgeois tastes developed in the general atmosphere of social conformity, and inert enough to fit into the myth of a happy and unified social whole—in short, it had all the elements to conform to the politically constructed image of the society.⁴⁸

The incorporation of an apolitical, autonomous art with the ideological demands of the state was met through the works, which were, for the most part, abstract or semi-abstract. This made them vague enough to subsume both the Party’s official agenda and modernist formal autonomy (like, for example, the public monuments discussed later in this chapter.) Echoing Lukic’s words, art critic Lazar Trifunovic described socialist

⁴⁷ Sveta Lukic, “Socijalistički estetizam,” in *Umetnost na mostu*, (Beograd: Ideje, 1975), 11.

⁴⁸ *To se dobro uklapalo u koncepcije odgovarajucih politickih struktura, posto je sloboda stvaralastva afirmisala pravo na licni izraz, sto je za politiku moglo da znaci i znacilo skidanje odgovornosti za subinu umetnosti, a za umetnike, opecene socrealizmom, odvajanje umetnosti od drustvene probelmatike i zivotne stvarnosti. Tom ispolitiziranom I u velikoj meri sujetnom drustvu seste decenije odgovarala je umetnost koja ga ne uznemiruje I koja mu ne postavlja zagonetna i ‘nezgodna’ pitanja. Usmeren ka zakonima forme I pikturalnim problemima slike, estetizam je bio dovoljno moderan da umiri opsti kompleks ‘otvorenosti prema svetu,’ dovoljno tradicionalan da zadovolji nov gradjanski ukus izrastao iz drustvenog konformizma I dovoljno inertan da se uklopi u mit srecne I jedinstvene zajednice,-on je imao sve sto je trebalo da se stopi s politicki projektovanom slikom drustva.* Sveta Lukic, “Socijalistički estetizam,” 11.

modernism or, as he termed it, aestheticism as art that did not pose difficult questions, nor stir cultural, social or political life of its time.⁴⁹ He singled out in this context the *December Group* and similar movements, which in the 1950s and '60s dominated the artistic scene in Belgrade and elsewhere in Yugoslavia. It would be wrong, however, to claim that socialist modernism was a unified movement; rather, as Jesa Denegri and Trifunovic argue, it represented a number of different styles and artistic groups that existed throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and later.⁵⁰ The works produced in this style could be easily molded to fit any number of meanings. Such meanings were usually non-confrontational and unproblematic, concentrated on purely formal questions of colour or composition. In order to satisfy ideological demands, artworks used appropriate themes and titles that referred to broad socialist ideals and yet were far removed from more serious probing of what socialism was truly accomplishing. Conformity to the hegemony of both the state and the modernist aesthetic proved to be a winning combination for state culture.

Jesa Denegri makes a convincing argument that Yugoslavian socialist modernism's retreat into a form of aestheticist⁵¹ art was a symptom of a burgeoning bourgeois

⁴⁹ Lazar, Trifunovic, "Oktobarski salon — u znaku mladih generacija," in Dragan Bulatovic ed., *Lazar Trifunovic: studije, ogledi, kritike*, (Beograd: Muzej savremene umetnosti Beograd, 1990), 197 originally published as "Oktobarski salon — u znaku mladih generacija," *NIN*, 5 oktobra 1961.

⁵⁰ See: Jerko Denegri "Inside or Outside 'Socialist Modernism'?: Radical Views on the Yugoslav Art Scene 1950-1970," in *Impossible Histories*, and Trifunovic, Lazar. *Enformel u Beogradu*, (Beograd: Umjetnicki Paviljon Cvijeta Zuzoric, 1982).

⁵¹ Denegri's use of the term aestheticism was related to earlier uses of the term by other Yugoslav art historians, most notably Sveta Lukic and Lazar Trifunovic who used the term to describe art that was characterized by its inclination to separate itself from the

culture.⁵² Yugoslavian society in the late 1950s was progressively becoming a class society with a growing urban socialist middle class. What Milovan Djilas called the “new class” was the audience for the nascent socialist modernist aesthetic. The departure from earlier forms of art had a particular formal, and subsequently, social character.⁵³

Denegri also underlines the importance of this artistic expression for the larger state ideology because of its character, which was removed from the everyday, or from the praxis of life. I would argue that this means that Socialist modernism was not attempting to address the needs and wants of the people in the way that art in the immediate post-war period tried to do; it was there to, in part, support the phantasmagoria of the socialist state apparatus.

An aestheticist, apolitical stance, its preoccupation with the purely pictorial and material aspects of art, and with formal question in general, suited, artists who wanted to avoid the scrutiny of political cadres. The new socialist elites were satisfied with that type of art and fully supported it. As one of the pre-eminent Yugoslav modernist architects, Bogdan Bogdanovic explained, President Tito and the Communist Party’s attitude towards modernism and abstraction was liberal:

social- to be autonomous, - by its insistence on formalism, and by ideologically correct and unproblematic narratives.

⁵² Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 26.

⁵³ “The Yugoslav art world generally becomes, in the mid-1950s, a relatively homogenous ideological organism that assumes in the course of time the characteristics and social standing of the mainstream, despite differing language models used in the articulation of the artists of each generation. We are not, of course, dealing with an official state and party artistic line here in the manner of socialist realism, but this was nevertheless a type of art that was generally, or even particularly, favoured by the powers that governed social promotion (benefits for exhibiting in the country, selections abroad, purchasing committees, and appointments of professors at art academies)” Jesa Denegri, "Inside or Outside ‘Socialist Modernism’?" 203.

Tito, in all truth, did not have much artistic discernment. But he understood that my monuments were not Russian monuments (at the time, unfortunately, all the best sculptors had adopted the Russian formula: headless bodies, wounded figures, stretchers . . .) When he saw me, a bizarre man with a surrealist biography, ready to build him constructions that weren't Russian, he said, "Let him!"⁵⁴

Trifunovic points out that the state needed to present its liberal policies of negotiation with the world powers, and openness towards Western-style democracy.⁵⁵ As long as artists contributed to these general prescripts without too much political interference, the state did not much care about how they went about doing so. The formal exigencies of modernism in Yugoslavia, therefore, followed closely the country's political moves.

Forms of Socialist Modernism: The Monumental Sculpture

Culture was to be operationalized. Its products would serve "progress" as the latter's visual representation . . . Constrained by the historical goal, revolutionary culture became sedate, conserving a past that appeared to lead meaningfully into the present, eschewing new primitivisms that blurred the line of progress, appealing to the masses by means of conventional art forms in order to mobilize them for movement "forward" in time.⁵⁶

In *Dreamworld and Catastrophe* (2002), Susan Buck-Morss proposes that post-revolutionary Russian avant-garde art and culture exemplified a new relationship to time, history, and the future. Although the Communist Party also proposed a new understanding of time, the two viewpoints diverged significantly. While the artists sought

⁵⁴ Alexandre Mirlesse, "Interview with Bogdan Bogdanovic," *Rencontre Europeenne* 7, no. February (2008): 4.

⁵⁵ Lazar Trifunovic, *Enformel u Beogradu*, 11.

⁵⁶ Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld*, 49.

to “estrangle the familiar” and “interrupt the continuity of perceptions” in the everyday, the Party proposed a rationalized, definite future and a “cosmology of the present.”⁵⁷ In both cases the future was at stake. However, unlike the Communist Party’s perceptions, the avant-garde perception of time was fluid, unstable, without certainty, and promising nothing but experimentation in an aesthetic and a political sense.⁵⁸ The Communist Party vision won over, arresting the revolution’s movement, which became “one of the dead ends of history.”⁵⁹ Although the Soviet state publicly announced that it had permanently turned towards the future, proclaiming scientific and technological utopia, its revolutionary gaze did not go far, that is, it lasted only until 1989. During these years, symbolic representations of utopia increased in inverse proportion to the Communist Party’s failure to implement it.

Similar paradoxes in ideological systems took place in Yugoslavia where, once the socialist revolution was fully enacted, its liberatory utopian elements were silenced and replaced by ossified, bureaucratic structures. As the state attempted to build national unity and self-managing socialism, it increasingly did so by abandoning some of its more lofty revolutionary ideals. The demands of modernization and industrialization were followed by the creation of a large bureaucratic system with a new ruling elite, and the utopianism of the early war and post-war years dissipated.⁶⁰ The political ossification of socialist ideas was

⁵⁷ Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld*, 48.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 49.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 51.

⁶⁰ For more on the bureaucratization of Yugoslavian socialism see: Djilas, *The new class: an analysis of the communist system*,

simultaneous with Yugoslavia's cultural move towards its Western counterparts by importing, and then adapting, forms of popular entertainment, culture, fashion, and consumerism. Revolutionary ideals of socialism, equality, and Non-Alignment partly became empty gestures, a façade, through which the state kept the dreamworld alive. Socialist Yugoslavia became a society paying lip service to the highest ideals of the revolution, while indulging in forms of Western phantasmagoria.

This trend, which started in the late 1950s and continued until Yugoslavia's breakup, was paralleled by an earnest implementation of public memorialization of the utopian ideals that were quickly disappearing from everyday life. In a sense, the state commenced a large-scale project of commemorations of its utopian vision and memory. All types of cultural creations were activated in the rebuilding of the public consciousness; the official, especially public art, was key to maintaining the vision of utopia. Now, while adhering to the apparently neutral language of modernism, public art could clearly speak to the needs of the State.

State socialist art and culture were imposed most successfully through building sites of public memory and pilgrimage, or what Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger have dubbed "invented traditions" of state politics.⁶¹ The monumental, hybrid sculptural/architectural projects served to sustain national and social cohesion, with ideological narratives of progress and the future, and symbolic body politic. Examples

⁶¹ Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger, *Invention of Tradition*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

of these complex built environments can be found across the former Yugoslavia (although some have been destroyed during the wars of the 1990s),⁶² their sites chosen because of their significance in the history of the Yugoslav liberation movement, the socialist revolution and the sacrifices made during WWII. Starting in the late 1940s, thousands of monuments were commissioned by the state, various republics, and municipalities. The monuments varied from small plaques in village and town squares (Fig. 2.4) to monumental sculptures and architectural complexes carved into the natural landscape and comprising museum buildings, archives, and educational facilities.

The monuments commissioned by the state were designed in the socialist modernist mode. They are examples of the triumph of official socialist modernism, and are a testament to its appropriateness for building a network of meaning between political ideologies and sites of memory. Because most of the large-scale projects were built outside of urban centers, they served as a bridge between an

⁶² Since the wars of secession (1991-1995) in the former Yugoslavia countless monuments to partisans, communist revolution, and various WWII insurrections were either badly damaged or outright destroyed. No significant research on this cultuicide was done until relatively recently. Even though there are moves to counter this wave of destruction of public memorials, the efforts to do so have been sporadic at best. In the last ten years there was only one study done to catalogue and document the state of monuments in Croatia. No such research is done in other parts of the former Yugoslavia. It remains to be discussed as to how remaining monuments could be saved and properly contextualized. For more see: Juraj Hrzenjak ed., *Rusenje Antifasističkih spomenika u Hrvatskoj 1990-2000*, II izdanje s dodatkom ed. (Zagreb: Savez antifasističkih boraca Hrvatske, 2002).



Figure 2. 4. Krunoslav Buljevic, *Portrait bust of the partisan fighter Nikola Buljevic and a commemorative plaque with names of fallen WWII solders, 1974.*

increasingly urban population and remote sites where WWII battles took place. The monuments also allowed a new generation of urban Yugoslavs, born after WWII

and removed from revolutionary WWII politics, to forge bonds with these sites of memory. Because these places were envisioned as sites of pilgrimage, processes of embodied, often scripted, memorial rituals were regularly enacted. Especially after the late 1960s, the sites complemented numerous state events that sought to make the war of liberation meaningful to the younger, consumerist audiences. Apart from school trips organized by all primary and secondary schools in Yugoslavia to visit the sites, there were annual events when military, political, and cultural elites gathered to remember the great World War II battles. These events were spectacular in nature, involving hundreds of thousands of people, and included concerts, contemporary dance, and speeches.⁶³ Children, youth, and soldiers would place wreaths and pay their respects to the dead, often mimicking church processions.

Clean modernist forms, which characterized the design of such sculptures, paintings, prints, architectural structures, and other art, provided perfect vehicles for grafting socialist narratives onto the material and symbolic landscape of the country. Their abstract, stylized forms were operating as symbolic signs that in some cases mimicked the surrounding landscape, as in Miodrag Zivkovic's *Tjentiste* monument (Figs. 2.5 and 2.6), or as was the case with the three sculptors I will be discussing more closely, their works used landscape as a backdrop to their monumental structures. Most importantly, the fact that the abstract symbolic language of such monuments allowed visitors to read into them different subject matter, made it

⁶³ Darko Karacic, et. al, eds. *Revizija proslosti: Sluzbene politke sjecanja u Bosni i Hercegovini, Hrvatskoj i Srbiji od 1990*, (Sarajevo: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, ACIPS, 2012).

possible for a variety of activities to take place there — such as cycling tours (Fig. 2. 7), school trips (Fig. 2.9), or annual picnics (Fig. 2. 8.)

I do not, however, wish to oversimplify the modalities and significations of modernist socialist works. Although theirs was a particular form of modernism—one that retained both its commitment to the main features of international modernism, namely its insistence on an autonomous artistic sphere, and various forms of political activism—socialist modernists often managed to convey a sincere and deeply humanistic vision of the world. This was one of the qualifying features of Yugoslav modernism, and of the three artists and architects whose work will be discussed further.



Figure 2.5. The last WWII commemoration event organized at Tjentiste Memorial, Bosnia & Herzegovina (from *Oslobodjenje* daily July 6, 1983)



Figure 2.6. Miodrag Zivkovic, *Victory Monument at Sutjeska*, Tjentiste, concrete, 1971

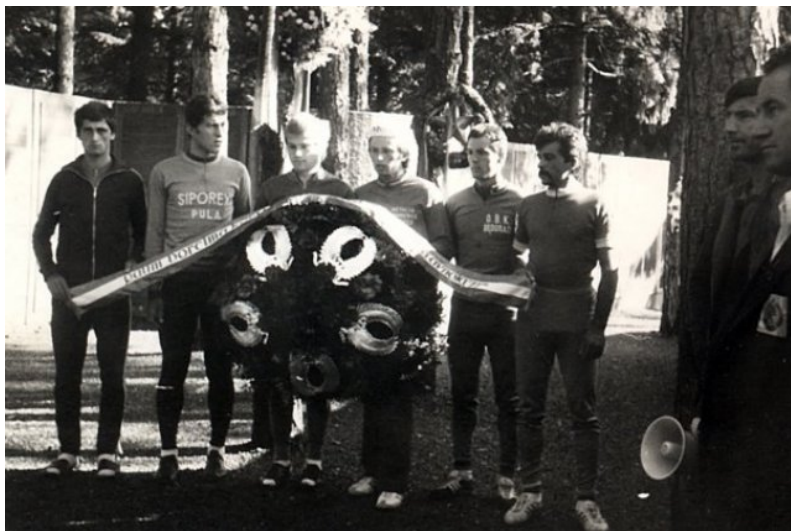


Figure 2.7. *AVNOJ* annual cycling tour of Yugoslavian memorial sites, Mrakovica c. 1979



Figure 2.8. Picnic in front of D. Dzamonja's *Mrakovica Monument*, c.1972



Figure 2.9. A student excursion in front of Dusan Dzamonja's *Markovica Monument*, 1985

Dusan Dzamonja: The Politics of the Autonomous Work of Art

Dusan Dzamonja, like the poets of the past, is a “public” sculptor: he has dedicated, without rhetoric, almost all his work to his country, to the heroes and to the victims of the Second World War.⁶⁴

These words, written by art historian Giulio Carlo Argan, describe the work of Dusan Dzamonja, one of the pre-eminent Yugoslavian modernist sculptors. Dzamonja’s works were among the largest and most expensive public projects of the period. He was also known internationally, executing several commissioned public sculptures in Italy and at Dachau. Two of his more significant projects were *Monument to the Revolution* (1967) erected in a small village, Podgaric (Figs. 2.10 and 2.11) Croatia, and *Mrakovica* (1972) on the mountain Kozara in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Figs. 2.12, 2.13 and 2.14). Both monuments commemorated WWII battles and were envisioned as cenotaphs. Dzamonja’s work embodies the intricacies of socialist modernism; it carries deep ambiguities in terms of modernist conceptions of the relationship between art and the social sphere. His work hovers between architecture and sculpture in its attempts to retain its autonomous, abstract nature, yet is also committed to political representation; the push and pull between the built environment that overpowers the landscape, and the artist’s vision of creating in synchronicity with nature; the works are heavily influenced by myth and ritual, but are also meant to be representative of socialist industrialization. These rich

⁶⁴ Carlo Giulio Argan, *Dzamonja* (Zagreb: Mladost and Beograd: Jugoslovenska Revija, 1981), 7.



Figures 2.10 and 2.11. Dusan Dzamonja, *Monument to the Revolution in Moslavina*, Podgaric Moslavina, Croatia, concrete and aluminum, 1967

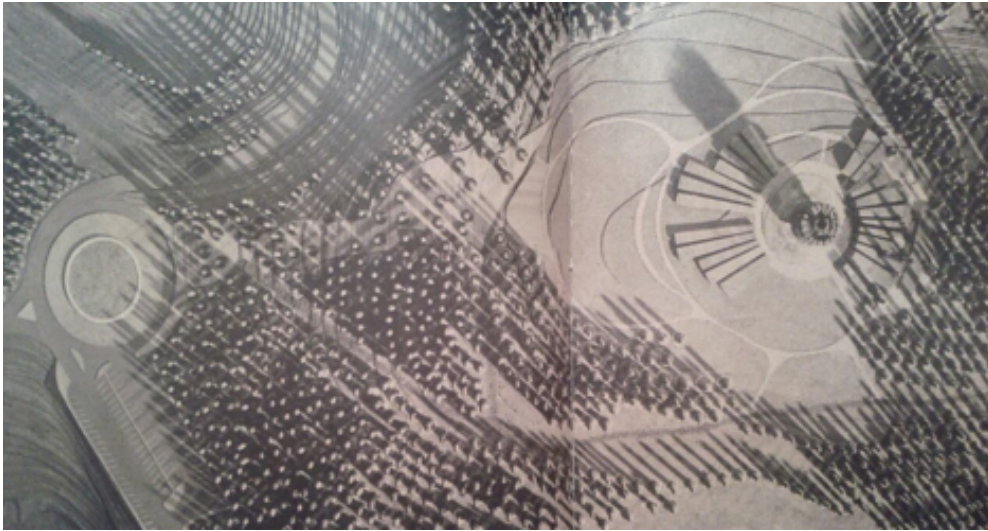


Figure 2.12. Dusan Dzamonja, *A Model for the Memorial at Mrakovica,* Kozara, viewed from above, Bosnia and Herzegovina 1972



Figures 2.13 and 2.14. Dusan Dzamonja, *Monument to the Revolution Mrakovica,* Kozara, Bosnia and Herzegovina, concrete and stainless steel, 1972

oppositions found in Dzamonja's monuments speak to the artist's complicated perceptions of modernism and its role in social relationships.

The Memorial to the Revolution at Podgaric in Croatia (Figs. 2.10 and 2.11) was commissioned in 1965 and completed in 1967. It represented a new subject matter for Dzamonja. Up until then he had mostly worked on memorial sites dedicated to the victims of fascism, while the Podgaric memorial was dedicated to the revolutionary insurrection organized by the local population during the war.⁶⁵ Reminiscing on the process of designing *Podgaric*, the artist stated that he conceived "it as an architectural project of sculpture with heavy concrete volumes placed in a mutual relationship that would suggest the dynamic movement of the masses."⁶⁶ Monument's large mass of concrete and aluminum placed on the top of a hill stands as a signifier, or a strange emblem, overlooking the surrounding landscape from its mountaintop pedestal. Its size (10m x 20m) towers over the landscape. Its large sides remind one of a bird, and yet the sculpture is also strangely anthropomorphic with an enlarged circular head-like middle. Argan describes Dzamonja's concept of a monument not as an abstraction, "but a reality—the reality which man knows and experiences through his work . . . always at the centre of space is man, the living cycle that rises from the earth and returns to the earth."⁶⁷ Dzamonja achieved a synergy between abstract, geometric forms (he used basic geometric shapes such as the circle, square and cube), and elements of anthropomorphic,

⁶⁵ Dusan Dzamonja, "Dzamonja on Dzamonja," in *Dusan Dzamonja* (Zagreb: Mladost; Beograd: Jugoslovenska Revija, 1981), 61.

⁶⁶ Dusan Dzamonja, "Dzamonja on Dzamonja," 62.

⁶⁷ Carlo Giulio Argan, *Dusan Dzamonja*, (Zagreb: Mladost & Beograd: Jugoslovenska revija, 1981), 8.

bodily parts (such as the stylized stretched-out arms on the side of the sculpture.) Argan's comment on Dzamonja's ability to speak to the "reality" of things points to the artist's ability to represent human being in sacrifice (we can read the sculpture as a stylization of a typical figure of a fallen soldier), together with interest in more typically modernist exploration of the pure form (exemplified in its geometric structure). The ability to speak to the "reality" of socialism through stylization is an important feature of all socialist modernist works.

Argan noted in his study of Dzamonja's work that the "matrix of the monument is not architectonic, but representational."⁶⁸ The work, he claims, is in tension with the need to be both representational and abstract. This tension arises out of the need to provide ideological content, by representing Yugoslavia's progress through the symbol of the human body. Although artists did not subscribe to using representational language in their work, this was implied through political contextualization in popular descriptions as the work became part of the national cultural consciousness.⁶⁹ The contextualization of abstract art and emphasis on its formal elements as a way to produce political narrative represent the ambiguity of socialist modernism and modernist art in general. It proves the ultimate usefulness of non-representational language in the building of political consciousness. Such

⁶⁸ Carlo Giulio Argan, *Dzamonja*, 9.

⁶⁹ Examples of such contextualization are found in books and monographs produced for popular use that contextualized Yugoslavia's national cultural patrimony in light of the socialist revolution. Example of such a book is Dara Janekovic ed., *Josip Broz Tito: Monografija*, (Zagreb: Spektar, 1977); Drago Zdunic, ed., *Umjetnost i revolucija: revolucionarno kiparstvo*, (Zagreb: Spektar, 1977). Both monographs contextualize artworks presented by employing vague formalist language in conjunction with political, ideological rhetoric.

language allowed politicians to imbue work with whatever meanings they wanted, while it allowed artists to freely experiment with modernist, formalist visual elements.

The second, well-known large-scale site built almost immediately after *Podgaric* was *Mrakovica* monument, commissioned by the Yugoslav government in 1969 through open competition.⁷⁰ The work is situated on the mountain Kozara in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where one of the most grueling battles of WWII took place. Vastly outnumbered partisan units held out in a forty-day battle during an extremely cold winter. Many soldiers and a number of local civilians died. The Kozara battle, as it was known, became a symbolic mythic event, represented in books, films, and finally, through the memorial site completed in 1972. Džamonja, who was at this point a famous sculptor with several large public commissions, won the competition and went on to build both the monumental complex and the adjoining museum.⁷¹ Unlike *Podgaric*, *Mrakovica* is a multi-layered complex (Fig. 2.12) with a central monumental sculpture, a number of smaller sculptural elements surrounding its central axis, a war museum, and several footpaths to take the visitor from one site to the next; the museum is situated some two hundred metres from the main sculptural complex. The museum is carved into the landscape and repeats the circular plan of the main sculpture. The two memorials are

⁷⁰ Dusan Džamonja, "Džamonja on Džamonja," 63.

⁷¹ The process of commissioning the work was somewhat difficult. Writing after the process completed, and after Džamonja was announced as the competition winner, Grga Gamulin noticed that there was a considerable amount of unease with the kinds of proposals offered by various artists who have submitted their designs for the monument. See: Grga Gamulin, "Spomenik na planini: Natjecaj i analiza spomenika na Kozari," in *Grga Gamulin: Itaka koja traje*, ed. Tonko Maroevic, (Zagreb: Institut za povjest umjetnosti, 1999), 94. Originally published as Grga Gamulin, "Znak u vremenu," *Dometi*, no.3-4, (Rijeka 1970): 45-51.

similar in their relationship to the landscape, and in their ritualistic character. The sites are imbued with the aura of a religious site, and place of pilgrimage for hundreds of thousands of children, soldiers, students, workers and others who came to visit annually. Dzamonja's works were not confined to sculptural form, but took on elements of architecture, seeking to transform the look and use of landscape. Some of his monuments were even built in collaboration with architects; in the case of the two monuments discussed here, however, Dzamonja worked alone. Nikolina Vrekalo notices that his pieces became the opposite of what architects like Daniel Libeskind or Frank Gehry are said to have done—namely turned architecture into sculpture.⁷² Dzamonja turned sculpture into architecture by enlarging it to the scale of buildings; working with industrial materials usually employed in architecture, namely *beton brute*⁷³ and unadorned steel, and by imposing his particular sculptural sensibility onto the landscape where the pieces were installed; and finally, by literally serving as

⁷² Nikolina Vrekalo, "Rastvaranje savršene kružne forme," *Zarez*, no. 249, (22.01.2009) <http://www.zarez.hr/pages/249/vizualna3.html>

⁷³ *Beton brute* was a form of building practice that became popular after WWII. Concrete was used without finishing (*fascade*), or adornment. The first such building was Le Corbusier's *Unite d'Habitation*, 1952. Le Corbusier decided to leave all the imprints of the wooden formwork, used to pour concrete into its final form, imbedded in the concrete walls; he also decided not to polish or even-out wall surfaces. Reyner Banham comments on Le Corbusier's design by stating that he "conjured concrete almost as a new material, exploiting its crudities, and those of the wooden framework, to produce an architectural surface of a rugged grandeur" Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism, Ethic or Aesthetic*, First American. (New York: Reinhold publishing Corp, 1966), 16.

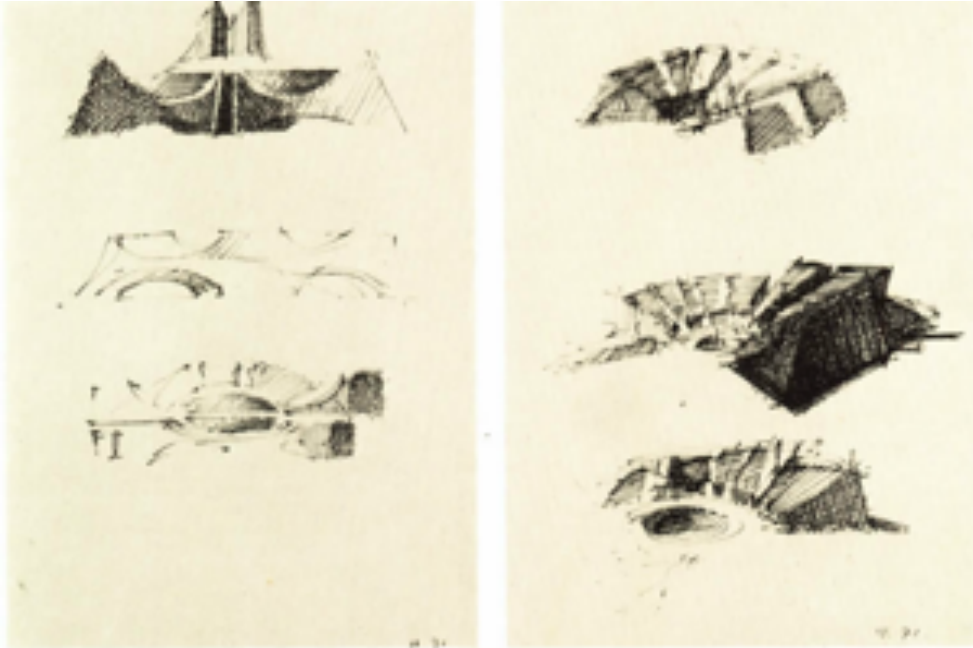


Figure 2.15. Dusan Dzamonja,
Drawing 71/IV and *Drawing 71/V*,
1971



Figure 2.16. Ernő Goldfinger, *Trellick Tower*
London, 1966–72

architect for the site's memorial museum. Ultimately, he played on the border between the two disciplines, treating sculpture as an urban design form in some projects, while in others conceiving of buildings as sculptural forms.⁷⁴

An important element in the transformation of Dzamonja's sculptural work into architecture is the use of unadorned concrete. Influenced by Brutalist architecture (Fig. 2.16), flourishing internationally at this time, Dzamonja and other artists used the poured concrete with little to no adornment and the addition of steel and other metals. Brutalist architecture evolved from Le Corbusier's *Unite d'Habitation* at Marseilles (1947-1952), which is perceived as the first step away from illusionism in architecture through the use of concrete without adornment. Theorist Reyner Banham writes that in building *Unite*, Le Corbusier "decided to recognize that concrete starts life as a messy soup of suspended dusts, grits and slumpy aggregate, mixed and poured under conditions subject to the vagaries of weather and human fallibility."⁷⁵ Unadorned poured concrete became commonplace in Yugoslavian post-war building practices because it was easy to use and affordable. In *Podgaric* and *Mrakovica* the large structures are laid bare, their grayish-white colour protruding from the mass of green trees surrounding them, each in defiance of the curving, hilly landscape of the site.⁷⁶ The ruggedness of concrete adds to the perception of size and to the overall impact of the sculptures. It also separates them further from the nature around them.

⁷⁴ Dzamonja, Dusan. "Dzamonja by Dzamonja," 85.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 16.

⁷⁶ In some ways they are also reminiscent of the Minimalist sculptures of the 1960s and 1970s, for example, Richard Serra's *Shift* (1972) installed in a field in King City, Canada or Donald Judd's slightly more recent, untitled project from 1980-85 in Marfa, Texas. Both artists used sculpture in defiance to the landscape.

Dzamonja's works exist in the landscape as a form that transforms it, either by cutting through the landscape, or by imposing, both vertically and horizontally, a concrete geometric mass onto the land. The sculptures work against the land, molding it to their own needs. That Dzamonja did not consider the landscape in which his works were to be erected, except insofar as they serve his existing aesthetic vocabulary, is supported by his smaller-scale sculptures (Figs. 2.15, 2.17 and 2.18) many of which contain almost identical formal elements as those in the two large monuments. There is little consideration of the site and its natural daily or seasonal cycles. Rather, Dzamonja developed forms from his existing visual vocabulary and enlarged them to a monumental scale. Ironically this imposition of Dzamonja's artistic will onto the space can be interpreted as paralleling the ways in which the state imposed its ideology onto the citizens, seeing them as sculptural material to be molded and shaped into a particular political will. Dzamonja's distinctly modern, urban treatment of the sculptural form became somewhat of a problem during the competition process for his Kozara monument. Grgo Gamulin argues that it was hard for jurors to imagine his abstract, distinctly urban approach to form, in the hilly, green landscape of Kozara Mountain.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Gamulin, *Spomenik na planini: Natjecaj i analiza spomenika na Kozari*, 93.

