

COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF COMMUNISM
IN CROATIA SINCE 1994:
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS
AND NATIONAL NARRATIVES

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Abstract: The Croatian identity politics, especially after winning its independence from the former Yugoslavia, has focused on the self-image as one of the democratic European countries, not of Communist Balkan. The nostalgic stories about the Croatian kingdom and the image of Croatia as European country has been constructed, exhibited and consumed in Croatia today, displacing and eliminating the heritage of Communism era, the tragedy of the independence war, and the history of Yugoslavia. Croatian contemporary artists, in contrast, try to resist this collective “amnesia”.

My paper analytically compares the attitude of the national cultural industry with the artistic performance and works by several artists in Croatia, focusing on the three mutually related topics: the concept of “Communist Balkan”, the collective memory of the Yugoslav wars and the view towards the cultural heritage which doesn't fit to the homogeneous history of Croatia.

Keywords: communist past, representations of communism, films, nostalgia, urban legends.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I want to comparatively analyze the interrelation of national narratives that emerged in independent Croatia after the Yugoslav wars, and contemporary artists' attempts to efface those narratives, as well as their respective methodologies. The handling of Communist-era collective memory in post-independence Croatia is a real and significant issue. While national narratives attempt to erase the collective memories of old Yugoslavia, contemporary Croatian art uses various means to allude to or even explicitly point out this deception. Previous research, reviews, and artists themselves have often commented on this dialectic, but while most remarks deal with the differences in function, few refer to the essential differences in the methodologies of these two praxes. This paper thus seeks to analytically compare how Croatian identity politics, as formulated by national narratives, is realized within the country's cultural apparatus, as opposed to the methods of contemporary artists.

We may begin by noting that most contemporary Croatian art is characterised by close interactions with social milieu, a tendency visible in Central

and East European post-communist cultures. If the category of ‘conceptual art’ tends to deal with particular and momentary issues, we may describe the attitude shared by the various contemporary arts in Croatia as a dedication to what Nicolas Bourriaud calls art relationnel,¹ in other words the emphasis on the relatedness of artworks and daily life. Here I would like to focus on three important themes in post-war Croatian perspectives of its communist era in order to make clear the contrast with identity politics based on national narratives: (1) the concept of Balkanism, (2) memories of war, and (3) evaluations of the past and its legacy. Since they overlap at many levels, of course, these themes may function as extensions or dimensions on one another depending on context. The following sections will consider them in the order presented.

1. THE CONCEPT OF BALKANISM

Croatia is often situated within the Balkan archipelago and is considered a Balkan state geographically. Historically, however, the Balkan region refers to the territories once controlled by the Byzantine and the Ottoman empires, and since Croatia was controlled by the Holy Roman and the Austro-Hungarian empires for a significant period of time, defining it as a Balkan state is by no means easy. In fact what must be taken into account here is that the word Balkan has moved far beyond a simple geographical or historical definition and is in fact a polemic term charged with very strong negative connotations. It is believed that the image of the Balkan region as a ‘battleground’ for ‘barbaric, blood-smeared races’ which had emerged after the Balkan wars, was later reinforced by the events of World War II and in particular the Yugoslav wars.² Instead of the region’s inherent traits, the nature of Balkanism has often been defined, by the metaphor of “epicenter” adopted by European and American media, as an “in-betweenness” with respect to Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, terms which also imply that it causes instability.³ Contrasting Orientalism and Balkanism, Maria Todorova emphasizes the fact that the Balkan region is a self-defined part of Europe.⁴ If one considers the region functioning as a scapegoat or a necessary image of otherness in Europe and America, however, then Balkanism and Orientalism may well be similar phenomena.

¹ See Nicolas BOURRIAUD, *Esthétique relationnelle*, Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 1998.

² During the Bosnian conflict in particular, the anti-Serbian campaign carried out by an American public relations firm at the request of the Bosnian foreign minister introduced to the world the phrase „ethnic cleansing”, as well as an indelible association of the Balkans with violence.

³ “As is often the case, the Balkans are thus defined not by identity traits of their own but by their position on the fault line, their fate predetermined by their explosive ‘in-betweenness’”, Vesna GOLDSWORTHY, “Invention and In(ter)vention: The Rhetoric of Balkanization”, in Dušan I. BJELIĆ, Obrad SAVIĆ (eds.), *Balkan as Metaphor*, Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002, p. 25.

