

ART AS THE CRITICAL REFLECTION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE:

The Production of Social Space in Serbia in the
Milošević's Era

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• INTRODUCTION

It could be argued that the specific socio-political frame and context in Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SRJ)¹ was in many ways unique in Europe. The way social space was *produced*², starting from mid eighties in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ) in the period of severe economic and political crises, and later in the new independent republics that were formed after its disintegration, was extremely harsh. The brutal civil wars and ethnic conflicts shaped up the social space of these countries in the radical way, breaking up with the long history of the idea of Yugoslavism and a common state for all South Slavic nations with the constitutive concept of fraternity and unity that president Tito used to cherish.

The newly formed Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had an especially peculiar context due to the sanctions of UN that were introduced in 1992 after the clashes in Bosnia and cases of ethnic cleansing. One of the causes for the production of such a drastic social space could be seen in the strongest wave of ethnonationalism recorded in recent European history, accompanied with the equally strong wave of populism, that were interestingly enough conceived in highest cultural institutions in Serbia like the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU), as a program of Serbian national and cultural renaissance. After being recognized as a powerful homogenizing force by the communist elite that came to power,

¹ After disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1991, the two remaining republics: Serbia (with autonomous provinces Vojvodina and Kosovo) and Montenegro formed on 27th of April 1992 the new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Finally, after rejecting the name of Yugoslavia, the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro was proclaimed on 4th of February 2003.

² From the perspective of the materialist (Marxist) theory of Henri Lefebvre I will make an assumption that every society - and hence every mode of production with its subvariants - produces its own social space. See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Blackwell, Cambridge MA & Oxford UK, 1991, (pp. 30, 31)

Slobodan Milošević being its strongest representative, these ideological matrixes came back to the sphere of culture and contaminated it, thus inducing reproduction of the same ideological messages in the cultural sphere. On the other hand the sanctions by UN and complete isolation of the country and breakdown of official communication with the rest of the world caused the "economy of destruction"³, economic collapse with the highest rate of inflation ever recorded. The effects of these phenomena were devastating for the new FR Yugoslavia, where thus produced social milieu was dominated by patriarchalism, authoritarianism, a warlike spirit, xenophobia, and national-chauvinism.

In the analysis of different layers of the social space produced in such manner, I will try to elaborate and implement the theoretical model that is based on the meeting point of urban geography, spatial-cultural discourse, and theory of radical democracy. The discourse that I want to develop could be coined *spatioanalysis*, analysis of libidinal circuits between subject, society and space, and their political implications. I will try to use those theoretical tools to reflect the cultural phenomena, and especially art practice that could be regarded as a "symptom" of the society, and the context where it was produced. The first assumption in my work is that any society is also spatially structured and that social space is a matter of construction and production. I will therefore try to give an overview of the different models of social space in theory and especially focus on the concept of the public sphere and its genealogy in Western thought. My main task is to test the validity of the implementation of such a concept in the analysis of the context of the particular socialist society of SFRJ, its disintegration and formation of the new republics. I will try to translate

³ Mladjan Dinkić, *Ekonomija destrukcije*, Beograd 1996.

the concept of the public sphere coming from the theory of radical democracy and human geography into the context of the Yugoslav society of socialist self management, where the public sphere belonged to the basic constitutive unit of society – the workers, and later into the context of Serbian society of the end of the eighties and nineties where the hegemonic struggles and negotiations on the founding principles of the society were occurring in an specific authoritarian regime of Slobodan Milošević. It might be even said that the several public spheres functioned in autonomous way, one official having all the monopolistic instruments from the former socialist – communist ideological structures, and the other alternative and oppositional having just few alternative media houses and mainly the streets for the public address and speech.

Finally, I will try to focus on the cultural public sphere that was developed in the similar manner and analyze both the art practices that reproduced the dominant ideological matrix in the use of the regime, as well as the ones that tried to enter the public sphere in the critical way and offer the alternative model of the public sphere. The paradigm for the analysis of the Serbian art scene or art community in the period of sanctions and isolation, mostly in the first half of the nineties, but also encompassing the whole decade, was the one of the “art in the closed society”. As much as this formulation was explanatory for the situation in Serbia under the sanctions, my perspective on the problem is that self-isolation by the artists was more important than the outer wall of barriers, and what mattered was the decision of the majority of the artists to stay out of the public and social spheres. In the global age of informational society where Internet was providing all necessary information on the actual happenings in art, the paradigm of the closed society could be more

used as a psychological feature of self-isolation and withdrawal from the reality as it was too hard to bare it. I am therefore focusing mainly on art practices that were trying to deconstruct the dominant ideological matrix, create platforms and arenas where artists could engage in cultural activity and raise different critical issues, and eventually construct the alternative cultural public sphere.

- **PRODUCTION OF SOCIAL SPACE IN SERBIA OF THE 80s AND 90s**

1. The Legacy of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

The origin of the idea of Yugoslavism

The idea of Yugoslavism, the tendency to form common state of South Slavic nations, was conceived by Croatian intelligentsia belonging to the Illyrian movement of Croatian cultural renaissance in 1830s and 1840s. It had its further development in the second half of the nineteenth century, as articulated by Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmajer and Franjo Rački. They conceptualized Yugoslavism in the following way:

"...supranational ideology expressing the common origins, cultural ties, and transcend the ethnic, religious, and political divisions separating the individual South Slavic groups – disputes that had been exacerbated during their lengthy subjugation by different external forces and their exposure to contrasting cultural and state traditions".⁴

The territory of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia was at that historical period incorporated into the big Austro-Hungarian Empire, while Serbia on the other hand in 1848 gained independence from Ottoman Empire after the series of uprisings from the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the Balkan wars from 1912 to 1914 the Turks

⁴ Cohen, J. Leonard, *Broken Bonds: Yugoslavia's Disintegration and Balkan Politics in Transition*. Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1995. (p. 5)

were definitively thrown out of the Balkans and Serbia and Montenegro arose as the only independent monarchies that could initiate the formation of the common country for all South Slavic nations - Yugoslavia. It took some time before the idea conceived and elaborated by the intellectual elite of all three major nations was recognized and accepted by political elites, thus becoming political concept for the formation of the new state. It has happened by the end of the 1914, when the World War I had started, and Serbia with the Declaration of Niš for the first time officially proclaimed as one of its war aims the liberation and unification of all South Slavic brothers.⁵

In the later course of events after the World War I the South Slavic provinces from the disintegrated Habsburg Empire joined Serbia and Montenegro into a united kingdom. The Assembly of Montenegro had to force the king Nikola from the Petrović dynasty to abdicate from the throne, and make a decision to unify with Serbia and accept the rule of the Serbian dynasty of Karađorđević over the whole new country. This process marked formation of the first constitutive concept of Yugoslavia that could be called "peoples unity concept", and it dominated from 1918 till 1939.

Dejan Jović gives four basic elements of the concept of «peoples unity»:

- 1) It comprised that the state had to be strong enough to promote the formation of the Yugoslav nation;
- 2) It was based on at that time actual trends of liberal democracy, and therefore not only supported from the powerful liberal democratic

⁵ Fira, Aleksandar, "Problemi legaliteta i legitimiteta u društvenom razvoju Jugoslavije" in Društvo za istinu o antifašističkoj narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi u Jugoslaviji 1941-1945, *Ratovi u Jugoslaviji 1991 –1999*, Beograd: 2002, (p. 87)

countries, but also seen as the role model for the prevention of «kleinstaaterei» formation of many smaller countries in the region;

3) Stability of Yugoslavia depended on the right balance between liberal democratic and fascist - nazist understanding of the nation. These differences were important for the definition of the nation inside the country, as well as for its international orientation.

4) It was not defeated only for the reason of growing differences in the country – above all ideological, (mostly because of the different understanding of the nation by Croats and all other nations) but because the liberal democratic concept was loosing the battle with fascist –nazist in the European frame. ⁶

Inherent in this concept was the idea that three major South Slavic nations due to the ethnic and linguistic similarities have natural desire to form joint country and possibly new Yugoslav nation. The first name of the country, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, as it was formulated right after the World War I and the unification, expressed clearly who those constitutive nations were. Behind this constitutive concept stood the liberal ideas of freedom, fraternity and unity of South Slavic nations and with the formation of the common state, it became a political concept and project as well.

From this point onwards, as the new country was being formed, the debate over the implementation and legal constitution of the long awaited ideas of Yugoslavism had to be resolved. The constitutional discussions in 1920 and 1921 showed that the differences between the opposed poles seemed to be irreconcilable: on one side Croatian and Slovenian leaders were proposing confederal principle for the new country, on the other side Serbian leaders rejected this idea in favor of

⁶ Jović, Dejan. *Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla. Uspon, kriza i pad Četvrte Jugoslavije*. Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2003, (pp 110,111)

unitary form of government they were accustomed to in independent Serbia, and didn't want to give up on the political dominance they had in the immediate postwar government.⁷ Important obstacle in further debates was the rise of the so called Croatian question, which in the core was the question of different understanding of the notion "nation" than it was the case in liberal-democratic tradition.⁸

The cohabitation of the South Slavic nations in the new united Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, and their interaction in the 1920s eventually did foster the building of the Yugoslav identity, but in a long term run the overcentralization and ethnic inequalities caused the disappointment that could always grown into latent conflict. This tendency and unfulfilled wish to reconcile the opposing interests provoked king Aleksandar Karađorđević to introduce a dictatorial rule in 1929 with the attempt to impose new pan-ethnic organizational symbols and structures that would resolve the tensions. The unitarianism was supposed to flourish after the merging of all ethno-regional allegiances and renaming of the country into "Kingdom of Yugoslavia". The dictatorship caused exactly the opposite reaction and the extremism from different ethnic groups reached the point of open conflict with the idea of Yugoslavism embodied by the figure of the king Aleksandar, and the direct and planned act of terrorist attacks which ended with the assassination of the King in 1934 by a joint group of Ustashi (Croatian) and IMRO (Macedonian).

Towards the beginning of the World War II the idea of centralism and unitarism, mandated by the Constitution of 1931 totally collapsed. The concept of "peoples unity" was first challenged by Croatia that along with the change of global political balance and the growth of

⁷ Cohen, J. Leonard, *Broken Bonds: Yugoslavia's Disintegration and Balkan Politics in Transition*. Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1995. (pp. 13,14)

⁸ Jović, Dejan. *Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla. Uspon, kriza i pad Četvrte Jugoslavije*. Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2003, (p 109)

Fascism and Nazism shifted the perspective of the liberal-democratic understanding of the notion of "nation" to the more "organic" and anti-liberal understanding as promoted in fascism and Nazism.⁹ The cohesive powers of the concept of «peoples unity» were thus getting weaker and the new solution and constitutive concept has to be found.

In this situation the regime was afraid of the disintegrative tendencies in the country and had to recognize and empower the ethnic nations of the Kingdom, especially the Croats. The political act that proclaimed it - "The Cvetković-Maček Agreement" of 1939 meant the official rejection of the concept of Yugoslav nation.¹⁰ With the new regionalization of the country and the formation of the Croatian autonomous unit called «Banovina» it was obvious that Croatia got a prerogative of a «special» nation among other nations. This was exactly opposite to the idea of the «peoples unity» concept that comprised that the differences among the individual nations will diminish in future and the common Yugoslav identity will strengthen. In 1939 it became clear that the new agreement in the country has to be made and that the Yugoslav identity was undermined and compromised.¹¹

Yugoslavism as a way of pacification of ethnic tensions in SFRJ

In the World War II, that for Yugoslavia meant also a brutal civil war, the communist had lead the "Struggle for National Liberation" (NOB - Narodno Oslobodilačka Borba), against the Fascist occupying forces, and managed to overpower the likewise antifascist but royalist

⁹ Jović, Dejan. *Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla. Uspon, kriza i pad Četvrte Jugoslavije*. Belgrade: Samizdat B92, 2003, (p. 110)

¹⁰ Ibid (pp. 16,17)

¹¹ Ibid (p. 112)

Chetniks in Serbia thus opening new chapter in the realization of the Yugoslavism as a state concept. The new country was called Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FNRJ) and the constitutive concept was leaning on the idea of "fraternity and unity" of all nations that was initiated and cherished in the revolutionary fight in the war. The basic ground for this concept and new Yugoslav identity were two elements – ethnic bonds between South Slavic nations on one side, and socialist character of the production in society on the other.¹² The new Yugoslavia was formed with the idea to be completely, revolutionary different than the old one, both in social and in national meaning. The ethnic element that was crucial for the identity of the Yugoslavia before the World War II was still present in the first period after the war but unlike previous constitutive concepts of Yugoslavia it was not the only and utmost cohesive force, but just addition to the new ideological bond – the project of socialism. It is important to acknowledge that the further development of Yugoslav socialism could be seen as the continuous suppression and elimination of the ethnic cohesive forces on behalf of the growing communist ideology.

The decisive moment in development of Yugoslav socialism was the break with the dictate of Stalin in 1948. The whole Yugoslav political structure after Stalin's accusations that Yugoslavia was "too similar to the old regime" was led by the idea that Stalin was wrong, and had to prove this fact to the Soviets. The Yugoslav socialism therefore had to be different than Soviet state socialism that led to the ideological experiment of non-state type of socialism. It was at the same time anti-Soviet and soviet-centric because it was created as the mirror image to USSR's model. It couldn't exist without USSR as the

¹² Ibid (p. 16)

necessary Other in relation to whom the new Yugoslav identity was being built.¹³

Yugoslavia has developed a socialist regime that could be seen as an eclectic model that united theoretical background of some aspects of Marxism but also "borrowed" some of the socioeconomic premises of capitalism. First formed with the concept of "fraternity and unity" of South Slavic nations Yugoslavia was though not conceived as the national state, without specific aim to form a new nation that could be seen as a revival of the old regime. The new concept was for society that is national in appearances but socialist in essence. Unlike liberal-democratic understanding of the state as central institution of democracy, the socialist regime insisted on Marx's idea of dying out of the state. The idea of socialism was to turn state into society, to weaken its power to the level when the state functions will be taken over by the associations of free producers. From the point of view of the socialist ideologists the true democracy was not political, as the liberalism would like to claim, but economical. Liberal democracy was therefore seen as inferior to socialist, economical democracy.

The reforms of the Yugoslav socialist society that was positioning itself in between eastern and western blocks coincided with the economic boom in the fifties and sixties through the big "injection" of loans by IMF and West European countries. For Yugoslav communists the concept of self-management as promoted in 1950 meant the same as the concept of democracy for Western European liberal countries. True democracy could be only seen in the concept that the human being him/herself decides on the products of his/her work. The successful reforms and economic prosperity led Edvard Kardelj, the mastermind of the reforms, to claim: "*self-management had not only*

¹³ Ibid (p. 128)

demonstrated the economic effectiveness” but also allowed Yugoslavia to “solve democratically most of the contradictions and conflicts that cropped up in society.”¹⁴

Exactly the ideas of Edvard Kardelj as the main Marxist ideologist of Yugoslav socialism were to shift the development into the next step that could be also seen as a new constitutive concept of the country. This new concept started to occur in sixties with the suppression of the idea of “fraternity and unity” by socialist Yugoslavism, and then in seventies by concept of unity of all Yugoslav nations and national minorities. The dimension of Yugoslavism has slowly diminished in favor of the ideocratic socialist society.¹⁵ The whole Yugoslav building was therefore to be founded on the pillar of ideology and not ethnic unity. The prevalence of Edvard Kardelj as the key ideologist over the Serbian politician and main “etatist” Aleksandar Ranković that happened in 1966 marked the beginning of the new period of thorough reforms of the society and new revision of the Constitution in 1967, and finally lead to the new Constitution in 1974. It meant the rejection of the concept of “fraternity and unity” and ethnic concept of Yugoslav identity. Interesting enough is that Tito never really abandoned the idea of Yugoslavia as the country of South Slavic nations unlike Edvard Kardelj who rejected ethnic element and insisted on the ideological construct of socialist / communist identity.

¹⁶

The main aim of Kardelj’s concept was the clear distinction between socialist Yugoslavia and the previous “bourgeois” country, but also between Yugoslav model of socialist self-management and the state socialism in Soviet Union. The idea of fraternity and unity

¹⁴ Ibid (p. 121)

¹⁵ Ibid (p. 129)

¹⁶ Ibid (p. 133)

therefore too much resembled the concept of “peoples unity” in the pre war Yugoslavia mainly because in its foundation it had the idea of ethnic (South Slavic) reason for the existence of Yugoslavia. Likewise, the bigger emphasis on “fraternity” then on socialist “unity” was one of the main accusations to Yugoslavia by Stalin in 1948. Kardelj therefore insisted that all Yugoslav nations are “completed” and like all other nations they tend to claim their statehood. Yugoslavia for Kardelj was not seen as the creator of new Yugoslav nation but the frame in which the statehood of all Yugoslav nations will fully develop. As the socialism couldn't create or deny the nation, he therefore believed that socialism is the key issue at stake and not Yugoslavia and Yugoslavism because the mode of production and the content of the power was more important then the state itself. In this concept there was no room for ethnic bonds of South Slavic nations as it was irrelevant.

The outcome of these ideas was the renaming of the country from Federal Peoples Republic of Yugoslavia into Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia and creation of socialist republics as national states. Thus on the symbolical level the ideology (socialism) came before the type of state (federative). The condition for the creation of national states – the republics was that they were above all socialist. Kardelj's idea of Yugoslavia was that it should be decentralized, and with a political structure that would prevent return to both liberal-democratic and/or state-socialist model. Both of those models had in common centralized, strong state, and Kardelj's concept favored the opposite, weak, decentralized state that is dying out.¹⁷

Instead of the concept of Yugoslavism, Kardelj offered the idea of national states, socialist in character. He claimed that all nations tend naturally to form a state and therefore Yugoslavia only has

¹⁷ Ibid (pp. 136-140)

historical sense if it makes possible achievement of that historical goal to all Yugoslav "completed" nations. The paradox that could be seen in collision of this idea of republics as states where nations reach their sovereignty on one side, and the idea of the state dying out on the other side, Kardelj tried to surmount by claiming that the communists must overpower the nation they are belonging to and that the meaning of statehood of republics is not the same as in the bourgeois one, but as the instrument of power of the working class in every nation. Kardelj's concept was all-encompassing and it changed the whole structure of the power in the country becoming thus the essence of the new Yugoslav political identity.¹⁸

In the almost half century long history of the socialist (communist) doctrine in Yugoslavia, the ethnonational factor had to be first pacified by the idea of "fraternity and unity" of all nations, and then suppressed by the idea of self-management of the working class and solidarity of all comrades regardless of their ethnic origin. It may be true that the Yugoslav communists didn't have the intention to create a Yugoslav nation, but the idea of Yugoslavism as conceived by the intellectual elite, and later overtaken by the political elite in time managed to spread out and have effect on the population. From the beginning of the fifties when the national unity was cherished, even new national identity, namely the Yugoslavs, was constructed and introduced in 1961 in the demographic polls and declaration of citizens in official documents. A growing percent of citizens, and especially the ones coming from mixed ethnic marriages tended to adopt a new identity and claim that they are just Yugoslavs.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid (p. 143)

¹⁹ Pešić, Vesna, «Rat za nacionalne države», in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska strana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 44)

The chance of pacification of ethnic differences that this identity offered was constantly endangered with ethnic outbursts of nationalist that couldn't see Yugoslavia as a fulfillment of their national goals and opted for independent nation states. The cases of nationalistic movement in Croatia in the early seventies, demonstrations in Kosovo in the beginning of eighties are major examples of this tendency. But the communist elite regarded both separatist nationalism (tending to form new countries) and unitarist nationalism (formation and strengthening of new Yugoslav nation and Yugoslavia as nation state) as the same evil and anti-socialist doctrine and therefore suppressed them from the public sphere. Thus nationalism was regarded as the main threat to socialism that gave it impetus as the only serious alternative.

On the other hand, the effect of the new identity that was formed over one central idea of workers self management provided by Edvard Kardelj's reforms - ideological construct of socialism / Marxism and not ethnic unity - made possible that the later rejection of socialism could empty out the identity of Yugoslavia. It was therefore not possible to preserve the anti-state, anti-Soviet Yugoslavia and at the same time to reject the ideological narrative on which it was based. Andrew Wachtel from this perspective elaborated a thesis and argued that Yugoslavia didn't fall apart for any other reason (economic, institutional) but the one of destruction of the concept of Yugoslavism, the prevention of the creation of new Yugoslav nation.²⁰

After the death of the leader and "father of the nation" Tito in 1980, the system started slowly but inevitably to collapse, and the suppressed antagonisms came to the surface. The ultimate efforts in maintaining the Yugoslavism as a concept by founding it on the new

²⁰ See Wachtel, Andrew Baruch, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

ground, - the creation of a civil society - were the reforms of the last prime minister of SFR Yugoslavia, Ante Marković. They were focusing on four fundamental principles: free market economy; opening up of the country to the world; establishment of legal state, and developments of civil rights; and democratization of the political life with introduction of the pluralistic parliamentary democracy. This program faced big resistance by the communist oligarchy in the republics because it was compromising all previous pillars of the doctrinarian rule, and all the monopoly that public companies had. The Serbian leaders launched right away the media campaign against the reforms and finally with the break into the monetary system and illegal emission of Yugoslav currency Dinars fully undermined the policy of reforms and devastated the state budget with the loss of 1.5 billions of US Dollars.²¹

Thus the last chance for choosing the civil society instead of the purely ethnic was lost due to the prevailing "national awareness" which lead to the ethnification of the republics in SFR Yugoslavia that couldn't find common interest in a peaceful manner. It was obvious that the state apparatuses couldn't mediate between common state identity and the narrow national identities, but those identities were competitive and in collision.²² The consequence was disintegration of the country and ethnic clashes that were soon to happen.

²¹ Mladjan Dinkić, *Ekonomija destrukcije*, Beograd 1996.

²² Pešić, Vesna, «Rat za nacionalne države», in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska strana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 42)

2. Disintegration of the federal country

Ethnification of the republics

The process of disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on one side and the ethnic clashes and wars on the other were very close and intertwined, but it is important to analyze them not in the causal way because the fact that country fall apart doesn't necessarily comprise that this should end up in war. There were many possible peaceful scenarios and even proposals for asymmetric federation and confederative state that were introduced by leaders of the republics, especially significant being the initiative of Bosnian leader Alija Izetbegović and president of the Republic of Macedonia Kiro Gligorov.

In the case of the SFRJ the causes for war and disintegration of the country were not necessarily identical. The incapability for integrative processes of the post-Titoist regime and the later institutionalization of the new and so called sovereign states, the interests of the former republics of the country were so disparate and in collision that the common state couldn't be reconstructed in the democratic manner. This was a long term process and the formation of the new nation states which couldn't reach any agreement on the division of territories, the frontier lines and ethnic demarcation led to the open confrontation of new political elites. As much as the republics were narrowing down the identity of the newly formed countries, which was the case in Serbia and Croatia, they lost the potential for integration of different nations and ethnic groups in their sovereignty as well as in other countries. The narrowest possible identity was the

ethnic homogeneity, and exactly this was the case with the republics of the former Yugoslavia.

Yugoslavia was like many other socialist federations a multinational state consisting of different nations that were institutionalized in the territorial and political sense. For this kind of states it was typical to have nations founders and minority nations, and the relationship among nations could be established as civil, based on liberal ideal, or ethnonational related to the cultural defining of the nation. The socialist federations had a specific way to deal with the national question, not just because they institutionalized multinationality, but also because the whole state and its construction were based upon the authoritarian rule of the communist parties (in the case of SFRJ by the League of Yugoslav Communists) that were regarded in Marxist terms as the avant-garde of the society. Their vulnerability lied in the two intertwined facts: ethnical mixture of people, and unbridgeable gap between territorial-political (civil) and ethnocultural model of nationality. Both polarities were enforced by the historical heritage and constitutive suppression of any public debate over national issues by the communist regime. This instability and latent crisis in the multinational countries that were founded on the ruins of big Empires in the Central and Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia being one of the most paradigmatic examples, was seen in the fact that they never stopped «solving» their national questions, always looking for new forms of «equality» and balance of forces among ethnonational political units. This balance couldn't be achieved because of the tensions between «people» in ethnocultural sense (ethnos) and in political sense (demos).²³

²³ Pešić, Vesna, «Rat za nacionalne države», in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska strana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (pp. 32-35)

Throughout the whole period of the history of Yugoslavia dominated the fight for the independence of nations / republics manifested in the clash between central power and member nations – republics. The problem could be seen in the fact that the historically generated ideological positions and the way different nations saw solutions for their national questions were asymmetrical and in collision. Serbian nation regarded Yugoslavia as the state where all Serbs live in one country, and it occupied the central position in the state and proposed unitarism as a political doctrine. On the other hand the national goal of Croatia was the fight against the central power and reach of independence and autonomy. This irreconcilable antagonism of Serbian and Croatian concept of Yugoslavia and solutions for their national questions was pushing both sides on extreme poles in the critical period towards the nineties. Those positions were inevitably leading to national unity (congruency of nation and state) on the pure ethnical basis and necessary change of the borders of the republics within the federal country. With the choice of extreme positions the possibility for the peaceful scenario was diminishing fast.²⁴

One of the most common prejudices in the analyses of the Yugoslav crises was its simplification to the sheer fight for supremacy. The cause of disintegration according to this standpoint was seen in nationalism as the fight for power. Consequently the politics of aggressive nationalism that the republics were leading was seen just as the aim to improve their positions after the break of communist regime. The communist oligarchies of the republics were all facing the same challenge, whether to stick to the old system or to embrace the reforms. In the power games that went along, most of the republics

²⁴ Ibid (pp. 36,37)

found the solution in mobilization of national and nationalistic forces and the homogeneous national state as the way out of the old system and a pillar of further democratic reforms.²⁵

National question is usually related to the birth of the nation-state with the claim for the right of any nation for independence. The countries in Eastern and Central Europe and especially on the Balkans, due to the legacy of Empires that left big ethnic mixtures, in the process of making of their states couldn't establish firm congruency between nations and their politico-territorial frames. In this legacy lies the very comprehension of the nation as ethnocultural construct, and this perspective on the problem of the nation couldn't overcome the tensions of non-congruency between nation and state by the acceptance of ethnically neutral state (civil principle). If the relation between the nation and the state is of crucial importance for the formation of the "national question" then nationalism can be defined as the political doctrine or mode of politics lead in the name of one particular nation with the aim that it acquires its own state.

If the only satisfactory solution of the national question is establishment of congruency between nation in ethnical sense and the state, especially under the circumstances of highly mixed ethnical units as it was the case in former Yugoslavia, then the national politics can be aggressive and hostile towards the nations that are on the way of the establishment of the congruency of nation and state. When the nation replaced the class as the main ideological principle, the opponents to the regime became the enemies of the nation. That nationalistic politics could easily grow into the politics of war, as it was the case in Yugoslavia.²⁶

²⁵ Ibid (p. 41)

²⁶ Ibid (p. 64)

Constitutional ground for the disintegration

The question of national identity and the way it should be solved within the institutions of SFRJ had several important and almost decisive regulations. On the VIII congress of the League of Yugoslav Communists in 1964 the role of the nation was redefined. All the discussions ended with the normative conclusion that any perspective on the question of Yugoslavism different than the accepted, and that was the one of «socialist patriotism», would be seen as the hegemonistic or assimilatory.²⁷ With this repressive act the communist believed that they have solved the national question in the country. Unfortunately they were just covering it and pushing it aside by declaring all national issues and conflicts as a taboo topic. Any kind of national interest and demand was immediately proclaimed as nationalism.

In the later development of the society two main fractions were formed. One was gathering the liberal forces that supported the liberalization of the economy, decentralization and workers self-management but without questioning of the communist monopoly over society. On the other side were the conservative forces that were emphasizing the socialist values, unity of the League of Yugoslav Communists and centralism. The leading position in the first fraction was taken by the Croatia while the Serbian oligarchy stood for the second option. The negotiation between these two positions, and the relation between federation and republics was in the “no way out” situation until Edvard Kardelj has drawn the amendments to the Constitution of 1971. They completely shifted the Constitution of the federation and allocated all the power to the republics as sovereign

²⁷ Ibid (p. 45)

states. With this law the central power was split and transformed from authoritarian unitary power into decentralized power of the republics. The only remaining cohesive force and integrative factor was the utmost power, and the cult of personality of the president Tito himself.²⁸

The new Constitution from 1974 asserted this tendency and established new national and state system. On one side the authoritarian role of the League was strengthened and on the other side the executive power was transferred to the republics. In the Constitution the republics were described as states constituted on the principle of the sovereignty of nations and as communities of working people and citizens, equal nations and national minorities. The republics had prerogatives of the state, but the federation was the "union of states" in whose context the term sovereignty was not used. In the introduction part of the Constitution was declared that:

*Nations of Yugoslavia, starting with the right of any nation for self-determination including the right for secession, on the basis of their freely expressed will in the common battle of all nations and national minorities in the peoples-liberation war and socialist revolution, and according to their historic tendencies, conscious that further strengthening of their fraternity and unity is in common interest together with national minorities with which they live, have united into the federal republic of free and equal nations and national minorities and created socialist federal community of working people – Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia...*²⁹

²⁸ Ibid (p. 49)

²⁹ Dimitrijević, Vojin, «Sukobi oko Ustava iz 1974.» in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 2, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (pp. 17,18)

The right of self-determination and secession was left vague, and it was never explained whether the carriers of this right are ethnic nations or nations in terms of citizens of the state or territory.³⁰ This problem reappeared after the proclaimed secession of Slovenia and then Croatia in 1991. The federal government, or what has left of it, tried to declare unconstitutional the decisions of those republics, but their counter argument was that SFRJ is disintegrating. The republics in secession were asking all territories that were their integral parts thus showing that they understood the word «narod» as people or citizens living on one territory, which in Croatia included the parts where Serbs were in big majority, as it was the case with Krajina.³¹

Finally, the biggest lack in the Constitution was that all the decisions had to be made with the agreement of six federal units and two autonomous provinces. In this situation the only force that could control the multinational federation was the authoritarian rule by Tito and the League of Yugoslav Communists. For that reason one could argue that SFRJ was actually not a true federation. In spite of the Constitution of 1974 it was unitary state under control of the centralized League of Yugoslav Communists, and this condition lasted until Tito was alive.³² With the weakening of the communist rule after Tito's death the disintegrative processes started to speed up.

Serbia was the least satisfied republic with the new Constitution and with the fact that the autonomous provinces Kosovo and Vojvodina on its territory had almost equal position in the federation. As an after-thought from the position of the Serbian nationalist came the analysis of the reasons why the Serbian communist elite accepted

³⁰ In Serbo-croatian and other Slavic languages the word narod stands both for people and nation.

³¹ Dimitrijević, Vojin, «Sukobi oko Ustava iz 1974.» in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska strana rata*, Vol 2, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 18)

³² Ibid (p. 33)

at all the new Constitution. The main arguments were focusing on the compulsory obedience to the dictate of authoritarian figures of the leaders Tito and Kardelj; that the Serbian politicians at that time were not focusing on national interests of Serbia, but only trying to preserve their own privileges and that the Serbian people had different opinion but couldn't express it in public due to repression.³³ Actually the issue was more complex than the arguments taken from this "nationalist" perspective wanted to present. Another possible argument could be exactly the opposite, that the reforms Edvard Kardelj has initiated and the new Constitution provided Serbia with the realization of two main national objectives, i.e. to have common state with Serbs from other republics, and to have the most possible level of independence in this country and society. It may be said that the Serbian communist actually believed that by the acceptance of the Constitution of 1974 they are acting in accordance with Serbian national interests from the position of the Marxist concept. On one hand by decentralization they would prevent the accusations for centralism and unitarism often identified with Serbian model for domination and hegemony in the country, and on the other hand the federal monopoly including the unlimited power of Tito would have been prevented. In that period the Serbian communists believed that the position of an equal socialist republic with all its prerogatives would be the ideal one for Serbia, and that the main task of each republic should be its fight against nationalism of its own nation.³⁴

Soon enough after the proclamation of the Constitution the Serbian communist elite was to see that the actual situation was quite different than they expected, that the communists from other republics

³³ Jović, Dejan. *Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla. Uspon, kriza i pad Četvrtre Jugoslavije*. Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2003, (p. 161)

³⁴ Ibid (pp. 183-200)

were criticizing more Serbian nationalism than the one coming from their own republics. Other major problem was that the autonomous provinces took all the prerogatives of the statehood – the legislative, juridical and executive power, even more that it was granted by the Constitution. From that point onwards, the disappointed Serbian communists wanted to change the Constitution and the status of the Republic of Serbia. They submitted the official request in 1976 for the revision of the Constitution, but it was never considered. The same issues were raised over and over again with the so-called Blue Book of Serbian examples of problematic relations with the autonomous provinces in 1977, the debate over Kosovo issue in 1981, the proposal of Serbian politician Najdan Pašić to make a critical analysis of the functioning of the political system in 1982 and finally with the proposal of one of the leading Serbian politicians Miloš Minić to discuss the state of affairs in the League of Yugoslav Communists in 1983. None of these requests was really considered to be accepted even though Serbian political elite protested and got the support from Kardelj who gave them right in their claims that only the republics are states with sovereignty and that it is the republic who has to decide how much power should be allocated to both autonomous provinces as the lower and federation as the higher level of power. The Serbian communist elite itself was disappointed with the incapacity to strengthen its position by means of the change of the Constitution and towards the mid eighties decided to find new arguments beyond constitutional ones. They went back to the “original” concept of Tito’s Yugoslavia – fraternity and unity of all nations and national minorities and socialist Yugoslavism that soon became dominant discourse in Serbia. The real problem that undermined the implementation of socialist Constitution was that during the eighties the dissatisfaction with the system and

the ethnic tensions were growing, and it was mostly expressed in Kosovo with big demonstrations in 1981. The protest of Kosovo Albanians with the final aim to become a seventh republic was seen at that time as the "counter revolution" and thus the ethnic side of the problem and conflict was neglected and its consequences not comprehended. The Yugoslav army was used to suppress the demonstrations and control the province for couple of years and when the police of the Republic of Serbia took over, the problem has shifted from the perspective of the constitutional issues and started to be reinterpreted as the ethnic threat to the Serbian nation.³⁵

The battle for Kosovo

It wouldn't be exaggeration to claim that Yugoslavia was actually disintegrated over the Kosovo issue. All aspects of the Yugoslav society crisis are best exemplified and can be summed up in the province were the country didn't manage to protect its own citizens, neither Serbs, nor Albanians, and it didn't have any instrument to neutralize and pacify the national tensions.

In the very narrow division of viewpoints on the problem of Kosovo coming from both Serbian and Albanian sides, it was inevitable that these positions will become more hostile and irresolvable, as the tension has started to grow. The Serbian side opted for the principle of historical rights in the process of resolving the problem of Kosovo and its status, starting from the fact that Kosovo was "the cradle of Serbian statehood and spirituality". On the other hand, the Albanians were insisting on the principle of ethnical rights based on the fact that

³⁵ Jović, Dejan. *Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla. Uspon, kriza i pad Četvrte Jugoslavije*. Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2003, (pp. 57-59)

their nation is in absolute majority on Kosovo and that the territory should therefore belong to the people that live on it. Very important aspect was that the constitutive concept of socialist Yugoslavia was first based on fraternity and unity of South Slavic nations that excluded Albanians who had different ethnic origin. As a growing population the Albanians were insisting on the equality as one of the main foundations of socialist society and also distributive justice for all nations and national minorities.

The crucial moment was also the legal issue and the Constitution of 1974 and the ideology of Edvard Kardelj who abandoned Tito's concept of South Slavic unity in socialist country thus providing the new platform for solution of the biggest internal problem of non-Slavic Albanians in Kosovo. With the new Constitution the autonomous province of Kosovo had acquired almost the same prerogatives as any republic and the Serbian leaders did not welcome this tendency. This situation caused the strong national defensive reaction of the Republic of Serbia, especially when the demonstrations of Albanians proclaiming "Kosovo Republic" enflamed the province in March 1981. The initial reason for the demonstrations was mainly the social problem of inequality as presented by the Albanian students. When the group of arrested students didn't get released from prison after two weeks, much stronger wave of demonstrations broke out, but then the issue shifted to more political emphasis of "Kosovo Republic" and on ethnic non-Slavic origin and relation to Albania. The feeling of injustice for Albanians had thus gathered over three aspects: economic, political and national.³⁶

This request for equality had long prehistory and Albanian intellectual elite raised it in 1968 when they expressed the idea of

³⁶ Ibid (pp. 275-276)

"Kosovo Republic". In the background of the request for equality of republic and autonomous provinces and nation and national minorities the politicians from Kosovo actually promoted the symbols and institutions of statehood, as it was the case in all republics. They demanded a Constitution for Kosovo, state holidays, flag, equal representation in federal institutions etc. The Constitution of 1974 just partly met the demands of Albanians by elimination of the distinction between Slavic nations and other minorities and even the introduction of official and compulsory definition of equal nations and national minorities that went together as a phrase. The autonomous provinces also became "constitutive elements" of the federation having direct representatives in federal institutions, just with smaller number than the republics. The name of the province was changed from Kosovo and Metohija to solely Kosovo diminishing the importance of Serbian tradition of the first name in another symbolic act.

The communist elite in the country characterized the Kosovo demonstrations as counter-revolutionary and nationalist. The ideological reason could be seen in the inspiration in the different model of socialism than the non-state, self-management as it was in Enver Hoxha's Albania where the state-socialism was guided by the model of radical egalitarianism. Only this ideological background provided the reason for the communist elite in Yugoslavia to describe the demonstrations as counter-revolutionary and not separatist or secessionist.³⁷

The Serbian pride was hurt over the issue of Kosovo and that caused the rise of ethnic movement with long-term implications much broader than the request that all Serbs become united in one state. That movement grew into a vision of disintegration of Yugoslavia

³⁷ Ibid (pp. 270-276)

where fight for redistribution of power and domination becomes one of the reasons for future wars. The politization of the endangered Serbian people on Kosovo actually had as its aim the renewal of Serbian domination on Kosovo that comprised enduring use of force.³⁸

Very important moment was that the migration of Serbs that had a traumatic symbolism for the Serbian nation, the one imbedded in the Kosovo myth, was leading to the irrational view at reality.³⁹ The Serbian people regarded Kosovo, not just as a province of their republic, but also as a cradle of Serbian nation, its national history, religion, mythical tales, and as soil whose frontiers are marked by Serbian graves. On the other hand the use and abuse of facts of the migration of Serbs from Kosovo triggered the wave of Serbian nationalism.⁴⁰ The international community did not adequately perceive the problem of Serbian migration, and one of the possible reasons could be seen in the fact that the Serbian political representatives never chose the right interpretation. Instead of presenting it as a problem of civil rights, as it actually was, they interpreted it as an ethnic conflict and therefore never reached the ideal of western democracies, i.e. the civil society with all human rights, but opted for solution of ethnic state where the ethnic problems were not resolvable but through repression, secession or clashes.⁴¹

What Kosovo meant for the Serbian people explained the priest Božidar Mijač in a text «The Light from Kosovo» where he says:

³⁸ Pešić, Vesna, «Rat za nacionalne države», in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 61)

³⁹ Ibid (p. 61)

⁴⁰ Blagojević, Marina, «Iseljavanje sa Kosova», in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 266)

⁴¹ Ibid (p.266)

*«Kosovo is not just the physical habitat, but a metaphysical construction... This Serbian homeland constitutes the heaven and earth. Noumen of the spirit in the phenomena of time and space. It is the utmost proof that what is crucial for belonging to one soil is not just numerical, mass constitution of population, but even more so the spiritual construction that it has made, and where it exists on a higher existential level. Idea-genesis is in this case prevalent to the ethno-genesis».*⁴²

The mythical aspect of the Kosovo problem is seen in the legend of Kosovo battle. It was conceived after the death of Serbian ruler Lazar Hrebeljanović for the need of building of his cult as a martyr, and legitimization of the heirs to the throne, and establishment of the dynasty of Lazarević, named after its founder. The legend was of religious character, focusing on Lazar as one of the greatest Serbian heroes who got killed in battle against much bigger army of non-Christian Turks. One of the most important parts of the legend was the treason that was described in almost identical manner as the New Testament story about Christ's Last Supper.⁴³

The death on the battlefield and a consequent heroic transcendence into eternal life was one of the mythical cores of many pre-Christian epic poems. The choice between spiritual values and material goods of life is at the very heart of many religions and cultures. In Christianity this dilemma is dramatized in the story of the decision between «heavenly of earthly Empire». Similar to Christ, Serbian ruler Lazar was facing death with the same decision between the Empire of heaven or earth. With his sacrifice, the Serbs got

⁴² As quoted from Radić, Radmila, «Crkva i 'srpsko pitanje'», in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 305)

⁴³ Zirojević, Olga, «Kosovo u kolektivnom pamćenju», in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (pp. 235-237)

freedom, but in the heavenly Empire, the one that was within themselves, in the spirit and consciousness of the people, beyond reach of any conqueror.⁴⁴

According to Miodrag Maticki, *«what made possible the endurance of the system of songs on Kosovo battle..., and provided that it is the longest recollection in collective memory of our people, is indeed its archetypal system, accepted and functional in collective memory long before Kosovo battle»*. Therefore, in all songs on Kosovo there are two different layers: mythical-heroic, and purely Christian. Thus in the course of centuries, the parallel mythization of Kosovo legend in prose, with the ten verses lyrics, without doubt contributed to the creation of the Kosovo myth and its penetration to broad population.⁴⁵

The words of the scholar Miodrag Popović from 1976 in his essay on the cult of Vidovdan, the religious holiday and the day of the Kosovo Battle, could be seen almost as a prediction of the course of events in the crisis over Kosovo:

«The cult of Vidovdan that mixes historical facts with mythical reality, the actual fight for freedom with maintained pagan tendency (revenge, slaughter, sacrifice, the revival of heroic order), potentially contains all features of the societies with untainted mythical impulses. As a certain phase in development of national thinking, it was historically necessary. But, as a continual state of the spirit, the cult of Vidovdan can be fatal for the ones that are not capable to pull out of its pseudo mythical and pseudo historical net. In them, the

⁴⁴ For the analysis of the dilemma of Lazar and its reflection in peoples poetry see Bandić, Dušan, *Carstvo zemaljsko i carstvo nebesko*, Beograd: XX vek, 1997. (pp.227-238)

⁴⁵ Zirojević, Olga, «Kosovo u kolektivnom pamćenju», in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (pp. 240-241)

*contemporary thought, the human spirit, can live through new Kosovo, intellectual and ethical defeat».*⁴⁶

The media campaign over Kosovo became a milestone of the "Serbian cultural revolution" from 1986 to 1989. In the so-called "meetings of truth" the symbols of Kosovo were largely used. The biggest meeting was held on Gazimestan in 1989, to celebrate 600 years from the Battle of Kosovo, and almost two million people attended it.⁴⁷ The celebration was followed by the evocation of the myth of Kosovo seen through the lens of actual political reality. Kosovo battle was characterized as the clash of "two civilizations", Muslim and Christian where Serbia in 1389 was the "last fortress against the invasion of Islam". The epical songs in ten verses also arose, and this strategy of propaganda Ivan Čolović has coined war-propagating folklorism that consists of "*representation of war under the shield of eternity, i.e. in translation of the conflict from the sphere of politics, economy and history, into the extra-temporal sphere of the myth*".⁴⁸

The voice of the new Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević at the celebration on Gazimestan was aiming both to the mythical side of the Kosovo legend and its revival in the actual political circumstances. He pointed out that what has happened to Serbian people at Kosovo 600 years ago was discord, and argued: "*discord and treason on Kosovo will continue to follow the Serbian people as evil course throughout its*

⁴⁶ See Popović, Miodrag, *Vidovdan i časni krst, Ogled iz književne arheologije*, Beograd: 1976, as quoted from Zirojević, Olga, «Kosovo u kolektivnom pamćenju», in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 252)

⁴⁷ See Thompson, Mark, *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj, Bosni i Hercegovini*. Beograd: Medija centar Radio B92. 1995.