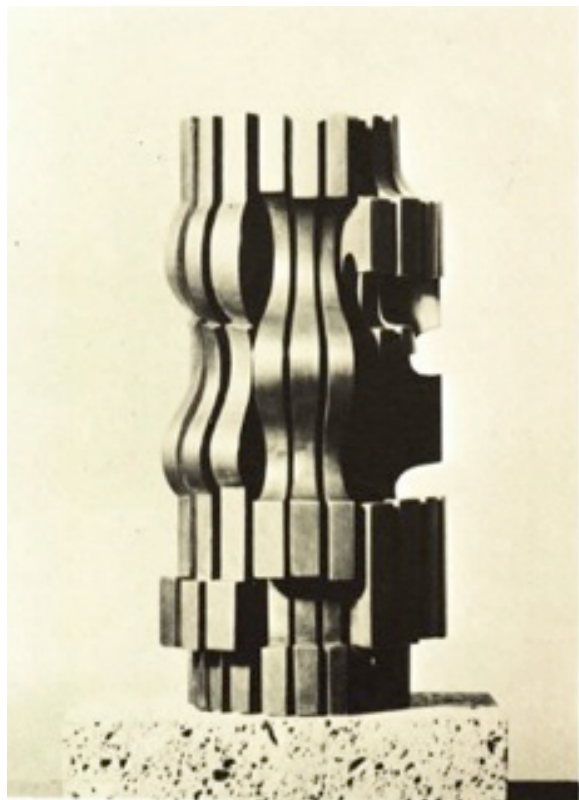


Figure 2.17. Dusan Dzamonja, *Model V*, bronze, 1969

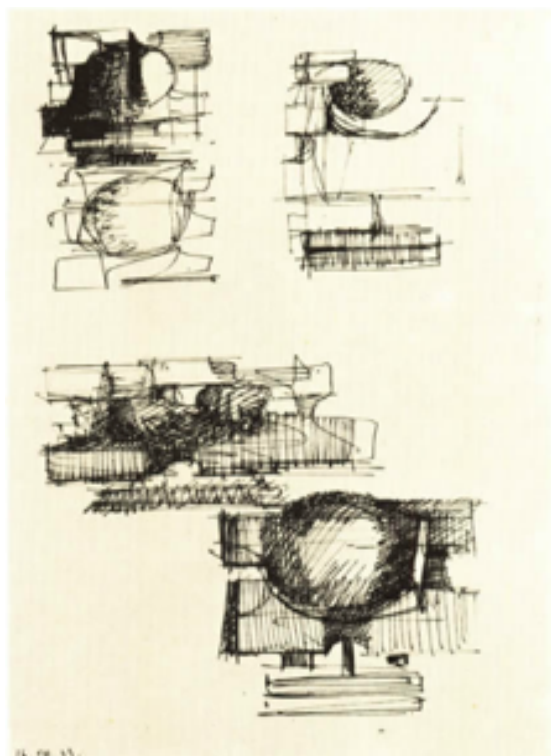


Figure 2. 18. Dusan Dzamonja, *XVII/63* ink drawing, 1963

Modernization figures prominently in the two monuments as well. Argan argued that Dzamonja's use of materials (concrete, nails, metal) is a metaphor of industrialized production. Like the work of American Minimalist sculptors, whose use of factory-made objects and processes without artist's involvement, Dzamonja's monuments were also made through an elaborate industrial building process. The construction of the Mrakovica complex took fifteen months to complete and involved a complicated construction plan.⁷⁸ Each monument was made in an industrial manner, with the help of construction firms and dozens of workers who built the reinforced metal skeletons and poured concrete.⁷⁹ On a more symbolic level, Dzamonja's use of repetitive production methods—especially for some of his earlier sculptures for which he used nails that were meticulously driven into the body of a wooden shape—evoke a factory assembly line. The notions of repetition and hard labour, we could say Taylorism, are deeply inscribed in the way he approached sculpture.⁸⁰ This translated well into the memorial sites because along with symbolizing the struggle for the liberation during WWII, they also projected into the future through an aesthetic tropes of mechanization and labour.

This second meaning, embedded in the form and materials chosen, was a gesture towards Yugoslavia's move towards modernization. While the artists of the immediate post-war era employed illustrative ideas shaped by the socialist realist aesthetic, twenty years later, modernists like Dzamonja were employing abstract

⁷⁸ Jokic, Gojko. *Nacionalni park Kozara, Prijedor: turistički vodič*. (Prijedor: Nacionalni park Kozara and Beograd: Turistička štampa, 1989), 27.

⁷⁹ Dusan Dzamonja, "Dzamonja on Dzamonja," 85.

⁸⁰ Carlo Giulio Argan, *Dzamonja*, 9.

language to do the same. Instead of depicting young workers and farmers sacrificing themselves for the nation's future, Dzamonja's symbolic use of rugged materials and geometric forms, his repetitive mechanized aesthetic, minimalist colour and imposing size speak to the same political concerns as the socialist realist artists, through metaphors embedded in their form, rather than mimetically.

The socialist modernist aesthetic in this case performed a similar function to that of the American modernist aesthetic, which, at the height of its popularity, was considered a cultural and ideological sign of Western, capitalist democracy. The larger than life, abstract gestures of *Mrakovica* and *Podgaric* are dedicated to a formal autonomy of the artistic object, and to reflecting a yearning for the utopian dream of the socialist Yugoslavia as a fully modernized, developed nation. The image of the concrete and metal rising out of the green, lush landscape of the mountain Kozara was a reinforcement of Yugoslavia's entry into modernity. In fact, as much as the sites described in this chapter were meant to create memorials to the Yugoslav involvement in WWII, they were also symbols of Yugoslavia's struggle to be recognized by, and welcomed into, the international community as a nation state.

Yugoslavia's modernity, constantly reiterated through the building of cities, factories, and infrastructure was, however, highly ambiguous. As already stated, Brutalist architecture was accepted enthusiastically because of its relative ease of use.⁸¹ The tension created by imposing geometric, machine-like, shapes onto natural

⁸¹ Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism, Ethic or Aesthetic?* (London: Architectural Press, 1966).

environments, parallels the tension in Yugoslavian socialism attempting to carve out a place in the political landscape of the Cold War. While the country's political elites promoted its socialist project, and celebrated its success, monuments such as Dzamonja's became metaphors for both the promises and failures of socialism. The size, political symbolism, and use of abstract language gave the monuments a utopian and humanist façade, however, they also represented socialism's inability to fully implement its more lofty goals of humane, classless, and equal society. The tension between the reality of bureaucratic socialist structures (which were unequal and distinctly classed), and the state's utopian rhetoric, spilled over into the socialist modernist project. This was most clearly visible in the artists' use of form with respect to the environments in which those forms developed. Artists instrumentalized the landscape and nature without consideration for its richness of meaning or its relationship to humans; in short, nature's immeasurable material and spiritual worth.

Dzamonja, Bakic, and Bogdanovic adopted the notions of autonomy in art and its truthfulness to its own formal logic. Their works, however, manifested as symbols of political power. Ideological implications of all such monuments were inescapable, both because they were commissioned by the state, and because of the way that they were presented to the public and spoken about by artists and critics. Their ideological content was however always expressed through formalist, modernist language. So for example Juraj Baldani writes the following about Dusan Dzamonja's *Mrakovica* monument:

In its perfect organization of forms imbued with ideas, this work marks an acknowledgment and deepening of demands that the artist places on

monumental sculpture. Uniting of the sculptural mass in its contours with the landscape, adaptability of its details to atmospheric changes, shifts in perception of the work due to the constant cycle of imaginative variations, and suggestive impression of liveliness of the sculptural material — are all the rich, material characteristics of this monument. A psychological component arises out of these formal structures, and it repeats the meaning of the socialist revolution as an unstoppable energy that in its permanent movement strives towards elevation of freedom, dignity of strength and fullness of beauty.⁸²

Baldani's analysis is consistent with the formalist, modernist art criticism of the time, it presents the work through its sculptural elements (volume, movement, contours) which are then read as an ultimate symbol of the revolution. As part of pan-Yugoslavian state building project, the monuments played the role of witnesses to the narratives of the official culture. Their form (suggestion of the stylized human body, geometric shapes signifying movement through space, three-dimensional spaces which envelop viewers), lent itself to a variety of meanings and symbols implied by the political and cultural establishment, from modernization, brotherhood and unity, to Yugoslavian exceptionalism, to adherence to the principles of the Non-Aligned. Dzamonja, for example, did this by designing abstract forms with just enough of figurative detail to allow visitors to imbue his structures with their own perceived meanings. In their usual professional practice, however, the artists always ascribed to the language of pure form, and described their works as such in numerous gallery and museum catalogues, reviews, and critical texts.

⁸² Juraj Baldani, "Jugoslavensko angazirano socijalno is revolucionarno kiparstvo," in *Revolucionarno kiparstvo*, ed. Drago Zdunic (Zagreb: Spektar, 1977), 17.

Vojin Bakic: The Future is Near

Like Oscar Niemeyer's massive plan for Brasilia (Fig.17), Yugoslavia's socialist monuments embody a modernist longing for a utopian future. A speculative futurist imagination was not something new to post-WWII culture. Rather, it was inscribed into the basic premises of the Enlightenment. The 19th and 20th centuries are full of such accounts of the future, from the writings of Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, and Mary Shelley to Futurist manifestos to Bauhaus and Constructivist designs. Instances of imagining the future abound in post-WWII modernist art, especially as part of Eastern Europe's post-war technological boom and its involvement in the nuclear armament and the space race.

The notion of time shifted and accelerated the cultural imaginary. Socialism was filled with such dreams of the future largely because of its constant need to prove itself against the Western capitalist world. Susan Buck-Morss refers to it as a "dreamworld." She writes that the yearning for the future in the Soviet Union reached its peak before the 1917 revolution, after which, especially during Stalin's era, from 1929 on the dreamworld turned oblique and was instrumentalized. Buck-Morss points to the artists of the Soviet avant-garde, saying that they "gave expression to the changed anthropology of modern life in forms and rhythms that left the perceptual apparatus of the old world triumphantly behind."⁸³

⁸³ Buck-Morss, Susan. *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, 45.



Figure 2.19. Oscar Niemeyer,
National Congress of Brazil,
Brasilia 1960

apparatus of the old world triumphantly behind.”⁸⁴ The politics of the revolution, she states later, used the new utopian impulses of the avant-garde for particular political projects (e.g. visual project in direct service to the state).⁸⁵ “Liberating visions became legitimating ones, as fantasies of movement through space were translated into temporal movement, re-inscribed onto the historical trajectory of revolutionary time.”⁸⁶ It is at that point that the avant-garde vision in the USSR, in its striving for a future utopia, was harnessed as a political tool for shaping the revolutionary consciousness of the masses. An official utopian impulse was similarly present in Yugoslavian culture —realized through monumental public projects such as those described here. Imagining a utopian future became part of various political structures that harnessed and projected it outward through the form and content of the monumental sites of memory.

As noted earlier, these particular spaces also carried a dystopian element. They were, at once, part of creating a monumental historical mythology that promised a new future, while at the same time inadvertently announcing the dismantling of utopia — most clearly in the ways that the monuments imposed themselves onto land. Vojin Bakic’s *Monument to the Partisans* from 1981 exemplifies these tensions in socialist modernist sculpture (Figs. 18 and 19). Its size, setting, and structure are futuristic, resembling an enormous rocket launch pad, and yet its movement towards the sky is arrested as the sculpture is wedged into the ground by the large space at its base. There is also a tension between the horizontality of the large, wave-like elements, and the vertical

⁸⁴ Buck-Morss, Susan. *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, 45.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 45.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 45.

flow of the structure. The push and pull between immobility and the desire to fly makes the sculpture hover, almost suspended over the site. Perhaps Bakic intended to subconsciously imply through this tension a struggle within Yugoslavian socialism between the desire to create a utopian society, and the difficulties of doing so in reality.

Monument to the Partisans was completed in 1981. It combined a dual purpose of memorial and museum building. It was built near the original partisan hospital, which was hidden underground in the mountainous region of Petrova Gora during the war. Bakic's sculpture was designed to house a permanent collection relating to the WWII hospital, a medium-sized theatre, a lounge, and a number of utility rooms. Bakic's design suggests a shift in the perception of time and space, in part due to its monumental size (it is more than 20m in height), and to its formal language of simple abstract elements based on a combination of mechanized and biomorphic forms. As suggested earlier in this chapter, the temporal shift is also suggested by the sculpture's metal cladding that gives it an appearance of a mechanical object from the future. All of these elements point to Bakic's



Figure 2. 20. Vojin Bakic, *Monument to the Partisans*, concrete, stainless steel, and glass, Petrova Gora, Croatia (view in 2010)



Figure 2. 21. Vojin Bakic, *Monument to the Partisans*, concrete, stainless steel, and glass, Petrova Gora, Croatia (view in 1981)

interest in suggesting that the appeal of abstraction for the socialist modernist sculpture lies in its ability to use universal language. Therefore, striving or moving towards the sky, or moving forward, as a formal element in the work, was an important political gesture through which the site spoke to those who came to visit it. For Bakic abstract art was not supposed to illustrate so much as embody meaning:

I don't think that any senseless abstraction can serve as a symbol of war or a monument to warriors. In fact, an abstract form may not even be abstract in its essence. For example, I may perceive its elements in different way. For when people ask "what does it represent?" that answer is this: it doesn't represent anything, just like obelisk doesn't represent anything.⁸⁷

The work therefore exists in its own being, in its autonomous life, and by doing so it is also speaking to the viewer. Bakic points to an important shift in the post-war modernism; its metamorphosis into a universal signifier of freedom and possibilities afforded to it by its formal qualities.

Through their scale and the totality of the built environment around them, the memorial offered a cathartic experience to the viewer, overwhelmed by the monuments' dimensions, that affectively sutured aesthetics and politics. Its impact, or what I would term affect, was produced by the interaction between the space and time of the here and now and that which is to become: the future. The affective work of the site connected the spectator, or visitor, to political intensities that served to keep citizens part of the project of nation building.

What Bakic's monument suggests is that there can be no effective ideology without a deep intertwining of art with citizens' sense perception, or more precisely,

⁸⁷ Vojin Bakic, "Apstrakcija i simboli" *Omladinski tjednik*, 1975, n.p.

without art's ability to tap into a feeling of immensity. In *The Poetics of Space* (1964) Gaston Bachelard writes about immensity as a property of space. Immensity, he claims, is a quality that we feel is external to us, as when we confront landscapes or large-scale buildings, and yet is actually a property of our imagination.⁸⁸ As such, the feeling of being overwhelmed, of being confronted with something greater than ourselves, is one that is deeply connected to our perception of the self, and of what he calls "imagining being."⁸⁹ Imagination, therefore, plays a key role in our perception of space, and our connection to its materiality. The way Bakic's memorial connected to the visitors was through a sense of immensity, which played upon an apriori ability to imagine something greater than oneself: the nation. As the matrices of forces (past and future, nature and built space) conjured up the past and the present, one was able to take part in the project of building socialism. In the process of becoming sites of secular public ritual, the memorials recreated, or partook of, some of the WWII history, while at the same time suggesting a possible future. Apart from revealing official socialist culture's commensurability with the idea of the nation, the sites also point to Yugoslav culture as a liberal rather than a purely socialist culture, given the forms of individual social sovereignty implied in the functioning of the sites.

⁸⁸ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 184.

⁸⁹ Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*, 184.

Bogdan Bogdanovic: Memorial Site as a Ritual

In 1966 Bogdan Bogdanovic published one of his early books on architecture entitled *Urbanističke mitologeme*.⁹⁰ The book presented a history of architecture as a history of ritual, or an evolution from early human dwelling spaces in caves and primitive built structures, to pyramids and modern forms of urbanism. An anthropological as much as it is an aesthetic thesis, Bogdanovic's book speaks about the mythology of architectural language and its mystical symbols, which, he argues, innately connect to our biological makeup. Architecture, he claims, is a natural outcome of this ancient biological connection. In the same year that the book was published, Bogdanovic's *Stone Flower Memorial* in Jasenovac, Croatia was completed (Figs. 2.22 and 2.23). When asked about the links between his writing and his architectural work, Bogdanovic replied that for him, "words and forms have always been intertwined."⁹¹ In his many years of practice as an architect, Bogdanovic embedded his interest in the transcendental and ephemeral into the works he designed. While his buildings were not as closely related to metaphysical ideas explored in his writing, the many monuments he completed over his thirty-year socialist career were clearly an embodiment of the ritualistic and mythical in art. Bogdanovic was interested in creating monuments that were outside the usual powerful representations found in socialist sculpture of the time — referring to large,

⁹⁰ Bogdan Bogdanovic, *Urbanističke mitologeme*, (Beograd: Vuk Karadžić. 1966), 24.

⁹¹ Vera Grimmer, "Bogdan Bogdanovic: Gradovi su bica," *Oris: Casopis za arhitekturu i kulturu*, vol. VII, 41 (2006): 152.

masculine structures, or heroic figures.⁹² In an interview with Vera Grimmer, the architect described his monuments as works that did not “command respect, or even fear, these were always kingdoms you enter, you go through, and spend the entire day in.”⁹³ In his understanding of the monument as an interactive site, ephemeral and completed only through its contact with the audience, Bogdanovic’s works can also be read as examples of land art. The most famous of his work in monumental sculpture is *Stone Flower Memorial* at the site of the Jasenovac concentration camp. Because of the significance of the Jasenovac site in the collective psyche of Yugoslavians, and the fact that this was one of the most often visited places in the country, the *Stone Flower* quickly garnered mythic status. The monument was completed in 1966 and I would suggest is representative of memorialization as a site of ritual re-enactment. While all such monuments were imagined as sites of memory, it is Bogdanovic’s work that most clearly articulated the link between socialist modernism and memory as ritual.

The sculpture is a single, biomorphic form rising from the large marsh where the Jasenovac concentration camp was located during WWII.⁹⁴ The camp was built by the Croatian Ustashi regime.⁹⁵ Jews, Serbs, Gypsies, Croatian communists, and

⁹² Alexandre Mirlesse, "Interview with Bogdan Bogdanovic," 3.

⁹³ Vera Grimmer, “Bogdan Bogdanovic: Gradovi su bica,” 152.

⁹⁴ "Jasenovac Camp II: Brickworks," in Spomen područje Jasenovac memorial site [database online]. [cited 2013]. Available from <http://www.jusp-jasenovac.hr/Default.aspx?sid=7291>.

⁹⁵ Ibid.



Figure 2. 22. Bogdan Bogdanovic, *The Stone Flower Memorial*, Jasenovac memorial site, Croatia, reinforced concrete, 1966



Figure 2. 23. Bogdan Bogdanovic, *Stone Flower* (on the right) Jasenovac, Croatia, reinforced concrete, 1966

other non-Croatians were imprisoned and killed there. While there were a number of other prison camps across the former Yugoslavian territories, Jasenovac was the largest and in operation for the longest time.⁹⁶ A memorial site with a museum and several additional buildings was officially opened in 1968, with Bogdanovic's sculpture completed in 1966. After it was built, Bogdanovic described his idea for the monument:

And so the basic symbol is precisely a FLOWER, the symbol of eternal renewal, and after a series of variations, stylized as a flower structure, with the superstructure, turned in two ways – through the crypt towards the victims from whom it draws its roots, and the crown, as a kind of inversed dome, towards the light and the sun. Symbolically towards life and freedom.⁹⁷

Stylization of the flower was in line with Bogdanovic's interest in architecture as a primordial sign closely linked to language and the etymology of words.⁹⁸ In this case he chose the notion of renewal and growth as a counterforce to the destruction that occurred at the site. The stone flower rises from the landscape, and unlike Dzamonja's and Bakic's memorials, it responds to its environment by mimicking nature's forms.

Architectural historian Ljiljana Blagojevic analyzed Bogdanovic's interest in ritual and biological forms as an announcement of an early form of postmodernism in socialist Yugoslavian artistic space.⁹⁹ She suggests that the bringing forth of the primordial forms was a way of going against the tide of modernity's demands for industrialization and rational, organized thought and action. Perhaps we can argue that the forms found in

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Natasa Jovicic et. al., "Bogdan Bogdanovic o spomeniku Cvijet u Jasenovcu 1966," in Spomen produkcje Jasenovac memorial site [database online]. [cited 2013.]. Available from <http://www.jusp-jasenovac.hr/Default.aspx?sid=5923>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Biljana Blagojevic, "Postmodernism in Belgrade: Between Cultural Modernity and Societal Modernization," *Spatium: International Review*, no. 25 September (2011): 25.

Blagojevic's works were a way of responding to what he perceived as problematic modernization enacted by the socialist government. Even though Blagojevic's argument might be true to an extent, Bogdanovic's works were still enmeshed with the socialist realms of memory and memorialization, which were, at their core, political and modernist. As with all other public monumental sculpture in Yugoslavia, Bogdanovic had to address the needs of the state by suggesting ideological elements — in this case an idea of a people or a nation (represented through the symbol of the flower), rising from the ashes of destruction. The ritualization of memory takes place in Bogdanovic's use of an organic form (the flower) to symbolize birth, this would have been very appealing to the state as it did not problematize the state's role in building national memory. The artist, however, always felt ambivalence with respect to what kind of ideological message he was creating at the time. More recently, Bogdanovic talked about the legacy of his memorial architecture, stating:

I didn't enjoy building these monuments. I did it because it was my duty, and because I saw that I could meet the challenge in an anti-monumental way. I would not have been able to do this in another socialist country.¹⁰⁰

Ambivalence about his own work is ironic given that the architect became famous mostly for his monumental architecture. It also suggests that artists who participated in the building of state socialist modernism had to self-censor their work.

“Ritualistic” and “urban” are two of the most common adjectives attributed to Bogdanovic's monuments. These two notions, however, stand on opposite sides of a spectrum of ideation. The ritual represents that which modernity refused to accept, and

¹⁰⁰ Alexandre Mirlesse, "Interview with Bogdan Bogdanovic," 4.

that which also became its downfall. The urban became the very symbol of modernity and modernism, although, at its core, as Bogdanovic argues in many of his writings, the term “urban” is an ancient one and rooted in ritual. There is no antagonism between the two in his work, rather, they coexist side by side, and call on memory to join them. The politicization of such terms and symbols is obvious, and as many historians, from Ernst Cassirer to Pierre Nora to Michael Kammen have noted, monuments belong to the realm of the communal memory, or the ritualization and reenactment of memory. Perhaps Bogdanovic was deeply aware of that, and somewhat apprehensive about the implications of representing communal and political through architecture and therefore perceived it as contentious within his own project.

Memory, History, and the Everyday in Socialist Modernism

All three artists and architects whose works are discussed above attempted to bridge gaps between the exigencies of socialist political life and the autonomy and formal integrity demanded by post-war modernism. Their attempts at marrying such seemingly opposite ideas brought forth a fascinating visual and conceptual language, reflected in the form of sculptures that are monumental in size, employ non-figurative and figurative formal language, and are highly symbolic. But more importantly, all the sculptures/sites discussed here exist as signifiers of memory, animated through their interactions with the millions of people who came to visit the sites over their forty-year existence. Yugoslavian socialist modernist monuments paralleled the country’s efforts at

modernizing social, economic, and political structures, thus becoming a preeminent material embodiment of the country's new course and place in history. This aesthetic dreamworld was built as a network of sites across Yugoslavia in order to guide, remind, and call its peoples to participation in the active invention of new historical traditions.

The monuments transcended their aesthetic, autonomous role, acting as the catalysts for the enactment of collective memory and myth. The function they performed, and still perform in some cases, rested primarily on commemoration of history in the service of socialist state-building. As has been pointed out by various theorists, acts of memorialization are mythical in nature. In that respect, Yugoslavian monuments are sites of myth creation, and as such, represent fraught, ideological structures in both their cultural logic and aesthetic form.

In his discussion of symbolic forms, Ernst Cassirer explains the relationship between nation building, history and myth.

In between myth and history, myth proves to be the primary, history the secondary and derived factor. It is not by its history that the mythology of a nation is determined, but, conversely, its history is determined by its mythology – or rather, the mythology of a people does not *determine* but *is* its fate, its destiny as decreed from the very beginning.¹⁰¹

Michael Kammen furthers Cassirer's idea by stating that in fact all societies construct their past rather than record it.¹⁰² Similarly Maurice Halbwachs has pointed out in *On Collective Memory* (1952) that all modern forms of collective memory and national projects of memorialization are subject to particular social needs posed by the present.

¹⁰¹ Cassirer, Ernst. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. II: Mythical Thought*. Trans. R. Mannheim. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1955), 5.

¹⁰² Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, (New York: Random House, 1993), 12.

History and collective national memory, of which Yugoslavian monuments are representative, are subject to the contingency of ideological necessities. During their socialist lifespan the monuments oscillated between the demand for stability embedded in modern projects of nation building, and the shifting of those projects with respect to the changes in the politics of the day. More importantly, as Halbwachs argues, collective memory is structured through its relationship with individual memory; the two work in tension with each other as the nation state imposes its constructed memories on individual citizens and vice versa.¹⁰³ When socialist Yugoslavia ended in the 1990s, its constructed commemorative fantasies were superseded by new myths. Its complicated history was shifted towards ethnic exceptionalism. At that point the monuments were no longer useful to the historical narratives of the new nationalisms demanding differentiation from the common Yugoslav identity. The fact that most of the memorial sites discussed here were relegated to oblivion in the last twenty years, either literally destroyed or left to decay, speaks to Kammen's assertion on the contingency of history and memory.

The official Yugoslavian socialist modernism, and its most iconic forms—the monumental memorial sculptures—were a product of the socialist modernity and the particular demands it placed on the construction of memory. It is important to briefly summarize what that relationship entailed. Tension between what modernity has deemed tradition, and its push for modernization and progress, has transformed societies' relationship to what and how they remember. Pierre Nora argues that in the age of

¹⁰³ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis Coser, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992 [1952]), 39.

modernity, acts of remembering and memorialization have been transformed. Societies have exiled earlier forms of memory from everyday life, instead, building repositories of memory through social institutions. Different monuments, archives, museums, public commemorations, libraries, and even dictionaries for Nora represent *lieux de memoire*, or sites which isolate, preserve, and historicize memory, but are “fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out memory because it has abandoned it.”¹⁰⁴ Such sites were crucial for the construction and preservation of the modern nation state because they provided a seemingly objective way to represent national history as unified and coherent. Socialist Yugoslavia is an example of such a process of preservation, and its forms of architecture and sculpture based in the modernist aesthetic provided a perfect repository for modern ideas of a universalist, progressive, enlightened nation.

Eric Hobsbawm’s notion of the “invented tradition” is particularly important in my analysis of official socialist modernism as a site of the nation-building project. Like Pierre Nora and Maurice Halbwachs, Hobsbawm first acknowledges that profound social changes, mostly desacralization, brought on by the age of modernity rendered earlier customs and traditions obsolete. This shift in collective consciousness required the establishment of new traditions for the purpose of instituting authority, social control, and coherence. Hobsbawm describes:

‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition,

¹⁰⁴ Nora, Pierre. “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire.” *Representations*. No. 26 Spring (1989): 12.

which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.¹⁰⁵

New values, belief systems, and norms that can attain social significance only by suggesting continuity with a chosen past are needed. The products of such invented tradition are a number of rituals and symbols employed to galvanize modern societies and create national identity. In terms of nation states whose identity was built not on the idea of continuity with the past, but rather on the radical break with it, the relationship between new traditions and history is still important. Socialist Yugoslavia was one such nation, and like the Soviet Union in the 1917, its socialist revolution was built on the premise of the radical break from its pre-war past. Yugoslavia's invented traditions were carefully constructed to mirror the country's revolutionary zeal.

The elements of the Yugoslav past chosen to represent the continuity of history via socialist modernist art and to construct a national historic tradition were interesting. While the state denounced the pre-war Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and disregarded many historical events, it also searched the histories of the region to find stories that would epitomize continuity with socialist ideas. An example is Antun Augustincic's *Monument to the Peasant Revolt 1573*, completed in 1973 (Fig. 2.24.) Augustincic envisioned his

¹⁰⁵ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *Invention of Tradition*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1.



Figure 2. 24. Antun Augustincic,
Monument to the Peasant Revolt
1573, Klanjec Croatia, bronze,
concrete, stainless steel, 1973

memorial as a commemorative site and a place of gathering.¹⁰⁶ It followed similar aesthetic prescription of public socialist monuments across Yugoslavia: a weaving together of abstract and representational elements; a monumental scale (7m high and 40m long) in the surrounding landscape; a mix of sculpture and architecture. Instead of celebrating battles from WWII however, it depicts a sixteenth-century Croatian peasant revolt against feudal lords¹⁰⁷ in order to link that past to Yugoslavia's communist revolution. The elements Augustincic chose were the traumatic nature of the sixteenth-century battles, the depictions of everyday life and struggles of the peasantry, their inferior weapons, and their bravery and bodily strength. These themes were formally and narratively structured around one character chosen as a symbolic hero of the people, Matija Gubec, one of the leaders of the revolt,. The figure of Gubec standing in front of the massive wall relief with his arms lifted high, his fingers bent in agony, resonated with numerous similar representations of partisan fighters found elsewhere. Augustincic succeeded in linking three hundred years of history in a single gesture that all Yugoslavians could immediately recognize and adopt as part of their socialist tradition.

The socialist modernist monuments spoke equally to the traumas of WWII as well as revolutionary struggles down through the centuries, repeatedly addressing the plight of the workers and the peasants. Repetition of sacrifice in socialism also served the purpose of internationalization of Yugoslavian history. It did so by establishing solidarity with the

¹⁰⁶ "Antun Augustincic: Spomenik Seljackoj buni i Matiji Gupcu," in Muzej seljackih buna [database online]. [cited 2013]. Available from <http://www.mdc.hr/msb/zbirke-likovna.htm>.

¹⁰⁷ Vjekoslav Klaić, *Povjest Hrvata od najranijih vremena do svrsetka XIX stoljeca*, vol 5 (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod MH, 1975), 367-378.

traumas of other subjugated peoples across the world, more specifically those who were under colonial rule (such as India and Egypt). In this move, the collective, colonial, memory of Yugoslavia became incorporated into the collective memory of the former colonial nations with which Yugoslavia was building friendly relationships through the establishment of the Non-Aligned. The past and the present were framed within the structure of remembering, which was powerful because it was both traumatic and triumphant, and because it provided a strong narrative network (national and international) for building a socialist nation-state.

The monuments discussed in this chapter were a tool for nation building, not only because they were committed to promoting political ideals through aesthetic means, but because they used the language of modernist aesthetics, which guaranteed that the monuments would be read as humanist and universal — the two ideas so important in international politics of the twentieth-century. The role of official socialist modernist art, public monuments in particular, was to structure a utopian network of ideas, reminders of what Yugoslavia as a new nation-state stood for and how those ideas should live in both the realm of the everyday and the realm of the symbolic. When students, workers, peasants, and tourists visited the monuments each year they treated them as sites of pilgrimage. The state encouraged and supported the building of such sites in all parts of Yugoslavia because it wanted to create an aesthetic, memorial network, or a series of signposts of the life of the people and the life of their state.

Chapter 3
The Socialist Mass Culture: Spectacle for the People 1945–1987

*We live in a spectacular society, that is, our whole life is surrounded by an immense accumulation of spectacles.*¹

–Larry Law, “Images and Everyday Life”

One of the ways in which complex societal structures play out in their many guises is through people’s collective participation in various communal events such as religious celebrations, processions, coronations, displays of public punishment, or military marches. Although this is a somewhat crude generalization of a number of diverse practices across the spectrum of human cultural relations, it has been noted by historians and anthropologists that particular modes of public communal life exist in all social environments and that these modes of being are represented through a number of symbolic, ritual, or fetishistic mechanisms.² In the modern era millennial-old traditions were amplified through the proliferation of visual media, transforming them into mass-mediated spectacles.³ Through newspapers, photography, film, radio, television, and more recently, the Internet and wireless communication, spectacles have become

¹ Larry Law, *Images and Everyday Life*, (London: Spectacular Times, c. 1980)n.p. Accessed 15 May 2013. <http://archive.org/details/SpectacularTimesImagespdf>

² For a more detailed discussion on the issue see: Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

³ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith., Zone Booksed. (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

embedded in the everyday, making their many divergent forces coalesce around visually powerful events.⁴

Amitai Etzioni argues that public spectacles in the modern age are a form of secular ritual, and, as such, reinforce important social bonds that would be lost if society was left to the many centrifugal, individualistic activities of everyday life. He states that “rituals provide one major mechanism for the recreation of society, one in which the members of a society worship shared objects and in which they share experiences that help form and sustain deep emotional bonds among the members.”⁵ According to Etzioni, public spectacles are a form of state building, especially in times of modernity. The notion of the state and its relationship to what we could call spectacular mechanisms of its representation can be pushed even further. In fact, the state itself can be defined as a purely symbolic, mythical form whose power is sustained through an ongoing process of representation (political, social, or visual,) and interaction with individuals.

Michael Taussig succinctly explains this relationship by positing that the state is in fact a construct to which we accord the status of a “being” by imbuing it with what he calls “soulstuff.”⁶ As such, the state is a fetishistic entity of pure invention. It is akin to a

⁴ For more see: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London U.K.: Verso, 1988.); Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1991.)

⁵ Amitai Etzioni, "Toward a Theory of Public Ritual," *Sociological Theory*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2000): 41.

⁶ Michael Taussig, *The Magic of the State*, (London U.K. and New York U.S.: Rutledge, 1997), 3.

mask, Taussig argues—drawing from Phillip Abrams—which hides political practices.⁷ The state functions as a shroud, obfuscating political transactions. Timothy Mitchell similarly defines the state not as a structure but as a “structural effect . . . the powerful, metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist.”⁸ For both Taussig and Mitchell the state is a cultural construct, “both real and unreal,” an ideological entity that operates through symbolic, even ritualistic modes.⁹ Following this logic Taussig suggests that when talking about the state we should “try substituting the word *God*, for the word *state*.”¹⁰ The state then becomes a fetish constructed through practices of symbolic representation akin to a nervous system contracting and expanding according to its needs.¹¹

State fetishism operates within a system of the sacred, but as Taussig proposes, this system rests on a tension between that which is sacred and that which is evil; that is, between reason and violence. The power of the state requires both elements: for example, it needs reason to organize its bureaucratic forms and violence to defend its territorial interests. Reason becomes a legitimization of violence, as one cannot exist without the other. According to Taussig, this tension arising from the conflation of reason and violence, is clearly perceptible in state practices and the forms of cultural legitimation that obfuscate the state’s need for violence, thusly perpetuating its power. Such practices

⁷ Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System*, (London U.K. and New York U.S.: Rutledge 1992), 113.

