



ALTERNATIVE FASHION IN LATE SOCIALISM

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This paper deals with a paradox: the activity of fashion production, which by its very definition presupposes a large number of users and the social recognition of its own preconditions, could not be realized in the Eighties in the social context of late socialism. During socialism, "alternative fashion" was an inevitably hopeless production. Its exclusivity lacked the credibility granted to western *haute couture* which successfully lent its name to mass produced clothes. The social standing of alternative fashion was rooted in the individual expression of unique life-style, recognized by just a handful of like-minded participants of one's own group. In itself, it testified to the character of those practices as well as to the social context in which it existed. The products of "alternative" fashion born during socialist times denied the whole system by their mere existence. By doing so, they justified their alternative status at both a sociological and at a political level. On the other hand, alternative fashion because it was essentially useless and produced as individual items, was stuck in the area traditionally defined as "art". It did not even question the postmodern industrially defined re-interpretation of art.



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INTRODUCTION

We are well aware that talking of "alternative fashion" as a part of alternative behaviour, and the "alternative in the 1980s in Croatia", from a sociological perspective, means – in fact talking of individual life styles in the late socialist era, the ways in which it was generated and perceived in the society which, glorifying the ideals of collectivism, was systematically hostile to the individual.

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It should be stressed that "alternative fashion", as it existed in socialism, was unlike anything that can be found in today's garment industry, called also the "industry of life styles" and justly recognized as a legacy of "alternative culture". Fashion, which recycles "alternative" cultural *stilema* in post-industrial societies, is already a part of the modern clothing industry, which relies on already redefined gender roles and sexual orientations, and is global, media-aware and integrative.

Western promoters of alternative culture have, with their attitude to themselves and the environment, pointed to the crisis of the paradigm "the use of resources" which culminated with the oil shock in the mid-70s. Also, they have defined the models and standards of post-industrial society. With the actualization of the idea of small plants using alternative sources of energy and being capable of swift changes in production programmes, and with the development of alternative ways of growing food, "alternative" began gaining importance as a productive and economic subject, so that what had initially appeared as an extravagant concept of little if any relevance was soon to occupy a prominent position in society.

Encouraging, with its own example, solutions to apparently marginal, yet growingly important political, social and economic issues, alternative culture in the eighties entered into "the midstream of post-industrial social modernization" (Ule, 1989, 20). The integration of "alternative culture" into what was the dominant reality was carried out through individual relationship of young people and the productive system of post-industrial society based on the exchange of information and circulation of "cultural capital".

In the meantime, alternative culture in post-industrial countries, with its specific life-styles and attitudes, through social, political and cultural actions of individuals or groups, has become dominant in defining behaviour not only of the young, but also of those less young sections of society sharing the attitudes and life-style of the so-called "prolonged youth".

LIMITATIONS OF ALTERNATIVE IN SOCIALISM

While young westerners showed a constructive approach to transforming productive processes, in the early eighties in Croatia the economic growth and relative manoeuvring space for distribution, were shrinking. The growth crisis, accompanied by lagging behind in technology, poor work morale, increased foreign debt and ever larger spending on arms, was also accompanied by growing appetites in consumption. Not surprisingly, the society, which "under the name of self-government skilfully combined etatism with particularism of all sorts" (Ule, 1989, 12) could not offer the preconditions for the rise of alter-

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native culture: independent economic and political subjects and an autonomous politic public. Also, the social potentials of the young were systematically frustrated through the so-called "youth organization", which allegedly promoted their interests in political praxis. It was only natural that under these circumstances the young generation could not develop their individuality and a culture of their own.

Not only that the omnipresent repressive mechanisms which were at work in late socialism provided hostile background for the rise of "post-industrial" life styles and alternative culture, but the very socialist ideal of collectivism was, in itself, opposite to every form of individualism. Also, in a situation where every more noticeable manifestation of individuality inevitably led to social "ghettoization", it would be hard to imagine any systematic process of individual emancipation which would not be encompassed by the institutions of the system. Sporadic, individual efforts towards emancipation, which sometimes were made, could not, however, be described in categories pertinent to a neo-socialist context.

On the other hand, due to the totalitarian pretension of socialism to subject the whole "realm of life", even the least sign of differentiation was seen as potentially subversive to the system. This is the second reason why it was impossible for authentic, post-industrial, individualized life-styles, and alternative culture to emerge in socialism. In socialist contexts, with their totalitarian structuring, alternativity could never mean only diversity; it meant opposition as well, for in the eye of the order alternative culture was inevitably subversive towards the system.

