

APPROACHING SOCIALIST MONUMENTS NOWADAYS

(Introduction to Thematic Section)


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How do we think about the vast and rich memorial heritage of socialism? Are numerous monuments left across former socialist countries to be thought of as artistic objects and explained in terms of aesthetics or canonical periodizations within art history? If so, how do we begin to periodize? Are we justified in creating the divide between the socialist ‘East’ and the non-socialist ‘West’? What are the repercussions of this divide, and, moreover, where do we find its ideological and political roots? Is there such a thing as socialist art or socialist modernism? If so, what are its conditions and its manifestations? Or should we, on the other hand, think of these monuments within the total artistic production of 20th century? Do we then fall into the trap of ignoring the singularity of these works? And are we right to think that what was so singular about socialism was its cultural and artistic production (rather than its emancipatory and transformative politics)?

We argue that we should move away from looking at these monuments solely as artistic objects and approach them from the anthropological point of view, which highlights narratives and social practices of diverse agents, organized with and around these monuments. In that case, instead of asking about some intrinsic meaning represented in a monumental style or form, we focus on the diverse meanings these monuments acquire in particular

interactions with individuals and groups in different political, economic and social contexts. However, such a position opens up some additional questions: what sort of an insight are we provided with once we embark on the arduous journey of uncovering the ethnography of a site? Are we in peril of overlooking the unconscious and obscured, but still structural foundations behind people's memories, beliefs and motivations by focusing on the subjective everyday impressions and memories of individuals? And do we not then, in the last instance fall again into the trap of depoliticization via culturalization?

In the recent years, scholars across disciplines and across the world have addressed some of these questions in their research about socialist monuments. This issue of *Studia Ethnologica Croatica* contributes to those discussions with the thematic block *Socialist Monuments and Modernism* selected by the guest editors Nevena Škrbić Alempijević and Tihana Pupovac. The thematic block is primarily dedicated to the proceedings from the international symposium *Socialist Monuments and Modernism*, which was held at the Multimedia Institute in Zagreb in November 2015. The symposium was a part of the international project *Heroes we Love*, coordinated by the Maribor Art Gallery. The Croatian partner Blok, together with Lana Lovrenčić and Tihana Pupovac, undertook the organization of the symposium as one of the activities of the project. The two-day symposium brought together 11 participants with 10 presentations that, in terms of disciplinary approaches, ranged from philosophy to architecture, ethnology to social critique and covered topics and case studies from Eastern and South-Eastern Europe to Great Britain and the USA. The programme was divided into three thematic blocks. The first panel analysed different figures of modernism or associated with modernism today, namely hero, partisan and worker. The second panel, entitled *Normalising Socialism*, dealt with the revisionist trends regarding socialism and the socialist heritage nowadays. The third panel, that bore the title *Spaces of Post-Socialism*, provided insight in the transformations of memorial sites from socialism we are witnessing today. The symposium was closed with a keynote lecture that focused on the critique of the discourse of modernization in research about socialism.

Presented in this volume are six of the conference proceedings, along with two additional invited papers that both deal with the memorial heritage of socialism from the post-socialist perspective.

The issue opens with the text by Rachel Aumiller, *Antigone's Stance Amongst Slovenia's Undead*. Aumiller reinterprets Smole's critique of the socialist regime's dealing with the deaths of collaborators in his reworking of Antigone. In her analysis, she discusses what that critique offers us from the point of view of post-socialism and the revisionist rehabilitations of fascist regime.

Katja Hrobat Virloget and Neža Čebroň Lipovec write their article *Heroes We Love? Monuments To The National Liberation Movement in Istria Between Memories, Care, and Collective Silence* by framing their analysis in the same state politics of remembering and forgetting, but from a different angle. The authors focus on tensions between different mnemonic systems, between the individual and the collective evocations of the WWII past, and between the official silence around the monuments and the people's need to remember.

Similar spatial dynamics between materializations of memory and intentional collective amnesia is discussed in the text *Cultures of Memory, Landscapes of Forgetting: the Case Study of the Partisan Memorial Cemetery in Mostar*, written by Kristina Ilić and Nevena Škrbić Alempijević. The authors discuss the question: what happens to a memorial site when the past it commemorates is no longer up-to-date and desirable in the current political order?