⁴⁸ Čolović, Ivan, *Pucanje od zdravlja*. Beograd: Beogradski krug. 1994. (p. 96)

history".⁴⁹ He emphasized that even today the same discord of Serbian politicians is degrading Serbia, and the inferiority of this politicians is humiliating Serbia. Finally as a consequence Milošević has concluded his argumentation with the now famous and often quoted statement:

"six centuries later, we are again in battles and facing battles. They are not armed, but even this kind of battles is not excluded. But, regardless of their character, the battles cannot be won without determination, courage and readiness to sacrifice".⁵⁰

3. Genesis of Serbian ethnonationalism and populism

The role of intelligentsia

When the old socialist systems of values and the communist ideology collapsed, the change of cohesive forces in the society and production of new collective identity was unavoidable. According to Claus Offe, the breakdown of communist regimes and the fall of the Berlin Wall was the crucial moment for redistribution of power over territories and the former communist oligarchies understood that well and were prepared to develop different strategies in this new hegemonic struggle. The questions of national identity that arose after the loss of communist rule and led to inter-ethnic tensions could therefore be regarded not as the product of inherent, psychological

⁴⁹ Blagojević, Marina, «Iseljavanje sa Kosova», in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska strana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 264)

⁵⁰ Ibid (p. 264)

hatred and irreconcilability among different ethnic identity groups, that was often the common view point, but the question of new open chances for identification that occurred after the loss of compulsory communists identity.⁵¹

The newly formed oligarchy that came to power in Serbia abused the fact that citizens needed to acquire a new identity, and to identify either with political, national or other programs and goals. In this situation, when the question of collective identity became blurred and confusing for most of the citizens, it was very easy to turn to the over emphasized national identity and 'rediscovery' of national, and ethnic identity as being 'older' than the ones of other neighboring nations. The proof for this claim was found in rich national history, so the process of recirculation of national myths, mainly from the Serbian Medieval Empire, started to shape strongly the public opinion through all media. The History therefore "*became comprehended as an active force that defines roots of the nations, feeds the constituent myths of ethnic groups and strengthens national identities.*"⁵²

If we try to conduct an historical analysis and draw a genesis of the phenomena of ethnonationalism, we could claim the role of culture, cultural institutions and "intellectuals" was one of the most vital. My thesis is that starting from the mid-eighties up to the mid-nineties a double transition of ethnic concepts and projects took place there - transition from culture to politics, which respectively came back to culture. A cultural stream that until the early eighties was not considered as playing a significant role on the cultural and public scene of the internationally oriented Titoist Yugoslav society, suddenly, in the times of post-Titoist political crises, flourished with a program of

⁵¹ As analyzed in Pešić, Vesna, «Rat za nacionalne države», in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 29)

⁵² Božidar Slapšak, Changing of the past in a changing society, *Republika*, no. 64/1993, March 15-31, (p. 16)

structural changes of the Serbian society by its ethnification and firstly only cultural, and then broad social segregation on the ethnical lines, and from the mid-eighties indeed became a motor of a total social and institutional restructuring of the Serbian society.

Ethnonationalist vision of new collectivity made it extremely attractive to the masses in East-European countries that were absolutely disorientated within the vacuum of doctrines and forms of collective action that appeared for them by the collapse of Communism. Concerning that these societies, bearing the legacy of communist collectivism haven't had opportunities to acquire traditions of building and maintaining civic institutions, the flood of ethnonationalism imposed ethnic divisions into all spheres of social life, which superseded other (non-ethnic) forms of social segmentation and stratification, and in certain cases led even to the total destruction of existing institutional structure, erasing of the middle classes, ethnic clashes and even civil wars.

The case of SFRJ in that respect offers the most drastic examples of the eruption of the destructive potentials of ethnonationalist movements. The wave of ethnonationalism in post-Titoist Yugoslavia gained initial impulse from the highest cultural and intellectual elites, such as, in Serbia, the group of scholars from the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) that wrote the Memorandum on Actual Social Questions, and, in Slovenia, the group of intellectuals around the magazine Nova Revija, that published the Supplements to the Slovenian National Program. Effecting, first and foremost, the political elites in respective federal republics and gaining mass publicity and support of the ideologically disorientated population, that impulse induced an overwhelming ethnomobilisation process, that was exercised on the following levels:

- 1) As an elite design when national(istic) 'Grand coalitions' were created between the politicians, intellectuals, the church and the military;
- 2) As a populist movement - in mass demonstrations or, later on - through referenda on national independence and sovereignty;
- 3) As constitutional, legal design - first, declarations of independence and sovereignty, followed by the post-communist constitutional design, including the adoption of minority laws, laws on citizenship, educational and language reforms;
- 4) As the apex of nationalist politics - through (para)military nationalist actions of 'ethnic cleansing'

Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and its Memorandum

Already in 1984 the member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the writer Dobrica Ćosić, while speaking of the legacy of the past, and challenges of the future requested from the Academy to take a clear standpoint on necessity to engage with the actual national and social problems.⁵³ The outcome of such need for expression in public coming from the highly respected institution in the eyes of the Serbian population, was the creation of one of the most important documents in the period of Yugoslav crisis – the «Memorandum on Actual Social Questions».

The Memorandum was conceived in the following sequence of events. On the regular meeting of the assembly of the SANU held on 23rd of May 1985 there were many concerned voices of the members who spoke about the overall economic crisis and the position of Serbia

⁵³ Olivera Milosavljević, Annual of SANU, XCII for 1984,1985 (p. 342).

in the federal state. The proposal of Ivan Maksimović was that the Academy should point out to most actual social, political, economic, scientific and cultural problems in the form of a Memorandum that should be distributed to all responsible for public affairs of the Republic of Serbia and SFR Yugoslavia. The assembly supported this proposal and on the next meeting appointed the committee for preparations of the Memorandum. Before the assembly approved the text of the Memorandum, it happened that the text somehow got to press⁵⁴ and after media exposure the first strong criticism came from the communist establishment in Serbia.

What has provoked the debate over the text and the role of the SANU was the second part of Memorandum with the title «Position of Serbia and Serbian people». While in the first part of the text, the main reason for the crisis in the country was identified with the inefficiency of the political and economical system caused by incapability of the political elite or corruption, the second part shifted the perspective on the problem as seen through the narrow lens of Serbian national optics. Its rhetoric was therefore neglecting the perception on other nations and republics and their problems in the same situation of crisis, and focusing only on the national, economic, political and cultural discrimination of solely Serbian people and Republic of Serbia.⁵⁵

This part of the text explicitly introduced the new nationalist rhetoric and was taken up as the «Serbian national program» by some of the most radical nationalists among the members of the Academy. The claim that the: *Integrity of Serbian people and its culture in the whole Yugoslavia has to be set as a vital question of its survival and*

⁵⁴ In was published in the daily papers Večernje Novosti on September 24th 1986

⁵⁵ Olivera Milosavljević, Annual of SANU, XCII for 1984,1985 (p. 344)

*progress*⁵⁶ was alarming and calling for the mobilization and homogenization of the Serbian nation. The presented arguments were the following: that the Serbian people is the only one underprivileged in the federal state, without any rights to constitute itself as a nation; that the Serbian minority in other republics doesn't have any political and cultural rights to express their specificity and ethnicity; that the Serbian industrial development was deliberately suppressed; and finally that the genocide is being conducted at Kosovo against Serbian people from the beginning of the eighties.

Despite the fact that throughout the Memorandum the members of the SANU were trying to give evidences for the need of democratization of the society as the only way out of the crisis, regarding the problem of Kosovo, seen as the key problems in this crisis, they were requesting «political battle» which should be carried out by «revolutionary fight».⁵⁷

The leading Serbian politician Ivan Stambolić immediately characterized the Memorandum as the «chauvinist initiative» with the aim to provoke conflict among Yugoslav nations. While Stambolić saw Memorandum as In Memoriam to Yugoslavia, his protégé Slobodan Milošević who was at that time already president of the Central Committee of Serbian League of Communists was surprisingly enough not expressing his opinion in public. One possible argument that came later was that he has already become nationalist in disguise, but his acts were not proving it. He was the chair of the meeting of the Presidency of the League of Serbian Communists where the decision was made to conduct the «ideological attack» against certain cultural

⁵⁶ Mihailović, Kosta and Vasilije Krestić Eds. *Memorandum SANU – Odgovori na kritike*, Beograd: SANU, 1995. (p. 137)

⁵⁷ Olivera Milosavljević, Annual of SANU, XCII for 1984,1985 (p. 344)

institutions and media houses, including the SANU.⁵⁸ Probably Milošević was unlike Stambolić cautious to directly confront in public with the Serbian nationalists from the critical intelligentsia, but on the other hand his credo was that the main and only focus are the problems of the League of Communists itself and the program as well as actions that should prevent all alternatives, nationalism being just the strongest one raising at that time. The task of the League for him was the creation of the constellation where the Socialist Republic of Serbia will have the equal status in the federation and the fight against all kind of nationalisms from the respective republic itself.⁵⁹

The decisive moment in the shift of Serbian politics was the Eight Congress of the League of Serbian Communists when Slobodan Milošević managed to overpower Ivan Stambolić and become the key figure of the Serbian political elite. The pressure on the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts all of the sudden became open support and even more so, the ideas of the writers of Memorandum were very soon implemented in actual political deeds of Milošević.⁶⁰ The Memorandum was to become a core of the semi-official Serbian political discourse in late eighties and as the leader with extreme popularity and authority Milošević concurred, and took advantage from the Serbian critical intelligentsia by adopting their “national program”. The new discourse comprised of three main requests:

1) Democratization of Yugoslavia

⁵⁸ Jović, Dejan. *Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla. Uspon, kriza i pad Četvrtje Jugoslavije*. Belgrade: Samizdat B92, 2003, (p. 364)

⁵⁹ Ibid (pp. 365,366)

⁶⁰ Slobodan Milošević in one interview with journalists by the end of 1989 even claimed that: «As far as SANU is concerned, one don't see any reason why it shouldn't have influence on politics in Serbia, which nation in the world, and which reasonable state would be ashamed of its Academy of Sciences?» In newspapers *Politika*, 22. December 1987, p.7, as quoted from Mihailović, Kosta and Vasilije Krešić Eds. *Memorandum SANU – Odgovori na kritike*, Beograd: SANU, 1995. (p.44)

- 2) The change of Constitution from 1974 to improve the position of Serbian republic
- 3) The decisive action against "genocide on Kosovo" and assimilation of Serbian population in other republics of the country. ⁶¹

From this moment onwards the Academy was offering unconditional support to the official Serbian politics identifying it with the will of Serbian people. The first moment in the newly establish relationship of trust and support was the scientific conference held at SANU with the title: «Actual Problems of Constitution and Constitutional Changes» from 17th to the 19th of March 1988. On the regular Annual Assembly of SANU that followed in May 1988 its president Dušan Kanazir in front of the Academy expressed the support to the efforts of the Serbian politicians to find the way out of the crisis.

The famous «Opinion of SANU» was formulated in the time of the greatest activity of Serbian rulers to change the Constitution, and in the middle of dramatic events in Kosovo, Vojvodina and Montenegro with mass gatherings of people. It was published in daily newspapers Politika on 19th of November 1988, the day of the biggest rally of «fraternity and unity» at Ušće. In the text of the «Opinion of SANU» as in its Memorandum, the Constitution of 1974 was marked as the main cause of the crisis of Yugoslav society that was one more time understood just as the crisis of Serbia. The changes that were suggested by SANU were seen as just the first step in the creation of the new Constitution. ⁶²

⁶¹ Jović, Dejan. *Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla. Uspon, kriza i pad Četvrte Jugoslavije*. Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2003, (p. 366)

⁶² Ibid (p. 352)

While Memorandum had hybrid marks that encompassed communist ideology (self-management, controlled economy), democratic tradition (civil rights) as well as national-romantic ideology (national program for inspiration of all generations), the other documents with more political content because they occurred as immediate reaction to the concrete political events, had unquestionably shown the determination of the institution. It is noticeable that none of the political documents or its announcements in the period from 1988 to 1992 or any public address of the members of Academy had put in question the official Serbian politics on any issue. On the contrary the relationship of the power and the institution of SANU on different political events was the same, and the formulation mostly identical like the ones in 1988: the thorough changes of the Constitution, the erasure of the statehood of provinces, decrease in birthrate of Albanians in Kosovo; or later ones in 1991: Serbia is not in war, and Serbian leaders are unfairly attacked.⁶³

Association of Serbian Writers

Important institution that produced the same ideological matrix as SANU and Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) was the Association of Serbian Writers (UKS). From the beginning of the eighties, the UKS made major contribution to the democratization of the society with its appeals and fight for human rights of the writers who suffered from political and ideological repression. Unfortunately, as this decade came to an end, the UKS became one of the major exponents of the nationalist doctrine. One of the reasons for the change of direction,

⁶³ Ibid (p. 369)

and such big shift, was that the UKS never had any clear concept and program for democratization of the society, but just criticized the communist ideology as such. The consequence was the replacement of one ideology with the other, namely with the nationalist one.⁶⁴

In March 1986 in the UKS were held three days discussions on the literature from Kosovo, but mostly the focus was on the actual political situation in the province. As the conclusion, the letter signed by 212 intellectuals and respectable cultural practitioners was sent to support the petition that Serbs from Kosovo declared asking for equal rights and protection against the violence of the Albanians.⁶⁵

Next year in May 1987, the evening of protests started to be held at the UKS, as an act of support to the endangered Serbs from Kosovo.⁶⁶ At that time the official Serbian politics regarding Kosovo crisis has shifted with the rise of Slobodan Milošević, and especially after his visit to Kosovo Polje. The UKS never publicly offered the support to Milošević because of his communist past, but their evening of protests and other actions were on the line with the actual Serbian politics and provided good institutional background for the new leader.

With these events, the UKS has shifted its political interest from the field of free speech onto the broader and more dramatic ground of state politics. Its appearances in public were thus taking a new direction. While in the first half of the eighties the profession was shaping up and determining the political attitude, now the political standpoint was determining the profession. The writers started to defend their own "people".⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Gojković, Drinka, «Trauma bez katarze», in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (pp. 401-405)

⁶⁵ Radić, Radmila, «Crkva i 'srpsko pitanje'», in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 305)

⁶⁶ Gojković, Drinka, «Trauma bez katarze», in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 408)

⁶⁷ Ibid (p. 408)

In the Literary Journal no 733 from June 1st 1988 the editorial published the report from the cycles of literary sessions that were held under the title «About Kosovo – for Kosovo» from 16th to 23rd of May as a sign of support of Serbian writers to the efforts to solve the biggest problem of Yugoslavia, an that was according to UKS the problem of Kosovo. One of the ideologists of the movement and the protest Dobrica Ćosić, also an influential member of the SANU, summarized the problem over three statements: «*Kosovo is the existential question for Serbian people*» and at the same time «*vital question for Yugoslavia*»⁶⁸ that can be solved only with the change of Constitution from 1974. The essence of the problem for Ćosić was in the tragic position of all Serbian people in Yugoslavia.

Kosovo was for Ćosić also of utmost importance for the existence of the federal state, for the same reasons as it was important to the Serbian nation. He contended that the crisis of this province revealed the breakdown of the ideology of Yugoslavism and the established social order and tried to demonstrate that Yugoslavia couldn't survive because it was the state of fatally wrong politics. The main reason for this diagnosis was found in the "fact" that the ethnic minority (the Albanians) in one of the republics have terrorized the biggest nation in the federal state (the Serbs) and conquered its territory by oppression, thus revealing the alleged democratic and socialist character of the society. The Constitution from 1974 for Ćosić made legally possible the total "albanization" of Serbian and Yugoslav national and state space and creation of second Albanian state on the Yugoslav territory. Finally, Ćosić concluded with the following argumentation:

⁶⁸ Ibid (p. 411)

*«The solution of Kosovo question is the new historical challenge of the reasons and meaning for the existence of Yugoslavia as a union of different nations and states, because it is not just Kosovo that breaks at Kosovo, it is also Yugoslavia».*⁶⁹

It is important to notice that in the interpretation of Ćosić there are no problems of the political system, but according to the old ideological division, there is just the clear distinction between the victim and the oppressor. Serbian nation is here defined as the universal victim of Yugoslavia.

In the second half of the eighties the UKS published three programmatic documents on the question of the nation and democracy. The first one came in 1988 and it was titled "Supplement to the Public Debate on the Constitution". The opening remarks were focusing on the lack of elementary democracy and the wave of repression in Yugoslavia and proposed democratic processes like abolition of monopole of power in possession of the ruling party, freedom of press and pluralism of the modes of property, and real freedom of citizens. The problem came when the writers from UKS started proposing how to achieve such democratic society. The Supplement actually suggested that the frontiers between federal units of the state, established in 1943, and 1944 were just the act of the oligarchy of the League of Yugoslav Communists, without any contribution of Anti-Fascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ), the later Assembly and the plebiscite of the people, especially from the territories with mixed ethnic population. According to them, the communists never paid attention to the ethnic frontiers, and therefore, what is required is to make possible political, cultural

⁶⁹ Ibid (pp. 411, 412)

and spiritual integration of big parts of certain nations that are outside of its republic.

National and cultural identity and spiritual belonging to the ethnic group has to be achieved through the constitutionally granted independent political and cultural associations and organizations. The establishment of full national, spiritual and cultural integrity of any Yugoslav nation, regardless of the republic and province where it is located, had to be done according to UKS by political parties based on national principle. This idea was exactly opposite to the democratic process of political unions. The Supplement was based on the assumption that favoring of the national principle in political national parties is the best way to overcome the shortcomings of the Constitution from 1974 and reach the democracy.⁷⁰

At the UKS assembly meeting, most of the members accepted such a standpoint. Only four writers raised their voices against with posing a crucial question: is the political pluralism based on national political party's nationalism or democracy? Neither the Supplement, nor the later two programmatic texts tried to answer to this question. The most moderate among them was the text «Serbia and Democracy, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow» and it proposed political, religious, and economic equality of all Yugoslav people, and wanted Serbia to be defender of the civil, national and political freedom and social justice.

On the other hand, the text "Establishment of the State" from June 1990 has brought more radical and expanded version of the statements from the "Supplement to the Public Debate on the Constitution". The writers claimed there that the fight for freedom, democracy and return of Serbian people on the historical scene gave

⁷⁰ Ibid (pp. 424,425)

true results, but the hesitation of the official Serbian politics was slowing them down.⁷¹

The role of the Orthodox Church

From the foundation of the first joint country of South Slavic nations, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians in 1918, two opposed principles of statehood continuously have existed: according to the first, Yugoslav state was the enlarged Kingdom of Serbia, while the second saw it as a union of many nations. Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC), who thought of itself as the religious and national patron of Serbian people, opted from the beginning for the first principle. It didn't treat the national question as a special political problem, but as a form and element of religion, and therefore it declared itself as both national and religious institution.⁷²

The post World War II period in the Yugoslavia was marked by the repression of the communist regime over the Church, formerly one of the pillars of the society, and its silent existence withdrawn from the public sphere. The revitalization of the Church and Orthodox religion occurred in the mid eighties when the communist regime started to collapse, and with the crisis in society and liberalization of social relations. It is important to recognize that the impulse to use the symbolic potential and meaning of Kosovo and its legend came mostly from the Serbian Orthodox Church.⁷³

⁷¹ Ibid (p. 426)

⁷² Radić, Radmila, «Crkva i 'srpsko pitanje'», in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 337)

⁷³ Pešić, Vesna, «Rat za nacionalne države», in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 60)

Using Kosovo as one of the unsolved problems within Serbia and Yugoslavia SPC had offered its mediation as a milestone of Serbian traditional national safety and epicenter of its national life that was proven on the centuries long experience of the only institution that had "never let down the Serbs throughout its history"⁷⁴

In 1987 the SPC was preparing itself for the celebration of 600 years from Kosovo Battle. For that purpose the archbishop Anatasije Jevtić published the text entitled «Kosovo oath». He was quoting the famous religious thinker bishop Nikolaj Velimirović who said that:

*«Lazars choice of the heavenly Empire was made in the name of the whole Serbian people, and it was the strongest expression of the meaning of our history and its normative idea... Kosovo (i.e. Lazars choice on Kosovo), has shown that our history was taking place on the highest level, on the tragic and sublime frontier between heaven and earth, God and man».*⁷⁵

In the epistle bishop of Šabac and Valjevo Jovan has made on the occasion of the return of the relics of Emperor Lazar the term "Heavenly Serbia" was used for the first time. Addressing the same issues of Kosovo myth and Lazar's dilemma, but now with more militant connotations, bishop Jovan express the following ideas and beliefs:

"from prince Lazar and Kosovo, the Serbs are mostly making Heavenly Serbia, which has until now grown into a biggest heavenly state. If we just count innocent victims of the last war, millions and

⁷⁴ Radić, Radmila, «Crkva i 'srpsko pitanje'», in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 306)

⁷⁵ Ibid (p. 310)

millions of Serbian men and women, children and babies, killed or tortured in the most terrible way, and thrown to ditches and caves by Ustaša criminals, then we could comprehend how big today the Serbian Empire on Heaven must be". ⁷⁶

The homogenization of Serbian people was soon to follow over same beliefs. It was supported by the political acts of the change of Constitution when the autonomous provinces were merged back into republic, the populist gatherings like the mass celebration of the 600 years from the Kosovo Battle, and the religious festivities in monastery Krka to commemorate the anniversary, were all events that SPC declared as the most important in recent history of the Serbian people. Those events were seen as a renewal of the authentic spiritual legacy, the comeback of the cultural and national consciousness, sobering up of the Serbian people.⁷⁷

4. Defining the Serbian regime

The rise of the leader- Milošević as new Tito?

Milošević's rising political star was mostly depending on his relation to Miloš Stambolić who was for years the dominant figure in Serbian politics. Stambolić managed to elect Milošević, as his trusted man, on the chair of the presidency of the League of Serbian Communists Central Committee in 1986 with the idea to secure his

⁷⁶ Ibid (p. 312)

⁷⁷ Ibid (p. 315)

political option in Serbia. At that point the rhetoric and discourse of Milošević was not much different than other Serbian communists. He was for the equality of Serbian republic and overtly criticized non-unity in Serbia and Yugoslavia. Unity (especially in the League of Communists) was a key issue for him, and the prerequisite for the solution of all problems that the country was facing. Important shift in his rhetoric came when he replaced the word *unity* with the word *accord* coming not from the communist but from more traditional, peoples vocabulary, especially symbolically important in Serbia. The crucial point in his discourse could be seen in the rhetoric of optimism and fight against anarchy, delivered in very sharp and clear thought speeches.

The most important test for all Serbian politicians was the Kosovo issue, and both Ivan Stambolić and Slobodan Milošević recognized that, and were ready to deal with it. Stambolić was the first Serbian politician who tried to meet the requests of Serbian people from Kosovo on site by visiting the protesters in Kosovo Polje in April 1986. He pointed out then that Serbian and Albanian communists should be united in the fight against nationalism. One year later, Milošević had to face the same problem at the same place, but the context was now different, the eyes of the whole country were fixed on Kosovo problem and media coverage of his visit was extremely big.

The speech that Milošević delivered in front of the 2000 furious Serbs at Kosovo Polje was mostly regarded as the beginning of Serbian nationalism on the top of the Serbian political structures, and the crucial lift for Milošević's political rise. When analyzed, the speech doesn't show many different ideas than Stambolić himself presented in 1986 to the same crowd, but his attitude was different, he showed optimism, firmness and clear mindedness. What was most important

was the combination of Titoist concept of brotherhood and unity with the rhetoric of traditionalist discourse indulging Serbian peoples feelings of pride and morality. He concluded that Kosovo is the problem of the whole Yugoslavia, and that Yugoslavia as a country cannot exist without Kosovo.

While visiting Kosovo, Milošević realized the influence that Serbian nationalist intelligentsia had over people, as they were the only ones to focus on Serbian national interest and support the Serbian people in the cases of radical terror and harassment that came to the peak with the case of two Albanians using the bottle to sexually humiliate Serbian military employee Đorđe Martinović. When this incident has happened in May 1985 the wave of protests of Serbian population on Kosovo reached culmination, and it provided the opportunity for the Serbian critical and nationalist intelligentsia to make direct link with Serbian people on Kosovo whom they wanted to protect.

Now Milošević had to play the same role of the protector of Serbian people on Kosovo and he had fully succeeded with this intention. Surprisingly enough, his rhetoric was fiercely accusing nationalisms, both Albanian and Serbian, but his strong Titoist legacy and the demand for fraternity, unity and justice for all nations in Yugoslavia appealed the masses that recognized him as the person that could fill in the emptied place of the father of the nation – the people saw him as «new Tito». When Milošević realized this, he started to act in accordance to the Tito's technology of ruling. He made direct, immediate contact with the masses, indulged them by repeating in public speeches their demands, used this direct link to eliminate political opponents in the communist elite, and used the newly established relation and unity of the League with the masses to

prevent and diminish the influence of the opposition to the regime. The speech at Kosovo Polje and the implementation of this strategy was a big turning point in Milošević's politics.⁷⁸

The big divisions in the Serbian political elite over the issues of Kosovo, relation towards rising nationalism, relation to Serbian intelligentsia, and the strategy how to deal with those issues, have marked the summer of 1987. Milošević's popularity and influence was growing, and that had impact on the position of Stambolić who was still the leading politician in the Republic of Serbia and wanted to shift the decisive power to the state institutions, and not the League of Communists. As a party leader, now Milošević regarded the League still as the crucial locus of political power, even more important as the avant-garde of society than the state itself. Stambolić was leading the fraction that insisted on the action only in the institutional frames with the aim to change the Constitution, but Milošević was determined to conduct the changes no matter where the initiative will be launched from – in the state institutions, or outside them, on the streets if needed. This revolutionary strategy of Milošević's circle prevailed in the confrontation of two fractions at the VIII Congress of League of Serbian Communists when the other Stambolić's fraction lost power and was marginalized in the way that major political figure like Stambolić himself withdrew from politics. Milošević has achieved his aim, the unity in the League in the most radical manner, by eliminating his mentor and other opponents and uniting the League with authoritarian rule and unlimited power thus claiming the position of «new Tito». By reintroducing the Titoist concept of fraternity and unity and rejecting Kardelj's concept and Constitution Milošević rehabilitated the discourse of Aleksandar Ranković, the most influential

⁷⁸ Jović, Dejan. *Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla. Uspon, kriza i pad Četvrte Jugoslavije*. Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2003, (pp. 376-379)

Serbian politician, and head of federal police, in the post World War II period, and the protagonist of etatist politics of Yugoslavism who lost power over Kardelj in the sixties. Milošević thus acquired sympathy from the nationalist «dissidents» like Dobrica Ćosić and even more so from some members of the army and secret police elite.⁷⁹

Milošević's dedication to Tito's ideas of unity were expressed in the following way: *In the part of the revolution we are leading these days new battles are facing us. To be able to win them we have to be united together again, like we use to be before. This is the meaning of Tito's deeds and the essence of our Yugoslav revolution, this is the condition to look forward to future that will after all be bright in not so long time.*⁸⁰

Accord or unity was thus the crucial issue for Milošević, not just in the phrase of Titoist fraternity and unity but also as accord in the League and Yugoslav country as well.⁸¹ After achieving unity in the League of Serbian Communists he continued with the same program on the federal level.

Another important difference in attitude of two fractions in the League of Serbian Communists was Milošević's ability to "seduce" representatives from very different social and political circles in Serbia like old revolutionaries and partisans, university professors and students, army elite, Serbs from Kosovo, younger communist politicians, etc. His willingness to concur with the corpus of ideas and political concepts introduced by the nationally oriented part of Serbian intelligentsia gave him another silent ally and a stronghold of support. While at the very beginning Milošević's rhetoric remained in the

⁷⁹ Ibid (p. 397)

⁸⁰ Ibid (pp. 398,399)

⁸¹ Ibid (p. 398)

tradition of Yugoslav communists and the ideal of “fraternity and unity” with the formal criticism of nationalism, soon enough after securing his position of unlimited power in the League he recognized the potential of national renaissance initiated by Serbian intelligentsia and especially the members of SANU and accepted their support in informal coalition. When the Serbian intellectual elite opened up the national issue, focusing mainly on Kosovo as a mythical traumatic point for Serbian people, this pretext provided intellectual frame for Milošević’s politics. This influence was leading him to more radical nationalist marks in rhetoric and practice, and one of the ways to approach the delicate issue of Kosovo was the attack on the Constitution of SFR Yugoslavia based on the ground of the fight for the right to equality of Serbian people, and the right for sovereignty of the republic of Serbia.⁸²

Another important concept introduced by Serbian intellectuals was the one of the “voice of people” as the crucial political argument that the politicians should follow and listen to. Paradigmatic statement for this wave of populism was the one of Dobrica Ćosić who claimed the following: *“in each of my works I see the people”*. This populist rhetoric designated “people” as the major political subject as opposed to the by that time sovereign role of the “workers class” or “working people”. The shift implied soon the national connotation, as the people that had something to say were Serbs. In practical implementation of this concept, Milošević had embraced this strategy of populist gatherings of people on meetings and demonstrations that marked the first period of his popularity. He actually made a populist campaign to take over the institutions run by the old communist 'bureaucracy' with

⁸² Stojanović, Dubravka. «Traumatični krug srpske opozicije» in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 2, , Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (pp. 75,76)

the method of 'street democracy', i.e. the 'anti-bureaucratic revolution'.⁸³

To consolidate his power Milošević continued on the same track and capitalized on the fear of Serbs in other republics like Croatia and especially in Kosovo where he created an image of the defender of all Serbs and their national interest. The "national program" that the League of Serbian Communists has offered came to the peak of its populist manifestations in 1988 when all the cities in Serbia "spontaneously" organized the "meetings of truth". The biggest one that year was held in New Belgrade at Ušće when the poet Milovan Vitezović described these meetings as "happening of people". It could be said that this "invention" marked the first phase of Milošević's rule when he implemented this form of political violence over the non-obedient opponents. It started in 1988 with the three months long traveling rallies that managed to throw down the government of Vojvodina. The "people" on the streets gave the ultimatum to the politicians, demanding the abolishment of the autonomy of Vojvodina as a province and expansion of state sovereignty of Serbia over it. The same procedure, and for the same reason was used in the province of Kosovo a month later, in November 1988. Finally the last one to fall was the government of Montenegro in January 1989. The government of the federal country of Yugoslavia couldn't prevent this political violation and (ab)use of people and public gatherings and rallies, and it became clear that Milošević was capable of using force to change the balance of power in the country.⁸⁴

⁸³ See the analysis in Vuković, Stevan. *Politics, Art and Problems with Reality*, Balkan Umbrella No.1, Belgrade: October 2001, (pp.14-19)

⁸⁴ Major, Nandor. «Raspad druge Jugoslavije» in Društvo za istinu o antifašističkoj narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi u Jugoslaviji 1941-1945, *Ratovi u Jugoslaviji 1991 - 1999*, Beograd: 2002, (p. 44)

From that moment onwards, Serbian political scene started to be shaped up and defined in the manner that was inevitably leading to war, and this marked the second phase of Milošević's rule, the one when he used the military violence and force on Kosovo from march 1989. Facing the adoption of the new Appendix to the Constitution of Serbia, where all elements of autonomy of the provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo were to be abolished, the outburst of dissatisfaction from the Albanians on Kosovo immediately have arisen. The mass demonstrations and strikes of Albanians were suppressed by the use of violence by police when more then 30 people were killed and hundreds of intellectuals were arrested.

The strategy called "happenings of people" continued with even more hostile and aggressive rhetoric that was introduced on the biggest meeting on 28th of June 1989 on Gazimestan, upon celebration of 600 years from the Battle of Kosovo. The final step in the populist strategy of «anti-bureaucratic» revolution was the attempt to export it to other republics in SFR Yugoslavia when Milošević announced the «meeting of truth» on the 1st of December 1989 in Ljubljana. The Slovenian government prohibited the gathering and prevented the busses with people to reach territory of the Republic of Slovenia. This provoked the strong reaction of Milošević who declared publicly the break of economic relations between Serbia and Slovenia and the boycott of Slovenian products in Serbia. This was the last and unsuccessful example of the populist strategy of the «happenings of people», «meetings of truth» or «anti-bureaucratic revolution» as it was called by its ideologists.

Nationalist Authoritarianism or Authoritarian Corporativism

It is a great challenge to try to theoretically elaborate and define the character of the Serbian regime in the era of Milošević's rule. It was no doubt authoritarian one, but the nuances and inconsistencies or contradictions of the mechanism Milošević and his oligarchy used to maintain on power were slipping from the identification with all existing and defined models in political theory. I would try here to avoid and ignore the most often colloquial definitions that is was a fascist and totalitarian regime, criminalized state, or family dictatorship. It would be much more fruitful to consider more elaborate definitions that tried to get grasp of the mechanisms of social control of one regime that managed to last for almost 15 years in such difficult conditions and circumstances.

I would therefore like to consider three possible definitions, namely nationalistic-authoritarianism, corporative authoritarianism or just ironic term "Slobism"⁸⁵, for different reasons and level of theoretical and descriptive grounding and accuracy.

Nationalistic authoritarianism as suggested by Erick Gordi refers to the specific set of conditions where authoritarian regime uses nationalistic rhetoric to make approval for its rule.⁸⁶ Though sharing common authoritarian heritage this kind of regime can't be coined totalitarian, as it doesn't control completely the everyday institutional life and doesn't rely on the consistent schematic ideological viewpoint. Instead, it made some kind of illusive scenario with pluralistic institutions, trying at the same time to limit their functioning and independence. This ideological inconsistency for the regime of such

⁸⁵ From the nickname of Slobodan Milošević – Sloba

⁸⁶ Gordi, D. Erik, *Kultura vlasti u Srbiji, Nacionalizam i razaranje alternativa*, Beograd: Samizdat B 92, 2001. (pp. 21,22)

provenance would make possible changeable short terms coalitions with different conformists, followers of the former communist regime, right wing nationalists and even some liberal fractions that thought they could compromise the regime from within.⁸⁷

Another interesting proposal comes from Stevan Vuković, namely that in the nineties the Serbian society faced a reality crisis.⁸⁸ The reason for the crisis was seen in the fact that the new political elite for many reasons didn't produce new reality because it followed the politics of continuity with the old federation. The social reality comprised a multitude of isolated collectivities that represented the only frame for identification and a common denominator for the citizens of Serbia. In the example of the formation of sovereign Republic of Kosovo Vuković sees the symptom of the process where different collectives created realities opposed to the official one that was imposed by the state's institutions and its system, and guided by principle of "corporate authoritarianism". The secret of Milošević's rule, according to this theory, was in creation of strong ties between many fragmented and disparate realities, and not one coherent ideological position conducted and controlled by the state's repressive apparatuses. Milošević's strategy was to offer the production of a chain of equivalence among different social groups where the doctrine of corporativistic authoritarianism could be seen as:

"a promise of a new order under a new master mark, giving them the freedom to chose the policy of forming the identity and

⁸⁷ Ibid (p. 22)

⁸⁸ See Vuković, Stevan, «Politics, Art and Problems with Reality», Balkan Umbrella No.1 October 2001. (pp. 14-19)

*ideological orientation, and forcing upon them only the obligation of giving legitimacy to him alone as the bearer of this mark.”*⁸⁹

The authoritarian regime was based mostly on the charisma of the leader, and the submissive mentality of his followers, whose politics lacked flexibility when trying to solve conflict situations, and who wanted to form the whole body of the state based on the principles of connecting and structuring of heterogeneous political groups with a phantasm of national reconciliation.⁹⁰

The last definition comes from Miša Đurković who used the ironic term “Slobism” to describe the regime that he called the “rule over the controlled chaos”⁹¹. Đurković compared the regime with the three models of dictatorship derived from Franz Neumman⁹²: simple, totalitarian and cesaristic but concluded that it didn’t match to any of these models. From the formal point of view, the regime that has liberal-democratic constitution and parliamentary democracy, and doesn’t use mass violence over its opponents couldn’t be seen as a dictatorship as it existed in the classical cases of totalitarian regimes in European countries in the first half of the twentieth century.

According to Đurković, Milošević made a contribution to the political theory by invention of one model of contemporary functional dictatorship that thanks to its system and sub-systems of distribution of power can be operative in the conditions of pseudo-formal democracy and partial civil and political freedom even without classical totalitarian control and dominant ideology as it was in communism. His

⁸⁹ Ibid (p.15)

⁹⁰ Ibid (p. 15)

⁹¹ See Đurković, Miša, *Diktatura, nacija, globalizacija*, Beograd: Institut za evropske studije, 2002.

⁹² See Neumman, Franz, *Demokratska i autoritarna država*, Zagreb: Naprijed, 1992 (p. 195)

thesis is that Milošević's system of dictatorship was based on rule by way of simulacra, i.e. the regime where the simulacrum of opposition and parliamentary democracy was the crucial instrument of the legitimization of the regime, and on the other side for the demobilization of the true, authentic, oppositional and reformatory forces and energy that existed in the society without the means of its articulation.⁹³ The center of power was thus deliberately creating simulacra on certain topos in order to prevent the development and growth of real phenomena.

The essence of this method of ruling is that the center of power was pseudo-limiting itself and its power in order to prevent the real and true alternative and limitations to its power that could control and monitor its sheer demonstration and exercise in reality. The center of power thus maintains its unlimited power and control without unpopular methods of classical dictatorship. For the implementation of this model the pre-transitional situation in Serbia was ideal as the communist regime had to accept the fact that the changes in society after 1989 were necessary, but instead of trying to prevent them by force and eventually lose power, Milošević and the communist oligarchy decided to control the changes and channel them, direct them in the way he would maintain on power. One of the main features was the monopoly over the (pseudo) nationalism that gave impression that the regime was the carrier of the changes towards new ethnically homogenous country that was welcomed by most of the population in Serbia.⁹⁴

As a conclusion it could be said that the regime represented the continuation with the old communist system as well as distancing from

⁹³ Đurković, Miša, *Diktatura, nacija, globalizacija*, Beograd: Institut za evropske studije, 2002. (pp. 18,19)

⁹⁴ Ibid (p. 28)

it. With its authoritarian policy of use of different collectivities as legitimizing principle, and leaning on the structures of power inherited from the old regime, it resembles very much its communist predecessor. Milošević's power was based on several crucial pillars like: domination of public property over private one, the monopolistic control of goods, services and information flow from most important media, repressive apparatuses of the state, mostly police, manipulation over national and constitutional issues of the state, and control over opposition (or the simulacrum of the opposition) and the actual one-party rule with its temporary and dispensable allies.