⁴ See Maria TODOROVA, *Imagining the Balkans*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

National narratives on Balkanism

After gaining its independence from the Balkan state of Yugoslavia, Croatia made it known that it was no longer a part of the Balkans, a proclamation that its citizens happily accepted. The notion of the Balkans as defined by “in-betweenness” did not, however, disappear so easily with respect to the ex-Balkan territories that had just joined the European community. Paralleling events in Slovenia, which in 1991 had separated from Yugoslavia just before Croatia,⁵ the term “Balkan” came to function within Croatian society as a rhetorical device describing the Balkans as barbaric and foreign, while in external interactions Croatia defined itself as Balkan in order to ironically express a stance of third-world neutrality.⁶ The difference between Slovenia and Croatia is, of course, that Croatia is much closer to the Balkans. It shares a large part of its border with Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, as well as many linguistic similarities. In the four years it took to win independence from Yugoslavia much Croat and Serbian blood was spilled and many cities were destroyed. The war for independence may be interpreted, paradoxically, as proof that Croatia *is* a Balkan state, a “symbol of ethnic conflict”. In the Croatian rhetoric on Balkanism, one may sense a psychological desire to erase the “Balkan handicap”.

In her essay *Café Europá*, Slavenka Drakulić (1949–) makes mention of a certain cinema in the center of Zagreb as a symbolic example of the “European complex” prevalent in East Europe in recent years.⁷ With the demolition of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the various republics of Yugoslavia saw an intensification of nationalist movements. Slobodan Milošević led Serb nationalism in Serbia, while Franjo Tuđman headed Croat nationalism in Croatia and was elected President in 1990. That same year the Kino Balkan, a symbol of Zagreb and a beautiful cinema, was renamed Kino Europa.

The reaction of contemporary art to Balkanism

The most representative artist on the subject of Croatia’s “Balkan handicap” is Vlado Martek (1951–), known for his works that redefine the Balkan map such as *Balkan* (1995). In this piece, a red map in the shape of the United States is covered in the words BALKAN, in white, and city names are replaced with the names of contemporary Croatian artists. The

⁵ After a ten-day conflict with the Serbia-led Yugoslav army over border management, Slovenia gained independence in a relatively smooth manner. No casualties were reported in those ten days. Detailed analysis of usages of the term “Balkan” within Slovenia and Croatia can be found in Rastko MOČNIK, “The Balkans as an Element in Ideological Mechanisms”, in *Balkan as Metaphor*.

⁶ For example, at a press conference held for the French foreign minister’s visit to Croatia, President Tuđman delivered the following greeting: “I thank the Minister for having come to our dark Balkans”, *Ibidem*, p. 94.

⁷ Slavenka DRAKULIĆ, *Café Europá: Life After Communism*, London: Abacus, 1996.

overwriting of “Balkans” with “Europe”, the adoption of the color red, and the overwriting of artists’ words with grand narratives on constructing a nation – all this is ironically realized on a hand-drawn map of distant America. A similar message and juxtaposition of images can be seen in Željko Badurina’s (1966–) *Exploatacija živih* (Exploitation of the Living, 2007), in which the word Radi! (Work!) appears in the space under a headshot of the artist, a 100-euro note stuck to his forehead. On the surface, this work might be considered a commonplace satire of capitalist society and the commodification of art. Of course, no singular ‘correct’ interpretation can be derived for any artwork, nor can the artist’s testimony be taken as absolutely valid. But if one follows Stanley Fish in saying that context constructs “correct” interpretation,⁸ then it is necessary to know how Mladen Stilinović’s (1947–) *Pjevaj!* (Sing!, 1980) provides a context for *Exploatacija živih*. Here a worn-out 100-dinar note is stuck to the artist’s forehead in this headshot, the word Pjevaj! (Sing!) written in the space underneath. Alluding to an image representative of Balkan culture, that of the Romani musician, Stilinović satirizes the relationship between artists and art collectors or organizations such as galleries.⁹ By replacing Sing! with Work! and exchanging dinars for euros, Badurina brings out clearly the differences in the societal context behind Stilinović’s 1980 piece. Badurina “de-Balkanizes” Stilinović’s treatment of art’s relationship to capitalism and organizations, and this move can be read, paradoxically, as an indicator of the processes of “de-Balkanization” or “Europeanization” that have been all-too tactically promoted in Croatian society.