In the text *Modernization Discourse and Its Discontents*, Milan Rakita offers a compelling critique of the prevalence of the discourse of modernity/modernization in recent interpretations of socialism. The author asks whether that discourse is a companion of the more general anti-communist revisionism and what other possibilities we have in reclaiming our socialist past.

Revisionist trends are also at the centre of Goran Janev's *Burdensome Past: Challenging The Socialist Heritage In Macedonia*. In his analysis of the reshaping of the urbanistic landscape of Skopje, Janev reminds us that we need to understand these changes not only from a cultural perspective, but also in economic terms, since we are dealing with the reappropriation or primitive accumulation of land/possession. The author this shifts his analysis from the perspective of cultural critique of post-socialism to a critique of capitalist transformation of the remnants of socialism.

Aneta Vasileva and Emilia Kaleva track the transformations of socialist memorial sites in their article entitled *Recharging Socialism: Bulgarian Socialist Monuments In 21st Century*. Juxtaposing everyday practices on the sites to state procedures and revisions, and the artistic and NGO reactions to the negligence by the state, they shed light on diverse new meanings and uses socialist monuments are given in Bulgaria today.

Romeo Kodra's *Architectural Monumentalism In Transitional Albania* traces the modernist traditions in the urbanistic development of Tirana's city centre. Understanding modernism in close relation to the problem of state power, Kodra presents three stages in the development of Tirana's city centre: fascist, socialist and post-socialist. By doing so, the author poses the question which of these regimes and their consequent urbanistic plans can be considered in stricto sensu modernist.

To close with, Owen Hatherley presents the troublesome and heterogeneous relationship of today's Britain to its revolutionary past in *Our Monuments To Glorious Defeat: Socialist Memorial Art In Britain*. Hatherley switches the paradigm of glorious victory often used to interpret monuments in socialist countries and rather approaches the revolutionary memorials of Britain from the point of view of historical failure.

Although it encompasses articles heterogeneous not only in their topics, but also in their approaches, this thematic block, viewed as a whole, fosters transdisciplinarity. On the one hand, this transdisciplinary approach emerges from the topic itself: any grounded analysis of socialism should at least minimally adopt the critical viewpoint and question the ideological limitations of one's discipline. On the other hand, at least as far as humanities and social sciences are concerned, to the editors of this issue it seemed anachronistic to insist on strict disciplinary boundaries in an era when disciplines no longer own a 'right' over selected topics, concepts and methodological principles. But lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the question remains: what is the ideological role of scholarly, academic objectivity in the reinterpretations (and revisions) of socialism? Hopefully this issue deepens our insights in such processes and provides us with some possible answers not only about how to treat our socialist past, but also how to understand our political present.

Tihana Pupovac
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PRISTUP SOCIJALISTIČKIM SPOMENICIMA DANAS

(Uvod u tematski blok) (Prijevod)

Kako razmišljati o opsežnom i bogatom spomeničkom naslijeđu socijalizma? Treba li brojne spomenike razasute po bivšim socijalističkim zemljama smatrati umjetničkim djelima i objašnjavati ih pomoću estetike ili kanonske periodizacije unutar povijesti umjetnosti? Ako je tako, kako započeti s periodizacijom? Možemo li opravdano stvoriti podjelu između socijalističkog “Istoka” i nesocijalističkog “Zapada”? Koje su posljedice takve podjele te, nadalje, gdje nalazimo njezine ideološke i političke korijene? Postoji li to što zovemo socijalističkom umjetnošću ili socijalističkim modernizmom? Ako postoji, koji su joj uvjeti i kako se manifestira? Ili bismo, s druge strane, o tim spomenicima trebali razmišljati unutar cijele umjetničke produkcije 20. stoljeća? Upadamo li tada u zamku zanemarivanja jedinstvenosti tih djela? Jesmo li u pravu kada kažemo da je ono što je bilo jedinstveno za socijalizam njegova kulturna i umjetnička produkcija (a ne njegova emancipatorska i transformativna politika)?