5. Economic collapse and gray economy

The "economy of destruction"

The end of the eighties in the SFR Yugoslavia was the period of severe political crisis in the country, but paradoxically the economic situation was very stable and solid due to the economic reforms of the prime minister Ante Marković. Like his predecessors Marković was fighting with the League of Communists oligarchy over the ideological doctrine of self-management society, trying to present the need for the shift towards free market economy. At least for a short period Marković managed to stabilize the local currency that became conversable on international monetary exchange institutions and the salaries of all state employees have reached the highest level in the whole decade. Marković also opted for a program of political reforms,

for democratization of the whole society and establishment of parliamentary democracy. He realized the need for the opening up of the country on all levels, especially to free market economy. Unfortunately like all other prime ministers, Marković lost political battle when the communist oligarchy in all republics started protecting its economic monopoly of the control of public companies. Marković's economic program was first undermined by the Serbian republic under Milošević's leadership that illegally printed a great amount of Yugoslav Dinars thus shattering the monetary system of the country. The loss in the federal budget reached the sum of 1.5 billions of US Dollars, and this policy was in short time followed by the similar reaction coming from Croatia and Slovenia.

In Serbia at that time Slobodan Milošević was achieving high level of national mobilization and homogenization, and in doing so he came to the idea of the economical mobilization to help the development of the republic. The major project in this respect was the «Loan for the Serbian Industrial Renaissance» that was announced in June 1989. It coincided with the big meeting at Gazimestan to celebrate 600 years from the famous Kosovo Battle. The Loan was supposed to show the cohesive strength of all Serbs throughout the world and all state run institutions and media had the task to support this project.⁹⁵ This step was just one in a row of the «robbery of people» how Mladan Dinkić called it.⁹⁶ The next was the case of hyperinflation initiated by the political oligarchy that abused the monetary and political power for their personal economic gain.

The drastic case of hyperinflation in FR Yugoslavia was bound to happen just in such a specific social circumstances. The most important precondition for its occurrences was the complete monopoly

⁹⁵ Dinkić, Mladjan, *Ekonomija destrukcije*, Beograd: Stubovi kulture, 1996. (p. 80)

⁹⁶ Ibid (p.12)

of political and economic power in the hands of small oligarchy led by the authoritarian leader whose acts were beyond control of any institutional and state instance. In such an environment, the ruthless abuse of monetary control was a formal cause of hyperinflation.

Inflation in Yugoslavia was a long lasting phenomenon. It came out of the socialist mode of social production based on the uneconomical concept of public property, supported by dozen of solutions within the workers self-management social system described as "social negotiation" or "merging of work and means of production". The deficit in the budget was covered either by loans from international financial institutions or by emission of money. The serious problems occurred by the end of seventies and beginning of eighties when the conditions of international credits and loans were becoming worse. This coincided with Tito's death. When in the eighties the amount of credits from the West was rapidly decreasing, the emission of the money was the only solution for maintaining the budget flow, but it provoked the inflation.⁹⁷

The most severe economical crisis came after the UN Security Council by its resolution 757 declared the economic sanctions against Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the 30th of May 1992. The formal reason for this measure of UN was the engagement of Serbian military and para-military forces in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and cases of ethnic cleansing. In April 1993 the complete blockade of all financial transactions with SRJ was established by the UN declaration 820. In this socio-political environment the hyperinflation started to grow rapidly and in January 1994 it reached its peak with the daily rise of prices on the level of 62% or 2% per hour!

⁹⁷ Ibid (p. 26)

The hyperinflation induced social stratification in a drastic manner. It meant impoverishment of major population on one side and creation of political-financial elite on the other. The new elite consisted of highest political leaders, small number of directors of state run companies and banks, and owners of certain «private» but essentially «para-state» companies. They all based their material and formal status on different kind of monopoly: over emission and distribution of money, import and trade of certain merchandise, media, privilege in financial transactions with the state etc. Their interest was therefore never oriented to the overall development of the state economy, but the maintenance of their personal monopoly and wealth.⁹⁸

The above-described economy of destruction through its activities mainly in the «gray» zone compromised all major categories of free market. The private property was considered as something suspicious in the period when all the so-called private institutions like banks and companies did money laundry for the state and other illegal business. The bottom line was that the Serbian regime never really cared for the development of private property as it was directly in collision with their mechanisms of maintaining on power through the monopolist positions.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Ibid (pp. 234,235)

⁹⁹ Ibid (pp. 256,257)

- **ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE**

1. Different theoretical models of social space

Social space

The relationship between spatialization and social reproduction is very complex in sense that value and meanings are not inherent to any spatial order and must be invoked. The idea that there exists one universal language of space, semiotics of space independent on practical activities and historically situated actors can hardly be accepted. However in context of specific activities organization of space can define relationships between people, activities, things and concepts.

B. Moore

Following Henri Lefebvre, who was one of the first theoreticians to analyze at length the notion of space in all of its ramifications and different concepts of space in history, we may argue that it is not only the physical space that is being produced but also the social space. His materialist (Marxist) approach led him to make further assumption that space considered in isolation is an empty abstraction and that every society and hence, every mode of production with its subvariants, produces its own space.¹⁰⁰ For Lefebvre, if we take the

¹⁰⁰ Lefebvre, Henri, *The Production of Space*, Blackwell, Cambridge MA & Oxford UK, 1991. (p. 12)

point of view of knowing (connaissance), social space works as a tool for the analysis of the society in question.¹⁰¹

If we adopt the materialist perspective of Henri Lefebvre, one can then argue that objective conceptions of space are necessarily created through material practices and processes that serve to reproduce social life. The objectivity of space is given in each case by the material practices of social reproduction, and to the degree that these latter vary geographically and historically, so we find that social space is differently constructed.¹⁰² With the idea to link historicity, sociality and spatiality, Lefebvre conceived his conceptual triad, the 'trialectics' which consists of: *perceived space* of materialized spatial practice; the *conceived space* which is defined as *representations of space*; and the *lived spaces of representation*. To put it in other terms, the materialized spatial practices refer to physical and material factors, transfers and interactions that occur in, and through space in the way they provide production and social reproduction. Representations of space include all the signs and significations, codes and meanings that allow such material factors and deeds to be spoken of and understood by discursive terminology of academic spatial disciplines. Finally, spaces of representation are understood as: codes, signs, 'spatial discourses', utopian plans, imaginary landscapes or even the material constructions like symbolic spaces, specially designed environments, or places of culture that conceive new meanings and possibilities for spatial disciplines.

One possible argument is that spatial relations and spatial processes could be actually understood as social relations taking a

¹⁰¹ Ibid (pp 30-34)

¹⁰² Harvey, David, *The Condition of Post-modernity*, Blackwell, Cambridge MA & Oxford UK, 1990. (p 204)

particular geographical form.¹⁰³ Society is accordingly necessarily constructed spatially, and that fact – the spatial organization of society – makes a difference to how it works. We therefore need to conceptualize space as constructed out of interrelations, as the simultaneous coexistence of social interrelations and interactions at all spatial scales, from the most local level to the most global.¹⁰⁴ The emergence of capitalist social relations in Europe brought a very specific set of social and political shifts that established social space as the premise of hegemonic social practices. This capitalist conception of space has contributed to what is widely assumed today in Western societies as ‚real space‘, the space of contemporary ‚commonsense‘.¹⁰⁵

Frederic Jameson analyzed the capitalist concepts of social space and discerned three basic phases in the development of the spatial logic of society under capitalism. In the first stage, he argued that market capitalism was dominated by the spatial logic of the grid. Capitalism organized, and was organized by, a geometrical view of the space. In the second stage, monopoly capitalism, figurative space stands in the place of absent causes. Space represents, and is represented by, distorted images of the real determinations of social relations. Currently, the spatial logic of multinational (postmodern) capitalism is simultaneously homogeneous and fragmented – a kind of ‚schizo-space‘.

In order to counteract the political paralysis of today, Jameson developed an alternative view of space and political action, provisionally naming it as the aesthetic of cognitive mapping. Jameson was not calling for the mapping of old notions of space, instead this is

¹⁰³ Massey, Doreen, „Politics and Space/Time“, in Keith, Michael and Steve Pile Eds. *Place and the Politics of Identity*, Routledge, London New York, 1996 (p. 145)

¹⁰⁴ Ibid (p. 155)

¹⁰⁵ Smith, Neil and Cindi Katz, *Grounding Metaphor Towards a spatialized politics* (pp. 75-76)

the name of a new form of radical political culture, whose fundamental object is the world space of multinational capital. It is the logic of capital itself that produces an uneven development of space. These spaces need to be ‚mapped‘, so that they can be used by oppositional cultures and new social movements against the interests of capital as sites of resistance. Following Lefebvre, Jameson argued that what is needed, in order to help recover the sites of resistance, is: a new kind of spatial imagination capable of confronting the past in a new way and reading its less tangible secrets off the template of its spatial structures – body, cosmos, city, as all those marked the more intangible organization of cultural and libidinal economies and linguistic forms.

While Jameson analyzed space as a process of distance, Edward Soja, drawing on Lefebvre and more on Foucault, didn't see the space as so passive, undialectical and rather treated distance as a dialectics between separation and the desire to be close. This leaves the question of the individual's occupation of subject positions in a different conceptual place. For Jameson, the individual is to be mapped by the spatial specificity of their subject positions, in order to uncover the hidden human geography of power, but Soja's schema suggested that even this dynamic understanding of the situation is too solid and that space is not an innocent backdrop to position, it is itself filled with politics and ideology, and to quote him at length:

We must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are

*inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology*¹⁰⁶

Soja's arguments were grounded on the fact that contemporary social theory introduced a double illusion that space is either regarded as opaque or as transparent. On one side, the illusion of opaqueness has led to a focus on concrete forms, where space was regarded to be fixed, dead and undialectical, but what has been neglected from this view were: *"the deeper social origins of politics, power and ideology"*¹⁰⁷ On the other side the illusion of transparency dematerializes space in the manner that it becomes an abstraction, a supposedly real representation of concrete forms. Spatiality is therefore reduced merely to a mental construct. Social space in consequence folds into mental space, distancing itself from materialized social geometrical space, but still makes links between the representation of space and the actual space.¹⁰⁸ After establishing such connections Soja was able to argue that the actual historical moment is marked by the convergence of three different kinds of spatialization: posthistoricism, post-Fordism and postmodernism. Here the analysis of Soja could be intertwined and theoretically bound to Jameson's radical cultural politics of cognitive mapping. Because when these characteristics of space are mapped it will for Soja create a context where: *"a new way of seeing through the gratuitous veils of both reactionary postmodernism and late modern historicism to encourage the creation of a politicized spatial consciousness and a radical spatial praxis"*.¹⁰⁹ If according to Soja's argument, *"the*

¹⁰⁶ Soja, Edward, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, London: Verso Books, 1989. (p. 6)

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. (p. 124)

¹⁰⁸ Ibid (p. 125)

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. (p. 75)

geography and history of capitalism intersect in a complex social processes which creates a constantly evolving historical sequence of spatialities”,¹¹⁰ then the spatialized concepts, such as mapping or spatioanalysis are vital for any investigation of different social layers and the questions related to the notions of (urban) place, (political) public sphere, or (cultural) identity.

The spatial turn

The great obsession of the nineteenth century was history: with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its great preponderance of dead men and the menacing glaciation of the world... The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.

Michel Foucault

One of the crucial symptoms of the late capitalism is reflected in the term that cultural theorist and human geographers call the *spatial turn*. At certain point at the end of the sixties, with the last efforts of the neo-avant-garde to project its ideas into the 'better' future, with questioning and even rejection of basic principles of Modernity, by

¹¹⁰ Ibid (p. 127)

post-structural theorists, the issue was raised that we are witnessing a shift in the perception of space. It may be said that different movements that brought Modernism to its apogee had to think of the new logic in a conception of space. Daniel Bell argued that as early as from the mid-century organization of space has become the primary aesthetical problem of the culture, like the problem of time (Bergson, Proust, Joyce) was the primary esthetical problem of the first decades of the century.¹¹¹ For Fredric Jameson this postmodern spatial turn could be attributed to the crisis in our way of experiencing space and time, in the crisis in which spatial categories started to dominate over categories of time, while at the same time passing through such mutations that we can't keep pace with them. Jameson goes even further and argues that we still don't possess the perceptual tools to match this new mode of hyperspace, partly because our perceptive habits had been formed in the older space of high modernism. He writes about the special kind of spatial experience that characterizes postmodernism and for him this new way of addressing is aspect of what he calls postmodern 'spatialization'.¹¹²

The spatial turn went along in theory with another narrative, namely the one of time-space compression, also elaborated by Jameson and other authors like David Harvey and Zygmunt Bauman. The almost paradoxical argument says that while space became more important at the same time it became less important due to the fact that with the increase of speed of travel and communication places become closer together in time. This process of acceleration was induced particularly by the new information technologies and

¹¹¹ Harvey, David, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Blackwell, Cambridge MA & Oxford

UK, 1990, p. 201

¹¹² See Jameson, Fredric, *Utopianism After the End of Utopia in Postmodernism*, Duke University Press 1991

communications networks, but also with the advent of international capital markets. In theory of Manuel Castells, it produced the 'space of flows' or as Paul Virilio interpreted it, the total dissolution of space, space as the 'lost dimension'. This speed-up as the global phenomena gave reasons for the thesis that world is in the middle of the globalization process. On one side this notion of speed-up world has become a means of making identity, and on the other the effect of globalization produced a bigger susceptibility for the acknowledgment of the all kind of differences. With the globalizing tendencies of frequent and fast mobility of the individuals as well as information, the issues like (cultural) identity became increasingly important.¹¹³

The theory of human geography or critical geography has argued that this development takes place in several steps. In the seventies due to the influence of Marxist theory the crucial slogan was that the space is a social construction. The space was thus no longer seen as the given already existing substance on which the society has to be built, but that the specific structure of space is the result of socio-political and economic production. In the eighties this argumentation was radicalized by its inversion, so not only the space was seen as a subject of social construction, but also that the social sphere is spatially constructed. The way certain society functions thus had to depend on its spatial structure. The big shift in theory could be thus seen in the distinction that in the seventies the space was still considered as the passive mass and the result of the process of social construction, while later in the eighties and nineties the space itself begin to have the function of the social actor.

¹¹³ Crang, Mike and Nigel Thrift, *Thinking Space*, Routledge 2001, (p. 18)

2. The concepts of the public sphere

Genealogy – from public space to public sphere

There are many questions to be raised, and many possible approaches concerning the very definition of the notion of the public space¹¹⁴ and its genealogy. One is the historical analysis of the different spaces like Greek agora, Roman forum, medieval fairs, French bourgeois parliament or World Wide Web. The other is the analysis of the theoretical concepts related to the emergence of the public space and its role in respective societies. The third we might see in the ideological differentiation of the opposed pairs like public – private related to the economic relations in society, but also to the gender, different minority groups and other issues that were raised in more recent history. Those arguments have revisited the social aspect of the (non)existence of the public space in societies of the informational age, and the need for constant renegotiation over the public space and its comprehension as multi-layered, fragmented and opened for all social and other civil groups.

In theoretical debates on the issue of the emergence of the public space one of the first arguments came from Jürgen Habermas. He appreciated the role of the ancestors from Antique period in the genealogy of the public space, but recognized the nucleus for its emergence in British coffee houses, French salons or German

¹¹⁴ It is important to make a distinction between the meaning of the German word *Oeffentlichkeit* or *oeffentlich* that in Serbian would be matched by the word *Javnost*, and the English or French words *publicity* or *publicite* that lost its originary political conotation, and have more social background. Therefore, the more adequate English word that I will use futher is *public space*, or in the later elaboration of more radical conceptual notion – the *public sphere*.

Tischgesellschaften of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. French theorist Claude Lefort, on the other hand, located the emergence of the public space in the very act of decapitation of the head of the French king Louis XVI and the democratic revolution that after emptying the space of power offered it to the "people" for constant renegotiation. For Hannah Arendt the acknowledgement of the private property was the decisive moment in the formation of the society – the society was founded when the private household and its economy became a matter of public sphere. Arendt claimed that the public sphere grew «organically» from private sphere, or the private was transformed into public. The destiny of the public sphere was therefore closely connected and interrelated to the destiny of the private sphere, and consequently the dying out of the public sphere in the neo-liberal societies of the informational age is in the last stage followed by the radical intrusion into privacy.¹¹⁵ Finally, in the language of radical cultural criticism ¹¹⁶, the rather neutral term "public space" is being altered with "public sphere", understood as an arena in which citizens engage in political activity.

There are at least three major competing critical concepts of the (political) public sphere that could be analyzed in details. On the one side there is the concept based on a strict division between an abstract, universalist public and a private arena of conflicting, partial interests. The exponents of this concept, like Jürgen Habermas, treat public sphere as a realm of social plentitude that is disappearing in a postmodern epoch of conflict, heterogeneity, and particularity.¹¹⁷ As the critical reflection on the Habermas' influential reading came the

¹¹⁵ Tadić, Ljubomir, *Ogled o javnosti*, Beograd: Fakultet političkih nauka, 1998. (pp. 14,15)

¹¹⁶ As in Hannah Arendt, Ernesto Laclau, Rosalynd Deutsche etc.

¹¹⁷ See Habermas, Jürgen, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, Darmstadt, 1962.

reaction from German filmmakers Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge who saw the public sphere as an arena of political consciousness and articulation of social experience leaving the space for the formation of alternative public spheres and counter-publics. The other critical voices came from the Anglo-Saxon reception of Habermas and the critics like Bruce Robbins claimed that unitary public sphere is just a "phantom" and it was never fully inclusive and that the very notion of an undivided social space is irremediably deceptive, constituted by disavowing plurality and conflict.¹¹⁸ The third critical concept could be seen in the theory of radical democracy starting from Claude Lefort, via Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, to Rosalyn Deutsche's analysis of the role of art in the public space. This line of argumentation contends that the "society is impossible", that it is always a matter of construction and renegotiations, and therefore the public sphere is not emerging in the consensus of the public debates, but on the contrary where this consensus breaks down and where the hegemonic fight, the conflict, division and instability starts. I will now try to briefly outline all the three mentioned concepts.

Habermas' liberal model of the public sphere

In his seminal book *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*¹¹⁹ from 1962, Jürgen Habermas regarded the public space as historically grounded in liberal democracies, but having its ancestors in Greek and Roman societies. The Antic period had its manifestations of the public sphere on agora or forum, leaving private life to "oikos" or family, on

¹¹⁸ See Robbins, Bruce Ed., *The Phantom Public Sphere*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993.

¹¹⁹ The first English translation came rather late, in 1989 with the title *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*

the other hand the “civil” public space was growing with the opening up of the economy and trade to the market – the fair of stock exchange. He defined the citizens public sphere as a sphere of private people gathered in public, and noted that the political public sphere was growing out of the literal public sphere as the first sites of these gatherings were the coffee houses and aristocratic salons.

Habermas has started his analysis of the notion of the public sphere from the theory of Kant and Hegel. He pointed out that Kant understood public sphere not just as the method of Enlightenment, but also as the principle of legal constitution in the Republic. If the public sphere meant inclusiveness for all, as Habermas would like to see it, then the conclusion is that the public sphere from which some groups of the society were excluded is not just incomplete, but it is not a public sphere at all. On the other hand Hegel broke the illusions of the civil opinion on the existence of common interest, thus showing the public opinion as the subjective judgment on the undifferentiated plenitude. While Hegel sought the universal criteria, and therefore freedom, in the political state as the only true integrative lieu for the civil society, Marx tried to disqualify the ideological function of public opinion as disguised bourgeois class interest. According to Marx, personal freedom doesn't lie in the private sphere leaning on the private property, but in the very public sphere that puts sign of equality between man and citizen, instead of man and bourgeois.¹²⁰

If the production by means of exchange is left out of the political authority control, then according to Habermas, the foundation for the civil public sphere lies on the separation of the state and society. Civil or bourgeois public sphere for him was founded in 18th century and can be exemplified in the form of the separation of the private sphere

¹²⁰ Tadić, Ljubomir, *Ogled o javnosti*, Beograd: Fakultet političkih nauka, 1998. (p. 45)

and the public authority and power. The private sphere thus consists of the civil society with its market exchange and social labor to whom political public sphere relates, then the family sphere and civil intelligentsia with corresponding literary public sphere where the clubs, press, cultural exchange market and the «city» belong to. ¹²¹

Habermas was proposing the concept of the "the liberal model of the public sphere", a feature diverse from the economic, the private, and the political. For him this environment is ideal for citizens to reflect upon their inclusiveness and solidarity, in the realm that is hypothetically free of oppression, evil deeds or private interests.

One of the main problems in the theory of Habermas' was the unifying concept of the holistic, standardized public sphere that could be also seen as a meta-space in society. Here we have to make an important distinction, as Oliver Marchart rightly did, between Habermas' understanding of plurality of public spheres – he spoke of literary, political, medial, cultural and even subcultural partial public spheres – and his concept that this plurality is being absorbed by an all-encompassing public sphere. For Habermas all the interrelated partial public spheres disappear and merge by the positive principle of communicative reason into one and only "democratic" or "autonomous" public sphere where the citizens engage into the debate over public matters. ¹²² Emphasis on this space of rational discussion as being the only public sphere lead his critics to ask a question whether exactly the opposite – the irreducible plurality of the public spheres is a prerequisite for the very existence of democracy in society. For Ernesto Laclau for example, democratic society is incompatible with the existence of just one public sphere. He clearly

¹²¹ Ibid (pp. 46,47)

¹²² Marchart, Oliver "Art, Space and the Public Sphere(s). Some basic observations on the difficult relation of public art, urbanism and political theory", http://www.eipcp.net/diskurs/d07/text/marchart_prepublic_en.html#f32

argued in his analysis that the condition for any democratic society is that the public spheres have to be plural, multiple.¹²³ It would be over simplified only to pluralize and fragment the holistic, unitary concept of public sphere as set by Habermas¹²⁴, nor to imply that democracy can be seen in the "patchwork" of public spheres. Moreover, democracy means that the conflict among the politically legitimate and illegitimate public spheres is not decided in advance and that actually the place of the public sphere is void and has to be constructed filled in and specialized through constant renegotiation and hegemonic struggle.¹²⁵

Negt and Kluge's contribution - Public Sphere and Experience

Habermas's groundbreaking concept was strongly criticized, and one of the pioneering critiques came from German filmmakers Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge in 1972 with the book, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit*.¹²⁶ They proposed the construction of a public sphere that would be oppositional to both pseudo and private public spheres grounded in relations of exclusion, homogenization, and private property. This public sphere according to their statement would be an arena of political consciousness and articulation of social

¹²³ Laclau, Ernesto, *Emancipation(s)*. London-New York: Verso 1996, (p. 120)

¹²⁴ See for example Nancy Fraser: "Rethinking the Public Sphere", in Calhoun, Craig Ed.: *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 1992; and Seyla Benhabib: "Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jürgen Habermas", op. cit.

¹²⁵ Marchart, Oliver, "Art, Space and the Public Sphere(s). Some basic observations on the difficult relation of public art, urbanism and political theory"
http://www.eipcp.net/diskurs/d07/text/marchart_public_en.html#f32

¹²⁶ The reception of Negt and Kluge was also late in Anglo-Saxon literature and the English translation of the book came in 1993 with the title *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*

experience that challenges these relations.¹²⁷ For Negt and Kluge, different social groups could potentially possess the public spheres of their own, and therefore we could now open debate on potential alternative public spheres and counter-publics.

Negt and Kluge made an important distinction between the bourgeois public sphere and the one of the proletariat, and tried to analyze the dialectics of these two conflictual public spheres. For them the proletariat public sphere is being formed in historical ruptures, aporias, crises and capitulations, revolutions and counter-revolutions that marked the concrete constellations of the social formations and actors.¹²⁸ The two authors gave extremely important role to the notion of experience, especially in the formation of the collective experience of proletariat in the forms of the proletarian public sphere.

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The analysis of the notion of proletariat for Negt and Kluge was grounded in the theory of Marx. For them the way of existence of this class comprises the production as well as the «experience in production of the experience». The notion of production is not just seen as the material production of goods and commodities, it is broader notion of social production as a compulsory social activity. But the problem lies in the bourgeois societies where the material production of commodities is putting in shadow all other aspects of this notion, like the one of production of the way of living. Negt and Kluge therefore try to face the notion of the bourgeois public sphere with the one of proletariat public sphere. The mechanism that influences the production and reproduction of the bourgeois public sphere they are

¹²⁷ Deutsche, Rosalyn, *Evictions - Art and Spatial Politics*, MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1988. (pp. 58-59)

¹²⁸ Tadić, Ljubomir, *Ogled o javnosti*, Beograd: Fakultet političkih nauka, 1998. (p. 52)

¹²⁹ Ibid (p. 53)

describing by way of investigation of the interest of the bourgeoisie in the public sphere. The following features mark those interests:

- 1) Bourgeois mode of production has to be publically installed as social order. That is constitutional public sphere.
- 2) Public sphere as the organized form of «dictatorship of the bourgeoisie».
- 3) Public sphere as the illusion of the all-encompassing social synthesis.
- 4) Public sphere as the mode of expression of the character of the use value defined by the bourgeoisie.¹³⁰

Finally, Negt and Kluge made an interesting distinction between the “industrially productive public spheres” as opposed to the classical ones like newspapers, parliaments, clubs, parties and associations. The former ones are distinguished by the superior highly organized lever of production and they don’t have a tradition related to the different stages in development of the civil public sphere because they belong to the new technological boom of the twentieth century (radio or TV). Negt and Kluge have concluded that this new media are influencing the production of the public sphere in both capitalist and socialist societies.¹³¹

Radical democracy theory

A political theorist Claude Lefort described the logic of society’s spatial dimension, and by doing it outlined the emergence of the public

¹³⁰ Ibid (pp. 54,55)

¹³¹ Ibid (p. 61)

space. Following Alexis de Tocqueville, Lefort historically based his theory of democracy in the advent of the 'democratic revolution'. He saw the crucial event for the emergence of modern democracy in the act of execution of the French king Louis XVI, the act that could be only seen as a symbolic condensation of a development that has begun much earlier. According to the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the legal act that Lefort saw as crucial, the origin of social unity or power after the fall of the monarchy resides in "the people". The declaration allocates power to the people, but interestingly enough deprives "the people" of a fixed source of meaning without any substantial identity. The democratic revolution in Lefort's view therefore consists of the loss of certainty about the meaning of society that legitimates debate about the question of social unity.¹³² In the same manner that the king was physically decapitated and 'disembodied', the place of power in the society was disembodied in the symbolic way. This resulted in the loss of the place of power in the society, both earthly and transcendental joined in the body of the king.¹³³ The emptied space of power became therefore the subject of political competition and struggle, so that the society had to be restructured repeatedly.

Another important outcome of this loss of the space of power and sacral legitimation of society is that civil society became a place of autonomous self-institution of the society. It henceforth induced birth of the public space in the civil society, that could be seen as a space of the political within the non-political, i.e. the 'private' or economic parts of the civil society that could possibly become subject of public conflictual debate.

¹³² Deutsche, Rosalyn, *Evictions - Art and Spatial Politics*, MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1988. (pp. 40-41)

¹³³ See the argument of Ernst H. Kantorowicz in *The King's Two Bodies: Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Ernesto Laclau developed his theory of (public) space from the perspective of radical democracy. The first premise in his theory is based on the argument that every system of meaning can reach the stability only when it becomes differentiated from its "constitutive outside". Because the constitutive outside has to be radically different, and not fall into the system of meaning in consideration, this system can never achieve its full stability while it cannot fully have control under part that is not incorporated into its structure. The constitutive outside of one system of meaning, be it discourse, identity or public space in Laclau's analysis, prevents its totalization and closure. This system is in that manner traversed by the forces of "dislocation" that create this constitutive ambivalence. Finally Laclau regards the system or structure as a spatial category while the dislocation that affect every system are temporal category.

To be able to symbolize, systematize or finally spatialize certain structure we must therefore eliminate the forces of dislocation or its temporal character. This process Laclau calls "hegemonization of time by space" and the method for its achievement he sees in repetition. Space for Laclau is thus the result of an articulatory practice where the meaning has to be defined. Finally, for Laclau, because space is constantly subverted by time there is no real possibility to close or conclude the contingent construction of a certain system of meaning unless if we regard its elements from the essentialist position as being already determined or articulated for goods. Since this is the basic point for Laclau's criticism of essentialism, the process of articulation has to be constantly repeated, or time has to be continuously hegemonized with the practices of spatialization, thus the articulation as a process of repetitive linking of different elements of the system has to be a process of continuous failures to establish the total stability

of the system, be it called “discourse”, “society”, “identity” or the “public space” that is of our concern here.¹³⁴

The implication of this theoretical position for Laclau is that society as a totality is impossible. On the other hand this is exactly what provides the existence of the public sphere because the politics of spatialization is possible due to the lack of basis in society and it always has to try to connect spaces and their constitutive outside into the space of society. But as Laclau has argued, this process is condemned to failure.

Rosalyn Deutsche takes up on this theory to contend that the public space emerges only when the conviction in an absolute basis of social unity is left behind. Deutsche here comes back to Claude Lefort and his “democratic revolution” where the place of power was emptied out and the new place has been separated from the state and left for the autonomous self-institution of the society. The public sphere that has thus emerged in the civil society became a space of the political conflictual debates within the non-political where the society’s founding principles have to be renegotiated over and over. Democracy is therefore seen as the institutionalization of conflict, the guaranteed legitimacy of public debate over most important issues in society and its legitimization. The public sphere has to be constructed and reconstructed, produced and reproduced by means of conflictual debates on its foundational principles and the rights of different groups of the population.

¹³⁴ For more elaborate analysis see Laclau, Ernesto, *Revolution of Our Time*, London: Verso, 1990. and interesting analysis of the unveiling the inconsistency of criticism Doreen Massey to Laclau concept of space as a stasis in Oliver Marchart text *Art, Space and the Public Sphere(s)*. Some basic observations on the difficult relation of public art, urbanism and political theory, http://www.eipcp.net/diskurs/d07/text/marchart_public_en.html#f32

For Deutsche via Laclau and Mouffe and via Lefort the public sphere emerges when the consensus in society breaks down, or in Laclau's terms is dislocated, and where all the temporary alliances have to be renegotiated and rearticulated. Here exactly lies the distinction between them and Habermas who would try to unify the public space with rationalization of the conflicts thus suppressing the fundamental social antagonism and denying the distinction between society and its constitutive outside; or between space and time where the temporal character of the dislocation forces can be rationally resolved. Unlike Habermas, Laclau, Mouffe and Deutsche see the public sphere as a space of dissent and not consensus.

Finally, this makes possible the argument that the public sphere can emerge in any situation where the debate is taking place, and that it is not just restricted to the places that society designates for the debates. Moreover, the public sphere doesn't have to be regarded as space at all but the principle of "*political dislocation of social sedimentations as a result of the onset of temporality*".¹³⁵ Lefort doesn't define the public sphere as a meta-space like Habermas, because time cannot hegemonize space, it is the other way round as Laclau would say, it is just the principle of the temporalising opening of space that can provide that the public sphere remains empty, and subject of construction by constant antagonistic debates, renegotiations and conflicts, thus leaving the possibility for democratic actions.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Marchart, Oliver, "Art, Space and the Public Sphere(s). Some basic observations on the difficult relation of public art, urbanism and political theory", http://www.eipcp.net/diskurs/d07/text/marchart_prepublic_en.html#f32

¹³⁶ Ibid.

What has left of the public sphere(s)?

If we now try to draw conclusion from different theoretical arguments on the emergence and development of the public sphere, one of the definitions could be that the public sphere is seen as a space in between state and society. The state with all its force is only public if it takes care for common welfare, and if its power is subsumed and controlled by democratic public sphere. The public sphere is thus the space where the state power and the private sphere of the society overlap and interact, intertwine, but also the space where the free flow of communication between people mediated by words, letters, sound and images takes place.¹³⁷

We could also regard the public sphere as a field in our social life where public opinion could be formed. The public sphere should be in principle opened to all citizens and it is constituted in any conversation where the private people are freely gathered in public to express their opinions. The means by which their opinion is transferred in public are the public media such as newspapers and magazines, radio and TV. There are two remarks to be made in such a broad, "neutral" and almost idealistic analysis of the public sphere. First concerns the very notion of the public, because the Marxist critics contend that the concept of the public was brought out by bourgeoisie with the aim to protect the rights of private property and legitimate state control of urban spaces.¹³⁸ We therefore have to acknowledge that the public can be as Craig Owens stated a "*discursive formation susceptible to appropriation by the most diverse – indeed, opposed – ideological*

¹³⁷ Tadić, Ljubomir, *Ogled o javnosti*, Beograd: Fakultet političkih nauka, 1998. (pp. 28,29)

¹³⁸ Deutsche, Rosalyn, *Evictions - Art and Spatial Politics*, MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1988, (p. xxi)

interests."¹³⁹ The other remark would be coming from the actual situation in many societies that oppression and censorship of public speech and opinion are often used as tools of control of the public opinion and suppression if not abolition of the public sphere. This might lead to conclusion that in non-democratic societies there is no public sphere even if the means of mass communication exist, and instead of the public sphere in such societies as replacement there is a political propaganda.¹⁴⁰

Jürgen Habermas' final conclusion regarding the perspective of the public sphere is that the one gained by the liberal bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century was lost in the epoch of mass media, consumerism, and the intrusion of the state into the intimate space of the family. He was one of the first authors, among many to follow, who announced the decline, degradation, crisis or extinction of the public sphere. This imaginary ideal of the classic public sphere is that it is all-inclusive. The actual fact is that its constitution can be achieved only through the exclusion of certain marginal groups in society. Hannah Arendt's perspective on the public sphere's deterioration was based on her analysis of the relation of the public sphere with the private sphere from which it grew. For Arendt the radical intrusion into privacy sphere in the last stage of the neo-liberal societies of the informational age has for a consequence the dying out of the public sphere. Many other cultural theorists continued in this direction and asked the question, like W.J.T. Mitchell did, if there is any such thing as a public sphere in the cultures of late capitalism? He was questioning whether we are witnessing the elimination of the public sphere by publicity, and: *the final destruction of the possibility of free*

¹³⁹ Owens, Craig, *Beyond Recognition*, University of California Press, Berkley 1992. (p. 316)

¹⁴⁰ Tadić, Ljubomir, *Ogled o javnosti*, Beograd: Fakultet političkih nauka, 1998. (p. 31)

public discussion, deliberation, and collective determination by a new culture of corporate, military, and state media management. Nevertheless, Mitchell opened up the possibility that the internationalization of global culture could provide prospect for new types of public solidarity to appear that could make possible and facilitate new forms of public resistance to homogenization and domination.¹⁴¹

3. The question of public sphere in the context of SFRJ

Self-management – workers public sphere?

The sharp distinction and difference between the public sphere, an arena where citizens express their opinion in public and actively take part in political debates, and Arcanum - space of secrecy, where the oligarchy or ruler on power has prerogative for the decision making processes that never falls into any category of public dispute or questioning, could be seen as one of the main distinctions between democratic and authoritarian societies. It would be therefore over simplified to qualify Yugoslav society as the one where the public sphere didn't exist, even though the regime was in many ways authoritarian. Nevertheless, the often misconception of the attribution of totalitarian features could be supported by the analyses on the totalitarian regimes of the theorist like Hannah Arendt, Claude Lefort or Raymond Aron who never really considered Tito's communist

¹⁴¹ Mitchell, W.J.T., *Art and the Public Sphere*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993. (p. 2)

Yugoslavia from this perspective. Only one footnote in Arendt's book *Le systeme totalitere* mentions the following:

"The regimes of Eastern Europe ruled for the benefit of Moscow and behaved as agents of the Comintern; they represented an extension of the totalitarian order which was run from Moscow and not national development. The only exception, it seems, was Tito in Yugoslavia who broke with Moscow because he realized that totalitarian methods according to the Russian model would cost him too large a percentage of the Yugoslav population". ¹⁴²

In later editions of her book Arendt had revised and clarified a bit explanation why Tito's Yugoslavia couldn't be regarded as a totalitarian regime and to quote her again at length:

"The Russian satellite states in Eastern Europe are, of course, only branches of the Bolshevik movement led in a unified manner from Moscow, while domestic dictators, who Moscow appointed and replaced, were only its agents. Things stand differently with Tito in Yugoslavia, the only movement which produced from within the strong liberation movement. And Tito did not break with Moscow only for the sake of his own independence, but, at the same time, he also renounced true totalitarian methods according to the Russian model and contended himself with a type of one-party military dictatorship. To all intents and purposes, he realized that fully developed totalitarian

¹⁴² As quoted from Ugo Vlaisavljević text "Tito's greatest gift: the vacant seat of power", in Leposavić, Radonja, Ed. *VlasTito iskustvo*, Samizdat B92, Beograd 2004. (p. 88)

*rule in such a small country as Yugoslavia was unachievable, because too large a percentage of the population would be 'erased'.*¹⁴³

The main reason for the historical brake with Stalin, and the development of the system that could be seen as a "mirror image" to the Soviet state socialism was the authentic and strong anti-fascist liberation movement. It provided with the concept of strongest cohesive force among such multiethnic country, namely fraternity and unity of all nations in the fight against German occupation. Tito cherished this concept throughout his life, even when the new more ideocratic model of Kardelj was implemented, but Tito's position in society was always exceptional. Even though some analysis could lead to the comparison with semi-totalitarian, definitively authoritarian regime, more important aspect was its counterbalance of an society lead by the idea of direct, immediate democracy for the working people, and an enlightened foreign policy of non-aligned movement.

If we regard societies through this prism of existence and non-existence of public sphere(s) and not through economic determinism of different modes of production, such as capitalism and socialism, or through the classical debate on totalitarian societies as in Hannah Arendt, it would be interesting to analyze the whole society of SFR Yugoslavia in Titoist and post-Titoist period. One of the reasons is that even in the bipolar world of "capitalist" and "communist" blocks in the period of Cold War, Yugoslavia has paved way for the third option with the establishment of the movement of non-aligned countries, and with the development of constitutive concept of workers self-management as opposed to the state socialism in USSR.

¹⁴³ Hannah Arendt, *Elemente und Urspruenge totaler Herrschaft. Antisemitismus, Imperialismus, totale Herrschaft*, Piper Muenchen, Zuerich, 1996, p 663, as quoted from *Ibid*, (p. 95)

Tito's Yugoslavia was the example where communist society had accepted some aspects of liberal democracy in the economy, but also had the (semi-transparent) public sphere through all rights given to the working class to express their opinion in their factories, companies and associations, and not just in the League of Yugoslav Communists which was designated to rule the society as its avant-garde. Yugoslavia was actually built on the concept of the «mirror image» of the Soviet type of socialism. In Yugoslavia the media were in much better condition and much more open than the most liberal countries of the Eastern block like Poland and Czechoslovakia, and the institutions of the civil society were much more free.

Self-management - development

The concept of workers self-management was promoted as early as in 1950, but its fully developed phase was implemented after the Constitution of 1974. For the Yugoslav communists the concept of self-management meant the same as concept of democratization for liberal democracies of the West. For the society where the workers were most important subjects, the true democracy could be reached only when the workers decide on the products of their labor through self-management.¹⁴⁴

Edvard Kardelj, as the main ideologist of the concept made an original contribution to the Marxist thought. He conceived an ideocratic society and tried to push the «social reality» towards the ideological concept. He thus followed Marx's recommendation that it is not enough to interpret the world in the new way, but to make possible that the

¹⁴⁴ Jović, Dejan. *Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla. Uspon, kriza i pad Četvrte Jugoslavije*. Belgrade: Samizdat B92, 2003, (p. 146)

world changes in the way that the reality will come closer to your interpretation.¹⁴⁵

For the workers self-management socialism, the society had much bigger importance than the state that was supposed to die. Kardelj had a vision of an association of free producers that would take over the state functions. The notions of class, and proletariat would in future have no relevance any longer, as the milestones of the new society would have been the free producers and their associations. All kind of social associations like working councils, civil society unions etc. flourished in new society and created a broad network in the self-management system of Yugoslavia.¹⁴⁶

The main nucleus of this society was seen in creation of basic units in factories and industry – “the basic organization of associated labor” (OOUR) – that provided the workers with the prerogative to decide for themselves on the production process.¹⁴⁷ This lower levels of society were the place where the real direct democracy took place, where all workers participated in the decision making process. While the working councils were independent in decisions on production, and also other social issues like distribution of income, vacations, rights to the state owned apartments for the workers in need, etc. on other issues they depended on one side on experts regarding the scientific issues, and on the other they were under the auspices of the League of Yugoslav Communists regarding all cadre questions. The communist elites had exclusive prerogative in cadre administration, and therefore while the real self-management of workers occurred on the lower level, on the upper level of elite in League of Communists there was not much democracy.