The potentially conflicting "difference", i.e. the kind of difference which leads into extra-institutional struggle about seminal cultural patterns of a society, was considered particularly dangerous, not only because of the fear of public rioting and destabilization of the socialist order, which were never quite convinced of their own legitimacy. At a deeper theoretical level this difference implicitly contradicted the ideal of non-conflictual homogenization. Although the state of non-conflictual homogenization was achieved less often by means of direct physical repression and far more frequently through the sophisticated mechanism of endless conferring and consensus, in reality dictated by the political top, late socialism in Croatia, with its "pluralism of self-governing interests", like other socialist and totalitarian societies, never permitted public structuring of opposition.

Yet, unlike eastern European real-socialism, which bluntly suspended numerous civil rights of the citizens, the domes-

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tic project of "self-governing socialism" supplanted them by a system that permitted rudimentary forming of social behaviour and type of politics which characterize alternative culture. On the other hand the project of "self-governing socialism" clearly showed that totalizing tendencies and all-encompassing modernist ideology which lies at the root of every socialism are incompatible with the type of order which has given birth to alternative culture of post-industrial society.

Creating within the "self-governing" working class the illusion of participation in power, "self-governing" socialism got so deeply accepted that it managed to wipe out even those civil traditions which in apparently more rigid eastern European socialisms survived, in defiance of the system by which they had been suspended and replaced by crude repression and dictatorship. The "self-governing" socialist project was far more efficient in instituting political monism of the ruling Communist party and Communist ideology than any east European real-socialist system ever was. Yet, instead of abolishing state, as its ideological project clearly demanded, and employing reverse etatist processes, it brought about mere "pseudo-politicizing of every-day life" (Ule, 1989, 30).

Mapping out the complicated network of institutions of "delegation system", conceived as the embodiment of the ideal of self-government, it ended up with "more state" than it had ever been the case with the straightforwardly repressive systems of the east. Under the comforting surface of "plurality of self-governing interests", all difference was monitored, and each option unrespectful of the ruling values was "tabooed or pushed to the margin of social anonymity and privacy" (Ule, 1989, 12).

In reality, the potential actors of the alternative scene could select between withdrawal to private sphere and independent co-operation with the political machinery" of self-governing socialism, which in truth granted public manifestations of "difference", but only to the point at which transgression of ideological basis of the system begins. In other words, the authoritarianism of the institutions of socialist society, the type of ideology which served as the instrument of their legitimization, and the "realm of life" built over it, left no space for "difference" which could put in jeopardy the legitimacy of the order.

While young westerners, developing models of alternative culture, were entering the midstream of post-industrial society, the young generation in Croatia was ghettoized into the "adolescence" phase through the so-called "Socialist Youth League" as an instrument of surveillance and rule. Although many of these young people showed tendencies of modernization, that could be traced in the activity of the youth orga-

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nization, supporting universal, trans-juvenile, cultural, feminist and environmentalist causes, forms of self-organizing past the instruments of surveillance and rule, which apart from the Socialist Youth League, included also the Communist Party, Confederation of Trade Unions, Socialist Alliance of the Working People and War Veterans Federation, was virtually impossible.

Despite diverse alternative initiatives aimed at breaking through the narrow horizons of "politicized society", and due to an extremely restrictive definition of minimum standards of political participation and civil freedoms, domestic socialism still identified "alternative" with whatever remained outside its scope, or was opposite either to its narrowly defined boundaries of cultural pretensions or to the values of the dominant world. In other words, each alternative initiative had to be carried out within the boundaries of the official "pluralism of self-governing interests" and its institutions.

Although in the late eighties Croatia materialized some elements of post-industrial economic modernization, politically it was a total, though modern society. This resulted in the repressive tendency on the part of the system to subjugate the entire "realm of life". Some environmentalist and feminist "alternative initiatives" were allowed, under the patronage of the Socialist Youth League and Socialist Alliance. However, they were not to become alternative political subjects. Fully controlled by the system and never questioning the values of the ruling order, they operated through the institutions of the system established to promote "pluralism of self-governing interests".