Smatramo da bismo se trebali odmaknuti od gledanja na te spomenike samo kao na umjetnička djela te im pristupiti iz antropološke perspektive koja naglašava narative i društvene prakse raznovrsnih subjekata organiziranih oko spomenika i s njima. U tom slučaju, umjesto da se pitamo o intrinzičnom značenju predstavljenom u stilu spomenika ili formi, usredotočujemo se na raznovrsna značenja koja ti spomenici dobivaju u specifičnim interakcijama s pojedincima i skupinama u različitim političkim, ekonomskim i društvenim kontekstima. Međutim, takva pozicija otvara dodatna pitanja: kakav uvid dobivamo kada započnemo to mukotrpno putovanje razotkrivanja etnografije nekog lokaliteta? Postoji li opasnost da ćemo previdjeti nesvjesne i skrivene, ali još uvijek strukturne temelje iza pamćenja ljudi, njihovih uvjerenja i motivacija, koncentrirajući se na subjektivne svakodnevne impresije i sjećanja pojedinaca? Ne upadamo li tada, u krajnjem slučaju, ponovno u zamku depolitizacije kroz kulturalizaciju?

U posljednjih nekoliko godina, znanstvenici iz raznih disciplina i diljem svijeta, dok su istraživali socijalističke spomenike, pozabavili su se nekim od tih pitanja. Ovaj broj časopisa *Studia ethnologica Croatica* doprinosi tim raspravama tematskim blokom *Socijalistički spomenici i modernizam* koji su odabrale gostujuće urednice Nevena Škrbić Alempijević i Tihana Pupovac. Tematski blok posvećen je prvotno spisima s međunarodnog simpozija *Socijalistički spomenici i modernizam* koji se održao u Multimedijalnom institutu u Zagrebu u studenome 2015. godine. Simpozij je bio dio međunarodnog projekta *Heroes We Love*, u suradnji s Umjetničkom galerijom Maribor. Hrvatski partner BLOK, zajedno s Lanom Lovrenčić i Tihanom Pupovac, bio je zadužen za organizaciju simpozija kao jedne od aktivnosti projekta. Dvodnevni simpozij okupio je jedanaest sudionika te je održano deset prezentacija koje su se, u smislu disciplinarnih pristupa, kretale od

filozofije do arhitekture, od etnologije do društvene kritike, i obuhvaćale su teme i studije od istočne i jugoistočne Europe do Velike Britanije i SAD-a. Program je bio podijeljen na tri tematska bloka. Na prvom panelu analizirane su različite figure modernizma ili one koje su povezane s modernizmom danas, posebice one heroja, partizana i radnika. Drugi panel, nazvan *Normalizacija socijalizma*, bio je posvećen revizionističkim trendovima oko socijalizma i socijalističkog naslijeđa danas. Na trećem panelu, nazvanom *Prostori postsocijalizma*, dan je uvid u transformacije spomeničkih lokaliteta socijalizma kojima svjedočimo danas. Simpozij je zaključen glavnim predavanjem čija je tema bila kritika diskursa modernizacije u studijama socijalizma.

U ovom broju jest šest radova s konferencije, uz dva dodatna pozvana rada u kojima se autori bave spomeničkim naslijeđem socijalizma iz postsocijalističke perspektive.

Broj počinje tekstem Rachel Aumiller *Antigone's Stance Amongst Slovenia's Undead*. Aumiller reinterpreтира Smoleovu kritiku nošenja socijalističkog režima sa smrću kolaboracionista u njegovoj adaptaciji Antigone. Aumiller u analizi razmatra što nam ta kritika nudi iz perspektive postsocijalizma i revizionističkih rehabilitacija fašističkog režima.

Katja Hrobat Virloget i Neža Čebren Lipovac napisale su članak *Heroes We Love? Monuments To The National Liberation Movement in Istria Between Memories, Care, and Collective Silence* u kojem uokviruju svoju analizu u istu državnu politiku sjećanja i zaborava, ali iz drugačijeg kuta. Autorice se usredotočuju na tenzije među različitim mnemoničkim sustavima, između pojedinačnih i kolektivnih prizivanja prošlosti Drugoga svjetskog rata, te između službene tišine oko spomenika i potrebe ljudi za sjećanjem.