¹⁴⁵ Marx's analysis in th 11th thesis on Feuerbach

¹⁴⁶ Jović, Dejan. *Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla. Uspon, kriza i pad Četvrte Jugoslavije*. Belgrade: Samizdat B92, 2003, (pp. 54,55)

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. (p. 209)

The Constitution of 1974 introduced concept of self-management in all spheres of the society. The population was divided into «working class», «working people» and «citizens». Working class was the Marxist term used to mark the locus of power in socialist regime, in accordance with Marxist theory. Working people were all employees in the state owned companies and institutions. All other members of the society were seen just as citizens. To be able to actively take part in the self-management system, the «citizens» had to join different socio-political associations on different levels from the county, city to the federation, but they actually could act only on the level of their local territorial units, while the other «socio-political» organizations were reserved for the working people only. The state laws and regulations were controlling all these associations and organizations, and their activities had to be monitored and approved by the Socialist Union of Working People (SSRN), the biggest one from them all.¹⁴⁸

In the political system the self-management functioned in the following way. The new concept was based on the principle of «delegates» and «delegations». The system started at the lowest level in factories and all associations and social groups on local levels like OOUR where the delegates were selected to form the delegations. This principle continued up to the parliament, but the delegates in the parliament were responsible to the delegations that selected them, and had to follow strictly their instructions. The population had the possibility to choose delegates only at the lowest level, still having just one mostly unknown candidate. The whole system of delegates and delegations was regarded as the major shift from the bourgeois

¹⁴⁸ Vojin Dimitrijević, «Sukobi oko Ustava iz 1974» in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 2, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 15)

parliamentary democracy to the more immediate workers democracy.

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The system of self-management became universal in society and covered all the areas in public sector and all professions that used public (state) property for its activities. It was implemented in such spheres of society like state administration, schools, and cultural institutions like museums and theatres.

Self-management - problems of implementation

In ideocratic societies such as Yugoslav socialist society was, we have to analyze the level of discrepancy between the conceptual ideological premises how the society has to function, and the actual modus operandi that occurred in social reality. The implementation of workers self-management system had many obstacles and problems, but also inherent antagonisms. Instead of de-bureaucratization of the society the numerous working councils, associations, and other social units produced even bigger and more complex administration and bureaucratic apparatuses. The major criticism of Marxism towards liberal democracy, that it represents abstract citizens when leveling society to political democracy, now came back to the Yugoslav communists: their system eliminated the idea of the abstract citizen and expected from the workers to represent the interests of abstract "working people".

The first critical voices that attacked the bureaucratization of the self-management system came already in the sixties from the radical Marxist theorists whose platform was magazine *Praxis*. They found the

¹⁴⁹ Ibid (p. 14)

main problem and cause of unsuccessful development of a proper self-management socialist system in the prevalence of "statist bureaucratic" groups in Yugoslav society. They opted for more effective and less bureaucratized system of self-management.¹⁵⁰

Other problems in implementation of such an elaborate and complex political and social system could be seen in the rather undeveloped country where it was conceived, the country where the working class was not historically developed and the population in majority was rural. It was difficult to create a modern, ideologically conscious working class in such a society where most of the workers were still strongly related to the village and land.

On the federal level the structural problem was the strong contrast between the richer and the poorer republics. There was always big discrepancy in the pace of development and economic standard between north-western part of the country, Slovenia and Croatia being the most developed republics, and the south-eastern parts, Macedonia and Kosovo suffering from the very low developing process and economic growth, partly due to the overpopulation. The distributive justice among the republics was always a major issue for Tito and communist elite and the federal budget had a complex strategy in overcoming such problems. The fair redistribution of the federal budget and the percent that the republics above average economic growth had to contribute to the under-developed ones eventually never succeeded in fostering adequate pace of economic growth in all republics.

The key ideological problem that provided the ground for later disintegration of self-management system, Renata Salec found in the

¹⁵⁰ See Renata Salec's text "The Crisis of Identity and the Struggle for New Hegemony in the Former Yugoslavia" in Laclau, Ernesto Ed. *The Making of Political Identities*, Verso, London New York, 1994 (pp. 205-232)

thesis of Edvard Kardelj from 1970 about the necessity of the “plurality of self-management interests” that was of crucial importance for the society of self-managed workers. For Salecl this phrase among many different in the vocabulary of self-management actually had greater relevance than just an empty formulation and could have been used to undermine the unbreakable monolith of the League of Yugoslav Communists. The League had to be united and there were no possible dissonant voices from its elite in public address, otherwise the method of discreditation of “astray thinkers” was too familiar to all socialist regimes. Therefore the plurality of opinions, ideas and interests was never welcome in the public sphere. With the introduction of this concept from the very ideologist of the society, the unity of the League of Yugoslav Communists was challenged in the public sphere. Salecl analyses further that this, how she called it *surplus syntagm*: “became the point at which the system began to fracture, that is to say, the point where elements, which had until then formed an ideological structure, now achieved independence and began to function as ‘floating signifiers’ awaiting new articulation”.¹⁵¹ This tendency opened up the public sphere for the hegemonic struggles.

Public debates, or why Yugoslavia fell apart?

In Tito's Yugoslavia there were five major issues that were practically out of public debates, and couldn't be criticized:¹⁵²

1) Movement of non-aligned countries

¹⁵¹ Ibid (p. 208)

¹⁵² Jović, Dejan. *Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla. Uspon, kriza i pad Četvrte Jugoslavije*. Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2003, (p. 337)

- 2) Tito's personal role in the World War II, and the «official version» of the war
- 3) Any political activity and promotion of religious believes in public by the Church
- 4) The politics of nationalism
- 5) Military issues, especially the role of the JNA (Yugoslav National Army)

Whoever dared to publicly criticize one of those issues had to face the authoritarian side of the regime and its repressive institutional forces. The regime was very efficient in suppression and elimination of the voices that attacked its founding principles, and managed to arrest or marginalize any opponents in that respect.

In post-Titoist Yugoslavia all those issues started to be raised in public, whether in literature, or in public addresses of the intelligentsia. The first important initiative came from more than hundred intellectuals all over the country (Zagreb, Ljubljana, Sarajevo, Novi Sad and Belgrade) who wanted to establish a magazine "Javnost" (Öfentlichkeit or Public Sphere) in November 1980. The founders and editors to be: Ljubomir Tadić, philosopher of the Praxis circle, and writer Dobrica Ćosić, opted for democratic socialism based on the freedom of speech and communication, synthesis of knowledge, experience and imagination.¹⁵³

The suppression of all those vital issues of the Yugoslav society and its concept of non-belonging to political blocks in foreign politics, and socialism and workers self-management in inner politics, were opened at once to public debates and had to be revisited. This fact might even lead us to the argument that Yugoslav society couldn't pass the test of

¹⁵³ Ibid (p. 329)

opening of the public sphere(s) and that public discussion over the taboo topics fostered the disintegration of the country, especially when the ethno-nationalist movement arose in the strong wave.

Two examples of opening of the public sphere for the debates on major political issues such as Constitution and the political system can witness for the deference in Titoist and post-Titoist Yugoslavia and the level of authoritarianism and control in society over the above-mentioned taboo topics.

The Constitution in SFR Yugoslavia was constantly changing and revised towards the final implementation of the concept of self-management in all spheres of society. After the Constitution of 1963 the preparations for new revised and updated one already started in 1967 in the form of amendments. The final drafts of these amendments was made in 1971 and opened for public debate. The most important discussion on the amendments was held at the Belgrade University and its tone and critical voices lead to the arrest of professor Mihailo Đurić, and throwing out of several other professors and assistant professors from the Law Faculty. The Belgrade magazine *Student* where some of the criticism was even questioning the leader's Tito role and policy was banned and the issue of the Faculty magazine where the documents and summary of the discussion was published had been banned and destroyed. After these repressive acts the discussion took milder tones, if anyone still dared to take part in the critical debate, and the new Constitution was declared on February 21st 1974.¹⁵⁴

The first major public debate on the political system in the post-Titoist period was initiated from Najdan Pašić, Serbian representative

¹⁵⁴ Vojin Dimitrijević, «Sukobi oko Ustava iz 1974» in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 2, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 13)

in the Central Committee of the League of Yugoslav Communists.¹⁵⁵ His initiative started in 1980, the very year of Tito's death, and was followed in 1982 by an open letter to the presidency of CKSKJ with the request for the formation of the committee that will discuss four major issues he thought are the crucial reasons for the crisis in society and in the workers self-management system:

- 1) Strong control and influence of the political elites over the economic system
- 2) Changes in the electoral system that would enhance the responsibility of the politicians.
- 3) Uncontrolled growth of the bureaucratic apparatus in the country
- 4) Question of democratization and the abuse of juridical state power in all spheres of society

It was very important that the initiative came from the member of the communist political elite, actually at the moment when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was putting bigger pressure on Yugoslavia because of its debts and asking for the reform of the society. Some of the questions that Najdan Pašić has raised were rather old, but the context was new. When Milovan Đilas raised the issue of bureaucratization of the state apparatuses and formation of the «new class» of privileged bureaucrats he was recognized as a major enemy of the socialist society and became the first big dissident in Yugoslavia. The question of bureaucratic concepts was also raised by Jovan Đorđević, professor of constitutional law and Kardelj's advisor in preparations of all post World War II Constitutions, but when Najdan

¹⁵⁵ For the elaborate analysis of this debate see Jović, Dejan. *Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla. Uspon, kriza i pad Četvrte Jugoslavije*. Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2003, (pp. 308-322)

Pašić, another layer, and the representative of the communist elite took over the initiative, the League of Yugoslav Communists had to find the way to deal with this new situation. The CKSKJ decided to form the working group but within the Federal Council for the questions of social system, therefore outside of the League of Yugoslav Communists as the main locus of power. The chair of the working group was given to Janez Vrhovec, the president of the presidency of CKSK of Croatia. In 1983 the working group publically called for an open and democratic debate on the problems of the political system. The debate was to become the broadest public debate ever held in the socialist Yugoslavia, actually the very first time that the communist elite addressed the «public» to join in the constructive debate on the vital issues for the socialist society of Yugoslavia. The debate lasted for one and a half years, till 1985 when Vrhovec's group offered the document called "The critical analysis of the functioning of the political system".

The public debate opened up the possibility for new actors to step into the public sphere and to offer their perspective on the Yugoslav society and its crisis. The big contribution to the debate came from Jovan Mirić, professor of politicology from Zagreb who actually published a series of articles in newspapers Borba in 1984 and a book titled "*System and Crisis*" in 1985. His argument was that all problems lie in the Constitution of 1974 that ignored and left aside all founding principles of Yugoslav federalism as formulated on the Second meeting of AVNOJ in Jajce in 1943. Declaration from this meeting named five Yugoslav nations (national minorities were not mentioned) and Yugoslavia was defined as federative republican state. Kardelj's later thesis that Yugoslavia was neither federal nor confederal was therefore in collision with AVNOJ declaration. The autonomous provinces, now

constitutive federal units were also never mentioned in AVNOJ meeting. Mirić claimed that the differences of the new constitutive concept with the legacy of partisan anti-fascist fight were so big, almost irreconcilable. He also criticized the consensus principle for all political decisions as negation to the fundamental political principles of majority and minority. For him the new Yugoslavia as defined in Constitution of 1974 was not founded neither on democratic nor on class principle, but on national one. The citizens and workers were represented in federal institutions only as citizens of their republics or autonomous provinces and not directly.

Mirić was accusing the main ideologist Edvard Kardelj for a confusion of the form of state structure (unitary state, federation or confederation) with type of regime that is developed in the state (bourgeois democracy, administrative socialism or self-management socialism). He also criticized Croatian leader Vladimir Bakarić for the concept of national economies as he saw in it the main source for nationalism. For Mirić it was obvious that the elite didn't want Yugoslavia as a society and community *sui generis* in spite of the fact that the percent of people declared as Yugoslavs in 1981 was still growing.

Mirić's sharpest opponent in the debate was his colleague from the Faculty of Political Sciences in Zagreb, Zdravko Tomac. He argued that the problem was not in the Constitution but in its slow and selective implementation. For him exactly the unconstitutional practices, as well as the one out of the reach of the Constitution have generated the crisis. He acknowledged the problem of bureaucratization, but recommended exactly the opposite solution in literal and strict reading of the Constitution and not in its changes. It was interesting that the support to Mirić and his book came from all of

the republics and from the old partisans regardless of their nationality. More conservative communist core treated it as the attack on socialism, similar to the one of Milovan Đilas in 1953.

The big debate has ended without the result, but it strongly influenced later political events in the country. It was crucial for consolidation of two opposed blocks – defenders and attackers of the Constitutions that started to act like two political parties within the Communist League. The ideological positions were thus more tightly connected to the belonging to the republics of the communist elites. Secondly the debate has widely opened the space for other political players, out of the communist circles. The call for public debate by Janez Vrhovec was accepted first by marginal parts of the political elite, then pro regime intellectuals, and later this circle started to spread out to media and the outside criticism of the system. It was paradoxical that the openings of the public sphere for the political debate lead to the even stronger homogenization of the public support to its leaders. Learning from this the new leaders have opened the door to public sphere to anyone who would support their positions, and thus eliminating the strict division to communist and non-communist in society. This marked the turning point in the further political battles that counted more and more on the broad support in the public sphere and the influence of the media in the creation of the public opinion.

4. The rise of multiple public spheres in Serbia of the nineties

The end of the SKJ

The political and economic crisis in post-Titoist Yugoslavia of the eighties had divided the political elite of the country in all republics into the fraction that was attacking the Constitution, and the one that was defining it. The political gap between those fractions was in time leading to consolidation of the opposed concepts in all republics of the country and by the mid-eighties was manifested as inner-republics conflict, Serbia being leader of the criticizers, and Slovenia of the defenders of the Constitution. In Serbian republic this also meant the conflict between the republic and its autonomous provinces Vojvodina and Kosovo.

It the period of the mid eighties two new important actors entered the politics: different groups of intellectuals that were critical towards the communist elites, and the spontaneously gathered groups of people, first among Serbs on Kosovo and then elsewhere in Yugoslavia. The communist elite didn't prevent this to happen as it might have been expected, at least in the Tito's time, on ground of believe that they could be controlled, or just unwillingness or incapacity to deal with such groups any longer. This was a decisive moment in the emergence of the political pluralism and its institutionalization, and it also marked the end of the monopoly of the League of Yugoslav Communists ¹⁵⁶

In Serbia, the new leader of the communists Slobodan Milošević used, as I have already described in previous chapter, the «anti-

¹⁵⁶ Jović, Dejan. *Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla. Uspon, kriza i pad Četvrte Jugoslavije*. Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2003, (pp. 325, 326)

bureaucratic revolution» - populist strategy of mass rallies of people to change the establishment in the autonomous provinces. In 1988 he proclaimed that the public protests are the expression of democracy and that the communists have clear choice, whether to distance themselves from the people, that would be the end of the League, or to join and embrace the protests and gain back the lost confidence of the citizens. The League of Serbian Communists was now speaking about the separation of the League from the State, and representation of the people and not the bureaucracy. When this method was implemented in the neighboring republic of Montenegro, it marked the signal for the alert in other republics, and the elites from Slovenia started to accuse Milošević for hegemonism and centralism.¹⁵⁷

Milošević was trying to change the balance of powers in the SKJ and opted for the new Statute with the basic principle of democracy – one member one vote as the foundation of the decision making process in the League. He was counting that the Congress of the Communist of Yugoslavia will vote in majority for the new Statute, and therefore the new elite in Vojvodina put the demand forward at the Congress of SKJ. This principle had as a goal to diminish the role of the Communist Parties on the level of the republics and consolidate the League on the federal level according to the Serbian vision of Yugoslavia, but also to elect the new president of the presidency of CKSKJ who would by Constitution become the ninth member of the presidency. Serbia would thus in alliance with the autonomous provinces Vojvodina and Kosovo and the Republic of Montenegro have the majority of votes in the presidency and control over the decision making process. The opposition to this strategy came from the Slovenian communists who proposed further federalization of the

¹⁵⁷ Ibid (pp. 417-420)

League in the form of the Union of all Republic Leagues of Communists. SKJ should according to their proposal follow the logic of decentralization of the state and become just the loose union among the independent Communist Parties of the republics. The Slovenian communist elites even considered their further participation in the SKJ if the Serbian proposal prevails. The XIV Congress of SKJ held from 20th to 22nd of January 1990 was the meeting where the decisive battle for the control over the federal Leagues of Communists, but also for its survival ¹⁵⁸

During two days debates the Serbian strategy of keeping together SKJ as unified organization with the principle of democratic centralism, as well as the isolation of Slovenians and their proposals was successful. The Serbian proposal for the new Statute of the League and even for the new Federal Constitution that should define Yugoslavia as the country with full legal and state subjectivity was accepted with big majority of votes.¹⁵⁹ At that point the delegation of Slovenian communist in protest decided to leave the meeting and declare its League as independent organization. The Croatian delegation followed the Slovenians and that actually meant the end of the SKJ and the key moment for the disintegration of the country.

The beginning of parliamentary democracy

There were two decisive moments in the process of establishment of the parliamentary democracy in SFRJ. The first global event was that by the end of the 1989 all socialist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe collapsed; the second local one was, as already

¹⁵⁸ Ibid (pp. 458,459)

¹⁵⁹ Ibid (pp. 470,471)

described before, the irreconcilable political conflict of the communists from Serbia and Slovenia that led to the break down of the SKJ.¹⁶⁰

The end of the era of Communist regimes, reconstruction of the USSR into the Union of Independent States and the fall of the Berlin Wall were just the final manifestations of the process that started with the election of Mihail Gorbačov in 1985 and his later program of Perestroika and Glasnost. His political program revealed the weak point of all Real Socialist regimes, seen in the fact that the Stalinist fraction that was for long on power in Bolshevik party, and whose manner of ruling was role model for all other communist parties in Eastern block, didn't recognize the public sphere as the space for political debates and political life in general. Instead of public sphere the communist oligarchy ruled with the Arcane and bureaucratic secret politics where the major principal was the absolutist state-party cause always being in hands of authoritarian leader whose cult of personality was cherished. With Gorbačov and the concept of Glasnost – public sphere – this epoch has reached its end, and it certainly had a great importance for the development in SFRJ, the country that shared the communist ideology but never belonged to the Warsaw Agreement. All of the sudden, the communists in the republics of Yugoslavia realized that they are one of the rare communist parties left on power in all European countries and the changes, at least in appearances were necessary.

Still, in 1989 there were voices that the parliamentary democracy is not necessary, and there was strong opposition to its implementation in some republics, mostly in Serbia. The reasons such as: unity of all Serbian people, hostile coalition against Serbia in the federation, and even global conspiracy, were used to prevent the

¹⁶⁰ Gordy, D. Eric, *Kultura vlasti u Srbiji, Nacionalizam i razaranje alternativa*, Beograd: Samizdat B 92, 2001. (pp. 41,42)

political changes and pluralization of the system in Serbia, thus defending the system of one party, i.e. The League of Communists. An illustrative example for this argumentation came from the member of SANU and one of the ideologists in Milošević's circle, Mihajlo Marković who claimed that:

"The political situation in Serbia shows that the majority of serious people doesn't want to engage in different political parties, even if they are critical towards the League of Communists. Those parties would remain small and couldn't have any significant role in the political system... The most important is the fact that the political system projected by the existing reforms is not, and it cannot be plural" ¹⁶¹

Thanks to this and similar theories about one-party democracy as the higher type of true democratic society, system of party pluralism and free elections in Serbia was facing great deal of pressure. The SKS has publically accepted the establishment of party pluralism in November 1989 and the oppositional political parties begun to form in 1990, but the law didn't legalize the multiparty parliamentary elections till June 1990, almost year later then in Croatia. The Serbian political elite was eventually forced to make necessary laws, and legalize the establishment of political parties and declare the first parliamentary elections for December 1990.

Slobodan Milošević, who has used the strategy of "anti-bureaucratic" revolution to consolidate his power in SKS, was now facing the new challenge of the elections for the democratic

¹⁶¹ The statement of Mihajlo Marković in newspapers Politika on 16th of August.1989. As quoted from Latinka Perović, "Beg od Modernizacije" in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska strana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 153)

parliament. One of the first steps that he had made was the transformation of the SKS into the "new party" SPS (Socialist Party of Serbia) that has happened on the Congress of unification of SKS and SSRN in Belgrade on the 17th of July 1990. The SPS thus maintained and preserved the historical, ideological, structural and personal continuity with the SKS and was the only ex-communist party in the Eastern Europe that managed to stay on power after the "revolution" of 1989.¹⁶²

After securing the power Milošević was able to open the possibility for parliamentary democracy without providing adequate institutional background for political pluralism that is manifested in serious shortcomings of the law on political parties, electoral law, public media, and the fact that the SPS inherited all property of the SKJ and SSRNJ, avoided the introduction of law on financing of different political activities and prevented the equal treatment of parties in most influential state media. The opposition thus had to create a public sphere of its own, the non-parliamentary one where it lead its political battles.¹⁶³

The first elections were held in Serbia on the 9th of December 1990. Thanks to the electoral system SPS who got 45,8% votes, managed to obtain 77,6% mandates in the Parliament of Serbia, thus securing the 2/3 of votes and the absolute control over the Parliament. Slobodan Milošević as a presidential candidate got 65,35% of the voters and was elected as a president of the Republic of Serbia.¹⁶⁴ With the number of its members and the results on the elections SPS

¹⁶² Marija Obradović «Vladajuća stranka: ideologija i tehnologija dominacije» in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 2, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (pp. 37,38)

¹⁶³ Dubravka Stojanović, «Traumatični krug srpske opozicije» in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 2, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p.70)

¹⁶⁴ Marija Obradović «Vladajuća stranka: ideologija i tehnologija dominacije» in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 2, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 42)

had managed to get the absolute political power in the period of next three years, thus transforming the one-party system in Serbia into the system of one dominant party that provided continuity with the SKJ as its successor in the same manner as the new FR Yugoslavia claimed succession over the ex-SFRJ.¹⁶⁵

The role of the "dissidents"

The specific position of SFRJ among other countries where communism was a dominant ideology could be also seen in relation to the role of dissidents. The relation between the communist elites and its dissidents in Yugoslavia was quite different then in the countries where existed more rigid and oppressive system. In those countries certain groups of opponents to the regime through its continuous political engagement that often ended by long-term imprisonment managed to acquire big respect and charisma in the masses and thus create a nucleus of the new society and alternative place of power. After the break of the communism, these dissidents were right away recognized as leaders of opposition and got to power.

In SFRJ the regime used more sophisticated methods of isolation of its dissidents and even managed to corrupt and pacify them by assimilating them into society in different scientific institutes or faculties.¹⁶⁶ When the clashes between the opposed communist elites in the republics were intensified in the eighties, both sides found convenient option to have someone else, who could be always discredited as the enemy of socialism, to radicalize the political

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. (pp. 44,45)

¹⁶⁶ Đurković, Miša, *Diktatura, nacija, globalizacija*, Beograd: Institut za evropske studije, 2002. (p. 31)

statements and thus present the elites to be the moderate one in comparison to the semi-dissidents circles. The argument in the debates would be: if you don't want to discuss with us, you would have to deal with them – our dissidents. So the use of quasi dissidents was often a test for the validity of certain attitude and standpoint on important state affairs matters.¹⁶⁷

Two most important circles of dissidents were the one that was accused for nationalism, and the other, more moderate consisting of professors, philosophers who were radically left wing ideologists, gathered around the *Praxis* magazine. The first big dissident of the regime was, as already mentioned, Milovan Đilas, one of the leading Serbian politicians at the moment, and member of the communist oligarchy. He was criticizing the regime already in 1953 and pointing out that instead of de-bureaucratization, the new class is being created, the one of bureaucrats. His book "*The New Class*" was published in USA and was considered to be the major attack on the Tito's regime. The role of the nationalist oriented criticism of the regime, and their relations to the elites were discussed in the previous chapter. It was also shown how Milošević made alliance with the Serbian nationalists and overtook their program. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to point out how Dobrica Ćosić, one of the leading exponents of the ideology of the Serbian national Renaissance and later first president of the SRJ after being marginalized for many years came back into Serbian politics. Dobrica Ćosić was one of the first among the Serbian communist elites that tried to warn colleagues about the possible conflict between Serbs and Albanians on Kosovo. Already in 1968 he made a following prediction:

¹⁶⁷ Jović, Dejan. *Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla. Uspon, kriza i pad Četvrte Jugoslavije*. Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2003, (p. 328)

"If the traditionalist, national-etatist forces prevail in Yugoslavia with their particularistic orientation, if the democratic forces of socialism doesn't prevent this to happen and eliminate bureaucratic, petit bourgeois tendencies, there is a possibility that the old historical goal and national ideal of unification into one state will burst into flame in Serbian people". ¹⁶⁸

Ćosić was at that point criticizing the new tendencies in the socialist development from the position of «socialist Yugoslavism» and the ideological position of the constitutive concept of fraternity and unity. He was against the idea of the confederalization of Yugoslavia, but eventually he accepted some elements whose source was the discourse of Serbian nationalism, especially in respect to the sharp criticism of the acknowledgement of the new nations and national minorities in Yugoslavia – Bosnian Muslims, Macedonians, Montenegrins and above all Albanians as autonomous political actors. While his rhetoric of socialist internationalism could be grounded in the first period of socialist development in SFRJ from 1945, and the concept of fraternity and unity, regarding the national issue he came closer to the ideas of cultural federation whose aim would be to form one Yugoslav nation. ¹⁶⁹

When the question of Serbian national interest, and the Republic of Serbia and its position in SFRJ became the focal point from 1975 onwards, like the question of Croatia was dominating before that, the alternative concepts that emerged soon appropriated the criticism that Dobrica Ćosić address to the Serbian politicians in 1968. ¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Ibid (p. 185)

¹⁶⁹ Ibid (pp. 188,189)

¹⁷⁰ Ibid (p. 253)

The sequence of events that followed in the eighties, like the initiative for the formation of the magazine *Javnost* (Public Sphere), the Memorandum of SANU, the debates in UKS over Kosovo crisis, were described at length in the previous chapter, but it is important to emphasize again that they were all marked by the great role of Dobrica Ćosić. Finally after the VIII Congress of SKJ, Milošević's rise on power and the alliance with SANU and UKS, Ćosić was brought back into the public sphere after 20 years of marginalization by the communist elites, and recognized as one of the ideologists of the new Serbian "national program". Finally in March 1990 Dobrica Ćosić and Slobodan Milošević have met for the first time and agreed almost on all issues in discussion except on the fact that Yugoslavia is dead and not worth fighting for its survival, the scenario that Milošević couldn't accept.¹⁷¹

The other major threat for the regime was always coming from the left wing intellectuals whose activities around magazine Praxis and at the Belgrade University was always closely observed. For this reason after the death of Tito, the communist elites initiated the changes in the law regarding the high education where the criteria of "ideological-political and moral-political suitability" for teachers, was introduced instead of the former formulation of "adequate social and general-moral behavior". The consequence of this change was that in January 1981 eight professors of the Belgrade University related to the Praxis magazine were thrown out of the faculties on ground of "serious undermining of social interests". Three most renown members of this group were to become the most important oppositional leaders in Serbia, namely: Dragoljub Mićunović, Zoran Đinđić and Vojislav Koštunica.

¹⁷¹ Ibid (p. 476)

Destruction of alternatives

When he has managed to establish the power of SPS in the new National Assembly of Serbia, and to become the president of the Republic of Serbia, Slobodan Milošević has continued to use all possible means to prevent the rise of alternatives and to diminish the role of the oppositional parties and their leaders. The situation has changed now regarding the previous one-party authoritarian rule of the communists in SFRJ that was constitutionally granted and guaranteed, so that the new center of power that Milošević has established, had to have more precise and thorough control over different political actors and social groups. One of the strategies that he has successfully used for years was according to Miša Đurković the creation of the simulacrum of the opposition whose role was important in giving legitimacy to the regime's democratic provenience, and on the other hand the instrument in the demobilization of the true oppositional forces of democratic reforms that couldn't be articulated in this social constellation. The center of power thus deliberately marked certain topos with the deliberate formation of a simulacrum to prevent the real phenomena to be conceived instead.¹⁷²

This strategy of the SKS that later became SPS was successfully preventing radical changes in society and managed to maintain the previous monopolistic position of the communist system of power, i.e. the control over great deal of public institutions, property and services, and the control of information flow through the indirect control of media. The regime has managed to survive by systematic destruction of all components of regular system of parliamentary democracy and to prevent the creation of autonomous alternative centers of power,

¹⁷² See Đurković, Miša, *Diktatura, nacija, globalizacija*, Beograd: Institut za evropske studije, 2002. (pp. 18-26)

while at the same time keeping all the formal aspects of pluralistic political system, even claiming the credits for its establishment in Serbia.¹⁷³

The ideology of the SPS was based on two main points. First one was the public property as the main regulation in social relations. The second one was related to the national question and national interest of Serbia where SPS had provided the collectivistic, traditionalistic approach to this issue with the aim to get support from the more traditionally oriented part of the population. The SPS was claiming the legacy of the communist society of Yugoslavia where public property, social justice and equality for all nations was the primary goal, and managed to persuade the large group of population, mostly older ones, that they are the only factor of stability in the new society providing social peace and also capable of peaceful solution of all ethnic conflicts in Yugoslavia.¹⁷⁴

Collectivist nature of the egalitarian-communist and traditionalist-nationalist ideology made possible their symbiosis in the program and political activities of the SPS.¹⁷⁵ Both communist and nationalists have had tendency to transform the public sphere into the private one, refusing to share with other segments of the society all the rights and privileges that they claimed for themselves. By embracing the program of nationalist oriented intellectuals the SPS managed to appropriate the main ideological edge of the opposition and prevent them to legitimate themselves as the only defenders of the Serbian national interest in the period of the crisis and ethnic tensions in the SFRJ. By the alliance with certain institutions like

¹⁷³ Gordy, D. Eric, *Kultura vlasti u Srbiji, Nacionalizam i razaranje alternativa*, Beograd: Samizdat B 92, 2001. (p. 35)

¹⁷⁴ Marija Obradović «Vladajuća stranka: ideologija i tehnologija dominacije» in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska strana rata*, Vol 2, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 38)

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. (p. 39)

SANU, UKS and individuals like Dobrica Ćosić, SPS prevented the opposition to articulate the new principle of social integration – the radical national and ethnic cohesion.¹⁷⁶ The Serbian opposition thus lost its ideological identity and was not able to recover and propose alternative concept. Without the capacity to deliver alternative cultural and political model as a founding principle for new social structure, the oppositional parties by their internal organization and ideological identity remained the part of the same (authoritarian) model as manifested in the ruling party.¹⁷⁷

The crucial event for the maintenance of the former communists now disguised as socialists was the war in 1991. The war has offered the regime the possibility to disqualify all opponents on the ground of non-patriotism, treason for breaking the national unity in the period where it is of utmost need for the defense of all Serbs in the republics of former Yugoslavia.¹⁷⁸ It was also the most important source for legitimization of the regime and its homogenization and mobilization of the masses in the populist waves. The confrontation and conflicts were inherent to the SPS ideological position, the ruling party needed conflicts on the political and social scene to provide the role of the arbiters to themselves, and thus legitimize their monopoly of power. The political program of SPS was constructed to provoke social tensions and high intensity crisis like “anti-bureaucratic revolution”, “spontaneous rallies” with the aim of erosion of all social institutions. Those institutions thus lost the function of catalyst, and instrument for solving all social conflicts, and this role overtook the SPS and its leader

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. (pp. 46-48)

¹⁷⁷ Dubravka Stojanović, «Traumatični krug srpske opozicije» in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 2, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 72)

¹⁷⁸ Gordy, D. Eric, *Kultura vlasti u Srbiji, Nacionalizam i razaranje alternativa*, Beograd: Samizdat B 92, 2001. (p. 36)

Slobodan Milošević.¹⁷⁹ With all these strategies the SPS managed to narrow down and limit the space for formation of different social groups, syndicates and nongovernmental organizations, and diminish their appearance in the public sphere.

5. The role of media in generating the public sphere

Structural system in the federation

The public media in SFRJ were reflecting the whole socialist system and had the similar structure as the society consisting of six republics and two autonomous provinces.

The media were very rich, versatile and free compared to the ones in other socialist countries. They were structured on the federal level and the TV programs were broadcasted for the whole country, and this was the case for the distribution of the press as well. In the sixties and seventies the political power was transferred from central federal institutions to republics and autonomous provinces, and the media followed this decentralization. By the eighties, the media were almost fully under the control of the republics, and oriented to the public in the republics only. The breaking point in the development of the media was in 1989 when the federal regulation allowed foundation of the private companies, including the media houses. By that time the federal country had nine TV stations, one for each republic or

¹⁷⁹ Marija Obradović «Vladajuća stranka: ideologija i tehnologija dominacije» in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska strana rata*, Vol 2, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (pp. 52-54)

autonomous province, and one for Italian minority in Slovenia and Croatia; 202 radio stations, 27 daily papers, 17 major magazines and hundreds of local magazines and periodicals.¹⁸⁰

There were only three all-Yugoslav media established from 1945 onwards: the federal state press agency Tanjug, daily newspapers Borba and the TV station Jutel (founded in 1991 and lasted shortly). Only those media represented the unified informational space of the whole federal country.¹⁸¹

As far as press is concerned in post World War II Yugoslavia, the major daily papers¹⁸² were founded or controlled by the Socialist Union of Working People (SSRN). It was a «socio-political» mass organization consisting of unions and associations of youth, students, women, and veterans of war in every republic, and under patronage of the League of Communists. The SSRN in each republic appointed the director, the editor in chief and the editor of the paper. Local authorities founded the regional and local papers, but still the influence of the League of Communists was decisive. The weekly magazines belonged to the newspapers houses or associations in the frame of SSRN, mostly of students or youth.¹⁸³

The publishing boards controlled the media and big majority of members was coming outside of the respective media. There were many other instances of control like the Committee for ideological work, or Committee for political-propaganda work within the system of information – both formed at Central Committee of the League of

¹⁸⁰ Thompson, Mark, *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj, Bosni i Hercegovini*. Beograd: Medija centar Radio B92. 1995. (pp. 7,8)

¹⁸¹ Ibid (p. 21)

¹⁸² To name just a few most important: federal Borba, Vjesnik and Večernji list in Croatia; Politika, Politika ekspres and Večernje novosti in Serbia; or Oslobođenje in Bosnia

¹⁸³ Thompson, Mark, *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj, Bosni i Hercegovini*. Beograd: Medija centar Radio B92. 1995. (p. 13)

Communists; then Section for information and public opinion of SSRN, Committee for press, radio and television of the Federal SSRN, etc.¹⁸⁴

The TV houses started to rise in the sixties, soon to become the most widespread and most influential media of public information. Already in 1974 the 90 % of the population was watching TV. The same political model of decentralization was used in the sphere of media, so that each republic, and from mid seventies both autonomous provinces, could have their own TV stations. The principle of national equality and balance in the republics that Tito has established was functioning in the cadre policy in media and in the whole TV system in multi-ethnic republics like Bosnia and Serbia with its autonomous provinces. The federal body in charge of the control of the TV stations was Yugoslav Radio-TV (JRT) and it coordinated all programs and the exchange of programs between the republics. This scheme and model was functioning till the end of the eighties and all TV stations broadcasted the common programs coordinated by JRT.¹⁸⁵

In the course of political events by the end of the eighties, when the Kosovo crisis was affecting the whole country, the Serbian station TV Belgrade has managed to replace the reports coming from the Kosovo station TV Priština on the crisis and to insert its own programs into the federal system of exchange. The other TV stations have reacted by sending their own reporters to Kosovo in 1987. The system of federal rotation of program was thus undermined from within, and couldn't last longer then 1988 when it collapsed. Finally, when the leaders of the Serbian republic managed to abolish the autonomy of the provinces Kosovo and Vojvodina and throw out the political

¹⁸⁴ Ibid (p. 13)

¹⁸⁵ Ibid (pp. 15,16)

establishment in Montenegro, all four TV stations started to reproduce the ideology of Milošević and to follow his policy.¹⁸⁶

Legal regulations for media

The legal aspect of the treatment of human rights in the Constitution of the socialist Yugoslavia shows that for example freedom of the press, public speech, association and public gatherings were all joint in one small sentence of the paragraph 167 and related to the duty of all media to "inform the public truthfully and objectively". That fact was the constitutional ground for the legal persecution on the account of "false information", "disturbance of the public" and finally of "enemy propaganda".¹⁸⁷

The legal regulation used the same model, the law prohibited to local media publications that endanger, or even can possibly endanger the public order and safety.¹⁸⁸ The censorship was actually legalized in SFRJ with the paragraph 4 of the Legal act on the prevention of the abuse of freedom of the press. This paragraph demanded that all publishers present to the public prosecution two copies of all publications before distributing it in public. The prosecutor had the prerogative to put forward the complaint and temporarily ban any publication. The main aims of this regulation were the students, literary and religious publications that were banned depending on their potential influence on the population of readers.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Ibid (pp. 18,19)

¹⁸⁷ Vojin Dimitrijević, «Sukobi oko Ustava iz 1974» in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska strana rata*, Vol 2, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 30)

¹⁸⁸ Thompson, Mark, *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj, Bosni i Hercegovini*. Beograd: Medija centar Radio B92. 1995. (p. 10)

¹⁸⁹ Ibid (pp. 11,12)

In the actual political sphere the establishment of the pluralistic political system didn't have effect in practice on the complete monopoly of the ruling party over the executive and legal power, and its actual control of the parliament. Concerning the media, the alternative sources of information were mostly limited to Belgrade and other major cities. The most powerful media that covered the area of the whole country were under full control of the regime.¹⁹⁰

The Constitution of the republic of Serbia from 1992, and the Constitution of the new federal state SRJ from 1992 were guaranteeing freedom of opinion and public expression of opinion as well as the freedom of the press and other means of public distribution of information. This legal protection didn't prevent the ruling party to suppress all voices of the opposition and dissemination of their information in media that they had in control. According to the Criminal law of Serbia, the politicians on high positions were largely protected from criticism of their public functions, unlike most European laws where the public officers of government and its institution have to be submitted to stricter policy of control and monitoring of their professional activities than the private persons. After the pressure from the European council, the notorious paragraph 133 of the federal Criminal law incriminating «enemy propaganda» had to be changed in July 1991. Nevertheless, the one paragraph that has left gave broad authority to punish distribution of the «false information».¹⁹¹

Two crucial laws on media were declared in Serbia in 1991. The first was the one on the public informing, and the second on the radio-television. It was clearly explained in the legal act on the public informing that state funded organizations like services for radio

¹⁹⁰ Gordy, D. Eric, *Kultura vlasti u Srbiji, Nacionalizam i razaranje alternativa*, Beograd: Samizdat B 92, 2001. (p. 30)

¹⁹¹ Thompson, Mark, *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj, Bosni i Hercegovini*. Beograd: Medija centar Radio B92. 1995. (pp. 59,60)

diffusion must explicitly claim in their Statutes that their program is non-party driven. When the Serbian government started to take over control of the electronic frequencies from the federal authorities in March 1991, the legal act that followed declared that the governmental committee monitors the allocation of frequencies. The federal Supreme Court in October 1991 decided that this appropriation of frequencies is non-constitutional, but the Serbian authorities ignored this verdict and had complete control over the frequencies.¹⁹²

The hate speech in media

The argument of Snježana Milivojević that the nationalization of everyday life can be followed through its media coverage and language is very important for any analysis of the introduction of hate speech in media and its use to satanize the opponents and foster the rise of ethnonationalism and xenophobia.¹⁹³ The hate speech was a crucial concept for the media propaganda that went along with the ethnic clashes in the republics of Yugoslavia. Even though the media couldn't create the nationalistic society, without their support the Serbian leaders couldn't acquire the alleged public consent for their politics that they claimed to have in majority of the population.¹⁹⁴ Milivojević marked three phases in the nationalization of everyday life in Serbia in the media:

- The first phase from 1985 to 1987 was characterized by the attempt to preserve all legacies from the past, to suppress the

¹⁹² Ibid (pp. 61,62)

¹⁹³ Snježana Milivojević, «Nacionalizacija svakidašnjice» in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. Srpska strana rata, Vol 2, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (pp. 235,236)

¹⁹⁴ Thompson, Mark, *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj, Bosni i Hercegovini*. Beograd: Medija centar Radio B92. 1995. (p. 116)

liberalization of the society; and deny all anti-socialist and anti-communist tendencies with the emphasis on the continuity and succession as the founding principles of SFRJ.