Nicole Hewitt’s (1965–) *In Between* (2001–2002) also makes use of the Romani as an image of Balkanness. This short film presents, in the style of an animation, montages of material shot in Zagreb during the city’s annual collection of large domestic rubbish. During this event the city’s streets overflow with old furniture, lumber and all manner of trash,¹⁰ making Zagreb look rather unsightly. In the film Hewitt presents in time-lapse the accumulation of furniture and rubbish as people come and go, to the effect that the trash itself seems to be moving. Amidst the junk there are objects that cannot fail to bring to mind Yugoslavia’s past, including an enormous portrait photo of Tito. In addition, the voices of residents talking to Hewitt as she records is played back in places, and from the many instructions to not film this area or to cover up this address, one senses that for them the act of throwing many things away or the sight of Zagreb covered in refuse is accompanied by a kind of guilt. While the furniture, lumber, etc. con-

⁸ Stanley FISH, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980.

⁹ See Frano DUBILIĆ, “Fenomen Humora u Likovnoj Umjetnosti: Otrovi Ozbiljnog Sadržaja”, in *Kontura*, March 2008, no. 96, Zagreb: Art Magazin Kontura.

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that the tendency for Zagreb residents to throw away significant amounts of large domestic rubbish has often been criticized and cited as a post-independence phenomenon.

tinues to pile up, however, the collection process is well underway. Not to be confused with the rummaging of random passers-by, the Romani trash collection process is carried out with some organization; they separate, recycle, and probably even convert trash into goods for sale. The film's close-up shots are of the Romani children playing around the adults separating the rubbish, thus it is not to be taken as a record of how the Romani dispose of large domestic rubbish and finally exchange it for money. It is clear though that between the Zagreb residents' attitude of continually disposing outdated things and the Romani's actions of trash collection and recycling, a question of representation is entailed: which is normal? Furthermore, one may notice a resemblance between the disposed, outdated things and the Romani, both "entities which should have been excluded" from Croatian society. Even if they continue to be excluded by the Croatian people, they cannot be, will not be disposed of entirely.

2. MEMORIES OF WAR

The magnificent military parade held in 1995 to commemorate Croatia's independence proudly heralded a new national order, in the armed and flag-bearing form of President Tuđman. To use Homi Bhabha's formulation, as a "spectacle that signifies *because* of the distanciation and displacement between the event and those who are its spectators"¹¹ this type of military parade ritually validates the deaths of the heroes and victims of the war for independence, while forcing memories of war, still recent and vivid, into the category of the past.

Hewitt's short film *Most* (Bridge, 2004) documents the making of the Memorial Bridge,¹² built in 2001 in the city of Rijeka as a monument to the lives lost in the war for independence, from construction through to its unveiling ceremony and opening for public use. The merit of this bridge lies in its functioning both as monument and as something usable and approachable, and its refined design, with elements such as precise lighting effects, contains no trace of the war. In the film Hewitt asks the workers on-site if they know the formal name of the bridge or what its purpose is. They mumble in response that they do not know its formal name, and that it is a monument in memory of the war. To the question "Will people crossing this bridge think of the war?" too, their reply is simply automatic: "If there's a monument, young people will remember the war." During the segment on the unveiling ceremony, the camera shows close-up the faces of many politicians, including the president. In effect, the film throws light on how the or-

¹¹ Homi K. BHABHA, *The Location of Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 348.

¹² Formally, the Most hrvatskih branitelja (Bridge for Croatian Defenders). It received Croatia's award for most outstanding architecture, the Viktor Kovačić award, in 2001 and an award from the magazine *The Architectural Review* in 2002.

ganizers of this memorial gain legitimacy: by reshaping the past as a “lesson” for the present, symbolizing the war as an “historic event”, and privileging its victims. In wide shot the camera shows, on the day the bridge was opened to the public, crowds of people walking contentedly over the bridge as if it were a new tourist spot, as if the war were completely forgotten.