⁸ Timothy Mitchell, “The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics,” *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 85, no. 1 (March 1991): 94.

⁹ Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System*, 114.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 114.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 113.

are powerfully symbolic, appearing in the public sphere as visual narratives of state benevolence. They are also what Taussig calls “Statecraft,” or intricate technologies based in the realm of the visible. Walter Benjamin noted this in the early twentieth century by expressing his unease with what he saw as the process of “aesthetization of politics.”¹² More recently, Jaques Ranciere writes in *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004) that aesthetics should be understood “as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience.”¹³ Ranciere continues:

It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.¹⁴

Considering both Ranciere and Benjamin, we can argue that aesthetics play a crucial role not just in totalitarian, fascistic politics, but also in the very fabric of all politics and nation-building. This is especially true with respect to the role of politics in the construction of Statecraft, or the symbolic, ideological mask that constitutes a state. What shapes Statecraft are symbolic visual forms, civic rituals, and public visual expressions of the state. As anthropologist Victor Turner has argued: “The social world is a world in becoming, not a world in being.”¹⁵ The world in becoming demands a constant

¹² Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” *Illuminations, Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt trans. Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 242.

¹³ Jacques Ranciere. *The Politics of Aesthetics, the Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 13.

¹⁵ Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors Symbolic Action in Human Society*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).

negotiation and structuring of the social through aesthetic means. Aesthetics is therefore one of the preconditions for the functioning of the state and its political structures.

The complicated relationship between the state, politics, and aesthetics is at the core of this chapter as I seek to uncover the workings of particular public spectacles in socialist Yugoslavia, using the phenomenon of Youth Day as my case study. Youth Day was an annual celebration of Yugoslav socialist youth and their accomplishments, but it was also celebrated as President Tito's birthday. As such it represented a key element in the construction of public national consciousness (along with May Day and Independence Day,) and served to reinscribe important socialist ideologies into the space of the everyday. I will contrast such official state spectacles with examples of resistance to these narratives, most notably Dusan Makavejev's 1967 film *Parade*. While in the previous two chapters I analyze official art of the post-war period, emphasizing the forms and structures of emerging socialist modernism, in this chapter I want to bring to light the structuring of socialist modernity through public spectacles. Both socialist modernist art and broader forms of visual culture operated within state structures, showing the multiplicity of aesthetic-political negotiations amidst the project of building a socialist utopia. Both official art and official public visual representations (forms of state pageantry such as celebrations of Youth Day, May Day, Yugoslav National Army Day and other similar state holidays) were implicated in the larger question of the functioning of the socialist state and provided forms of state legitimization. In short, art and visual representations buttressed Statecraft, giving visual material form to the state's ideological needs by appealing to the senses. How the Yugoslavian state built its political and state

sensoria will be discussed in the following pages in order to show the deep entanglement of the sensual with the political, demonstrating that no state can exist without appealing to the citizens' senses. In Yugoslavia state legitimization was also imbued with a utopian longing that was at the core of its form of socialist modernity.

Youth Day: Thinking Through the Spectacle

From very early on, the Yugoslavian state built a sense of social cohesion via a lively and politicized mass culture. Apart from the typical public speeches, radio addresses, and televised broadcasts, Yugoslavian mass culture was built on numerous and regular, large and small public gatherings commemorating important dates from the country's short history. These events were envisioned as occasions for building national unity in a state that was made up of various nationalities, religions, ethnic groups, languages, and cultural histories. President Tito, aware of Yugoslavia's complex identity, attempted to build unity through political and social means, and more importantly, by creating a common socialist culture. Mass spectacles played an important role in shaping Yugoslavian national culture and were regularly attached to other official cultural productions such as the erection of public monuments, national music, architecture etc. Populist character, shaped by a mixture of politics, entertainment, and art constituted part of the national consciousness and influenced the way the citizens of Yugoslavia navigated their way in the world.

As a case study of how the senses were mobilized on behalf of Yugoslavian Statecraft, I will analyze the political, cultural, and visual spectacle known as Youth Day. This yearly event took place over a period of forty years and celebrated President Josip Broz Tito's birthday as well as the life and work of Yugoslavia's youth. The youth were placed within a complex matrix of political and social relationships as signifiers of a healthy nation able to take ownership of its future. Their youthful bodies and their visual, physical, and symbolic power were harnessed to create social cohesion, support official state ideology, and uphold the power of President Tito, who was placed at the centre of all the symbolic narratives. Yugoslavian socialist culture was therefore negotiated through an intricate body politic that paired the symbol of the President with other symbols of the state, in this case the youth; Tito became the signifier, or the symbolic pole around which all other meanings and subject-positions were organized and negotiated. Within the solidity of such strong ideological narratives, however, I find fissures in which the official representations appear more fluid, even ideologically counterintuitive.

By engaging with the intricacies of the visual technologies of representation embedded in Youth Day, I analyze the ways in which its symbolic apparatuses operated within the realm of the cultural and social production of meaning. In uncovering the workings of what Don Handelman calls "the technology of events,"¹⁶ and more specifically their spectacular, representational mechanisms, I read Youth Day as more than a totalitarian ritual. The event's manifold, complex, and sometimes paradoxical

¹⁶ Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 7.

nature highlights that its character was not necessarily solely an outcome of repressive politics, but rather, a process of negotiation of meaning, of tarrying with forces in which Yugoslavian “masses” were willing participants as much as they were the subjects of active repression. Youth Day functioned to create a sense of stability in an otherwise precarious social system, but it also represented a moment of communal pleasure, or of *jouissance*, as Slavoj Žižek would argue, in which pain and pleasure existed as close companions.¹⁷ Youth Day was an emblem of Yugoslavian mass culture and official state politics, but at the same time it operated as an ambiguous event, at once both troubling and constitutive of the highest forms of socialist idealism.

Historical Narratives

According to official historical accounts Youth Day was spontaneously initiated in the spring of 1945 while Yugoslavian territory was still partially under occupation.¹⁸ A local chapter of the Young Communist League of Yugoslavia, Savez Komunističke Omladine Jugoslavije (SKOJ),¹⁹ from a small town in Serbia, decided to thank the President for his leadership by sending greetings for his birthday on May 25, 1945. Around twelve thousand young Yugoslavs participated in this first celebration carrying

¹⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying With the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

¹⁸ Zoran Sekulic, ed., *Titova stafeta mladosti*, 2nd ed. (Beograd: Mladost, 1989), 5; also see: Zivadin Stepanovic, *Kragujevačka stafeta: Titu*, (Kragujevac: Opstinska konferencija Saveza socijalističke omladine, 1985).

¹⁹ Acronym for Union of Yugoslavian Communist Youth [Savez Komunističke Omladine Jugoslavije.]

several Youth Day batons and a book in which people from across the nation wrote their messages of thanks.²⁰ Several years later, in 1957, President Tito renamed his birthday Youth Day;²¹ this enabled him to engage the potent symbol of youth and wed it to his own benevolent and paternal representation. More importantly, the power of the Youth Day spectacle also resided in the Youth Day baton, which represented President's direct power. The baton also symbolically embodied President's phallus travelling across the nation. The celebrations were at first documented through photographs, books, and on film. Once television became a mainstay in most households, Youth Day became a highly embedded broadcast media event that brought Tito's image, and the images of thousands of youth, into the homes of every Yugoslav citizen. The exact structure and organization of Youth Day changed over time, but the basic premise stayed the same until 1987 when it was discontinued.

Each year, a few months prior to May 25 the country started preparations for the main celebration. Official posters and postage stamps were circulated and radio and TV shows announced the day. A contest was held for the best designs for the "štafeta" (relay

²⁰ Zoran Sekulic, ed., *Titova Stafeta Mladosti*, 4.

²¹ Borisav Djuverovic, one of the official historians/sociologists of the baton, wrote a book on the history of the Youth baton in which he states that the youth of Yugoslavia planned to start with the event of the baton as early as 1944-45 while the country was still in war with Germany. However, according to him, the country was soon liberated and the baton was then freely passed through the country. Less than ten years later Tito himself requested that the so-called Tito's Baton be renamed the Youth Baton and that the day of his birth be celebrated as Youth Day. In his address on the occasion of his birthday in 1957 he praised youth for their efforts and stated that his wish was that his birthday be the day that would celebrate youth achievements in the war and their constant struggle for the good of the country.



Figure 3.1. Trpin, Janez. *25 Maj 1948*
Poster 96 x 67 cm, 1948.



Figure 3.2. The First Day Cover
comemorating
1975 Day of Youth with President
Tito's portrait by painter Bozidar Jakac.

baton) and the official poster.²² It has been suggested that in Youth Day's forty-year history there were some twenty thousand relay batons carried across Yugoslavia.²³ Every republic elected its representatives to carry the main baton. The chosen youth had to be deemed deserving, due to their public service, their work, or their intellectual and athletic achievements. During the protracted celebrations many smaller, live spectacles were created for local audiences across the nation, the most popular of which were local welcoming committees. People lined the streets to see the batons; some cities organized concerts, and athletic and dance contests in the President's honour. Primary, and many secondary schools had Youth Day relay events so that the students, teachers, and school administrators could celebrate the passing of the baton. The largest and most extravagant spectacle, however, took place at Yugoslav National Army Stadium in the country's capital, Belgrade. The relay baton concluded its journey there as a member of the Yugoslavian League of Communist Youth turned it over to President Tito. Youth Day was not a single event, but represented months of preparations including the travelling of the baton across the country,²⁴ mass celebrations in towns and cities, and the culmination at Yugoslav National Army Stadium. The images and live events formed a visual apparatus that was part of the larger disciplinary mechanism of

²² Historian Ivan Colovic locates two kinds of relay batons: primary and local. There was one specially designed primary baton each year, it was carried through the whole country to be finally presented to the president. Local batons, however, were many and these were carried regionally and presented to local city officials. See: Ivan Colovic "On Models and Batons" *vlasTITO iskustvo, Past and Present*, Ed. Radonja Leposavic. Tans. Vladimir Brasanac. (Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2005), 154.

²³ Zoran Sekulic, ed., *Titova Stafeta Mladosti*, 4. ; Ivan Colovic, "On Models and Batons." In *vlasTITO iskustvo: Past and Present*, Radonja Leposavic.ed, Vladimir Brasanac trans. (Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2005), 153.

²⁴ Each year the baton would start its journey in a different city and was carried according to a particular route. The route would change each year to include as many territories as possible.

the state, seeking to organize, train, mobilize, and supervise large numbers of people living in a fragile social structure.

In *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (1988) John Tagg highlights this interdependence between state power and visualization by tracing the development of modern visual representations—photography in particular—and linking it to the development of the nineteenth-century capitalist state, with its complex sociopolitical structures. For Tagg, the documentation and visualization embedded in the history of photography is in direct correlation with the exigencies of the liberal state. In his view, the state used its various coercive and non-coercive mechanisms, to which photography belonged, to shape the masses of workers into a docile, diversified, and motivated workforce.²⁵ Photography played a dual didactic regulatory role in the implementation of correct public behavior, on the one hand presenting proper images of citizenry, and on the other displaying visual warnings by documenting images of those who were deemed socially problematic.²⁶

In non-capitalist countries such as Yugoslavia, the dialectic of surveillance and consent was complicated by the lack of capitalist monetary incentives (the promise of future riches and climbing the social ladder). What was left of socialism was pure idealism. As a result, the Yugoslav people performed almost unthinkable feats of self-sacrifice in order to live up to the ideal of the socialist super ego. This was most famously done by the “shock-workers,” [udarnici] such as the coal miner Alija

²⁵ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, (London: Macmillan Education, 1988), 4.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 5.



Figure 3.3. Some of the first batons carried in 1945



Figure 3.4. Carrying the relay baton somewhere in Bosnia and Herzegovina, c.1961

Sirotanovic and his crew, who mined a hundred and fifty-two tons of coal in one work shift. Representational mechanisms deepened this structure of the super ego by symbolically enacting the social discursive field, which oscillated between utopian idealism and various institutional and administrative mechanisms of discipline.

The main baton's journey across Yugoslavia created a symbolic network through which all parts of the country were joined together.²⁷ This network, constructed by the bodies of young people criss-crossing Yugoslavia's landscape, served to provide a sense of national cohesion. Although fleeting and ephemeral, the network was kept alive by yearly repetition, constantly reinstating its virtual, transitory life into the citizens' consciousness. While carrying the baton, Yugoslavian citizens also symbolically carved President Tito's body into the land itself, into the geography of each region. The landscape of the country became the landscape of Tito's body transforming the entire nation into his likeness. Traces of his body remained even after Youth Day ended via inscriptions of Tito's name left in the landscape (Figs. 3.5 and 3.6). These seemingly spontaneous, crudely written monuments (done either by piling stones or planting trees) were meant to transform the landscape itself and were the material remnants of his absent presence.

Images of young workers, farmers, and students smiling and carrying the baton (Figs. 3.3 and 3.4) were documented and reproduced in daily newspapers, magazines, large monographs, TV specials, and documentary films. These recurring images followed a very particular formal strategy. They depicted people in motion, often

²⁷ Ivan, Colovic "On Models and Batons," *vlasTITO iskustvo: Past and Present*, ed. Radonja Leposavic, trans. Vladimir Brasanac, (Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2005), 154.



Figure 3.5. *Our Tito*, carved into a mountain on the Slovenian/Austrian border.

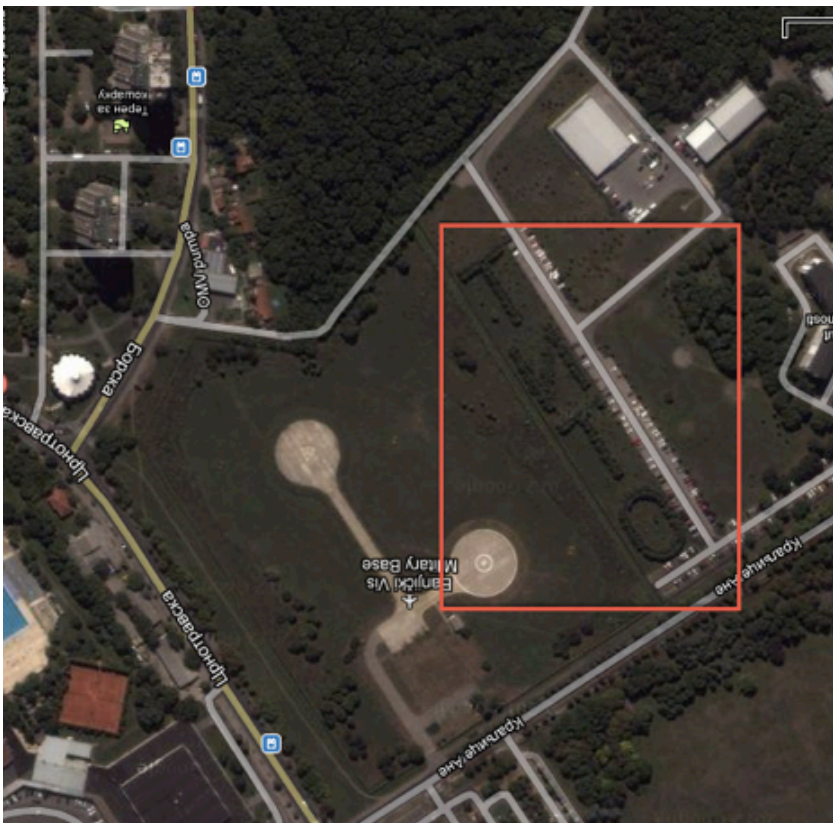


Figure 3.6. Tito's name landscaped with trees, Belgrade (taken with Google Maps on July 15, 2012)

running towards the viewer, pictured on a city street or remote roads in the company of the relay team. Human bodies were framed in long shots, showing strong diagonals meant to convey movement and dynamism. Purportedly offering pictorial evidence of the event, these visual representations were ideologically structured as particular reflections of the Yugoslav society of the time—namely youthful exuberance, which the state needed in the context of the post-war reconstruction and economic crisis. The able-bodied young athletes with both smiles on their faces and expressions of pain from straining their bodies, were a testament to the society's determination and sacrifice. Performativity is deeply embedded in these extravagant acts of carrying the baton to the most remote corners of the land, running to exhaustion, and enduring harsh weather.²⁸ The state representational mechanisms of Youth Day demanded sacrifice, which was displayed through strenuous bodily effort. These somewhat outlandish feats of human endurance were deeply embedded in the idealism of socialist politics and always produced excess. The excess here is a form of *jouissance*, an enjoyment and pleasure of participation in the act of sacrifice for “the greater good,” an externality of the idealism of the socialist body politic. There can be no successful politics without excess, without the *jouissance* produced in the material bodies of the citizens whose performative actions structure the state's mythical body.

²⁸ For more on cultural performance and social structuring see: Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*.

Official posters followed a similar formal logic, as evidenced in one of the earliest Youth Day posters by the Slovenian graphic designer Janez Trpin (Fig. 3.1). In his design a woman and a man pictured in the foreground are running towards the viewer. The man is carrying the baton, they are both young and they exude joy with their wide smiles. The crowd—which we can assume is a welcoming committee—is behind them on the left as the two move towards the viewer to exit the picture frame. Symbolically, they seem to be moving towards some future event. Their bodies are strong and muscular, perfect in form, close to the bodily ideal of socialist realist aesthetics. Photographs of similar actions (Fig. 3.2) have an identical formal language. The image of the road, the movement of the bodies, and the constant implication that the young people depicted are about to leave the frame of the visible makes such images potent symbols of the state's ambition to project into the future. The graphic images and their photographic counterparts operate in what Tagg would argue is a disciplinary, or didactic mode, pointing to a desired attitude of sacrifice and unity and showcasing what a socialist body should look like.

Youth Day as an Urban Spectacle

Although the batons were carried across the entire territory of Yugoslavia, the main focus of Youth Day celebrations was always placed on large and small urban sites (for example Figs. 3.7 and 3.8.) For a country in the midst of post-war rebuilding and industrialization, the notion of an urban site represented a promise of a better socialist

future. The more urbanized Yugoslavia became, the closer it got to the Western countries it tried to emulate or even supersede in its development. The city became an emblem of the future, embodying characteristics of revolutionary time and space in which, as Susan Buck-Morss argues, history provides legitimacy for the revolution and, in effect, establishes a linear trajectory towards the future.²⁹ After the war, Yugoslavian urban spaces were undergoing an enormous transformation as the country rapidly moved from an agrarian to an industrial society. City life embodied the state's goal of building a highly industrialized society, one that was meant to legitimize Yugoslavia's international status as a progressive state.

City space is, however, more complex than simply being the fulfillment of a futuristic dream. In *Three Urban Discourses* (2008) John Rennie Short points out that cities are places of both freedom and confinement.³⁰ They are perceived as spaces where individuality reigns and usual social roles are reversed, as well as spaces of possibilities and malleable destinies. On the other hand, cities have always been spaces where human destinies were intertwined with powerful political and social forces

²⁹ Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, 43.

³⁰ John Rennie Short, "Three Urban Discourses," in *A Companion to the City*, eds. G. Bridge and S. Watson, (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2008), 18.



Figure 3.7. Dino Neskusil.
Youth Day in Karlovac, 1977.



Figure 3.8. Dino Neskusil. *Youth Day in Karlovac, 1977.*

which often sought to discipline the actions and identities of all those living inside the city's confines.³¹

Analysis and deconstruction of Youth Day as a phenomenon of culture, praxis, and a mass mediated sociopolitical form have to take into account the ways in which socialist modernity developed in the context of the city as a contradictory space. Understood in such a complex environment, Youth Day transcends its image of an oppressive spectacle and becomes an embodiment of a need to build cohesion and community in a socialist state. While many characteristics of Youth Day were indeed totalitarian in nature, most obviously its nurturing of the cult of President Tito's personality, other elements, such as celebrations of the communal bonds established through preparation and planning of the event, its emphasis on ethnic and, in some respects, gender equality, promotion of education, employment, and also its value as entertainment were all positive elements.

As an urban cultural phenomenon Youth Day also needs to be understood in relationship to the state's ideology of progress and development. One of the ways in which the Communist Party and the socialist state attempted to do this was by implying

³¹ Many modern thinkers have theorized on this subject, including Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre, and Manuel Castells. For an in depth discussion of each theorist's understanding of the city space See for example: Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, (New York: Belknap Press, 2002); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Vintage Books 1995); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall. (University of California Press, 1984); Manuel Castells, *City, Class and Power*, (London; New York, MacMillan; St. Martins Press, 1978); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity, An enquiry into the origins of cultural change*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

that there was an inherent link between socialist politics and urban and industrial development as the state saw itself in direct competition with the West in both spheres.³² The urban space became a material symbol of the state's success in building socialist modernity. Rapid industrialization, electrification, and large-scale housing projects were all signifiers of socialist hard work, and the city was their epicentre. The city's material, political, and economic potential was harnessed to become a site in which the state could not only build the country's future but also enact its ideological goals such as national unity and political cohesion.

As a result of its 1949 break from the Soviet Union and the need to present itself as a moderate socialist country, Yugoslavian political elites supported the artists and architects in looking towards high modernism and the West when it came to building the new socialist urban space. As I noted in Chapter 2, many of the architects of the time were influenced by Le Corbusier's aesthetic, which profoundly changed the way urban spaces were envisioned. As a result of encountering international modernism in the mid 1950s many of the suburbs sprouting up around the large cities in Yugoslavia, such as the New Belgrade (Fig. 3.9), were directly influenced by Le Corbusier and the International style. Concomitant to the growth of the socialist modernist city was the opening of Yugoslavia towards commerce and consumerism. Use of the term consumerism seems paradoxical in a socialist context, but production of surplus goods and socialist consumption became commonplace in the public discourse in Yugoslavia of the 1950s.

³² For more on this see: Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*.



Figure 3.9. General view of The New Belgrade, Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 1967



Figure 3.10. Charles- Le Corbusier, *L'Unité Édouard d'Habitation: La Cité Radieuse*, Marseille, 1952



Figure 3.11. Milorad Pantic, *Beogradski Sajam [Belgrade Fair Grounds]* 1954-57

Marketing, branding, and advertisement were adopted in the rest of Eastern Europe after Stalin's death during the so-called period of the Thaw.

Even as elements of Western consumerism were being adopted in Yugoslavia, David Crowley and Susan Reid argue in *Style and Socialism, Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe* (2000) that some of the new state rhetoric maintained its roots in the Eastern European ideology that held that socialism should, in all ways, supersede Western societies (in science, manufacturing, industry, culture and so forth), thereby proving the supremacy of socialism.³³ It became a matter of national strategic importance to invest and create goods better, or as good, as those produced in Western factories.³⁴ Cities in Yugoslavia reflected this impetus towards production and openness to international trade by developing trade fairs with a number of eye-catching pavilions. Fairgrounds were constructed in each of the large cities in Yugoslavia; the fair in the capital, Belgrade, was the largest and most ambitious.

Socialist politics pushed for a planned economy, industrialization, modernization, and forms of a consumerist market, as it was also attempting to, literally and symbolically, inscribe its power, its history and its memory onto the space of the city where industrialization and modernization were occurring. The creation of enormous public building projects, apartment complexes, department stores, and factories was therefore supplemented by state pageantry that celebrated socialist past

³³ David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds. *Style and Socialism, Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2000), 9.

³⁴ Eli Rubin, "The Form of Socialism without Ornament, Consumption, Ideology, and the Fall and Rise of Modernist Design in the German Democratic Republic," *Journal of Design History*, vol. 19 no. 2, (2006): 158-9.

and projected it into the future. This totalizing environment of the city as a built space and a space of mass performances functioned as a traditional representation through its construction of images of happy workers and farmers; it, however, also became a phenomenological environment through which the new socialist-built spaces seamlessly integrated public events such as Youth Day into their new psycho-spatial architecture.³⁵

Youth Day operated within what Stuart Hall terms the field of “representational practices,” which become meaningful only through people’s participation. He argues:

The power or capacity of the visual sign to convey meanings is only “virtual” or potential until those meanings have been realized in use. Their realization requires, at the other end of the meaning chain, the cultural practices of looking and interpretation, the subjective capacities of the viewer to make images signify.³⁶

The event made sense once it was inserted into the mainstream everyday life experiences of the Yugoslavian people. The relationship between urban spaces, everyday life, and representational practices can be understood as a discursive practice that ultimately functioned within a larger socio-political realm through which the people’s subjectivities were constructed in relationship to, and through, the work of normative structuring of the state ideology.

Youth Day’s initial character was that of a populist didactic theatre. From the late 1960s onwards, however, it became more akin to an entertainment spectacle adopting formal, visual, and narrative tropes of Western pop culture, which had become more and

³⁵ Walter Benjamin, “The work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” 239.

³⁶ Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Looking and Subjectivity,” *Visual Culture, The Reader*, Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall eds. (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications in association with Open University 2001), 310.



Figure 3.12.
Anonymous.
*Youth Day
Concert, 1985*



Figure 3.13. *Youth Day Celebration,*
Belgrade, TV Still, 1987



Figure 3.14. *Youth Day
Celebration, Belgrade, TV Still,*
1987

more widespread in Yugoslavia. Its didactic role slowly dissipated as people, and the state, turned towards new cultural genres coming from the West—especially rock ‘n’ roll music and Hollywood film and television productions. A famous instance of a ‘westernizing trend’ was when one of the acts for the 1970 main Youth Day event at the JNA Stadium was “Let the Sunshine In” from the musical *Hair* which had begun its run on Belgrade stage a couple of years earlier. By 1980 Youth Day turned into socialist pop-kitsch in which the ideological political component almost entirely receded into the background. By this time, Youth Day was orchestrated by a large TV production team, which treated it as any other concert. Famous Yugoslavian rock bands and pop singers, dancers and entertainers, as well as thousands of extras were regularly hired to create an elaborate variety show (Figs. 3.13 and 3.14).

Despite the backgrounding of ideological content, the form of the pop spectacle was a reflection of Yugoslavian socialist ideology, which even in its beginnings, sought to appeal to the masses, recognizing that popular entertainment acted as a form of escapism and release of social frustrations. Perhaps the clearest example of this tension was in the ambivalence around television production and consumption; television as a leisurely, frivolous entertainment, stood for bourgeois and capitalist forms of mass culture, but it was also used by the state to structure citizens’ subjectivity (in the sense of self-regulation and mirroring of state ideologies). State-run television would regularly run American soap operas, such as *Dr. Kildaire* and *Peyton Place*, followed immediately by highly ideological socialist propaganda programs such as documentaries on army life. Instead of creating dualistic, and oppositional meanings, such programming created a hybrid cultural

experience in which the state managed to appear open and democratic.³⁷ In fact, as Victor Turner argues rituals are structured to provide a separation from the everyday, only to reinscribe given social norms. He claims that *communitas*, or the points at which members of a community participate in liminal common experiences, allow for a temporary stripping down of social norms and act as a form of release.³⁸ The Yugoslav Communist Party and its state structures never censored populist forms of culture, allowing its citizens to use them as a release valve.

The transformation of Youth Day from an ideological statement to entertainment is telling of the complexities of such events, which operate in a dialectical mode between ordinary life and the ritualistic, sacred space of ideology represented by the event. John MacAloon reminds us that all ritual events encompass both normative and dissident acts and ideas, and within the ritual experience the two forces inevitably join and conflict.³⁹ Dramas, as MacAloon calls such conflicts, are the constitutive part, without which rituals would lose their power. The melding of the high and low and the creation of highly dramatic experiences, as MacAloon posits, are the ways in which spectacular events such as Youth Day hold their power. As much as the event was a ritualized and affective spectacle,

³⁷ For more see: Marusa Pusnik, "Flirting with Television in Socialism: Proletarian Morality and the Lust for Abundance," in *Remembering Utopia: The Culture of Everyday Life in Socialist Yugoslavia*, eds. Breda Luthar and Marusa Pusnik, (Washington: New Academia Press, 2009).

³⁸ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process, Structure and Anti-Structure*, (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1969), 96.

³⁹ John J. MacAloon, "Double Visions: Olympic Games and American Culture," *The Kenyon Review*, The New Series, Vol. 4 No. 1 (Winter, 1982), 107.



Figure 3.15. *Youth Day Celebration, Belgrade, TV Still, 1987*



Figure 3.16. Anonymous. Schoolchildren celebrating Youth Day with their teacher. c. 1980

it was also an example of mass popular culture, which, along with similar populist events, provided an important symbolic infrastructure of the society “in becoming.”⁴⁰

Youth Day was a conscious reminder of the state and the President’s power, but also a subconscious system of signs. Parades, relay batons, floats, displays of bodies, parachute landings, singing, youthful exuberance and speeches were some of the elements of the spectacle, which influenced the spectators and participants via a number of non-discursive means. Multisensory elements such as gestures, colours, lights, sounds, movement, repetition, and order influenced people’s bodily responses, operating on the level of affect. The sensory elements structuring the affective represent the orrectic part of ritual symbolism. Their operation involves the pre-cognitive and is not ideological, even though it contributes to the structuring of ideology. Affect, as I use it, refers to the immediate physical, pre-cognitive impact of the visual “even when its precise meaning remains, as it were, vague” or suspended and unresolved.⁴¹ Lawrence Grossberg posits that affect is “a-signifying” and varied in its forms and structures.⁴² Affect is described as an *intensity* that informs a series of maps that help navigate a person’s non-linguistic relationship to the world. In effect, this is a non-conscious process in which our brain responds to imagery, or other sense data, before these become available to conscious reflection — making the affective functioning of images a powerful system that structures responses even before we are able to understand what those responses are.

⁴⁰ Victor, Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 24.

⁴¹ Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Looking and Subjectivity,” in *Visual Culture: The Reader*, eds. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall, (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications in association with Open University, 1999), 311.

⁴² Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 80.

Grossberg describes affect in terms of its ability to create social connections or “the feeling of life” shared among a group of people thus making affect potentially socially transmitted.⁴³

As period photographs (Figs. 2.16–2.18) show, the masses of bodies participating in Youth Day floats were organized in a collection of synchronized movements operating as living signs, or as Siegfried Kraucauer termed, signs of a “body culture.”⁴⁴ The floats, choreographed dances, and other events involving mass participation allowed individuals to become an organic part of the socialist whole, sutured to it both through active involvement (youth who carried the batons and participated in mass floats) and by seeing everything as part of a live or TV audience. The real and the televised meld into one, structuring representation from the masses, so that the floats, or images that the masses create, are in fact ornaments as Kraucauer argues, perceived from the outside and from afar like areal photographs.⁴⁵

Images from the stadiums exemplify Stuart Hall’s argument that signifying processes are subjective and always implicated in affective processes. For Turner the bodily, the affective, or as he calls it “the orectic” works hand in hand with the ideological. These two poles of ritual symbolic meaning-making process work simultaneously.⁴⁶ The social, political, and cultural impact of Youth Day provided

⁴³ Grossberg, Lawrence. “Mapping Popular Culture,” 80.

⁴⁴ Siegfried Kraucauer, “The Mass Ornament,” in *The Mass Ornament Weimar Essays*, ed. Thomas Y. Levin, trans. Thomas Y. Levin. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 75.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 77.

⁴⁶ Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, (Ithava: Cornell University Press, 1967), 54.

something far more important than a mere display of the state's ideology: a sense of belonging that operated via the people's sensory apparatus surpassing purely didactic, ideological structures. Affect, operating within the structures of Youth Day was both active and reactive. It was reactive in the sense that people responded to what was given in the spectacle; it became active once they become participants. This dialectic of passivity and activity was what gave the event such potency, and what MacAloon describes is a power of all such ritualistic events—their concomitant play between passive and active forces.⁴⁷

Closely wedded to the affective functioning of the Youth Day spectacle, which operated as an automatic bonding agent, was the factor of physical bonding, without which the spectacle would not have been successful. This was especially important for those who were actively participating in Youth Day programs. Each participant dancing and singing in the parades and on the floats also embodied the narratives played out. Unlike actors who play a character in theatre or film, these youth *became* ideology through their bodies. In this process the affect is captured, qualified into the commonsensible. There is a doubling of meaning and an inherent tension within such embodiment. While the youth performed their socialist duty, playing out scenarios of historical struggle for a better future, they inevitably *became* socialism. While their participation was always embedded in the material production of meaning, this production also became operational on the level of the transcendental.