- The second phase (1987-1989) was marked by the questioning of the past, and recuperation of nationalistic projections, recirculation of national myths and the glorification of national history. It comprised the unveiling of the anti-Serbian conspiracy behind the communist ideology of Tito and Karedelj as exponents of the alleged alliance of Vatican and Communistic International. In this period the Kosovo crises was recognized as the crucial federal problem and it fostered the rise of populist and nationalist identification as the only defense against the opposing republics.

- The third phase (1989-1991) has shown the rereading of the past, and redefinition of the national history, affirmation of the new Constitution in Serbia and the request for the solution of the Serbian national question in Yugoslavia, rejection of reforms, suppression and undermining of the opposition and political pluralism with all necessary means. The dominant political paradigm was the preservation of the federal country, proclamation of the national consensus and reaffirmation of the national program announced in the SANU Memorandum with the emphasis on the role of the "people" in the populist rallies and gatherings but of course with the acclamation that the authority of the leader was necessary to canalize its energy.¹⁹⁵

The language of media followed all the tendencies in the political sphere and even went ahead with its influence on the public opinion. As the first phase had past into the second one as described, the media slowly started to reject the archaic socialist vocabulary and replaced it with the new language of demagoguery and rhetorical

¹⁹⁵ Snježana Milivojević, «Nacionalizacija svakidašnjice» in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska strana rata*, Vol 2, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (pp. 235,236)

question, the fatalistic lamentations and mythical background. To name just some of the most frequent formulations like: «heavenly people» facing its evil faith, «eternal enemies», «forces of chaos and insanity». The role of the media was to point out at the complot that was prepared against Serbian people, driven by the conspiracy theory and paranoia whose other side was the fierce accusation without any proof, and heating up of the warlike spirit. The Serbian and Croatian side started using the qualifications Chetniks and Ustasi for each other, thus reviving the memories from the World War II at time when the actual groups that identified with those movements in both republics were of minor influence.¹⁹⁶ It was the language of war in the time when the war was almost incomprehensible scenario for majority of the population.

The first important shift in Serbia was the change from the term «working people» that most of the communist leaders used, to the notion of «Serbian people» thus making clear what was the essence of this new formulation for the Serbian regime. From 1987 the newspapers Politika had become the platform and public forum for anyone who wanted the social legitimation and support of the regime. It was not just the tools in hands of the political and ideological mechanisms of power; it became an institution with special mission, almost a «populist bible». Politika was regarded as stronger than law, the pioneer in society and «spiritual bastion of truth, justice and progress». It was actually the source where the development of Serbian ethnonationalism can be clearly followed.¹⁹⁷ The column that was offered to the «people» was called «Among Us» but in August 1988 it got the more appropriate title: «Echoes and Reactions» and

¹⁹⁶ Bugarski, Ranko, *Jezik od mira do rata*, Belgrade: Belgrade Circle, 1994. (p. 79)

¹⁹⁷ Latinka Perović, «Beg od Modernizacije» in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (pp. 150,151)

was widely opened to intellectuals and mostly all readers who wanted to spread out the hate speech and attack all the opponents and enemies of the regime.¹⁹⁸ The dignity of this column came mostly from the members of SANU who used it as a forum for critique of the Constitution from 1974, ideas for the reform of the confederation and elaboration on the need of Serbia to abolish the autonomy of its provinces in order to have equal rights as other republics.¹⁹⁹ Already in the 1987 in *Politika* prevailed the texts that stimulated the fear, paranoia and hatred towards all «domestic and foreign enemies» from Kosovo Albanians, Croats, Bosnian Muslims, and Slovenians to Vatican and CIA.²⁰⁰

The column where “people were editing the newspapers” became very popular, and Milošević and the editor in chief Živorad Minović proudly boasted with their populist strategy. Minović in January 1988 literally claimed that *Politika* in his hands doesn’t have the right to think different than the people, and one year later in February 1989 he concluded victoriously that:

*“In all these events, Politika and its editions have changed, the public opinion has changed as well, and I think that it happened mostly because of the fact that the public opinion was influencing our editions, but on the other hand our editions were influencing the public opinion... It was a great crossroad of Yugoslav journalism”.*²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Aleksandar Nenadović «'Politika' u nacionalističkoj oluji» in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 2, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 151)

¹⁹⁹ Latinka Perović, “Beg od Modernizacije” in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 151)

²⁰⁰ Thompson, Mark, *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj, Bosni i Hercegovini*. Beograd: Medija centar Radio B92. 1995. (p. 68)

²⁰¹ Aleksandar Nenadović «'Politika' u nacionalističkoj oluji» in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 2, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 165)

9th of March 1991

The first major conflict between the oppositional parties and SPS in the newly established multiparty competition in Serbia occurred when the ruling party excluded for several months the opposition from all informative programs and news on state run channels, and used the national TV to mobilize the public by presenting the intense ethnic tensions in the SFRJ through the prism of Serbian nationalism. It took some time for the opposition to find way to react, but since the only space left for them for public speech and appearance was the city itself, the public rallies and gatherings of people, the chosen option were the mass demonstrations. The biggest protest with almost 100.000 people were initiated by Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO) and held on the 9th of March 1991. The demonstrations were at first focused on the role of TV Belgrade and its control by the state, but they grew into the overall protest against Milošević's authoritarian rule and the economic chaos in Serbia. The violent clashes between the demonstrators and the police, with two casualties, one student and one policemen were killed, provoked the ruling party to send the army with tanks to the streets. This was the end of hope that the Serbian regime will be changed in the peaceful manner, as the conflicts, clashes and very soon the war were proven to be the best option for the maintenance on power of Milošević and its regime in this period. The preparations for the war were mostly leaning on the power of public, national media and its propaganda and hate speech.²⁰²

²⁰² Gordy, D. Eric, *Kultura vlasti u Srbiji, Nacionalizam i razaranje alternativa*, Beograd: Samizdat B 92, 2001, (pp. 50-56)

The only TV station that actually broadcasted the events on the 9th of March was the *Studio B*.²⁰³ The national media were at first trying to ignore the demonstrations, as if they were unprepared, or had to wait for the instructions. The Radio Belgrade just gave highlights on the event in their regular news program, and the TV Belgrade didn't want to change the program schedule and had broadcasted Walt Disney's Snow-white while the streets fights between demonstrators and police were reaching a peak. The evening news showed the strategy of the TV Belgrade, the demonstrations were mentioned just briefly with the information that 76 people, mostly policeman were injured. The focal point for the news was the story about the family of the only policeman that was killed in demonstrations, without any reference to the actual events and what provoked them.²⁰⁴

The day after, 10th of March, the media started the campaign against the demonstrations and the oppositional leaders. The ruling party used every possible means that the media provided to abuse «patriotism» for their own benefit.²⁰⁵ The most influential daily newspapers Politika quoted Milošević on the first page: «Serbia has to fight the forces of chaos and insanity». Politika was later reporting on the «vandalism and violence» and «attempt to realize the scenario of the destruction of the legitimate Serbian government, legally elected on multiparty elections».²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Studio B was founded as a radio station in 1970 by the newspapers Borba. In 1972 it became the first independent company of a kind in SFRJ. TV Studio B was established in March 1990.

²⁰⁴ Dragičević-Šešić, Milena, "Media War and Hatred: the Role of Media in Preparation of Conflicts", in: *Kultura*. No 93-94, 1994 (p. 206)

²⁰⁵ Rade Veljanovski, «Zaokret elektronskih medija» in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 2, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 191)

²⁰⁶ As quoted from: Thompson, Mark, *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj, Bosni i Hercegovini*. Beograd: Medija centar Radio B92. 1995. (p. 71)

The media that tried to be neutral, and give impartial view on the demonstrations, without the hysteria and manipulation initiated by the ruling party, suffered soon the consequences. The most drastic abuse was the one of prohibition of broadcasting for Studio B TV station, and Radio B92²⁰⁷ in the period of 36 hours to prevent their comments on the demonstrations. This decision came from the public prosecutors office that didn't care much for the complaints and appeals these houses immediately sent. Different strategy was used for the federal press agency Tanjug whose editor in chief Dušan Reljić was soon degraded which marked the beginning of the decline of the most professional information agency. The editor of the newspapers Politika ekspres who was leading all the attacks on Tanjug replaced him on the editorial post.²⁰⁸ The other example was federal newspapers Borba that used Tanjug reports for its articles and review on the events and whose example, and I will later analyze at length the history and development of this newspapers. On this case all the aspects of the state control of the media in SFRJ and later in Serbia can be reflected, and the legal and conceptual transformation of the newspapers, the policy of informing and the suppression of information can be followed.

²⁰⁷ Radio B 92 was founded in 1989 by contributors of Student's radio programs, and it started to work without the license for broadcasting. It was constantly harassed by Serbian authorities because of its pro-oppositional policy and always in danger of losing the frequency for broadcasting. After resolving this situation in 1993 the radio was safe to work but with limited range that covered Belgrade only. It was specifically important in the cultural sphere and it would be analyzed more in the next chapter.

²⁰⁸ Thompson, Mark, *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj, Bosni i Hercegovini*. Beograd: Medija centar Radio B92. 1995. (p. 23)

Production of war

The overtaking or destruction of one major media house followed each important phase in Milošević's rule. His rise was marked by the most influential, and the oldest newspapers Politika, weekly magazine NIN and public radio and TV network RTS (Serbian Radio and Television).²⁰⁹ Milošević has used the mechanism of hyper production of information together with the classical oppression of information depending on the situation and need, thus avoiding the explicit and full censorship.²¹⁰ One of the oppositional leaders, Ivan Đurić explained Milošević's strategy in the very illustrative way:

*"It is certain that Milošević never read Marshall McLuhan but he understood better than anyone else the function of mass media, especially TV: he knows well that there is nothing but the national TV, and that on national TV there is nothing but the evening news at 7.30 PM. This is where the consensus of the public opinion is being produced".*²¹¹

The beginning of the nineties for the republics of Serbia and Croatia meant the preparations for the war, and the media had the crucial role in it. After preparing and articulating the public opinion; launching false information on the enemies; and broadcasting reports with descriptions full of hate speech, the media were ready for next

²⁰⁹ Gordy, D. Eric, *Kultura vlasti u Srbiji, Nacionalizam i razaranje alternativa*, Beograd: Samizdat B 92, 2001. (p. 74)

²¹⁰ Đurković, Miša, *Diktatura, nacija, globalizacija*, Beograd: Institut za evropske studije, 2002. (p. 38)

²¹¹ Thompson, Mark, *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj, Bosni i Hercegovini*. Beograd: Medija centar Radio B92. 1995. (p 82)

phase.²¹² It appeared as if they appropriated the Klauseivtz's statement that the war it extension of TV news by other means. When the war in Croatia has started, the control of the public opinion became as important as the control on the battlefield. Each side did their best in mobilizing, homogenizing and manipulating the public, and thus creating the public opinion. The media were therefore not commenting on war, they actively produced it, being its very front line. The fundamental goal of the wartime propaganda was to persuade the people that the war was inevitable and the only possible path in reaching the national ideal of independence for Croatia, or to protect the Serbs in Croatia and unite with them in one country for Serbia.²¹³

In the period of wars that followed throughout the nineties the monopoly over media was necessary to foster the support to the Serbian regime (as well as Croatian), and it propaganda was crucial in shaping up the public opinion and spreading the panic from the nationalist regimes in other republics that are endangering the Serbian population living there.²¹⁴ The initial step at the beginning of war in Croatia, that both governments of Serbia and Croatia did, was to undermine all joint Yugoslav media and the first victim was the federal TV station Jutel.

When the ethnic clashes in Croatia begun, the Serbian media started profiling its language. The first slogan that they used to describe the position of Serbs in the hostile republic of Croatia was the «barehanded defenders of their centuries old households». Very soon, when it was obvious that they were not exactly barehanded but heavily armed, and that they are not always defending their own

²¹² Dragičević-Šešić, Milena, "Media War and Hatred: the Role of Media in Preparation of Conflicts", in: *Kultura*. No 93-94, 1994 (p. 192)

²¹³ Ibid (pp. 199,200)

²¹⁴ Gordy, D. Eric, *Kultura vlasti u Srbiji, Nacionalizam i razaranje alternativa*, Beograd: Samizdat B 92, 2001. (p. 82)

villages and houses, the rhetoric has changed but the crucial notion of *defense* has remained intact. Later on, the new notion of *liberation* was added as the light motive in all reports. The absurdity of this phraseology can be illustrated by several typical headlines from the Serbian press: «*The Yugoslav National Army (JNA) is liberating Cavtat and Dubrovnik*» or «*The defenders of Mirkovci are liberating Vukovar*».²¹⁵ TV Belgrade has used the same code in all the reports from the front lines. The emphasis was always on the defensive nature of Serbian military activities. The Serbs in Croatia were described as “freedom fighters”, which “protected” their “place of birth” from the “Ustashi” (Croats) who wanted to incorporate them into their anti-Serb, already in the World War II confirmed, Fascist country. When the war in Bosnia in 1992 started, the same words were used to describe the fight of the righteous Serbs, now against the “Mojahedins” who wanted to force Serbs to live in the Islamic country. The nations from neighboring republics, not long ago considered as “brothers” and comrades, were now qualified on TV Belgrade as “butchers”, “villains”, “Ustashi”, “Islamic Ustashi”, “Mojahedins”, “the warriors of Dzihad”, “commando-terrorist groups” or “Muslim extremists”.²¹⁶

The case of newspapers Borba

Newspapers Borba was published in Belgrade as the official media of the League of Yugoslav Communists. The control over media in 1964 was transferred to the SSRN when it became the all-Yugoslav newspapers. The distribution was organized in all major cities of the

²¹⁵ Bugarski, Ranko, *Jezik od mira do rata*, Belgrade: Belgrade Circle, 1994. (pp. 81,82)

²¹⁶ Thompson, Mark, *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj, Bosni i Hercegovini*. Beograd: Medija centar Radio B92. 1995. (p. 94)

federal country and the edition was reaching 650.000 issues. Nevertheless, the newspapers were not very popular among broader audience, and it was seen as rather dry, boring informational platform of the socialist society. In the late eighties the newly appointed editor decided to revitalize the newspapers, and to take different conceptual course. The first important challenge was the VIII Congress of the Serbian Communist League Central Committee in 1987 where Slobodan Milošević came to power. Borba published all statements of the communist leaders, even the ones that were critical towards the Milošević's circle. This neutral strategy caused the loss of many subscribers in Serbia who were supporting Milošević ²¹⁷

Regarding the issue of privatization, Borba was logically one of the first media companies to fall into this category with the economic reforms initiated by the federal prime minister Ante Marković in 1989. The federal government has bought 17 % of the companies shares; the banks bought 15 % and the employees 12 %. The unprivatized institutions and companies bought the rest. ²¹⁸

Another crucial moment of crisis were the demonstrations in Belgrade in March 1991 when Borba reported on the events without accusations of the demonstrators which increased the edition of the newspapers to 150.000 issues and for the first time younger people started to read it. This neutral, and sometimes even critical position had become very dangerous when the war has started later on in the 1991. One of the most drastic examples of threats to the newspapers was the incident with the leader of paramilitary forces Željko Ražnatović – Arkan. After the report on his activities and on his volunteers on the front line he personally came to the editors office

²¹⁷ Ibid (p. 29)

²¹⁸ Ibid (pp. 30,31)

and threatened to kill the journalist who published the article, unless the newspapers publish in return an interview with him.²¹⁹

In September 1994 the federal government of SRJ accused Borba for not being registered as the shareholders company. The federal prosecutor asked from the court in Belgrade to erase Borba from the register of companies and annulated the first decision of the federal government from 1990 to allow the transformation of the newspapers into the shareholders company under the control of the federal government. At the same time the prosecutor tried to prevent the new registration of the company. The verdict was that an "unauthorized person" signed the registration in 1991 and therefore Borba D.O. couldn't have valid registration. This decision provoked strong reaction and 154 layers from Serbia and Montenegro joined in the legal tribunal to defend the newspapers Borba. The international institutions like UNESCO or International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights accused Serbia that it uses illegal means for the control of independent media. The ruling party SPS overtly classified Borba as the «anti-state newspapers», and the federal Minister for information, Dragutin Brčin, used more subtle strategy, claiming that the state only wants to protect the property in which it invested for 50 years. The regime claimed right to Borba on ground of succession with the SFRJ who privatized the newspapers at first place, but the succession and continuity from SFRJ to SRJ was not based on international law, and not approved by any international organization or other foreign state.²²⁰

The result was that the Minister Brčin himself took the position of the director of the newspapers and replaced the editor Gordana Logar.

²¹⁹ Ibid (pp. 30,31)

²²⁰ Gordy, D. Eric, *Kultura vlasti u Srbiji, Nacionalizam i razaranje alternativa*, Beograd: Samizdat B 92, 2001. (p. 101)

On the 26th of December 1991 the new editor published the first issue and soon got big support from the assembly to consolidate the newspapers, but the majority of journalist followed Gordana Logar to leave and start the new edition of newspapers that was sold on the streets in Belgrade. The final decision by the court on December 28th was that Borba has to be terminated, so the new edition of Gordana Logar was reregistered as Naša Borba with the support from businessman from Novi Sad Dušan Mijić who owned two third of the shares in the new company. From 171 journalists of the old newspapers Borba, 126 stayed with Naša Borba.

In the later course of events in 1998 with the immediate threat of NATO intervention against SRJ the Ministry of information finally had the chance to prohibit Naša Borba for violation of the governments «Regulation on the special measures in the conditions of the threat of NATO attacks on our country» declared on the 8th of October.²²¹

²²¹ Thompson, Mark, *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj, Bosni i Hercegovini*. Beograd: Medija centar Radio B92. 1995. (pp.48-50)

- **THE CULTURAL PUBLIC SPHERE(S) IN SERBIA OF THE NINETIES**

1. Serbian art scene - isolation and its consequences

Cultural public sphere(s)

Social space is produced and structured by conflicts. With this recognition, a democratic spatial politics begins

Rosalyn Deutsche

I will now try to shift the rhetoric of the analysis of the political public sphere coming from the theory of radical democracy to the field of art history and art theory where exists an attempt to initiate such a challenge within art practice by constructing what could be coined cultural public sphere. The idea is that art cannot assume the existence of a public but must help produce one and that the public sphere is less a physical space than a social form. I see the most important consequence of this idea of construction of the public sphere(s) in the fact that any exhibition venue, be it museum, private gallery or park could potentially be a public sphere and a place or an "arena" in which artists engage in cultural activity and raise different critical issues.²²² In this respect, the most important issue raised by Deutsche is the necessity to: "*...define public space as the space where society constitutes itself through an unending declaration of*

²²² Deutsche, Rosalyn, *Evictions - Art and Spatial Politics*, MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1988. (p. 42)

rights that question and limit power."²²³ If we accept this definition of the public sphere, and try to translate the political theory of radical democracy into the analysis of the art in public sphere, the double question that we have to pose right away is, what is the function of the public sphere for political art practices and what purpose can political art practices have for the public sphere? It would be interesting to see how this question can be asked in such radical social context of Serbia in the nineties and to see first how the cultural public sphere was produced and reproduced in this context.

Profilation of the Serbian art scene in the nineties

From the beginning of the 90's there has been often discussed by Serbian critics if such thing as the "Serbian Art Scene" exists at all. This dilemma was raised from the point of existence and survival of the so-called "independent" or "alternative" scene. The arguments that were brought into fore included the claims that: "escapist and partisan" strategies suggest that the more appropriate word would be the "artistic community" than the "scene"²²⁴; that the scene is at the beginning stage of its profilation²²⁵; or that the basic functions of the

²²³ Ibid, (p. 42)

²²⁴ Dejan Sretenović, "Art in a Closed Society" in Sretenović, Dejan Ed. *Art in Yugoslavia 1992-1995*, Belgrade: B 92, 1996. Sretenović analyses the period that Yugoslavia spent under the UN sanctions. He deals exclusively with the processes of formation of an independent art community that repudiates any identification with the social-political reality of the circles where it originates, in an attempt to establish its own, parallel world of art. Sretenović argues that: "the scene is constituted through the art system and its institutions of representation and critical evaluation, while the community is a kind of forced and informal association aimed at ensuring one's survival."

²²⁵ Zoran Erić, "Is a Shift Away from the Formal Level of Work Possible?", pref. cat. 2nd Yugoslav Biennial of Young Artists, Vršac: September 1996.

scene are provided by the particular "world of art" that frames it²²⁶. Whatever term had been in use, the definition was necessarily drawn in opposition to the dominant tendency in art, favored for ideological reasons by official governmental cultural institutions. Although the art system in Serbia was not developed and some of its most important components were not present at all²²⁷, or were atrophied, certain dispersed and sometimes opposed art networks have existed. It may be even said that several parallel "scenes" functioned at the same time, and that they have produced their own cultural public spheres that very rarely came in touch with each other.

In terms of artistic expression, that also implicitly show the ideological position towards the local social space and also the relation to the global art scene, several paradigms could be outlined:

- 1) The national-epic, alias photo-realistic tendency, or, in its pastoral variant, the oniric-fantastic "Painting of Scenes"²²⁸ was the most aggressive, and had very strong official backing and a stronghold in the Museum of Contemporary Art, as well as in certain private galleries.
- 2) Closely tied and, sometimes interwoven, was a tendency which consists of anti-modern disposed, nationally revived painters, who cherish a kind of cult of unique artistic genius and of original artistic expression that drives inspiration from the local environment.

²²⁶ See Stevan Vuković, *Personal Experiment in Art*, in Uroš Đurić, *Works 1989-1997*, Samizdat, Belgrade 1998. Vuković used the terms "independent scene" and "compulsory alternative" in opposition to the "mainstream" that he analyzes in terms of the Baudrillard's notion of simulacrum.

²²⁷ See Jasmina Čubrilo, *Beogradska umetnicka scena devedesetih*, Radio B 92, Belgrade 1998. Čubrilo favors more the thesis of Sretenović, and contends that throughout the nineties there was no proper scene or art system. For her one of the biggest problems was the non-existence of the art market.

²²⁸ A title of the exhibition held in "Paviljon Cvijeta Zuzorić" in Belgrade, 1996.

3) More moderate was the scene which consists of conditionally called traditionalists, i.e.: the so called Belgrade School of Painting, intimacy painting, poetic realism, painting on the traces of Paris school, etc. that constantly had its place and institutional support.

4) Apart was the phenomena described above as the "independent scene" which gathered artist of different provenance, but in given composition the general attitude of this scene was that it identified itself through aspiration to follow and reflect the global currents in art and cherish artistic expression with universalizing potential. This scene was tentatively isolated by highest institutions of culture, and was supported only by NGO's and dependent mostly on Soros Foundation.²²⁹

Institutional background

When the public sphere was "contaminated" by the hate speech in media, and the warlike spirit that followed in the beginning of the nineties, the cultural public sphere either reproduced, or rejected this dominant ideological matrix. Since Milošević and his oligarchy have offered institutionalization and legitimization to anyone who contributed to their political goals, the cultural institutions very soon became the target for the aspirations of some of the pro-government oriented "cultural workers". The changes of management in major

²²⁹ It was also indicative that the worst situation for the "independent" scene was in the capital city of Belgrade, where the influence of the dominant power structures was the strongest. The "independent" scene therefore had some important centers for exhibiting and support in cities like Novi Sad, Pančevo, Vršac or Čačak. This sharp division as far as the exclusive support of governmental institutions²²⁹ to all other tendencies but not the "independent" scene, existed roughly till the mid 90's, when it started to be blurred, especially after the end of sanctions to FR Yugoslavia by UN in 1995.

cultural institutions were happening in the drastic manner and the newly appointed directors managed to devastate the institutions of national importance like the National theatre²³⁰ and National Museum²³¹. The final stage of political replacements happened by the end of the 1993 when the smaller institutions but of great importance for the city of Belgrade, like Students Cultural Center and the House of Youth²³² couldn't prevent the same intrusion.

Probably the most drastic case of political usurpation happened in the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), the institution that was not drawing large public attention, and therefore could have been a good test for the future violations of managerial positions. The regularly appointed director Zoran Gavrić was brutally forced out of his office on the 28th of January 1993 by the threat of police intervention. The official documents of his replacement were never delivered to him, and the newly appointed "general director" offered just the photocopy of the transcript of his inauguration to the position. The Serbian minister of culture Miodrag Đukić didn't even care to follow the procedure of replacements of the directors of the major cultural institutions and he took the opportunity of the interregnum when the Prime Minister of Serbian government Nikola Šainović was taking over this position from Radoman Božović. The change and the taking over of newly appointed

²³⁰ After Belgrade, all major Theatres in Serbia suffered the same consequences. See Velimir Čurgus Kazimir's text "Rušenje Kulture" in Matić, Veran and Dejan Ilić, Eds. *Kultura Vlasti, Index smena i zabrana*, Beograd: Radio B92, 1994

²³¹ The changes in this institution happened from within as certain curators already embraced the leading political doctrine with the big retrospective of Milić Stanković in 1991.

²³² The fight for taking over the House of Youth was especially long and it took several months for the ruling party to accomplish it. It was a place with long tradition of cultural, political, social and civil alternative, and the associations and NGO's like Radio B 92 had its offices there, and the others had regular meetings, like the Belgrade Circle, Media Center etc.

director Radislav Trkulja²³³ was a sheer act of power, conducted in the violent illegal manner and followed by the media campaign to support this decision.²³⁴

The change affected the Museum in the drastic way, and the internationally oriented institution with very rich and competent program in few years had turned into the platform for “new ideologists” of the nation to implement their ideas. The list of exhibitions that the MCA had organized in the last mandate of Zoran Gavrić before the political usurpation comprised of big retrospective shows of local artists like Matija Vuković, Vasa Pomorišac, Olga Jančić, Kosta Hakman, Petar Omčikus, Vane Živadinović – Bor; then exhibitions of international exchange like the ones of group Cobra, Georg Baselitz, Alvar Alto, Robert Mappelthorpe, Barry Flanagan, Wols, Le Courbisier, group Gutai; not to mention all thematic-research shows of Serbian art of the twentieth century, exhibitions of Serbian artists abroad (Sava Šumanović, Milena Pavlović Barilli, Venice, Sao Paolo and Sydney Biennials), solo shows of Serbian and international artists in the Gallery of the Museum, three editions of books published by the Museum etc. In the same period the MCA has managed to acquire 99 paintings, 42 sculptures, 208 graphics, 72 drawings, 65 new media works. In comparison, in the first year of the mandate of Radislav Trkulja there was just one painting that was bought for the collection, and the number, and not to mention the level of the exhibitons has drastically decreased.²³⁵ After changing the board of the Museum and consolidating the stuff²³⁶ Trkulja was able to justify his appointment

²³³ A painter whose first job in civil service was the place of the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art

²³⁴ Jovan Despotović, «Muzej savremene umetnosti u zagrljaju levog i desnog totalitarizma», in Matić, Veran and Dejan Ilić, Eds. *Kultura Vlasti, Index smena i zabrana*, Beograd: Radio B92, 1994. (pp. 43-47)

²³⁵ Ibid (p. 44)

²³⁶ Five curators left the Museum during the mandate of Radislav Trkulja, see Ibid

with two exhibitions in 1994 that explicitly demonstrated the ideological position of the cultural institution that supported and reproduced the dominant ideological matrix of the political oligarchy. The first exhibition under the title "Nikola Tesla"²³⁷ was dedicated to the famous scientist of Serbian origin, and the second one "The Balkans Origins in the Serbian Twentieth Century Painting" provided with the elaborate discourse produced by the author Dragoš Kalajić, whose role will be discussed at length in next passages.²³⁸

On the Serbian art scene of the first half of the nineties in was noticeable that exists the tendency of all participants on the so-called "alternative scene" to group in linguistically and conceptually confronted micro-units. Such links among artists of related, or at least temporarily close visual expression conditioned interaction with "patrons" - critics or theoreticians of various vocations and groundings, linked sometimes to state-funded, but mostly to new, alternative institutions. The link between existing critical positions and theoretical orientations and the ability, or inability, of artists to fit into them and respond adequately reflected the dynamics of events on the Serbian art scene. It was possible to mark out some of the most important platforms towards which the artists gravitated.

The major initiative was coming from the Radio B 92 that has formed a nucleus that facilitated many group projects such as "Urbazona", "Led art" (Ice Art), "Art vrt" (Art Garden) and "Pogled na zid" (Gaze at the wall) that were held in the Gallery of the House of Youth or in the newly opened art space Cinema Rex. The artists

²³⁷ The "Illuminator" of the project was the artist Peđa Gavrović, it was held from January to February 1994, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade

²³⁸ The author of the exhibition was Dragoš Kalajić together with critic of younger generation Dejan Đorić, it was held at the Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade, from August to September 1994

gathered over these projects belonged to different generations, from the older one, including some professors from the Academy of Fine Arts, to the very young one, without accomplished Academic training. The common denominator was that they all nurtured in widely diverging visual languages a basically urban sensibility and themes linked to subcultural phenomena.

Another strong point was the Soros Center for Contemporary Arts founded in 1993 by the newly established Open Society Fund, that was one of the main, if not the only financing body that helped NGO initiatives with the idea to build the stronger and more opened society. The Center for Contemporary Art had a task to build a documentation of the contemporary artists, support the private initiatives, and projects in open contests as well as the production of the monographic catalogues of Serbian artists. The major projects organized by the staff of the Center were the annual exhibitions. The first one, held in 1995 in the Cinema Rex under the title Scenes of the Gaze was curated by the director of the Center Dejan Sretenović, and showed the high quality of production and extremely big budget for the period in Serbia due to the allocated resources of the Open Society Fund. On the theoretical level, it defined the problem of the gaze, of perception in the time of the "screen paradigm". However, the show demonstrated that as anticipatory as a theory may be, it cannot confirm its credibility completely on the local scene, and that this discrepancy can maybe be explained by the inability of some artists to act creatively in accordance with the set theoretical framework. The Center continued to foster the production of new media art, and facilitated the rise of such artistic paradigm among the circles close to this institution.

Finally, another important site was the Students Cultural Center that was the state-run institution with the great legacy from the end of

sixties and beginning of the seventies when the first generation of conceptual artists in Belgrade started to gather in its Gallery and hold exhibitions, performances and workshops.²³⁹ The policy of gathering the youngest generation of artists had endured in the nineties as well. The workshops, one-day exhibitions and presentations and increasing experimentation in the visual language of installations, ambiental works and interactive projects were prevailing. Such an approach provided young artists, mostly still students at the Academy of Fine Arts with the freedom to re-evaluate the foundation of their ideas through frequent appearances, and to purify their expression.

Reaction to the social reality

The socio-political frame of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as disposed in the first chapter, whose features were the strongest wave of ethnonationalism and populism favored by the political oligarchy, respectively came back to the sphere of culture and "contaminated" it. The effects were so strong that produced the social milieu dominated by patriarchalism, authoritarianism, a warlike spirit, xenophobia, and national-chauvinism which devastated the most important cultural institutions that started to reproduce this ideological matrix. The exhibitions that were organized and shown in the National Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade had a task to glorify the history of Serbian people and to recycle the national myths from

²³⁹ The program of the Gallery was first run by Dunja Blažević and the circle of art historians that worked on building the institution included Biljana Tomić, Jasna Tijardović, Bojana Pejić, etc. The first generation of conceptual artists was now identified with the world most famous artist from the group Marina Abramović, but the informal group of six included Raša Todosijević, Neša Paripović, Era Milivojević, Zoran Popović and Gergelj Urkom, but also very prominent role had Braco Dimitrijević from Sarajevo.

the past, mainly from the golden period of the medieval Serbian Empire. The works of art, presented at those exhibitions could be therefore read as symptoms of the social pathology of the milieu in which they originated.

Due to the existing socio-political circumstances, the condition in which Serbian artists worked could be without exaggeration called traumatic. The lack of information and cultural contacts with international centers of art as well as the psychological feeling of deprivation, confinement, and even repression has certainly left their mark on them. For the artists who didn't want to conform to the dominant ideological matrix and accept this "mainstream", the trauma experienced had different effect and caused strong reaction. One aspect was the withdrawal from the social, public sphere into the closed, hermetic artistic circles and the strategy defined as *active escapism*²⁴⁰. Another aspect was gathering of artists into groups and associations like *Urbazona*²⁴¹ or *Led Art*²⁴² with the aim to criticize, oppose, and "face" the social reality with the engaged artworks.

This problem regarding the relation of the artists towards the social sphere could be defined through the "ever-present" dilemma whether to emphasize aesthetical or ethical aspects of their work. For the beginning of the nineties, in the hardest situation of war in the surroundings and total economic collapse, it was remarked that Serbian artists were primarily concerned with aesthetical issues in their art, and rarely openly reflected, either analytically, critically,

²⁴⁰ Lidija Merenik, *No Wave in Art in Yugoslavia 1992-1995* edition of *Center for Contemporary Arts, Fund for an Open Society*, Belgrade 1996.

²⁴¹ The movement that emphasized the need for restoring the "urban values" and popular culture that was in danger of fading away and disappearing under the wave of populist "turbo-folk" scene.

²⁴² Loose association of artists that gathered occasionally to make happenings, actions and performances. "Led art" means "Ice art" and it was a metaphor for the closed society in which the artists are forced to work.

ironically or committedly, social issues. The impression prevailed that majority of Serbian artists did not work *in socius*, and react to social circumstances nor to their marginalized position, but had turned to formal problems immanent to the artistic medium and material. A tendency that was especially current was to situate these problems in the sphere of purely formal, plastic solutions, with artists infrequently expressing themselves in polymorphous works that would presuppose different levels of reading or with works that would take a step outside a certain medium. Moreover, the artists rarely understood the accepted media of painting, sculpture, etc. as "sliding" categories, and they did not tend to mixture, mingling or stylistic heterogeneity. A distinction should be drawn here, however, between the eclectic procedure of combining and quoting various iconographic, historical models and its tendency towards a *Gesamtkunstwerk* characteristic of the post-avant-garde art of the eighties and the conceptually defined and grounded strategy of analysis, recontextualisation or deconstruction of various linguistic (not necessarily historical) models and the ease of "slipping out" of the medium, that is, working in different media, increasingly visible in the international art of the nineties.

Theoretical debate of the "independent scene"

The symptoms that artists are dealing more with formal problems in their work provoked the theoretical elaboration on the emergence of "Modernism after Post-modernism" that was for some time creating conflictual arguments on the "independent art scene",

and turned into a major theoretical debate of the nineties where almost all critics from this circle took a stand point.

The theoretical debate had its first public platform at the international conference under the title: "Modernity After Post-modernity?" held in conjunction with the First Biennial of Young Artists in Vršac in 1994. While the foreign participants to the conference and international artists were surprised not to see any reaction of Serbian artists to the war in Bosnia that was at its peak at the moment, or the harsh social space of Milošević's Serbia under sanctions by UN, the dominant theoretical debate on the "alternative" art scene was focused on global cultural condition and the aesthetical issues derived from the world of art itself. After heated debate where most of the critics of the younger generation²⁴³ were quite critical of such imposed and untenable formulation and diagnostics for the actual condition of Serbian art, the debate took wider public scope and continued in the magazine for visual arts *Projekart*²⁴⁴ and with the exhibition thesis that Jerko Denegri²⁴⁵ and Miško Šuvaković²⁴⁶ had conceptualized and curated in mid nineties. The first paradigmatic exhibition was: "Tendencies of the Nineties – Hiatuses of Modernism and Postmodernism"²⁴⁷, to be followed by "Examples of Abstract Art – One

²⁴³ Dejan Sretenović, Lidija Merenik, Jadranka Tolić, Zoran Erić, etc.

²⁴⁴ The debate and the polemics between Šuvaković and the critics that engaged most actively in the debate with him like Lidija Merenik (part-time employee of the SCCA - Soros Center for Contemporary Art and Assistant professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, Chair for Modern Art), Branislav Dimitrijević (employee of the SCCA, Belgrade) and Jovan Despotović (curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade) was published as the final edition of the magazine *Projekart* in 2001 under the title "Hijatusi modernizma i postmodernizma. Jedna teorijska kontroverza".

²⁴⁵ Professor of History of Modern Art at the Faculty of Philosophy

²⁴⁶ Art theorist and lecturer on aesthetics

²⁴⁷ "Tendencije devedesetih: hijatusi modernizma i postmodernizma" series of seven one man exhibitions held from 22nd of December 1995 to 12th of April 1996 at the Visual Culture Center "Zlatno oko" in Novi Sad, and then as the group exhibition of all artists (Dragomir Ugren, Ivan Ilić, Mirjana Đorđević, Aleksandar Dimitrijević, Nikola Pilipović, Marija Vauda and Neša Paripović) at the Center for Cultural

Radical History"²⁴⁸, "Rhetorical Figures of the Nineties"²⁴⁹, and finally "Infracting Forms of the Nineties – Postmodern and the Avant-garde Towards the End of the Twentieth Century"²⁵⁰.

Jerko Denegri used the formulation "Modernism after Post-modernism" in Serbian context²⁵¹ to describe the actual art practice of certain group of Serbian artists whose language was evoking the principles of the high modernist, self-referential art. Denegri at first admitted that this tendency cannot be traced globally and therefore is just a useful term in local context and not broader ranging theoretical definition. He therefore narrowed down the focus of the formulation to local micro scene exactly using it to describe the actual moment of Serbian artistic climate.²⁵²

Denegri argued that there are many historical examples where artists had to respond to the social crisis and he saw only two options: one was the insistence on the autonomy of art and its resistance to all outer pressures, and the other was active engagement of the artists for, or against, certain social and political options.²⁵³ For Denegri who

Decontamination, Pavilion Veljković in Belgrade, June-July 1996. Concept dr Miško Šuvaković

²⁴⁸ "Primeri apstraktne umetnosti – jedna radikalna istorija", "Pavilion Cvijeta Zuzorić, Belgrade, August- September 1996.

²⁴⁹ "Retoričke figure devedesetih", Gallery of the Youth Cultural Center, Belgrade, November-December 1996.

²⁵⁰ "Prestupničke forme devedesetih – postmoderna i avangarda na kraju XX veka", Contemporary Culture Center Konkordija Vršac, Museum of Contemporary Fine Arts, Novi Sad, May-June 1998.

²⁵¹ Denegri actually borrowed the term of Slovenian theorist Tomaž Brejc from 1987 who has used it to mark certain practices in Slovenian painting of the eighties. Brejc was according to Denegri also noticing that the problem of visual and plastic form is becoming focal for many artists that didn't fit into the typical postmodern art practices of the moment like «transavangardija», new expressionism and anachronism.

²⁵² Denegri, Jerko, "Prioritet forme in nova duhovnost u umetnosti devedesetih", pref. cat. First Yugoslav Biennial of Young Artist, Vršac: Konkordija 1994.

²⁵³ Denegri, Jerko, "Umetnička scena devedesetih: u očekivanju ukupne obnove, magazine Zlatno oko, No. 1, Novi Sad, Vršac, September 1994, (pp. 58,59)

claimed that the “priority of form and spirituality”²⁵⁴ was the evidence of the return of some of the paradigmatic features of the culture of modernism, the other option of the active artistic work in socius was just not developed in Serbia of the nineties, at least not in any relevant artistic practice. He thus a priori took the ideological position on the necessity to preserve the autonomy of art and artistic language and changed the proposed thesis of the choice between aesthetical or ethical response into aesthetical as the only ethical response. The following statement explains the best his position:

“In the conditions such as the local ones today, the virtue of art consists in its absolute autonomy, in its aesthetical independence and self-sufficiency, and those are exactly the founding principles of modernity and modernist art, not only as a specific language and style but at the same time as certain mode of social behavior.”

In the society where all values including the artistic ones were compromised, Denegri couldn’t accept the post-modernist ideological call for pluralism, anti-essentialism and criticism of all normative doctrines. For him this condition was an good excuse for “para-artistic” practices, as he called them, to smuggle themselves into official art system and therefore he had to assert a system of values that would discern “true” valuable art from the “fake” invaluable, and he found the basic criteria for this system in the *form* as it shows the integrity of thoughts and practical demands of the *métier*.²⁵⁵

After the first immediate reaction as a critic detecting actual currents on the local art scene, Denegri modified his approach and

²⁵⁴ Denegri, Ješa, “Prioritet forme in nova duhovnost u umetnosti devedesetih”, pref. cat. First Yugoslav Biennial of Young Artist, Vršac: Konkordija 1994.