Sanja Iveković's (1949–) video art piece *Opća opasnost* (Danger Alert, 1996–2000) makes use of unedited footage as it was broadcast by Croatia's state-operated TV station in 1995. We see some footage from an ordinary serial melodrama, when suddenly the message OPĆA OPASNOST ZAGREB (Danger Alert Zagreb) appears at the top of the screen. This was what Zagreb saw after the last missile landed in the city. For the twenty or thirty minutes before the broadcast switches to the terminal screen and starts instructing the residents of Zagreb to evacuate, this message remains superimposed on the melodrama. During this interval, unusual contrasts and affinities arise between the message and the content of the show. Their interaction takes on a form beyond the fictive level, as in a scene where a crying boy hugs his mother saying that he dreamt she was dead, or when a young woman talking about an unhappy marriage delivers the line “To je moja sudbina” (That's fate). When this footage was actually broadcast, the residents of Zagreb likely did not have the time to concentrate on the melodrama, though viewers in other regions perhaps watched it as calmly as those watching this video. Iveković takes up as her subject an unedited fragment of life during the war in order to impress upon viewers the idea that the war is not *ipso facto* something differentiated in time but is instead connected to the present. This theme of confusing fiction and reality, public history and private memory in media is characteristic of Iveković's work,¹³ and by foregrounding the closeness of past and present her works resist narratives that deify and attempt to sanitize the past.

K6 (2000) by Bosnian artist Zlatko Kopljar (1962–) is fairly simple: the number 23091992, and nothing else, is written under a white rectangle drawn on the ground. However the work gains meaning from its very location. The rectangle is drawn directly on the street called either Slavonski Brod or Bosanski Brod at the border of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Kopljar's father was killed in the shellings of 1992. This work tells the viewer nothing; as a mark on the street it forces him to confront the meaninglessness of the war and its casualties. Though this installation may be highly personalized and restrained, it has the potential to efface the state-imposed evaluation of the war.

¹³ In her *GEN XX* series (1997–1998), for instance, Iveković added the names and profiles of female members of the Partisan movement next to models in print ads for famous companies and published these as regular ads in magazines. For readers unaware of Iveković's project, these models may well have participated in the Partisan movement. The profile information included method of execution, reasons for execution (anti-Nazi resistance, in almost all cases. During WWII Croatia became a Nazi puppet state, the Independent State of Croatia), and age at time of death. Most of them were as old as the models.

3. EVALUATIONS OF THE PAST AND ITS LEGACY

Monuments as part of the national cultural apparatus

I would like to consider next the interactions with historic buildings as legacies of the past. The same year in which the Kino Balkan was renamed Kino Europa (1990), the statue of Ban Josip Jelačić,¹⁴ who administrated virtually all of Croatia under Austro-Hungarian rule, was reinstalled in the main city square just a five-minute walk away from the cinema. Accordingly, the city square was renamed Trg Bana Josipa Jelačića (Ban Jelačić Square) from Trg Republike (Republic Square). The statue of Jelačić on horseback had stood in the square since 1866, until it was removed overnight in 1947 by the Yugoslav government,¹⁵ two years after Tito,¹⁶ leader of the Partisans, entered the picture. The square was also renamed Trg Republike. It takes little to read the Jelačić statue as a symbol of Austrian control over Croatia, and this image must have contradicted Yugoslavia's ideal of a unified nation of south Slavic peoples. Forty years later, in a Croatia aiming to become an "independent European state", the Jelačić statue graces the center of Zagreb once more, connoting both Croatia's unity as well as a connection to the Austro-Hungarian empire (in short, to Europe).

In this way, the overwhelming majority of narratives in modern Croatia "reappraise" what it was before Yugoslavia and "rediscover" its long history as part of Europe. The branding of Croatia as Domovina kravata (Homeland of the Cravats) has been noted as an example showing the strong link between identity politics and the cultural tourism industry. The story is told of how the scarves worn by Croat soldiers in the Austrian army during the Thirty Years' War caught Louis XIV's eye, and as a result the cravate¹⁷ (necktie) made its debut in Parisian society and even replaced the wig as a fashionable accessory for men (the veracity of this tale is unclear). It is evident though, that this story is in line with Croatian identity politics as well as tourism industry policy. Croatia began marketing expensive neckties together with beautiful photo postcards¹⁸ of the Adriatic Sea. Foregrounding Croatia's emphasis on aesthetic

¹⁴ The first Croatian Ban to officially govern Croatia. He is credited with the abolition of serfdom and the suppression of the Hungarian revolution, among other achievements. Croatia was part of the Austro-Hungarian territories up until the end of WWI.

¹⁵ See Dunja RIHTMAN-AUGUŠTIN, "The Monument in the Main City Square: Constructing and Erasing Memory in Contemporary Croatia", in Maria TODOROVA (ed.), *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory*, London: Hurst & Company, 2004, for details.

¹⁶ Real name Josip Broz, Croatia-born Yugoslav politician. Organized the Partisan resistance movement against the Nazi German invasion. Elected President in 1945. After his expulsion from the Cominform in 1948, he set about developing a form of socialism independent of the Soviets.