⁴⁷ John J. MacAloon, "Double Visions: Olympic Games and American Culture," 108.



Figure 3.17. Youth Day at the JNA Stadium, Belgrade, TV Still, 1987



Figure 3.18. Anonymous, Youth Day on the streets of Zagreb, c.1960

In his work on representation, Louis Marin discusses public spectacles, such as parades, military marches, and processions, arguing that all such events, whether secular or religious, are ritual in nature and operate through a “structure of repetition.”⁴⁸ The element of repetition and sequencing of time, unfolding in a specific order, points to the “symbolic structure,” which is organized in terms of liturgy and formal order.⁴⁹ Marin, furthermore, argues that these events operate as a narrative embodiment of the system of values existing in a given community or society. What this means is that apart from the importance of visual representation in constituting and re-inscribing meaning within the public realm, those who participate in such events (viewers and participants alike) emotionally and intuitively re-enact narratives of the social order through their bodies, just like the faithful who, for example, in Catholic processions re-enact the stations of the cross and in so doing feel as if they have relived them. Such investments in the social require more than just intellectual acceptance of the act that is being performed; they need to include the participants’ emotional, as well as bodily, identification. So, for example, a typical Youth Day celebration at the stadium would have several thematic components, each of which celebrated different achievements of youth in socialist Yugoslavia. Participants created enormous flowers, flags, words, and machines with their bodies. The body became a common property, a conductor of powerful ideologies; as Foucault argues, it became “the property of society, the object of collective and useful

⁴⁸ Louis Marin, *On Representation*, trans. Catherine Porter, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 41.

⁴⁹ Marin, Louis. *On Representation*, 41.

appropriation.”⁵⁰ Such kinesthetic mechanisms can be termed spectacle management, as they were structured to bring affective intensity in line with ideology and make it commonsensible. The collective appropriation was, among other things, a display of the masses as one body sacrificing itself to the President. As for the opportunity afforded to the citizens to touch (if only for a moment) the body of the leader, partaking of his power by carrying the relay baton, this contact can be likened to medieval relic worship. Youth Day provided a symbolic network in which Yugoslavian society renewed its commitment to a set of shared ideological mechanisms through the sacrifice of the youth and the sharing in the power of the relic—the President’s baton.

As the secular ritual unfolded and specific kinds of powers transferred from person to person, from territory to territory, and from the nation to the President, a temporal element of Youth Day became more obvious. The unfolding of the event, spanning months of preparation, and its culmination opened a temporal network in which the past, present, and future intersected. The utopian visions of time were furthered by the exuberance of mass exercise, mobile floats, parachute landings, electronic displays, and elaborate choreographed dances re-enacted in the stadium with the leader in attendance. The displays of power and prowess were created as sites of a remembrance of the past. The past was relived first through the participants and then through those who watched either at home or at the event. But it was primarily the youth who were remembering kinesthetically and through habit. They did so by reenacting history that symbolically passed through their bodies as they created massive floats representing

⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*, 2nd edition, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 109.



Figure 3.19.
Youth Day float,
JNA Stadium
Belgrade. c.
1977



Figure 3.20. President Tito
at the Youth Day, JNA
Stadium, Belgrade. c.1977

Tito's name, Yugoslavian flags, peace symbols, or communist party insignia. In *Photography and Propaganda, 1945–1958* (2005) Milanka Todic writes that “the mass spectacles of the body formed key cultural models of behaviour according to which the whole apparatus of the new social community functioned.”⁵¹ Therefore, such mass spectacles may be understood as didactic models through which young people were educated about their past, and more importantly, were shown what the communist future held for them. In 1974 Yugoslav sociologist Borisav Dzuvegovic writes about Youth Day:

Youth Day is a day which needs to be constantly linked to struggles and successes, life and work goals, hopes and dreams of the young generations, as well as revolutionary spirit and activities inspired by the great revolutionary himself, signifying thusly the complete continuity of our revolution.⁵²

His apologia of the event's purpose points to the fact that the young body was shaped not only for a remembrance of the past, but through the vision of what Yugoslavia could become, for the creation of the new future. Tito's speeches during these events always carried a twofold message that was linked back to the lives and the future of Yugoslav youth. His message reminded the participants of the spectacle and its viewers of past struggles that the country had endured, and of future hardships and successes that await it. This didactic linking of the past and the future through young bodies was meant to represent the continuation of the communist revolution. Like the above-mentioned text by Dzuvegovic, numerous other proclamations were written about Youth Day stressing

⁵¹ Milanka Todic, *Fotografija i propaganda, Photography and Propaganda 1945-1958*, (Banja Luka: JU Knjizevna zadruga, 2005), 127.

⁵² Borislav Dzuverovic, *25 Maj- Dan Mladosti*, (Beograd: Popularna Biblioteka, 1974), 7. [My translation.]

the notion of continuity under the leadership of Tito. Within the idea of the continuation of the socialist narrative was also the idea of the survival of the nation itself, which was possible only through the body and the work of the Yugoslav youth.

As I have already noted, John MacAloon argues, the spectacle of various rituals would not work if it did not contain excess, or slippage. The survival of the spectacle is dependent on the existence of the surplus libidinal economy, which contains an element of enjoyment unforeseen by the state. These instances of slippage may be interpreted as examples of what Michael Taussig calls “mimesis” and “alterity”. In *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (1993) Taussig builds on Benjamin’s notion of mimesis as a way “to get hold of something by means of its likeness.”⁵³ According to Taussig, the mimetic process is made up of the act of copying, or imitation, but also of a “palpable, sensuous, connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived.”⁵⁴ In the case of Youth Day the young people creating floats with their bodies, dancing in front of the President, were involved in the mimetic process in which they copied/embodyed the ideological construction. Mimesis is invoked as an “optical tactility, plunging us into the plane where the object world and the visual copy merge.”⁵⁵ Through this mimetic process, however, those who mimic also stray away from the object that is copied. Taussig explains this as an instance of contact. Taussig provides an

⁵³ Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 21.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 21.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 35.

anthropological example of the slippage⁵⁶ and argues that the copy is never the same as the original, nor does it seek to be. Rather, through contact with its environment, its social, bodily, and other contexts, the copy gains its own power. This is what Taussig describes as a play between mimesis and alterity. In the case of Youth Day this play was enacted through the slippages in which the bodies participating in the celebrations were both copying the ideological constructs while at the same time constructing other meanings. This enjoyment is reflected in the ways that the citizens, Yugoslavian youth in particular, interpreted the spectacle, not always conforming to the state's vision of socialism. Furthermore, as the second part of this chapter will show, there were always slippages in which the citizens deliberately infused their participation with subtle performative irreverence, a countermovement of sorts that distorted the master-narrative. The instances of slippage, or play between alterity and mimesis, however, were nevertheless still reproducing the official narrative. MacAloon argues that all rituals contain dissonant forces, and that these—arguably still enjoyable actions—were necessary for the continuation of the main narrative. Taussig points to a similar notion when he argues that the structure of the state, itself mythical, can be understood as containing both God and the Devil.

⁵⁶ Taussig recounts anthropological studies done by Baron Erland Nordenskiöld with the Cuna peoples. Studying Nordenskiöld's accounts Taussig encounters an example of the workings of alterity and mimesis in the ways that the Cuna used copies of Europeans as figures in their ritual enactments. See: Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 2-5.

The Image of the President

As much as it was an event that sought to integrate the youth into the fold of the socialist state and provide a sense of social unity, Youth Day was also a way to activate the image of the President. Among the many ways in which the event celebrated the continuity and stability of the state, the most important was in the ideological equivalence drawn between the representations of Tito and the nation's survival. With each float bearing Tito's name, each instance of his picture presented or displayed on a poster, or represented through the bodies of the Youth Day participants, his presence was further embedded into the consciousness of the nation. President Tito's visual representations emphasize three important points. First, they point to the symbolic and actual space which President Tito's body and his image occupied in the public and private realms in the former Yugoslavia. The omnipresence of the President's image/body, its symbolic existence in the baton, and its interaction with the bodies of citizens demonstrates the kind of power it had, and in many cases still has, in the collective minds and memory of Yugoslavs. Second, the visual representations of Youth Day and Tito address the polarity and the complexity of Tito's political power in Yugoslavia, being dictatorial and totalitarian and yet friendly at the same time.

Anthropologist and historian Maja Brkljacic observes this relationship:

We might thus argue that by picturing Tito as a *patronus* and an *amicus* and by building an intimate relationship between him and his protégées (Yugoslavs), a very "rich combination of power and intimacy" was established, which helped, in my view, to keep him close to the masses without at the same time undermining or

threatening his position of unquestioned power: one was supposed to believe him not on the grounds of fear but love.⁵⁷

Thus, Tito's actual body and its representations, traversed a fine line between close proximity and balanced distance in order to be present in the public consciousness, and maintain power. Finally, the relationship between the youth and the President, meticulously documented and transmitted during Youth Day events, was structured around admiration, adoration, and a symbolic exchange that could be characterized, as I have noted, as secular religiosity, ultimately pointing to Tito's symbolic ascension and immortality.⁵⁸

In his now classic study of the representation of King Louis XIV, Louis Marin suggests two important functions of royal representation. First, representation serves to substitute the physical presence of the King. He writes that, "as the place of representation then, there is a thing or a person absent in time or space, and a substitution

⁵⁷ Maja Brkljacic, "A Case of a Very Difficult Transition, The Ritual of the Funeral of Josip Broz Tito," in *Limen: Journal for theory and practice of liminal phenomena*, no.1 (2001) http://limen.mi2.hr/limen1-2001/maja_brkljacic.html

⁵⁸ I remember very vaguely an occasion when I was three years old, and on my way to visit my grandmother with my mother. My mother decided to take the streetcar, a twenty minute ride that wove through most of Sarajevo's mid and downtown. It was a busy day, rush hour, and the streetcar was filled with people returning from work. At one point, as we passed by a large office building, for no apparent reason I shouted "there he is mom, there he is!" Half-confused, half-embarrassed, my mother asked me "who is there?" I shouted back "Tito!" Naturally, everyone on the streetcar had heard me and laughed. Unknowingly I had recreated a curious and rather bizarre scene of ideological identification that had caused me, even as a toddler, to recognize and embody the notion of the president as the ultimate symbol of power.



Figure 3.21. President Tito surrounded by the pioneers [communist children association] c. 1976



Figure 3.22. A Young woman handing over Youth Day Relay Baton to President Tito, Belgrade c.1980

operates with a double of this other in its place.”⁵⁹ The representation of the King serves to reassert his presence. The image of the President, the pomp associated with the Youth Day baton, and the relay-related rites served to reposit Tito’s power and presence even in his absence. According to Marin, it is often the substitute, or the representation, which serves to reinstate the leader’s power, that is more potent than the actual physical body. In Tito’s case, this observation holds greater currency because it is precisely through his absent presence, through the multiplication of his images and inscription of his body, through the young bodies creating mass floats and filling television screens, and other symbolic representations, that his power was kept alive. When the baton was carried from republic to republic, and when it was welcomed by legions of young elementary and high schools students, Tito was present. In anticipation of the solemn event, each school would gather students in the schoolyard, dressed in uniforms, usually black or blue skirts/pants and a white shirt topped off by a red scarf and a blue cap. Before the Youth baton entered the schoolyard, children would sing, dance, recite poems, and recreate important historical events, such as World War II battles. Although unaware of all the small, local celebrations, Tito was symbolically everywhere at all times through the diligent re-enactment of the commemorative staged spectacles in his honor.

The second function of representation according to Marin is to intensify the presence of the absent leader. He writes that “to ‘represent,’ then, is to show, to intensify, to duplicate a presence.”⁶⁰ Representation extends power through repeated

⁵⁹ Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King*, trans. Martha M. Houle, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, vol. 57, 1988), 5.

⁶⁰ Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King*, 5.

regimes of duplication. During the Youth Day activities in Yugoslavia, the presence of the leader was intensified, his power, both political and moral, heightened through the sheer multiplication of images. In photographs from the period there are numerous images of the leader emblazoned on flags, portraits, paintings, and banners. Tito's bold, upright, paradigmatic pose, the enormous scale of the images, and their public presence in central locations made his *absent presence* more pronounced. Thus, everyone acted as if in his presence, with words and actions weighted carefully so that the President would be proud of 'his' youth:

The first effect of the representational framework and the first power of representation are the effect and power of presence instead of absence and death; the second effect and second power are the effect of the subject, that is, the power of institution, authorization, and legitimization as resulting from the functioning of the framework reflected upon itself. If, then, representation in general had indeed a double power—that of rendering a new and imaginarily present, not to say living, the absent and the dead and that of constituting its own legitimate and authorized subject by exhibiting qualifications, justifications, and titles of the present and living to being—in other words if representation reproduces not only *de facto* but also *de jure* the conditions that make its reproduction possible, then we understand that it is in the interests of power to appropriate it for itself. Representation and power share the same nature.”⁶¹

Finally, Marin argues that representation needs to enter into institutional relations to be fully realized. In other words, there needs to be both a public and an institutional validation of the representation of the King (leader) to attain legitimacy and consistency in the public realm. Accordingly, the constitution of the citizens' subjecthood has to be obtained not only by inserting representation into everyday culture, but via mechanisms of structural support found in legal, economic, and political organizations. By this I mean

⁶¹ Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King*, 6.

institutions that legitimate the President's status (parliament, courts, government institutions) and those that create cultural and socio-political meaning (national television stations, national theatres, educational institutions). A proliferation of the leader's representation would be virtually impossible without large apparatuses that reach great numbers of people. In Yugoslavia such agencies of legitimization have always participated as the secondary network of meaning, so that, for example, the Youth Day manifestations were always closely followed in the media and publicized in hospitals, factories, and schools with posters, announcements, and by stamps with the image of the President and the Youth baton design for that year, issued by the national postal service. Consequently, as Marin argues, power, and the ways in which it proliferates in society go hand in hand with the ways in which visual representation proliferates; one cannot exist without the other.

In the course of his public appearances Tito appeared both distant and very close to those around him. In photographs taken at various events he was usually seen with people; however, there was always a space between his body and the bodies that surrounded him. Never in close contact with the people, Tito kept his distance yet smiled; he was friendly, yet always separated from the masses. In typical photographs from the period, such as the ones in Figs. 3.21 and 3.22, though he is allowing a child to kiss him, he is looking into the distance, not fully engaging with the crowd around him. Tito's presence was felt everywhere; there are still stories of friends of friends who had seen him, but in reality not many had close access to him. Maja Brkljacic argues that this close, yet distant, relationship between Tito and the citizens of Yugoslavia recalls the

traditional Christian relationship between believers and their patron saints.⁶² Thus, the deliberate and highly calculated space between Tito and the Yugoslavian people was meant to create a particular mode of representational address in which the President would be immortalized by being in an anachronic space. In such a space Tito did not exist in real time; he was present but was not in the same realm as the rest of the citizenry. In a way, his physical presence was sanctified and transformed into an image. Louis Marin argues that “the king is only truly king, that is, monarch, in images.”⁶³ Consequently, he can only “exist” as an iconic sign, even when he literally walks among his people. The body becomes detached from its physicality (becomes pure image, pure symbol) and is able to take on different kinds of significations.

When theorist Brian Massumi discussed representations of former President Ronald Reagan, he argued that the presidential image created the basis for national unity.⁶⁴ The image became the substance that multiplied its subsumed symbols, such as body, family, or flag. However, by subsuming them, it also reproduced them into an infinite number of possible signifiers.⁶⁵ The president’s body image, unlike other elements in the multiplicity of signifiers, wanted to become the Signifier, the One, the

⁶² Maja Brkljacic, “A Case of a Very Difficult Transition, The Ritual of the Funeral of Josip Broz Tito.”

⁶³ Marin, Louis. *Portrait of the King*. 8.

⁶⁴ Dean Kenneth and Brian Massumi, *First and Last Emperors: The Absolute State and the Body of the Despot*, (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1992), 90.

⁶⁵ Massumi argues that the unity always leaves excess that cannot be contained by it- or ‘remainder of the spirit.’ The remainder constantly seeks something else to absorb it. So out of the constant play between unity and its own excess, more and more signifiers are born and the space of the nation is overtaken by its own remainder.

Sap of national unity, or the “wetness” of the nation-mother’s milk, as Massumi argues.⁶⁶

The president’s image became everything and nothing—capable of subsuming or entering any and all symbolizations, any and all spheres of life. In a way, it could be attached to everything and at the same time keep its separate nature. The constant shift between the corporeal presence and its image, between the space of symbolization and the space of being, is what grants a powerful role to the image of the president. Image, or the icon, hovers between the space of embodiment (through the material stuff that it is made out of) and its transcendental space, occupied by pure power.

The spectacle of Youth Day and President Tito’s comportment and interaction with the people exemplified how his body was no longer just a body but an ultimate presence revered as a religious icon. Paradoxically, the supposedly communist, atheist Yugoslavian social structure was unable to function without such a divine presence, without a patron saint, or a transcendent father as the ultimate benevolent eye watching over his people, present at all times. The limitations of his physical body were overcome by his transformation into pure images, most potent of which was the Youth Day baton.

The tense relationship between Tito’s physical body and its image is best exemplified through the category of the body without image as Kenneth Dean and Brian Massumi emphasize. Their notion is based on the idea of the “body without organs” found in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.⁶⁷ The body without image is a

⁶⁶ Dean Kenneth and Brian Massumi, *First and Last Emperors*, 95.

⁶⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 40.



Figure 3.23. The Collection of Youth Day Relay Batons, History Museum, Belgrade

state in which certain aspects of the body, the vocal and the visual according to Massumi, become detached from the flesh itself. These aspects, Massumi argues, “take on a life of their own, entering self-propagating apparatuses of social circulation that exceed the individual (orally transmitted memory, portraits, statues, written history, documentary film and video, archives, birthplace museums, coinage, and stamps).”⁶⁸ The body without image therefore closely resembles Louis Marin’s notion of the royal image in which the monarchical power resides. However, for Massumi and Dean the power of the image is situated in its affective functioning, on the level of the pre-conscious. In both theoretical frameworks, the body loses a static, unified image. The image becomes capable of taking on many different guises and subsuming many different symbols. Through this transference of representation the physical body transcends its primary meaning and is capable of taking on new meanings.

Such workings of the body are embedded in, and carried by, social dynamics and apparatuses. Accordingly, the youth baton is a perfect example of the body without organs. Tito’s body—sanctified, mediated, and transformed into a pure image—is attached to the physical, phallic object—the Youth Day baton (Fig. 3.23)—then carried around and given life by young Spartan bodies. The President’s body/phallus floats in the intermediate space between his living body and the symbolic phallus, and it is precisely because of his ability to symbolically transfer his power onto others, to become everything and anything for the whole country, that Tito’s power became omnipresent.

⁶⁸ Dean Kenneth and Brian Massumi. *First and Last Emperors*, 138.

This could be qualified as an act of transubstantiation, or an act through which the image of a leader's body becomes his reality.⁶⁹

Dean and Massumi argue that the ultimate success of Reagan's political image was in its perpetual motion. The same can be argued for President Tito's image, which was, like his body, in constant motion during his presidency. Tito's transformed body, that I have already shown operated within the dialectic of absent presence and through an actual object (the youth baton,) was also characterized by constant change. The baton, with its small, multifaceted design, provided a convenient object to be carried around. More importantly, it was a body in constant movement, carried through the country in the hands of tens of thousands of young people. Tito's baton thus became meaningful only through its movement as it circulated his essence across Yugoslavia's terrain. Its circulation optimized Tito's potential powers of life-giving authority, expanding it by what Dean and Massumi term arrogation of the power of the adoring masses.⁷⁰

The youth baton's movement was also symbolically represented in its numerous designs that were created by hundreds of different people (artists, craftspeople, workers, children, and even some politicians.) In its forty-year history there were many different batons, each of which was lovingly crafted out of wood, metal, wire, paper, and other materials. The metamorphosis of each object pointed to Tito's own ability to change and adapt to his environment. Each unique design of the baton was, in effect, another version of Tito's body, adapted to a particular situation (a factory floor, a school yard, or a large stadium, for example). However, the Youth Day movement of his body image was only a

⁶⁹ Marin Louis, *Portrait of the King*, 8.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 93.



Figure 3.24. President Tito's Funeral, view of the VIP Balcony with 128 world leaders, 1980

continuation of an already existent discourse around Tito's life and work. Almost all the anecdotes and images of Tito's pre-war and wartime experiences were characterized by stories of movement. It has been said that during his underground communist activities in pre-war Yugoslavia he was constantly on the move, evading authorities. Similarly, his combat and leadership during the war were characterized by tactics of evasion and movement, so much so that it was often said that he almost never slept in the same place twice. The mythology of Tito's ability to move with ease was subsequently transported into the images and stories of the post-war period.

The problem was that Tito was quite old after the War, hence his movement was reinvented through the bodies of the youth who ran, swam, flew, and travelled in his stead, carrying the youth baton. It provided the symbolic, visual power and at the same time allowed Tito to use the youth's ability to move. Beyond that, the potent corporeal presence of the leader was merged with the representations of youthful and strong bodies. This is what theorist Ugo Vlaisavljevic calls the phenomenon of embodying the entire society in Tito, or "in the figure of the leader."⁷¹ With the translation of the leader's aging body into the bodies of young people, Tito's symbolic transformation from a mere mortal to an immortal was complete.

Even in death Tito's body was carried in a coffin across the country in his presidential train. The so-called "Blue Train" was a symbol of Tito's ability to be in perpetual motion, stopping only to wave at the crowds and kiss adoring children (Figs

⁷¹ Ugo Vlaisavljevic, "Tito's Greatest Gift: The Vacant Seat of Power," in *vlasTITO iskustvo: Past and Present*, ed. Radonja Leposavic, trans. Vladimir Brasanac (Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2007), 80.



Figure 3.25. President Tito Kissing children from the deck of his “Blue Train



Figure 3.26. President Tito meeting a crowd of people from the deck of the Blue Train

3.25 and 3.26). In these brief moments of contact with the masses some of his power rubbed against the social and political potential of the citizens. Extending Dean and Massumi's argument even further, Tito's ability to graft himself onto all symbols of power was evident during the final stages of his funeral when all 128 world leaders were neatly arranged on a purpose-built large proscenium, in front of which Tito's body lay in a coffin. In the historical documentation of the event (Fig. 3.24) we see the world's leaders standing like a Greek chorus giving homage to Tito. Again, the President's body became a symbol into which all other symbols were subsumed.

The Countermovements

As Tito's body passed throughout the country, melding with the masses, there were instances of countermovements, what Michel de Certeau called "invisible operators" who engaged in various oppositional socio-cultural practices. For de Certeau, although everyday life is organized through the disciplining power of various discourses, it also, in many ways, allows those who are under the disciplinary gaze to evade discipline. De Certeau's countermovements are examples of slippage, or of instances when the citizen body rebels. He writes:

These "ways of operating" constitute the innumerable practices by means of which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production. They pose questions at once analogous and contrary to those dealt with in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*: analogous, in that the goal is to perceive and analyze the microbe-like operations proliferating within technocratic structure and deflecting their functioning by means of a multitude of "tactics" articulated in the details of everyday life; contrary, in that the goal is not to make clearer how the violence of order is transmuted

into a disciplinary technology, but rather to bring to light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and make-shift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of “discipline.” Pushed to their ideal limits, these procedures and ruses of consumers compose the network of an antidiscipline.⁷²

Oppositional tactics of “making do” in the countries of Eastern Europe pointed to the fissures in the fabric of modernity under socialism and the fact that the socialist state apparatuses were incapable of fully subsuming citizenry into the phantasmagoria of their politics. Seemingly simple acts of emulating Western or Hollywood cultural tropes by chewing gum, or smoking brand cigarettes⁷³ represented inconspicuous moments of slippage, quiet acts of rebellion and participation in the Western-style consumer culture. However, as Reid and Crowley argue in *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in The Eastern Bloc* (2010) pleasure was not shunned by the official mainstream state cultures in the East. In fact, it was something to aspire to and celebrate;⁷⁴ but official forms of pleasure were removed from those often practiced in everyday life. The ephemeral pleasures sought by the citizens in the Eastern Bloc were those the state condemned as petit bourgeois and counterproductive (shopping for luxury items such as shoes or jeans, watching entertainment shows, or even something as simple as chewing gum.) These pleasures were also the ones that were most appealing and most often mimicked through acts of ‘making-do’. Tensions between the ephemeral, the luxurious,

⁷² Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steve Rendall, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1988), xiv.

⁷³ See: David Crowley and Susan Reid, *Style and Socialism*.

⁷⁴ David Crowley and Susan Reid “Introduction,” in *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in The Eastern Bloc*, (Evanstone: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 4.



Figure 3.27. Dusan Makavejev, *Parade*, film still, 1962



Figure 3.28. Dusan Makavejev, *Parade*, film still. 1962.

the forbidden, and the needed produced various forms of activities that were often unassuming, but also produced, as Reid and Crowley argue, forms of agency. Such activities were forms of countermovements as de Certeau theorizes, allowing the so-called “ordinary” practitioners, people living out their lives in the various spaces of the socialist everyday, to, in some ways, oppose the often oppressive environment in which they lived. Tensions between that which was allowed, and that which was pleasurable and practiced, constituted the multilayered counterculture in socialism.

The Yugoslavian relationship to leisure and consumerism was further complicated by the fact that the state had already opened its doors to forms of a bourgeois culture of leisure . As stated earlier in this chapter, certain forms of Western entertainment were adopted more readily, and as early as the 1950s, continued in their ‘socialist’ form until Yugoslavia’s end. Various forms of consumerism followed the development of mass culture. The constant tension between the citizens’ wants and needs, between utopian socialist ideals and capitalist consumption and between availability of goods and the ability to purchase them created a culture of paradoxes, a culture always in contradiction with itself.⁷⁵ The state, however, happily accepted such paradoxes, allowing forms of socialist advertising, entertainment, and consumer culture to co-exist. Yet it censored particular critiques of such practices when they attained the

⁷⁵ For more on the tensions in, and the paradox of socialist consumerism see: Breda Luthar, “Shame, Desire, and Longing for the West: A Case Study of Consumption,” and Marusa Pusnik. “Flirting with Television in Socialism: Proletarian Morality and the Lust for Abundance,” in *Remembering Utopia, The Culture of Everyday Life in the Socialist Yugoslavia*, (Washington: New Academia Press, 2010).



Figure 3.29.
Dusan Makavejev,
Parade, film still,
1962



Figure 3.30. Dusan
Makavejev, *Parade*,
film still, 1962

status of countermovements, by condemning the forms of socialism that the Yugoslavian state practiced or questioning the fetishistic representations of the President.

A potent example of such a countermovement is Dusan Makavejev's short documentary entitled *The Parade* from 1962. The film is interesting not only because of its subject matter, which was the May Day parade in Belgrade, but also because Makavejev managed to produce an oppositional vision of socialist culture in a documentary that was commissioned by the state to commemorate the event. I am especially interested in the documentary because its critique of the state spectacle is in dialogue with the state-organized mass spectacles that were ideologically saturated. Although documenting preparations for the parade, Makavejev used the symbolic language of the official Communist Party to invert the very meaning of what he recorded.

Although I am looking at *The Parade* from the perspective of its oppositional relationship to an official state spectacle and not as a moment in the history of Yugoslavian cinema, it is nevertheless worth taking a moment to place Makavejev's practice as a filmmaker in context. As one of the most prominent and most censored of Yugoslav film directors, Makavejev's work stands out as an example of new cinema influenced by the French New wave, Direct Cinema and Cinema Verite which had spread to several Eastern European countries in the early 1960s. In this particular documentary, Makavejev used the strategies of cinema verite and direct cinema as he juxtaposed images in order to create a clash between them. For example, he introduced instances of hand-held camera, and chose unusual camera angles to make viewers aware of the process of filming, and built the



Figure 3.31. *Carrying Youth Day Baton* still from a newsreel, c.1950



Figure 3.32. *Mayday Parade 1947*, still from a newsreel, 1947

narrative as a collage, rather than a linear progression. Although there were other equally political and interesting films created at this time, Makavejev's documentary is noteworthy because it was commissioned by the state for the specific occasion of May Day and although subsequently censored it was never destroyed.

As with the majority of the state-sponsored films, *Parade* was supposed to present an informative and uplifting image of the country united in its support for Yugoslav socialism and its leader, President Tito. However, in the seven-minute film Makavejev does not focus on the grand narratives of socialism embodied in the images and live events of Youth Day and May Day. Contrary to the usual documentary style of the time, the filmmaker did not present an idealized "reality"; *Parade* shows unflattering images of ordinary people as they prepare for a celebration in Belgrade. During the opening sequence (Figs. 3.27- 3.30), in which Makavejev shows a cropped view of a bus with a miniscule Yugoslav flag on top, he alludes in fact to an anti-image of national pride. The flag is barely visible in the shot, nothing like the large and upright images of flags held by strong young women and men as seen in many newsreel documentaries of the time (Figs. 3.31 and 3.32). The small flag seems more of an appendage than a larger-than-life symbol of national pride. The shot of a convertible filled with tables and chairs equally alludes to a more haphazard organization of the event and a culture of "making-do" with what is given in the socialist culture. For the director, the city street and the ordinary people who inhabit it, represent an alternative vision to that of the state.

Although the director films citizens preparing for the arrival of the President, their actions could be construed as sacrilegious: picking their noses, spitting, and

unceremoniously going about their day in such a way as to interrupt the solemnity of the event (Fig. 3.30). Other examples include young women and men walking around the city draped in flags (Fig. 3.38), and soldiers eyeing half-naked young women dressed in skimpy gymnastics outfits. These actions were not in accordance with the idea of modernization and urbanization, which were the main goals of the state policy of the time. They also did not conform to the idea of a future-oriented society in competition with the West. Makavejev was commenting on the ways that important ideological signifiers (such as flags, military uniforms or images of the President) are used by people as entertainment at best, or ignored and treated as secondary at worst.

Makavejev's documentary depicts the anonymous masses that made up the fabric of socialism, those whose actions were imperfect and therefore never shown in the official images of state events. The film captures the moments of slippage, of *jouissance*, in which the ritual of the state and the sacred body of the leader are desecrated by the informal behaviour of the people. While such moments of slippage were absolutely integral to the proper functioning of the state power, as I argued earlier, they were also not supposed to be immortalized in film. Once captured by the camera they became too visible, their secret *jouissance* revealed as a counterpart to state power. Although the Yugoslav state allowed such behaviour, it needed to stay invisible, just like the secret jokes everyone told about the President.

Because the Yugoslavian government allowed for forms of bourgeois popular and even reactionary culture, as long as they did not interfere with its politics, films that gave an image of the country as having a leisure culture were welcomed. An example of this kind of



Figure 3.33. Ljubomir Radicevic. *Ljubav i moda*, film still, 1960



Figure 3.34. Ljubomir Radicevic. *Ljubav i moda*, moda film poster, 1960.

production was the 1960 film *Ljubav i moda* [Love and Fashion] (Figs. 3.33 and 3.34) which became an instant hit when first released. Made within two years of Makavejev's *Parade*, *Ljubav i moda* represents a frivolous take on the youth culture of the day. The film followed a group of young students, who, through trickery, managed to organize a fashion show in order to make money for an air show. It showcased Yugoslavia's openness to the West, flaunting domestic fashion, pop music, and urban images of youth riding Vespa scooters, dancing, and pursuing romantic relationships. Neither the film's characters nor its storyline conformed to the high-minded ideals of socialist politics; however, the state allowed citizens to feel part of the international community through its portrayal of Western culture, consumerism, and urban life.

As long as these forms of entertainment and behaviour stayed within the realm of leisure, not questioning the problematic relationship between socialist utopian ideals and capitalist modes of production of meaning, the state turned a blind eye to them. Makavejev's film, unlike *Ljubav i moda*, recorded the paradox between the official ideology and the peoples' lived lives, which were saturated with mundane, sometimes capitalist, discourses of culture. This filmic intervention pointed to the inherent ironies of such a social contract and through such a gesture politicized it. *Parade* was banned at the time, while *Ljubav i moda* became an icon of socialist culture, apparently seen by the President himself.