²⁵⁵ See Ibid. Denegri was here greatly indebted to Clement Greenberg’s theoretical discourse.

tried to "inscribe" the local context of the "closed society"²⁵⁶ into the condition of the "cultural globalization". He detected the global revalorization of some of the modernist principles in such elaboration as Heinrich Klotz's notion of second modernity (Zweite Moderne)²⁵⁷; Renato Barrili's thesis of neo-modernism²⁵⁸; or Filiberto Menna's call for the renewal of the "modernist art project"²⁵⁹, and argued that in spite of the socio-political condition of isolation from the international art scene, the Serbian art scene of the nineties – of course within its own limitations – had demonstrated some general coincidences with the certain problems and ideas of the global historical moment.²⁶⁰

Miško Šuvaković had offered a thorough theoretical explanation of the phenomena and argued that if in the current art production some authors are returning in their work to certain Modernist

²⁵⁶ He adopted the thesis of Dejan Sretenović and used this term to describe the condition of the whole decade of the nineties in Serbia. See Denegri, Ješa, *Devedesete: Teme srpske umetnosti (1990-1999)*, Novi Sad: Svetovi 1999. (pp. 5-18)

²⁵⁷ Klotz, Heinrich, *Umetnost u dvadesetom veku: moderna – postmoderna - druga moderna*; Novi Sad: Svetovi, 1995. The book was published in 1994 in Germany, and translated next year. In the last chapter Klotz has analyzed the "New Abstraction" and recognized it as a tendency that could mark the symptoms of second modernity. Denegri contended with the thesis of Klotz that the second modernity is not just the sharp break in relation to postmodern, but its continuation and its revision, in the same manner as the postmodern is not just negation of the historical modernity, but just one of its constitutive parts. See the text Denegri, Ješa, "Moderna posle postmoderne: poreklo termina, okolnosti i razlozi upotrebe", in Ugren, Dragoljub. Ed., *Hijatusi modernizma i postmodernizma. Jedna teorijska kontroverza*, Novi Sad: *Projekart* No. 11-15, March 2001. (pp.197-200)

²⁵⁸ At the exhibition "Anni novanta" in Bologna in 1991 Barilli made diagnosis of the "return to modernism" in actual art and called it neo-modernism as common denominator for the practices that are equalizing the semantic and ideological aspect of art in the nineties. See Denegri's text "Umetnost u zatvorenom društvu u uslovima kulturne globalizacije, in catalogue of the exhibition "Prestupničke forme devedesetih – postmoderna i avangarda na kraju XX veka", Contemporary Culture Center Konkordija Vršac, Museum of Contemporary Fine Arts, Novi Sad, May-June 1998.

²⁵⁹ Menna Filiberto, "Moderni projekat umetnosti, Beograd: Press Express, 1992, The book was published first in Italy one year after Menna's death under the title "Il progetto moderno dell'arte"

²⁶⁰ Denegri, Ješa, "Umetnost u zatvorenom društvu u uslovima kulturne globalizacije, pref. cat. "Prestupničke forme devedesetih – postmoderna i avangarda na kraju XX veka", Contemporary Culture Center Konkordija Vršac, Museum of Contemporary Fine Arts, Novi Sad, May-June 1998.

paradigms, that is the evidence that Modernism and Postmodernism cannot be seen as sharply delimited entities as there are always minglings and meshings. That was the reason why we should always search for the existence of disruptions, fissures in the corpuses of both Modernism and Postmodernism. For Šuvaković the term «Modernism After Post-modernism» was just of technical nature and it reflects: «*the complex thematizations, research, discussions, simulations and historical initiations of the tradition of modernism in the post-modern culture*». ²⁶¹ In the world of art, he wanted to make a distinction between the practice of radical formalism that revisited the fundamental ontological aspects of modernist aesthetic and culture from the widely acknowledged post-modern tendencies of the eighties whose main feature was eclecticism and fictionalism. For Šuvaković formalism was one of major philosophical, scientific and artistic concepts of the twentieth century modernist culture that was introduced in Yugoslav space in the literary theory, philosophy and visual arts in the sixties and seventies. In visual arts formalism for him meant the critical reaction and rejection of the moderate modernist aesthetics in favor of more radical constructivist, structuralist and conceptual art. ²⁶²

²⁶¹ Miško Šuvaković's glossary in Ugren, Dragoljub. Ed., *Hijatusi modernizma i postmodernizma. Jedna teorijska kontroverza*, Novi Sad: Projekart No. 11-15, March 2001. (p. 432)

²⁶² See Miško Šuvaković's text "Oko formalizma – postformalizmi: modeli formalističke i postformalističke umetnosti u Srbiji posle 1970". in Ugren, Dragoljub. Ed., *Hijatusi modernizma i postmodernizma. Jedna teorijska kontroverza*, Novi Sad: Projekart No. 11-15, March 2001. (pp. 272-275)

2. Reproduction of dominant ideological matrix

Recirculation of national myths

Myth and fantasy is of utmost importance for the identity politics that is the ground for human definition nowadays – ethnic, religious, related to former or existing state borders, and are trying in this world of uncertainty, to find some certainty under the slogan: 'we are different and better than others'... History is primary material for nationalistic, ethnic and fundamentalist ideologies... Past is essential, perhaps the most essential element of this ideologies.

Eric Hobsbawm

Among all Serbian national myths, the myth of Kosovo²⁶³ is the most present in revived ethnonational stories and phantasmagoria, and it points to the "Emperor".²⁶⁴ Lazar's choosing of Divine realm as a correct path and decision for the Serbian national character.²⁶⁵ It fits perfectly into mythological, anti-historical perception of time, where the time comes back again and again in everlasting cycles, unlike the usual comprehending of the linear flow of time in Judeo-Christian civilization. Final consequence of such speech took shape in

²⁶³ The Battle of Kosovo in 1389 marks the symbolical loss of independence of Serbian Empire over the Ottoman Turks.

²⁶⁴ The last Emperor from the dynasty of Nemanjić was Uroš, and Lazar Hrebeljanović had in the Byzantine hierarchy of titles a rather small one of "Knez" similar to title of Duke, but traditionally in oral history he was always called Emperor or Tsar.

²⁶⁵ Čolović, Ivan, *Politika simbola*, Beograd: XX vek, 2000, (pp. 18-19)

the populist stories like the one of Božidar Vučurević, Serbian leader from Trebinje:

*"Even the dead we lined up to preserve and defend dignity of the living; that's why the history is not for Serbs only a teacher of life, but also a teacher of death. St Sava, Tsar Lazar, Njegoš, Karađorđe... they are still with us, reminding us who we are and what we are."*²⁶⁶

It could be even said that just the mention of Kosovo and its myth became a choice and determination for a myth, it became a "myth about a myth" as Ivan Čolović remarked.

Recirculation of national myths and especially the 'ever-present' Kosovo myth had significant role in the visual arts in Serbia of the nineties. There is nothing strange in the inspiration of Serbian artists with this myth, and there are many examples in the history of art of the XIX and XX century that artists were exploring this topic, Ivan Meštrović, Paja Jovanović and Petar Lubarda, being just a few of the many renowned. Nevertheless, interesting enough was the coincidence that gave impetus to the actualization of the myth - the celebration of 600 years of Kosovo battle at Gazimestan in 1989 - with the moment when Milošević was being firmly «enthroned» on power carried by the wave of enthonationalism and populism in Serbia. It was not a surprise that this wave respectively came back to the sphere of culture and "contaminated" it. The effects of the social milieu dominated by patriarchalism, authoritarianism, a warlike spirit, xenophobia, and national-chauvinism devastated the most important cultural institutions that started to reproduce the ideological matrix. Very soon, and manly when the war in Bosnia has started in 1992, the motif of

²⁶⁶ Ibid. (p. 22)

Kosovo battle emerged as extremely important one among many «nationally conscious» artists, and it was even recognized as anticipation of new national upraise in some examples in painting of the eighties.²⁶⁷

More important than the actual historical topic, or stylistic and artistic language was the “interpretation” from the ideologists of national “renaissance”, and the performative role of these artworks that were presented in highest national institutions of culture like the National Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade with a task to glorify the history of Serbian people. They could be read as symptoms of the social pathology of the milieu in which they originated, and contributed largely to the above outlined social space and reproduction of the hate speech that was present in all the media.²⁶⁸

It would be interesting to mention just the titles of the theatre plays in summer 1987 in Belgrade to illustrate what was dominant thematic focus of culture: «The defeat of Serbian Empire», «The Thessaloniki veterans speak», «They have killed the Duke», «The battle of Kolubara», «Memoirs of the priest», «The secret of Black Hand» etc.²⁶⁹ All the plays were focusing on reinterpretation of the Serbian past, mostly in the World War I where Serbia being a small and weak country, managed to stay on the side of the winners. The

²⁶⁷ To quote Dragoš Kalajić writing on the painting by Olja Ivanjicki “Kosovo Battle” from 1986: “In her modernization of the ‘Kosovo Battle’ the experienced eye could see the anticipation of new liberation war, in which Serbian people, again, defends Europe from the of Islam invasion”. Text published in the catalogue of the exhibition «The Balkans Origins in the Serbian Twentieth Century Painting», Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade, August - September 1994.

²⁶⁸ In the same catalogue, the co-curator Dejan Djorić describes the painting «Death of Murat» by Dragan Malešević Tapi from 1982 as a bold anticipation of the National and to quote: «with the powers of creative act and intuition, he depicts the figure of Murat dying, a figure cruel as much as a Turk could be.»

²⁶⁹ See Stambolić, Ivan, *Put u bespuće: odgovori Ivana Stambolića na pitanja Slobodana Inića*, Beograd : Radio B92, 1995.

plays were actually contributing to the myth of Serbian victory in wars, and defeat in peace, which was promoted by Dobrica Ćosić and the intellectuals from his circle. The media followed the same instructions, and had covered the cultural topics only if they were inspired by the national cultural history, as if other topics were irrelevant.²⁷⁰

Deconstruction of the myths

The exception on the above disposed "alternative scene" regarding the relation to the socio-cultural context and the produced reality were several artists of the older generations formed in the language of conceptual art of the seventies, like Raša Todosijević, or the ones from the generation of the sixties, that always had strong conceptual agenda in their art, like Dušan Otašević or Predrag Nešković. Those artists not integrated into dominant ideological structure were reflecting, thematizing and deconstructing the produced and recycled national mythology. In 1991 Todosijević has made a cycle of aquarelles with surreal motifs and recognizable ideological symbols of war. In the series "Got Liebt die Serben" in the same technique with the symbols like the skull, swastika and the slogans like "Serbs the Oldest Nation", "Raša über Serb" he was directly referring to all ideological proclamations of the new political and cultural establishment. His conceptual strategy of the seventies comprising of questioning and subversion of the "official" system of values in art as developed through his actions, performances and statements, in the nineties has shifted the focus on the newly produced systems of values in Serbian society of the time, with the same critical edge, and ironical

²⁷⁰ Dragičević-Šešić, Milena, "Media War and Hatred: the Role of Media in Preparation of Conflicts", in magazine: *Kultura*. No 93-94, 1994. (p. 200)

distance. In performances and installations of that period Todosijević approached with a radical critical angle the myth of "national greatness" of Serbs. In the late nineties with a series of posters, like the one of "Serboranges" he introduced the method of subtler ironical deconstruction of the public proclamations and evidences of the pathos of Serbs as "Heavenly people", the "chosen" nation inheriting the oldest culture and civilization in Europe, and other theories of the "Serbian Cultural Renaissance".

This attitude was characteristic also for Otašević who was dealing more with fictionalization of national history and Nešković who was playing with the kitsch aspects of traditional art and folklore. Predrag Nešković who started his career in the sixties with the tendency of new figurative painting, was playing with the kitsch aspects of traditional art and folklore in his series of paintings resembling the aesthetics of needlepoint, where he introduced many quotations from the historical motifs as well as from popular culture.

From this position in the nineties came the examples of the art practice that was using the same historical motifs, but with the intention to loosen the heavy burden of its mythical legacy by recontextualizing, and rereading it. The examples of works of Čedomir Vasić and Ivana Jakšić, were showing the conceptual approach that had different agenda than the artist that were just reproducing the dominant ideology and glorifying Serbian history. Čedomir Vasić, one of the first artists of the generation of 80's who worked in the media of video and video installation, used the interactivity as the method to offer the audience to print and reproduce the very famous motif of the Kosovo Girl who takes care of the wounded after the battle. Vasić was playing with the digital media to erase the motif from the famous painting of Uroš Predić from 1919, and leave the plain landscape of

Kosovo, like an empty signifier where one projects his fantasies and inscribes the mythical narration. Finally, young artists Ivana Jakšić used the figure of the national hero Kraljević Marko (Prince Marko)²⁷¹ in the series of paintings divided into segments of a grid. She represented him as if he was an actor in a Pacman like video game, and with the painterly structure that resembles the monitor image in pixels, adding the most recent ironical interpretation and deconstruction of Serbian national myths.

Milić Stanković

There could be outlined several important moments and personalities in the whole body of acts and events that contributed to the creation of such a cultural scene. One of the first and most decisive was a major retrospective in the National Museum of painter Milić Stanković (1934-2000), known as "Milić od Mačve" (Milić of Mačva)²⁷², held in 1991. It was the big exception and the first case of this kind of solo show dedicated to the living artists who presented 600 works. The paradox was that the oldest and the most respected Museum and cultural institution in the country didn't offer to the painter just the space dedicated to the temporary exhibitions, but also

²⁷¹ The historical character doesn't belong to the period of Kosovo Battle, but was born later and served as a Trukish vassal. Nevertheless, he was one of the most popular heroes among the people, and many national poems glorify his virtues. There is even a proverb saying that Marko was late for Kosovo Battle, explaining the reason for the defeat, as often used in mythological anti-historical perception of time.

²⁷² Milić Stanković used many aliases and nicknames. He came from a small village in part of the Vojvodina called Mačva, and since he noticed that his countryman say that they are of Mačva, and not from Mačva, which sounds like archaic Serbian language, he started signing himself "Milić od Mačve". Another important reference for him was the tradition of Renaissance painters to use the names of their villages like Leonardo da Vinci that in Italian means from the place of Vinci.

the other rooms where the masterpieces of the XX century collection were on public display.²⁷³

The exhibition was not actually based on the artistic merit of artists work, but was more so a sheer political statement, and Milić Stanković was exactly fitting the stereotype of the romanticist myth of a “great national painter” and “authentic Serbian genius artist”.

It would be interesting to look back at the beginning of his career and to find traces of his explicit demonstration of nationalistic ideas and attitude. As early as in 1962, Milić Stanković on the occasion of his third solo show in Belgrade wrote the Manifesto titled: “New Realism or National Art”²⁷⁴. The introduction in the Manifesto that showed the special dedication to the famous Serbian painter Sava Šumanović is worth quoting at length:

*“I am opening this exhibition in memory of painter Sava Šumanović, killed by Ustaši beasts. And all the Serbian patriots whose eyes were pulled out, and bones torn out of the skeleton, that fall with Sava in the year 1942 during Revolution, defending the Cyrillic letters.”*²⁷⁵

The Manifesto itself was in artist’s own interpretation focusing mainly on strictly art problems and actual dilemma whether to embrace new realism or national art that he proclaimed in opposition to the Enformel or the movement of Mediala with whom he exhibited at the first joint exhibition, but the group didn’t fulfill his “national”

²⁷³ Subotić, Irina, *Retrospektivna izložba Milića od Mačve: od Narodnog muzeja do Gradića-Rodića*, Delo, May-August 1992, (p. 249)

²⁷⁴ The exhibition was opened at midnight between 21st and 22nd of February in the Gallery “Grafički kolektiv» thus having symbolism of the vampiric meeting of Serbs.

²⁷⁵ In Milić Stanković’s autobiography «*Povjesnica Milića od Mačve – Sa kućišta do dvora Ufici sa litalicom u zastancima*», Part One, Belgrade: Authors publication, 1985, (p. 282)

aspirations in art.²⁷⁶ The manifesto with its tone and defense of the “perfect Serbian Cyrillic letters” provoked the strong reaction by the political oligarchy and it was regarded as the act of Serbian nationalism and chauvinism. The strong wave of criticism appeared in all printed media and the exhibition was closed just three days after the opening. Milić Stanković, till then an emerging and promising young artist with support from cultural circles, was publically condemned as Serbian “Chetnik” and Serbian nationalist. The artist dared to touch one of the taboo topics of the socialist society, at the very moment when the new Constitution of 1962 was being in preparation. From this point onwards, Stanković has continued his fight for the “survival” of Serbian Cyrillic letters, and national identity of Serbs, but he had to make compromises with communist authorities in order to step out of obscurity of the circle of outcasts and dissidents in the socialist society.²⁷⁷

The new context for his rhetoric had been created in the eighties with the rise of Serbian cultural Renaissance, and Milić Stanković’s “discourse” was recognized and brought to public attention. The big retrospective in the National Museum in 1991 didn’t only come as the final institutionalization of his artistic career, but moreover it put him

²⁷⁶ Ibid (pp. 281-293)

²⁷⁷ It is interesting that after the direct attacks on his Manifesto in 1962, for the next show in Belgrade held in 1964, he deliberately visited the federal Minister of Culture, Macedonian Krste Crvenkovski, to document and explain the history of prohibitions of the Cyrillic letters, and that the open socialist society shouldn’t have the same strategy, as repressive regimes that banded this letter. He tried to defend his attitude as artistic and not political and got the “blessing” from the high political position for his next show, but had to compromise and avoid his pseudonyms like Milič of Mačva, or Radovan’s skeleton, and just use his name Milić Stanković and of course avoid all political connotation in his public actions. After this agreement all major Serbian politicians: Aleksandar Ranković, Koča Popović, Nikola Ljubičić, Slobodan Penezić – Krcun had visited the opening of his show which added to his “rehabilitation”, as a promising artist. See «*Povjesnica Milića od Mačve – Sa kućišta do dvora Ufici sa litalicom u zastancima*», Part One, Belgrade: Authors publication, 1985, (pp. 306-308)

on the highest pedestal among all active national painters. The title of the show: "From Lepenski Vir to Serbian Vedanta" aimed to pretentiously show the pre-historical origin of Serbian people documented by the relics from the civilization found near locality called Lepenski Vir and dated around 8000 BC thus appropriating it into the legacy of the Serbian culture.²⁷⁸ The notion of "Vedanta", neologism derived from Indian books Veda was bringing even bigger confusion and mysticism into the whole story that the artists wanted to tell to the audience. The last cycle of paintings that he made in 1989 and exhibited was devoted to the Kosovo battle with the title "Kosovo - First Serbian Threshold", thus making his contribution to the revival of the national constitutive myth of Kosovo.

Besides the adoration of the «national painter» organized visits of schoolchildren to attend the guided tours of the artists «shepherd» guiding his «spiritual herd», and the public acclamation of the successful show presented by most of the media, there were hardly any critical texts and reviews on the show.²⁷⁹

One of the rare examples is the text of Dejan Sretenović published in magazine *Vreme*²⁸⁰. The author was analyzing the religious background of Serbian Orthodox Church that Milić Stanković took as a pretext for his work. By reference to the statements of Amfilohije Radović, archbishop of the Serbian Church on the role of Orthodox art in contemporary society, Sretenović tried to show that the paintings of Milić Stanković are reviving the protestant type of painting as created by Hieronymus Bosch or Peter Bruegel, painters biggest reference in art, and to quote his analysis at length:

²⁷⁸ The historical fact was that South Slavic tribes started invading the Byzantine Empire from 6th century AD

²⁷⁹ The tours and the outfit of the painter were more resembling the sermons in the church.

²⁸⁰ Sretenović, Dejan, "Putevi iskušenja", *Vreme*, no. 60, 16.12.1991.

«When Milić of Mačva locates Serbian myth and religion into the landscape of Mačva, but figurally represents it in the folklore and grotesque form of the protestant painting with the didactic and moralizing tendency, then this is something in collision with the Orthodox concept of transcendentality of the image that has supra-historical and supranational character. The Orthodox painting (the icon) is by its nature silent and focused, and Milić's paintings are loud and talkative; the Orthodox painting is the art of the high stylization and symbolization, and Milić's laymanship and folklorizing of the Orthodox spirituality in the form of the protestant painting points out at all the dangers and blind alleys that are waiting for our artists in the search of authentic national artistic language». ²⁸¹

What had been more important in the public promotion of the retrospective was Milić Stanković's public persona, his appearance and a radical nationalist orientation, as it was clear from the beginning of his career, and had culminated in hatred and poems of curse to USA and «the new world order»²⁸². His statements had a form of prophetic visions revealing the destiny of Serbian people such as the one where he claims that: *"the Serbian people is the heavenly people that will gather all righteous peoples, like Nikola Tesla did"*.²⁸³ It was clear that exactly this kind of media propaganda and vocabulary, the hate speech that the author delivered without any limitations was the most desired by the political oligarchy that was homogenizing the nation and

²⁸¹ Ibid

²⁸² It is interesting how recent anti-globalist movement is sometimes mistaken to have same goals and ideological position like the radical right wing local nationalism.

²⁸³ Interview of Milić Stanković on Radio Beograd, 10.4.1993, as quoted from the text of Rade Veljanovski, "Zaokret elektronskih medija" in Popov, Nebojša, Ed. *Srpska srana rata*, Vol 1, Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2002. (p. 196)

preparing the public opinion for the period of wars.

Dragoš Kalajić

Dragoš Kalajić could be regarded as the *spiritus movens* and ideologist who articulated the anti-modern disposed, nationally revived language of painters who cherish a cult of unique artistic genius and original artistic expression that drives inspiration from the *genius loci* where it was anthropologically grounded. Kalajić's discourse had a long prehistory and was substantially modified towards the nineties.²⁸⁴ In mid sixties, based in Rome, Kalajić had begun a successful international career with the advent of the new wave of figurative painting that was coined Narrative Figuration. He was included in many international shows reflecting this tendency and got support from critics like Enrico Crispolti who recognized not only his work as a painter, but also the sharp critical edge of his writings that were pointing out at the actual cultural and artistic moment in Europe as it was best exemplified by the following thesis:

"The formal facade of linguistic coherence in its totality cannot today have any other value of meaning but the one exclusively relative, as opposed to absolute, and it cannot aspire to suggest or reveal one truth, one and only truthful image of reality. The reality is too complex, diversified, contradictory, with too many meanings to be encapsulated in one linguistic-stylistic code... Therefore the meaning passes the frontiers of globality of the stylistic code and linguistic grammaticism, and the language in its new dimensions acquires a

²⁸⁴ Kalajić started his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade, and graduated from Accademia di Belle Arti in Rome in 1966.

plentitude of motivations, one polyphonic possibility of meaning that are completely new..."²⁸⁵

This polyphony of voices, accent on the content over predominant formal issues in artistic language had opened up the possibility for incorporation of different layers of reality and the whole new vocabulary of symbols derived from different registers into his multi-segmented structure paintings.

Kalajić's ideological position was profiled towards the mid seventies, and he started to act as mediator and interpreter of the new tendency he coined with the term "The Renewal of Paining". He curated the exhibition with the same title in the Gallery of the Cultural Center of Belgrade at the end of the 1973 and the beginning of 1974. In the preface of the catalogue, Kalajić has introduced the strong anti-modern orientation in his discourse and managed to create ideological platform not just for the likeminded critical voices but also for different groups of traditionally disposed painters. He interpreted the "New Figuration" of the sixties as the strong opposition to the dominant modernist doctrine that managed to: *"bring back the predominance of meaning over the sign and submission of the means of visual arts to the goals of social engagement, thus making the painting inseparable from its social and historical ground, and finally reintegrating the idea and narration into painting"*²⁸⁶ and thus tried to make a link and logical development to "The Renewal of Painting" of the beginning of seventies. As opposed to the isolated and totalized self-referential parts of the integral image, that was the character of the modern art, he proposed the integral, traditional meaning and purpose of the

²⁸⁵ Enrico Crispolti, in the catalogue of the exhibition at the Gallery of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, 29th February- 17th March 1968.

²⁸⁶ Dragoš Kalajić, pref. cat. "The Renewal of Paining" Gallery of Belgrade Cultural Center, 28th December 1973 – 10th January 1974

painting, and called to centrist idea of humanity, to the “traditional order” and integral vision of the world. The “Renewal of Painting” was therefore for Kalajić to achieve this goal in spite and against the nihilism of the avant-garde art and to continue the tradition by encompassing and building upon the incompleteness and shortcomings of modernist painting into a higher order.²⁸⁷

In the society of the socialist self-management and ideology oriented more towards modernism and “internationalism”, Kalajić’s discourse relying on the theory of the autochthon genius and of the peoples and chosen individuals, as Stevan Vuković has remarked, had to be condemned to the very margins of the society as the relict of the pre-modern past.²⁸⁸

Kaljić’s discourse was greatly indebted to the thinkers like Oswald Spengler as he was trying to give evidence of the decline and degradation of the Western civilization. His quest for the authentic values of the Indo-European civilization, the European spiritualism, the ontological as opposed to ideological, the “internal human light as reflection of truth”, the contemplation against consumerism, have become the main focus in the cycle of paintings “In search for Hyperborea”²⁸⁹ and was articulated further till the exhibition “Northern Star”.²⁹⁰ The prominent motif in his paintings was the allegorical figure of the eagle, and Kalajić’s explanation is showing his ideological position at that point. He recognized the eagle as the greatest symbol

²⁸⁷ Ibid

²⁸⁸ See Stevan Vuković analysis in the text “Politics, Art and Problems with Reality”, *Balkan Umbrella* No.1 October 2001 (pp. 14-19), one of the rare if not the only example that tries to trace the ideological matrix behind the artistic strategy that was mostly just ignored by the art critics and art historians of the so called alternative scene in the nineties.

²⁸⁹ The exhibition under this title was held at the Salon of Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, 11th April- 7th May 1973

²⁹⁰ The exhibition held in the Gallery of the Belgrade Cultural Center, 20th February- 5th March 1979

of the fundamental values of European man. As crucial arguments, Kalajić claimed that even the national emblems and flags of socialist countries like Albania, the oldest Indo-European nation, and Poland, the youngest European group of Slavic people, have kept the great symbol of the eagle.²⁹¹

It is interesting that Kalajić was one of the first authors to start writing on the post-modern condition and the context it created in Serbia, and his discourse could be further followed on the exhibitions that he initiated such as: «Signs of post-modern art» (BITEF – Atelje 212, Belgrade, 1976); «Post-modernism in Belgrade» (Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade, 1982) and “New Figuration: the Sixties and the Continuity”, (Pavilion Cvijeta Zuzorić, Belgrade, 1984).

Kalajić has understood the term post-modernism and post-modern condition as the radical break with dominant features of modernist art and beginning of new period in art with new principles. Those main characteristics of the idea of modernism and modernization in broader context of society as well as in art he identified with the concepts of «progress», and «novum» - the fetishisation of the «new». He even contended that the post-modernism is not conceived by negations of modern art, on the contrary it comprises freedom and openness of diverse developments, including the incorporation and upgrading of the legacy of modernist art, but with different functions of expression and implementation. Finally, he noticed that one of the most important characteristics of the post-modernism is its openness that is best exemplified in the

²⁹¹ See the interview with Dragoš Kalajić by Dušan Đokić in the catalogue of the exhibition “Northern Star”, Gallery of the Belgrade Cultural Center, 20th February- 5th March 1979

pluralistic scenes of culture and society it creates.²⁹² The diagnosis of modernism and post-modernism that Kalajić has offered with these conclusions show big erudition and perceptiveness, that most of the thinkers who wrote on post-modernism would concur with. Albeit, when he starts with criticism of the internationalism of modern art, the strong anti-modern tone of his discourse is revealed in its true ideological position. Kalajić here put on the same level of meaning the international expansion of the modern art with the expansion of Coca-Cola or Hilton-Hotels. He argued that the global expansion of modern art was conducted by the system of influences and "black-mailing" with the aim of neo-colonial suppression and extinction of authentic, autochthones and specific local cultures as alternatives and establishment of the cultural hegemony of multinational capital. The internationalism for him meant the destruction of rich cultural diversities and uniformization, leveling down to one normative language of modernism. This situation for Kalajić has created the global crisis of the system of modern culture and civilization, and he saw the alternative in post-modernism that will bring back and revalorize the rich and versatile cultural specificities.

Kalajić located another major feature of modernism in the active problematization of the relation of the art and society that in great deal affected its theories, modes of functioning and methods of communication. The solution for the modernist complying with the demands of even most radical societies Kalajić saw in post-modern relativism, and speculative perspective on the societal processes always at the safe distance, independence and skepticism.²⁹³ Finally he contends that in principle: "*the post-modern spirit, as he calls it, is*

²⁹² Dragoš Kalajić in the preface of the catalogue of the exhibition «Post-moderna u Beogradu» (Post-modernism in Belgrade) Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade, 4-29 June 1982

²⁹³ Ibid

*immune to the fascinations of the 'society' or 'system' that attracted many protagonist of modern art with the strength of the magnet.”*²⁹⁴

Exactly with this claim Kalajić has latter fallen in the trap of his own believes that finally got recognized by the newly produced “society” in Serbia that shared the same “fascination” as the artist, and his discourse had provided with the theoretical elaboration of this ideological matrix.

In the nineties, when he was fully institutionalized, Kalajić has demonstrated all facets of his multi-talented persona, both as artist, prolific writer²⁹⁵ and media star²⁹⁶. As a member of the board of Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade Kalajić had a chance to elaborate his fully developed discourse with the exhibition entitled «The Balkans Origins in the Serbian Twentieth Century Painting»²⁹⁷, held in the Museum of Contemporary art in 1994 within the re-named «Belgrade summer festival» that year called «The First Meeting of the Spiritually Close Eastern-Christian Nations».

The author finally, and without any constraints and hesitation locates the roots of all the values of European spirituality that he was for years lamenting on, exactly on the soil of the Balkans, the cradle of all autochthones civilizations starting from Lepenski vir, the oldest civilization in Europe, to the great imperial Byzantine solemn culture.

²⁹⁴ Ibid

²⁹⁵ He started publishing books already in his twenties. His publications include: “The End of the World”, “American Evil”, “Europe Betrayed”, “Russia is Rising” and the most recent one “The Last European”.

²⁹⁶ He was running the show on art and culture, but also on “degeneration of Western civilization on private TV station called Palma (The Palm Tree), more famous for the promotion of turbo-folk singers as well as pornographic movies in late hours.

²⁹⁷ The Serbian word “Istočnici” as translated by Origins, in its etymology also indicates to the geographical and cultural meaning of East, used here to oppose the Western civilization. On the other hand it implies the even more crucial meaning of the Source of authentic and autochthon civilization(s) from the Balkans that are dating from the first, and the oldest one located in Vinča around 8000 BC. This Source is, and should be, the inspiration and cultural legacy for all Serbian artists, as Kalajić tried to show.

He tried to trace different genealogy of Serbian art as opposed to the dominant one informed by the "international" spirit of modern art of the twentieth century, the one of occidentalization of the whole world that destroys all the autochthones cultures by imposing of Western models upon them.²⁹⁸

With his by now well known strategy of demonstration of consistent links and logical developments in his thought, art practice and projects, Kalajić have traced the beginning of the latest movement towards the Balkan Origins of Serbian art exactly at his authors exhibition "The Renewal of Painting" and argued that this movement has opposed and provided alternative to the *"political-ideological tyranny of the exponents and agents of the American cultural imperialism mediated by the institutions and resources of official culture"*²⁹⁹

The author now made explicitly clear that the main reason for the degeneration of the finest European cultural and human values have fallen down with the dislocation of the center of Western civilization to the United States of America. The "internationalism" of the modern art with its movement from Paris to New York has therefore lost its "historicistic" and cosmopolitan curiosity and became polluted by the American consumerist culture of cruel capitalism and commercialization of art.³⁰⁰

The final redefinition of the Kalajić's discourse, now adjusted to the demands of the actual political moment, had embraced the cultural matrix produced by the wave of political populism and connected it to the anti-modern tendencies of the Serbian painting thus rejecting its

²⁹⁸ Dragoš Kalajić's preface in the catalogue of the exhibition «The Balkans Origins in the Serbian Twentieth Century Painting», Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade, August - September 1994

²⁹⁹ Ibid

³⁰⁰ Ibid

own international referential points. Its final mutation had managed to shift the critical edge of his analysis of the globalization and neo-colonialization process, radical centrist “call to order” and restitution of the fundamental European humanistic values, and fit into the: *“paranoid picture of the Serbian autochthonous spirituality, forever jeopardized by the conspiracy of world capital, Masonry, the communist international and Vatican, materialized in the coordinated anti-Serb work of all world secret services, implemented – in the sphere of art – by the activities of the modern, post-modern, and particularly avant-garde artists as their mercenaries”* as Stevan Vuković has pointed out.³⁰¹

What at certain point could have been read as the criticism of the neo-liberal policy in the process of globalization and condemnation of consumerist culture was reduced to the “conspiracy theory” by global invisible power structures. What could have been seen as the first analysis of the post-modernism from the position of critique of essentialism and normativism of the modernist doctrine, ended up with the strong pre-modern and anti-modernist disposed exploration of national tradition and cultural heritage informed by the “theory of the oldest civilization” and eventually by the theory of the race with still fresh “biological potential”³⁰²

Dragan Malešević – Tapi

While Milić Stanković and Dragoš Kalajić started as very promising young painters, another important figure in the circle of

³⁰¹ Stevan Vuković, “Politics, Art and Problems with Reality”, *Balkan Umbrella* No.1 October 2001, (p. 17)

³⁰² Here Kalajić quotes Emil Cioran

publically most present Serbian artists of the nineties, Dragan Malešević – Tapi (1949-2002)³⁰³ had a very different career path. He graduated from the Faculty of Economy and was living in many different countries around the globe doing all kind of businesses. He started his sudden career as a painter in 1987,³⁰⁴ and according to his interviews became one of the seven leading painters of hyperrealism and exhibited worldwide before his Belgrade debut. After his first solo show in Belgrade in 1991³⁰⁵ he started to draw public attention to his work but his very frequent media exposure was mainly in different TV shows featuring clairvoyants and extra senses, with the topic of occultism, esoteric science, mysticism, freemasonry, all kind of cults, as he was recognized as an 'expert' on the field. He publicly claimed that he was a reincarnation of one famous Dutch painter of seventeenth century, that he had a high rank in the Serbian freemasons society, and he was never hiding his juvenile delinquency³⁰⁶, and relation to criminal circles³⁰⁷. He mirrored in his public appearances all the "virtues" that the audience in a Serbian pathological society of the nineties wanted to see, and expected a "celebrity" to represent. And indeed, he was the most famous of all

³⁰³ Malešević died from heart attack in the police precinct when he was taken in for interrogation in relation to the assassination of the police general Boško Buha in 2002.

³⁰⁴ Malešević later in many interviews confirmed that he had many unsuccessful attempts to enter the Belgrade art scene from 1977 onwards, but till 1990 he was never accepted at any competitive exhibition that had jury selection. For example in the interview with Mirjana Bobić-Mojsilović in Duga, 8.7.1993

³⁰⁵ It was held in the "Yugoslav Gallery of Art Works" in 1991 and according to press reports had more then 60.000 visitors.

³⁰⁶ His nickname Tapi was shortened slang word "Tapkaroš" – the people that sell tickets for cinema at double price before the screenings. He forged the first document in the fourth grade of Elementary school giving to his friend "medical confirmation" for the absence from school. He was later famous for forging documents like train tickets and managed to make business out of it.

³⁰⁷ He was a good friend with Željko Ražnatović - Arkan with whom, and two other friends he was running the popular nightclub "Amadeus" in mid eighties in Belgrade.

artists publicly, and in the late nineties he was even running a TV school for painters.

While the successful public promotion of his persona was mainly focusing on the mystification of his biography and connaisance of very popular topics in the society of crisis, when he was speaking on the marketing strategy and commercial success of his work, unlike so many others nationally disposed artists he showed a very pragmatic and "demystifying" approach. He claimed that making paintings is the same as any other job, similar to any other trade:

*When, exactly ten years ago, I decided to become a painter, a new thoroughly the way of global financial flows, because I was in business at that time. I didn't decide to work as a painter to make profit out of this profession because I was already rich man... But, I new how the system works and how to enter it and make everything I managed to make.*³⁰⁸

He has explained that he new how the art market as any other business works, and that he new how to get into the Gallery circles in New York, and also into business circles to be able to penetrate big multinational companies that later purchased his paintings.³⁰⁹

His behavior in public and fast rise of his popularity has become the ethical problem for the art critics and art historians of the "alternative scene", and they were mostly confused with such a phenomenon and didn't know how to deal with it. At first, the reaction was just the one of silence and ignoring, but when his position in the official art scene, and his popularity in media proclaimed him as one of

³⁰⁸ Interview with Verica Dukanac in «Ekonomaska Politika» 10.2.1997

³⁰⁹ Malešević claimed that he was selling his works for 100.000 dollars and that world celebrities and statesman like George Bush have his works. Interview in "Ilustrovana Politika" 23.3.1992

the most successful and respected Serbian painters in broader public's opinion, the experts on the field were challenged to respond. This was one of the rare meeting points and public confrontation of arguments between the so called official and alternative scene, and the group of 15 art historians have signed an open letter of protest against Dragan Malešević - Tapi and his paintings and tried to disqualify it by art historical argumentation.³¹⁰ Malešević responded with an insulting advertisement in the popular newspapers "Telegraf" where he has shown the photo of the big pile of junk and ironically stated that the 15 renowned art historians, with their names listed, will guide the audience and explain that this junk is actually contemporary art, and that everyone is invited to make the contribution and become an artist whose work the experts would validate. It was obvious that the language used to analyze the work of Malešević was focusing on wrong issues, such as: the lack of academic education, the mistakes in compositions, or mass reproductive techniques where the authorship is questioned. What was missing was the actual media strategy that Malešević has developed and that was more important for his legitimization as an artist than the works themselves, the strategy that Mileta Prodanović compared with the one of Jeff Koons for example in the global art context.³¹¹

One of the rare texts that was trying to analyze the broader social context in which the strategy, and the ideology of Malešević was operating, was focusing on the distinction between the right and left wing ideology. The authors Branka Anđelković and Branko

³¹⁰ The letter was published it in weekly magazine "NIN", in November 1994

³¹¹ Prodanović, Mileta, Deep-Frozen Years (In-Between Yoghurt and Bulldozer) Belgrade Art Scene in the Magnetic Field of Politics – The Last Decade of the 2nd Millenium Balkan Umbrella No.1 October 2001

Dimitrijević³¹² argued that the letter of accusation of Malešević was driven by the ideological motive because for the opponents of the Serbian “political right wing”, he represented the whole degradation of values in the society in political, economical and above all moral crisis.³¹³ The signers of the letter used the authority of their professional expertise to state that Malešević was not an artist to be considered by any professional critic or art historian. While doing so, they didn’t try to position themselves ideologically or elaborate “the theory of representations” consisting of sophisticated ideological criticism as Anđelković and Dimitrijević suggested is the only option. On the contrary, they spoke from the «elevated» discourse of autonomous language of art grounded in modernist normative. The group of art historians failed in their confrontation with the dominant ideological matrix, reproduced by the artists like Malešević on two levels: first was to provide adequate theoretical and critical tools to analyze the ideologically well-defined practice of those artists, for example the one that would be informed by the system of representation, policy of exhibiting in the local political and economic context; and the other was to understand the potential of the public speech and media and to see that the limits of their language are the limits of their world as Anđelković and Dimitrijević pointed out paraphrasing Wittgenstein.³¹⁴ The irreconcilability of the cultural public sphere that two such opposed poles produced couldn’t have been confronted on the terrain of art debates, as the artists like Malešević were quite aware of the legitimizing processes in the society that

³¹² They were both working in the Soros Center of Contemporary Art from its foundation.

³¹³ Branka Anđelković, Branko Dimitrijević Problem of Historization of Art in Serbia in the Nineties in the Light of Proclaiming Right-Wing Artistic Practice to be "Non-Art", www.cyberrex.org

³¹⁴ Ibid

always looked for the public persons that would provide the legitimization for the society itself, and give them full support and media coverage. He knew exactly how to react and how to respond to his critics when he accused them for being:

*"...part of the campaign that is conducted in all post-communist countries with the final aim to completely debilitate the whole nations. This program was conceived already in 1985 in Venice, and behind it stand the most important people of the group Opus Dei, and the Jesuits secret service that is in charge of its dissemination."*³¹⁵

What was very important for Dragan Malešević - Tapi, but also for Dragoš Kaljić and Milić Stanković, in imposing themselves as genuine Serbian genius artists was their awareness of the role of media in self promotion and all of them embraced this opportunity to a great extent, unlike the artists from the "compulsory alternative" scene whose strategy of "resistance" to the dominant ideology was manifested in withdrawal from the "official" public and media spheres, engagement in strategy defined as active escapism, and production of the alternative "micro" public sphere through the alternative institutions, media and circles of people.