In late socialist Yugoslavia the limits of social permissiveness was slightly pushed towards more freedom. This, however, was not enough to let spontaneous extra-institutional activity, with political implications. Paradoxically, the system which apparently permitted a certain degree of plurality and was therefore generally believed to represent an "alternative" not only to one-dimensional, socialist east European structuring of society, but also to some forms of political organization of developed western democratic societies, with whom it shared some of the most progressive tendencies, with its pre-modern structuring and intentions managed, better than other similar societies, to keep "alternative" under control.

Even though in that period the young stood more aloof from official cultural offer and political rituals than they had ever before, alternative milieus and scenes existed only in traces. In the latter half of the eighties the extra-institutional political space – which in developed post-industrial societies is space of action for fresh political movements and juvenile al-

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ternative culture and presupposes action which is carried out not just outside official political institutions but outside the dominant system of values as well – was here occupied by the individuals who never institutionalized their individual interests and respective public manifestations.

Due to the total nature of the system, they were irrevocably beyond the scope of all political institutions. Their "alternativity" was always passive and occurred solely at the expressive levels of life-style. Their conduct and the implied system of values were passive and outside the rituals of the dominant world, but they were still alternative in respect to the mechanisms of social action. However, they never linked up into a unique network of alternative interests. Therefore, it is best described as "atomized alternativity". "It was alternativity at micro-level. It included individuals or small groups of like-minded individuals, had to do with isolated life-styles, and posed a symbolic rather than real challenge to socialist society." (Tomić-Koludrović, 1993, 854)

In "atomized alternativity" style is identity. In other words, the common point of reference is style rather than some collective objective. However, as this alternativity is never structured by a collective or institution of the system, and does not abide by any traditional value, it comes closest to the conduct and values that we find in the life-styles in western alternative culture. Like young westerners, its bearers favour values which appertain to the private sphere and affirm the individual, and show positive attitude towards economic well-being and professions (Radin, 1988).

The germs of a so defined alternative culture, with the related life-styles, emerged in Croatia in the latter half of the eighth decade of the century. It was after some freshly established public institutions, such as the "Youth Cultural Centre", with its organizing potentials, and the "Youth Radio", with its transmission capabilities – both Zagreb based – began to back, in a more systematic way, alternative conduct and alternative action going through music, media, theatre and fashion. This, of course, caused a still more radical departure from the traditional values on part of some individuals and the embracing of ever more individual "post-materialistic" values.

The fact is that before the first democratic elections in Croatia we have no evidence of self-transformation of institutions of the socialist political system or of entering of topics concerned with self-reception or personal identity into the mainstream of political processes. All difference was carried out anonymously, through one of the mechanisms of "pluralistic self-governing interests". As a consequence, the instances of "ato-

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mized alternativnost" remained hopelessly uncovered by the institutions of the system. Like other lateral collectives that did not refer to traditional values, they never linked up into a network of alternative action. The Representatives of both options were perceived as manifestations of collectivism only at the level of sub-cultural styles, as neither of the two was granted legitimacy by the ideological apparatus of Croatian late socialism, which persistently perceived them as basically subversive.

Both, promoters and actors of alternative fashion were part of this, "atomized alternative". They shared the same hopes and because of the ambivalence of the values of post-industrial and socialist paradigms in the latter half of the eighties they found themselves in a potentially contradictory situation: On the one hand, they sought the liberation from traditional bonds, problematizing body, environment and gender roles, while on the other they had no chance whatsoever of entering the garment industry.

In a socialist system which did not seek to aestheticize the reality, but to politicize it one-dimensionally, fashion shows of a couple of alternative designers in the latter half of the eighties, bear witness to "fashion" as an "alternative" to socialist life-style. It is fashion which has no marketable value. Also, it is not aestheticized in the post-modern sense of the word nor oriented towards needs of every-day life. As a consequence, it could not, even if it wanted, join the non-aesthetic and "heavy" socialist industry.

We are facing here a paradox: The activity of fashion creating, which, by definition, presupposes a large number of users and social verification of its values, in late socialist context could not be realized as mass production.

In fact, in late socialism alternative fashion was hopeless production of "fashion". Its exclusivity lacked the credibility granted to western "haute couture", which successfully lent its name to mass produced clothes. Its social standing was rooted in the individual expression of a unique life-style of the participants of its "atomized" alternative culture, recognized by just a handful of like-minded participants of one's own group.

CONCLUSION

The products of "alternative fashion" in socialism implicitly deny, by their mere existence, the whole system. At sociological and political levels they vindicate their "alternative" status. With their prioristic uselessness and impossibility of realization, they have remained in the area traditionally defined as "art", as they have never been submitted to a post-modern industrial reinterpretation.