The flawed bodies in *Parade* disrupted a perception of the state as a well-oiled machine with strong, morally upright socialist comrades. Comparative analysis of Makavejev's documentary shows that his film inverts both the form and content of the

propaganda films and photographs of the time. Newsreels such as *Filmske novosti* produced a totalizing image of the world, which they constructed through specific scenes, usually framed in wide shots, using angles that accented healthy bodies and showed mass, unified movement of the people.⁷⁶ Official documentaries borrowed editing, camerawork, and other formal elements from the socialist-realist classics such as *Chapayev* (Fig. 3.35), which used powerful spatial and perspectival effects, often equating the human body with architecture and mythologizing its representation.⁷⁷ One of the iconic images in *Chapayev* occurs in the scene in which the main character, Chapayev, and his faithful companion open fire on the Tsarist soldiers from a moving carriage. The camera angle is low, placing the viewer below the two men and their machine guns, making them larger than life. Immediately preceding and following this scene are wide shots of the two men in a sprawling landscape, equating their bodies with the enormity of nature itself. None of these touches are present in *Parade*.

If Makavejev shows the human body, or its surroundings, such representations are fragmentary. Instead of focusing on the strong, potent socialist worker, farmer, or student he chooses to show close-ups of wrinkled faces, bodies engaged in menial tasks, people smoking or spitting; he concentrates on their feet, the backs of their heads or arms. His play with unusual camera angles and collage-like editing is reminiscent of the

⁷⁶ *Filmske novosti* [film news] were a form of a visual journal with particular ideological messages. These visual propaganda messages developed immediately after WWII and gained attention because for a time they were the only source of news information other than newspapers. Their importance fell substantially once the first TV sets became available in Yugoslavia. This visual journal form was usually shown in cinemas before feature films.

⁷⁷ David Bordwell and Kristine Thompson, *Film History: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw, Hill: Higher Education, 2009), 241.



Figure 3.35. Sergei Georgi Vasiliev, *Chapayev*, film still, 1934

Russian Constructivist photography of Dziga Vertov and Alexander Rodchenko and Montage filmmaking of Kuleshov and Eisenstein. However, unlike the Constructivists and the Montage filmmakers, who used innovative formal techniques to allude to the politics of the new revolutionary age, Makavejev uses similar techniques to poke fun at the failure of the revolutionary dream. Rodchenko's photograph entitled *Chauffeur* (Fig. 3.36) shows a radical perspective in which the shot is a reflection of two figures: a chauffeur and the artist himself. The artist reveals his own presence in the act of taking the photograph and therefore denies any sense of illusion while at the same time taking a portrait of the chauffeur. Rodchenko's photograph is both a radical gesture towards a new sense of time and space reflected in the positioning of the figures and their distortion through the mirror, and an illusionistic representation of the past, now broken into two realms: one of the image (existing through representation) and one of the actual life documented.

The camera angle from a scene in *Parade* (Fig. 3.37), although clearly indebted to Rodchenko's formal spatial gestures, points out the failure of the utopian socialist dream in Yugoslavian society. In the film, a man, a low-level bureaucrat (Fig. 3.37), is yelling at a group of children outside the frame who disobediently mess up a parade float. While the man is yelling, the viewers are directly below him. Instead of feeling disoriented and perhaps overwhelmed by the man's position high above their eye level, viewers are confronted with a comical situation in which the man's position above the children's heads prevents him from asserting his power over the children who stubbornly refuse to correct their mistake. The man is, in a sense, trapped and isolated. In Makavejev's



Figure 3.36. Alexander Rodchenko, *Chauffeur* b/w photograph, 1933



Figure 3.37. Dusan Makavejev, *Parade*, film still, 1962

camera frame society is a flawed, haphazard, sloppy mess of life at its fullest. There is humanity in the people depicted; they are depicted without ideological intervention, or as stereotypes. Makavejev's sympathetic representation of their everyday revealed images that the state usually excluded from the standard experience of Yugoslav citizenship: namely images of citizens who are not upright, idealized socialist revolutionaries, but fallible humans interested in their own immediate material needs. As viewers, we are invited to witness this mess, to see what happens behind the scenes of large spectacles, to be privy to their ultimate chaos and the unpredictability of life itself.

At its core the film is a critique of the oppressive, paradoxical nature of state rule. Around this time Makavejev became familiar with the work of the Praxis group⁷⁸ and his political views were influenced by their reading of socialism, especially as it related to personal freedom and the individual's responsibility to the community. Film theorist Pavle Levi argues that Makavejev's cinematic aesthetic and his conceptual subject matter were in direct correlation to the writings of the Praxis group.⁷⁹ Its basic critique of both state socialism and capitalism was that they were oppressive regimes in which a basic human inclination for praxis, or living a life that integrates all aspects of human nature (physical, social, aesthetic, sexual, and productive) is denied. The denial of this human

⁷⁸ The Praxis group was a group of several academics and public intellectuals who formed an official philosophical journal in which they discussed various issues around Yugoslavian socialism and its future development. Their work was influenced by the Frankfurt school and the early writings of Marx. Describing their work as humanist socialism, the members of Praxis sought to transform and further develop the revolution initiated by the Yugoslavian communists in WWII. Their goal was not to get rid of socialism, but to reform it.

⁷⁹ Pavle Levi, *Disintegration in Frames: The Aesthetics and Ideology in Yugoslav and Post Yugoslav Cinema*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 29.

state, in which an individual can be fulfilled and can be free, is what both the Praxis philosophers and Makavejev critiqued.

Learning from the Yugoslav Praxis group,⁸⁰ Makavejev's understanding of socialism stood on the side of freedom of expression, sexual liberation, and creativity. *Parade* highlights some of those tendencies, most clearly in his treatment of the mundane and the accidental, as they become the main focus of the film's narrative. His sympathy for anonymous passersby and their lives within the discourse of socialist ideology, is an indication of his view that the socialist state did not fulfill its promises of freedom. The irony and the paradox of the coexistence of capitalist cultural tropes and strict socialist political structures did not escape Makavejev. He saw their co-functioning as the ultimate failure of the socialist revolution.

On another level the film also reduces the leader to an afterthought. Although everyone in the film is buzzing with excitement, the brief appearance of the leader's body towards the end of the film serves an anticlimactic role. Just as the majority of the citizens never saw the President in reality because he was always kept at a distance in order for his power to stay intact, in Makavejev's documentary the leader is shown but his image is distant. The brief appearance that President Tito does put in is further accentuated by the funerary sound of a bell ringing while we see the President anxiously looking at his wristwatch as if he wants to leave as soon as possible. Indeed he is cut out of the frame right away. What we see in the next shot is a vacant street, followed by a

⁸⁰ Praxis group was a group of Yugoslav intellectuals working from the late 1950s until mid 1970s who created a particular Yugoslavian form of humanist socialism. They opposed both Yugoslav Communist Party, and Western sociopolitical and cultural structures. Chapter Four deals more closely with their work.



Figure 3.38. Dusan Makavejev,
Parade, film still,
1962



Figure 3.39. Dusan Makavejev,
Parade, film still, 1962

shot of several empty slogans glorifying the President's rule. This five-second appearance of the leader serves more to exemplify his absence than it does to support his power. The tension between the film's supposed main goal—to depict the exuberant and organized preparations for May Day and the leader's visit—is completely turned upside down as we witness the utmost absence of the leader and the disorganized character of the whole event.

These two elements of Yugoslav political, social, and cultural life in modernity (the constant struggle or tension and the paradox of life under the state socialist rule) represent the most interesting aspect of such a society. As the state and its leader constantly struggled to knit an orderly, unified social fabric, the actual social forces of comings and goings of various peoples, a variety of experiences under socialism, and the ongoing everyday ways in which citizens eluded conformity to the state represent some of the most important ways in which Yugoslavian modernity defied norms. As Makavejev's film shows, the citizens were always writing their own anonymous narratives, inscribing themselves onto the streets of the cities and towns across the country in spite of being (more often than not) under the surveillance of the socialist state machinery. The official histories and stories presented through the mass media and in the public sphere were always counteracted through the lives lived in the everyday. As these everyday, ordinary narratives developed further they also became a more fervent critique of the oppressive nature of the state.

De Certeau's ordinary practitioners, citizens who inscribed themselves onto the city as a text, have, in the end, left us the most interesting stories about life in Yugoslavia

under socialist conditions. If the city is a theatre, Dusan Makavejev's documentary introduces us to it as a satire in which citizens write their own reality, a reality both comical and deeply human. The city becomes a metaphor for understanding the conditions of life in socialist modernity. The everyday lives and practices of citizens under socialism represented an important element in the work of many artists who espoused an alternative view of socialist art. Like Dusan Makavejev, they chose to think about the everyday as a site of political and social difference and therefore engaged it in various ways. These alternative art practices, which had existed since the beginnings of socialist Yugoslavia, were less visible than the mainstream art and culture discussed in the last three chapters. They were, however, no less important. In fact the ideas expressed by various Yugoslavian avant-gardes and neo-avant-gardes in many ways represented an embodiment of all Yugoslavian revolutionary ideas.

Chapter 4

Alternative Forms of Art and Utopian Socialist Culture in the Yugoslavia of the 1950s and '60s: EXAT 51, Vjenceslav Richter, and Praxis

There were always two visions of socialist utopia operating in post-war Yugoslavia. These remained prevalent in the country's cultural consciousness for much of the twentieth century. Both were a product of the project of modernity because they stemmed from its basic premises: striving for progress; creating universal social, cultural, and political structures; and the emancipation of humanity. One was closely connected to the Communist Party leadership and its project of nation-building; it represented the official socialist utopia. The other came from a number of intellectuals, artists, and some politicians who critiqued state socialism and its wayward sociopolitical and cultural structures that they believed failed to live up to the revolutionary promise. Both visions can be traced back to World War Two, with the traumatic and triumphant events of the war fueling postwar optimism and zeal among Yugoslavia's citizens, artists included.

Official utopia, negotiated strictly within the realm of state politics, was prone to dogmatic rhetoric, which ultimately protected state interests. Rather than opening up Yugoslavia's socialism to negotiation and change, it ossified its ideals, often turning them into empty sloganeering. Unofficial utopia was found in various spaces of cultural life (academia, mass media, art), where alternative views of socialism, in opposition to the official state language, were regularly proposed. Many of these dissenting voices shared the values and principles of socialism, they just did not believe the state was

actualizing them effectively. They therefore called for a re-evaluation of Marxism, leftist politics, and socialist culture.

The official and dissident¹ utopian visions were also both embedded in the aesthetic premises of socialist modernism, a category that I am unpacking in this thesis. Socialist modernism stands at the intersection of the two as they both structured its various versions. Much like the two utopian visions discussed above, socialist modernism itself can be separated into two streams: official state modernism and its unofficial, radical counterpart. State-sponsored modernism was represented through official cultural institutions, major public art commissions, international exhibitions, and architectural and sculptural projects, but also through Yugoslavia's potent, idiosyncratic mass and popular culture. These aspects of socialist modernism were addressed in the previous three chapters through specific examples of state culture (national exhibitions and monuments), and its popular mass versions (Youth Day and its related spectacles). Chapter Four will analyze socialist modernism's dissident side, its more radical "other."

As I have discussed in previous chapters, immediately after WWII modernism symbolized advancement, freedom, and the future of socialist art among the younger generation of progressive artists. In the years of modernism's rise to prominence in Yugoslavian culture, however, some of its utopian promises and avant-garde tendencies quickly dissipated. What followed from modernism's eventual ossification and institutionalization was a socialist version of the international movement marked by

¹ I use the term dissident here to signal the character of the unofficial culture in socialism as one that was dissenting from the official versions of socialism, however, artists and intellectuals belonging to the unofficial cultural formations were not always dissident in the classic sense of the word.

formalist tendencies, but often nevertheless tied to politicized narratives while remaining removed from everyday life. This was contrary to the idealistic yearnings of the younger generation of artists. While mainstream culture became fully socialist modernist, relative and actual margins of this culture were inhabited by a number of interesting avant-garde artistic and intellectual groups holding on to the early twentieth-century ideas of revolutionary art and culture that they wanted to incorporate into Yugoslavian socialist everyday. Coexistence of the official and the somewhat marginal revolutionary cultures is key to understanding the complexities of Yugoslavian socialist modernism in general.

Many artists who were in the ranks of the unofficial art scene continuously operated between official and unofficial socialist modernism — moving back and forth between state commissions, and smaller, often unfunded projects. Some artists, such as the filmmaker Dusan Makavejev whose work I discuss in Chapter Three, were too radical, and although they produced work (including some state commissions), they were mainly marginalized, their work often censored. Others were able to create within the official culture, while at the same time critique it. All such artists were continuously re-imagining everyday socialism, and also critiqued modernism itself.

This chapter will analyze alternative versions of socialist modernism by looking at several artistic examples. I will first address the work of the Croatian art group EXAT 51, who, in the 1950s, espoused a neo-constructivist version of modernist art influenced by their sympathies for the radical avant-garde aesthetics of the early twentieth century. Their work was unique, not only because of their early espousal of abstraction (when Yugoslavian art was still in the midst of socialist-realist fervor), but also their re-

evaluation of the avant-garde's (in particular the Bauhaus and the Russian Constructivists) concept that radical aesthetics is closely tied to politics. My second example is the work of the Croatian architect Vjenceslav Richter (one of the initial members of EXAT), who continued to work on the idea of utopian socialist art and architecture even after EXAT ceased to exist. Finally, I connect the two artistic examples of alternative socialist modernism to their philosophical counterpart: the group called Praxis. All three examples speak to the fact that dissenting cultural voices within Yugoslavian modernism proposed a re-evaluation of the basic socialist principles rather than their outright rejection. While more recent historical narratives about this period emphasize the cultural affinities of these groups and individuals with their Western counterparts, I wish to emphasize their continuous refusal to be placed within either official socialism or Western capitalism. Liminality afforded such groups a productive position that I qualify as a position of non-alignment from which they could see both the West and the East and the positions between.

EXAT's Neo-Constructivist Socialism

To those who are surprised by the mode of expression in this painting we reply that they are forty years late.²

When the members of EXAT³ wrote their manifesto and read it for the first time at a meeting of the Association of Croatian Fine Artists on December 7, 1951, their aim was to challenge the Yugoslavian art establishment to move towards abstraction, which they considered a more revolutionary form of art. These young painters and architects were fed up with the post-war socialist-realist aesthetic, and with what they saw as petit bourgeois aesthetic forms, which were still prevalent on the Yugoslavian art scene of the time. Emphasizing synthesis of all the arts, with no differentiation between high and applied arts, EXAT positioned itself squarely within the legacy of the pre-war avant-garde in the context of post-war modernism.⁴ More importantly, their manifesto also acknowledged the transformational potential of the socialist revolution in Yugoslavia, which, according to the members of the group, was reflected in the way the new generation of artists rejected all aspects of previous art movements to create an integrated

² Vlado Kristl et. al., "Manifest s izlozbe Kristl-Picelj-Rasica-Srnc," in *Kristl, Picelj, Rasica, Srnc Obljetnica prve izlozbe clanova EXAT 51u Drustvu arhitekata, 18 veljace - 4 ozujka, 1953*, ed. Kresimir Rogina, (Zagreb: Biblioteka Psefizma, nakladnistvo udruzenja hrvatskih arhitekata, 1953), 16 originally published as Vlado Kristl et al., *Izlozba Kristl – Picelj- Rasica- Srnc, 18 februar – 4. mart 1953*, (Zagreb: Drustvo arhitekata hrvatske, 1953.)

³ EXAT 51 is an acronym for Experimental Atelier. The group was formed in 1951; their first public appearance was at the meeting of the Fine Artists Association in Zagreb where they read their manifesto. The group consisted of architects: Bernardo Bernardi, Zdravko Bregovac, Zvonimir Radić, Božidar Rašica, Vjenceslav Richter, Vladimir Zarahović and painters: Vlado Kristl, Ivan Picelj and Aleksandar Srnc.

⁴ Jesa Denegri, *Constructive Approach Art: EXAT 51 and New Tendencies*, (Zagreb: Horetzky Press, 2004), 41.



Figure 4.1. Photograph of the 1st EXAT exhibition, Zagreb, 1953.

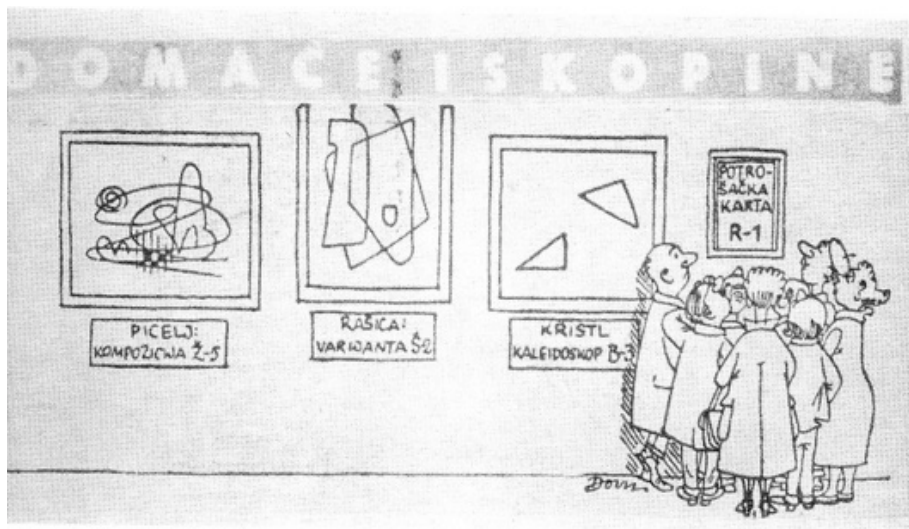


Figure 4.2. Editorial cartoon poking fun at the 1st EXAT 51 exhibition from the daily *Vjesnik*, 1953.⁵

⁵ This editorial cartoon shows viewers at an EXAT exhibition unable to discern between a found object 'consumer chart' and EXAT works. The text reads: from the top left "Domestic Excavations," from left to right under each painting: Picelj *Composition Z-5*; Rasica *Variant S-2*; Kristl *Kaleidoscope B-3*; no name *Consumer Chart R-1* from Kristl, Picelj, Rasica, *Srnc Obljetnica prve izlozbe clanova EXAT 51u Drustvu arhitekata, 18 veljace - 4 uzujka, 1953*, ed. Kresimir Rogina (Zagreb: Biblioteka Psefizma, nakladnistvo udruzenja hrvatskih arhitekata, 1998), 46.

aesthetic praxis.⁶ Finally, EXAT proposed that the new sociopolitical system should encourage radical artistic, cultural, and political experimentation. The group itself did not last long (1950–1956), but the impact they had on the future development of art in Yugoslavia was crucial.⁷ At the time EXAT was the only artist group to fully embrace revolutionary utopian ideas of the Russian avant-garde and the Bauhaus, and to situate those ideas within the context of Yugoslav socialism by adopting a purely non-objective pictorial language.

Because of our understanding of reality as an aspiration towards progress in all forms of human action, our group sees the necessity to combat all forms of obsolete views and production in the field of visual arts.⁸

EXAT's aesthetic program also corresponded, in part, to ideas current in the international art world of the 1950s. Artists' emphasis on synthesis, rationality in the use of form, and reductivism in terms of visual elements were some of the common characteristic of much post-war modernism.⁹ As with their counterparts in Japan, the United States, and across Europe, the group's understanding of abstraction was informed by the carnage of WWII and by aesthetic responses to the massive rebuilding after it. Unlike their Western counterparts, however, EXAT operated within the framework of Yugoslavian socialism,

⁶ I borrow the term praxis, which has a long philosophical heritage, from several different sources, most notably, from the Yugoslav theoretical group of the same name, which postulated that in the free and democratic, egalitarian socialism all aspects of one's life should be integrated into one whole. This was especially important in the sphere of culture and creativity, which according to both Praxis theorists and the members of EXAT 51 was what was missing in the socialist political program.

⁷ See Jesa Denegri's argument on EXAT 51 and the 'second trajectory' in *Prilozi za drugu liniju: kronika jednog kritičarskog zalaganja*, (Zagreb: Horetzky Press, 2002.)

⁸ EXAT 51, *EXAT 51- Eksperimentalni atelier manifest*, (Zagreb: Stamparija Vijesnik, 1953). [My translation].

⁹ Denegri, *Constructive Approach Art: EXAT 51 and New Tendencies*, 42.

which provided a political dimension to the artwork not always present in the West. EXAT envisioned their aesthetic as a parallel to self-management. Their experimental attitudes towards art-making, their interest in the synthesis of different forms of art and design under the term “plasticity,” and the emphasis on art’s active role in everyday life, were all products of their post-war revolutionary zeal.¹⁰

As I have noted earlier, postwar Yugoslavia undertook a Five-Year Plan to rebuild transportation infrastructure, factories, and mines and later started a major housing initiative for the increasingly urban population. EXAT’s manifesto echoed the sense of optimism and possibility that ranged across the spectrum of social and cultural spheres at this time. Its aesthetic production was aimed at building a new Yugoslav society by incorporating avant-garde art and design with new technologies; it espoused an experimental, rebellious, and utopian attitude. The ideas of EXAT’s members were, unfortunately, considered too extreme for the placid and conservative socialist culture of their time, and attempts to create new art for the new society were not received warmly. The tension between EXAT’s avant-garde ideas and the conservative artistic and cultural milieu had a major impact on how the group developed and presented itself to the public. For the most part their public actions were deliberately confrontational, sometimes bordering on bombastic. Although EXAT’s artworks were rejected by the socialist elites, the group’s members never rejected socialism as an idea. In fact, EXAT continued to support socialism, wanting to reform it through their ongoing engagement with Yugoslav

¹⁰ Several of EXAT 51 members participated in the antifascist resistance movement (Vlado Kristl, and Vjenceslav Richter most notably,) in active combat or by supporting the underground resistance movement.

art world and their audiences. EXAT is, therefore, an example of what I call modernism in-between, or non-aligned modernism. Even though their work was removed from the official state-sponsored modernist culture, EXAT's artists nevertheless exemplified a concern for the integration of the socialist revolution with the aesthetics of modernism.

EXAT's First Exhibition and Formal and Theoretical Ideas

EXAT's first official exhibition in Yugoslavia was a visual manifestation of the goals and objectives declared in their 1951 manifesto. I analyze the exhibition in the context of the group's theoretical goals, formal interests, and connectedness to the sociopolitical context in which they operated. My analysis uncovers the logic of alternative socialist modernism within various propositions offered to us by EXAT's works. Although, as I note at the end of the chapter, the group did not fully attain its stated goals, the legacy of avant-garde thinking it left behind was influential not only for the immediate generations of artists, but also for more recent generations who are reassessing EXAT's goals anew.

The group's 1953 exhibition was held in Zagreb in the gallery belonging to the Association of Architects of the Republic of Croatia (Figs. 4.1, 4.4 and 4.5). Only four EXAT members participated: Vlado Kristl, Ivan Picelj, Bozidar Rasica, and Aleksandar Srnec. "Exhibition Manifesto," a version of the earlier "EXAT Manifesto," accompanied

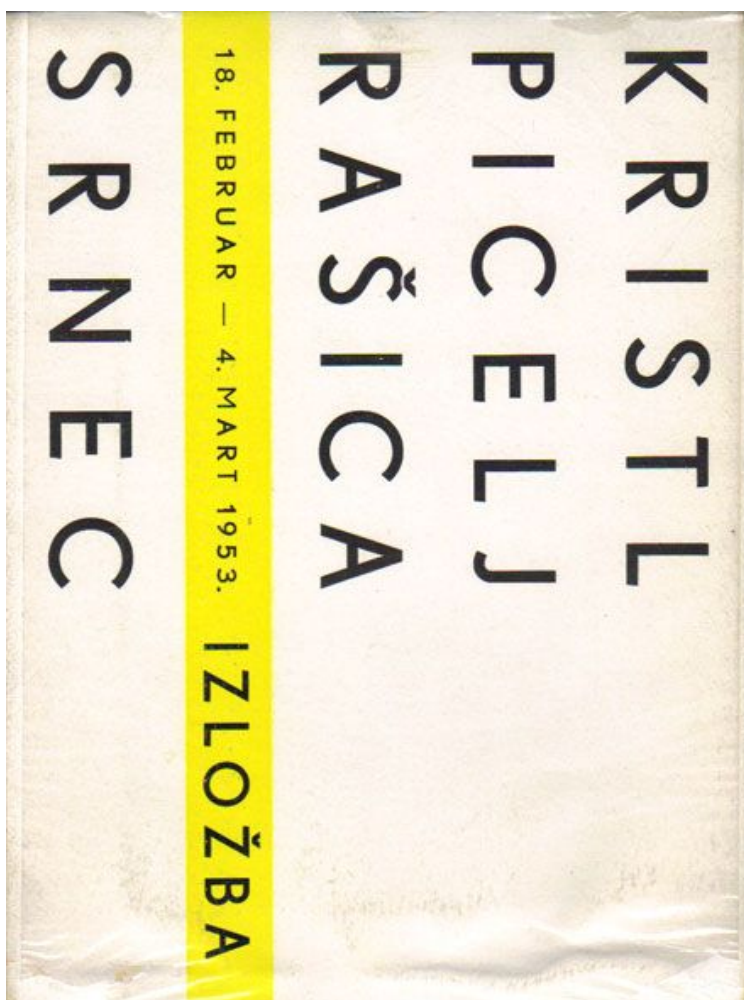


Figure 4.3. EXAT 51, Front cover of the catalogue for *Kristl, Picelj, Rasica, Srnec* exhibition, 1953

the event.¹¹ The gallery was chosen partly because of the group's belief in the synthesis of all the arts; holding the inaugural show in the Association's space was a way of emphasizing that imperative. This, however, was not their first exhibition as a group. Some of the group members exhibited at the 1952 *Salon des Réalités Nouvelles* in Paris, where they were introduced to similar artistic currents from around the world.¹² Jesa Denegri argues that EXAT's presence at *des Réalités* was of historical significance because it marked the first international showing of Yugoslav non-objective art.¹³ The Paris exhibition, however, occurred in a different context, one that was sympathetic to EXAT's aesthetic goals.

EXAT works shown at the 1953 exhibition varied in terms of materials and approaches but generally followed certain abstract tendencies present in international non-objective art of the time: notably the close ties between fine art, architecture and design. The gallery of the architects' association was also chosen because of EXAT's interest in integrating its members' work with the gallery's architecture more obviously. They believed that architects were more educated in, and more open to, new abstract tendencies and experiments and would therefore be more amenable to the group's overall aesthetic, and to what EXAT intended to do with the gallery space. In the letter of application for the show, written by Bozidar Rasica, he states:

¹¹ Kristl, *Manifest s izlozbe Kristl-Picelj-Rasica-Srnec*, 46.

¹² Ana Devic, "Reception of Modernism within the Context of Croatian Art since the 1950's," in *On Cultural Influence: Collected Papers from apexart International Conferences 1999-2006*, ed. Rand, Steve & Kouris, Heather, (New York: Apexart, 2006), 152.

¹³ It also meant that EXAT 51 were the first post-war non-objective group in Yugoslavia to exhibit internationally, making their Paris debut all the more important for the history of Yugoslavian socialist modernism.

The choice of your space seems to us to be very fitting, not only because I am an architect and a member of DARH [Association of Architects of the Republic of Croatia], but also because our goal of having the first exhibition of non-figurative art in Yugoslavia in the space of the architects' association is compatible with the generally open and progressive attitudes architects have towards life, and art in particular.¹⁴

The gallery space, its connection to the more open attitudes of the architectural association, and the manner in which the works were hung reflect EXAT's carefully devised formal strategy, based on the idea of exhibition as a totality of objects in space. Photographs documenting the final installation of the pieces point to their particular placement intimately tied to the building's architecture. The gallery's sparse interior was broken up by hanging rods that created strong verticals (Figs. 4 and 5). The rods became fully integrated with the artworks. Some pieces were installed directly on the walls, while others were placed on the rods and as a result were separated from the wall, creating a heavy shadow behind each piece. This decision made the works stand out as objects in their own right, rather than appearing as two-dimensional surfaces. The minimalist, geometric structure of the gallery's interior was reflected in the abstract, geometric, and sparse spaces of the works, and vice versa.

Vjenceslav Richter, a group member who did not exhibit at the 1953 show, noted artists' deliberate integration of the gallery space into the structure of the works. In his

¹⁴ *Izbor Vase sale cini nam se povoljan, te osim toga sto sam ja arhitekt i clan Darh-a mislimo da je sretno nastojanje da se prva izlozba iz podrucja non-figurativne umjetnosti kod nas organizira u prostorijama arhitekata, koji u vecini slucajeva zastupaju napredna shvatanja u vlastitim nastojanjima a i u umjetnosti.* Bozidar Rasica, "Molba drustvu arhitekata Hrvatske, 1952," in *Kristl, Picelj, Rasica, Srnec Obljetnica prve izlozbe clanova EXAT 51u Drustvu arhitekata, 18 veljace - 4 ozujka, 1953*, ed. Kresimir Rogina, (Zagreb: Biblioteka Psefizma, nakladnistvo udruzenja hrvatskih arhitekata, 1998), 9.

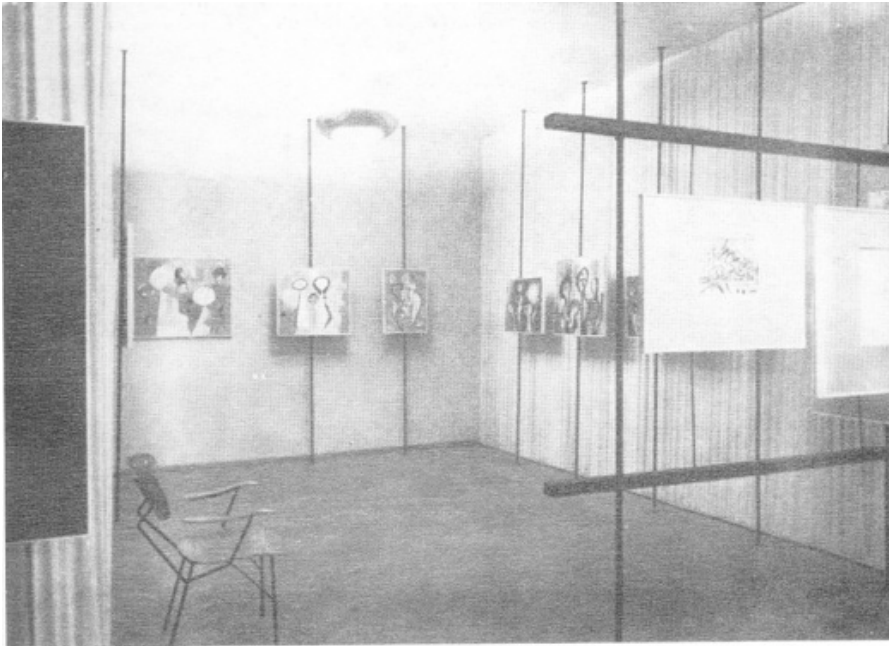


Figure 4.4. Photograph of the 1st EXAT show, Zagreb, 1953

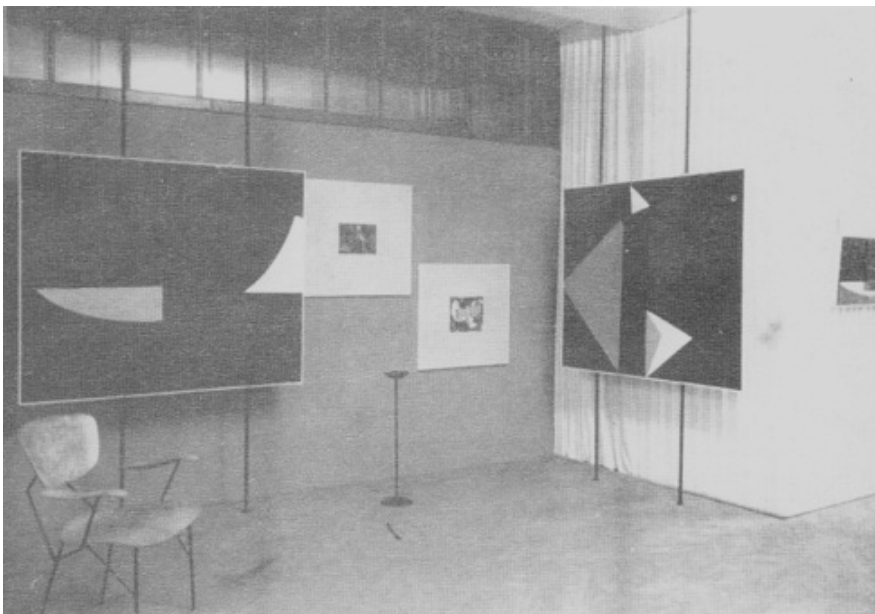


Figure 4.5. Photograph of the 1st EXAT show Zagreb, 1953

review of the exhibition for the journal *Buletin*, he said that “with its spatial arrangement the exhibition was marked by a search for the relationship between space and the paintings, one could say of plastic body, that is, basic elements of visuality as the group understands it.”¹⁵ The stated aim of the show was to underscore the importance of how works are installed in order to understand them more fully. Spatial relationships in the gallery became as important as the non-objective pictorial problems presented in the canvases. This points to the artists’ ambitions to turn their show into something more than an exhibition of two-dimensional art. Their emphasis on paintings and drawings, not as discrete objects housed in a non-descript white modernist cube, but as objects intimately tied to the gallery’s architecture (concomitantly transforming that architecture and being transformed by it), shows EXAT’s commitment to cross-pollination of the arts. It also shows that the artists were thinking about viewers’ experience of art in relationship to the gallery space. How viewers navigated the space was as important as how they approached individual pieces. It was a statement that in a society attempting to recreate itself after the war, fine arts should be treated as integral to its material and cultural rebuilding.