³¹⁵ Interview in "Politika Ekspres" 6.4.1995

- **ART AS THE CRITICAL REFLECTION OF THE SOCIAL SPACE - STRATEGIES OF ENTERING THE PUBLIC SPHERE:**

1. Stepping into the Public Sphere: city as a site of intervention

The shift in politics and culture in mid nineties

The socio-political, but also cultural climate in Serbia has drastically changed when Milošević has suddenly threatened to decline further support to Bosnian Serbs unless they sign the peace agreement of the so-called "Contact Group". When the leaders of Bosnian Serbs refused to do so, Milošević was forced to make one of the most delicate decisions during his rule, to cease all the official relations with Bosnian Serbs on the 4th of August 1994. The accusations from «Serbian patriots» were immediate, and they were coming from Bosnia as well as from Serbia. Milošević has therefore decided to create new strategy relying on the manipulative potential of the media, so the national TV got the instructions to change the policy of presenting the war in Bosnia that reached culmination. TV Belgrade, and other media controlled by the regime all of the sudden ignored the war in Bosnia which lead to such drastic examples of silence and not reporting on the events like the one in October 1994 when the military forces of Bosnian army in a commando attack near Sarajevo killed twenty people from the Serbian military staff, including four nurses. This case would otherwise be explored in all media for days for propaganda reasons, but now it was not mentioned at all, due to the new policy of peace that Milošević has turned to, and which lead to the end of war in Bosnia with the agreement signed by the leaders of all

sides in war in Dayton, Ohio in December 1995. Milošević had now identified with the new role of peacemaker, and «factor of stability on the Balkans» as the international media started to call him. This radical shift and the rejection of the politics of war had to have consequences on the social sphere as well, and new war had to be declared, the total war to the near past, as journalist Stojan Cerović has remarked. Some of the most radical allies of the regime, like the leader of Serbian Radical Party (SRS) Vojislav Šešelj had to be abandoned and discredited, or some of the most trusted members of SPS like the director of TV Belgrade Milorad Vučelić, or director of the newspapers Politika Živorad Minović had to be moved from their positions, as they were all identified in public with the nationalist policy of war.³¹⁶ The consequences were felt in the sphere of culture as well, and the pressure on the cultural institutions so visible in the first half of the decade has loosened. It is very interesting to note that exactly then in the mid-nineties, first sporadically and then more overtly, the socio-political sphere became the focus of reflection in the works of the generation of artists formed in this decade. As if the socio-political context of production of war had to be resolved, so that the delayed reaction of artists had to emerge, making up for the lacking of the immediate one. This period also marked the turning point in the careers and even in the artistic strategy of some of the most prominent Serbian artist active in the nineties (Apsolutno, Škart, Milica Tomić, Uroš Đurić, Zoran Naskovski, Tanja Ostojić, etc.) who shifted their work form aesthetical to ethical issues, but also from the more conventional media like painting and sculpture to the more conceptual use of the various media, i.e., new digital reproductive technology,

³¹⁶ Thompson, Mark, *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj, Bosni i Hercegovini*. Beograd: Medija centar Radio B92. 1995. (pp. 119-121)

video, or video-installations.³¹⁷ In this chapter I will analyze at length several paradigmatic strategies of the artists that started to critically reflect certain social issues in the public sphere, and who tried to break the boundaries of the isolation, and self isolation of the “alternative scene” and the separate cultural public sphere it produced for the very limited number of participants in it.

Urban context

A framework is required to show how and why cities develop particular meanings, and how these are constructed, interpreted and sustained. One approach is to think of city as a text, in the same way that a novel or film might be a text. This text has certain authors, is constructed in a particular way by various procedures and techniques, has a series of meanings embedded within it and is subject to forms of reading.

Savage and Warde

In order to be able to read the hidden meanings inscribed in the urban structures, to analyze different ‘chapters’ or layers superimposed in the historical marks of the city growth, we need first to specify and outline the appropriate interpretative framework. The first rather general premise that should be taken into account here is that the physical form of the cityscape could not be separated from the specific society in which it develops. Cities are therefore not just perceived as constituted of material artifacts, on the contrary, they

³¹⁷ The shift in work of some artists was probably the main reason for consequent international recognition of their art that resulted in the breakthrough on the European or even global art scene, mainly through their personal engagement and persistence.

are also seen as an open ground for the projection of ideologies, expression of cultural values and demonstration of power.

The organization and shaping of the city as well as the attribution of meaning to its different spaces could be understood as social processes. Spatial forms are therefore seen as social structures and the reorganization of urban space as a part of the full-scale social restructuring. In short, the space of the city is produced and reproduced and thus represents the site and the outcome of social, political, and economic struggle.³¹⁸ Following Henri Lefebvre's materialist approach, one might argue further that it is not only the physical space of the city that is being produced but also the social space. Spatial relations and spatial processes could be actually understood as social relations taking a particular geographical form; society is accordingly necessarily constructed spatially.³¹⁹ We therefore need to conceptualize space as constructed out of interrelations, as the simultaneous coexistence of social interrelations and interactions at all spatial scales, from the most local level to the most global.³²⁰ Lefebvre exactly saw the scientific potential of the use of social space as a tool for the analysis of the society in question.³²¹

To be able to unveil and deconstruct the meanings inscribed or connected to urban sites, we have to distinguish different layers superimposed on them. We could adopt the classification of Amos Rappaport who acknowledging the legacy of the classic triad of

³¹⁸ For this line of argument see for example: David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Blackwell, Cambridge MA & Oxford UK, 1990; Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, Verso, London New York 1989, and Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions - Art and Spatial Politics*, MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1988

³¹⁹ Doreen Massey, "Politics and Space/Time", in Keith, Michael and Steve Pile Eds. *Place and the Politics of Identity*, Routledge, London New York, 1996 (p. 145)

³²⁰ Ibid (p. 155)

³²¹ Lefebvre, Henri, *The Production of Space*, Blackwell, Cambridge MA & Oxford UK, 1991. (pp. 30-34)

Lefebvre ³²² recognized three different levels of meaning in the built environment reflecting: the world of cosmological, religious, etc. projections of producers; the class or cultural positions of producers; and the everyday use of space.³²³

The transformation and change is immanent to the development of each city. These processes are usually driven by growth, addition or demolition. The urban change that we are witnessing is often described in academic language as the shift from industrial to post-industrial, from modern to post-modern, from Fordist to post-Fordist.³²⁴ In the cities in (post) socialist countries (Savage and Warde classification) the process was induced by the change of mode of social production. After the fall of the Berlin Wall it took approximately two years for most of the countries of Communist ideology to pass the first phase of transition to post-communism. The second phase of transition that followed immediately afterwards, and was aiming for "new destinations" soon introduced all aspects of globalization on all social levels that in the more or less radical way influenced and determined the process of urban growth. The social space of those countries was marked by the similar problems like increasing level of unemployment, crisis of the system of values, a loss of former collective identity, commercialization and commodification, revival of ethno-nationalism and even resurgence of sympathy for the former political system, etc.³²⁵

³²² With the idea to link historicallity, sociality and spatiality, Lefebvre conceived his conceptual triad, the 'trialectics' which consists of: perceived space of materialised Spatial practice; the conceived space which is defined as Representations of space; and the lived Spaces of Representation.

³²³ Hall, Tim, *Urban Geography*, Routledge London and New York 2001, (p. 29)

³²⁴ Ibid (p. 2)

³²⁵ See Aleš Erjavec's introduction in Erjavec, Aleš Ed., *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition – Politicized Art Under Late Socialism*, Berkley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press 2003.

The question now is how to outline the process of urban growth and its specificities in SFR Yugoslavia that unlike other post-socialist countries had a different path in "transition", and especially in newly created FR Yugoslavia that is of our primary concern? Specific political context in SRJ in the nineties, i.e. the falling apart of the former SFRJ, the wars in vicinity, then the sanctions by UN, the hyperinflation measured in minutes and the economic collapse, created the situation of both outer and inner isolation under the rule of authoritarian regime. Unlike the cities where urban change was a slow but regulated process, Belgrade (but also other major cities and cultural centers like Novi Sad) had passed through a period of chaotic rule by Milošević and his oligarchy, and suffered from the consequences of bombing by NATO countries, when some of the landmarks of modernist architecture in the very urban core were destroyed or damaged. In the period of the 90's the master plan for urbanization of the city, which existed from Tito's epoch, was actually never considered, and illegal building, negligence and destruction underlined the process of urban change.

The produced socio-political frame was therefore dictating a specific set up in which the artists had to work. In the situation where the reaction was indolence and despair, Serbian artist were mostly choosing the strategy of *active escapism*³²⁶ and tried to withdraw from the political and social reality. On the other hand, there was a response by artist that couldn't bare the fact of the condition they were living in, so they formed different groups or associations whose aim was to engage into the political public sphere and to subtly subvert the dominant power structures in the cities.

³²⁶ Lidija Merenik, "No Wave: 1992-1995", in *Art in Yugoslavia 1992-1995*, B 92, Belgrade 1996

Since most of the official institutions were taken over by the authoritarian regime, and they were producing and reproducing the same nationalistic ideological matrix with the great support of media, the only space left for the production of "alternative" political as well as cultural public spheres that was left was the city, the streets. The strategy of oppositional parties comprising of the organization of mass rallies and demonstrations to keep the spirit of resistance among their followers intertwined with the protests of students and citizens. The culture of protests had culminated in 1996 and 1997 with three months long walks through the city in the "carnevalesque" atmosphere of urban rituals that were regarded as "para-theatrical" events.³²⁷ Students and artistic groups like Led art or Škart have used this rituals of protest walks to initiate different actions, performances and interventions.

Led art

The project «Frozen art»³²⁸ initiated by Nikola Džafo and organized by the Youth Cultural Center and Radio B92 was the first action of artists that immediately afterwards formed the group Led Art (Ice Art)³²⁹. The initial team that facilitated the event: Nikola Džafo, Dragoslav Krnajski and Gabriela Pajević have decided that the common exhibition space for all the participants would be the

³²⁷ See Čupić, Čedomir Ed. *Duh vedrine: Kultura protesta – protest kulture*, Beograd, Fakultet političkih nauka, 1998.

³²⁸ The project gathered 25 artists, from different generations and status like: Dragoljub Todosijević – Raša, Mrđan Bajić, Mileta Prodanović, Talent, Saša Marković – Mikrob, Vera Stevanović, Dejan Anđelković and Jelica Radovanović, Nikola Džafo, Gabrijela Pajević, Marija Ilić, Dragoslav Krnajski, Darija Kačić, Jovan Čekić etc.

³²⁹ The initial members were artists Nikola Džafo, Dragoslav Krnajski, art historian Gabriela Pajević, but later the group expanded and first artists from Novi Sad Dragan Živančević and Slobodan Vilček have joined.

refrigerator truck on minus twenty degrees centigrade, offered by agricultural corporation "PKB" as a production site for the works as well. The opening was held on 15th of May 1993 and the event was to last 24 hours. The idea was that after the exhibition all the exhibited art works remain frozen and preserved at the cold storage of "PKB" corporation thus creating a certain kind of gallery of «frozen art». Unfortunately the refrigerator truck that was used as "gallery" space had a malfunction during the night so that the art works were in the morning exhibited on the street and left to the process of melting. The reference of the project to the newly produced socio-political conditions in Serbia under the UN sanctions and in period when hyperinflation was rapidly raising was obvious, and it was treated as the change of state of aggregation of water – freezing and melting. The symbolic reading of this change could have both negative connotation of the brutality of the repressive and «frozen» social reality and positive, more optimistic reading of the status of hibernation where all remaining values will be kept from disappearance and destruction with hope of the new fresh start in the future.³³⁰

This project was groundbreaking for the establishment of the group Led Art and the principle of their action, but moreover, it was a symbolic start of the strategy of reaction to the social reality by a big group of artists on the «alternative scene». Instead of withdrawing from the public sphere and indulging themselves in «active escapism» they introduced another strategy on the scene, the one of «activist realism», where realism was not referring to reproduction of reality,

³³⁰ As Gabriela Pajević have argued. The quotation of her statement in the text of Predrag Kočović "'Rekonstrukcija zločina' ili rekonstrukcija smisla na Balkanu" in, Grginčević, Vesna Ed. *Led art 1993 – 2003 dokumenti vremena*" Beograd: MMC Led art 2004, (p. 17)

but direct and overt facing and problematizing of the brutal social reality.³³¹

The group Led art thus immediately chose not to emphasize the production of aesthetic objects or art works, but the conceptually determined and politically biased art action against the dominant ideology and the reality it has constructed.³³² For them the dilemma of the possibility of artistic creation, expression and exhibiting in such socio-political conditions was solved by the engagement in artistic provocation and not aesthetisation.³³³ The aesthetic aspect of the work of art was of course not neglected, and there were many artists that have joined the actions of Led art whose artistic language was exactly of this provenance, but in the broader context of the group strategy it acquired different connotation, it was used as a text to convey the message, or just as the symbolic presence of the artists in question.³³⁴

Once the group Led art was formed it has established certain principles of action and manifesto like statements on the goals and strategies of the group. It was always open for any kind of artistic orientation and it insisted on two major points: communication with artists of different individual expression, and on the urban realm as a space for actions and interventions.³³⁵ Throughout the nineties the group has organized and facilitated numerous actions in different

³³¹ Ibid. (p. 14)

³³² Miško Šuvaković, "Fragmenti o tragovima umetnosti, ideologije i politike" in Grginčević, Vesna Ed. *Led art 1993 – 2003 dokumenti vremena*, Beograd: MMC Led art 2004, (p. 10)

³³³ Milena Dragičević – Šešić, "Etika u okviru poetike", in Grginčević, Vesna Ed. *Led art 1993 – 2003 dokumenti vremena*, Beograd: MMC Led art 2004, (p. 24)

³³⁴ Predrag Kočović "Rekonstrukcija zločina' ili rekonstrukcija smisla na Balkanu" in, Grginčević, Vesna Ed. *Led art 1993 – 2003 dokumenti vremena* Beograd: MMC Led art 2004, (p. 15)

³³⁵ Gabrijela Pajević, "Zašto 'zamrznuta umetnost'" *Vreme – Vreme zamrzavanja*, 17th of May 1993, reprinted in Grginčević, Vesna Ed. *Led art 1993 – 2003 dokumenti vremena* Beograd: MMC Led art 2004, (p. 29)

venues in the cities of Novi Sad and Belgrade, but also in many smaller and provincial cities in Serbia.

From the variety of actions and events I would discern three possible strategies towards the social sphere, and three different ways of engagement in the public sphere with possible symbolic titles: Urban rituals, Playing with the symptoms, and Laughter as a cure.

- The strategy described as "Urban rituals" comprised of direct actions during the demonstrations and student's protests against regime. Different actions such as: "Mirror against the cordon"³³⁶, "S.O.S. for the president"³³⁷ or "Incidental graphics – Reconstruction of crime"³³⁸ were reactions to the actual political events and were organized as provocative comments and interaction with the repressive forces of the regime, or the president himself.

Similar to this strategy was the one of events that simulated the social reality or represented the metaphorical situations with reference to the traumatic real. One of the most successful actions was called "Kunstlager".³³⁹ The group has organized a whole scenario of an

³³⁶ After the stolen elections in November 1996 the opposition and the students had organized the walks of protest that lasted almost three months. On December 26th the Police has formed a cordon in one narrow street in the center to prevent the demonstrators to pass by. The reaction was the formation of the cordon against the police cordon. The group Led art has organized on 21st of January 1997 the action "Return them the image (Mirrors against the cordon)" and approached the police officers in the cordon with mirrors so that they could see "the reflection of power".

³³⁷ On February 11th the group has organized with the students the street performance of carrying the safety belt made of ice, and were heading to the assembly to give it as a present to president Milošević, but the police has stop them in their walks.

³³⁸ The project was initiated in 1994 and it comprised of the use of police method of marking the contours of the victim by white chalk on the ground, as the way of "cure" for the potential victims the group has recognized among the citizens that reacted to their poll. This method of incidental drawing was later used in most of the future projects like during the demonstrations on 18th of February as the reaction to the incidents on the "Branko's bridge" when the police has brutally attacked and beaten the demonstrating citizens.

³³⁹ Art – Concentration Camp would be the closest translation. The event was held on the 29th of February

“interactive allegorical play”³⁴⁰ in Novi Sad and reconstructed the concentration camp in the Catholic churchyard. The action comprised of two parts, the one for the day was called “Arbeit macht frei” and the one for the night “Gas Chamber”. While during day all the participants in the action were surrounded by the barbwire and in a kind of street spectacle have engaged in the “regular activities” of a camp, in the evening the group has organized the exhibition of documentary photos of their activities and the projection of video footage from the daily events.³⁴¹ After the isolation by the UN, the repression of the Serbian regime, the action could be read as metaphor for the existing ways of incarceration of the citizens, but also as the creation of the third possible level of confinement - the one of self-isolation.

- The title “Playing with the symptoms” could be used for the actions that had as a goal deconstruction and demystification of newly recycled national myths and their urban reference points. The most illustrative project was the one of “Vinča Waste”³⁴², whose symbolic was multifaceted, referring to many different ways of identification offered by the Serbian society. The group has recognized this location as the symptom of the “Balkan syndrome” of social and political deviations.³⁴³ Vinča is archeological site, the place of tradition that had to be preserved and the location of the culture from the Neolithic period of around 8000 BC, where the traces of a possibly first recorded alphabet was found. In the actual media campaign it was used as an argument for the claim that Serbs are not only the “Heavenly people”

³⁴⁰ As formulated by Predrag Kočović

³⁴¹ See the text of Jovan Despotović “Greetings from Serbia” in *Republika*, 16th to 31st of March 2000, reproduced in Vesna Ed. *Led art 1993 – 2003 dokumenti vremena*, Beograd: MMC Led art 2004, (pp. 197-198)

³⁴² The expedition was conducted on the 31st of October 1997 and it was directly initiated by the article in the newspaper “Dnevni telegraf” that the dead body of the baby was found on the Vinča city waste.

³⁴³ See the text “Ekspedicija 1 – Deponija Vinča” in Grginčević, Vesna Ed. *Led art 1993 – 2003 dokumenti vremena*, Beograd: MMC Led art 2004, (pp. 142-145)

but also the oldest literate nation. Vinča also symbolized the best national scientific institute, the pride of the socialist period, but now it was the place of the nuclear radioactive waste the institute had to dispose. Finally, as the suburb of Belgrade, Vinča was also the city waste disposal unit.³⁴⁴ The expedition that was organized by the group to Vinča had as the goal the "discovery" of the materials (waste) that could be recycled and used in artistic actions, and they actually gathered and "branded" different items such as choke, T-shirts, cans, soaps etc. On the event of the "Fair of Second-hand use and Unrecognized Inventions" held in Cinema Rex from 30th November to 1st December 1997 the products of the recycled waste by the group Led art, the result of their "artistic-scientific expedition" to Vinča waste, were exhibited and offered for sale. The products like "Incidental chalk", "Black water", "Life saver soap" etc. were packed in the designed wrapping and ironically placed into the context of the market, later being exhibited in the Belgrade Cultural Center Gift Shop "Beoizlog" as souvenirs from Belgrade.³⁴⁵

- The performances of the group in mid nineties, in the period when they participated in the creation of the NGO Center for Cultural Decontamination³⁴⁶ (CZKD) and took part in their activities had a bit brighter, humorous tone and could be titled "Laughter as a cure". These performances like "Ko was šiša" were self-ironizing, sarcastic comments with the use of slang in the titles. The performance of ritual haircut of 20 critical intellectuals and artist took place on the huge

³⁴⁴ Milena Dragičević – Šešić, "Etika u okviru poetike", in Grginčević, Vesna Ed. *Led art 1993 – 2003 dokumenti vremena*, Beograd: MMC Led art 2004, (p. 24)

³⁴⁵ Ibid

³⁴⁶ The Center for Cultural Decontamination was opened on the first of January 1995, exactly at noon with the sound of the sirens and the performance of the group Led art. The CZKD was run by a team lead by Borka Pavićević in cooperation with Led art until they left the space on the 17th of May 1996 because of the wish to change more static confinement of the Pavilion Veljković for the more dynamic, active and broader urban realm as it was initially decided and declared by the group.

chair that Nikola Džafo had made for a theatre play in the CZKD, but the actual slang meaning of the sentence was the statement that “we don’t give a damn about you”, about the regime and we found our own space, we have produced our own platform and the public sphere for the expression of ideas.

Urbazona

The project URBAZONA was conceived by Miomir Grujić – Fleka (1954-2003)³⁴⁷, one of the most prominent protagonists of the Belgrade art scene of the eighties when the urban culture and the sub-cultural happenings in the city were very resonant and dynamic. In the nineties, due to the big demographic changes³⁴⁸ and mostly with the wave of populism the elements of folklore and rural culture have effected the life in the city, and the role of media, especially of new private TV stations like “Pink” was to indulge the wider population with this new tendency described as “turbo folk” music. The culture of “new wave” of the eighties, so present in the city had disappeared and the other sub-cultural phenomena were in big retreat. One of the major aims of the project URBAZONA was to reinstall and preserve the lost urban sensibility and sub-cultural values of the city life and to create a platform for many individuals that were marginalized to be able to present their work in the public sphere.

The project URBAZONA has lasted from 1993 to 1995 and it

³⁴⁷ Miomir Grujić - Fleka was a painter, visual artists and one of the initiators of the Club at the Academy of Fine arts, the space of many alternative cultural events, concerts etc. Due to his illness he was gradually losing eye vision and in the nineties he was almost blind when he initiated the project URBAZONA. He was the author of the cult radio broadcasting on Radio B92 called “Šišmiš radio” (Bat Radio).

³⁴⁸ Approximately 250.000 young and educated people have left the country and more than 500.000 refugees have moved to Serbia from Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo.

facilitated the realization of thirty different actions, performances and exhibitions with more than ninety authors. It also consisted of other events like concerts, parties, fashion shows, different promotions, and radio programs thus creating an open platform for artist working in various media to join and even create projects together.

URBAZONA wanted to show artists that will represent exactly this "real" urban sensibility and be positioned clearly outside both the "show business kitsch art" of the official local cultural establishment of the moment, as well as the "third rate imitations of modern urban art"³⁴⁹ The movement was therefore just the platform and the mediator for the new ambient and spiritus movens of the gathering of all individual energies that will provide for and show existence of the system of values within its own parameters of urban sensibility, and not just fight and oppose the dominant populist cultural models. The author of the concept Miomir Grujić – Fleka in the manifesto of the project, or "the Manual for transmission and further broadcast" as he has called it,³⁵⁰ has put the objectives of the movement it in the following way:

"Envisaged as a collection centre of creative energies, as a meeting-point and asylum for all the ideas and expressive forms which, in the ruling circumstances, are not understood and are left with no chances to enter the public scene, the URBAZONE project aims for the promotion of such ideas and authors, as well as for the animation of new ones, potential participants, and finally the whole cultural audience. As the infusion in the blood-stream or the dying cultural organism, as a medicine against the illness of difficult

³⁴⁹ See Miomir Grujić – Fleka's text "URBAZONE - ENERGY 93, Manual for transmission and further broadcast." in the catalogue URBAZONA 1993-1995, Belgrade: Radio B92, 1995

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

*wakening, as a pill against apathy, lethargy and "letting go", as a Solomon solution for the global energetic crisis."*³⁵¹

Škart

The strategy of the artistic group Škart³⁵² was best explained with the phrase "the strategy of small steps".³⁵³ It comprised non-institutional actions in the social space and flooding the urban realm with printed items sealed as "Product of Škart": like the small editions of 30 to 50 copies of posters with enigmatic titles such as "R for Letter R" or "Bad", that were placed at random near the bookstores or on the facades of the old houses, secret passages, fences; or the leaflets that they spread around the city of Belgrade. The Škart production consisted of bibliophile editions of books-object, booklets, posters, flyers, coupons, small handmade cards etc. with recognizable minimalistic visual identity, and made from simple, cheap materials.

From the beginning of their activities the group has chosen the public realm of the city as the space for their actions and chose to communicate mainly with the "accidental" audience, the passers by and citizens they have met during their distributions of the products. The exhibitions and performances they held were mainly organized in private houses, in the province, or at the Faculty of Architecture, thus deliberately orienting their work outside of the established galleries

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Škart could be translated as scraps or waste. It was conceived as the art group in the 1990 and consists of Đorđe Balmazović & Dragan Protić both graphic designers and architects, Vesna Pavlović, photographer and "camera-women", who left the group in 1995 but remained the permanent collaborator, and Boris Mladenović, composer and painter, who joined in 1996.

³⁵³ Mileta Prodanović, "Strategija malih koraka", *Projekat*, Magazine for Visual Arts, No. 3, Novi Sad, July 1994., pp. 16-17

and Museums system. Even if they took part in the group exhibition in galleries, the same works were placed outside the gallery space in the city at the same time, and were always distributed to the visitors during the openings.

After first series of printed matter with cryptic, enigmatic messages, the group got interested into the different communicative aspects and potential for their projects, and new strategies of dissemination and distribution thus opening up the new perspective with inclusion of different media. The project "Škart Wishes You a Nice Day", realized on weekly basis throughout the whole year, combined the circulation of posters in the city of Belgrade accompanied with radio messages. The platform for announcement of the textual content of the posters was the Radio B92 with the Škart-news, and it was followed by spreading out of the posters into the city and sending them to the institutions worldwide.

In 1992, Škart has started with the edition of small hand made cardboard booklets called Sadness³⁵⁴ always containing the text written by the group in the form of the poem. The first among many to follow, were the "Sadness of the Potential Consumer" distributed in front of the big markets that due to the economic crises looked empty and depressive, and the "Sadness of Potential Travelers"³⁵⁵ spread out at the railway station where the traffic was limited to local lines because of the UN sanctions. The whole action had started with the

³⁵⁴ The Sadness were produced from December 1992 till August 1993 each week, if the lack of money for production didn't prevent the weekly rhythm.

³⁵⁵ "The sadness of potential travelers" contained the following verses:

travelers
do not travel.
something takes them away
and brings them back.
(changing places
is not traveling).
travelers
travel sadly.

proclamation of "The Attempted Killing of Belgrade" on several radio stations and in different newspapers, magazines and journals, and with it Škart has started their silent comments on the social sphere. The series followed with the sadness of potential winner, sadness of potential vegetables, sadness of potential return, sadness of potential hell, sadness of potential friendship, sadness of potential rifles, sadness of potential field... thus making the public declaration of the personal, intimate sadness of the citizens, of the "public" they chose to communicate too. With the series of Sadness Škart had opened, as Mileta Prodanović remarked: *"new intimate discourse at the meeting point of poetry and visual arts, and inaugurated not intrusive whisper on the surface of everywhere present shouting"*.³⁵⁶

The next step in Škart's production was the strategy of active engagement in the public sphere against the repressive measures of the regime, and it was best demonstrated with the project "Accused" (I Am Not Guilty) that was dedicated to a certain girl Mirjana who was charged for "public disturbance" because she was selling pro oppositional journal "Vreme" on the streets. Škart responded fast to this accusation with the production of printed cards with the name of the girl, stating, "I am not guilty" that the "accused" was able to hand out to the judge, prosecution and officials of the court at the trial. The action of Škart included the widest possible distribution of the posters with the photo of the accused girl and her statement, thus raising the public attention to this "legal case", shaping up the public opinion and raising public dissent against such measures of the government.

This strategy had been demonstrated during the students' protests in 1997 when the police cordon has blocked one of the central streets of Belgrade to prevent the students to reach the building of the

³⁵⁶ Prodanović, Mileta, "Sažeta likovna scena" *Vreme*, 24th of January, 1994.

Parliament. The students' action organized on 19th of January was called Students' Cordon Against Cordon and initiated the new kind of protest that turned into carnivalesque demonstrations in front of the police cordons with thousands of students and citizens gathering for eight days until the cordon has finally withdrawn. The Škart action was conducted in early morning hours, when only the most persistent of the demonstrators have stayed to face the police, and the group then distributed the "Permit for the Free Walk in All Directions" to them. The Permit was rubber stamped on cardboard and had a cord to be worn as a necklace.

In 1997 the Škart strategy of silent comments had culminated with the series under the title "Additional Survival-Coupons", for the purpose of consumption of things like fear, orgasm or relaxation, that alluded to the economic regulation in the period of crisis and the lack of some of the most important goods. The coupons were distributed with the leaflet containing the text with the instructions for the usage and dosage as if it were the medical recipe for coping with social reality.³⁵⁷

It is interesting that none of the posters and leaflets that Škart has made and spread through the city have had explicit political comments or political activist nature. They contained very subtle, puzzling and poetic sentences that outlined the sophisticated strategy of commenting on the social reality and entering the public sphere by "small steps". In the context of Serbian social space, their actions,

³⁵⁷ The text of the instruction was the following:

Instructions for use

Dosage

The amount is decided on according to diagnosis.

Repeat the treatment as often as considered necessary.

After use put the remaining coupons of flat surface in dry cool surrounding.

Further therapy indications

If the condition undergoes no change even after the prolonged treatment you will feel craving for the new coupons.

even though the political content was not explicit, had as a goal the creation of parallel public sphere, alternative to the dominant one that shaped the social reality.³⁵⁸ Škart was using methods and even visual language similar to different avant-garde movements to create situations of «resistance» to the dominant political sphere by paying tribute to «anonymous heroes» in the public life, by promotion of personal, intimate, ephemeral actions in everyday life, by emphasizing the aspect of public life that was mainly discarded in the time of great narrations of national renaissance. In the “*epical and slow*” culture, their choice for reduced expression, sustained action and “silent” presence in the public sphere contributed to “*the maintenance of the balance between avant-garde and the traditional*”.³⁵⁹ The strategy of Škart has helped in preserving the illusion of normal, bearable urban environment and fostered creation of an alternative public sphere, where many «marginal» voices could be heard, many micro-social spaces could be visible.

Apsolutno

Development of the association Apsolutno³⁶⁰ went from the site-specific reaction to particular features of a venue for exhibiting art, to the “socio-specific” research and intervention into the socio-

³⁵⁸ See the analysis of Branislav Dimitrijević in his text “The Grand Compromise: On the Examples of the Use of Political References in Serbian Art of the 90’s and its Historical Background, in Borčić, Barbara and Saša Glavan Eds. *Strategies of Presentation – The World of Art Anthology 2000/2001*, Ljubljana: SCCA Center for Contemporary Arts - Ljubljana, 2002.

³⁵⁹ Unpublished statement on Škart by the writer David Albahari.

³⁶⁰ The independent art association APSOLUTNO (Absolutely) was founded in 1993 in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia. The members of APSOLUTNO are Zoran Pantelić (1966), Dragan Rakić (1957), Bojana Petrić (1967) and Dragan Miletić (1970). The production of the association is a joint production and is signed APSOLUTNO, without any reference to personal names.

political, historical or cultural flows inscribed in the marks of certain site.³⁶¹ The projects they realized in the urban core of the city Novi Sad were therefore conceived in response to a stimulus they got from the political, sociological or cultural sphere of their immediate surroundings. They used several strategies and procedures of intervention on the specific sites. One is for example the insertion of a new sign over other existing signs, with the idea to "loosen" their essence and ideological message. The other strategy was the exposure and emphasizing of the specific paradoxical situation in the urban sites or locations with specific use or purpose. With all this operations, the idea of the intervention was to create a new contextual frame for the reading of the "absolutely real facts" with which association Apsolutno manipulates.

The project that would illustrate such a strategy is Absolutely temporary³⁶² realized in 1996. The location where the intervention took place is the bridge across the river Danube, which connects Petrovaradin and Novi Sad. The historical fact that is the motive for an investigation is that the bridge was built in 1945 as the temporary solution, until much better and more beautiful one replaces it. Eventually the bridge was never replaced and 42 years later in 1987 it was finally named "Marshal Tito's Bridge" and the plaque with this inscription was mounted to memorize the inauguration. It happened that the plaque after several years disappeared. The intervention of Apsolutno comprised a mounting and unveiling of the new plaque with the inscription "Absolutely Temporary". By doing it they made a metaphor for the temporality of ideological ideas that used the matrix of legitimization of the temporary urbanistic solution by the act of

³⁶¹ Stevan Vuković, Umetnicka asocijacija "Apsolutno": Projekti za kalendarsku 1995. godinu, *Projekat*, Magazine for Visual Arts, No. 7, Novi Sad, July 1996., pp. 94-97

³⁶² See the website www.apsolutno.org

covering it with the name and omnipotent shield of the "father of the community".

Another indicative project realized at the Fish Market in Novi Sad in 1995 was Absolute News(papers). The cite of investigation was the newsstand that was out of function, or to be more precise, changed its function with the brick wall built inside the stand. In the period of economic collapse and crisis in the country some people used this trick of occupying an existing space, like a news-stand, to avoid the legal way of getting allowance to build a small housing or other facility. The intervention of Apsolutno regarding this paradoxical situation was to put the sign NEWS(PAPER) on the door of the stand and "reactivate" it with this symbolic act. With the sign NEWS(PAPER) the whole situation, gained a completely different connotation.

Further step in contextualizing the given specific local socio-political and cultural frame was the project called "United Artists Under Sanctions" (UA!US).³⁶³ It is an association with the aim of exchange of ideas by artists from the countries punished by the international community by being put in "quarantine". UA!US deals with the position of the artist within the closed society where the even worse sanctions come from within. Therefore the idea of the different projects by UA!US is to particularly emphasize the importance and responsibility of the artist's critical attitude towards that society in question.

³⁶³ (UA!US) was founded by art association APSOLUTNO and p.RT in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia in 1998.

2. Identity politics

The question of personal vs. social identity

Both Marx and Freud asserted in their theory that identity -our sense of ourselves as individuals and as social beings - is constructed through structural processes rather than being predetermined. The implication for both was that there are no necessarily universal or unchanging attributes of human identity, but that differentiation and movement between identities is characteristic of modern societies.³⁶⁴ Drawn from this assertion is the conclusion that the social (political) identities are subject of construction. To understand this process of construction, we should take into account the psychoanalytic category of identification with its explicit assertion that there is a lack at the root of any identity. Because of the originary lack of identity, one needs to identify with something and assume an identity.³⁶⁵ How could we possibly think of the personal, self-identity beyond the social conditions that interfere and influence its formation? There is always two ways alley between the personal, individual and the social and public. The interdependence lies in the type of society, the socio-political constrains and the way the public sphere is being produced.

One way of engagement into the public sphere is through the realm of identity politics. In the process of constructing identity it is important how individuals (artists) define their own spaces and experience them. According to Liz Bondi, one of the most important manifestations that relates to identity politics is the dichotomy

³⁶⁴ Liz Bondi, "Locating Identity Politics", in Keith, Michael and Steve Pile Eds. *Place and the Politics of Identity*, Routledge, London New York, 1996. (pp. 85, 86)

³⁶⁵ Laclau, Ernesto Ed. *The Making of Political Identities*, Verso, London New York, 1994 (p. 3)

between the public and private sphere. The social tension between this dichotomy is emphasized from the point of view of class analysis, as well as from feminist analysis, and for both socialists and feminists the private sphere can serve to conceal oppression from those who are submitted to it.³⁶⁶ Either one of these approaches has the problem of relying on the already given categories of class, sexual orientation, or race, ethnicity, and therefore implies that identity needs to be unveiled and analyzed as if it is fixed and not the question of change, formation. When talking about construction of the identity, Ernesto Laclau reminded us that we have to be aware that identification is never fixed and finished process, and it comprises always the constitutive outside to which one needs to relate and position him/herself that prevents the terminal closure of this process.³⁶⁷

The strict polarization of the public / private dichotomy needs to be questioned and deconstructed, especially through a problematization of identity, and reconceptualization of identity politics. In doing so the post-structuralist theorists strongly relied on spatial terms of reference and with the reconceptualization of identity politics emphasized the need to relativise and also to spatialize our understanding of the common categories of identity like class, gender, nationality, ethnicity, etc.³⁶⁸ I am therefore analyzing here the notion of private in terms of personal, intimate space of the self, without relation to the economic determinism mostly implied in the analysis of public / private dichotomy.

³⁶⁶ Liz Bondi, "Locating Identity Politics", in Keith, Michael and Steve Pile Eds. *Place and the Politics of Identity*, Routledge, London New York, 1996. pp. 90-93

³⁶⁷ See for example in Laclau, Ernesto Ed. *The Making of Political Identities*, Verso, London New York, 1994

³⁶⁸ Liz Bondi, "Locating Identity Politics", in Keith, Michael and Steve Pile Eds. *Place and the Politics of Identity*, Routledge, London New York, 1996. (p. 97)

Through the lens of historical geography's analysis of the personal space or 'spatialized selfhood' it is clear that the relationship of body and individual is socially distinctive. The very emergence of the modern individual is linked to the 'textualisation of the self' which is especially seen in the flourishing of diaries and autobiographies, but also as legal personae in the early modern period.³⁶⁹ As Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift argue, «*the person is reshaped in time and space, and defined as an individual through particular spatialities of existence*».
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With the advent of the informational era, our self is increasingly connected to the world through the screen. Friedrich Kittler even acknowledged that the 'modern self' was created through mediating technologies and thus through not being self-present.³⁷¹ One of the effects of this development is that the self could be shaped through textual forms – into the narrative form of a life-like story that produced a very particular sense of agency.³⁷² Another aspect of connecting one self to the world and expressing in the public sphere is through different objects that create the senses of the self; through personal memorabilia and their collection in the forms of material maps, or 'autotopographies' as Gonzalez coined them.

The issue of identity politics as seen through the theoretical approach of Laclau and Mouffe in the theory of radical democracy has its analogues on the scale of the society and is exemplified in the politics of spatialization. Like the acquiring of fixed personal identity, the society is also 'impossible' because it can't be closed without its

³⁶⁹ In reference of A.R. Stones idea, as analyzed in Crang, Mike and Nigel Thrift, *Thinking Space*, Routledge 2001. (p. 8)

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ See Kittler, Friedrich, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press. 1999.

³⁷² Crang, Mike and Nigel Thrift, *Thinking Space*, Routledge 2001. (p. 9)

constitutive outside. Politics of spatialization is therefore possible because 'society has no basis' so it is bound to fail in the attempt to unite different spaces and their constitutive outside into the space of the society.³⁷³ In political theory, one of the first to introduce this line of argumentation was Claude Lefort and by describing this logic of society spatial dimension, as I have already analyzed, and outlined the emergence of the public space.

The loss of collective identity

The question of identity and identification has been one of the most frequently raised in the European post-communist countries since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The shift in ideology and dominant social paradigm were very strong social factors that started reshaping the social space of these countries, and resulted in serious inner confrontations of citizens. The period needed to accept the process of transition was very long and had its ups and downs in most of the countries of the region that respectively became members, or still are becoming candidates for joining the European Union.

The case of former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was the most specific because the transition didn't occur in the peacefully way. The wars were strongly affecting the development of the newly formed states, and one of the most particular cases was the case of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that passed the period of complete isolation from 1992 till 1995 due to the sanctions from UN, and finally

³⁷³ See the analysis of Oliver Marchart, *Art, Space and the Public Sphere(s)*. Some basic observations on the difficult relation of public art, urbanism and political theory, from: Andreas Lechner / Petra Maier (Ed.), *Stadtmotiv**, Wien: Selene 1999, <http://www.eipcp.net/>

in 1999 was bombed by NATO countries which devastated its already weak economy and infrastructure.

When the old communist systems of values and the ideology of 'brotherhood and unity' collapsed, the changes in collective identity were inevitable. The newly formed oligarchy that came to power abused the fact that citizens needed to acquire a new identity, and to identify either with political, national or other programs and goals. In this situation, when the question of collective identity became blurred and confusing for most of the citizens, it was very easy to turn to the over emphasized national identity and 'rediscovery' of national, and ethnic identity as being 'older' than the ones of other neighboring nations. The proof for this claim was found in rich national history, so the process of recirculation of national myths, mainly from the Serbian Medieval Empire, started to shape strongly the public opinion through all media. History was therefore "*understood as the active force that determines the roots of nations, nurtures the constitutive myths of ethnic communities and strengthens the national identities*"³⁷⁴ As a matter of fact, it was this big wave of ethno-nationalism and populism that brought Slobodan Milošević to power as the exponent of the doctrine of "national revival" conceived by the Serbian intellectuals. The pathological milieu that was soon produced was marked by the strong authoritarian politics, national-chauvinism, warlike spirit, hate speech in media and xenophobia. The socio-political context in the country was strongly influencing the citizens and was forcing them to choose whether to conform and identify to this dominant wave; to oppose it; or to try to ignore it by withdrawing themselves from the social sphere.

³⁷⁴ Božidar Slapšak, «Promene prošlosti u društvu koje se menja», *Republika*, no. 64/1993. 15-31. March (p. 16)

The brutality of the social reality was very traumatic for the artists and therefore the immediate reaction to the social conditions was delayed till the mid nineties when some of the most prominent Serbian artists started to reflect the problem of loss of identity and the confusion of citizens that couldn't find their response to this situation. Among the first paradigmatic art works that was addressing the issue of identity and identification were the video installations by Milica Tomić – "XY Ungeloest" in 1997 and "I am Milica Tomić" in 1999. While the first work was highly politically motivated where the artists identified with the Albanian victims killed in the demonstrations in Kosovo, the second work was more theoretically dealing with the issue of arbitrariness of the national identity formation through an statement of belonging to a numerous nations expressed in their language. It may be said that this work dealing with the problem of identity and identification (national in this case) opened up the discourse on the Serbian art scene, and that several younger artists took upon this problem in all of its ramifications.