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In this sense alternative fashion highlights the fact that "atomized alternativitiy" at the levels of individual life-styles and art, was the sole "alternative" granted in the system which allowed no organized action parallel to its institutions or "alternative" phenomena of any kind. Therefore, the creation of alternative fashion in the late phase of self-governing socialism is paradoxical in itself. Instead of targeting at a large number of consumers or even trying to join the industry, which are the preconditions of fashion as a phenomenon, it has questioned the very meaning of clothing and fashion in general. Problematizing body, identity and environment, advocating difference, and operating outside the established channels and customs of garment industry, domestic late socialist alternative fashion has symbolically expanded the boundaries of political involvement. Dealing with personal identity and postmaterialistic values, the participants of "atomized alternative" and alternative fashion have put in question the complete socialist system based on collectivism. They, however, never passed the borders of their small, like-minded groups and therefore represented symbolic rather than real challenge to the society of late socialism.

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Alternativna moda u kasnom socijalizmu

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Rad se bavi paradoksom: djelatnost modne proizvodnje, koja po svojoj definiciji pretpostavlja velik broj korisnika i društvenu priznatost vlastitih preduvjeta, nije se mogla ostvariti osamdesetih godina dvadesetoga stoljeća u društvenom kontekstu kasnog socijalizma. U vrijeme socijalizma "alternativna moda" bila je neizbježno beznadna proizvodnja. Njezinoj ekskluzivnosti nedostajala je vjerodostojnost koju je imala zapadna visoka moda (*haute couture*) te koja je uspješno dala svoje ime masovnoj proizvodnji odjeće. Društveni položaj alternativne mode bio je ukorijenjen u pojedinačnom izrazu jedinstvenoga životnog stila koji je prepoznala samo nekolicina istomislećih sudionika unutar vlastite skupine. Sama po sebi, alternativna moda svjedočila je o karakteru takvih praksa i o društvenom kontekstu u kojem je postojala. Proizvodi "alternativne" mode, rođeni u socijalističkim vremenima, nijekali su cijeli sustav samim svojim postojanjem. Time su opravdavali svoj alternativni položaj i na sociološkoj i političkoj razini. S druge strane, alternativna moda, jer je bila bitno beskorisna i izrađivana u pojedinačnim primjercima, zapela je unutar područja koje je tradicionalno pripadalo "umjetnosti". Nije niti propitala postmodernu industrijski definiranu reinterpretaciju umjetnosti.

Alternative Mode im Spätsozialismus

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Die vorliegende Arbeit widmet sich folgendem Paradox: Der Industriezweig der Modeproduktion, der seinen immanenten Gegebenheiten gemäß eine große Verbraucherzahl und die gesellschaftliche Anerkennung seiner Prämissen voraussetzt, konnte in den 80er Jahren des 20. Jahrhunderts – im gesellschaftlichen Kontext des Spätsozialismus – nicht verwirklicht werden. In der Zeit des Sozialismus war "alternative Mode" ein unweigerlich zum Scheitern verurteilter Produktionszweig. Um wirklich exklusiv zu sein, ermangelte es ihr an der Glaubwürdigkeit, wie sie der Haute Couture des Westens zukam – der es folglich auch gelang, die Massenerzeugung von Konfektionsartikeln unter eigenem Namen anzutreiben. Der gesellschaftliche Status alternativer Modeartikel war verwurzelt in der Äußerung eines individuellen Lebensstils, den nur eine geringe Zahl gleich denkender Mitglieder einer bestimmten Gesellschaftsgruppe für sich zu beanspruchen

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wusste. Alternative Mode diente an sich als der Nachweis eines solchermaßen praktizierten Lebensstils und zeugte vom gesellschaftlichen Kontext, innerhalb dessen sie existierte. Erzeugnisse "alternativer" Mode, die in der Zeit des Sozialismus entstanden, negierten allein durch ihre Existenz das gesamte gesellschaftliche und politische System. Somit war ihre alternative Position sowohl auf gesellschaftlicher als auch politischer Ebene gerechtfertigt. Da alternative Mode im Wesentlichen aber nutzlos war und in Einzelexemplaren angefertigt wurde, blieb sie andererseits wiederum auf Bereiche beschränkt, die traditionell der "Kunst" zugerechnet wurden. Ebenso wenig ist es zu einer Hinterfragung der postmodernen, industriell definierten Neuinterpretierung der Kunst gekommen.