Slična prostorna dinamika između materijalizacije sjećanja i namjerne kolektivne amnezije proučava se u tekstu *Cultures of Memory, Landscapes of Forgetting: the Case Study of the Partisan Memorial Cemetery in Mostar* koji su napisale Kristina Ilić i Nevena Škrbić Alempijević. Autorice se bave sljedećim pitanjem: što se događa sa spomeničkim lokalitetom kada prošlost koju obilježava u trenutnom političkom poretku više nije aktualna i poželjna?

U tekstu *Modernization Discourse and Its Discontents* Milan Rakita daje nam uvjerljivu kritiku prevalencije diskursa moderniteta u novijim interpretacijama socijalizma. Autor se pita prati li taj diskurs općenitiji antikomunistički revizionizam te koje druge mogućnosti imamo u prisvajanju naše socijalističke prošlosti.

Revizionistički trendovi jesu i u središtu teksta *Burdensome Past: Challenging The Socialist Heritage In Macedonia* Gorana Janeva. U svojoj analizi preoblikovanja urbanističkog krajolika Skopja, Janev nas podsjeća da trebamo sagledati te promjene ne samo iz kulturne perspektive nego i u odnosu na ekonomiju, jer bavimo se reapropriacijom ili primitivnom akumulacijom zemlje/posjeda. Autor tako prebacuje analizu s perspektive kulturne kritike postsocijalizma na kritiku kapitalističke transformacije ostataka socijalizma.

Aneta Vasileva i Emilia Kaleva prate transformacije socijalističkih spomeničkih lokaliteta u članku naslovljenom *Recharging Socialism: Bulgarian Socialist Monuments In 21st Century*. Uspoređujući svakodnevne prakse na lokalitetima kako bi uspostavile procedure

i revizije, i reakcije umjetničkog svijeta i nevladinih organizacija oko nemara države, razjasnile su raznovrsna nova značenja i uporabe koje se danas daju socijalističkim spomenicima u Bugarskoj.

Romeo Kodra u tekstu *Architectural Monumentalism In Transitional Albania* istražuje modernističke tradicije u urbanističkom razvoju centra Tirane. Sagledavajući modernizam u bliskom odnosu s problemom državne moći, Kodra predstavlja tri stupnja u razvoju centra Tirane: fašistički, socijalistički i postsocijalistički. Time autor postavlja pitanje koji se od ta tri režima, i posljedično tomu njihovi urbanistički planovi, mogu u strogom smislu smatrati modernističkima.

Na kraju Owen Hatherley predstavlja problematični i heterogeni odnos današnje Velike Britanije prema njezinoj revolucionarnoj povijesti u tekstu *Our Monuments to Glorious Defeat: Socialist Memorial Art In Britain*. Hatherley obrće paradigmu slavne pobjede koja se često koristi za interpretaciju spomenika u socijalističkim zemljama te radije pristupa revolucionarnim spomenicima Britanije iz perspektive povijesnog neuspjeha.

Iako nadilazi članke koji nisu samo heterogeni po temama nego i po pristupima, ovaj tematski blok u cjelini kultivira transdisciplinarnost. S jedne strane, taj transdisciplinarni pristup proizlazi iz same teme: bilo kakva utemeljena analiza socijalizma trebala bi barem minimalno usvojiti kritičko gledište i preispitati ideološke granice svoje discipline. S druge strane, barem što se tiče humanističkih i društvenih znanosti, urednicama ovog broja doimalo se anakronim inzistirati na strogim disciplinarnim ograničenjima u razdoblju kada discipline više nemaju “pravo” nad odabranim temama, konceptima i metodološkim principima. U konačnici, a možda i najvažnije, preostaje pitanje: kakva je ideološka uloga znanstvenika, akademska objektivnost u reinterpetacijama (i revizijama) socijalizma? Nadamo se da će ovaj broj produbiti naše uvide u takve procese te nam dati neke moguće odgovore ne samo za to kako se nositi s našom socijalističkom prošlošću nego i kako razumjeti našu političku sadašnjicu.



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