¹⁷ From the 17th century French Cravate, meaning Croatian.

¹⁸ In addition to the postcard, each necktie comes with a card explaining, in several languages including Japanese, the ancient history of Croatia and the beauty of the Adriatic. Clearly, the cultural industry has its sights set on tourists. In 2007 a "National Necktie Day" was proposed by Zagreb's "Necktie Academy" with the intention of privileging the necktie as a symbol of

values¹⁹ and its self-definition as a historically “European” and cultural state,²⁰ the necktie is the perfect national symbol.

There has been a series of performative attempts to consolidate the necktie as a national trademark relying on the necktie’s function as “accessory” and often involving historic buildings. In 2003 an installation piece fastened an enormous red necktie around the Pula amphitheater,²¹ while another project aimed to add red neckties to bronze statues throughout Croatia.²² What must be pointed out in the latter are the kinds of personages selected – Jelačić; Tuđman, “father of Croatian independence”; the 17th century writer Gundulić; Ružička, winner of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry and first Croat laureate; Picasso; Joyce. Considering that almost all West European nations share a common classical history under the rule of the Roman Empire, the gift of the necktie signifies nothing more than the existence of an independent Croatian state and its historical proximity to Europe.

A contrary fate lay in store for the statue of a Croat politician even more well-known than Tuđman. I refer to the statue of Tito, the president-for-life of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, by turns praised as the genius who supported Yugoslavia and criticized as the dictator who suppressed Croatia’s independence. Built outside of the house where he was born, the statue was found toppled on the ground with the head damaged on December 27, 2004. The first half of the 1990s saw the frequent, almost fanatical destruction of statues in ex-Communist states, and everyone who was a reminder of Communist autocracy – Communist leaders, even heroes of anti-Fascist resistances – became a target. In 2004, fifteen years after the demolition of the Berlin Wall, it is of course impossible to read the vandalism against Tito’s statue as a denial of Communism or a fervent cry for new ideologies. The fact that the figure of Tito, still too influential in 1990 for even Tuđman to grapple with, was damaged almost without anyone’s notice shows just how the presence of Yugoslavia, socialism, and Tito have been eroded.

Croatia.

¹⁹ The first two words of the Croatian anthem *Lijepa naša domovino* (Our Beautiful Homeland, lyrics by Antun Mihanović) is an expression linking the land’s beauty to the positive aspects of nation and people. Often used as a metonym for Croatia, it is also frequently heard as a joke or an ironic set phrase.

²⁰ Since its Yugoslav period, Croatia has carried out a form of identity politics characterizing itself as a “cultural region” on the one hand, under the slogan Hrvatska– Kulturni pijemont (literally, Croatia: Cultural Mountainous Area), while strongly characterizing Serbia as a “political region” on the other. See Dubravka Oraić TOLIĆ, “Hrvatski kulturni stereotipi: Diseminacije nacije”, in Dubravka Oraić TOLIĆ, Ernő Kulcsár SZABÓ (eds.), *Kulturni Stereotipi: Koncepti identiteta u srednjoeuropskim književnostima*, Zagreb: FF Press, 2006.

²¹ An arena built during Roman rule in the 1st century that now serves as concert venue and theater.

²² See Ines QUIEN, “Kravata kao izvor umjetničkih kreacija”, in *Kontura*, June 2005, no. 85, Zagreb: Art Magazin Kontura.

Standing up against monuments

The figure that had replaced Tito's statue, on top of the pedestal still bearing the name "Josip Broz Tito", was that of Dalibor Martinis (1947–). Along with Iveković, Martinis is considered one of the forerunners in video art within Europe²³ and a representative Croatian contemporary artist. His two performance pieces involving the Tito statue have been named *J.B.T. 27.12.2004*. One shows him standing on the pedestal making no particular effort to look like Tito. In the other he decapitates replicas of the Tito statue, sold as souvenirs in Tito's hometown, with a grinding machine. Depending on the societal context, the interpretation of these two pieces becomes problematic. Twenty-five years ago under the Tito administration, Martinis would probably have been incarcerated and more, while ten years ago under Tuđman, his work would have connoted an unreserved admiration for Tuđman and an impassioned protest against Yugoslavia. The significance of these acts in 2005, however, is the very fact that damaging Tito's statue is no longer considered provocative. Martinis' work foregrounds the absence of Tito, problematizing the rapid erosion of Croatia's Yugoslav past.²⁴