Autonomism

From another perspective we could argue that the key problem for the artists of the era of modernism was how to achieve identity in regard to the social reality, cultural codes and art history. In order to resolve it, the artists faced the eternal dilemma whether to preserve his/her inviolable integrity or to surrender, yield to the profane requests of the society. The artist was thus always facing the choice whether to be the True or the False Self, where the True Self is brought in connection with spontaneous gesture and personal idea,

whereas, opposed to it, the False Self leads to a feeling of unreality, or to the state of futility ³⁷⁵. The distinction can also be articulated through the duality of the terms avant-garde - kitsch, where avant-garde operates through vital plastic values that make the work of art breathe, whereas kitsch creates the effect of social identification. For the modernist artist art is, in its essence, an issue of self-identification and individualization, and he/she is interested only in the "unique identity of art". ³⁷⁶

For a postmodern artist, however, the problem of socialization imposes itself as an equally important problem of individualization, self-realization. His/her approach changes in that the identity that he/she achieves is not exclusively conditioned on innovation of forms, the aesthetic sublimity of the work of art or the ontological reflection of art as a phenomenon. Contrary to this, the artist becomes an observer and active decoder from all spheres of society, whose codes he manipulates. Art history also becomes one of the possible sources from which the artist takes ready models, giving them new meaning, introducing them into new contextual games, thus expanding the tradition of appropriation initiated by Duchamp with the idea of the ready-made.

One of the most interesting and conceptually defined attitudes regarding the socio-political milieu of Serbia of the nineties was coined "Autonomism" by the initiators Uroš Đurić and Stevan Markuš. In March 1994 they produced the manifesto of Autonomism to support their attitude and standpoint where they declared that the term is derived from the notion of autonomy understood as obedience to one's

³⁷⁵ The term is from the text of D.W. Winnicott, "Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self" as interpreted in the context of art theory by Donald Kuspit in the text "Critics, Primary and Secondary" in Joachimides, M. Christos and Norman Rosenthal, *American Art in the 20th Century*, Munich: Prestel, 1993.

³⁷⁶ The notion of Clement Greenberg from his influential book *Art and Culture*

own laws where the first principle is the personal principle.³⁷⁷ The motif that they chose as the logical one that fits the personal principles of Autonomism was the self-portrait that would encompass all the personal "confessions, fantasies, frustrations, dreams, acquaintances, intellect and the author's being itself".³⁷⁸ The work of art should therefore reflect the artists inner being as well as ethical and aesthetical code, and above all it has to be immersed into the social reality, not by finding inspiration in it, but by the effort to give answers and critical reaction to it.³⁷⁹ The attitude towards the produced social reality by Đurić and Markuš was best expressed in the statement of the artists from the manifesto:

"Subversion is an ability not to engage oneself in a big developing process and contribution to a general progress based on marginalizing of human values and false aims".

Even though the artists declared the manifesto of Autonomism together, they both pursued individual careers and for Uroš Đurić the next step in development of the principle was the Objectless Autonomism. In the case of Objectless Autonomism, by taking over Malevich's iconographic solutions, composition patterns and postulates, the visual approach is adopted in the formal sense, according to which a painting is a planar two-dimensional surface deprived of illusionistic effects. Malevich, however, is not set as an ego ideal for the artist who takes the paved roads of Suprematism, but as

³⁷⁷ The Manifesto was published in the catalogue of the exhibition The Autonomists held in the Contemporary Gallery of the Cultural Center "Olga Petrov", Pančevo, June 1995.

³⁷⁸ Ibid

³⁷⁹ As it was well observed by Jadranka Tolić in her text "Three points on autonomism painting" in Ibid

one of the possible patterns in which this artist inscribes personal themes, fascinations and obsessions.

Just as the first Suprematist form was quadrangular - the square - the first expression of Autonomism was the self-portrait. The square represented the pure, academic - "zero form" (Malevich) and was the chief element out of which Suprematist compositional entities developed and out of which the entire system of Suprematist relations and elements was set up. By analogy, self-portrait is the first painting of Autonomism and the basis for weaving contextual nets and introducing new images, forms and visions into a relation with the Autonomist I.

Objectless Autonomism represents the transition from self-portrait to portrait, thus canonizing the friends and protagonists of the Belgrade arts scene. Frontal portraits are rendered in the iconographic pattern of Malevich's late painting period, in which figures were reduced to a type: peasant, worker, sportsman, and were completely deprived of individuality and personality to the point of the lack of faces on the heads divided into level surfaces of different colors. According to Malevich's theory, namely, the face is experienced only as a mask hiding the truth about our being.

Unlike Malevich's figure-types, the identity of the portrayed characters is revealed by recognizable, specific attributes, like in the iconographic model of portrait painting - be that a secular, profane portrait, that of a ruler, or an icon of a saint, where these are the most common objects - symbols of suffering, sacrifice or torture.

The identity of the portrayed person is not recognized, as is usual in portrait painting, by the facial features, the characterization of the image, but by the given attributes, that is, the habitus, the

vaguely intimated gesture of expressionistic meaning³⁸⁰, which reveals the psychological nuances of the portrayed person, or his affinity for the fetishism of clothes. Instead of towards the I, the artist directs his gaze (libidinal energy) towards the object, the You, the Other... In this way the artist realizes - double-codes - his identity through his relationship towards the model taken over from art history, as well as towards the persons portrayed.

By the end of the nineties Đurić has shifted in his work from paintings, to web-projects and digital prints reflecting issues like populism. His argument was that populism could be understood as the new ideology that replaced all other social utopias. His Populist Project consists of three segments: God Loves the Dreams of Serbian Artists, Celebrities and Hometown Boys. The last part is the simulated virtual Serbian magazine (or the First Serbian Porn, Art & Society magazine as he calls it) Hometown Boys, just showing the front page with content of the issue that covers actual topics, whether related to his artistic career and the "world of art", or presenting his comment on the political sphere. Taking the form of the magazine or the manifesto as in the practice of historical avant-garde, Đurić is reflecting at the same time personal dreams and phantasms as well as creation and production of new social utopias. This was best exemplified in the series of performances with photo documentation where Đurić is posing in the outfit of the football player of different clubs like Sturm from Graz and Dinamo from Tirana. The football stadium could be therefore seen both as a space for production of individual phantasies (of success) and as an arena for the public (populist) display of national aspirations and anxieties.

³⁸⁰ In reference to Erwin Panofsky

Milica Tomić: traumatic real

Milica Tomić was present on the Belgrade art scene from the eighties when she was producing paintings whose aesthetics was coined monumental intimism.³⁸¹ The radical change in her work have happened with the provocative video installation "xy ungelooest" in 1997³⁸² when she has started to work in new media and to critically reflect the social reality. The subject of the work was the reconstruction of the crime that happened on the 28th of April 1989, the very day of the declaration of the new Serbian constitution, when 33 ethnic Albanians, citizens of Kosovo were murdered.³⁸³ Milica Tomić was trying to reconstruct the crime by inviting representatives of the Belgrade art scene and cultural life to take the role of each murdered Albanian by symbolically wearing the same clothes and falling into snow. She even tried to obtain as much as possible information on the victims and especially the way they were dressed using family photos she managed to get. The «actors» in her work were invited to take part in this ritual with different level of information on the content as the artist assumed that they would have different reactions to the traumatic political event. For the ones that she supposed that they will identify with the victims and recognize the need to reenact the whole event she told the whole story, but for the more nationally oriented persons that might have rejected to take part in the action she just

³⁸¹ A term introduced by art historian Nikola Šuica in the catalogue of the exhibition *Jedna slika aktuelnog beogradskog slikarstva*, held in Brussels and Antwerpen in 1992.

³⁸² The work was produced by Soros Center for Contemporary Art for the annual exhibition under the title "Murder" and as the artist claims herself, it encouraged her to start working in media of video installation. See the interview with Zoran Božović in Božović, Zoran, *Likovna umetnost osamdesetih i devedesetih u Beogradu - razgovori*, Beograd: Remont, 2001. (pp. 91-95)

³⁸³ Čubrilo, Jasmina, *Beogradska umetnicka scena devedesetih*, Radio B 92, Beograd 1998, (pp. 136-138)

used the mystical authority of the art work and their presence in it without further explanation. The majority was belonging to the third group, the neutral one that has just accepted their role without any political identification to the actual event.³⁸⁴

Branislav Dimitrijević has made a right point when he claimed that the identification with the roles of the “actor” and the general attitude on the Serbian art scene was actually taking art as a “consolation” for the social and political crisis and the “*mask of traumatic political identifications and relations*”.³⁸⁵ Therefore, the work of Milica Tomić was a breaking point in shifting this attitude towards more direct reaction and manipulation with the content of the political trauma. As the artists herself claimed each narrative for her was an attempt to escape the traumatic real:

*“In other words the narrative presents a certain view of a trauma, or more accurately, its framework. A trauma is not immediately accessible to us, it has to be relayed through a narrative that envelopes it and that paradoxically both obscures and reveals it”.*³⁸⁶

Another important work “I am Milica Tomić” from 1999 was more “programmatically” dealing with the issue of production of national identity and the process of identification through an artist’s statement of belonging to a numerous nations expressed in their language. In 64

³⁸⁴ See the analysis of Branislav Dimitrijević in his text “The Grand Compromise: On the Examples of the Use of Political References in Serbian Art of the 90’s and its Historical Background, in Borčić, Barbara and Saša Glavan Eds. *Strategies of Presentation – The World of Art Anthology 2000/2001*, Ljubljana: SCCA Center for Contemporary Arts - Ljubljana, 2002. (pp. 27-37)

³⁸⁵ Ibid (p. 43)

³⁸⁶ Milica Tomić in interview with Gerald Matt. From Gerald Matt (Ed.), *Interviews*, Kunsthalle Wien, TRITON Verlag 2003

different languages she claimed belonging to respective nation and each time she uttered the statement, the new wound appeared on her body. In her simple statement "I am Milica Tomić, I am Serbian" the basic premises for any theoretical analysis of the identity formation are to be found. For what is crucial for an identity formation is the language and the verbal expression of pronouncement of one's identity as a means of identification. Her given name is evidence of her identity as Milica is traditional Serbian name, and therefore her statement of belonging to Serbian ethnic or national identity would be logical. But when she later states for example "Ich bin Milica Tomić, ich bin Österreicherin"³⁸⁷ and continues to use different languages to assume different identities or to project her image upon these identities, the very process of national or ethnic identification is brought down to the level of arbitrary declaration.³⁸⁸ Tomić was actually referring with this work to the production of national identity in Serbia and its consequences for her personal identification process. The loss of collective identity in former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia of the eighties, and traumas that were effecting construction of new identities forced her to privately cherish the Orthodox Serbian identity but publically to criticize the abuse of the identification process of citizens for the production of the hatred and xenophobia.

³⁸⁷ I am Milica Tomić, I am Austrian

³⁸⁸ See the analysis of Branislava Anđelković and Branislav Dimitrijević in the text "Traps of Identification: Three Videos by Milica Tomić, in Eiblmayr, Silvia Ed. *Milica Tomić*, Galerie im Taxispalais, Innsbruck, Austria 2000. Their argument is that the only identity that the artist herself and the audience takes for granted is the identity of the woman, and use psychoanalytic reading of the wounds that keep appearing after every identity declaration to contend that the woman's sex is constructed as a lack, the "wound" instead of penis. Similarly as there is a lack at the root of any identity, every act of identification is making effort to mask this lack but actually it is continuously reaffirming it.

New generation: fake identities of Miodrag Krkobabić

It may be said that Milica Tomić with her work that was dealing with the problem of identity and identification (national in this case) opened up the discourse on the Serbian art scene, and that several younger artists, (Miodrag Krkobabić, Vladimir Nikolić, Žolt Kovač, Nikoleta Marković, Vera Večanski, Jelena Radić, etc.), took upon this problem in all of its ramifications. They addressed different aspects of identification and acquiring of an identity, i.e. social, religious, professional – artistic.

This generation of artists has entered the scene by the end of the nineties, and from the beginning of their work had very strong conceptual background. They started using various strategies, always in the most appropriate media, to address different aspects of the process of identification and acquiring of social, gender, religious, and above all, professional – artistic identity.

In the first video work '6=36' that he has made, Miodrag Krkobabić, one of the leading exponents of the generation, was using a narrative mode and documentary approach to tell the story about the relationship between his friends from childhood and himself. Born in the same building, nearly the same age, they all met again after a long time to tell each about character of the other ones. After years of growing up with the childhood friends, Krkobabić engaged in the artistic career, graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts and came back to see that his friends were still living in the similar manner, and that he was the only one to leave the old neighborhood. The method of investigation he is conducting could be seen as analogue to the term *display behavior* used by Erving Goffman, who was researching on the genesis and definitions of the very notion of identity, its definitions and

shift from individually-psychological, via micro-sociological to cultural level. For Gofman is important that the relationships of others towards an individual are mediated by the consciousness that this individual has on the consciousness the others have on him.³⁸⁹ In fact, Krkobabić's question about his relation with his friend was: "*do we actually know each other or we know the image that we made about us or about the people we know?*"³⁹⁰

Krkobabić is dealing here principally with the problem of "our incapability of catching a personal identity" which is always changing and relational. This claim could be supported by the thesis of Ernesto Laclau that the identity cannot be understood as something fixed and should therefore always be a process, never an artefact. Laclau develops this argument further with the stress on the necessary incompleteness of identity formation. As he puts it, *the field of social identities is not one of full identities but of their ultimate failure to be constituted*.³⁹¹ He argues that all objects of scrutiny in the social sciences are incompletely constituted because of their location within a field of difference from one another. What marks them is a particular historicity that is provided by the forces of dislocation, which always block the formation of complete objects. Consequently, any articulation of identity is just temporarily complete, it is always in part constituted by the forces that oppose it (the constitutive outside), always contingent upon surviving the contradictions that it subsumes (forces of dislocation).³⁹² In the case of the video of Krkobabić this line

³⁸⁹ As quoted in Branimir Stojković, *Identitet i komunikacija*, Čigoja štampa, Beograd, 2002 (p. 14)

³⁹⁰ Unpublished artists statement.

³⁹¹ As quoted in Keith, Michael and Steve Pile Eds. *Place and the Politics of Identity*, Routledge, London New York, 1996. (p. 29)

³⁹² Ibid (pp.25-29)

of argument could be expressed with his statement that the: "*story of 6 men become a story of 36 identities*"³⁹³.

In any kind of sociological and political analysis on the matter of personal identity, the personal identification document is very important resource. From the historical perspective, ID cards, passports, and similar documents were used for centuries, but their adoption by all nations is a development of the 19th and 20th centuries. In contemporary societies the ID document owes much to the reforms of the judiciary system in establishing identity, conceived by Alphonse Bertillon³⁹⁴. He established a method known as anthropometry that incorporates a series of refined bodily measurements, physical description and what is most important for the future look of ID documents - photographs. From the sphere of criminology photographic identification was gradually extended to cover the entire population. ID document is the motif that is often used to start the debate on the issue of the personal and national identity, and all the consequences of belonging to one nation. It always implies the state regulatory rules, methods of control and constrains imposed to its subjects. In that respect Foucault argued that the identity of a person is socially constructed through the instrumentalized methods of state control.

This pretext is becoming very important in the series of works where Krkobabić is further elaborating on the issue of impossibility of caching the definite identity. This is exemplified best in the project *Portrait of an unknown man with a beard*. Krkobabić is here using the form of police photography, *en face* and two profiles but mixing the eye line of friends and colleagues with his own face and marking the

³⁹³ Unpublished artists statement.

³⁹⁴ Philippe Comar, "Made-to-measure Identity in Identity and Alterity", the catalogue of the 46th Venice Biennial, Marsilio, Venice 1995

photos with the personal ID number of the one whose identity he is “borrowing”. His own process of identification was interwoven with the same process of the members of his family, friends and his colleagues from the art-world. These encounters in life and professional career are influencing and shaping the personal identity of the artists, always adding something to it, and setting track for his identity formation process that is eventually never going to be fully concluded and determined.

Tanja Ostojić: Personal Space – Public Body

The final question regarding different aspects of artistic analysis of identity formation process could be seen in the one focusing on the perception of body and gender in the public sphere. These issues are best exemplified in the work of the artist Tanja Ostojić.

“Personal Space” was the first significant project with which Tanja Ostojić reflected the legacy of avant-garde, radical performance and body art, focusing at the same time on the artists inner being, space that it occupies and its psychological dynamics. It came after a series of classical objects modeled in regular geometrical shapes with the accent on the formal qualities of materials like bronze and especially stone. The process of work on marble sculptures comprised contemplative, dedicated shaping and polishing to get to the perfect surfaces emphasizing the textures, veins of the material. Nevertheless, more important than aesthetical perception of the *objet d’art* was the need of the artist to canalize her energy and express her mood and inner processes in the material form. The further necessary step in this development for Ostojić was to start using her body as a medium of

expression and it almost appeared that in her performance she absorbed the firmness and motionless of the marble. Standing on the square of white marble dust, her body emanated a solemn space of inner calmness reserved for the artist, evoking on the other hand the 'auratic' space of Malevich's Suprematism. Her work was at the same time introvert and extrovert - while trying to mark a private, even intimate space, she was exposing herself, her naked, shaven body to the eyes of the viewers. To claim the right for the impenetrable personal space that determines artist's identity, she needed to enter the silent communication and dialogue with the audience. Once established this ambivalent shifting between the dichotomies of inside / outside, introvert / extrovert, private / public, will keep appearing in her further project and in this case is best articulated in the statement of the artist:

*When I deal with the stone, I start from its inner structure moving along towards its surface texture. When I work on my own head I move from the outside to the inside. I fall deeply into the space of my own spirit. So what is physical remains only texture of my surface.*³⁹⁵

The performance *Personal Space* was first presented at the Biennial of Young Artist held in Vršac, in 1996³⁹⁶, in the time when Serbian society just passed the period of most severe isolation due to the sanctions of UN. The circumstances under which artist worked

³⁹⁵ Tanja Ostojic, and Sasa Gajin, " Personal Space ", published by Gallery 12+, Belgrade, September 1996.(p. 63)

³⁹⁶ The performance was presented for the second time at the exhibition "Manifesta 2" Young European Biennial, held in Luxemburg in 1998. It comprised a modified setting, i.e. Ostojic was standing for one hour in the elevator Museum of History of the City of Luxemburg .

were underlined as the paradigm of the art in the closed society where the most frequent strategy was withdrawal from the social sphere and dedication to the introspective work and reflection of the aesthetical issues in art. The mid-nineties were crucial phase when some of the most prominent Serbian artist started to shift the emphasis of their work towards more critical and engaged reaction to the socio-political frame that was so strongly determining the conditions in which they worked. In this context, Ostojić's project was one of the rare to take a more radical statement, though still in the frame of artistic problems that had strong heirs in the circle of conceptual artists formed in the Students Cultural Center in Belgrade in the seventies, Marina Abramović being one of the globally most acknowledged. Without any doubt the need of the artist working in the economically collapsed and torn by wars country was to define her own position, her own identity and her own attitude towards the social reality. However, as the artist claimed the dynamic of this work was above all interior. With the standpoint always to make strong statement with her work, one small step was needed to get from the realm of introvert meditative treatment of her body into its more engaged placing in the social and political sphere. The work of Ostojić from this point had started to engage more actively with the issue of blurring and crossing of the social, political, economic boundaries.

The work Personal Space was a good resource for Ostojić to start shifting some of the issues raised in it from more local perspective of the Serbian society in crisis to more global universal issues. Her strategy has thus developed two main avenues, one focusing on the problem of body-gender relations, and other focusing on gender-social sphere interaction.

The same situation from the performance "Personal space", with the artist's body naked, shaven in the still, static position offered a new reading in the project "Looking for the Husband with EU Passport". This ongoing work started in 2000 as an interactive web project with an online advertisement from Tanja Ostojić where she declared the quest for the husband with EU passport. With this act Ostojić made public the idea to transgress the given political constraints to the individual coming from the country like Serbia in the very year when the political changes were to happen, or moreover to any individual having non European Union passport. The former 'physical' body inscribed in the personal space gained connotation of the social body communicating to the broad audience on the web. She used her body as a mediator, a tool for questioning and rising issues in the public sphere. Her naked body made public was deliberately presented without seductiveness and sensuality in the bare physicality of her flesh, taking a position of written invitation, but visual repulsion³⁹⁷, and was thus performing the role of the political message.

The constant shifting between dichotomies like private and public that was noted as one of the main characteristics from the beginning of Ostojić's work, finally appears in the performance *Crossing* which took place on the lawn in front of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade in 2001. This was the site of her meeting with German artist Klemens Golf, who was the chosen one from many 'candidates' to respond to her advertisement, and with whom she had six months long correspondence. This first encounter of Tanja Ostojić and Klemens Golf was public and it led to the secret and private wedding. With this act the project entered another and more challenging phase where all the possible problems appear: from bureaucratic and administrative

³⁹⁷ As Suzana Milevska remarked in her text *Spectacle of Invisible*, NU, Nordic Art Review, VOL. III No. 5/2001 (pp. 60-61)

regulations of the German country regarding the non EU wife of the German citizen, to interpersonal relations between two artists, two projects that crossed their paths, and finally the interpersonal relations of the legally bound "married couple".

Interesting document of this ceremony, and the project itself, offered the official witnesses, the artistic, but also married couple Jelica Radovanović and Dejan Andjelković. They introduced the Lacanian psychoanalytical reading of Ostojić's (women in general) position in the marriage where men is taking the role of the active factor in the public sphere and women is prevented to speak directly but through men, allocating herself the role of the object of men's desire and of the phantasm of men's lack. Their crucial argument is that Tanja Ostojić with her project publicly presented her photo as a object of desire but nonstereotypical one, and by making selection of the offers by men she is subverting man's domination in the relationship and his violent position of public speech, and gaining the signifying position, i.e. in psychoanalytical terms threatening by castration.³⁹⁸

I would consider taking into account another perspective, i.e. certain body of feminist theory that set as a target for questioning the classical distinction between *private* and *public* and tried to disrupt the idea of a centered subject. The strategies of those feminist theories, often highlighted in the famous feminist slogan *the personal is the political*³⁹⁹, were to critique the limited definitions of gendered space and to deconstruct the separate spheres of the polarized binary term male/female. They elaborate on the idea of Jacques Derrida to expose

³⁹⁸ Jelica Radovanović and Dejan Andjelković's text on the occasion of the wedding, to be published in the catalogue of the exhibition *UNCERTAIN SIGNS – TRUE STORIES* Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, Germany, April 2002.

³⁹⁹ See Stuart Halls text "The question of cultural identity", in *The Politi Reader in Cultural Theory*, Cambridge: Politi 1994. (pp. 119 –125)

the ways in which binary systems function only through positive and negative reference to the dominant category. The first step in this process of deconstruction would be to reverse the binary terms so that the one occupying negative position in a pair replaced the one in the positive, which could be here seen in the project that criticizes and deconstructs the mechanisms that marginalize and exclude women from public life.⁴⁰⁰ Implying that this line of theoretical argumentation could be used to support the artistic strategy of Tanja Ostojić it would be possible to emphasize that her work consists of continual alterations from the disposed 'negative' to the 'positive' position with the aim to deconstruct and transgress the given gender, social, political constrains.

Another segment of the project Personal Space was the photo album done with Saša Gajin. It recorded the different inscriptions of the square onto Ostojić's body, from white positive and black negative on her shaved head to the shaved square on her Venus Hill. The same black square of Malevich reappeared again in projects "Black Square on White" and "I'll be your angel" conceptualized for the Biennale of Venice in 2001, in the time when the political situation in Serbia has changed, and Ostojić was for some time entering the European art scene. Taking up the role of the escort, a "guardian angel" of the curator of the Venice Biennale Harald Szemann, Ostojić again used the twofold strategy. She was exposed all the time to the audience, actually got all the public attention being constantly au pair with the "most wanted and desired" person of the Biennale but another part of

⁴⁰⁰ For elaboration of these feminist theories see Jane Rendell's Introduction: 'Gender Space' to the publication *Gender Space Architecture*, Rendell, Jane, Barbara Penner and Iain Border Eds. London, New York: Routledge, 2000; and the publication *BODYSPACE, Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*, Nancy Duncan ed., Routledge, London New York 1996.

her project, the Malevich's square on her Venus hill was reserved just for the sight of Mr. Szeemann.

Through the lens of area of feminist theorizing on women in urban settings, the exposure of feminine body to the gaze of man was one of the key issues for criticism. For Susana Torre the construction of bourgeois femininity in the cities of nineteenth-century Europe was exactly based on the fact that *women are seen as extensions of the male gaze and as instruments of the emerging consumer society and its transformative powers at the dawn of modernity.*⁴⁰¹ The right spot to problematize this context in the artworld would be exactly the Venice Biennial whose constitution coincided with the growth of the modern bourgeois societies.

Ostojić deliberately used her body to position herself exactly to the place reserved for the women in the way social hierarchy is expressed in the public space. If she was not bound to the premises of secret privacy of the home, she should be in the shadow of the dominant powerful figure of man, finally as his accompanying person or escort. When playing her role she used all the prerogatives of women's seductiveness, wearing *haute couture* dresses by Lacroix, high heel shoes, and assuming lovely and charming attitude in addressing the public. With this role Ostojić became present in ceremonies, press conferences, cocktails and parties, even the subject of gossips of the untouchable elite that gravitates around the artworld and witness of its power games. One aspect of this artistic position was that it offered her the possibility to transgress the pyramidically disposed strata of social status within the artworld, and put herself right onto the top, a place hardly reserved for an artist, especially from

⁴⁰¹ Susana Torre, "Claiming the Public Space: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo" in Rendell, Jane, Barbara Penner and Iain Border Eds. *Gender Space Architecture*, Routledge, London New York, 2000. (p. 140)

her region. She appropriated the position that symbolized the prerogative of power, and was marked always by exclusion and restriction. In this situation, to paraphrase Torre, she took the most effective standpoint to construct herself as transformative subject, altering the perception of all participants of the world of art on the 'space of public appearance' (term of Hanna Arendt) and placing her own persona and finally her artwork itself into the glamorous elite circles, even more so, making them all part of her performance. To assume and construct an identity of this kind it is essential to define your own space and experience it. Interesting problem here would be that while in modernism the universal subject excluded women, in poststructuralism underlying of otherness women are often given the role of the means of constructing the identity of the men.⁴⁰² Taking up this problem it can be said that Ostojić managed to reverse this situation and to use a man, and indeed the person in charge – the curator of the Biennial Mr. Szeemann, to construct her own (artistic) identity.

A further aspect was that she problematized the place of the artwork and the role of the artist in such a manifestation, the phantasm of his / her success and power games of artist / curator relationships. New extreme dual situation was that while hiding one part of her artwork from the eyes of the audience through the second part - the performance - she made it more "visible" and her concept and message more loud in the turmoil of the Vernisage when the rules of the highly commercialized art market prevails.

⁴⁰² Mary McLeod, "Everyday and 'Other' Spaces" in Rendell, Jane, Barbara Penner and Iain Border Eds. *Gender Space Architecture*, London, New York: Routledge, 2000. (p. 186)

On narratologies

Representation of biographical records, family tales and artist's stories from their close environment could be recognized as a frequent way of expression of this new generation of Serbian artists. Without any pretension to fetishize personal history, glorify intimacy of the artist's personal space, this tendency introduced a kind of immediate, direct (sometimes ironic) narration, often in a documentary mode of expression. With these topics artists raised and addressed the issues of the personal, self-identity, the way it is being constructed and altered, and by doing so, enter the battle field of identity politics regarding the question of their status in the context of the society in which they act, and the issue of positioning oneself into the public sphere. With this strategy of bringing private experiences into the public domain, the artists were creating a new kind of public identity for them. There were many possible stories to be told, and facets of the individual to be shown, but their variety was always revolving around the issue of the artist's identity, his/hers position in society and right for the presence in the public sphere. Therefore, one of the problems that I have reflected is how the artists shift the introspective position and translate the personal intimate history into the public sphere, how do they contextualize the individual narrations and inscribe this personal space into the public sphere. On the other hand, the inverse reading of the problem would be the issue how the public sphere was influencing the individual, how it was determining his or her work regarding the topics that are related to the given context, i.e. how the artists encircled their personal space while working *in socius*. I took under consideration here a kind of narrative approach that is exposing the personal narratives of the artists where their life is not

just represented as a document, documentation but also as an act of entrance in the public sphere where the issues of identity politics are raised. Regarding these strategies of the young generation of artists, exemplified in the mode of narration, and «storytelling» I would propose the term narratologies.

4. Epilogue

NATO intervention

The conflicts among ethnic groups and the consequent reenforcement of new and/or resurrected ethnic identities effectively disrupt the old aggregations based on national political lines. These conflicts make the fabric of global relations more fluid and, by affirming new identities and new localities, present a more malleable material for control.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri

The period of post-Dayton peace agreement, and the stability in the region didn't last very long, and Milošević has provoked many internal protests in Serbia. At the elections in October 1996 in spite of the fact that his party SPS and the coalition party Yugoslav United Left-wing (JUL) has won the majority in the federal assembly, the local elections were a disaster for his rule as he lost 15 of 18 major cities. Milošević in his well known manner of conduct didn't want to except the results of these elections, and this abuse of power have induced strong protests and mass demonstrations and rallies organized by the

oppositional parties and the students of Belgrade University. The protests were held till February next year, when Milošević had to accept the result of the elections due to the strong international pressure.

The shift in the balance of power, and the new oppositional government and mayor in Belgrade represented a big obstacle for Milošević, and finally in March 1998 the crisis had come back to the place where it started – to Kosovo. The repression and police brutality over the ethnic Albanians at Kosovo was increasing thus creating a political situation of latent conflict, and that was the atmosphere in which Milošević managed to use all the prerogatives of his power the best. In March 1998 he initiated the formation of the «government of national unity» where first SRS with its leader Vojislav Šešelj has joined, and then the oppositional leader Vuk Drašković in January 1999 joined with his SPO to the coalition thus compromising his local rule in the city of Belgrade. The result was the strong policy of control on Kosovo, and the fierce media campaign against the «Albanian terrorists separatism». The control of the media became complete when the NATO countries in October 1998 started warning Milošević of the possibility for the military intervention to prevent the violence of the Serbian regime on Kosovo.

The government was soon to adopt a: «Decree on special measures in the conditions of the threat of NATO military attack against our country». The paragraph seven of the «Decree» was prohibiting all TV programs and newspapers articles that would attempt to spread the «fear, panic and defeatism» and thus have a «negative effect on the readiness of the citizens to defend the integrity of the Republic of Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia». The proposed penalties for anyone who dared to fall into this category

were drastic and included high financial fines, prohibition of the media and confiscation of the property. This resulted in the closing down of three daily newspapers and one radio station in a very short period. The assembly has reacted fast to adopt the new Law on public information on 20th of October, and that act gave legal support to shut down all the media favoring the opposition.⁴⁰³

The last chance for peaceful resolution of the Kosovo crisis was the summit that was organized in February 1999 at Rambouille near Paris with the delegations from Serbia and delegation of Kosovo Albanians. The proposal by the NATO countries was the «Transitional agreement on peace and autonomy on Kosovo». The Kosovo Albanians concurred with the agreement but since the Serbian side rejected to sign it, the NATO started the military campaign against Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the 24th of March 1999.

The bombing finally contributed to the traumatic social and political reality. On one side Milošević and his regime were able to play one more time on the card of nationalism and «patriotism», to homogenize the Serbian population now against almost the whole world, including the UN that followed to acclaim the NATO intervention. On the other side the opponents to the regime had finally to take a political standpoint, and it mostly ended up with both the strong reaction to the policy of the regime, and to the policy of retaliation by bombing of NATO that didn't have any effect on Milošević's losing of power, on the contrary it gave him one last chance of maintaining his position.

One artistic project that was initiated during bombing and that summarizes the cultural climate of the «alternative scene» that in the

⁴⁰³ Thompson, Mark, *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj, Bosni i Hercegovini*. Beograd: Medija centar Radio B92. 1995. (p. 124)

meantime became also more politically biased and engaged, was conceived by the Center of Contemporary Art, and its director Dejan Sretenović under the title «Reality Check». ⁴⁰⁴ The artists used the format of postcards for their works, and the curator has chosen the postcard with the quotation from 55 statements about Art and Reality by Fridrich Duerrenmatt⁴⁰⁵ to emphasize the position and conceptual background by claiming that the art is above all about difference and the task of a society is "to discover its reality in a work of art".⁴⁰⁶

Reality check was the project that has gathered the efforts of a group of Serbian artist from the alternative scene that have already individually started to reflect the social reality from mid nineties. With this project they got the theoretically grounded strategy for coping with the traumatic reality and even tried to produce a new competitive reality with the one imposed in the social sphere.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁴ The term reality check is technical psychoanalytical term, derived from the theory of Freud on the processes of investigating the origin of the indicators of reality. Freud had used the method of testing the reality to question the way the psychological apparatus is functioning. The artists engaged in the project were: Apsolutno, Jovan Čekić, Mirjana Đorđević, Uroš Đurić, Era Milivojević, Zoran Naskovski, Vesna Pavlović, p.RT, Jelica Radovanović, Dejan Anđelković, Raša Todosijević and Milica Tomić.

⁴⁰⁵ The thesis of Duerrenmatt on the postcard are the following:

"Every work of art is subjective.

The reality that a work of art represents is a 'subjective reality'.

Every 'subjective reality' is contained in reality.

It is impossible for a work of art to fall out of reality.

The task of society is to discover its reality in a work of art".

⁴⁰⁶ See Dejan Sretenović text on <http://realitycheck.c3.hu/text.html>

⁴⁰⁷ See Stevan Vuković analysis in the text "Private Coldness / Public Cruelty: A Stumbling Walk Through The Nineties" in Radosavljević, Darka, Ed. *Remont. Review – Belgrade art scene of the nineties*, Belgrade: Remont, 2002. Unlike Vuković who claimed that this was the first project that intentionally questioned the traumatic real, and managed to create different platform outside of the strategy of dominant "active escapism", I argued that most of the participating artists have already actively engaged since mid nineties in the process of reflecting and facing of social reality thus leaving the "active escapism" for "active engagement in the public sphere".

Stepping again into the Serbian public sphere

The Serbian society started to change after the dramatic events that were induced by the election crisis and had its culmination with the revolt of people on the streets of Belgrade on the 5th of October 2000. In the later sequence of reforms of the society, that are still taking place, the new regime brought back FR Yugoslavia into the international community and its institutions, and reversed the image of one of the last communist bastions in Europe. With the opening up of the country on all social levels, the sphere of culture, begun to obtain a new platform for communication. All of the sudden, the so far globally unseen Serbian art scene, as for its peculiar frame and closed system in which it managed to function, was put in focus which made possible the fast realization of several projects presenting Serbian artists in European countries.⁴⁰⁸

After the political changes that took place in 2000 a certain period of interregnum and a new break concerning "great national projects" occurred, together with an attempt to homogenize the citizens and to create the new models of identification. New

⁴⁰⁸ *Inside/Outside* exhibition held in the Zacheta Gallery in Poland, 6 November - 3 December 2000 questioning among other aspects the borderline between art and politics, and the possibility of art to enter the polemics with the society. Besides the artists whose work I briefly outlined in this overview, like Apsolutno, Milica Tomic, Skart, Uros Djuric... presented the exponents of the youngest generation of Serbian artists, namely pR.T (Radišić & Trkulja), Vesna Vesić, Aleksandra Ristanović and others - curators Jelena Vesić and Karolina Ziebinska
Dossier Serbien, held at the Akademie der Kuenste in Berlin, 19 November - 17 December with the emphasize on the phenomena of the resistance to the regime and documentary materials of *Otpor* and photos of demonstrations. It also showed mostly engaged artworks - curators Borka Pavicević, Irina Subotić and Ana Miljanić.
En Fin, exhibition held from at the gallery of UNESCO in Paris 18-25 December 2000 showed the work of two different generations of artists with the idea to show as the curator Jovan Despotović claims that the "aesthetic dignity of art" is being preserved in FR Yugoslavia, in spite of hard social conditions.

(proto)democratic society in the public field initiated the idea that all progressive forces including artists should actively participate in carrying out the reform and contribute in producing a "better society". However, they were still many problems in the public field and the way of its production and reconstruction. Enthusiasm that started to fade away after the first years of changes opened many possibilities for further critical reflection of social processes so, unlike a directly politically committed art which lost its *raison d'être* a new strategy slowly started to develop characterized by its ironic approach and consciousness of the need for a reflection of social processes, a awareness of the necessity of the work *in socius*. Finally, although in these years a paradigm of mythological fabula has been replaced with much more pragmatic models offered to the citizens for their identification, a constant state of uncertainty and expectation of a realization of foggy aims still makes an individual passive, keeps him in lethargy and prevents him to join the public field more actively. Unlike direct and overtly politically engaged art, the new strategy started slowly to occur in the public sphere. The artists performing it are dealing with subtle ironical or self-ironical approach regarding the situation in the social sphere. With their work and interventions those artists⁴⁰⁹ started to *appropriate* some spaces in the public realm and to leave traces of their *subtle presence*.

⁴⁰⁹ Mainly the ones belonging to the youngest generation. Besides the ones already mentioned, like Miodrag Krkobabić, Vladimir Nikolić, Žolt Kovač etc., there were many others to appear at the beginning of the new historical epoch of post-Milošević Serbia

Speech from the margin

If we finally try to shift the perspective to the global context where the new “reformed” SRJ has stepped into, we may argue that the new paradigm of social relationships is reflected in the appearance of supra-national hegemony where the movement of global capital, commodities and services worldwide is overcoming the strength and borders of national states. This type of sovereignty, which Hardt and Negri ⁴¹⁰ described as the appearance of a new Empire, actually, is a European concept on which Euro-centrism is based, developed at the same time as the Modernism. The latest expansion of the European Union on 1st of May 2004 and tendency to include the remaining “non-privileged” states in the following decade gives us the right to think about Europe as a geopolitical reflection of that new type of sovereignty.

While the global integration process has been speeding up, there are still blind spots: spaces which have not yet defined nor solved the question of the national state’s influence and have not yet built a coherent model of identification and homogenization, not even adopted basic constitutional and heraldic marks of state. In those states ⁴¹¹ which are emerging from inter-ethnic conflicts, on the scene are actually occurring different social processes, different social realities are being produced, which could be characterized as proto-democratic with a presence of the phenomenon of primary accumulations of capital and “privatization” as the only process which is including them into the web of globally flowing capital. In discrepancy between the struggle for purifying and shedding the

⁴¹⁰ Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 2001.

⁴¹¹ The recently renamed Union of Serbia and Montenegro (SCG) is again the most drastic case.

heritage and ballast of previous ideological constructions, and defying models for equal entry and adjustment to global process and the new order of sovereignty, there are the numerous roads and blind alleys.

The question, what is more important for the constitution of the Empire, the center or the periphery, opens up the possibility for the appearance of new types of resistance to global processes, the new types of struggles which are neither political nor economical. That struggle for a democratization of the process of globalization, and for creation of new types of public spaces and a different social community can never be compared with ethno-national, clerical-traditional and above all, anti-modern voices. This archaic, and even schizophrenic position of simultaneous existence of pre-modern and anti-civilization movements in one society, like the one of Serbia today, that due to the marginalization and striving to get to the achievements of European democracy, even at the cost of acceptance of the neo-liberal politics of the so called "predatory capitalism", additionally make more difficult critical speech in the public sphere, as well as adoption of the positions of active critical thinking of societal process and cherishing the culture of resistance.

The problem imposed from this angle is how to create critically cultural public domain, how to reflect complex societal processes we are facing, how to take a critical distance against it. The rarely present position of activist fighting, protests and actions in a wider cultural field in the world of visual arts is opening possibilities for more subtle orchestration of critical thought, the use of metaphors which are depicting those socio-political processes, locating problems and pointing out at their consequences, focusing on both local and global issues.

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List of abbreviations:

AVNOJ - Anti-Fascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia
CKSKJ – Central Committee of League of Yugoslav Communists
CZKD - Center for Cultural Decontamination
FNRJ - Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia
IMF - International Monetary Fund
JNA – Yugoslav National Army
JRT - Yugoslav Radio-TV
JUL – Yugoslav United Left-wing
KPJ – Yugoslav Communist Party
MCA - Museum of Contemporary Art
NOB - Struggle for National Liberation
RTS - Serbian Radio and Television
SANU – Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts
SCCA – Soros Center for Contemporary Art
SCG - Union of Serbia and Montenegro
SFRJ – Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
SKJ – League of Yugoslav Communists
SKS – League of Serbian Communists
SPC – Serbian Orthodox Church
SPO – Serbian Renewal Movement
SPS – Socialist Party of Serbia
SRJ – Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
SRS – Serbian Radical Party
UKS – Association of Writers of Serbia