EXAT’s holistic vision of art and its environment was in direct dialogue with earlier Russian avant-gardes, especially Kazimir Malevich’s installation at *The Last Futurist Exhibition 0.10* in Petrograd in 1913 (Fig. 4.6) and Vladimir Tatlin’s *Counter*

¹⁵ *Izložba je po svom prostornom riješenju imala biljeg traženja odnosa slike i prostora i, moglo bi se reci, plasticnog tijela, dakle osnovne likovne problematike, kako ga grupa shvaca.* Vjenceslav Richter, “Kristl, Picelj, Rašica, Srnec,” *Bulletin JAZU*, No. 3-4, (1953): 31.



Figure 4.6. Kazimir Malevich, *The Last Futurist Exhibition 0.10, 1913*



Figure 4.7. Vladimir Tatlin, *Counter Relief*, 1914

Relief of 1914 (Fig. 4.7). With both examples, discrete artworks go beyond the confines of their particular medium (sculpture and painting), treating the space as an integral part of the work. EXAT's first exhibition, however, was not as successful in its goal of fully integrating art, architecture, and the viewers' experiences. When looking at the documentation of the show, the space still strikes us as more typical of the usual presentations of modernist art. Their first show can therefore be understood as an attempt at resolving formal questions posed by their neo-constructivist tendencies. It can also be understood as a way of announcing abstraction's ultimate importance for society in post-war transition.

An example of a more developed form of EXAT's synthesis was Vjenceslav Richter and Aleksandar Srnec's collaborative work on the *Yugoslavian Pavilion* for the XIII Triennale di Milano in 1964 (Fig. 4.8.) The pavilion was a hybrid architectural design that mixed elements of installation art, sculpture, and architecture. It articulated the importance of social interaction for reception and use of art and architecture by emphasizing interactive design features. Richter and Srnec created a large, open structure made out of wooden laths. The joints and materials were deliberately left visible. The floor was constructed with the same 2"x4" wood laths. Although the structure rested on a grid plan, the structure of the grid was broken by two elements: flooring and spatial openness. The flooring was organic, flowing unevenly between the vertical wooden pieces. The structure was open on all sides, allowing visitors to enter the space from different points. Visitors could walk through the meandering space, they were invited to

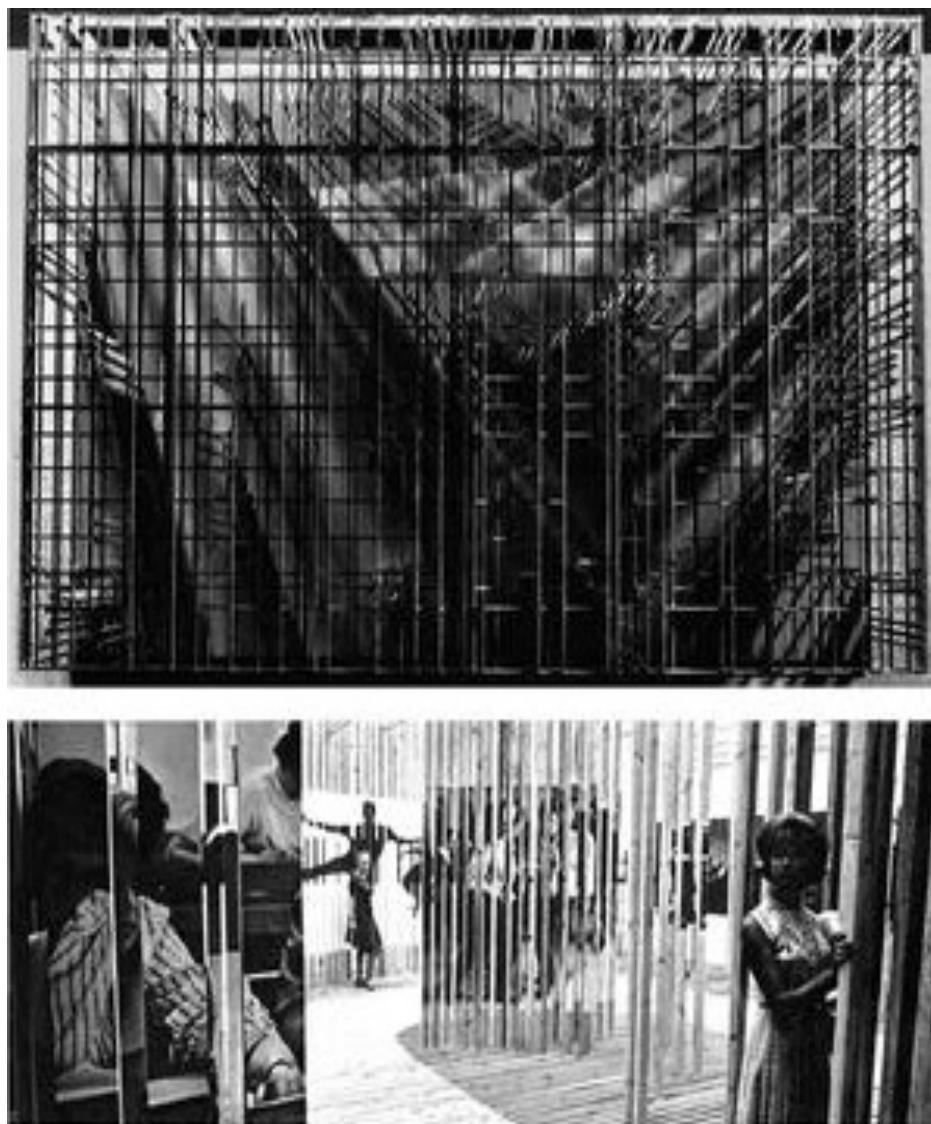


Figure 4.8. Vjenceslav Richter and Aleksandar Srnec, *Yugoslavian Pavilion*, XIII Triennale di Milano, 1964

touch the structure, socialize, and in fact play with and in the space (Fig. 4. 8). Their design was continuously changing as visitors passed through it. Because there were no wall barriers, the entire structure was visible on all sides so that each visitor's movement through space was transforming the overall appearance of space. Srnec and Richter's playful installation served as a material platform for development of social interaction, and, we could argue, was a predecessor of similar social aesthetic forms such as the Situationist movement, or more recently relational aesthetics.

A closer look at particular works included in EXAT's 1953 show gives us some insight into other theoretical concepts of concern to the artists. I have already mentioned their interest in installation and spatial relationships; other important aesthetic interests were the concepts of multidisciplinary and plasticity both of which were wedded to show's overall abstract tendencies. Ivan Picelj's *Composition* from 1951 (Fig. 4.10) and Aleksandar Srnec's *Lines-X2-6* from 1950 (Fig. 4.9) are both excellent examples of the group's early formal and theoretical interests. Both works sought to abandon representational elements. Surfaces are flattened, there is an interest in atonal composition¹⁶ and simplification of form; an emphasis on plasticity;¹⁷ and a removal of references to representation in the language used to describe the works and in the titles. These qualities corresponded to ideas percolating in the work of their international contemporaries (European art groups, such as *Forma*, founded in 1947 in Italy; the

¹⁶ See Jesa Denegri, *Prilozi za drugu liniju: kronika jednog kritičarskog zalaganja*, (Zagreb: Horetzky Press, 2002), 108.



Figure 4.9. Aleksandar Srnec, *Lines- X2-6* ink on paper, 1950



Figure 4.10. Ivan Picelj, *Composition*, oil on canvas, 1951

Swedish group, *Concretists*, founded in the early 1950s; and *Zen 49*, founded in Germany in 1950).

Srncic's drawing employs intersecting lines and simple geometric shapes to construct a dynamic, fluctuating composition. It reminds one of a kinetic sculptural object (something that Srncic will develop later on in the 1960s,) or perhaps a plan for an impossible spatial structure. Srncic often commented on the play of light, lines, and space in his paintings and drawings, which is evidenced in this early work in the web of curving lines that have an appearance of a complex three-dimensional space. A similar web was developed in his and Richter's three-dimensional installation for the *XIII Triennale di Milano* (see above.)

Ivan Picelj's *Composition* is formally closer to Abstract Expressionist work of the same era. It is concerned with relationships of colours and shapes, producing various pictorial push and pull effects. Several gray shapes in *Composition* act as a counterbalance to the patches of yellow, red-ocher, and blue. The size of each colour adds to the dialog between them therefore creating an optical effect in which parts of the surface seem to come out towards the viewer, whereas others recede. By doing this Picelj created kinetic relationships in paintings, making them dynamic objects that seek to engage with the viewer's perception, and her/his actual space.

Both pieces move towards breaking two-dimensionality of the painted surface, as the space of the painting pushes to enter the actual space in which it is situated. There is a tension in such works, as a painting at once acknowledges its flatness (its surface quality,) and its three-dimensional character as an object in space. Critics such as

Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried, Lawrence Alloway, and Jules Langsner have commented on this well-known tension in modernist art.¹⁸ As noted earlier, all EXAT members intended to create multidisciplinary works, therefore, the pictorial problems that Picelj and Srncic were solving aimed at doing so by showing that a painting is a material object influencing the space in which it sits.

In 1966, Abraham Moles¹⁹ wrote a short text about Ivan Picelj's paintings in the context of Yugoslavian socialism, technological and scientific development, and abstract painting of the time. His observations on Picelj's particular version of geometric abstraction contain important clues about more general characteristics of EXAT's understanding of abstraction, and its relationship to viewers. Although Moles wrote the essay ten years after EXAT ceased to exist, he uncovered aesthetic ideas that were a part of EXAT's initial mandate, and later on continued in artists' independent work.

Ivan Picelj's oeuvre belongs to the form of modern art we call geometric, and seems to me, is well suited for the philosophical structure of socialism. The entire field of modern art that we call geometric indeed has many

¹⁸ Painting's objecthood was a contested topic in the period of the 1960s as hard-edge painting and Minimalism supplanted the older generation of Abstract Expressionists. The debates around painting as object were some of the most important texts in the history of late modernist art. See: Lawrence Alloway, "Systemic Painting," in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock, (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 37.; Jules Langsner, *Four Abstract Classicists*, 1st ed. (San Francisco & Los Angeles: San Francisco Museum of Art & Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1959), 70.; Clement Greenberg, "Post Painterly Abstraction," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 192.; Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* v/10, no. June (1967): 12-23.

¹⁹ Abraham Moles was one of the pioneers of the new media and computer art in the 1960s. He later on became involved with the *New Tendencies* movement, which was founded started in the mid 1960s by several former members of EXAT. For more on Moles work see: Abraham Moles, *Information Theory and Aesthetic Perception*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1966a).

characteristics which place it well within the new sensibility of a society oriented towards technological progress. As much as Tachisme and art informel intentionally ignore their audiences, so that the best, as well as the worst examples of such works are situated within arbitrary disorientation, — on the contrary, all the arts based on recognition of forms and their play have to express an idea of a plan, they submit the nature of perceptions to intelligible rules, while at the same time maintaining a relationship with creative fantasy. Artists propose rules and how to follow them, the rules are understood by the audience who is free to engage, or not to engage in play with them.²⁰

In the midst of discussing Picelj's emphasis on structure and construction in painting, Moles suggests that artist's geometric abstraction is oriented towards interaction with its audiences. In fact its seeming analytical distance, or perhaps even coldness (acknowledged in the text as 'rules') is in fact an invitation for viewers to engage with the works, to enter into a dialog with the works' structure. Moles claims that Picelj "sets certain rules and follows them" while audience "can understand them and choose to engage, or not, in their game."²¹ Picelj's paintings therefore function as highly organized, yet open form of imagination. Artist's emphasis on dialog between his work and audience is one of the key characteristics of plasticity because it points to artist's interest in audience participation, something that Moles argues was not present in the work of groups such as Tachism or Art Informel.

As the group evolved in its aesthetic, interest in abolishing differences between design, painting, architecture, and sculpture became more prominent. Some of this has already been addressed, particularly in the section on the 1953 exhibition's emphasis on

²⁰ Abraham Moles, "Predgovor izlozbi Ivan Picelj," in *Katalog izlozbe Ivan Picelj 14. novembra - 4. decembra 1966*, ed. Bozo Bek, (Zagreb: Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, 1966b), 1.

²¹ *Ibid*, 1.

art's direct dependence on built space. Another way that this became apparent was in the multidisciplinary nature of the group's members, who came from different disciplines so that each artist brought their particular aesthetic interests, and technical strengths to shape the overall trajectory of EXAT. The idea of multidisciplinary nature remained present even after individuals left the group. For example, Aleksandar Srnec went beyond painting and in the early 1960s started making experimental films, such as *Luminoplastic* from 1966 (Fig. 4.11), which bears all the aesthetic markers of his 1951 drawing *Lines-X2-6*. In *Luminoplastic* Srnec further explored the kinesthetic possibilities of two-dimensional and three-dimensional objects. The film contains a number of dynamic, swirling lines and intersecting geometric shapes created by manipulating light with projecting screens, moving wires, and rotating slides.²² With the help of the 16mm film, the 1951 composition became an image-object moving through space, time, and with the help of light. As mentioned earlier, after his initial work with EXAT, Aleksandar Srnec worked in film and animation, and at the same time commenced a closer collaboration with Vjenceslav Richter (Fig. 4.8). Other artists in the group also moved seamlessly between disciplines: sculpture, architecture, graphic design, new media, and film.

EXAT's experiments and collaborations, which started in the early 1950s, eventually led several artists, especially Ivan Picelj, to participate in an international collaborative project called New Tendencies, which officially started in 1961 with their

²² Andrija Mutnjakovic, "Predgovor izložbi Aleksandar Srnec," in *Izložba Aleksandar Srnec 10. januar-2. februar* (Zagreb: Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, 1969).

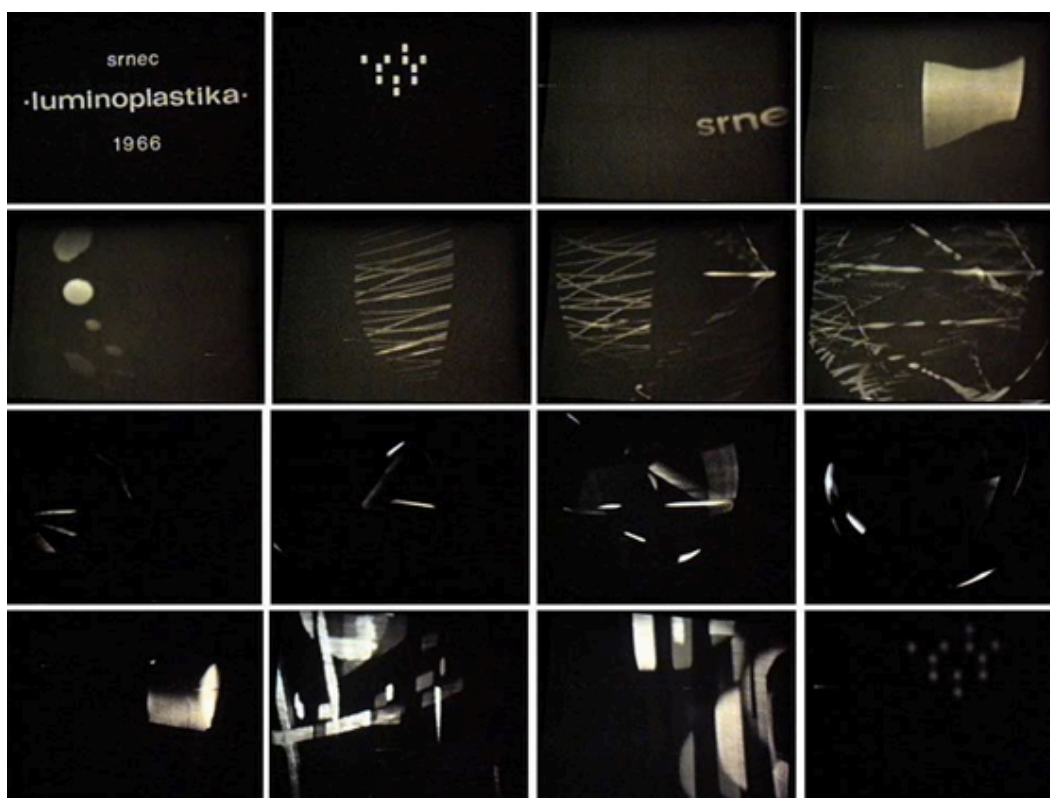


Figure 4.11. Aleksandar Srnec.
Luminoplastika 16 mm film stills,
1966

inaugural show and symposium.²³ As an international movement, New Tendencies became a gathering place for a number of artists who were experimenting with computer art, animation, kinetic art, and other similar forms. Exhibitions of such works were organized in Yugoslavia and internationally from 1961 to 1973. Ivan Picelj, especially, was connected with the journal *Bit International*, which was published alongside catalogues for New Tendencies from 1968 to 1971.²⁴ He considered such work an important element of art of his time, and collaboration figured prominently in his efforts at organizing different events. In effect, EXAT's ideas of multidisciplinary and collaboration lived on through the work of New Tendencies, and included a significant new media component.

Plasticity is another concept that spans all EXAT's aesthetic interests and can be defined as a unity of form (across the spectrum of art, design, and architectural practices,) and connectedness of objects' material presence, their use, and aesthetic appeal. It featured prominently in the group's manifesto and was reiterated through the artists' formal decision to espouse a constructivist, non-representational stance towards object-making. Plasticity, as used by EXAT members, referred to the material world as an aesthetic proposition that needed to be considered in its entirety by the artist working with, and in, it. This is something that echoes in Vjenceslav Richter's review of the 1953

²³ Matko Mestrovic and Radoslav Putar, *Katalog izlozbe Nove Tendencije, 3. august - 14. septembar*, (Zagreb: Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, 1961).

²⁴ For more see: Margit Rosen ed., *A Little-Known Story about a movement, a Magazine, and the Computer's Arrival in Art: New Tendencies and Bit International, 1961–1973*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011).

show, in which he referred to the group's intent to create a "plastic body."²⁵ His reference to plastic did not refer to plastic as a polymer but to the notion of the material existence of objects in space and time. Like the members of the Russian avant-garde, EXAT wanted to employ their notion of plasticity to better industrial and graphic design as well as architecture. Examples of this are Ivan Picelj's numerous graphic designs, Vjenceslav Richter's architectural work on trade pavilions, housing, and industrial complexes, or Bernardo Bernardi's industrial design.

EXAT's aim was to "operate in actual time and space, assuming plastic requirements and potentials as a tentative point of departure," thereby enacting social change.²⁶ All modernist movements that attempted to blend art and design imagined that progress in industrial manufacturing and design would allow masses to own well-crafted, fine aesthetic objects at reasonable prices.²⁷ These avant-garde ideas that sought to integrate fine art, design, and craft were never solely aesthetic, but were political in their goal to provide equality of access to high quality fine art, and design, something that was for centuries a domain of the elites. EXAT's aesthetic and political aims were embedded in that same sentiment as they sought to contribute to the material transformation of Yugoslavia by creating high quality socialist architecture, design, and art.

Contemporary accounts of EXAT's history, especially those by Jesa Denegri, Ljiljana Kolesnik, and Zvonko Makovic, suggest that both EXAT's formal development

²⁵ Vjenceslav Vjenceslav Richter, "Kristl, Picelj, Rašica, Srnec," *Bulletin JAZU*, no. 3-4 (1953): 31.

²⁶ EXAT 51, *EXAT 51- Eksperimentalni atelier manifest*,

²⁷ Most famous of such aesthetic programs being William Morris' Arts and Crafts Movement, and German Bauhaus.

and its subsequent rejection by the Yugoslav mainstream art establishment were fundamentally related to the group's lack of interest in dealing with political themes in art, and producing more palatable figurative or semi-figurative artworks. I argue that although EXAT's members never subscribed to an overtly politicized rhetoric, aesthetic ideas that they proposed were closely related to the politics of their time. Of those ideas the one that best spanned modernist avant-garde aesthetics and socialist politics is their notion of plasticity. Once we understand what EXAT meant by plasticity, it becomes clear that seemingly formally removed and socially disinterested abstraction produced by the group had everything to do with Yugoslavian socialism as artists tried to create a visual language that would more fully express progressive nature of socialist revolution.²⁸

EXAT's view of plasticity in relationship to socialist revolution was based not just on material transformation of labour, which Yugoslavian official state politics fully endorsed, objects and spaces, but also on a complete transformation of the human sensorial apparatus. According to this, in order for the revolution to be fully enacted, it had to embrace a new relationship to reality and material world. This view was not new to EXAT, it was a cornerstone of the Russian Constructivists' aesthetic program.²⁹ Literary historian Olga Matich argues that Russian revolutionary avant-gardes proposed a re-articulation of everyday life by removing boundaries between private and public

²⁸ This is especially important with regards to EXAT 51's espousal of the Constructivist aesthetic which they intended to pursue and develop further.

²⁹ Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, 49.

spheres. She states that “according to Tatlin, the artist was a reformer of daily life, constructing new objects and exposing the vulgarity of old ones.”³⁰

Both the Constructivists and EXAT perceived spaces of everyday life (architecture, urbanism, industrial design, visual art and culture) as spaces that would through their new aesthetic, material structures contribute to the transformation of human consciousness. Transformation of consciousness was in turn necessary for achieving political and social change promised by the socialist revolution. According to Matich, one of the main problems Constructivists saw in the built environment, art, and design of the Soviet Russia was that they were embedded in petit bourgeois morality. The group intended to change this by removing boundaries between the public and the private, between human creative apparatus and activities of everyday life, and between various forms of art. Similarly, EXAT proposed ways in which products of high culture would be incorporated into the lives of the masses. A concrete example of the link between fine art, design, and the everyday was Aleksandar Srnec’s design of the inside spread of the women’s fashion magazine *Svijet* from 1956 (Fig 4.12) and his design solution for *Fotokemika* ad (Fig. 4.13) from 1961. Both designs show his abstract artistic sensibility, his interest in the work of Kazimir Malevich, Piet Mondrian, and Alexandr Rodchenko, but also his interest in exposing everyday, unsuspecting audiences to avant-garde ideas.

³⁰ Olga Matich, “Remaking the Bed, Utopia in Daily Life,” in *Laboratory of Dreams: The Russian Avant-Garde and Cultural Experiment*, John E. Bowlt and Olga Matich eds. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 60.



Figure 4.12. Aleksandar Srnec,
Magazine Svijet, 1956



Figure 4.13. Aleksandar Srnec,
Fotokemika Ad, 1961

There were also important themes of transformation of time and space through plasticity. For EXAT, ideas around transformation of consciousness, shifting of time and space, and reorganizing sensory relationships in tune with the revolutionary were most clearly articulated through plasticity. Plasticity meant unification of the entire human sensory apparatus by recreating the material world as a unit—the world as a work of art inevitably initiating a change in how humans navigate space and time. In that respect there would be no differentiation between painting and architecture, or between design and sculpture; all are integral parts of the singular movement towards a total transformation of the everyday. EXAT's aesthetic propositions demanded a political engagement, as one cannot intervene in the functioning and shaping of the material world without engaging with the question of politics. In the group's case, this meant Yugoslavian socialist politics, which were in a state of flux, uncertainty, and experimentation in the early 1950s.

Such an experimental attitude was further expanded once Yugoslavian state broke away from Stalin and was forced to find an alternative system of governing that came in the form of self-management.³¹ As I argued in chapter one, self-management in theory promoted a democratic approach to functioning of economy, politics, and everyday life; its principles were based on respect for individual and collective rights, expressed through dialogue between different participants (workers, farmers, politicians, and

³¹ Although present in other socialist and communist theories self-management in Yugoslavia was a radically more open concept and one that promised much more democratic reform. For more in-depth discussion see Sharon Zukin, *Beyond Marx and Tito: Theory and Practice in Yugoslav Socialism*, (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

intellectuals) at all levels of social organization.³² This meant that from work places, organized through workers' councils, to housing, organized through housing councils, all decisions were made collectively for the good of the social whole.³³ Radical nature of self-management as an idea was embedded in EXAT's holistic understanding of art as a medium for transforming human environment (in material and immaterial sense,) and in their commitment to collaboration and dialogue, something they emphasized right from the start. Group members state in their 1951 manifesto that they "consider the foundation of the activity of the group to be the positive outcome of the development of differences in opinion, which is a necessary prerequisite for the promotion of artistic life in this country."³⁴ For EXAT there was a natural link between how they worked as a creative group of people, and how tenets of self-management were supposed to operate.

EXAT's linking of nascent Yugoslav socialism to its own push for non-objective art is further delineated in Vjenceslav Richter's 1952 text, "Imprisoned Theories,"³⁵ written as a response to art critic Grga Gamulin and his socialist-realist criticism of fellow-abstract artist Antun Motika's show from the same year. Their public debate is

³² See chapter one of this thesis where I explain the theory of self-management in more detail.

³³ The gap between theory and practice of self-management was one of the most important elements in the breakdown of socialism in Yugoslavia. The country, or better yet the government could not find a way to bridge the gap between its enormous bureaucracy and flexibility in governing that the self-management councils demanded.

³⁴ Bernardo Bernardi et al., "Manifesto of 1951," 386.

³⁵ Vjenceslav Richter, "Zarobljene teorije," in *Hrvatska likovna kritika 50-tih godina; izabrani tekstovi*, ed. Ljiljana Kolesnik, (Zagreb: Drustvo povjesnicara umjetnosti Hrvatske, 2003), 115. Originally published as Vjenceslav Richter, "Zarobljene teorije," *Krugovi*, no. 1, (1952): 84-91.

recognized as one of the fiercest dialogues on socially engaged art.³⁶ Richter's text reiterates some of the most important premises of the group's attitudes and their vision for links between the social and the aesthetic. While Gamulin argued that abstract art is an escape from reality, Richter clearly defined abstract, non-objective art as a more advanced, more democratic, and more appropriate form of art for the nascent socialist state. Richter pointed out that its prosecution in communist and fascist societies was a sign of the political failure of such societies. Furthermore, he stated that the only reason abstract art was accepted in the democratic West is because, "its influence, albeit growing, is limited by both the organic characteristics of capitalist society and the opportunistic attitudes of those with a direct interest in its marketing."³⁷ Richter's parallel criticism of the communist rejection of abstract art on moralistic grounds, and capitalist attempts at its monetization aims to highlight an elemental misunderstanding of abstract art on both sides.

There is no need for abstract art to be overtly political; Richter is quite critical of such a dogmatic position. Instead, the abstract art that EXAT practiced was in pursuit of addressing a new and dynamic vision of the post-WWII world.

Dialecticians, as opposed to problemists, consider objective reality to be a dynamic process of self-development of matter. Thusly, they are able to consider our cognition of reality to be dynamic. Furthermore, in addition to this relationship, there is something new in our current, broader perception of reality: it performs the function of presenting the unrepresentable. Let us mention the most dominant: the theory of relativity and nuclear physics. Perhaps contemporary art can be better explained through a general revision of concepts and terms when taking into account

³⁶ See Kolesnik, *Izmedju Istoka i Zapada: hrvatska umjetnost i likovna kritika 50.-ih godina*, 463.

³⁷ Richter, *Zarobljene teorije*, 115.

the consequences of these dramatic developments in mankind. This would be a prerequisite for any revolutionary action. Marxism, in the social complex, revolutionizes theories and social practices. Biology, medicine, astronomy, in addition to the remaining forms of human discovery, increasingly imbue objective reality with the character of substance, in the sense of the relationship between elements and the intensity of these relationships, and not with the resultative, or maybe narrative character of its objectification.³⁸

Accordingly, what both East and West fail to understand is the dynamism of the aesthetic of the sociopolitical world. In Richter's view socialism as a progressive, emancipatory movement should respond to profound scientific breakthroughs in the understanding of our physical world—the splitting of the atom, X-ray technology, the microscope and so forth. In turn, art, and abstract or non-objective art in particular, should also reflect these discoveries. As Richter states, abstract or non-representational art speaks to and about the unrepresentable because it does not objectify reality, it does not use illustrative language of perspective and illusionistic spatiality, or monocularity.³⁹ Through its synthesis of the fine and applied arts, abstract art, for example, speaks more clearly to the realities of the post-war world than illusionistic representations of socialist realism. Objectification of reality found in representational art, its forcing of separation into discrete artistic disciplines, and its emphasis on illusion are all regressive according to Richter and EXAT. Abstract art, does not represent the flight from reality, but addresses a modern reality in clearer, more concrete ways. Richter's argument brings us back to EXAT's position that abstract art seeks to transform human sensory apparatus in the light of the effects of new scientific, and technological breakthroughs in the twentieth century —

³⁸ Ibid, 116.

³⁹ Ibid.

especially when confronted with the fact that humans could see past the limitations of the feeble binocular vision. Far from announcing art's need to be separated from the social, EXAT sought to represent art's complete involvement with it in multiple ways (abstract, biological, physical) that did not treat reality as stable but as a dynamic socio-aesthetic whole.

Unfortunately, the traditionalist art establishment of the early 1950s disagreed and continued to criticize EXAT's work, with the most controversy created after their 1953 show opened.⁴⁰ Croatian art historian Zvonko Makovic argues that the Yugoslavian art establishment heavily criticized 1953 show because artists proposed a denial of local artistic legacies, choosing to align themselves instead with various international

⁴⁰ Unlike EXAT's showing at *des Réalités Nouvelles*, which was warmly welcomed by the international modernist art, their 1953 show created a major controversy in Yugoslavian art of the time. Without going into a longer discussion of the turbulent response to EXAT exhibition, it will suffice to note that there were dozens of reviews and public statements published about the show in various daily newspapers and art journals. These texts showcase a divide among the critics and artists some of whom still subscribed to figurative work (such as Mladen Stary, Rudi Supek, and Aleksa Celebonovic,) while others (Vjenceslav Richter, Dimitrije Basiccevic, and Kosta Angeli-Radovani,) argued for abstraction as a way to move forward with contemporary Yugoslavian art. The very public arguments between various artists and critics culminated in a standoff between EXAT members and critics such as Gamulin at a famous artistic hangout Ritz-bar on October 22, 1953 where they further discussed the value of abstract art. No real documentation exists of this meeting except for eyewitness accounts [Marijan Susovski, "Exat-51: europski avantgardni pokret," *Zivot umjetnosti* 71/72, no. Umjetnost i ideologija - pedesete u podijeljenoj Europi (2004): 107-115.] For more on the controversy over EXAT's 1953 show see: Mladen Stary, "Izložba Četvorice - povodom izložbe Kristl, Picelj, Rašica, Srnec," *Vjesnik, Zagreb*, 3.6. 1953. 1953, p. 5.; Rudi Supek, "Konfuzija oko astratizma," *Pogledi*, no. 6 (1953): 415-421.; Aleksa Celebonovic, "Prva grupa zagrebačkih apstraktnih slikara," *Borba*, 4.2.1953. 1953, p. 7.; Richter, *Kristl, Picelj, Rašica, Srnec*, 31.; Dimitrije Basiccevic, "Jezik apstraktne umjetnosti," *Krugovi*, no. 4 (1953): 365-371.; Kosta Angeli-Radovani, "Dvije legalnosti modernog," *Naprijed*, 10. 30. 1953. 1953.

movements of the time.⁴¹ Grga Gamulin's and Mladen Stary's criticisms are representative of such arguments.⁴² They accused EXAT of not being in touch with the needs of the socialist state. Other traditionally minded artists and critics who still subscribed to figurative art, found the radical formal nature of EXAT's work unpalatable.⁴³ Criticisms of EXAT's position were also affected by the echoes of an earlier, and still very fresh debate over whether to accept the socialist-realist aesthetic and Soviet-style culture or not. Both those who claimed EXAT's lack of connection to legacy of local art, and those accusing them of misunderstanding socialism, were in fact touching on two important points. One was that indeed EXAT did forge connections to international modernism, but in doing so their goal was to take what they found to be the best of international modernist characteristics, and adapt them to Yugoslav cultural milieu — notably through the work in architecture and design. Notwithstanding their sympathies for Western form of modernism, EXAT were always aware of inherent problems with it. When writing about validity of abstraction, Vjenceslav Richter stated that abstract, avant-garde artists were equally prosecuted in the West and East. Abstraction in the West, he claimed, was limited in its development “by the organic characteristics of capitalist society, and by an opportunistic attitude of those with direct

⁴¹ Zvonko Makovic, "Kristl, Picelj, Rasica, Srnac: Cetrdeset pet godina kasnije," in *Kristl, Picelj, Rasica, Srnac: Obljetnica prve izlozbe clanova EXAT 51 u Drustvu arhitekata, 18 veljace- 4 ozujka 1953*, ed. Kresimir Rogina, (Zagreb: Biblioteka Psefizma: udruzenje Hrvatskih arhitekata, 1998), 5-12.