A notable example of installation pieces that make use of historic buildings is Igor Grubić's (1969–) sound performance *Kada čujem...* (When you hear this..., 2002), which utilizes a white-walled cylindrical building in central Zagreb. This building was designed by leading Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović and belongs at present to an artists' association. Its formal name Dom hrvatskih likovnih umjetnika (Center for Plastic Arts), abbreviated HDLU, is rarely used and even as the more casual Umjetnički Paviljon (Art Pavilion) it has not gained much of a presence among Zagreb residents. Colloquially, it is known as džamija, or "the mosque". First conceived of as a museum it was completed in 1938, when in 1941 the Independent State of Croatia, a WWII puppet state of Nazi Germany, added three minarets and converted it into a mosque. After the war it transformed into the Muzej narodnog oslobođenja (Museum of the Emancipation) in 1945, losing the minarets, and in 1990 finally became the art museum it is today. For his performance Grubić attached speakers to the main entrance and broadcast the

²³ The two have collaborated on and actively displayed video installations since the early 1970s. See Nada BEROŠ, *Dalibor Martinis: Javne Tajne*, Zagreb: Muzej suvremene umjetnosti, 2006.

²⁴ For his 2006 installation *Drugovi i drugarice: građani i građanke* (Comrades and citizens!) held in the coastal city of Zadar, Martinis projected a video on a wall in the central square of himself, dressed as Tito and delivering one of the latter's speeches, in reverse. Many of the residents were hostile to the image of Tito, but because nothing except noise could be heard of the speech in reverse, they walked past it without paying it much attention. Martinis later made a film of the installation itself, combining footage played alternating between forward and in reverse. In the reverse segments, Martinis as Tito can be heard making his speech clearly, while the actions of Zadar's residents crossing in front of him are all backwards. The relation between Zadar and Tito's image is represented in the video as one of impossible coexistence, except by barely missing each other.

adhan (the Islamic call to prayer) several times a day. While Grubić's work seems fitting given the building's history and what Zagreb residents call the building, or perhaps precisely because of the fit, the performance was extremely controversial and had to be forcibly stopped, after opposition from not only the residents but the Church and the police as well. The psychological resistance to a building popularly known as "the mosque" starting to function as a mosque points to a rejection of different cultures, in particular of Islamic culture since it closely identifies with Balkanness. The reaction to this piece may be said to show how, in the body politic overwhelmed by narratives fabricating its continuity with the Croatian kingdom, what exposes the country's successful exclusion of other races is nothing more than an unpleasant cacophony.

CONCLUSION

The image of Croatia as "refined" European state, far from the "barbaric" Balkan federal republic that was Yugoslavia, was through the 1990s planned and constructed via many different parts of the cultural machinery. In the wake of Croatia's victory in the four-year war against the Serbian-led Yugoslav army, this image was continually and energetically reworked as part of a campaign stressing the nation's "new" independence. Croatia, arriving on the scene somewhat later than its neighboring states, has for its national identity a space that excludes the symbols of the Communist era: (1) the Balkan image, (2) memories of civil war, and (3) its Yugoslav history. Into this space the European image, or else nostalgic stories about the Croatian kingdom are placed, and the resulting identity has been constructed, flaunted, and consumed via the imposing cultural machinery.

Contrasting the national cultural industry's "spectacular" methods, the performance pieces of contemporary artists, though they continue to be forgotten, show the public what has been excluded by the nation, albeit in an all-too reserved manner. The artists are almost without exception "modest" in dealing with their subject, when in fact their works are about things that are "no longer problematic" and the problems of this attitude shift. Performance art must implicate the viewer or risk being overlooked.

Co-opting people through spectacle, narratives of national scale create histories in which the state has always been culturally unified, and attempt to erase memories of discontinuous elements and contrary faiths. Something that could oppose such a narrative might be a private act, apparently insignificant but which in one context alone acquires great significance. Against the unconventionality of spectacle, these private acts pick up on what is discontinuous, different, and strange within the conventional to put on display, all the more threatening because they are part of the everyday stuff of life. When Croatian contemporary art deals with the Communist past, one might say that these "modest" narratives succeed in decentralizing the national

narratives of collective amnesia by virtue of their modesty. In the relatively “new” independent nation of Croatia, national narratives actively manipulate collective memory on the one hand, while contemporary arts work to salvage what the collective has forgotten.

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