⁴² Susovski, *Exat-51: europski avantgardni pokret*, 107-115.

⁴³ See Denegri, *Cetiri modela "Druge Linije" u hrvatskoj umjetnosti 1950.-1970.*, 95-106.; Kolesnik, *Izmedju Istoka i Zapada: hrvatska umjetnost i likovna kritika 50.-ih godina*, 463.

interest in its marketing.”⁴⁴ Second point was that EXAT understood Yugoslav socialism very well and they weaved their formal interests with their activist attitude towards art in order to create a particular, Yugoslav version of modernist art — something already alluded to in their manifesto.

Most importantly, the controversy over EXAT’s 1953 show should be read as the tail end of socialist-realist aesthetic. As discussed in chapters one and two, socialist realism was on its way out at this point, and the modernist ethos eventually prevailed. There was generally more openness towards abstraction as only two years earlier it would have been impossible for EXAT to even try to put together a show of their work.⁴⁵ Yugoslavia’s new openness to modernism, however, did not go far enough to fully accept EXAT’s radical stance even after modernism became Yugoslavian official art.

While Jerko Denegri, Ljiljana Kolesnik, and Zvonko Makovic have noted official culture’s rejection of EXAT, arguing that there was considerable pushback against them, the artists were, for the most part, functioning freely and publicly. Most EXAT members were involved in cultural life in Yugoslavia, with some, like Vjenceslav Richter, representing the country at important international events such as EXPO 1958. Given their public exposure, they still had a tenuous relationship with the cultural and political establishment, being both inside and outside it. Other more popular mainstream artists were commissioned to do large, much-publicized projects, while many of the EXAT members flew under the radar, so to speak, and were known mostly to a very informed

⁴⁴ Richter, *Zarobljene teorije*, 115.

⁴⁵ Marijan Susovski, “The Conceptual Spaces of Vjenceslav Richter’s Art Synthesis,” in *Richter Collection*, (Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2003).

and narrower artistic public. Their work, however, was often awarded international and national prizes, and they participated in creating iconic industrial and graphic designs as well as teaching full-time and influencing generations of students.

Although the official political discourse, especially in the early days, promoted equality of all nationalities living in Yugoslavia; anti-fascism; pan-Slavism; affirmation of social rights; and worker and farmer coalitions—a major transformation of the social sphere—it did so within the confines of a less radical understanding of the cultural implications of the socialist revolution.⁴⁶ It could not expand its vision to understand the radical call of EXAT's utopian socialist-modernist aesthetic. While EXAT's formal style corresponded to these general political ideas in that it promoted a radical redefinition of what a work of art was (just as the young Yugoslav state experimented with the notion of socialism), their attempts at redefinition of the nation's sensorium proved too much for the Yugoslavian political and cultural elites. In the late 1950s EXAT members understood that their call to synthesis, so vital to their project, would not be realized in the context of increasingly conservative interpretations of socialism and modernism. Largely due to this issue the group disbanded, and its members went on to do other things.⁴⁷

EXAT's work represents what Jesa Denegri calls the “second line”—a number of artists who were relatively anonymous in their time but who were crucial to the

⁴⁶ Although many of these principles were already a part of the standard language of the Left, some of them were re-worked by Yugoslav intellectuals and the Party to accommodate both its multi-ethnic population, and the need to move away from Stalinism. For more see Katarina Spehnjak, “Povjesno-kulturna politika u Hrvatskoj 1945 -1948,” *Casopis za suvremenu povjest*, no. 25, 1 (1993): 74.

⁴⁷ Denegri, *Constructive Approach Art*, 82.

development of Yugoslavian alternative socialist modern art. Each artist stayed true to the group's initial commitment to experimentation, abstraction, and collaboration. The artistic legacy of this first truly non-objective example of post-war aesthetics in Yugoslavia was significant. EXAT's influence was felt immediately through the formation of New Tendencies. EXAT's rebellious attitude also provided a source of inspiration for a newer generation of artists who were educated in the 1960s and who, in the 1970s and 80s created what Jesa Denegri has titled "new artistic tendencies"⁴⁸, a number of neo-avant-garde conceptual and post-conceptual groups that ushered in a postmodern aesthetic to the Yugoslav art scene.

Vjenceslav Richter, Sinturbanizm and Socialist Modernist Utopia

As a founding member of EXAT, Vjenceslav Richter fully embodied the spirit and work of the group. He also had the most profound influence on shaping their theoretical aims because he had penned the EXAT manifesto. As an architect, artist, set designer, and intellectual Richter was involved in important cultural debates of his time, making him an influential erudite figure. In 1964 Richter published his magnum opus, *Sinturbanizam*, in which he completed the development of his idea of synthesis sketched out earlier during his time with EXAT. The last part of the book focused on the notion of synthesis by proposing a utopian urban plan that linked socialist politics and futuristic architecture. He writes:

As the topic of the day socialism should not be understood as an exclusively practical question based on the power of progressive forces and the possibility of

⁴⁸ Denegri, *Cetiri modela "Druge Linije" u hrvatskoj umjetnosti 1950.-1970*, 95-106.

seizing control of political power. Instead, it should be understood as a question of designing the world—historically placed at the top of the agenda for development of productive forces.⁴⁹

Only a decade after writing EXAT's manifesto, Richter again proposes a whole new organization of the social, cultural, and creative apparatuses by employing a holistic interdisciplinary approach to art making, architecture, and design. His theory of sinturbanizm, a neologism Richter constructed by combining the word “urban” with his notion of a synthesis of the arts, was an idea that, for him, could only take root in the particular socioeconomic circumstances of Yugoslavian socialism.

His book on the subject, *Sinturbanizam*, starts with an explanation of why the term speaks to the progressive politics of socialism. According to him, socialism could not be a strictly political question, concerned with practical issues of governing and party politics, rather, it needed to be understood as a transformative force through which a new world could be designed with the help of new technologies.⁵⁰ The question of socialism, as he refers to it, had been only partially dealt with Yugoslav Marxists, and therefore the official socialist project had attained only superficial results. There could not be true social transformation on a global scale, according to Richter, as long as socialism was seen in isolation as an exclusively political question, or one related to the sociocultural transformation in particular nations.

⁴⁹ Socijalizam kao pitanje dana- ne smije se shvatiti kao isključivo praktično pitanje, koje se bazira na snazi progresivnih partija i mogućnosti zauzimanja vlasti., već kao pitanje uređenja svijeta historijski postavljeno na dnevni red razvitkom proizvodnih snaga. Vjenceslav Richter, *Sinturbanizam*, (Zagreb: Mladost, 1964), 15.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 99.

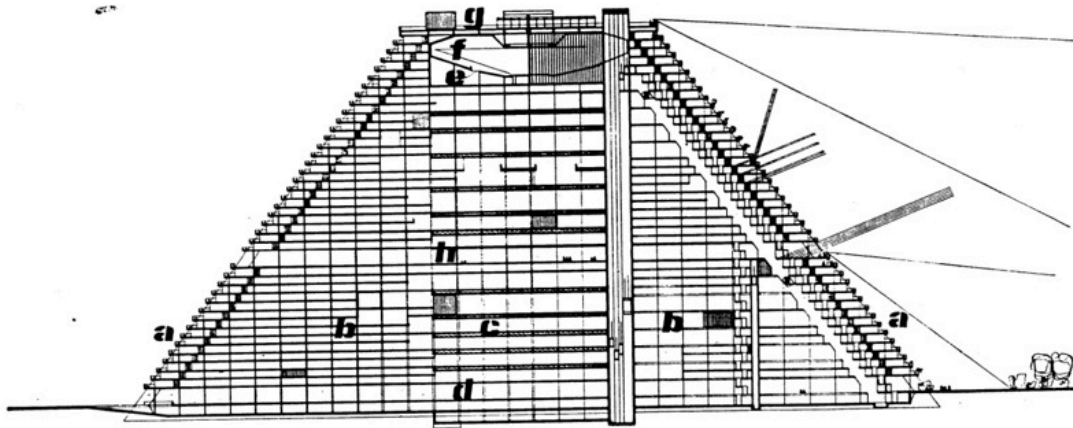


Figure 4.14. Vjenceslav Richter, “Plan for a Ziggurat Building” from *Sinturbanizam*, 1964

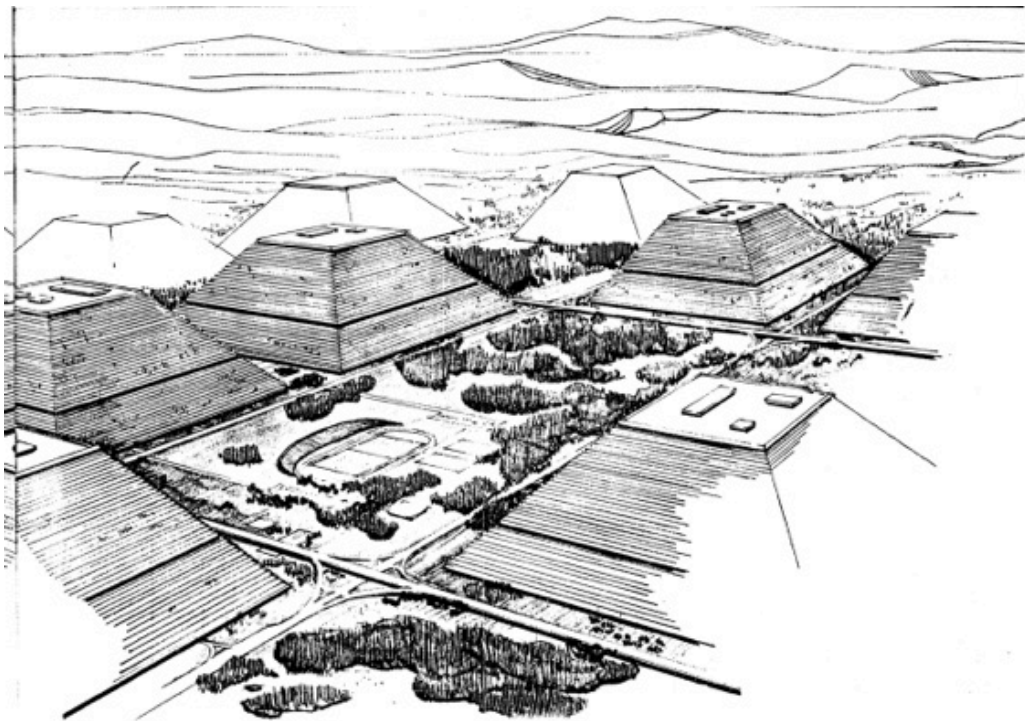


Figure 4.15. Vjenceslav Richter, “Plan of a Ziggurat Building,” from *Sinturbanizam*, 1964

Using the language of biology, Richter proposed that socialism needed to be seen holistically and epidemiologically, so that it would cover all spheres of life and penetrate all domains of human action and interaction. This includes the creation of a new sensory apparatus that would transform human perceptions of time and space. Links to EXAT's ideas are again apparent in the text. From this perspective he makes a direct correlation to the artistic field, arguing that artistic practice also needs to be understood as a synthesis. Looking at various historical and contemporary examples, from Gothic cathedrals to the architecture of Herb Greene and le Corbusier, Richter maintained that there can be no differentiation between sculpture, architecture, and painting. Instead, one had to talk about the object—the object that is formed.⁵¹

In synthesis there is neither architecture, nor sculpture, nor painting in their classical understanding. There is a viewer as a subject and a unique visual world- space, in which everything is situated, moves, is still, and lives. If we are a part of a visual synthesis in a holistic world, then everything is architecture, everything is sculpture, and everything is painting, including the viewer who is a motor-spatial and psychological element.⁵²

His synthetic and holistic understanding of the designed, visual, and lived environment can be achieved through abstract non-objective art. Such art needed to cease to exist in its classical form, delineated by specific disciplines. Echoing the claims of Minimalist art theory, Richter states that “in order for a painting to become architecture it has to become a real object.”⁵³ In turn, architecture also ceases to exist in its purely utilitarian form and frees itself from slavery to its traditional constructive systems. In this particular move, through which Richter unites all forms of making as

⁵¹ Richter, *Sinturbanizam*, 19.

⁵² *Ibid*, 21.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 22.

part of the same organically constructed system of relationship to the world, he distances his work from the mechanistic, purist architectural theories prevalent earlier in the twentieth century. Although his practice was informed by le Corbusier's systemic thinking about relationships between architecture and the human body, Richter denounces architecture's slavery to function and proposes architecture as both an aesthetic (or non-utilitarian) and functional environment. Ultimately, in his work there can be no differentiation between the political, the spiritual, and the aesthetic since all are dependent on one another.

Croatian art historian Jasna Galjer wrote an analysis of Richter's architectural project for the Yugoslavian Pavilion at EXPO 1958 in Brussels (Figs. 4.25 and 4.26). Galjer argues that Richter was somewhat vague with respect to his views on politics.⁵⁴ She further states that he had an ambiguous status in artistic and political circles, where he was often criticized. Yet his biography suggests he also knew influential members of the political establishment of the time. He was also a participant in the WWII Communist resistance movement, and a life-long leftist.⁵⁵ Other historians, such as Ljiljana Kolesnik and Jerko Denegri, have placed his political views aside, choosing to emphasize Richter's aesthetic and formal arguments rather than his political leanings. What is important to note, however, is that all these arguments downplay Richter's own

⁵⁴ Jasna Galjer, *Expo 58 i jugoslavenski paviljon Vjenceslava Richtera*, trans. Graham McMAster, (Zagreb: Horetzky Press, 2009), 359.

⁵⁵ Narcisa Krizman- Lengel and Petar Strcic eds., *Revolucionarni omladinski pokret u Zagrebu 1941-1945*, ed. Branko et al Gumhalter, (Zagreb: Gradska konferencija SSRNH; Gradski odbor saveza udruzenja boraca NOR-a; Sveucilisna naklada Liber, 1984), 94. And "Zbirka Richter Collection," in Muzej suvremene umjetnosti [database online]. [cited 2013]. Available from <http://www.richter.com.hr/flash.html>.

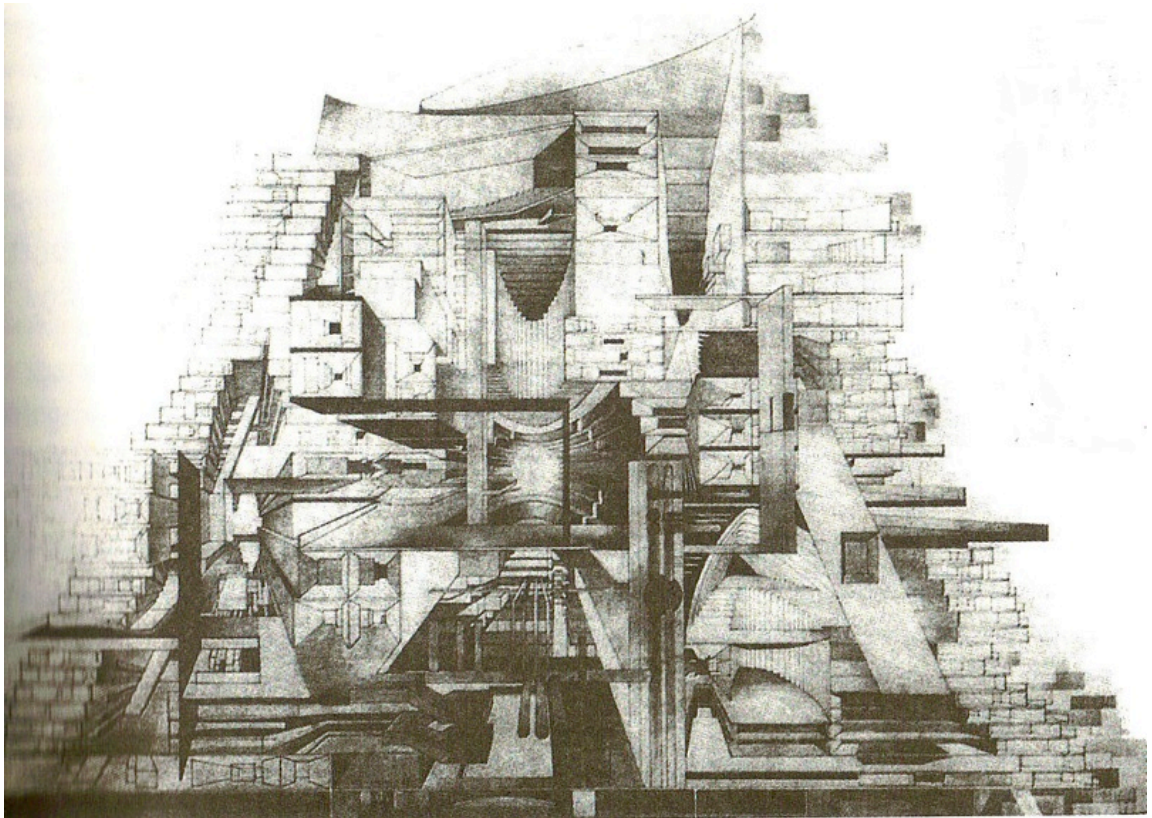


Figure 4.16. Cross-section of a Ziggurat Building, from *Synturbanizam*. 1964

texts, in which he makes a direct and very close relationship between the political and the aesthetic. Any attempt at understanding new, abstract non-objective, or, in his words, “progressive aesthetics,” cannot be divorced from progressive social and political ideas. Richter’s was, therefore, a uniquely political-aesthetic proposal only seemingly removed from the everyday.

The final chapter of Richter’s book is a culmination of the initial discussion of various arts and their mutual interconnectedness. Discussion and plans for a sinturbanist city are Richter’s final steps in the synthesis of all the arts. The chapter starts with a discussion of structure, movement, and time as basic elements of visual expression and explores how these elements enter into the modern world and its everyday. He argues that time and space are precious commodities of that world, and their presence and influence in architecture has not been properly addressed.⁵⁶ Richter claims, for example, that le Corbusier’s urbanism attempted to provide a model, but it did not fully address the interconnected nature of various built environments.

Richter’s sinturbanist plan call for a series of ziggurat buildings, each of which would contain living, working, cultural, and leisure sections. Each building was also to house ten thousand people and be completely self-contained. This would, he believed, allow for a reduction in the number of cars in the cities and resolve uneven urban development that prevents full usage of different city spaces. Stating that modern urban life is full of unresolved paradoxes, he points to traffic congestion, space, and time lost in doing very complex everyday human activities. The ziggurat is the basic unit, but the

⁵⁶ Richter, *Synturbanism*, 85.

city is built out of an interconnected network of such buildings, all easily accessible to each other as well as to other important amenities that cannot be contained within a single unit. All primary life functions and human activities, such as food production, infrastructural, administrative, cultural, and even agricultural elements of urban life would coexist within a single ziggurat.

Richter's is both a mechanical and a biological model. When he speaks of the basic formal elements such as the square, or the cube, or for that matter the ziggurat, he points to their links to modern civilizational development and their close connection to new technologies. These are in turn, he claims, based upon precise mathematical calculations. Repetition of a single element over and over again across a complex structure forms, in effect, a dynamic mechanism corresponding to computer technologies of the day. Yet if we observe his grid-like layout of the entire *sinurbanist* city (Fig. 4.20) it becomes clear that it owes as much to the Bauhaus aesthetic and the general modernist obsession with the grid⁵⁷ as it does to the aesthetic of the computer chip or motherboard (Fig. 4.17)

⁵⁷ Rosalind Krauss has aptly analyzed the prevalence and meaning of the grid in modernist art, claiming that its prevalence in all forms of modernist art is a sign that coveted idea of 'originality' in modern art is nothing but an illusion. See: Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *October* 9, no. Summer (1979): 50-64.; Rosalind Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 151.

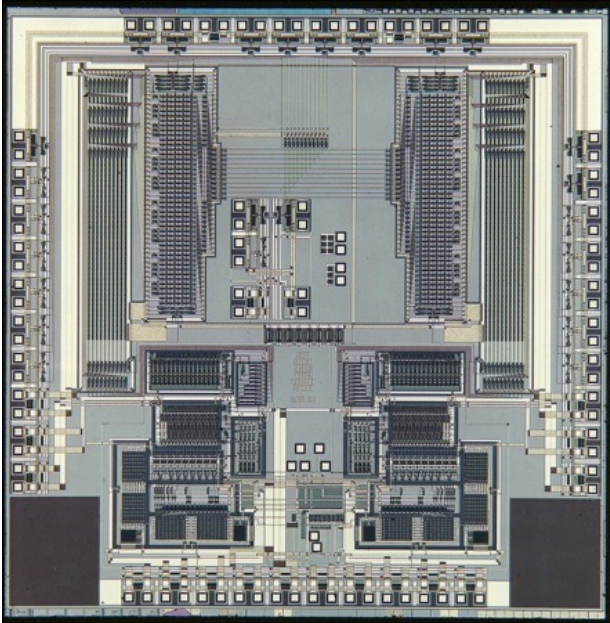


Figure 4.17. A 1964 computer chip.

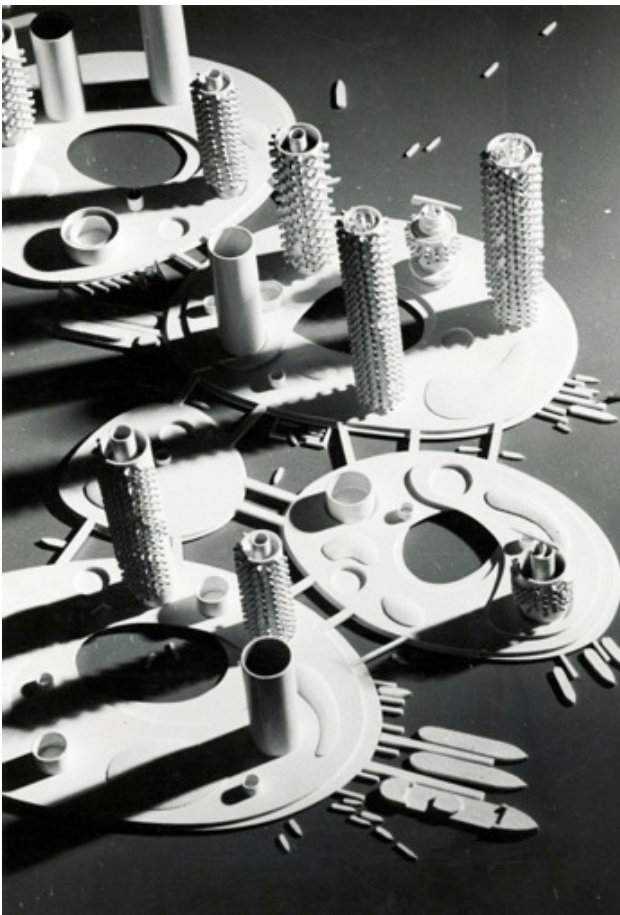


Figure 4.18. Kikutake Kiyonori,
Marine City, 1963

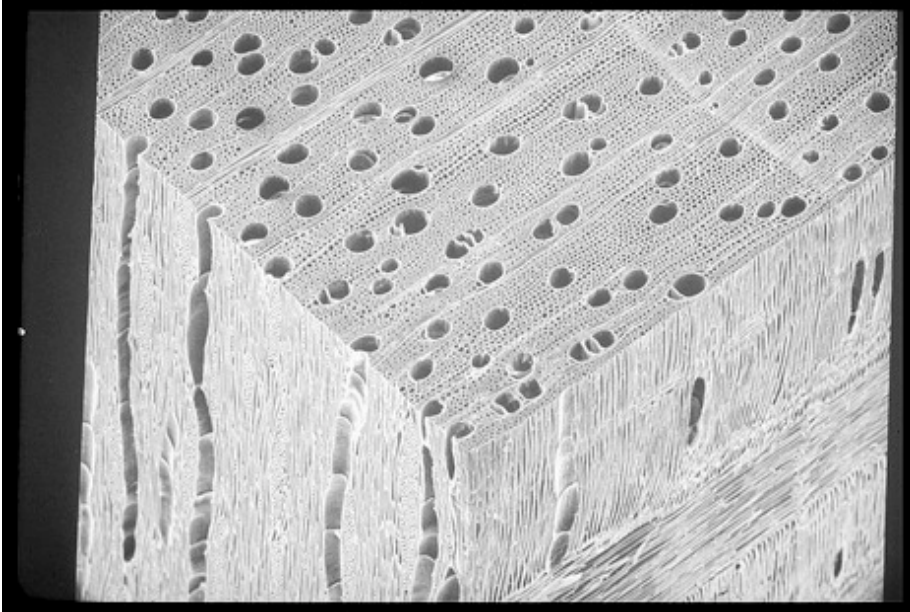


Figure 4.19.
Microscopic cross-section of a maple tree.

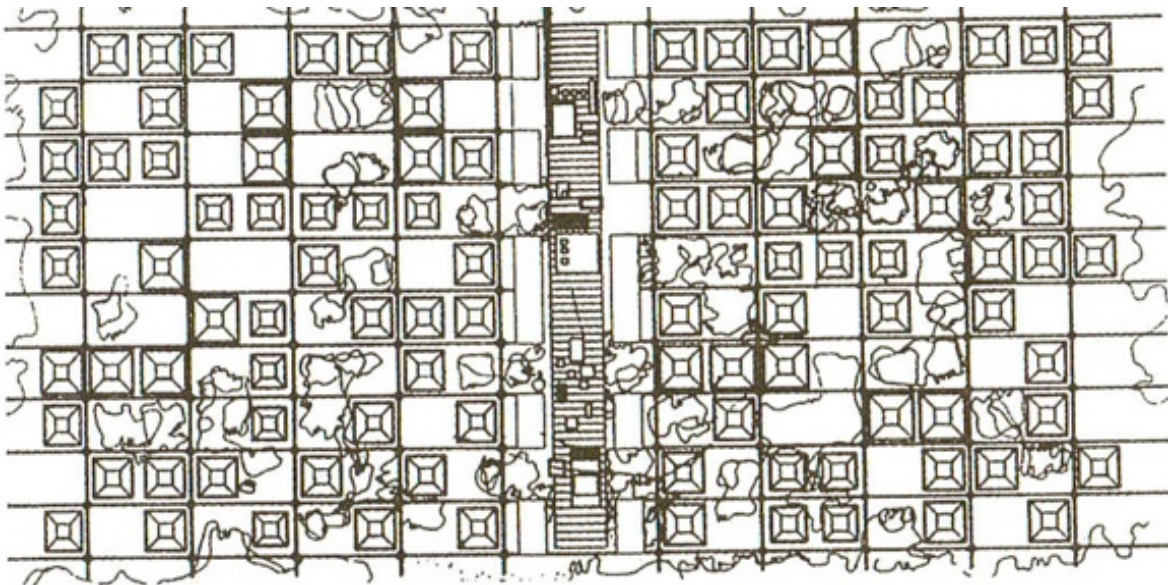


Figure 4.20. V. Richter, Section of an urban plan from *Synturbanism*, 1964.

His plan, however, also employs a biological paradigm, making reference to epidemiological and metabolic systems. Although grid-based, Richter's structures hark back to cellular organization in which many individual cells compose a single organism (Fig. 4.19.) The interior of each ziggurat was envisioned as a series of smaller modular pieces that could turn on axis according to the individual needs of the people using them (Fig. 4.14). The grid can be read as a living organism, whose cells, when working together, form a dynamic whole and are capable of reconstructing themselves.

The entire core of the ziggurat, which is in the shape of a three-dimensional honeycomb, is used for production, work, and leisure and is elastic enough so that with good preparation spatial changes can be done practically overnight.⁵⁸

Elasticity and adaptation, the most important characteristics of vibrant biological configurations, figure prominently in *Sinturbanizam*. Richter places a special emphasis on rhythms of change and heterogeneity in planning because he finds other examples of modernist architecture and urbanism to be monotone and uniform. He was encouraging flexibility in his modular designs within each ziggurat because he wanted to simulate changes occurring in the natural world. Synturbanism could also be understood as problematic if read superficially. Its emphasis on mass housing and geometric highly organized biological structures such as the honeycomb seems totalitarian, yet Richter's constant emphasis on diversity, dynamism, and change in both architecture and the flow of life inside his architecture counters that initial observation.

Jasna Galjer finds a direct correlation between synturbanism and contemporaneous developments in international architecture, especially in the work of

⁵⁸ Richter. *Synturbanism*, 87.

Kikutake Kiyonori, such as *Marine City* from 1963 (Fig. 4.16), as well as in the work of others involved with Metabolist architecture.⁵⁹ These parallel international developments also contained direct references to biological systems. Richter's aesthetic is both analogue and digital, taking from the rational, organized world of computer chips and cybernetics, as well as from the idiosyncrasies, rhythms, and changes of cell structures and the complex functioning of biological organisms.

There is a direct correlation between Richter's other work and the sinturbanist project. At this stage of his career he was involved with some of his fellow ex-EXAT members in the New Tendencies movement, which promoted integration of art and new technologies and media.⁶⁰ Some of the sculptures produced by Richter (Figs. 4.21 and 4.22) are also based on the premise of a singular, simple geometric unit repeated throughout the structure. Repetitiveness of the works speaks to his interest in the digital world and the dynamic, unpredictable nature of different biological organisms. Other artists involved with New Tendencies used similar techniques as they started to incorporate movable parts into their sculptures, in effect creating kinetic sculpture. Richter's involvement with New Tendencies most notably influenced his perception of time and space in architecture, as, for him, it stopped being static and became movable, as did his sculptures.

⁵⁹ Galjer, *Expo 58 i jugoslavenski paviljon Vjenceslava Richtera*, 338.

⁶⁰ Mestrovic and Putar, *Katalog izlozbe Nove Tendencije, 3. august - 14. septembar*, 5-6.

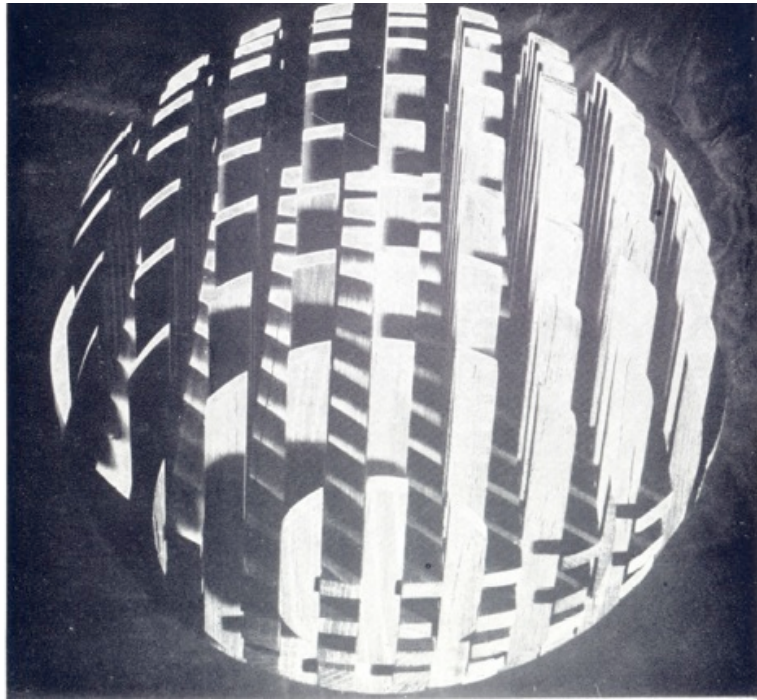


Figure 4.21. V. Richter, *Asymmetric Centra*, sculpture, wood, 1963



Figure 2.22. V. Richter, *Reliefmeter*, aluminum, 1967

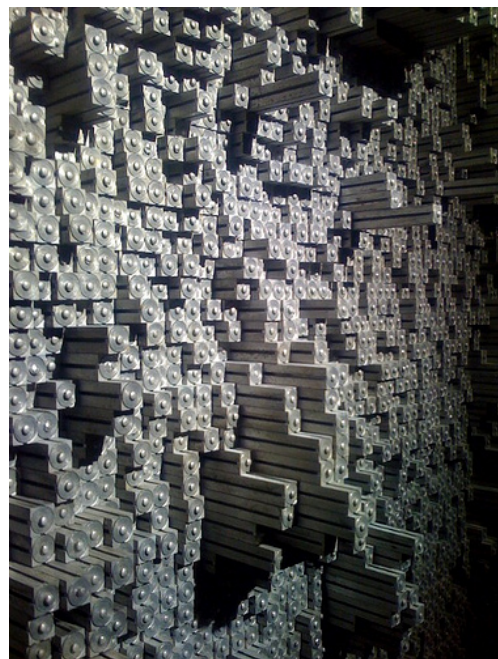


Figure 2.23. V. Richter, *Reliefmeter*, detail, 1967

Synturbanism, as both a philosophical and an architectural model and an aesthetic, utopian, or even whimsical proposal for a new world, shows Richter's interest in marrying creativity and everyday life. Richter's vision belongs to something that, we could argue, is a form of progressive socialism. At its core, the proposal for the ziggurat city maintains that human life is more than just an economic, political, or even merely biological proposition. The fact that each ziggurat building would have all the necessary socio-economic and cultural structures speaks to the architect's interest in allowing urban dwellers to be equally involved in different activities of life, including the creative ones. Although his architectural proposal seems utopian, and probably was, Richter adamantly opposed such a reading of his work, noting in his book that his theory is deeply rooted in an understanding of the material demands of architecture and its sociopolitical and economic limitations. Here again, a paradox arises in Richter's work. It is both deeply visionary and utopian, but it is, at the same time, based on his many years of working as an architect, his understanding of materials, practices and the economic demands that architecture makes on its practitioners.

Vjenceslav Richter and Praxis: Parallel Visions of Progressive Socialist Culture

A year after the publication of *Synturbanism*, Richter published a short text on the problems in Yugoslavian architecture, entitled "Assisting and Engagement: On Fundamental Questions in Our Architecture." The essay was published in the Yugoslavian philosophical journal *Praxis*, published by Praxis. Praxis was a group of

philosophers, sociologists, and cultural theorists who promoted a leftist, critical theoretical discourse based on a humanist re-reading of Marx. In his text Richter critically assessed the state of Yugoslavian architecture, noting a gap between the official political discourse, which promoted progressive attitudes in urbanism and architecture, and its failure to materialize in reality. Architects, he claimed, are often passive, not responding to the needs of their craft but to the political realities of increasingly bureaucratic socialism as it was practiced in Yugoslavia. Emblematic of this trend was the urban development of the time, which failed to address some of the main questions of socialist cities and economies. Richter's text also offered a criticism of international modernism, accusing it equally of passivity. Finally, he concluded, the only true way of being creative is through social and aesthetic engagement.

Richter's text came out at a time when Praxis had just started its public work. The essay demonstrates a parallel between his theoretical and practical work in architecture and art and Praxis' work in the field of philosophical, sociological, and cultural studies. Philosopher Borislav Mikulic, however, has recently argued that the ties between Praxis and artistic groups such as EXAT and New Tendencies or individuals such as Richter, were few and far between.⁶¹ It seems that perhaps these individuals and groups were connected unofficially rather than officially. The only clues that they knew each other are sporadic texts (such as Richter's) published in *Praxis* and reviews and critical texts

⁶¹ Mikulic, Borislav. "Poietic Notion of Practice and Its Cultural Context: *Praxis* Philosophy in the Political, Theoretical and Artistic Turmoil in the 1960s," Expanded version of a lecture given at Zagrebačkoj slavističkoj školi, [Zagreb Slavic Languages School] Dubrovnik, IUC, 1. 9. 2009. http://www.hrvatskiplus.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=55&Itemid=101&limitstart=12). Accessed July 22, 2012.

written by members of Praxis for exhibitions at the time.⁶² The lack of hard evidence of more frequent interactions does not, however, mean that their ideas did not correspond. Indeed, from reading texts in *Praxis* and comparing them to the manifestoes, critical writing, and exhibition reviews of the time it becomes obvious that certain artists and architects, as well as theorists, were thinking and expressing similar ideas around culture and society.

Praxis and the Culture of Humanist Socialism

Praxis took its name from a key concept that united the group's radical, humanistic revision of Marxism and its legacies, with what Mihajlo Markovic called "the great Yugoslav social experiment" — namely the theory of self-managing socialism.⁶³

For the group, praxis was based on the "central category of Marx's philosophy," which

⁶² Cedomir Veljacic, "Dhana: abstraktna umjetnost Buddhisticke kontemplacije," *Praxis: Filozofski casopis Jugoslavensko izdanje*, vol. IV, no.1-2, Zagreb, 1967.; Nikulae Bellu, "Teze o etickom znacanju umjetnosti u konstituiranju kulture," *Praxis: Filozofski casopis Jugoslavensko izdanje*, vol.IX, no.1-2, Zagreb, 1972.; Rudi Supek, "Psihologija modernizma," in *Hrvatska likovna kritika 50-ih godina: izabrani tekstovi = Croatian art criticism in the 1950's : selected essays*, Ljiljana Kolesnik, ed., Tarns. Edo Bosnar and Ljubo Lasic (Zagreb Društvo povjesničara umjetnosti Hrvatske, 1999).; Rudi Supek, "Konfuzija oko Astratizma," in *Hrvatska likovna kritika 50-ih godina: izabrani tekstovi = Croatian art criticism in the 1950's : selected essays*, Ljiljana Kolesnik, ed., Tarns. Edo Bosnar and Ljubo Lasic (Zagreb Društvo povjesničara umjetnosti Hrvatske, 1999).

⁶³ *Praxis* group was very much prosecuted through curbing of individual members' careers and academic work, however, their prosecution never reached the level of corporeal punishment as it did in other parts of the Soviet Block. Many of them have operated under difficult academic circumstances, but were also continually publishing articles and books [David Crocker, *Praxis and Democratic Socialism: The Critical Social Theory of Markovic and Stojanovic*, (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1983), 25]

was “free, human, creative activity.”⁶⁴ Practice, or praxis, supersedes all dualisms by showing that:

Objects we speak meaningfully about are not just given in themselves, they are objects of a historic, human world, transformed by our practical activity, mediated by our previous knowledge, language, needs, and indeed by the whole of human culture at a given historical moment.⁶⁵

The group’s philosophical position, coming from the margins of the Western world and emphasizing a humanist socialist culture, proposed a particular transformation of modernity by calling for praxis⁶⁶ as an organizing principle of life. These ideas were a part of neo-Marxist thought exemplified in the work of the Frankfurt School. Attempts at reassessing and restructuring life in the twentieth century for Praxis meant that progressive thought had to take into consideration a critique of all oppressive regimes of modernity (orthodox Marxism, fascism, and capitalism,) and recognize modernity’s paradoxes. More specifically, Praxis critiqued bureaucratic forms of socialism operating in Yugoslavia. Texts such as Milan Kangrga’s *Eticki problem u djelu Karla Marxa: kritika moralne svijesti* (1963), or Mihajlo Markovic’s *Humanizam i dijalektika* (1967)

⁶⁴ Markovic, Mihajlo and Gajo Petrovic ed., *Praxis: Yugoslav Essays in the Philosophy and Methodology of the Social Sciences*, (Dordrecht: Holland, Boston: U.S.A., London: England: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1977).

⁶⁵ Ibid, xxi.

⁶⁶ Milan Kangrga defines praxis as a dialectical relationship between human beings and their most basic need for creative production (or what he calls poiesis). Therefore praxis is a human, social relationship between one another and their world in which the productive, creative work in everyday life is translated into relationships among humans and the physical world around them [Milan Kangrga, *Praksa, vrijeme, svijet: iskusavanje misljenja revolucij*, (Bograd: Nolit, 1984).]

point to deep flaws in modernity and Yugoslavian bureaucratic socialism.⁶⁷ Praxis argued that elements of socialism could be salvaged, but this would require reconciling the need for sociopolitical, gender, economic, and cultural equality with the need for creativity and “a variegated and free arranging of social living.”⁶⁸

Praxis members argued for humanist socialism as the possible alternative to the oppressive regimes of both Western liberal democracy and Stalinist tyranny. One of the crucial conditions for engaging alternative politics of modernity and socialism was to address the chasm between the lack of freedom in ruling political systems and the possibilities of expression and transformation of human consciousness in such circumstances. The tension of this assertion was at the core of Praxis’ philosophical enquiries. The elemental paradox of modernity, they believed, was reflected in its rejection of all that does not conform to the rational, quantifiable, autonomous notions of the world and subjectivity. Modernity’s nature can be addressed only by a radical reassessment of human freedom and action. This attitude is represented in Praxis’ reassessment of Marx, in which they argue that the basic question of Marxism is, “how to realize human nature by producing a more humane world.”⁶⁹ As a result they qualify the human being as a being of praxis, “a being capable of free creative activity by which he or she transforms the world, realizes his or her specific potential faculties, and satisfies

⁶⁷ Milan Kangrga, *Eticki problem u djelu Karla Marxa: kritika moralne svijesti*, (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1963).; Mihajlo Markovic, *Humanizam i dijalektika*, (Beograd: Prosveta, 1967).

⁶⁸ Srdjan Vrcan, "Social Equality and Inequality," in *Praxis, Yugoslav Essays in the Philosophy and Methodology of the Social Sciences*, ed. Markovic, Mihajlo and Gajo Petrovic. , trans.Coddington, Joan, Rouge, David. (Dordrecht, Boston, & London: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 317.

⁶⁹ Markovic, “Introduction,” xxviii.

the needs of other human individuals.”⁷⁰ In their view, this possibility is curbed by sociopolitical and other circumstances and creates a distance between what human beings *could* be and what they actually *are*.⁷¹

The distance between potential and actuality is how they define the familiar Marxist term alienation.⁷² More importantly, praxis signifies human self-realization through the opening of everyday life to creativity, leisure, and aesthetic and sensory pleasure. Milan Kangrga states that the term does not point to some sort of instrumentalized activity in which the human being’s potential to create is driven by a specific goal; instead, praxis represents an open-ended activity which is its own purpose. In that respect Kangrga points to creativity as the ultimate form of human liberation—an example of true praxis. The state of culture in a society is therefore the primary gauge of how free that society truly is. Correspondence between leisure, pleasure, creativity, and a socially and politically successful society is also at the core of Vjenceslav Richter’s sinthurbanist plan. His recognition that the multifaceted demands of modern life—and the speed with which they are made—place a great strain on an individual’s life is at the core of what his architecture is trying to resolve. He wanted to create a building and a city in which individuals could live out all the different aspects of their lives. Most importantly, he understood that this required, first and foremost, the building of a whole

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² In traditional interpretations of Marxism, alienation was seen in strictly material, production-based terms; that is, as an alienation from one’s labour. For Praxis, alienation was more than that. Although it included alienation in labour, it also included a more basic alienation produced by removal of all leisure, imagination, creativity, and similar ‘unproductive’ activities from everyday life. This is the basic paradox outlined in Marcuse’s work.

new urban system, one based on a transformed aesthetic and sensorial apparatus. Richter understood that the “look” and the “feel” of architecture and of one’s total environment contribute to how one lives and interacts with others. This was the ultimate modernist demand described some thirty years earlier by Walter Benjamin.⁷³

Praxis and Art

An understanding that praxis is related to creativity, freedom, and the creation of identity was shared by all the members of the Praxis group. Milan Kangrga and Zagorka Golubovic, however, tackled it in more detail. Golubovic wrote extensively about culture and its production under socialism. She stated that “if we define culture as a process of humanizing man, then every individual human being is potentially a *cultural being*, that is to say, a being with the ability to create his own life and change his surroundings.”⁷⁴

The issue highlighted by Kangrga and Golubovic is that the potentialities for transformation are curbed under all political systems (in their case, socialism). True freedom and creativity are closed off because social systems do not allow the development of individual potential for creativity.⁷⁵ This process was understood in

⁷³ Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*,

⁷⁴ Zagorka Golubovic, “Culture as a Bridge Between Utopia and Reality,” in Markovic, Mihajlo and Gajo Petrovic, *Praxis: Yugoslav Essays in the Philosophy and Methodology of the Social Sciences*, 176.

⁷⁵ A similar argument is presented in Herbert Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization*, in which he claims that “the very forces which rendered society capable of pacifying the struggle for existence served to repress in the individuals the need for such a liberation.” Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization, A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, 8th ed. (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 1974), xi.

psychoanalytic terms. Instrumental reason cannot accept the unruly forces of the pleasure principle.⁷⁶ Fantasy, imagination, sexuality, and other elements of the human psyche—which Herbert Marcuse called “receptive”—in the sense of being removed from the production of goods and the sustaining of social order—are in a constant struggle against “the reality principle”⁷⁷ which seeks to sustain order. The modern world actively seeks to remove the pleasure principle altogether. The Praxis members highlighted this through their insistence that true humanist socialism cannot deny the pleasure principle; fantasy, imagination, love and aesthetic and sensual pleasure are integral parts of the construction of the social. Culture and art for Golubovic are symbolic communicative actions, which help in the development of ideas and dreams—that which does not yet exist.⁷⁸ They are also a step towards the “humanization of the individual biological organism with the aid of the whole body experience,”⁷⁹ namely creativity, which fuels the production of art and culture also operates as a biological need in human beings, that is, as an essential part of life in all aspects. Finally, according to Golubovic, culture performs another purpose: it stands as a force for “the opposing need,” that is, as a creative practice it stands in

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ The reality principle here refers to the Freudian psychoanalytic concept which Marcuse used in his work to describe the relationship between sublimated and desublimated work. In classical Freudian conception of human relationships to pleasure and gratification the reality principle is a form of self control which compels one to deny oneself (to sublimate) instant gratification.

⁷⁸ Here Golubovic points to the utopian function of culture as a way of imagining a better future, as a way of fantasizing, or projecting into the future of our most treasured and imaginative ideas. Ernst Bloch points to the same phenomena when he calls art and creativity the repository of the yet-to-be.

⁷⁹ Zagorka Golubovic, “Culture as a Bridge Between Utopia and Reality,” 174.

opposition to *the real* and its exigencies.⁸⁰ Marcuse would call this the constant opposition between the reality and the pleasure principle in that the pleasure principle opens up the possibilities of seeing and experiencing alternative views of the future. Golubovic warns therefore that the denial of the creative potential and the pleasure principle in modernity has effectively precluded all other possible futures that could be thought of through the work of cultural imagination.

The potential of art to announce the problems of our age and speak to tensions and ways of being other than those we experience was what prompted members of Praxis to see art as a vehicle of transformation for the entire social order.⁸¹ In Golubovic's and Kangrga's writings art and creativity become repositories for a liberatory consciousness similarly to Theodor Adorno's conception of art as a form of thinking. Their arguments expanded upon, and diverged from the work of Adorno⁸² however, for whom art always stayed an autonomous activity that would be soiled by its entry into the everyday. Both Golubovic and Kangrga have a somewhat opposing view stating that, if liberated, cultural production is based upon praxis—an integrated, interdisciplinary existence in

⁸⁰ Ibid, 174.

⁸¹ See: Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice and Palice, Stephen & Knight, Paul. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995); Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor, Theory and History of Literature ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 383.; Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization, A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, 8th ed. (Boston: Beacon Press books, 1974).

⁸² That is why for Bloch art carries a utopian function. Some of the criticisms of Bloch and Adorno claim that their views of art are elitist as for example Adorno dismisses jazz, or specific kinds of visual arts as irrelevant or simply bad art. These attitudes should not however prevent us from taking his attitudes towards stifling of creativity via popular, consumerist culture, or specific forms of authoritarian cultures and use them to show that creative, artistic practices indeed carry a utopian function and speak to the potential in all of us to become fully engaged, free beings.

which all human activities are equally enriching—there can be no conflict in the integration of art and life or between so-called high and low culture.

Given that praxis, as an active term, can be defined as an attempt to reconcile production, everyday life, politics, and creativity, it is important to posit how cultural activities have been constructed under the modernist ethos in general and Yugoslavia's modernist ethos in particular. When members of Praxis write about the merging of art and life, that call to action is rooted in the conviction that modern culture has become alienated. Just as work has become an alienating activity, so too has cultural production, sterilized by its constant reification. Zagorka Golubovic argues:

If we define culture as a process of humanizing man, then every individual human being is potentially a *cultural being*, that is to say, a being with the ability to create his own life and change his surroundings, unless he is deprived of the social and cultural conditions which are necessary to develop those human potentials and needs through which he can establish himself as a cultural being.⁸³

Her words are a reminder that culture should not be a separate realm but an integral part of our experiences. Modernist conceptions of culture, which developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, followed the trajectory of culture as a separate entity, as that which offered a different kind of experience outside of everyday life. Formalist emphasis on the structure and form of cultural products, especially in the visual arts, served to create logic of culture and life separation, a separation through which life was instrumentalized.

For Golubovic, art takes a prominent place within cultural practices in all their complexities partly because of its idiosyncratic characteristics and partly because of the

⁸³ Zagorka, Golubovic, "Culture as a Bridge Between Utopia and Reality," 176.

ways in which it activates a range of responses from all those who engage with it. Because of this, art has always had an interesting position within culture and in its links to various social contexts. Miladin Zivotic, another member of Praxis, argues that any kind of social and spiritual transformation of modern societies—especially authoritarian ones—cannot happen without a profound understanding of art as a vehicle of such transformation.

If the de-bureaucratization of society is not to mean the development of consumer society—that is to say, a society which promotes only hedonistic values—the movement against bureaucracy must see culture as a factor that enables man to become aware of his human potential, enables him to avoid being a mere object of the operations of authoritarian social forces so that man will not flee from his authoritarian environment into new forms of escapism, into consumerism and empty amusement, but will become the subject and creator of his own history.⁸⁴

For him, as for others in Praxis, situated, activist art practices were the only way for humanity to become free of the burdens of consumerism, subjugation, inequality, and authoritarian politics. Art is not therefore a simple matter of superstructure or luxury, which comes around only once the material base has been built; art lives with and through social structures, playing a key role in their transformation.

This dialectical relationship between art and life, in which each influences and transforms the other, was at the core of Praxis thinking, but was also at the core of Vjenceslav Richter's and EXAT's work. The same can be observed earlier in the century with the writings of Miroslav Krleža who, throughout his career, called for an integration of art and life, and art and revolutionary politics — something I discuss in chapter one. In

⁸⁴ Miladin Zivotic, "Between Two Types of Modern Culture," in *Praxis: Yugoslav Essays in the Philosophy and Methodology of the Social Sciences*, 196.

fact, abolishing boundaries between creative and life practices continued as an important theme in the work of other Yugoslavian artists who did not subscribe to mainstream art practices. Although, perhaps, not in close contact with artists of their time, Praxis members had an influence on the zeitgeist of the alternative socialist culture.

Parallel Visions

Artists such as Vjenceslav Richter and theorists such as the members of Praxis posited a particular critique of socialism without rejecting its basic premises. Both argued that while socialism was an important civilizational human achievement as practiced in the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere at the time, it continued to alienate its citizens from the very notion of the social. The most profound way that this was done was by removing creativity and experimentation from everyday life. Attempts to change the status quo were met with resistance and hostility in political and intellectual circles of the time and artists' and Praxis members' work was relegated to the margins, thus creating two parallel cultures: the official and the unofficial. One of the best examples of the cultural and political elites' timidity and fear can be found in their reaction to Vjenceslav Richter's work for the EXPO 58 Yugoslavian pavilion. The Yugoslavian government held an open call for entries for the design of its pavilion in Brussels. Among the many entries Richter's *Diksi 2* (Fig. 4.24) was finally chosen as the winning design.⁸⁵ However, immediately after the selection both the committee and the various state

⁸⁵ Galjer, *Expo 58 i jugoslavenski paviljon Vjenceslava Richtera*, 301.

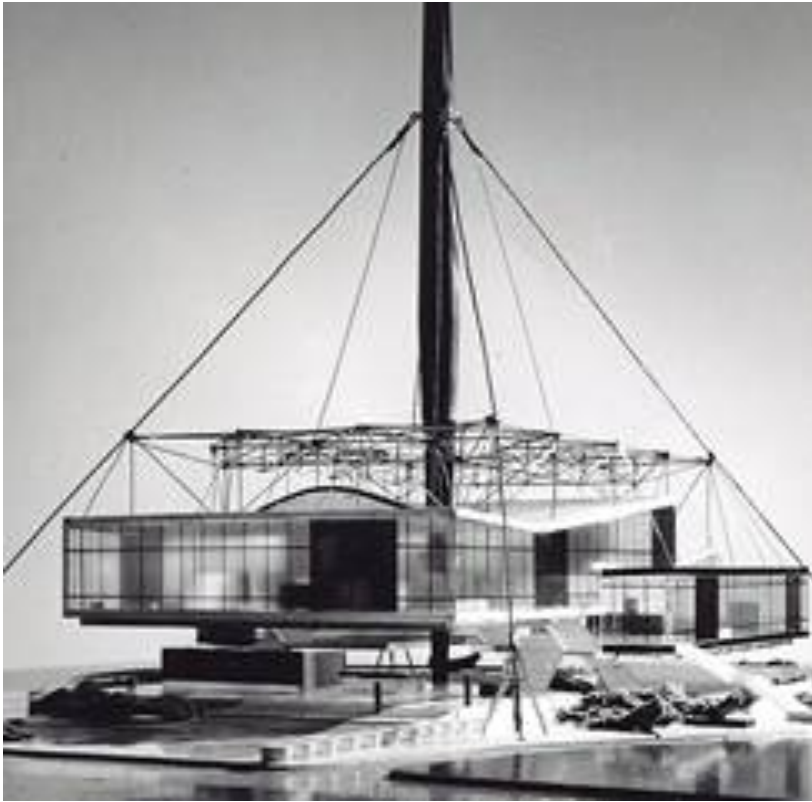


Figure 4.24. V. Richter,
Diksi 2 Competition
model, 1957



Figure 4.25. V.
Richter,
*Yugoslavian
Pavilion* EXPO
58, 1958

officials responsible for organizing and building the pavilion showed considerable fear about the radical nature of Richter's design.

In its original state the structure was supposed to be a steel and glass building suspended in the air by a system of steel cables. The whole weight of the structure was suspended from a large cone-shaped pillar. The base of the pillar was resting in line with the body of water near which the structure was supposed to be situated.⁸⁶ Richter wanted the pavilion to hover over the water. More importantly, he wanted it to be open on all sides with no dividing interior walls or central entry point; rather, it was supposed to be a centre-less space through which visitors would stroll in and out freely. The pavilion design was a precursor to Richter's 1964 installation with Aleksandar Srnec for the *Triennale di Milano*, which proposed a similarly open structure, but more modest in size and materials. Its openness, the lack of a central entry point, and its bold and futuristic design, as well as its relationship to the visitors and the landscape were all very different than the standard modernist architectural solutions found at EXPO 58 that year. These were, however, also the reasons Yugoslav officials asked Richter to change his design. Yugoslavian politicians at the time thought that Richter's building would be too aesthetically extreme; from this initial observation, the committee (mostly politicians such as Mose Pijade) chosen to assess the feasibility of Richter's design, also decided that it would be impossible to build it because of various engineering problems with the structure.⁸⁷ Their timidity and conservative attitudes won out and the architect was forced

⁸⁶ Ibid, 308.

⁸⁷ There were several committees involved with the planning of the Yugoslav Pavilion. The first committee was the one that chose the design, subsequent committees were

to radically change his suspended design. What was built was still an open, glass building but now firmly planted into the ground and with a clear entry point (Fig. 4.25).⁸⁸

Richter's initial model reflected both his architectural vision, which took into consideration the way visitors would walk through and interact with the space, and the ideological iconography of such a space, with which he wanted to symbolize Yugoslavia's openness—as opposed to the divisiveness of the Cold War era—and its position of neutrality within the nascent Non-Aligned movement.

The failure of the state to engage a bolder and more progressive aesthetic was in many ways prophetic. Its inability to form new ways of imagining socialism and embracing new ideas cost Yugoslavia dearly. Its demise at the end of the Cold War was foreseen more keenly by intellectuals and artists of the new generation coming to the fore in the 1970s and '80s. While Richter and EXAT truly believed in reforming socialism, it became clear that this would be impossible. This realization was evidenced by the work of artists such as Mladen Stilinovic, Tomislav Gotovac, the OHO group for example, who were interested in challenging modernist ideals and the politics of capitalist and socialist structures. In Yugoslavia, these artists worked in a variety of ways that can be categorized as post-socialist. Their ventures into conceptualism, performance art, and themes of feminism, sexuality, and politics were deeply critical of Yugoslavia's inability

organized to assess if the project could proceed as planned. Stenographic reports of the meetings indicate that for example engineer Djordje Lazarevic, who initially supported and chose Richter's design, subsequently wanted large-scale changes. Arhiv Jugoslavije, *AJ-56-2* qtd. in Jasna Galjer, *Expo 58*, 301-310.

⁸⁸ Jasna Galjer, *Expo 58*, 307.

to adjust to the new realities of the end of the Cold War. This was the last chapter in the history of Yugoslavian modernism.

Post Scriptum, Some Concluding Thoughts on Socialist Modernism

The First Image: The Angel of History

Do not believe in utopian projects unless you create them yourself [Ne veruj u utopijske projekte, osim u one koje sam stvaraš.]

— Danilo Kis, “Advice to a Young Writer”

I was recently reminded of a class trip in grade eight during which we visited famous historical sites across Yugoslavia before going to high school. One of my classmates circulated a picture from the trip a few months ago. It was taken in front of Dusan Dzamonja’s *Monument to the Revolution* at Kozara in the fall of 1990. In this strange photograph, I am in the foreground attempting to capture an image of my class with Dzamonja’s monument in the background. Someone else, however, took a picture of the entire scene, with me in the foreground, my face turned slightly towards the viewer, but my body strangely contorted as if I am running away from him/her. I become a visual mechanism by which this photograph functions, by which a viewer might enter it. My bodily gesture reminds of Benjamin’s description of the angel of history: “his face turned toward the past,” the angel would like to stay in the past and “awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned.”¹ Like Benjamin’s

¹ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Jephcott Edmund (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 259.

angel, I am attempting to be both in the picture (past) and capture it (be outside it,) and am therefore forever caught in-between the two.

The photograph reminded me that mine was the last generation of socialist children. We were born at the height of socialism in the late 1970s, and were grown enough to remember President Tito walking the streets of Yugoslavia. We were the last generation of children to be admitted into the prestigious Tito's Pioneers, a children's organization meant to celebrate the legacy of Yugoslavia's socialist revolution. We were also the last generation that clearly remembers celebrating Youth Day and participating in it. This photograph stands as a relic of that past, with my body captured in its frame.

I am, therefore, very much a product of Yugoslavian socialism. I come from a multiethnic, multi religious family. My mother is Croat and my father is Serb. Our family members are Croats, Serbs, Muslims, and Jews. My decision to delve into the history of socialist modernism is therefore not a matter of convenience, but an attempt to understand my own identity, as a person with no country (as Yugoslavia no longer exists), no language (as the official Serbo-Croatian language is no longer spoken), and no culture (as socialist cultural ideals are no longer wanted or needed in the hypercapitalized regions of the former Yugoslavia). Finally, writing this from a perspective of an immigrant in Canada, my awareness of space and place is even more heightened. I realize I live in a settler society which itself was built on repression and destruction of cultures and languages. Thus my position as a newcomer, and one with no stable identity has informed my political and ethical responsibility towards both my own history,



Figure 1. Anonymous, *Class photograph*, Kozara Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1990

and history and future of the place where I live now. This dissertation therefore seeks answers in a utopian past which, at least in theory, promised equality, dignity, and respect. These are also ideals that I aspire to and am thinking of for the future. My work investigates the history of such ideals and their validity for the present moment. And the question that haunts me is whether artistic, utopian visions found in the deep recesses of socialist modernity can teach us something about a possibility of transforming our current culture, which is in need of change. There would be no point in addressing history if we would not put it in a dialectical relationship with our present and our future, and throughout writing this thesis my intention was to put the past in tension with the present. Like Benjamin's angel I want the tarrying between the two timeframes to bring up a possibility of illumination. More importantly, I am also interested in the idea of art as an engaged practice, one in which artistic imagination enters everyday action.

As I have attempted to argue in this dissertation, although Yugoslavian socialist modernism represents a contested and somewhat marginal space in modernist history, its various cultural, political, and social narratives point towards a modernism that was idiosyncratic, and unique in its emancipatory drive towards creating a utopian socialist state. Reexamination of what I call Yugoslav non-aligned modernism contributes to a better understanding of international modernist ethos as one not necessarily driven by Western, Enlightenment cultural ideals, but often developed in tension, even opposition to such ideals. My study of non-aligned modernism also intervenes in the current histories of Yugoslavian and East European art and culture that often ignore emancipatory trajectories of socialist discourse. My socialist humanist analysis of

Yugoslavia's cultural history therefore offers elements of socialist modernism as models of cultural organization in our current cultural context. In discussing examples of alternative cultural models, and their state counterparts I propose that non-aligned socialist modernism contains a warning against reification of culture. At the same time it also carries a hope by offering a call to reintegrate forms of non-reified cultural production "both in the life of community and in the life of every individual."² The tensions and contrasts I uncover in studying and defining non-aligned modernism form a discourse of post-Yugoslavian critical theory that picks up where earlier Yugoslavian critical discourses left off.

The Second Image: The Summit

Last year in October I participated in a series of performances created by my collaborator artist Nahed Mansour and I. Our series was called *The Summit*. As two diasporic artists (Egyptian and ex-Yugoslavian) currently living in Canada we decided that it was the right moment to address issues of power through aesthetic engagement. Our performances were imagined as instances of estranging the everyday. In the course of our collaborations we have discovered connecting personal diasporic histories that intertwine on a cultural, political, and aesthetic level, as well as a strange nostalgia for

² Zagorka Golubovic, "Culture as a Bridge," in *Praxis Yugoslav Essays in the Philosophy and Methodology of the Social Sciences*, ed. Markovic, Mihajlo and Gajo Petrovic, trans. Coddington, Joan, Rouge, David. (Dordrecht, Boston, London: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 176.



Figure 2. Nahed Mansour & Bojana Videkanic, *The Summit*, Calgary AB, October 2013



Figure 3. Nahed Mansour & Bojana Videkanic. *The Summit*, University of Calgary, Calgary AB, October 2013



Figure 4. Anonymous, *Josip Broz Tito and Gamal Abdul Nasser at Briuni, Yugoslavia c. 1960*

similar iconic symbols of Egyptian and ex-Yugoslavian socialist states. We were fascinated by displays of power because we grew up under the influence of totalitarian regimes embodied in the image of the leaders Gamal Abdul Nasser and Josip Broz Tito. Our friendship and collaboration, in a paradoxical way, mimics the close ties that Nasser and Tito had during the second half of the twentieth century. Their political alliance is what we wanted to explore through aesthetic means in *The Summit*. More than that, we also wanted to speak to political power as it exists in general terms, thus extending our satirical intervention into the current global political theatre, exemplified by pre-arranged agendas, photo-ops, and theatrical baby kissing.

We took on the idea of a summit because it is described as a meeting of heads of state or government. The work that we did was comprised of on-going performance interventions which started with an engagement in everyday performative actions done in costume; our costumes mimicked the men's power suite and a military uniform pointing to the image of the politician/dictator and that of a political/economic summit. These images, for us, recalled both political dictatorship as well as the G20 Summits, political elections, and corporate boardrooms. Specific actions we performed—such as repeatedly shaking hands for several hours, standing as if holding a pose for a photo op, and standing in a military salute—were theatrical gestures used by those in power to signal political and military strength, and ironically enough instill trust in the masses. The physical difficulty, repetitiveness, and irony of our gestures pointed to an inherent paradox and tension within such spectacles. As we evoked the image of power, we at the same time pointed to the power's inevitable failure and decay. We both witnessed the

failure of the political systems in our respective countries, as the world watched. Now we turned our face to the world, mirroring the irony of its gaze. As Benjamin's angel of history Nahed and I turned towards the past, looking into the future, frozen, waiting, gazing. This is my gesture of engagement, homage to the socialist utopia, a utopia of my own creation.

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